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The women of Cairo

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Harrold Kaine





THE WOMEN OF CAIRO

VOLUME TWO



GERARD DE NERVAL

THE WOMEN OF CAIRO

SCENES OF LIFE IN THE ORIENT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

CONRAD ELPHINSTONE

VOLUME TWO



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CONTENTS

PART I

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

	PAGE
I. THE MOUNTAIN	I
II. A MIXED VILLAGE	7
III. THE MANOR	13
IV. HUNTING	18
V. KESROUAN	22
VI. A BATTLE	26

PART II

THE PRISONER

I. MORNING AND EVENING	33
II. A VISIT TO THE FRENCH SCHOOL	38
III. THE AKKALÉ	42
IV. THE DRUSE SHEIK	51

PART III

THE STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

I. HASHISH	61
II. THE FAMINE	70
III. THE LADY OF THE KINGDOM	75
IV. THE MORISTAN	82
V. THE BURNING OF CAIRO	90
VI. THE TWO CALIPHS	99
VII. THE DEPARTURE	108

CONTENTS

PART IV

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

	PAGE
I. THE PACKET	111
II. THE POPE AND HIS WIFE	116
III. LUNCH AT SAINT JOHN OF ACRE	123
IV. THE ADVENTURE OF A MAN FROM MAR- SEILLES	130
V. DINNER WITH THE PASHA	136
VI. CORRESPONDANCE (FRAGMENTS)	140

PART V

EPILOGUE

I. CONSTANTINOPLE	155
II. GALATA	156
III. PERA	159

THE NIGHTS OF RAMADAN

PART I

STAMBOUL AND PERA

I. BALIK-BAZAR	161
II. THE SULTAN	166
III. THE GREAT CEMETERY	170
IV. SAN-DIMITRI	178
V. AN ADVENTURE IN THE SERAGLIO	185
VI. A GREEK VILLAGE	191
VII. FOUR PORTRAITS	195

CONTENTS

PART II

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

	PAGE
I. ILDIZ-KHAN	201
II. A VISIT TO PERA	205
III. CARAGUEUZ	209
IV. THE WATER-DRINKERS	225
V. THE PASHA OF SCUTARI	233
VI. THE DERVISHES	237

PART III

THE STORY-TELLERS

A LEGEND IN A CAFÉ	244
------------------------------	-----

THE STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING AND SOLIMAN PRINCE OF THE GENII

I. ADONIRAM	247
II. BALKIS	254
III. THE TEMPLE	268
IV. MELLO	284
V. THE SEA OF BRONZE	296
VI. THE APPARITION	304
VII. THE UNDERGROUND WORLD	313
VIII. THE POOL OF SILOAM	325
IX. THE THREE COMPANIONS	339
X. THE INTERVIEW	348
XI. THE KING'S SUPPER	355
XII. MACBENACH	365

CONTENTS

PART IV THE BAÏRAM

	PAGE
I. THE SWEET WATERS OF ASIA . . .	380
II. THE EVE OF THE GREAT BAÏRAM . . .	387
III. FEASTS IN THE SERAGLIO . . .	392
IV. THE ATMEÏDAN . . .	396

DRUSES AND MARONITES

PART I

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

I

THE MOUNTAIN

I HAD gladly accepted the invitation which had been extended to me by the Prince or Emir of the Lebanon to go and stay some days at his home a little way from Antoura in Kesrouan. As we were to set out the following morning, I had only just time to return to Battista's hotel, and there come to an agreement about the amount I should have to pay for the horse which had been promised me.

I was taken to the stables, where there were some great bony horses, with good legs, but a backbone as sharp as that of any fish, which certainly belonged to the *nedji* breed. I was told, that when it came to climbing the steep mountain sides, they were the surest and most trustworthy. The elegant Arab steeds shine more upon the sandy *turf* of the desert. I picked out one haphazard, and was promised that it should be at my door the following morning at daybreak. It was suggested that I should take with me a boy called Moussa (Moses) who spoke Italian very well.

It was now night, but Syrian nights are only a kind of dark blue day. People were taking the air upon

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

their terraces, and as I climbed higher and higher up the hills outside the city the more I was reminded of Babylon. The moon drew white silhouettes upon the terraced houses which, by day, seem so high and sombre, with only the occasional tops of cypresses and palms to break the monotony.

When first I left the city, my way led through formless shrubs, aloes, cactus and prickly pear, whose multitudes of flaring blossoms might have been the heads of some hydra-headed Indian god. Their sharp swords and fearsome darts made my path more difficult. But when once these were passed, I came to a clearing, with white mulberries, oleanders and lemons with glittering, metallic leaves. Glowworms, flitting about, lit up the darkness of the groves. And from the pointed windows of some distant building, light poured too; and occasionally, from one of those manors which have such an austere look, I heard the strains of a guitar accompanying a melodious voice.

Where the path turns aside to the house at which I had been staying, there is a tavern in the hollow of an enormous tree. There the young people of the neighbourhood gather, and usually stay drinking and making merry till two o'clock in the morning. Night after night, one may hear their guttural accents, the droning melody of some nasal recitative which seems a challenge to any European ears that may happen to be listening. Yet there is definitely a charm in this primitive, biblical kind of music for anyone who can forget his preconceived notions of solfeggio.

When I got back, my Maronite host and all his family were waiting for me on the terrace outside my apartment. These good people think they are paying you a compliment when they bring all their relations and friends to see you. They had to be served with

THE MOUNTAIN

coffee and pipes, which was done by the mistress and daughters of the house, all, of course, at the expense of the lodger. The conversation dragged painfully along with a few phrases of Italian, Greek and Arabic all mingled together. I did not dare to say that I should like to go to bed, since I had to be up early the next day, and had not slept at all during the past day; but, after all, the sweetness of the night, the starry sky, the sea at our feet with its shades of the blue of night, and, here and there, the gleam of reflected stars, were enough to reward me for enduring the boredom of this reception. At last the good people took their leave, for I was to set off before they rose. I had hardly three hours of sleep, and even that was disturbed by the crowing of the cocks.

When I woke, Moussa was sitting at my door on the terrace wall. The horse he had brought was at the foot of the steps, with one foot bent by a rope beneath its belly, for that is the Arab's way of tethering a horse. All I had to do was to settle myself in one of those high Turkish saddles which squeeze you like a vice, and make it almost impossible for you to fall. Broad copper stirrups, shaped like a shovel, are braced so high that one's legs are bent double; and their sharp edges serve as a spur. The Prince smiled at my embarrassment at having to adopt the style of an Arab horseman, and gave me some advice. He was a young man of frank and open countenance, whose welcome had won my heart at the outset. He was called Abu-Miran, and belonged to a branch of the family of Hobeïsch, the most illustrious of Kesrouan. Although he was not extraordinarily rich, he had authority over ten villages which form a district, and paid their dues to the Pasha of Tripoli.

When everybody was ready, we went down to the

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

road that runs along the shore. Anywhere but in the Orient it would be considered nothing more than a ravine. After we had gone about a league I was shown the cave whence came forth the famous dragon which was about to devour the daughter of the King of Beyrouth when Saint George transfixed it with his lance. This place is greatly revered by the Greeks, and even by the Turks, who have built a little mosque at the very place where the fight took place.

All the horses in Syria are trained to go at an amble, and this makes their trotting very easy. I admired the sureness of their feet over the rolling stones, the sharp granite, and the polished rocks which they come upon at every moment. It was already broad daylight; we had passed the fertile promontory of Beyrouth, which goes out about two leagues into the sea, with its heights crowned by spreading pines, and terraces, one above another, laid out like gardens. A huge valley, which divides two ranges of mountains, stretches as far as one can see, and the double amphitheatre which it forms is dotted here and there with chalky specks against a violet background. These specks are really villages, monasteries and castles. It is one of the vastest panoramas in the world, one of those places where the soul must itself expand to appreciate the proportions of such a view. At the bottom of the valley flows the Nahr-Beyrouth, a stream in summer but a torrent in winter, which casts itself into the gulf. We crossed it in the shadow of the arches of a Roman bridge.

The water only came half-way up the horses' legs: knolls covered with oleander bushes break up the stream, and throw a shade over its normal bed. Two zones of sand, which mark its extreme limits in time of flood, make this long ribbon of verdure and of flowers stand

THE MOUNTAIN

out along the bottom of the valley. Beyond, the lowest slopes of the mountains begin, sandstone made green by lichen and moss; twisted locust-trees; stunted oaks with dark green leaves; aloes and noplas, hidden among the stones like armed dwarfs menacing the passers-by, and offering a refuge to great green lizards which fly by hundreds from the horses' hoofs—these are what the traveller sees as he begins the climb. Long stretches of dry sand occasionally form a break in this mantle of wild vegetation. A little farther, these yellow stretches yield themselves to cultivation, and regular lines of olive-trees appear.

We soon reached the top of the first zone of the heights, which, from below, seems to form part of the main mass of Sannin. Beyond is another valley parallel to that of the Nahr-Beyrouth, and this must be crossed to reach the second crest, when still a third appears. Now we see that the host of villages which, from a distance, seemed to find shelter in the dark flanks of one and the same mountain, on the contrary dominate and crown ranges which are separated by valleys and abysses, and it becomes quite clear how these lines, with their castles and towers, could offer to any army a series of inaccessible defences, if, as they used to do, the inhabitants would only unite and fight for the same principles of independence. Unfortunately, too many people have an interest in profiting by their divisions.

On the second plateau we stopped. There was a Maronite church built in the Byzantine style: Mass was being said, and we dismounted before the door to hear what we could of it. The church was full of people, for it was Sunday, and we could only find room at the very back.

It seemed to me that the clergy were robed in very

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

much the same way as the Greeks. Their costume is very beautiful, and the language used is the ancient Syriac which the priests recite or sing in the nasal tone peculiar to them. All the women were in a tribune, raised, and protected by a grating. When I looked carefully at the ornaments of the church, which were simple but lately repaired, I was sorry to see that the double-headed eagle of Austria decorated each pillar, the symbol of a protection which formerly was given by France alone. It is only since our last revolution that Austria and Sardinia have competed with us for influence over the minds and in the affairs of the Syrian Catholics.

One Mass in the morning can do no harm, provided one does not perspire when entering the church, and then expose oneself to the damp shade of vaults and pillars; but this house of God was so clean and bright; the bells with their silvery tinkle had called us with so delightful a sound, and besides, we had been so near the door, that we left there very gaily, well-disposed for the remainder of the journey. Our horsemen set off at a gallop, shouting merrily to one another, pretending to chase one another, and casting before them their silk beribboned lances, then pulling them out of the ground or tree trunks into which they had hurled them from a distance.

But this game did not last long, for the descent became more difficult, and the horses placed their feet more timidly on the polished stone and the sharp bright splinters. So far, young Moussa had followed me on foot, as is the custom of the *moukres*, although I had offered to take him up behind me, but now I began to envy him. Realising what I was thinking, he offered to guide my horse, and so I was able to cross the bottom of the valley by taking a short cut through

THE MOUNTAIN

the thickets and stones. Upon the other slope I had time to rest and admire the skill of my companions as they rode down ravines which would be considered impassable in Europe.

Then we climbed beneath the shade of a pine forest, and the Prince dismounted as I had done. A quarter of an hour later we came to another valley, not so deep as the first, which formed, as it were, an amphitheatre of verdure. Flocks were grazing upon the grass around a small lake, and I remarked some of those Syrian sheep whose tails, made heavy by fat, weigh as much as twenty pounds. We went down to water our horses at a fountain covered with a great stone arch, built, or so I thought, at some period of antiquity. Several women, in graceful garments, came to fill large vases which they set upon their heads. They did not, of course, wear the high head-dress of married women; they were young girls or servants.

II

A MIXED VILLAGE

Going a few steps beyond the fountain, still under the shade of the pine-trees, we came to the entrance of the village of Bethmeria, which stands upon a plateau, whence the view extends, on the one hand, over the gulf, and, on the other, over a deep valley, beyond which new crests stand out in shadow against a bluish mist. The contrast of this coolness and silent shade with the burning heat of the plains and the coast we had left only a few hours before, offered a sensation which is only to be appreciated in such climates. There were about twenty houses scattered

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

under the trees, and they seemed to make a picture very much like that of one of our Southern villages. We went to the sheik's house. He was away, but his wife had curds and fruit served to us.

On our left we had passed a large house which had been recently burned down, as its fallen roof and charred timbers clearly showed. The Prince told me that the Druses had set fire to the building while several Maronite families were together there celebrating a wedding. Fortunately the guests had been able to escape in time; but the strangest feature of the affair was that the offenders were inhabitants of the same locality. Bethmeria, being a mixed village, contains about a hundred and fifty Christians and sixty Druses. There are hardly two hundred yards between the houses of the two parties. As a consequence of this act of hostility, there had been a desperate struggle, and the Pasha had hastened to intervene by putting a small camp of Albanians between the two sides of the village, and these troops the rival sections had to maintain.

We had just finished our meal when the sheik came home. After the first greetings, he began a long conversation with the Prince, complaining bitterly of the presence of the Albanians, and the general disarmament which had been effected in his district. It seemed to him that this measure should have been enforced only upon the Druses, since they alone were to blame for the attack and the burning. From time to time, the two chiefs lowered their voices, and though I could not quite grasp the point of what they were saying, I thought it better to remove myself on the pretence of going for a walk.

As we went along, my guide told me that the Maronite Christians of the province of El-Garb, in

A MIXED VILLAGE

which we were, had previously tried to expel the Druses, who were scattered about in several villages, and that the latter had called to their aid their co-religionists from Anti-Lebanon. From this arose one of those quarrels which are so often renewed. The great strength of the Maronites is in the province of Kesrouan, behind Djebail and Tripoli, and the Druses are strongest in the provinces between Beyrouth and Saint John of Acre. The sheik of Bethmeria was doubtless complaining to the Prince that in the recent event of which I have spoken the Kesrouan people had not moved; but they had not had time to do so, for the Turks had put a stop to the matter with more than their usual smartness. This was because the quarrel had broken out at the time for paying the *miri*. "Pay first," said the Turks, "and then you can fight as much as you like." For how indeed can taxes be collected from people who are ruining themselves and cutting each other's throats at the very moment of the collection?

At the end of the row of Christian houses I stopped beneath a clump of trees, from which I could see the sea and its silver waves breaking upon the sand. From this point the eye looks down upon the terraced ridges we had crossed, the courses of the little streams which thread their way along the valleys, and the yellow ribbon traced along the shore by that splendid road of Antonine, upon which are still to be seen Roman inscriptions and Persian bas-reliefs. I had sat down in the shade, when someone came to invite me to take coffee with a *moudhir*, or Turkish commander, who I suppose was, for the time being, in charge of the village now that the Albanians were in occupation of it.

I was taken to a house newly decorated, doubtless in honour of this functionary, with a fine Indian rug

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

upon the floor, a tapestry divan and silk curtains. I was ill-mannered enough to go in without taking off my shoes, despite the remonstrances of the Turkish servants which I did not understand. The *moudbir* signed to them to be silent, and, without rising, pointed out to me a place on the divan. He had coffee and pipes brought, and then addressed a few polite words to me, interrupting himself from time to time to set his seal on sheets of paper passed to him by his secretary who was sitting beside him on a stool.

This *moudbir* was young and rather haughty. He began, with all the customary banality, by questioning me in bad Italian about steam, about Napoleon, and the possibility of discovering how to fly. After I had satisfied him on these points, I thought I might ask him for a few details with regard to the people about us. But on this matter he seemed very reserved, though he told me that the quarrel had arisen there, as in several other places, because the Druses would not pay their taxes into the hands of the Maronite sheiks, who were responsible to the Pasha. The same situation, but in the inverse sense, occurs in the mixed villages in the Druse country. I asked the *moudbir* if there were any reasons why I should not visit the other part of the village. "Go where you like," said he, "the people are all quite peaceable since we have been here. Otherwise you would have had to fight on one side or the other, for the white cross or for the white hand." These are the emblems which mark the flags of the Maronites and the Druses, both upon a red ground.

I took my leave of the Turk, and as I knew that my companions would stay at Bethmeria during the hottest part of the day, I went over to the Druses' quarter, taking only Moussa with me. The sun was

A MIXED VILLAGE

now at its height, and after we had walked for ten minutes we came to the two first houses. In front of that on the right was a terraced garden, where a few children were playing. They ran up to see us pass, shouting, so that two women came out of the house. One of them wore the *tantour*, which showed that she was either a wife or a widow; the other seemed to be younger, and her head was covered with a simple veil which she brought down over part of her face. However, it was quite possible to distinguish their features, for, as they moved, their faces appeared and disappeared, like the moon among the clouds.

The rapid glimpse I was able to catch of them was supplemented by the faces of the children, which were quite uncovered. Their features, perfectly formed, were very like those of the two women. The younger woman, seeing me stop, went into the house and came back with a vessel of porous clay, which she tilted in my direction through the thick cactus leaves which formed a hedge. I went over to drink, although I was not thirsty, for I had just had some refreshment at the *moudbir's*. The other woman, seeing that I only drank a mouthful, said to me: "*Tourid leben?*" (Would you prefer milk?) I made a sign of refusal, but she had already gone into the house. When I heard the word *leben*, I remembered that it means *life* in German. Lebanon also takes its name from this word *leben*, and owes it to the whiteness of the snows which cover the mountains. The Arabs, far away, beyond the burning sands of the desert, think fondly of these snows as milk—as life. The good woman came back again with a cup of foaming milk. I could not refuse to drink it, and I was about to take some money from my girdle, but as soon as I made a move to do so the two women made very energetic signs of refusal. I knew

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

that hospitality in the Lebanon has more than Scottish characteristics. I did not insist.

As far as I could judge from the appearance of these women and children, the features of the Druses are not unlike those of the Persians. The tan which gave an amber tinge to the faces of the little girls, did not affect the smooth whiteness of the two half-veiled women, so that it might well be concluded that the Levantine women cover their faces very largely out of coquetry. The healthy mountain air and work give a high colour to lips and cheeks. The paint that Turkish women put on would serve no useful purpose here, but, like the Turks, these Druse women stain their eyelids, and prolong the arch of their eyebrows.

I went farther; the houses were still all of one storey, and built of clay for the most part, though the largest were of reddish stone, with flat roofs held up by arches inside. They had outer staircases going up to the roof, and their only furniture, as could be seen through the fretted windows and open doors, consisted of carven cedar panels, rugs and divans. The children and women were the only living creatures to be seen; they did not seem too greatly astonished by the passing of a stranger, and addressed to me the customary "*Salkher*" (Good-day).

When we had reached the end of the village, where the Bethmeria plateau finishes, I could see on the other side of the valley a monastery, and Moussa wished to take me there, but I was beginning to be tired, and the sun had become unbearably hot. I sat down in the shade of a wall, and leaned against it with a kind of sleepiness due to the little rest I had had during the night. An old man came out of the house and invited me to go and rest in his place. I thanked him, but did not take advantage of his offer, for I was afraid that

A MIXED VILLAGE

it was already late and my companions would be getting uneasy about my absence. Seeing that I refused all refreshment too, he told me that I must not go away without accepting something from him. Then he went to find some little apricots (*mech-mech*) and gave them to me, and insisted upon going to the end of the street with me. He seemed annoyed when Moussa told him that I had lunched with the Christian sheik. "I am the real sheik," said he, "and *it is my right* to offer hospitality to strangers." Moussa then told me that this old man had indeed been the sheik or lord of this village in the time of the Emir Bechir; but as he had taken sides with the Egyptians, the Turkish authorities would no longer recognise him, and their choice had fallen upon a Maronite.

III

THE MANOR

It was about three o'clock when we mounted our horses again and went down into the valley, at the bottom of which flows a little stream. Following its course on its way to the sea, and then going up again amid rocks and pine trees, now and again crossing fertile valleys planted with mulberry-trees, olives and cotton shrubs, between which wheat and barley have been planted, we came at last to the banks of the Nahr-el-Kelb, or the River of the Dog, the ancient Lycus, whose scanty waters flow between reddish rocks and laurel-bushes. This river, which during the summer is hardly a rivulet, has its source in the snowy peaks of Upper Lebanon, like all the other watercourses which make their way in parallel lines to the coast so far as

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

Antakieh, and fall into the sea of Syria. On our left rose the high terraces of the monastery of Antoura, and the buildings seemed quite close, although we were really separated from them by deep valleys. Other monasteries, Greek, Maronite, or belonging to European Lazarists, appeared, towering above a host of villages, and the whole scene might be described by simple reference to any landscape in the Apennines or Lower Alps. But when one realises that this is Mussulman country only a few leagues from the Damascus desert and the dusty ruins of Balbek, the contrast is striking. It is the fact that in the Lebanon there is none of that fearful heat which enervates the Asiatics, which makes it seem like Europe on a small scale. The sheiks and wealthy inhabitants have different residences for the different seasons—up in the mountains or down in the valleys—and so are able to live continually in an eternal spring.

The region to which we came at sunset, high up, but sheltered by two chains of wooded peaks, seemed to enjoy a very delightful climate. Moussa told me that the domains of the Prince began here. So we were reaching the end of our journey, though it was only when night had fallen, and after we had passed through a sycamore wood, through which it was very difficult to guide our horses, that we came in sight of a group of buildings upon a hill, round which a steep road wound its way. It looked exactly like a Gothic castle; a few lighted windows with narrow arches were the only external ornament of a square courtyard and an enclosure of high walls. After a low gate in a surbased archway had been opened, we entered a great courtyard, surrounded by galleries supported upon pillars. A host of servants and negroes took charge of our horses, and I was taken into the hall, or *serdar*, a huge

THE MANOR

room with divans on which we sat and waited for supper. The Prince, after having refreshments served for his companions and myself, apologised because the lateness of the hour prevented his introducing me to his family, and went to that part of the house which, among the Christians as among the Turks, is given up wholly to the women; he had only taken a glass of *golden wine* with us when the supper was brought in.

The next day I was awakened by the noise the sayces and slaves made as they busied themselves with the horses in the courtyard. There were also a number of mountain folk who had brought provisions, and a few Maronite monks in black cowls and blue robes who looked on with a benevolent smile. Soon the Prince came down, and took me to a terraced garden, sheltered on two sides by the castle wall, with a view over the valley where the Nahr-el-Kelb flows along its deeply hollowed bed. In this little space were banana-palms, dwarf palm-trees, lemons and other trees of the plain, which, on this high tableland, are a rarity and a sign of wealth. I thought for a moment of the chatelaines whose barred windows probably looked out upon this little Eden, but there was no mention of them. The Prince talked for a long time about his family, the travels which his grandfather had made in Europe, and the honours he had received there. He spoke very good Italian, like the majority of the emirs and sheiks of the Lebanon, and himself seemed eager to visit France some day.

At dinner-time, that is about noon, I was taken to an upper gallery overlooking the courtyard, of which one end formed a kind of alcove, with a raised floor fitted with divans. Two well-dressed women were sitting on the divan, their legs crossed in the Turkish fashion, and a little girl near them came and kissed my

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

hand as soon as I appeared. I would willingly have rendered the same homage to the two ladies, if I had not thought it might be contrary to good manners. So I simply greeted them, and took my place with the Prince at a marquetry table laden with food. Just as I was about to sit down, the little girl brought me a napkin of silk fringed with silver at both ends. During the meal the two ladies continued to pose upon the daïs as though they had been two idols. But when the table was taken away, we went to sit down opposite them, and at the command of the older lady, narghiles were brought.

Besides their tight-fitting jackets and long-pleated *cheytian* (trousers) they wore long robes of striped silk. A heavy jewelled girdle, and diamond and ruby ornaments gave evidence of a degree of wealth which is very general in Syria, even in women of less exalted rank. The cornet which the mistress of the house wore upon her forehead, which made her imitate the movements of a swan, was of silver gilt, with masses of turquoises; tresses of hair, with their bunches of sequins, fell over her shoulders, after the general custom of the Levant. The ladies' feet, tucked up on the divan, were innocent of stockings, a custom in this country which gives beauty an added attraction of which we should never think. Women who hardly ever walk, who bathe themselves in perfumed water several times a day, and whose shoes do not compress their toes, succeed, as may easily be imagined, in rendering their feet as charming as their hands. The henna which reddens the nails, the rings about their ankles as rich as bracelets, add a final touch to the grace and charm of this portion of a woman, which, with us, is rather too readily sacrificed to the glory of the shoemakers.

The princesses asked me many questions about

THE MANOR

Europe, and spoke to me of several travellers whom they had already met. For the most part, these had been legitimists making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and you may imagine what a number of contradictory ideas about France are thus spread about among the Christians of the Lebanon. Fortunately, our political dissensions make very little impression upon peoples whose social organisation is so widely different from our own. Catholics, who are compelled to recognise the suzerainty of the Emperor of the Turks, have no very clearly defined notion of our political condition. However, they only consider themselves as tributaries in relation to the Sultan. For them the true sovereign is still the Emir Bechir, who was handed over to the Sultan by the English after the expedition of 1840.

In a very short time I found myself quite at home in this household, and I was glad to welcome the disappearance of the formality and ceremony of the first day. The princesses, simply dressed, and like any other countrywomen, took part in the work of their people, and the youngest went down to the fountain with the village maidens, like the Rebecca of the Bible, and Homer's Nausicaa. Just then they were very busy with the silk harvest, and I was shown the *cabanes*, lightly built buildings which are used as nurseries. In some of the rooms the worms were still being fed upon superimposed frames; in others the ground was covered with thorns, on which the silkworm larvæ worked their transformation. The cocoons studded the branches like so many golden olives. Later, they have to be detached, and exposed to sulphur vapour so as to destroy the chrysalis. Then the almost invisible threads are wound. Hundreds of women and children were employed at this work, and the princesses watched over it.

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

IV

HUNTING

The day after my arrival happened to be a feast day and I was awakened at daybreak to go and take part in a hunt which was to be more than usually magnificent. I was about to apologise for my lack of skill in this exercise, fearing lest I should compromise the dignity of Europeans in the eyes of these mountaineers, but I found that nothing more than hunting with the falcon was in question. The principle which forbids Orientals to hunt anything other than harmful beasts has for centuries caused them to make use of birds of prey, so that on them may fall the guilt of bloodshed. Nature takes all the responsibility for the cruel act committed by the bird of prey. It is for this reason that such forms of hunting have always been particularly characteristic of the Orient. After the Crusades, the fashion became prevalent with us.

I thought that perhaps the princesses would deign to accompany us, which would have given the entertainment a knightly character; but they did not appear. Servants, whose business it is to look after the birds, went to bring the falcons from the cages within the courtyard, and handed them to the Prince and two of his cousins who were the most important people present. I was holding out my own wrist for one, when I was told that the birds would not allow any stranger to hold them. There were three of them, all white, with elegant hoods upon them, and it was explained to me that they belonged to a breed peculiar to Syria, whose eyes have the brightness of gold.

HUNTING

We went down into the valley, along the course of the Nahr-el-Kelb, until we came to a place where the horizon grew wider, and there were great open spaces shaded by walnut-trees and poplars. The stream, making a bend, formed a number of broad shallow pools half-hidden by reeds and rushes. We halted, and waited until the birds which, at first, were startled by the noise of the horses' hoofs, had recovered their normal mode of movement or rest. When all was silent again, we saw, among the birds which were chasing the insects of that marshy place, two herons which probably were fishing. From time to time they flew in circles above the vegetation. The moment had come: a few shots were fired to make the herons climb, then the hoods were taken off the falcons, and each of the horsemen who held them, tossed them into the air with shouts of encouragement.

The birds began by flying haphazardly, looking for any prey, but they soon caught sight of the herons which, attacked one by one, defended themselves with their beaks. For a moment we feared that one of the falcons would be transfixed by the beak of the heron which he was attacking singly; but, probably becoming aware of his danger, he broke away and rejoined his two companions. One of the herons, thus freed from his enemy, disappeared among the thick foliage of the trees, while the other rose in a straight line to the skies. Then the real interest of the chase began. In vain the heron tried to lose himself in space, where our eyes could no longer see him: the falcons saw him for us, and, since they could not go after him to such a height, waited until he came down again. It was an extraordinary sensation watching the movements of these three combatants; they were hardly visible, for their whiteness blended with the blue of the sky.

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

At the end of ten minutes, the heron, wearied or perhaps unable to breathe any longer the too rarefied air at the height at which he was flying, appeared again, a short distance from the falcons, who immediately pounced upon him. The struggle only lasted for a moment, and as the birds came nearer to the earth, we were able to hear the cries, and see a wild mingling of wings, necks and claws. Suddenly the four birds fell in a heap upon the ground, and the beaters were obliged to spend some moments looking for them. Finally, they picked up the heron still alive, and cut its throat so that it should no longer suffer. Then they threw to the falcons a piece of flesh cut from the heron's stomach, and brought back in triumph the bleeding remains of the vanquished. The Prince talked to me about the hunting he sometimes had in the valley of the Becqua, where the falcon was used to hunt gazelles. Unfortunately, there is something even more cruel in this kind of hunting than in using weapons, for the falcons are trained to settle on the heads of the poor gazelles and to pluck out their eyes. I had no desire to assist at any form of amusement quite so gruesome.

That evening, there was a splendid banquet to which many neighbours had been invited. Little tables had been set, Turkish-wise, in the courtyard, and these were arranged according to the rank of the guests. The heron, the glorious victim of the expedition, adorned the centre of the Prince's table, with his head kept in position by a wire, and his wings outspread like a fan. The table was placed upon a daïs, and I was invited to sit down beside one of the Lazarist fathers from the Antoura monastery who happened to be there on the occasion of the feast. Singers and musicians were posted on the steps of the courtyard, and the

HUNTING

lower gallery was full of people sitting at other little tables, each with about five or six people. The dishes, hardly touched, passed from the upper tables to the lower, and ended by going the rounds of the courtyard, where the mountaineers, seated on the ground, received them in their turn. We had been given old Bohemian glasses, but the majority of the guests drank out of cups that were passed from hand to hand. Long wax candles lighted the principal tables. The basis of the repast was grilled mutton, with pyramids of pilaff, coloured yellow by cinnamon and saffron; then there were fricasses, boiled fish, vegetables stuffed with chopped-up meat, water melons, bananas and other native fruits. At the end of the meal, healths were drunk while the instruments played and the assembly shouted gaily. One half of the people seated at table rose and drank to the other half. So it went on for a long time. Needless to say, the ladies who had been present at the beginning, though they had no part in the meal, retired within the house.

The feast went on until far into the night. Generally speaking, it is difficult to perceive any great difference between the life of the Maronite sheiks and emirs and that of other Orientals, except perhaps for the mixture of Arabic manners and certain customs which have come down from our own feudal period. It is the transition from tribal life, as it is still to be seen at the foot of these mountains, to the era of modern civilisation, which is gathering strength and already changing the busy cities of the coast. One feels as though one were living in the middle of the thirteenth century in France; but at the same time it is impossible not to think of Saladin and his brother Malek-Adel whom the Maronites claim to have conquered between Beyrouth and Saïde. The Lazariſt next to whom I

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

was sitting during the meal (he was called Father Adam) told me a great deal about the Maronite clergy. Hitherto I had believed that as Catholics they were none too good, seeing that they are allowed to marry. But it appears that this is a privilege specially granted to the Syrian Church. The wives of the priests are called priestesses as a title of honour, but they exercise no sacerdotal functions. The Pope also permits the existence of a Maronite patriarch, appointed by a conclave, who, from the canonical point of view, has the title of Bishop of Antioch; but neither the patriarch nor his twelve suffragan bishops are allowed to marry.

V

KESROUAN

The next day we took Father Adam back to Antoura. It is an enormous place built upon a terrace which looks out over a vast extent of country with, below it, a large garden planted with great orange-trees. The enclosure is crossed by a brook which rises in the mountains and is caught in a large pool. The church is outside the monastery, which is made up within of a fairly large building divided into a double row of cells. The fathers, like the other monks in the mountain, spend their time in cultivating oranges and vines. They have classes for the children; their library contains many books printed on the mountain, for some of the monks are printers, and I even found there a set of the review called *The Hermit of the Mountain*, which had ceased publication some years before. Father Adam told me that the first printing press was set up a hundred years ago, at Mar-Hama, by a monk from Aleppo called

KESROUAN

Abdallah-Zeker, who himself cut and founded the type. A number of books on religion, on history, and even collections of stories, have come from these consecrated presses. It seems strange to see printed sheets drying in the sun below the walls of a monastery. Then, again, the monks of the Lebanon have all sorts of other occupations, and they can certainly not be accused of idleness.

Besides the many monasteries of European Lazarists and Jesuits, who are now competing for influence and not always upon too friendly terms, there are at Kesrouan about two hundred monasteries of regular monks, without including a large number of hermitages in the district of Mar-Elicha. There are also several convents principally devoted to education. All together, this is not too insignificant a religious population for a country of a hundred and ten square leagues, which has no more than two hundred thousand inhabitants. It is true that this part of the ancient Phœnicia has always been famous for the ardour of its beliefs. A few leagues' distance from this place flows the Nahr-Ibrahim, the ancient Adonis, which still assumes a reddish tinge in the spring at the time when the ancients used to mourn the death of the favoured one of Venus. Near the place where this river falls into the sea is Djebail, the ancient Byblos, where Adonis was born, the son of Cynire and Myrrha, the own daughter of that Phœnician king. These fabulous memories, the adoration, the divine honours once rendered to incest and adultery, still make the good Lazarist fathers indignant. The Maronite monks are happy enough to know nothing whatever about them.

The Prince was good enough to go with me and act as my guide in several excursions through this province of Kesrouan, which I should never have believed

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

to be so large or so vastly populated. Gazir, the chief town, which has five churches and a population of six thousand souls, is the residence of the Hobeisch family, one of the three most noble Maronite families: the other two are those of the Avaki and the Khazen. The descendants of these three houses are to be counted by hundreds, and the Lebanon custom, which insists that property shall be shared equally among the brothers, has necessarily greatly reduced the appanage of each. This explains the local joke which gives to some of these emirs the title *princes of olive and cheese*, thus alluding to their meagre means of subsistence.

The most extensive properties belong to the Khazen family, which lives at Zouk-Mikel, a town with a population greater even than that of Gazir. Louis XIV greatly contributed to the glory of this family by entrusting consular powers to several of its members. There are in all, five districts in the part of the province called Kesrouan Gazir, and three in Kesrouan Bekfaya, which is by Balbek and Damascus. Each of these districts comprises a chief-town, usually governed by an emir, and a dozen or so villages or parishes under the authority of sheiks. The feudal system, thus constituted, has its apex in the provincial emir, who himself holds his powers from the Great Emir who lives at Deir-Khamar. The latter being now a Turkish prisoner, his authority has been delegated to two kaimakans or governors, one a Maronite and the other a Druse, who are obliged to refer all political questions to the Pashas.

This arrangement has the disadvantage of keeping up an antagonism of interests and influences between the two peoples which did not exist when they were united under one prince. The splendid idea of the Emir Fakardin, which had been to mingle the popula-

KESROUAN

tions and efface the prejudices of race and religion, is now exactly reversed, and the Turks are endeavouring to form two enemy nations in the place of one which had been bound together by bonds of solidarity and mutual tolerance.

It is sometimes asked how the sovereigns of the Lebanon succeeded in securing the sympathy and faithfulness of so many peoples of different religions. Father Adam told me that the Emir Bechir was a Christian by baptism, a Turk in mode of life, and a Druse in his death, for the Druses have the immemorial right to bury the sovereigns of the mountain. He told me a local anecdote. A Druse and a Maronite who were journeying together asked one another: "What is our sovereign's religion?" "He is a Druse," said one of them. "He is a Christian," said the other. A *Metuali* (member of a Mussulman sect), who passed by, was invited to act as arbitrator, and had no hesitation in replying: "He is a Turk." The good people, more undecided than ever, agreed to go and ask the emir to settle the matter for them. The Emir Bechir received them kindly, and having learned the dispute between them, turned to his vizir and said: "These are very inquisitive fellows! See that the heads of all three are cut off." Without being too ready to accept the sanguinary moral of this story, we may recognise in it the continued policy of the emirs of Lebanon. Their palace has a church, a mosque, and a *khalouè* (Druse temple) in it. For long this was the coping-stone of their policy, and yet perhaps, it may now have become the rock upon which that policy has foundered.

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

VI

A BATTLE

I found this mountain life very delightful, in a temperate climate, among customs hardly different from those of our own Southern provinces. It was a rest after the long months passed under the heat of the Egyptian sun, and as for the people, I seemed to find in them something which the spirit thirsts for, a sympathy which is never quite complete in the Mussulmans, or else, in the majority of cases, is counteracted by racial prejudice. Reading, conversing, exchanging ideas, I came back to those European things from which we turn away because we get bored with them, and tired of them, yet, after a certain time we come to long for them, as we had longed for the unexpected, the strange, not to mention the unknown. This does not mean that our own world is better than another; it is simply because one falls back insensibly upon the impressions of childhood and accepts the common yoke. In one of Heine's verses we read of a Northern pine-tree covered with snow, which longs for the dry sand and the fiery sun of the desert, while at the very same moment a palm-tree, scorched by the arid atmosphere of the Egyptian plains, longs to breathe the Northern fogs, to bathe in melted snow, and plunge its roots into the frozen earth.

It was such a spirit of contrast and unrest that made me begin to think of going back to the plain once more. I told myself that, after all, I had not come to the East to spend my time in an Alpine landscape; but, one evening, I heard everybody talking uneasily; the monks came down scared from the neighbouring monasteries.

A BATTLE

They were talking about the Druses who had come in force from their provinces and thrown themselves upon the mixed districts, which had been disarmed by the orders of the Pasha of Beyrouth. Kesrouan, which forms a part of the *pachalik* of Tripoli, had kept its weapons. They must go, then, to support their defenceless brothers, and cross the Nahr-el-Kelb, the boundary of the two countries, a Rubicon which is not crossed unless the occasion is grave. The armed mountaineers gathered impatiently around the village and in the fields. Horsemen went about the neighbouring districts, crying the old war-cry: "Up for God and the battle!"

The Prince took me on one side and said: "I do not know what this means. It may be that the reports we have had are exaggerated, but we shall have to be ready to help our neighbours. Help never comes from the Pashas until after the damage is done. You would do well either to go to the Antoura monastery, or to go back to Beyrouth by sea."

"No," said I, "let me go with you. Since it has been my misfortune to be born in a very unwarlike age, I have never seen any fighting except within our European towns, and wretched fighting it was, I assure you. Blocks of houses were our mountains, and squares and streets our valleys. For once in my life let me be present at a battle that has some style about it, that is in a war of religion. It would be so fine a thing to die for the cause you are defending."

I said, I thought, these things: the enthusiasm all around me took possession of me; I passed the following night dreaming of exploits which should perforce open to me the most glorious destiny.

At daybreak, when the Prince mounted his horse, in the courtyard with his men, I made ready to do

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

likewise; but Moussa objected very strenuously to my riding the horse I had hired at Beyrouth. It was his business to take it back alive, and he justly feared the possibilities of a warlike expedition.

I admitted the reasonableness of his protest, and accepted one of the Prince's horses. At last we crossed the river, at most a dozen horsemen and three hundred foot.

After four hours' marching, we halted by the monastery of Mar-Hama, where more mountaineers came to join us. The monks of Saint Basil gave us breakfast; but, they said, we ought to wait, there was no evidence that the Druses had invaded the district. However, the new arrivals were of another opinion, and we determined to proceed. We left our horses to graze about the woods, and towards evening, after some false alarms, we heard shots re-echoed by the rocks.

We were climbing up to a village which we could see above the tree tops, and I had become separated from the Prince. I found myself with a few men at the foot of a series of cultivated terraces. Several of them seemed to consult together, then they set to attacking the cactus hedge which formed a barrier, and, thinking we were about to force our way through and reach some concealed enemy, I did the same with my yatagan. The thorny leaves fell to the ground like heads chopped off, and soon we burst through the breach. My companions scattered through the enclosure, and, finding no one, set to work hacking the olive and mulberry trees with extraordinary fury. One of them, seeing that I was doing nothing, wished to give me a hatchet; but I would have none of it; the scene of destruction disgusted me. I had just recognised that the place in which we were was no other than the

A BATTLE

Druse section of that village of Bethmeria where I had been so kindly welcomed a few days before.

Fortunately, in the distance, I saw the main body of our people reaching the plateau, and I rejoined the Prince, who seemed very greatly put out. I was about to inquire whether the only enemies we had to fight were cactus and mulberry trees; but he was already deploring what had just happened, and was busy trying to prevent their setting fire to the houses. Seeing a few Maronites approaching them with lighted pine branches, he ordered them to come back. The Maronites surrounded him, crying: "The Druses have done so to the Christians: now we are the stronger, and we ought to do the same to them."

At these words the Prince hesitated, for the law of retaliation is sacred among the mountaineers. For one murder there must be another, and so for damage and for burnings. I tried to explain that already many trees had been cut down, and they might serve for compensation. But he found a more conclusive argument. "Don't you see," he said to them, "that they would see the blaze in Beyrouth? The Albanians would be sent back again."

This consideration finally calmed their minds. The only person who had been found in the houses was an old man in a white turban. He was brought out, and I recognised in him the old man who had invited me to rest in his house when I had passed through Bethmeria. He was taken before the Christian sheik, who seemed somewhat embarrassed by all the tumult, and, like the Prince, was trying to still the racket. The old Druse maintained a calm demeanour and, looking at the Prince, said:

"Peace be with you, Miram. Why have you come into our country?"

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

“Where are your brothers?” said the Prince. “They must have run away as soon as they saw us approaching.”

“You know that such is not their custom,” said the old man, “but against all your people they would be but a handful; they have taken the women and children far from here. But I wished to stay.”

“But we were told that you had called the Druses from the other mountain, and they had come in great numbers.”

“You have been deceived. You have listened to evil men, to strangers who would have been pleased to see us killed, so that our brothers might come here to take vengeance upon you.”

During this discussion the old man had remained standing. The sheik, in whose house we were, seemed to be impressed by what he said. “Do you consider yourself a prisoner here?” he said. “We used to be friends. Why do you not sit down with us?”

“Because you are in my house,” said the old man.

“Come,” said the Christian sheik, “let us forget all that. Sit down on this divan, and I will have coffee and a pipe brought for you.”

“Do you not know,” said the old man, “that a Druse never accepts anything from the Turks or their friends, lest it should be the product of exactions and unjust taxes?”

“A friend of the Turks! That I certainly am not.”

“Have they not made you a sheik, whilst it was I who was the sheik in the time of Ibrahim, when your people and my people lived in peace together? Was it not you who went to complain to the Pasha because of some trifling horseplay, a house burned down, a neighbourly quarrel, which we could quite well have settled between us?”

A BATTLE

The sheik shook his head and said nothing; but the Prince cut the discussion short, and left the house hand in hand with the Druse. "You will take coffee with me, who have accepted nothing from the Turks?" and ordered his *cafedji* to serve it beneath the trees.

"I was a friend of your father," said the old man, "and in those days Druses and Maronites lived in peace."

They talked for a long time about the time when the two peoples were united under the government of the Schehab family, and were not abandoned to the will of their conquerors.

It was agreed that the Prince should take back all his men, that the Druses should come back to the village without calling for outside help, and that the damage which had just been done should be considered as compensation for the previous burning of a Christian house.

So ended this terrible expedition in which I had promised myself I should acquire so much glory; but all the quarrels in mixed villages do not find arbitrators so conciliatory as Prince Abu-Miram had been. Yet if isolated murders can be mentioned, general quarrels seldom lead to bloodshed. They are rather like fighting among the Spaniards, where each party runs after the other into the mountains and they never meet, because whenever one side is in strength, the other always hides. There is much shouting, houses are burned down and trees hewn, and the bulletins drawn up by interested parties alone give the number of dead.

At bottom, these peoples think more highly of one another than is generally believed, and they cannot forget the bonds which formerly united them. Tormented and excited either by the missionaries or by the monks who are always seeking to extend European

A PRINCE OF LEBANON

influence, they spare one another as the condottieri used to do in those tremendous battles in which blood was never shed. The monks preach, and tell them that they must have recourse to arms; the English missionaries declaim and find the money, saying that they must show how valiant they are; but beneath it all there is doubt and discouragement. Everybody now understands what some of the European Powers want; though their aims and interests are divided, they are helped forward by the utter lack of foresight on the part of the Turks. By arousing a few quarrels in the mixed villages, they think they have proved the necessity for a complete separation of the two elements, formerly united and combined. The work which is being done in the Lebanon at this moment under colour of pacification consists in bringing about the exchange of the properties owned by Druses in Christian districts for those owned by Christians in Druse districts. So arise the domestic troubles which have so often been exaggerated, but in the end there will be two quite distinct peoples, one, perhaps, under the protection of Austria, and the other under that of England. Then it will be difficult for France to recover the influence which, at the time of Louis XIV, extended over Druse and Maronite alike.

It is not for me to express an opinion upon such a serious question. I can only be sorry that when I was in the Lebanon I did not take part in a more Homeric battle.

I was soon to leave the Prince and go to another part of the mountain. The fame of the Bethmeria affair grew greater as I went, thanks to the lively imagination of the Italian monks. The battle against the mulberry-trees gradually acquired the proportions of a crusade.

PART II
THE PRISONER

I

MORNING AND EVENING

WHAT shall we say about youth, my friend? With us, its keenest ardours are past; now it becomes us to speak of it only with modesty. Yet hardly have we known it; hardly have we realised that soon we should have to sing *Eheu fugaces, Posthume* . . . that ode of Horace which we so lately learned to understand. Study has stolen our finest moments from us. And the great result of so much lost effort is that one becomes able, as I was this morning, to understand the meaning of a Greek song which came to my ears from a drunken Levantine sailor:

Ne kalimera! ne ora kali!

This was the refrain that the young man tossed carelessly to the sea winds, to the noisy waves that break upon the shore: "It is not good-day; it is not good-night!" That is the meaning I found in these words, and, in so much of the other verses of the song as I could understand, there seemed to be this thought:

The morning is no more; the evening not yet come;
Yet the light has faded from our eyes;

and the continual refrain:

Ne kalimera! ne ora kali!

THE PRISONER

but, added the song:

But the golden evening is like the dawn,
And forgetfulness comes later with the night.

It is but a melancholy consolation, this thought of the golden evening of life, and the night which comes after. Soon we shall come to that solemn hour which is no longer morning, which is not the evening, and nothing in the world can alter the fact. What remedy would you suggest?

For myself I do see one, and that is to continue to live upon the Asian shore where fate has cast me; for a few months I have felt myself going back again upon the circle of my days. I feel younger, and in truth I am younger; I am only twenty years old.

I do not know why people grow old so quickly in Europe. Our best years are spent at college, away from women, and hardly have we had time to put upon us the robe of manhood than we are already no longer young. The virgin of our first love welcomes us with a mocking laugh; beautiful ladies of greater experience, when they are with us, dream perhaps of the uncertain sighs of Cherubin.

It is a mistake, you may be sure, especially in Europe where Cherubins are so rare. I can imagine nothing more awkward, nothing more ill-shapen, less graceful in fact, than a European boy of sixteen. We object to very young girls because of their red hands, their skinny shoulders, their awkward movements and their shrill voices; but what about that sickly-looking ephebus who is the despair of the military doctors? Only later do the limbs take form, the contours assert themselves, muscles and flesh develop upon the bony framework of youth; the man is formed.

In the East the children are perhaps not so pretty

MORNING AND EVENING

as our own; those of the rich are puffy, and those of the poor thin and pot-bellied, especially in Egypt; but generally adolescence is beautiful in both sexes. The young men look like women, and those who wear long robes can hardly be distinguished from their mothers and sisters. For that very reason, man as a man, becomes attractive only when years have given him a more masculine appearance, a more strongly marked cast of countenance. A beardless lover is not at all to the taste of the beautiful ladies of the Orient: there are a host of chances for one whose years have given him a majestically full beard to be the focus of those burning eyes which shine through the openings of the *yamack*, whose blackness is scarcely veiled beneath the gauze.

And, further, after that period when the cheeks are first covered with a thick fleece, there comes another, when stoutness, which undoubtedly makes the body more handsome, renders it hopelessly unprepossessing when clothed in those niggardly European garments in which Antinous himself would have looked like some clodhopping countryman. This is just the time when the flowing robes, the embroidered jackets, the trousers with huge folds, and the broad girdles bristling with weapons which the Levantines wear, really give them a most imposing aspect. Then there is still another lustre, when silver threads mingle with the beard, and begin to invade the hair; and this same hair grows thinner. Then, with us, even the most active, the strongest man, he who is most capable of emotion and tenderness, must give up all hope of ever becoming the hero of a romance. In the Orient that is the supreme moment of life. Hidden by the tarboosh or the turban, it matters little whether the hair is thin or graying; the young man himself has never been

THE PRISONER

able to reap any advantage from this natural adornment, for it is shaven: from his cradle days onwards he is never able to discover whether nature provided him with hair that is curly or the reverse. With his beard dyed with the aid of a Persian mixture, his eye brightened with a slight touch of bitumen, a man is sure of pleasing until he is sixty, however little he may feel himself capable of love.

Yes, let us be young in Europe as long as we can, but go to spend our old age in the Orient, the country of men worthy of the name, the land of the patriarchs. In Europe, where our institutions have suppressed physical strength, woman has become too powerful. With all that power of seduction, of ruse, of perseverance and persuasion with which heaven has endowed her, the woman of our own countries has become socially the equal of man, and this was more than was necessary to ensure that he should inevitably and eternally become her victim. I hope you will not point to the picture of happiness in a Parisian family to turn me aside from a plan whereon I base my future; I am already too sorry that I let such an opportunity slip at Cairo. It is essential that I shall unite myself with some innocent young girl belonging to this sacred soil which is the original fatherland of us all, and drench myself again in the life-giving springs of humanity, from which flowed the poetry and the religions of our fathers.

You laugh at this enthusiasm which, I admit, has been expended upon several objects since my journey began; but now you must know that I am in real earnest, and hesitation could never be more natural. This you know, and it is this fact which has perhaps given some interest to my confidences so far. I like to live my life as if it were a romance, and I am always

MORNING AND EVENING

ready to put myself in the position of one of those active, resolute heroes who must, at any cost, create an atmosphere of drama, interest, and action around them. Chance, however mighty it may be, has never brought together the elements of a tolerable story: at the most it can only provide the setting. So then, if one leaves everything to chance, things will go wrong, however excellent one's dispositions. Since, admittedly, there are only two kinds of dénouements—marriage and death—let us make one or other of them our aim. . . . Hitherto all my adventures have come to an end with my account of them. I only just managed to bring about a sort of minor catastrophe by joining to my own fortune that of the agreeable slave whom Abd-el-Kerim sold me. There was no great difficulty about that, to be sure, but still I had to think of it, and more especially I had to have money enough. By so doing, I sacrificed my hopes of a trip to Palestine which was marked upon my itinerary. For the five purses which this golden daughter of Malaya cost me, I might have visited Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, the Dead Sea and the Jordan. Like the prophet whom God punished, I must remain upon the borders of the Promised Land, and hardly can I, from the top of the mountain, cast a saddened glance in its direction. Serious-minded people will say that it is always wrong to act in a way different from everybody else, and to wish to play the Turk when one is only a Nazarean from Europe. Are they right? Who can say?

Undoubtedly I am imprudent; undoubtedly I have hung a great stone about my neck; undoubtedly also I have incurred a serious moral responsibility; but must I not, too, believe in that Fate which governs all this part of the world? It was Fate which would have it that poor Zeynab's star should come into conjunction

THE PRISONER

with my own; that I should change, perhaps for the good, the conditions of her destiny. Imprudence! There you are, with your European notions. Who knows whether, if I had taken the desert road, alone and richer by five purses, I might not have been attacked, robbed, and massacred by a horde of Bedouins who smelt my riches from afar? Get away with you! Everything is good which might have been worse, as the wisdom of the nations has long admitted.

Perhaps you are thinking, after all this preparation, that I have made up my mind to marry my slave, and by so ordinary a means to rid myself of scruples. You know that I am so nice-minded that I never for a moment think of selling her again. I offered her liberty and she would not have it, and for a very simple reason,—she would not know what to do with it. Besides, I could not add the necessary seasoning to such a noble sacrifice; a sum of money large enough to keep her out of need, for this, I was told, was customary in such a case. But to show you what are the other difficulties of my position, I must tell you what has recently happened to me.

II

A VISIT TO THE FRENCH SCHOOL

After my return from my excursion to the Mountain, I went to Madame Carlès' boarding-house, where I had placed the poor Zeynab, since I had not wished to take her upon so hazardous an expedition.

It was in one of those high Italian houses, whose buildings, with an inner gallery, surround a large space, half-terrace, half-courtyard, over which flutters

VISIT TO THE FRENCH SCHOOL

the shade of a striped *tendido*. The building had formerly been the French Consulate, and fleurs-de-lis which had once been gilded were still to be seen on the pediment. Orange-trees and pomegranates, planted in round holes left between the flags of the courtyard, gave some brightness to a place otherwise completely cut off from the life of the outer world. A little piece of blue sky, indented by the friezes, and crossed from time to time by doves from the neighbouring mosque: this was the only view the poor girls could enjoy. As soon as I went in, I heard the humming of lessons being recited, and, going up the staircase to the first floor, I went to one of the galleries outside the living quarters. There, upon an Indian rug, the girls were grouped in a circle around a divan on which Madame Carlès was sitting. The two biggest were next to her, and in one of the two I recognised the slave. She came to me in great delight.

Madame Carlès hastened to take us into her room, leaving her place to the other *grown-up*, who, by a movement natural to the women of that country, hurried, as soon as she saw me, to hide her face with her book. Evidently, said I to myself, she is not a Christian, for Christians never bother about being seen, when they are indoors. Long tresses of fair hair tied by silken ribbons, white hands with pointed fingers, with the long nails which indicate good-breeding, were all I could catch of that graceful apparition. Moreover, I hardly paid any attention; I was so anxious to know how the slave had fared in her new position. Poor girl! She burst into tears as she pressed my hand against her forehead. I was very moved, though I was not quite sure whether she had some complaint to make or whether she was overcome by my long absence.

THE PRISONER

I asked her if she was comfortable in that house. She threw herself upon her mistress's neck, crying that she was her mother.

"She is very good," said Madame Carlès to me in her Provençal accent, "but she will do nothing. She learns a very few words with the little ones and that is all. If I try to make her write or teach her to sew, she will have none of it. I said to her, 'I cannot punish you; but when your master comes back, he will have to think about it.'"

What Madame Carlès told me was very annoying. I had thought I should be able to settle the question of this girl's future by having her taught what was necessary, so that she could later get a place for herself and keep herself. I was in the position of a father who sees all his plans upset by the ill-will or idleness of his child. On the other hand, perhaps my rights were not as well-founded as those of a father. I put on the most severe air I could, and held the following conversation with the slave, with the assistance of the mistress.

"Why will you not learn to sew?"

"Because as soon as people see me working like a servant they will make a servant of me."

"The wives of Christians, who are free, work without being servants."

"Well, I shall not marry a Christian. With us a husband must give a servant to his wife."

I was about to answer that since she was a slave, she was less than a servant, but I remembered the distinction she had drawn between her position as a *cadine* (lady), and that of an *odaleuk*, who had to work.

"Why," I continued, "will you not learn to write? Then they would teach you how to sing and dance, and that certainly is not the work of a servant."

VISIT TO THE FRENCH SCHOOL

“No, but it is the sort of knowledge an *almée*, a *baladine*, has, and I prefer to stay as I am.”

We know only too well what power preconceived notions can have over the minds of European women; but it must be admitted, that ignorance and custom, basing themselves upon some ancient tradition, make them absolutely invincible in the women of the Orient. They are much more ready to give up their religious beliefs than to abandon an idea in which their self-respect is involved. So Madame Carlès said to me: “Never mind: when once she has become a Christian, she will see that the women of our religion can work without loss of dignity, and then she will learn what we like. She has been to Mass at the Capuchin monastery several times, and the superior was very edified by her devotion.”

“But that proves nothing,” said I. “At Cairo I have seen santons and dervishes going into the churches, either out of curiosity or because they liked to hear the music. They showed every sign of respect and devotion.”

On the table near us was a New Testament in French. Mechanically I opened it. At the beginning was a portrait of Jesus Christ, and further on a portrait of Mary. While I was looking at these pictures, the slave came over to me and, putting her finger on the first, said *Aissé* (Jesus), and on the second *Myriam* (Mary). Smiling, I put the book to her lips, but she drew back horrified, crying “*Mafisch!*” (No!).

“Why do you draw back?” I asked her. “In your religion don’t you honour *Aissé* as a prophet, and *Myriam* as one of the three holy women?”

“Yes,” said she, “but it is written: Thou shalt not worship an image.”

THE PRISONER

“You see,” I said to Madame Carlès, “her conversion has not got very far yet.”

“Wait, wait,” said Madame Carlès to me.

III

THE AKKALÉ

I rose, a prey to extreme irresolution. A little while ago, I compared myself to a father, and it is true that I had a feeling with regard to this poor girl that was in some degree a *family* feeling. She had only me to support her. That is certainly the one pleasant side of slavery as it is understood in the East. The idea of possession, which attaches so strongly to material objects and to animals, can it have a less noble and less vital influence when it is applied to creatures like ourselves? I should not care to apply it to the unfortunate black slaves of Christian countries, and here I speak only of the slaves the Mussulmans possess, whose position is regulated by religion and custom.

I took poor Zeynab's hand, and looked at her with such tenderness that Madame Carlès was doubtless misled.

“That's what I try to make her understand,” she said. “You see, my girl, if you will become a Christian, your master will perhaps marry you, and take you with him to his own country.”

“Oh, Madame Carlès,” I cried, “don't be in such a hurry with your system of conversion. . . . What an idea!”

I had not yet thought of this solution. Yes, at the moment when one is about to leave the Orient, it is a sorry business not to know what to do with a slave

THE AKKALÉ

that one has bought; but to marry her—that would be much too Christian. Madame Carlès, you do not think what you're about. This woman is eighteen years old already—a very fair age in the East. She will be beautiful for ten years more at the most, after which, I, still young, shall be the husband of a yellow woman, with suns tattooed upon her brow and bosom, with a sort of buttonhole in her left nostril, in which she once wore a ring. Reflect for a moment that though she looks well enough in the costume of the Levant, she would look hideous in European fashions. Can you see me going into a drawing-room with a beauty who might be suspected of cannibal tastes? It would be extremely ridiculous for both of us.

No, conscience does not demand that from me, and such a course is not dictated even by affection. I am certainly fond of the slave, but she has belonged to other masters. She has no education and no desire to learn. How can I make an equal of a woman, not a fool indeed, or ill-mannered, but certainly illiterate? Is she ever likely to understand the necessity for work and study? Besides, I must say, I am afraid it is impossible for any very great sympathy ever to arise between two individuals of races so different as ours.

Yet I shall be sorry to leave this woman. . . .

Let anyone who can, explain these irresolute sentiments, these contrary ideas which at that moment were jostling one another in my brain. I had risen, as though I were pressed by time, so as to avoid giving a definite answer to Madame Carlès, and we went from the room into the gallery where the children were continuing their lessons under the care of the biggest. The slave went and threw herself upon this girl's neck, thus preventing her from hiding her face as she had done when I came in. "*Ya makbouba!*" (This is my

THE PRISONER

friend), she cried. And the young girl, at last allowing herself to be seen, gave me an opportunity to admire features in which the whiteness of Europe was allied to the purity of that aquiline type which, in Asia as with us, has something noble about it. An air of pride tempered by grace irradiated intelligence over her face, and her customary seriousness gave value to the smile which she addressed to me when I greeted her. Madame Carlès said:

“This is a very interesting girl; her father is one of the sheiks of the Mountain. Unfortunately, he allowed the Turks to take him prisoner. He was rash enough to come to Beyrouth at the time of the troubles, and was put in prison because he had not paid his taxes since 1840. He will not recognise the powers that be, and all his belongings have been sequestered. Finding himself a captive and without a single friend, he sent for his daughter. She can only go and see him once a day, and the rest of the time she stays here. I teach her Italian, and she teaches the little girls the Arab letters, for she is a clever girl. In her people, women of a certain position can acquire knowledge, and even engage in the arts—a thing which, among the Mussulmans, would be regarded as a sign of low birth.”

“But to what race does she belong?”

“She is a Druse,” said Madame Carlès.

After that, I looked at her with more attention. She saw that we were talking about her and it seemed to embarrass her a little. The slave was half-lying on the divan by her side, playing with the long tresses of her hair.

“They look well together,” said Madame Carlès—“like day and night. It amuses them to talk to one another, because the others are so small. Sometimes I say to that girl of yours: ‘If you would model yourself

THE AKKALÉ

on your friend, you might learn something.' But she will do nothing but play and sing all day long. What can you expect? When they are taken so late, there is nothing to be done with them."

I paid little attention to the sorrows of the good Madame Carlès, always accentuated by her Provençal pronunciation. She was so concerned to show me that she ought not to be blamed for the little progress my slave had made, that she did not realise that at that moment I was more anxious to be informed about her other boarder. But I did not dare to make my curiosity too obvious; I felt that it would be to take an unfair advantage of the simplicity of this good woman. She was accustomed to receive fathers, ecclesiastics and other serious people . . . and in me she saw only another client as serious as they.

Leaning on the baluster of the gallery, thoughtful, and with my forehead bowed, I profited by the time which the southern loquacity of the teacher gave me to admire the delightful picture before my eyes. The slave had taken the hand of the other girl, and was comparing it with her own. With a thoughtless gaiety, she continued this pantomime by bringing her dark tresses near the fair ones of her companion. The other smiled at such childish play. It was clear that she did not think she suffered by the comparison; all she sought was an opportunity to play and laugh, with the naïve eagerness of the Oriental. But for me that spectacle held a dangerous charm, and I very quickly realised the fact.

"How comes it," I said to Madame Carlès, as though out of simple curiosity, "that this poor girl comes to a Christian school, though she is a Druse?"

"At Beyrouth there are no religious institutions; there have never been any public shelters for women

THE PRISONER

here, and the honourable place for her to go is to a house like mine. Besides, you know the Druses have many ideas like our own: they believe in the Bible and the Gospels, and they pray before the tombs of our saints."

This time I decided not to put any more questions to Madame Carlès. I realised that lessons were being suspended during my visit, and the little girls seemed to be talking with some surprise to one another. I must give back this place of shelter to its accustomed tranquillity; and I must also have time to reflect upon a whole world of new ideas which had just arisen within me.

I took my leave of Madame Carlès and promised to come and see her again the next day.

When you read the pages of this diary, you smile, do you not? at my enthusiasm for a little Arab girl whom I met by chance upon the benches of a school; you do not believe in sudden passions, you know me so experienced in this respect that I do not lightly conceive a new one; you doubtless put it down to my eagerness, the climate, the poetry of the place, the costume, all that setting of mountain and sea, those great impressions of memory and locality, which make the mind only too ready to welcome a passing illusion. You think, not that I am in love, but that I think I am in love; as if, so far as results are concerned, it is not the same thing.

I have heard serious-minded people make fun of the love which others conceive for actresses, for queens and poetesses, for everything which, in their uninspired opinion, stirs up the imagination rather than the heart. Yet, with such mad loves, a man is brought to delirium, to death or to unheard-of sacrifices of time, of fortune or intelligence. I think I am in love—I think I am ill, say you? But if I believe I am, I am indeed.

THE AKKALÉ

I spare you the story of my emotions; read all the stories of lovers you can, from those of Plutarch until *Werther*, and if there are still some to be met with in our own day, recollect that they have only the more merit because they have triumphed over all the methods of analysis which experience and observation offer us. And now let us escape from generalities.

When I left Madame Carlès' house, I bore my love, like a prey, to solitude. How delighted I was to find myself with an idea, an aim, a will, something to dream of, something to try to attain. This country which has given life again to all the powers and inspirations of my youth certainly owed me no less. I had been sure that when I set foot upon this mother land, and plunged myself again into the venerated sources of our history and our beliefs, I should arrest the passage of my years, and make myself a child again in this cradle of the world, still young in the bosom of this eternal youth.

Preoccupied by these thoughts, I crossed the town without paying any attention to the usual business of the crowd. I sought the mountain and its shade; I felt that the compass-needle of my destiny had suddenly veered round. I must meditate for some time and seek for a means to steady it. On leaving the fortified gates, on the side away from the sea, one comes to sunken roads, shaded by brush and bordered by the gardens of the country houses. Higher up is the wood of spreading pines, planted, two centuries ago, to prevent the sands which threaten the Beyrouth promontory from coming further. The reddish trunks of this regular plantation, which extends for several leagues, look like so many columns in a temple dedicated to universal nature. On the one side it stands above the sea; on the other, the desert, both the severe faces

THE PRISONER

of the world. I had been before to dream in this place, without any definite aim, without any other thought than those vague philosophical problems which always crop up in minds that have nothing else to think about, when the thinker is brought before a view so wonderful as this. But now I brought with me an idea capable of bearing fruit; I was no longer alone, my future stood out against the luminous background of this picture. The ideal woman whom every man pursues in his dreams had realised herself for me: the rest was all forgotten.

I hardly dare tell you what a very ordinary event brought me to earth again, as I was spurning the red sand with a proud foot. An enormous insect crossed my path, pushing before it a ball greater than itself; it was a kind of beetle, and reminded me of the Egyptian scarabs which carry the world upon their heads. You know I am superstitious, and you may well imagine that I drew an augury from this symbolic intervention across my path. I retraced my steps, convinced that there must be some obstacle against which I should have to fight.

The next day I hastened to Madame Carlès' house. In order to find some pretext for this visit so soon after the last, I went to the bazaar to buy some woman's ornaments—a *mandille* from Broussa, some silk made into fringes and festoons to make trimming for a dress, and some little artificial flowers which the Levantine women put in their hair.

When I brought all these things to the slave, whom Madame Carlès had brought into her room when I arrived, she rose with a cry of joy and ran into the gallery to show her treasures to her friend. I had followed to bring her back, excusing myself to Madame Carlès for being the cause of this folly, but the whole

THE AKKALÉ

class was already united in one sentiment of admiration, and the young Druse girl threw in my direction a smiling glance, which went to my heart. "What is she thinking?" I said to myself. "She must certainly believe that I am in love with my slave, and that these ornaments are tokens of my affection. Perhaps, too, these things are rather too gaudy to be worn in a school; I ought to have chosen something more useful, slippers for example; poor Zeynab's are not so new as they might be." I even decided that it would have been better to buy her a new dress instead of embroideries to sew upon her old ones. That was what Madame Carlès thought. She had good-humouredly joined in the excitement which the episode had produced in the whole class.

"She ought to have a very handsome dress for trimmings so magnificent!"

"See," she said to the slave, "if you would learn to sew, the *sidi* would go and buy seven or eight lengths of taffetas at the bazaar and you could make yourself a dress like a society lady." But there was no doubt that the slave would have preferred a dress ready-made.

It seemed to me that the Druse girl looked rather sadly upon these ornaments which were no longer suited to one of her position, and were indeed hardly more so for that which the slave could have with me. I had bought them without thinking, without bothering very much about possibilities, or what was fitting. But, obviously, a lace trimming calls for a velvet or satin dress. Into such a predicament I had imprudently allowed myself to fall. Besides, I seemed to be playing the difficult part of a rich man, anxious to show off what we should call his Asiatic luxury, though in Asia the idea conveyed would be rather that of European luxury.

THE PRISONER

It seemed to me that their supposing this turned the scales perhaps a little in my favour. Women, alas, are much the same the whole world over. Thereafter, Madame Carlès had perhaps more respect for me, and was prepared to see no more than the simple curiosity of a traveller in the questions I asked about the Druse girl. I had no trouble in making her understand that the little she had told me the previous day had excited my interest for the unfortunate father.

“It is not impossible,” I said to the school-mistress, “that I might be of some use to these people. I know one of the Pasha’s staff, and besides, you know, a European, with some slight reputation, has influence with the Consuls.”

“Yes, by all means do what you can,” said Madame Carlès with her Provençal eagerness. “She is worth it, and her father too, beyond a doubt. He is what they call an *akkal*, a holy man, a scholar, and his daughter, whom he has taught himself, already has the same title among his people—*akkalé-siti* (spiritual lady).”

“But that is only her surname,” said I. “I suppose she has another?”

“She is called Salema; the other name she has in common with all other women who belong to a religious order. Poor child! I have done all I could to persuade her to become a Christian, but she says that her own religion is the same thing; she believes everything we believe, and comes to church like the rest. . . . Well, what can I do? These people have much the same ideas as the Turks. Your slave, who is a Mussulman, tells me that she respects their religion too, and I finally gave up trying to persuade her. When a man believes in everything, he believes in nothing. That’s what I say.”

THE DRUSE SHEIK

IV

THE DRUSE SHEIK

When I left the house, I hurried to the Pasha's palace, desperately eager to make myself useful to the young *akkal-siti*. I found my friend the Armenian at his usual place in the waiting-room, and asked him if he knew anything about the imprisonment of a Druse chieftain for not having paid his taxes. "Oh," said he, "if that is all, I don't imagine the matter can be serious, for none of the Druse sheiks has paid the *miri* for three years. There must be something more than that."

He went to make some inquiries from the other officials, and soon came back to tell me that the sheik Seid-Escherazy was accused of seditious preachings among his own people. "He is a dangerous man to have about in troublous times. Besides, the Pasha of Beyrouth cannot set him free; that is a matter for the Pasha of Acre."

"The Pasha of Acre!" I cried. "Why that's the very man for whom I have a letter, the man I once knew personally in Paris."

And I showed my delight so obviously that the Armenian thought I was mad. Certainly, he was far from suspecting my motive.

Nothing adds strength to a new love so much as the appearance of unexpected circumstances, which, however unimportant they may be in themselves, seem to show the action of destiny. Fate or Providence, we sometimes seem to see, appears beneath the drab monotony of life, a line drawn upon some mysterious pattern, which points the way which we must follow, or go astray.

THE PRISONER

I immediately came to the conclusion that it had been written from all time that I should marry in Syria; that Fate had so far foreseen this tremendous fact, that for its realisation nothing less was needed than a thousand circumstances strangely interwoven in my existence, whose relationship to one another I doubtless exaggerated.

With the Armenian's help I readily obtained permission to visit the State prison, situated in a group of towers which form part of the eastern wall of the city. I went there with him, and, by giving a backsheesh to the people of the place, I was able to send a message to the Druse sheik to ask if he would receive me. The curiosity of Europeans is so well known and accepted by the people of this country, that no difficulty was raised. I expected to find him in some gloomy dungeon with damp walls, but there was nothing of the sort in that part of the prison which I was shown. The place was exactly like any other house in Beyrouth, though this indeed is not to pay them too high a compliment; there were only a few warders and soldiers.

The sheik, who had a whole apartment to himself, was allowed to go for walks upon the terraces. He received us in a room which served as a parlour; coffee and pipes were brought by his own slave. He himself did not smoke, *akkals* do not. When we had taken our seats, and I could look at him carefully, I was astonished to find him so young-looking; he seemed hardly older than myself. His noble, masculine features were but a reproduction of his daughter's in manly guise, and the penetrating quality of his voice also made a great impression on me for the same reason.

I had asked for this interview without thinking very much about it, and already I felt myself moved and embarrassed more than was fitting in a curious visitor;

THE DRUSE SHEIK

the simple, confident welcome of the sheik reassured me. I was on the point of telling him all I had in mind; but the expressions I tried to find only warned me of the strangeness of my behaviour. This time, I decided to be content with conversation such as he might expect from any tourist. He had already seen several Englishmen in his prison, and was accustomed to questions about his people and himself.

His position, moreover, made him very patient, and glad enough of conversation and company. My knowledge of the history of his country was quite sufficient to satisfy him that I was only guided by a desire for more knowledge. Knowing how much trouble others had experienced in trying to get the Druses to give some details about their religion, I employed the semi-interrogative formula: Is it true that . . . ? and then produced all the assertions of Niebuhr, de Volney, and de Sacy. The Druse shook his head with the prudent reserve of Orientals, and simply said: "What? Is that so? Are the Christians so clever? How could they have learned that?" and other evasive phrases.

I saw quite well that nothing more was to be got out of him on this occasion. Our conversation had been carried on in Italian, which he spoke well enough. I asked if I might come to see him again and bring with me some fragments of a history of the great Emir Fakardin, upon which I told him I was busy. I imagined that national pride would at least serve to induce him to correct certain statements which were hardly favourable to his own people, and I was not wrong. Perhaps he felt that now, when Europe was able to affect the policies of the Oriental nations so decisively, it was desirable to give up a little of that claim to secrecy of a doctrine which has

THE PRISONER

not been able to withstand the penetration of our scholars.

“You see,” said I to him, “in our libraries, we have a hundred of your religious books, all of which have been read, translated and commented upon.”

“God is great !” he said with a sigh.

This time, I believe he took me for a missionary, but outwardly he showed no sign of doing so, and indeed he pressed me to come and see him again, since I appeared to find some pleasure in so doing.

I can only give you a résumé of the conversations I had with the Druse sheik, in which he was kind enough to put right the ideas I had formed of his religion from the fragments of Arabic books, translated at random, and commented upon by European scholars. There was a time when these things were kept from strangers, and the Druses hid their books away in the most secret places of their houses and temples.

It was during the wars they had to wage either against the Turks or the Maronites, that a great number of these manuscripts were collected, and a general idea of their teaching gained, but it was impossible that a religion eight centuries old should not have produced a medley of contradictory dissertations, the work of divers sects and successive phases in the course of time. Certain writers have seen in them one of the most complicated monuments of human folly; others have made much of the relation which exists between the Druse religion and the ancient doctrines of initiation. In turn, the Druses have been compared to the Pythagoreans, the Essenes, the Gnostics, and it appears that the Templars, the Rouge-Croix and the modern Freemasons borrowed many of their ideas. It cannot be doubted that the writers of the Crusade period have often mixed them up with the Ishmaelians, one of

THE DRUSE SHEIK

whose sects was that famous association of Assassins which, at one time, was the terror of all the rulers of the world; but these lived in Kurdistan, and their *sheik-el-djebel*, or Old Man of the Mountain, has no connection with the *Prince of the Mountain* of the Lebanon.

There is this peculiarity about the religion of the Druses: it claims to be the last religion revealed to the world. Its Messiah appeared about the year 1000, nearly four hundred years after Mohammed. Like our own, he was made man; but he chose his human form well, and was able to live the life of a god even upon earth, since he was no less than the Commander of the Faithful, the Caliph of Egypt and Syria, beside whom all the other princes of the earth cut a very sorry figure in that glorious year 1000. At the time of his birth all the planets were united in the sign of Cancer, and at the hour of his entering into this world the sparkling Pharōis (Saturn) was in the ascendant. Moreover, Nature had provided him with everything needed to support the part he had to play: he had the face of a lion, a vibrant voice that sounded like thunder, and none could bear to meet the flash of his dark blue eyes.

It would seem difficult for a sovereign endowed with all these advantages not to be believed on his simple assertion that he was a god. But among his own people, Hakem found only a few adherents. In vain he closed the mosques, the churches and the synagogues; in vain he established lecture houses, where doctors, paid by himself, demonstrated his divinity. The popular conscience rejected the god while it respected the prince. The mighty heir to the Fatimites had less power over souls than the carpenter's son at Jerusalem, or the camel-driver Mohammed at Medina.

THE PRISONER

It was only in the future that he was to have a body of faithful believers, who, however few they may be in numbers, regard themselves, just as the Hebrew people do, as the depositaries of the True Law, the Eternal Rule, the Arcana of the Future. Soon Hakem is to reappear in a new form, and to establish throughout the world the superiority of his people, who, in glory and power, will then take the place of Mussulmans and Christians. The time fixed by the Druse scriptures is that when Christians shall have conquered Mussulmans throughout the East.

Lady Stanhope, who lived in the country of the Druses, and became infatuated with their ideas, kept in her courtyard a horse all ready for the Mahdi, which is the name given to this apocalyptic personage. She hoped to accompany him on his triumph. Her wish was not fulfilled. But the Mahdi's horse, which has upon its back a natural saddle formed by folds of skin, is still alive; it was bought by one of the Druse sheiks.

Have we any right to see nothing but folly in all this? At bottom, there is not a single modern religion which does not present us with similar conceptions. Let us rather say that the beliefs of the Druses are a synthesis of all the religions and philosophies that have gone before.

The Druses worship but one god, who is Hakem; but this god, like the Buddha of the Hindus, has manifested himself to the world in several different forms. He has been made flesh ten times in different parts of the earth: first in India, and then in Persia, in the Yemen, at Tunis, and elsewhere. These different incarnations are called *stations*.

In Heaven, Hakem is called *Albar*.

After him come five ministers, direct emanations

THE DRUSE SHEIK

from the divinity, whose names are Gabriel, Michael, Israfil, Azariel and Metraton. Symbolically, they are called Intelligence, Soul, Word, He-who-goeth-before, and He-who-cometh-after. Three other ministers of a lower order are called, figuratively, Application, Opening and Phantom. These have other, human, names in their various incarnations, for they, too, intervene from time to time in the great drama of human life.

So, in the Druse catechism, the principal minister, called Hamza, who is the same as Gabriel, is regarded as having appeared seven times. At the time of Adam he was called Achatnil, afterwards Pythagoras, David, Schoaib; at the time of Jesus he was the genuine Messiah and was called Eleazar; in Mohammed's time he was called Salman-el-Faresi, and finally, in the name of Hamza, he was the prophet of Hakem, caliph and god, and the real founder of the Druse religion.

Here we certainly have a religion in which Heaven is constantly concerned with the affairs of men. The periods at which these powers intervene are called *revolutions*. Each time the human race goes astray, and falls too deeply into forgetfulness of its duties, the Supreme Being and his angels take the form of men, and by human means alone re-establish order.

This is fundamentally the same idea as that of Christianity, with a more frequent intervention on the part of the Godhead, but it is the Christian idea without Jesus, for the Druses believe that the Apostles delivered to the Jews a false Messiah, who devoted himself for the sake of the other. The true Messiah (Hamza) was among the number of his disciples, called Eleazar, and only inspired Jesus, the son of Joseph, with his own thoughts. As for the Evangelists, the Druses call them the *feet of wisdom*,

THE PRISONER

and make but this one alteration in their stories. However, they will have nothing to do with the adoration of the cross or the idea of a God sacrificed by men.

Now, in this system of successive religious revelations, the Druses admit also the Mussulman idea, but without Mohammed. It is Hamza again; this time under the name of Salman-el-Faresi, who has sown the new seed. Afterwards, the last incarnation of Hakem and Hamza co-ordinated the different teachings revealed to the world seven times since Adam. These are related to the periods of Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Pythagoras, Christ and Mohammed.

It is obvious that this doctrine rests fundamentally upon a peculiar interpretation of the Bible, for in this chronology there is no question of any idolatrous divinity, and Pythagoras is the only person in it unrelated to the Mosaic tradition. Such a series of beliefs makes it easy for us to understand why the Druses have sometimes been accounted Christians, and sometimes Turks.

We have taken account of eight celestial beings who intervene in the affairs of men—some, like Christ, using the sword of the Word, others the sword of the warrior, like the gods of Homer. There necessarily exist, also, angels of darkness who play the opposite part. So in the history of the world, according to the Druses, we find each of the seven periods the scene of tremendous action, when in human form these enemies seek out one another and are to be recognised by their greatness or their hatred.

So, in turn, the spirit of evil is Eblis, or the serpent; Methouzaël, king of the city of the giants, at the period of the Flood; Nimrod, at the time of Abraham; Pharaoh, at the time of Moses; and later, Antiochus, Herod and other monstrous tyrants, assisted by sinister acolytes,

THE DRUSE SHEIK

who are reborn at the same periods, to fight against the reign of the Lord. According to some sects, this return follows a millenary cycle which is brought about by the influence of certain stars; in this case the period of Mohammed is not regarded as one of the great periodic revolutions. The mystical drama which, each time, renews the face of the earth is at one time Paradise Lost, at another the Flood, at another the Flight into Egypt, at another the reign of Solomon. The coming of Christ and the reign of Hakem are the two latest scenes in it. According to this point of view, the Mahdi will not appear again until the year 2000.

All through this doctrine there is no trace of original sin, no paradise for the just, no hell for the sinner. Recompense and expiation are effected on this earth by the passing of the soul to another body. Beauty, riches and power are given to the elect; the unfaithful become slaves, invalids and sufferers. However, a pure life may put them back again in the place from which they have fallen, and set in their place any one of the elect who may show himself too proud in his prosperity.

Transmigration is brought about in a very simple manner. The number of men upon the earth is always the same. Every second, one is born and another dies; the departing soul is magnetically attracted into the orbit of the new-born body, and the influence of the stars presides like Providence over the exchange of destinies. Men, however, are not like the heavenly spirits, conscious of their migrations. But the faithful can, by going through the nine stages of initiation, gradually arrive at the knowledge of all things and of themselves. This is the joy reserved to the *akkals* (spiritual), and any Druse can rise to this rank by study and by virtue. On the other hand, those who only

THE PRISONER

follow the law, without aspiring to wisdom, are called *djabels*, or ignorant. They always have the chance of rising higher in another life, and of purifying souls which are too greatly attached to material things.

As for Christians, Jews, Mohammedans and idolaters, it is clearly understood that their position is much inferior. But to the credit of the Druse religion it must be said that it is perhaps the only one which does not condemn its enemies to eternal suffering. When the Messiah has again appeared, the Druses will be established in all the kingdoms, governments and dominions of the earth by reason of their merits, and other peoples will take the positions of servants, slaves and workers; they will be, in fact, the common herd. In this respect the sheik assured me that the Christians would not be the worst treated. Let us hope, then, that the Druses will be good masters.

These details interested me so much that I determined to find out all about the life of this illustrious Hakem, whom the historians have depicted as a furious madman, half-Nero and half-Heliogabalus. I discovered that, from the Druse point of view, his behaviour could be explained in quite another way.

The good sheik did not seem to object to my repeated visits, and besides, he knew that I might be useful to him with the Pasha of Acre. So he was good enough to tell me, with all that romantic grace of Arab genius, the story of Hakem, which I write down as nearly as possible as he told it to me. In the Orient everything is made into a story. However, the principal facts of this story are founded upon authentic traditions; and I was not sorry, after having observed and studied modern Cairo, to discover traces of the ancient Cairo preserved in Syria, in families exiled from Egypt eight hundred years ago.

PART III
THE STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

I

HASHISH

ON the right bank of the Nile, some distance from the port of Fostat, where are the ruins of Old Cairo, and not far from the mountain of Mokattam which towers above the new city, some time after the year 1000 of the Christians, which corresponds to the fourth century of the Mussulman Hegira, there was a little village, mainly inhabited by people of the sect of the Sabeans.

From the last of the houses that stand upon the river's bank there is a delightful view. The Nile, with its caressing waves, surrounds the island of Rodda, seeming to hold it as a slave would hold a basket of flowers in his arms. On the other bank is Ghizeh, and at night, when the sun has just gone down, the gigantic triangles of the pyramids tear asunder the band of violet mist which follows the sunset. Upon this clear background the tops of the palms, sycamores and Pharaoh's fig-trees stand out darkly. Stretched out upon the plain, like a crouching dog, the Sphinx seems to watch over the herds of water-buffaloes which come trailing down to the watering-place, and the lights of fishermen pierce the thick darkness of the shores with stars of gold.

In the Sabean village, the place from which this

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

view might best be enjoyed, was a white-walled *okel*, surrounded by locust-trees. Its terrace went down to the water's edge, and there, every night, the boatmen, who were going up or coming down the Nile, could see the quivering wicks swimming in their bowls of oil.

Through the bays of the arcades, one who troubled to look from a boat in the middle of the river might easily have seen within the *okel*, travellers and customers seated before wooden tables on baskets of palm, or rug-covered divans, and would certainly have been astonished by their strange appearance. Wild gestures, succeeded by dull immobility, crazy laughter, inarticulate cries, would have enabled him to guess that this was one of those houses where, taking no heed of the prohibition, infidels came to make themselves drunk with wine, bouza (beer) or hashish.

One evening a boat, steered with the decision of a steersman who knows his bearings, touched land in the shadow of the terrace, at the foot of a staircase whose lowest steps were washed by the water, and from it there sprang a young good-looking man who seemed to be a fisherman. Mounting the steps with a strong quick step, he sat down in the corner of the room at a place which seemed to be his own. Nobody paid any attention to his coming; he was evidently an habitu  of the place.

At the same moment, by the opposite door, that is to say on the land side, there entered a man dressed in a tunic of black wool, wearing, contrary to custom, long hair beneath a *takieh* (white cap).

His unexpected appearance caused some surprise. He sat down in a corner in the shadow, and the general drunkenness gaining the upper-hand again, soon nobody paid any attention to him. Although he was poorly dressed, the newcomer's face did not bear the stamp of

HASHISH

the anxious humility of extreme poverty. His clear-cut features recalled the severe lines of a lion's head. His eyes, of dark sapphire blue, had an indefinable power; they alarmed and charmed at once.

Yousouf, which was the name of the young man who had come in the boat, immediately felt a secret sympathy for the unknown whose unaccustomed presence he had noticed. Since he had not yet taken part in the orgy, he approached the divan on which the stranger was seated.

"Brother," said Yousouf, "you seem weary; doubtless you have come a long way. Will you take some refreshment?"

"Indeed, my way has been long," replied the stranger. "I came into this *okel* to rest; but what can I drink here, where only forbidden drinks are served?"

"You Mussulmans, you dare not moisten your mouths with anything but pure water; but we, who are of the sect of the Sabeans, we can, without offending our law, refresh ourselves with the generous blood of the grape, or the fair juice of the barley."

"But I do not see any fermented drink in front of you."

"Oh, I have long disdained their vulgar drunkenness," said Yousouf, making a sign to a negro, who set upon the table two small glass cups surrounded by silver filigree, and a box filled with a greenish paste in which was placed an ivory spatula. "This box contains the paradise your prophet promised to his believers, and, if you were not scrupulous, in one hour I would put you in the arms of the houris without making you pass across the bridge of Alsirat," he said, laughing.

"But this paste is hashish, if I am not mistaken,"

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

said the stranger, pushing aside the cup in which Yousouf had put a part of the fantastic mixture, "and hashish is forbidden."

"Everything pleasant is forbidden," said Yousouf, swallowing his first spoonful.

The stranger looked at him with dark blue eyes; and his forehead contracted in folds so violent that his hair moved with the movement of the skin. For a moment one would have thought that he would spring upon the careless young man and tear him to pieces; but he contained himself, and, suddenly changing his mind, stretched out his hand, took the cup, and slowly began to sample the green paste.

After a few minutes, the effects of the hashish began to make themselves felt upon the young man and the stranger: a gentle languor spread over all their limbs, a vague smile hovered over their lips. Although they had hardly spent half an hour in each other's company, they felt as though they had known one another for a thousand years. When the effect of the drug upon them grew stronger, they began to laugh, to move about, and speak with extreme volubility, especially the stranger, who, a strict observer of all the prohibitions, had never before tasted this preparation and felt its effects strongly. He seemed a prey to extraordinary exaltation: hosts of new thoughts, unheard-of and inconceivable, traversed his soul like whirlwinds of fires. His eyes sparkled as though they were lighted from within by the reflection of some unknown world; his demeanour took on a superhuman dignity. Then the vision faded, and he collapsed limply upon the cushions.

"Well, my friend," said Yousouf, taking advantage of this interval in the stranger's intoxication, "what do you think now of this good pistachio jam? Will you

HASHISH

still anathematise the good fellows who gather peacefully here to be happy in their own way?"

"Hashish makes man like to God," said the stranger in a slow, deep voice.

"Yes," said Yousouf eagerly. "Water drinkers only know the common, material appearance of things. Drunkenness, while it disturbs the eyes of the body, enlightens those of the soul; the spirit, freed from the body, its stern jailer, escapes like a prisoner whose warder has gone to sleep, leaving the key in the door of the cell. Happy and free, he wanders through space and light, chatting familiarly with the genii he meets, and they delight him with sudden and exquisite revelations. He flies easily through atmospheres of unspeakable happiness, and all this in the space of a minute that seems to him an eternity, so rapidly does one sensation follow another. I have a dream which continually returns, always the same and always different. When I go back to my boat staggering beneath the splendour of my visions, closing my eyes to that continual stream of hyacinths, carbuncles, emeralds and rubies which form the basis upon which the hashish paints the most remarkable phantasies . . . in the bosom of the infinite, I see, as it were, a celestial countenance, more beautiful than all the creations of the poets, which smiles upon me with a sweetness that goes all through me, and descends from the skies to come to me. Is it an angel, a fairy? I know not. She seats herself beside me in my boat, whose common wood at once is changed to mother-of-pearl, and floats upon a silver stream, driven along by a breeze laden with perfumes."

"Strange, happy vision!" murmured the stranger, nodding his head.

"That is not all," continued Yousouf. "One night,

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

when I had taken a weaker dose, I woke up from my intoxication as my boat was passing the point of the island of Rodda. A woman like that of my dream was gazing at me with eyes which, though they were human, had none the less the glory of heaven. Her half-open veil showed me a jacket covered with precious stones which sparkled in the moonlight. My hand found hers; her soft skin, smooth and fresh like the petals of a flower, her rings of which I could feel the carving, convinced me of her reality."

"Near the island of Rodda?" said the stranger, thoughtfully.

"I was not dreaming," continued Yousouf, without paying any attention to the remark of his confidant of the moment. "The hashish had only brought out a memory buried in the very depths of my soul, for this divine countenance was known to me. Where had I seen it before? in what world had we met? what previous existence had brought us together? That I could not say, but this strange meeting, this bizarre adventure, caused me no surprise: it seemed quite natural that this woman, who so completely realised my ideal, should be there in my boat, in the middle of the Nile, as if she had sprung from the calyx of one of those broad blossoms which come to the surface of the waters. Without asking for any explanation, I cast myself at her feet, and spoke to her all that love in its exaltation could imagine that was most burning and most sublime: there came to me words of tremendous significance; expressions which contained a universe of thought, mysterious phrases in which vibrated the echo of vanished worlds. My soul grew greater and greater in the past and in the future; the love which I was expressing, I was sure that I had felt from all eternity.

HASHISH

“As I spoke, I saw her great eyes light up and send forth a mysterious force; her transparent hands came towards me tapering in rays of light. I felt myself enveloped in a net of flame, and in spite of myself I fell back from waking to dreaming. When I finally shook off the invincible delicious torpor which bound my limbs, I was on the bank opposite to Ghizeh, moored to a palm-tree, and my black boy was calmly sleeping beside the boat which he had drawn upon the sand. There was a pale red light on the horizon; day was about to break.”

“That was a love which seems little like our earthly loves,” said the stranger, without casting any doubt upon the possibility of Yousouf’s story, for hashish makes men credulous of prodigies.

“I have never yet told this unbelievable story to anyone; why have I trusted it to you, whom I have never seen before? It is hard for me to explain. A mysterious attraction draws me to you. When you came into this room, a voice cried to me from the depth of my heart: ‘There he is at last.’ Your coming calmed a secret uneasiness which gave me no rest. You are he whom I have awaited without knowing. Before you, my thoughts spring from me, and I have been forced to tell you all the mysteries of my heart.”

“What you feel,” said the stranger, “I too feel, and I will tell you something that I have never yet dared to own, even to myself. You have an impossible passion, but I have one that is monstrous: you love a fairy, but I love—you will shudder—I love my own sister. Yet, strangely, I can feel no remorse for this unlawful desire. In vain I blame myself; I am absolved by some mysterious power that I feel within myself. My love has nothing in it of earthly impurity. It is not lust that drives me to my sister, though in

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

beauty she is the equal of the phantom of my visions; it is an indefinable attraction, an affection deep as the sea, vast as the skies, and such as a god himself might feel. The idea that my sister might join herself to any other man fills me with disgust and horror, as though it were a sacrilege. Through the veils of flesh I see in her a something which is of heaven. Despite the name which this earth gives her, she is the spouse of my divine soul, the virgin who was destined for me from the very first days of creation: there are moments when, through the ages and the darkness, I seem to find signs of our secret relationship. Scenes from before the appearance of men upon this earth come to my memory, and I see myself seated with her beneath the golden branches of Eden, served by obedient spirits. If I united myself with another woman, I should be afraid of prostituting and dissipating the world-soul which beats within me. By the concentration of our divine blood, I would make an immortal race, a final god, more mighty than all those who have shown themselves until now with divers names and under different appearances."

Whilst Yousouf and the stranger were exchanging these long confidences, the customers of the *okel*, in their drunkenness, were giving way to mad contortions, wild laughter, ecstatic swoonings and convulsive dances; but little by little the power of the hemp having lessened, they recovered their calm, and lay along the divans in that prostrate condition which usually follows such excess.

A man of patriarchal appearance, whose beard fell down over his trailing robe, came into the *okel* and advanced to the middle of the room.

"Rise, my brothers," said he in a deep-sounding voice, "I have been to observe the heavens; this is

HASHISH

a favourable hour for us to sacrifice before the Sphinx a white cock in honour of Hermes and Agathodæmon."

The Sabeans rose to their feet, and seemed to be about to follow their priest; but the stranger, when he heard that suggestion, changed colour twice or even thrice. The blue of his eyes became black; terrible wrinkles furrowed his cheeks, and from his chest there came a dull roaring which made the assembly tremble with fright, as though a lion had fallen in the midst of the *okel*.

"Impious blasphemers! Impure brutes! Worshipers of idols!" he cried in a voice that resounded like thunder.

At this explosion of anger, a movement of stupor passed through the crowd. The unknown had such an air of authority, and raised the folds of his robe with such a proud gesture, that no one dared make answer to his reproaches.

The old man approached him. "Brother," said he, "what is there of evil in sacrificing a cock, with all due ceremony, to the good genii Hermes and Agathodæmon?"

The sound of the two names made the stranger gnash his teeth.

"If you have not the beliefs of the Sabeans, what has brought you here? Are you a follower of Jesus or Mohammed?"

"Mohammed and Jesus are impostors," cried the unknown, blaspheming with a hearty fearlessness.

"Then doubtless you belong to the religion of the Parsees; you worship fire . . ."

"Phantoms, delusions . . . all that is but lies!" the man in the black smock interrupted with redoubled indignation.

"Then whom do you worship?"

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

“He asks me whom I worship! I worship no one, for I myself am God, the one true God, of whom the others are but shadows.”

At this inconceivable, incredible, wild assertion, the Sabeans hurled themselves upon the blasphemer, and they would have dealt with him roughly, had not Yousouf, covering him with his body, drawn him away to the terrace beside the Nile, though he fought and cried like a madman. At last, with a vigorous kick at the bank, Yousouf drove the boat out into the middle of the stream. When they were in midstream Yousouf asked his friend where he should take him.

“There, where you see the lights shining on the island of Rodda,” replied the stranger, whose excitement had been calmed by the night air.

With a few strokes of the oars, they reached the shore, and the man in the black smock, before leaping ashore, offered his saviour a ring of ancient design, saying: “In whatever place you meet me, you have only to show me this ring and I will do whatever you desire.” Then he went off, and disappeared among the trees upon the river’s bank. To make up for lost time, Yousouf, who wished to be present at the sacrifice of the cock, began to cut through the waters of the Nile with redoubled energy.

II

THE FAMINE

Some days afterwards, the Caliph, as was his custom, left the palace to go to his observatory of Mokatam. Everybody was accustomed to seeing him go out in this way, mounted upon a donkey, accompanied only by a single dumb slave. It was supposed that he passed

THE FAMINE

the night gazing at the stars, for he returned in the same way at dawn. His servants were the less astonished at this, because his father, Aziz-Billah, and his grandfather, Moezzeldin, the founder of Cairo, had done the same thing, being well versed, both of them, in cabalistic lore. But the Caliph Hakem, when he had observed the position of the stars, and assured himself that no immediate danger threatened, took off his ordinary clothes, put on those of the slave who stayed and waited for him at the tower, and, having blackened his face slightly so as to disguise his features, went down into the town to mingle with the people and learn secrets of which afterwards as sovereign he made good use. It was in such a disguise that he had recently visited the *okel* of the Sabeans.

This time Hakem went down towards the Roumelieh square, that part of Cairo where the people gathered in most animated groups. There they used to assemble, in the shops and under the trees, to listen to, or to recite, stories and poems, and refresh themselves with sugared drinks, lemonades and preserved fruits. Jugglers, dancing girls and men with performing animals usually attracted a crowd eager for distraction after the labours of the day; but this evening all was changed, the people seemed like a stormy sea with roaring breakers. Sinister voices rose above the tumult, and words of bitterness were everywhere to be heard. The Caliph listened, and heard the same cry on all sides: "The public barns are empty."

For some time a severe famine had been making the population anxious; the hope of the speedy arrival of grain from Upper Egypt had momentarily calmed their fears, and everybody had economised as best he could. But that day a large caravan had arrived from Syria; it had become almost impossible to secure food, and

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

a large crowd, excited by the strangers, had proceeded to the public storehouses of Old Cairo, the final resource in times of greatest famine. There the tenth part of every harvest was set aside in a huge enclosure with high walls which Amrou built years ago. By the orders of the conqueror of Egypt, these storehouses had been left roofless, so that the birds might come and take their share. This pious desire had been respected ever since, and, indeed, only a small part of the store suffered thereby, while it was supposed to bring good luck to the town. But to-day, when the angry people demanded grain, they were told that the birds had come and devoured everything. When they heard this, the people felt that disaster was upon them, and there was general consternation.

"How is it," said Hakem to himself, "that I know nothing of this? Can such an extraordinary thing really have happened? I should have seen the signs of it in the stars, and besides, there was nothing wrong in the *pentacle* which I traced."

He was absorbed in such thoughts when an old man, who wore the costume of a Syrian, approached him and said: "Why do you not give them bread, my lord?"

Hakem raised his head with astonishment, gazed at the stranger with his lion-like eye, believing that the man had recognised him beneath his disguise.

The man was blind.

"Are you mad," said Hakem, "that you speak such words to one whom you do not see, whose steps you have but heard in the dust?"

"In the presence of God," said the old man, "all men are blind."

"Do you speak to God then?"

"To you, my lord."

THE FAMINE

Hakem spent a moment in reflection, and his thoughts whirled again within him as in the intoxication of hashish.

“Save them,” said the old man, “for you alone are power, you alone are life, you alone are will.”

“Do you imagine that I can create wheat, here, this very minute?” answered Hakem, uncertainly.

“The sun cannot shine through the clouds; it slowly disperses them. The cloud which veils you at this moment is the flesh which you have deigned to take. It can only act with human strength. Every being must submit to the law of things as God has ordained them. God alone obeys the law that he has made himself. The world, which he has made by his cabbalistic power, would dissolve in an instant, if he were false to his own will.”

“I see,” said the Caliph with an effort at reason, “that you are only a beggar; you have recognised me beneath this disguise, but your flattery is gross. Here is a purse of sequins; leave me.”

“My lord, I know not what your rank may be, for I see only with the eyes of the soul. As for your gold, I am deep versed in alchemy and I can make it when I need it. I give this purse to your people. Bread is dear, but in this good city of Cairo, with gold a man may have anything.”

“He must be a necromancer,” said Hakem to himself.

However, the crowd scrambled for the money which the old Syrian had thrown down, and rushed away to the nearest baker. That day but two pounds of bread was given for each gold sequin.

“I see how it is, I understand,” said Hakem. “This old man who comes from the land of wisdom recognised me and speaks in allegories. The Caliph is the image of God, and as God I must punish.”

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

He went to the citadel, where he found the captain of the watch, Abou-Arous, who was in the secret of his disguise. He told this officer and his executioner to follow him, as he had done several times before, for he was fond, like most Oriental princes, of this kind of summary justice, and led them to the house of the baker who had sold bread for gold. "Behold a thief," he said to the captain of the watch.

"Shall I nail his ear to the shutter of his shop?"

"Yes," said the Caliph, "after first cutting off his head."

The populace, who had not expected such an entertainment, joyfully made a circle in the street, while the baker in vain protested his innocence. The Caliph, wrapped in a black *abbah*, which he had put on at the citadel, appeared to be fulfilling the functions of a simple *cadi*.

The baker was on his knees, stretching out his neck and recommending his soul to the angels Monkir and Nekir. At that moment a young man forced his way through the crowd and, standing before Hakem, showed him a ring of silver. It was Yousouf the Sabean.

"Grant me," he cried, "pardon for this man."

Hakem remembered his promise, and recognised his friend of the Nile shore. He made a sign; the executioner released the baker, who rose joyfully to his feet. Hakem, hearing the murmurs of the disappointed people, said something in the ear of the captain of the watch, who cried in a loud voice:

"The sword is suspended until to-morrow at such an hour. Then every baker must supply bread at the rate of twenty pounds for a sequin."

"The other day," said the Sabean to Hakem, "when I saw your anger at the sight of forbidden drinks, I knew that you were an officer of justice. This ring

THE FAMINE

gives me a right which I shall use from time to time."

"Brother," replied the Caliph, embracing him, "you have said the truth. Now my evening's work is done, let us go and enjoy a little debauch with hashish at the *okel* of the Sabeans."

III

THE LADY OF THE KINGDOM

When they entered the house, Yousouf took the keeper of the *okel* aside, and asked him to forgive his friend for his behaviour some days before. "Everybody," said he, "has his own strange ideas when he is drunk. He believes that he is a god." This explanation was passed on to the customers, and they declared themselves satisfied.

The two friends sat down in the same place as the previous evening, the little negro brought them the box with its intoxicating paste, and they each took a dose, which quickly produced its effect; but the Caliph, instead of giving way to the phantasies of hallucination and giving the rein to his imagination in some wild flow of words, rose as though the iron hand of a fixed idea drove him onwards. His finely carved features showed an unchangeable resolution, and in a tone of irresistible authority he said to Yousouf:

"Brother, get your boat and take me to the place where you set me down yesterday at the island of Rodda, near the garden terraces."

At this unexpected order, Yousouf felt words coming to his lips which it was impossible for him to express, although it seemed to him an odd idea to leave the

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

okel just when the delights of hashish called for rest and the divan, so that they might take their natural course; but such a power of determination blazed from the Caliph's eyes, that the young man went silently down to his boat. Hakem sat in the bows, and Yousouf bent over the oars. The Caliph, who during the short crossing had shown signs of the most extreme excitement, jumped ashore almost before the boat had grounded, and, with a royal and majestic gesture, bade his friend farewell. Yousouf returned to the *okel*, and the Prince went to the palace.

He touched the secret spring in the postern and went in. Soon, after passing through some dark corridors, he came to his own apartments, where his attendants were surprised to see him, for usually he only came back with the first signs of dawn. His inspired countenance, his gait, at once unsteady and stiff, his strange gestures, made the eunuchs vaguely frightened; they thought that something extraordinary must be going to happen in the palace, and standing upright against the walls, with folded arms they awaited this event with respectful anxiety. Hakem's acts of justice, prompt, terrible and often without apparent motive, were well known. There was not one among them who did not tremble, for not one was conscious of his innocence.

However, Hakem did not call for the sacrifice of any head. He was wholly occupied with much more serious thoughts. Paying no heed to these attendants, he went to the apartments of his sister, the princess Setalmulc, so doing something in contradiction to every Mussulman idea. Raising the curtain, he went into the first room, much to the alarm of the eunuchs and the princess's women, who hastily veiled their faces.

THE LADY OF THE KINGDOM

Setalmulc—the word means the Lady of the Kingdom—was sitting upon a pile of cushions, at the back of a retiring room, in an alcove contrived in the thickness of the wall. The room was magnificently decorated. The roof, in a series of little domes, seemed like a honey-comb or a cave of stalactites, so ingeniously and cleverly was it adorned with red, green, blue and gold. Glass mosaics covered the walls to the height of a man; arcades, constructed in the form of a heart, rested gracefully upon capitals splayed like turbans, which, in turn, were supported by little marble columns. Along the cornices, on the door beams, and on the window frames, ran inscriptions in Karmatic script, the elegant characters of which were intertwined with flowers, foliage and arabesques. In the centre of the room, an alabaster fountain received in its sculptured basin a stream of water whose crystal jet went up to the roof and fell back again like fine rain, with a silvery tinkle.

At the commotion caused by Hakem's entry, Setalmulc, uneasy, rose and took a few steps in the direction of the door. Her majestic figure thus was shown to the best advantage, for the Caliph's sister was the most beautiful princess in the world: brows of a velvety black, with a bow of absolute regularity, surmounted eyes which made him who beheld them lower his gaze as though he looked upon the sun. Her delicate nose, with its slightly aquiline curve, bore evidence of her noble stock, and, in the golden pallor of a face whose beauty was enhanced by two little clouds of colour on the cheeks, a mouth of gorgeous scarlet shone like a pomegranate full of pearls.

Setalmulc's costume was of astounding richness: a metal coronet, covered with diamonds, supported a veil of gauze dotted with spangles; her dress, half of

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

green and half of incarnadine velvet, was almost hidden beneath an inextricable maze of embroidery. At the cuffs, at the elbows, over the bosom, it blazed with light amazingly, wherever gold and silver sparkled together. The girdle, made of plates of gold open-work, and studded by huge ruby buttons, fell of its own weight around a supple, stately figure, and stayed, held by the rich contour of the hips. So attired, Setalmulc looked like the queen of some vanished empire, who had the gods for her ancestors.

The hangings were roughly thrust back, and Hakem appeared upon the threshold. When she saw her brother, Setalmulc could not restrain a cry of surprise, not so much at the Caliph's unusual behaviour as at his strange appearance. In truth, Hakem seemed to be animated by no earthly spirit. His paleness reflected the light of another world. His outward appearance was that of the Caliph, but it was inspired by another mind and another soul. His movements were those of a phantom, and he might have been his own spectre. It seemed to be will power rather than any physical movement that took him to Setalmulc, and when he stood beside her, he swept her with a gaze so profound, so penetrating, so intense, so pregnant with thought, that the princess trembled and folded her arms across her breast, as though some invisible hand had torn aside her garments.

"Setalmulc," said Hakem, "I have long been thinking of giving you in marriage, but there is no man worthy of you. Your divine blood must suffer no contamination. We must hand on untouched to posterity the treasure we have received from the past. I, Hakem, the Caliph, lord of heaven and earth, will be your spouse. The marriage shall take place in three days. Such is my sacred will."

THE LADY OF THE KINGDOM

At this unexpected declaration, the princess was so astounded that her answer died upon her lips. Hakem had spoken with such authority, with so fascinating an air of command, that Setalmulc realised that no objection was possible. Without waiting for his sister's reply, Hakem went back to the door, then regained his room, and, overcome by the effects of the hashish, which were now at their highest, let himself fall in a heap upon the cushions, and went to sleep.

Immediately after her brother's departure Setalmulc sent for the grand-vizier Argevan and told him all that had happened. Argevan had been the regent of the empire during the early childhood of Hakem, who was proclaimed Caliph when he was eleven years old; uncontrolled authority had remained in his hands, and the force of habit continued to maintain him in the exercise of sovereign powers, while Hakem simply had the honours.

What passed in Argevan's mind, when Setalmulc had told her of the Caliph's nocturnal visit, no human pen can say, for who could have fathomed the secrets of that great soul? Had study and meditation thinned those cheeks and darkened that austere expression? Was it determination and will which had traced on the lines of that forehead the sinister shape of the *tau*, the sign of fatal destinies? Had the paleness of that motionless face, which never altered, save for an occasional, momentary wrinkling between the two brows, no more to tell save that he came from the sun-burned plains of Maghreb? Were the respect with which he inspired the Cairo populace, the influence he had over the rich and mighty, due simply to gratitude for the wisdom and the justice he brought to the government of the state?

Anyhow, Setalmulc, whom he had brought up,

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

respected him as greatly as though he had been her father, the previous Caliph. Argevan shared the Sultana's indignation. He only said: "Alas, what a misfortune for the empire. The Prince of the Faithful has lost his reason. . . . Now, after the famine, Heaven sends for our chastisement another scourge. We must order public prayers; our lord is mad."

"God grant that it be not so!" cried Setalmulc.

"When the Prince of the Faithful awakes," added the old man, "I trust that this disorder will have passed, and that he will be able, as usual, to preside over the high council."

At daybreak Argevan awaited the awakening of the Caliph. It was very late when Hakem called for his slaves, and he was told that the hall of the Divan was already filled with doctors, lawyers and cadis. When the Caliph entered the hall, the assembly prostrated themselves, and the vizier cast a questioning glance in the direction of his master's thoughtful face.

This did not escape the Caliph. He thought he saw a kind of frozen irony imprinted on his minister's features. For some time already, the Prince had been regretting that he had allowed too great a degree of authority to those beneath him, yet when he wished to take a course of action of his own choice, he was astonished always to meet with resistance from the ulemas, cachefs and moudhirs, who were all devoted to Argevan. It was in order to escape this condition of wardship, that he might decide things for himself, that he had made up his mind to disguise himself and take those nightly walks.

The Caliph, seeing that only routine business was being discussed, stopped the discussion, and said sharply: "Let us speak of the famine for a while;

THE LADY OF THE KINGDOM

I have made up my mind to cut off the heads of all the bakers." From the bench of the ulemas an old man rose and said: "Prince of the Faithful, did you not pardon one of them this last night?" The sound of that voice was not unknown to the Caliph. "True," he answered, "but the pardon was granted on condition that bread should be sold at twenty pounds for a sequin."

"Reflect," said the old man, "that these unhappy men must pay ten sequins for an *ardeb* of flour. Punish rather those who sell it to them at such a price."

"And who are they?"

"The moultezims, the caches, the moudhirs and the ulemas themselves, who have heaps of it in their own houses."

A groan went through the members of the council and those who were present, the principal inhabitants of Cairo.

For a few moments the Caliph leaned his head on his hands and thought. Argevan, annoyed, wished to make reply to what the old ulema had said, but the thunderous voice of Hakem resounded through the assembly.

"This evening," he said, "at the hour of prayer, I shall leave my palace on the island of Rodda, I shall cross the Nile in my boat, and, on the shore, the captain of the watch shall await me with his executioner. I shall go along the left bank of the *calisch* (canal), and enter Cairo by the gate Bab-el-Tahla, and proceed to the mosque of Raschilda. At the house of every moultezim, cachef or ulema to which I come, I shall ask if there is any corn there, and in every house where there is none I shall have the owner hanged or decapitated."

The vizier Argevan did not dare to raise his voice in

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

the council after these words of the Caliph, but, seeing him go back to his apartments, he rushed after him and said: "You will not do that, my lord!"

"Withdraw," said Hakem angrily. "Do you remember how, when I was a child, you used in joke to call me 'lizard'? Well, now the lizard has become a dragon."

IV

THE MORISTAN

That same evening, at the hour of prayer, Hakem went into the city through the soldiers' quarter, followed only by the captain of the watch and his executioner: he found that all the streets had been illuminated for his passage. The common people held candles in their hands to make a light upon their Prince's way, and had formed groups before the house of every doctor, cachef, notary or other person whom the decree affected. Wherever the Caliph entered, he found a great pile of wheat. He immediately ordered it to be distributed to the crowd, and took the owner's name. "I have given my word," he said, "and your head is safe; but learn from this not to accumulate heaps of wheat in your house, either that you may live in the enjoyment of plenty when others are in want, or that you may sell it at its weight in gold and, in a few days, put the people's fortune into your own pocket."

After visiting a few houses in this way, he sent officers into the others, and himself went to the mosque of Raschilda to pray—it was a Friday. But when he went in, he was greatly astonished to find the pulpit already occupied, and to be hailed with these words: "May the

THE MORISTAN

name of Hakem be glorified on earth as it is in heaven ! Praise eternal to the living God !”

In spite of the Caliph's popularity after his recent action, this unexpected prayer was bound to shock the devout, and several men went up to the pulpit to cast the blasphemer out of it; but he rose and went down the steps with a majestic air, at each step forcing back those who assailed him, and passing through the astonished crowd, who cried as they saw him more closely: “He is blind and the hand of God is upon him.” Hakem recognised the old man of the Roumelieh, and as in the state of waking an unexpected relation is sometimes established between a material phenomenon and the elements of an already forgotten dream, he realised, as if in a flash, the twofold nature of his existence in life and in ecstasy. His mind found difficulty in coping with this new impression, and without staying longer in the mosque, he remounted his horse and went back to the palace.

He sent for the vizier Argevan, but the vizier could not be found. As the time had come when he should go to Mokatam to consult the stars, the Caliph made his way to the observatory tower and climbed to the upper part, whose dome, open to the night, marked the twelve houses of the stars. Saturn, Hakem's own planet, was pale and dull, and Mars, which had given its name to the city of Cairo, blazed with that sanguinary splendour which threatens war and danger. Hakem went down to the first floor of the tower, where was a cabbalistic table which his grandfather Moezzeldin had set up. In the midst of a circle, around which were written in Chaldaic characters the names of all the countries of the earth, was a bronze statue of a horseman, armed with a lance, which usually he held upright; but when an enemy was marching against

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

Egypt, the horseman lowered his lance to the ready and turned towards the country whence the attack threatened. Hakem noticed that the horseman had turned in the direction of Arabia. "That race of the Abassids again!" he cried. "Those degenerate sons of Omar, whom we had destroyed in their capital Bagdad! But what do these infidels matter to me now? I have the lightning in my hand which shall destroy them."

But when he thought more deeply on the matter, he realised that he was, as he had always been, a man; no longer did hallucination add strength to his conviction that he was a god and make him confident of the possession of superhuman strength.

"I will away," he cried, "and take counsel of ecstasy." And he went to intoxicate himself anew with that marvellous paste which is perhaps identical with ambrosia, the food of the Immortals.

The faithful Yousouf was already there, looking out dreamily over the waters of the Nile, now calm and dull, low to a point which always indicated dryness and famine. "Brother," said Hakem, "are you dreaming of your love? Tell me who your mistress is, and, upon my oath, you shall have her."

"Alas," said Yousouf, "do I know? Since the breath of the Khamsin has made the nights so stifling, I have no longer seen her gilded barge upon the Nile. And even if I saw her again, should I dare to ask her who she is? Sometimes I am near to thinking that it is all an illusion caused by this treacherous weed, which is perhaps attacking my reason . . . so that I can no longer distinguish between dream and reality."

"Do you think that?" asked Hakem anxiously. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he said to his

THE MORISTAN

companion: "What matters it? Let us forget life again to-day."

When once the intoxication of the hashish was at work upon them, it came about strangely that the two friends entered upon a certain community of ideas and impressions. It seemed to Yousouf that his friend, soaring upwards towards the heavens, and spurning with his foot the soil unworthy of his glory, stretched out a hand to him and drew him into space through whirling stars and atmospheres made white by a multitude of stars. Soon Saturn, pale but crowned by a ring of light, increased, and came nearer, with the seven moons about it which its rapid motion carries with it, and thereafter, who could tell what passed on their arrival in the divine country of their dreams? The human tongue can only express sensations in conformity with our own nature; but when the two friends spoke together in this divine dream, the names they gave to one another were no longer earthly names.

In the middle of this ecstasy which had reached the point at which their bodies had assumed the appearance of inert masses, Hakem writhed suddenly and cried: "Eblis! Eblis!" At the same moment *zebecks* burst open the *okel* door. Argevan the vizier, at their head, had the room surrounded, and ordered that all these infidels, these breakers of the Caliph's laws which forbade the use of hashish and fermented drinks, should be seized. "Demon," cried the Caliph, recovering his senses, "I sought you that I might have your head. I know that it is you who organised the famine and distributed to your own creatures the reserves of the state storehouses. Down on your knees before the Prince of the Faithful! Begin to argue and you shall die."

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

Argevan frowned, and his dark eyes lighted with a frigid smile.

“To the Moristan with this madman who thinks himself the Caliph,” he said scornfully to the guards.

As for Yousouf, he had already leapt into his boat, for it was clear that he could do nothing to help his friend.

The Moristan, which to-day stands next to the mosque of Kalaoum, was then a huge prison, of which only a part was given over to the raving mad. The respect which Orientals give to the mad does not extend so far as to leave their freedom to any who may be dangerous. Hakem, when he awoke next day in a dark cell, very quickly realised that he had nothing to gain by flying into a rage or by saying that, beneath his fellah's clothes, he was the Caliph. Besides, there were already five caliphs in the establishment, as well as a certain number of gods. So there would be nothing to be gained by adopting one title rather than the other. Again, Hakem was only too well convinced, after, during the night, making a thousand attempts to break his chains, that his divinity, imprisoned in a feeble body, left him, like the majority of the Indian Buddhas and other incarnations of the Supreme Being, a prey to every human malice, and to the laws of material force. He even remembered that the situation in which he found himself was not new to him. “Above all,” he said, “we must avoid a scourging.” This was not easy, for it was then the means most generally employed to restrain the incontinence of the imagination. When the *kekim* (doctor) paid his visit, he was accompanied by another doctor who seemed a stranger. Hakem was sufficiently wise not to show any signs of surprise at this visit, and contented himself with explaining that a debauch upon hashish had been the

THE MORISTAN

cause of a passing derangement, but that now he felt quite normal. The doctor consulted his companion, speaking with great deference. The latter shook his head, and said that madmen often had lucid intervals, and by skilful suggestions secured their freedom. But he saw no reason why this particular one should not be allowed to take exercise in the courtyard.

“Are you also a doctor?” the Caliph asked the stranger.

“He is the prince of science,” cried the madhouse doctor. “He is the great Ebn-Sina (Avicenna) who, just arrived from Syria, has condescended to visit the Moristan.”

The illustrious name of Avicenna, the learned doctor, the revered master of the life and health of men—in the eyes of the mob he was considered a magician capable of performing the greatest miracles—made a great impression on the Caliph’s mind. Casting prudence to the winds, he cried: “Oh! you who see me here, given over, as *Aissé* (Jesus) once was, in this body and in my human feebleness, to the devices of Hell, denied as Caliph and as god, think how fitting it is that I should be freed at once from this ignoble situation. If you are on my side, let it be known; and if you believe me not, may you be eternally accursed.”

Avicenna made no reply, but he turned towards the doctor and shook his head. “You see,” he said, “his reason is leaving him again already. Fortunately, his visions do no harm to anybody. I have always said that the hemp from which this hashish paste is made was that same plant which, according to Hippocrates, induced in animals a kind of madness and made them cast themselves into the sea. Hashish was known even in the days of Solomon: you can find the word *bachichot* in the *Song of Songs*, where the intoxicating properties

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

of this preparation . . .” But Hakem heard no more, for the two doctors left him and went into another court. He was alone, given over to the most conflicting ideas, wondering whether he was god or not, sometimes wondering whether he was even the Caliph; trying to collect his scattered thoughts. Taking advantage of the relative freedom that was left to him, he approached the unfortunate people who, in one place or another, adopted strange postures, and listening to their songs and speeches, discovered in them some ideas which attracted his attention.

One of these madmen had succeeded in gathering bits of rubbish, and was making for himself a kind of tiara that glittered with pieces of glass. Over his shoulders, he draped rags covered with sparkling ornaments which he had made from scraps of tinsel. “I,” said he, “am the Kaimalzeman (the leader of the age), and I tell you that the days have come.”

“You lie,” said another. “You are not the true one; but belong to the races of *dives* and seek to lead us astray.”

“Who then, in your opinion, am I?” said the first.

“You are no other than Tahmurath, the last king of the revolting genii. Do you not remember him who vanquished you in the island of Serendib, who was no other than Adam, that is to say, myself? Your lance and your shield are still suspended as trophies over my tomb.”*

“His tomb,” cried the other with a shout of laughter. “Why, it could never be found. I should talk about that if I were he!”

“I have every right to speak of my tomb, since I

* The traditions of the Arabs and Persians suggest that for many many years the earth was peopled by people called *pre-adamites*, whose last emperor was overcome by Adam.

THE MORISTAN

have already lived six times among men, and died six times, as was my destiny. I have had magnificent tombs built for me; but it is yours which is hard to find, seeing that you *dives* only live in dead bodies.”

At this there was a general hullabaloo against the unfortunate emperor of the *dives*, who got up in a rage, while the pretended Adam knocked off his crown. The other madman rushed at him, and after five thousand years (according to their own method of calculation) the struggle between the two enemies was about to be renewed, when one of the warders separated them with blows from an ox sinew, which he administered with due impartiality.

What was Hakem's interest in these conversations between madmen which he listened to with marked attention and even provoked by a few words? The only one among these people of deranged intellect who was master of his reason, he plunged silently into a whole world of memories. For some strange reason, perhaps the consequence of his austere appearance, the madmen seemed to respect him, and none among them dared to raise his eyes to the Caliph's face. Yet something made them form groups about him, like those plants which, when night is nearly over, begin to turn towards the light which has not yet dawned.

If mortals cannot of themselves conceive what passes in the soul of a man who suddenly feels himself to be a prophet, or of a mortal who feels that he is a god, Fable and History at least have allowed them to form an idea of the doubts and anguish which must be produced in those divine natures at that indecisive moment when their intellect is just freeing itself from the transient bondage of incarnation. There were moments when Hakem doubted himself, as the Son of Man upon the Mount of Olives, and that which par-

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

ticularly astounded him was the feeling that his divinity had first been revealed to him in the ecstasies of hashish. "There must exist then," he said to himself, "something which is stronger than he who is everything, and this is a common plant which has the power to create such a spell. In truth a simple worm proved that it was stronger than Solomon, when it pierced and broke in the middle the staff upon which that prince of the genii was leaning; but what was Solomon compared to me, if I am indeed Albar (the Eternal)?"

V

THE BURNING OF CAIRO

By one of those strange freaks which only the spirit of evil could imagine, one day it happened that the Moristan was visited by the Sultana Setalmulc, who came, as is the custom of royal personages, to bring help and consolation to the prisoners. After having visited that part of the building given over to the criminals, she wished to see the madhouse also. The Sultana was veiled, but Hakem recognised her by her voice, and he could not restrain his fury when he perceived that she was accompanied by the minister Argevan, who was calmly and smilingly doing the honours of the place.

"Here," said he, "you see unfortunate men who are a prey to a thousand wild ideas. One calls himself the prince of the genii; another pretends that he is Adam; but the most ambitious of them all is this one you see before you, who bears a striking resemblance to your brother the Caliph."

"It really is very extraordinary," said Setalmulc.

THE BURNING OF CAIRO

“ Well,” continued Argevan, “ it is this resemblance alone which has been the cause of his misfortune. By dint of hearing himself told that he was the very image of the Caliph, he came to believe that he really was the Caliph, and not satisfied with that, professed to be a god. As a matter of fact, he is simply a poor fellah who, like so many others, has ruined his wits by the abuse of intoxicants. . . . It would be interesting to see what he would say if he were in the presence of the Caliph himself. . . .”

“ Wretch !” cried Hakem, “ have you then created a phantom to resemble me and take my place ?”

He stopped, suddenly realising that his prudence was leaving him, and that perhaps he might put his life in new danger. Fortunately, the noise the madmen were making, prevented his words being heard. All those unfortunate men were heaping imprecations and curses upon Argevan, and the king of the *dives* especially, overwhelmed him with challenges.

“ Peace !” he shouted at the minister. “ Wait only till I am dead, and we shall meet again elsewhere.”

Argevan shrugged his shoulders, and went out with the Sultana.

Hakem had not even tried to make her remember him. When he had thought of it, he saw that the net was too well woven for him to break it with a single effort. Either he was really unrecognised, and some impostor was reaping the benefit, or his sister and his minister had agreed to give him a lesson in wisdom by making him spend a few days at the Moristan. It was possible that they might later try to profit by the notoriety which resulted from this situation to seize the power and keep him in the position of a ward. Certainly, there was something of this in the matter. One thing which might give cause for reflection was

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

that the Sultana, when she left the Moriſtan, promised the iman of the mosque to set aside a considerable sum so that the part where the madmen lived might be enlarged and magnificently rebuilt, "so that," said she, "their abode may seem worthy of a caliph."*

After his ſiſter and the miniſter had gone away, Hakem only ſaid: "It had to be ſo." And he went on with his uſual mode of life, not belying the gentleneſs and patience which he had hitherto diſplayed. But he had long converſations with thoſe of his companions in miſfortune who had lucid intervals, and alſo with the inhabitants of the other part of the Moriſtan, who often came to the railings which ſeparated the court-yards, to amuſe themſelves watching the wild pranks of their neighbours. Hakem welcomed them with ſuch words that the wretches crowded there for hours at a time, regarding him as one inſpired (*melbous*). Is it not ſtrange that the divine word always finds its firſt believers among the wretched? So, a thouſand years before, the Meſſiah found an audience chiefly among thoſe of evil life, tax-gatherers and publicans.

When the Caliph was once eſtabliſhed in their confidence, he would call them one after the other, get them to tell him the ſtories of their lives, the circumſtances of their faults or their crimes, and ſought earneſtly to diſcover what firſt had put them on the wrong way. In every inſtance he found ignorance and miſery at the root of the evil. The men told him, too, the myſteries of ſocial life, the tricks of the uſurers, the monopoly holders, the lawyers, the heads of corporations, collectors, and the moſt important buſineſs men of Cairo, who ſupported one another, tolerated one another, increaſing their power and influence by

* It was indeed after this that the actual building, one of the moſt magnificent in Cairo, was conſtructed.

THE BURNING OF CAIRO

marriages between their families, corrupters and corrupted, increasing or lowering prices, able to decide whether there should be famine or abundance, masters of sedition and of war, having none to prevent them from oppressing a people who were enslaved by the necessities of life. Such had been the result of Argevan's administration during the long minority of Hakem.

Besides, there were sinister rumours about the prison which even the guardians themselves were not afraid to spread: it was said that a foreign army was approaching the city, and was already encamped upon the plain of Ghizeh; that treason would hand Cairo over to the enemy without resistance; that the lords, the ulemas and the merchants, fearing the results of a siege upon their fortunes, were preparing to throw open the gates, and had suborned the military leaders at the citadel. Next day, the enemy general was to make his entry into the city by the gate of Bab-el-Hadyd. From that moment, the dynasty of the Fatimites would be dethroned, and the Abbasid Caliphs would henceforth reign at Cairo as at Bagdad, and the public prayers would be offered in their name. "That is what Argevan has done for me," said the Caliph to himself; "that is what the talisman my father set told me, it was that which made the sparkling Pharouis (Saturn) grow pale upon the heavens. Now the time has come to see what power there is in my words, or whether I, like the Nazarean, shall let myself be vanquished."

It was nearly evening; the prisoners were gathered in the courtyard for the evening prayer. Hakem began to speak, addressing himself to that twofold population of madmen and malefactors who were kept apart by a grating. He told them who he was, and what he wanted of them with such authority, and with such

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

proofs, that no one dared to doubt. In a moment the strength of a hundred arms had broken all the interior barriers, and the warders, frightened, opened the doors that led to the mosque. Soon the Caliph entered it, carried in the arms of this people of the wretched whom his voice intoxicated with confidence and enthusiasm. "It is the Caliph, the true Prince of the Faithful," cried they whom the law had condemned. "It is Allah come to judge the world," yelled the crowd of madmen. Two of the latter had placed themselves to the left and right of Hakem, crying: "Come, all of you to the assize which our lord Hakem is to hold."

The faithful, gathered in the mosque, could not understand why the prayer was thus interrupted; but the uneasiness spread by the approach of the enemy had disposed everyone to expect something extraordinary to happen. Some ran, sowing alarm through the streets; others cried: "It is the last judgment." And this thought rejoiced the poorest and the greatest sufferers, and they said: "At last, lord, thy day has come."

When Hakem mounted the steps of the mosque, an unearthly splendour blazed from his countenance, and his hair, which he always wore long and streaming, though this was contrary to the custom of the Mussulmans, fell in long ringlets over the purple mantle with which his companions had covered his shoulders. The Jews and Christians, who were always numerous in that Soukarieh street which passes through the bazaars, threw themselves down, saying: "It is the true Messiah, or else the Antichrist who, the Scriptures say, shall appear a thousand years after Jesus." Some, too, had recognised their sovereign; though they could not understand how he came to be in the middle of the

THE BURNING OF CAIRO

city, when it was generally rumoured that at that very moment he was marching at the head of his troops against the enemy camped in the plain which surrounds the pyramids.

“Oh you, my people,” said Hakem to the unfortunate people who surrounded him; “you, my true sons, it is not my day but yours which has come. We have come to that time which recurs whenever the word of heaven loses its power over souls, the moment when virtue becomes crime, when wisdom becomes folly, when glory becomes shame, and everything goes contrary to justice and to truth. Never at such a period has a voice from on high failed to come to give light to the mind, as the lightning goes before the thunder; that is why it has been said: Woe to Enochia, city of the children of Cain, city of impurity and tyranny! Woe to you, Nineveh and Babylon, and woe to you, Jerusalem. That voice which never wearies, sounds from age to age, and between the threat and the punishment there has always been time for repentance. Yet the delay grows less from day to day; when the storm is drawing near, the fire follows the flash more closely. Let us show that henceforth the Word is armed, and that the reign which the prophets foretold is about to begin upon the earth. Yours, my children, is this city enriched by fraud, by usury, by injustice and rapine; yours, these stolen treasures, this ill-gotten wealth. Do justice to this deceiving luxury, these false virtues, these merits acquired at the price of gold, these treasons which, under pretence of peace, have sold you to the enemy. Fire, everywhere fire to this city which my ancestor Mœzzeldin founded under the auspices of victory (*kabira*); or it will be a monument to your baseness.”

Was it as their sovereign or as their god that the

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

Caliph spoke to the crowd? Certainly there was in him that supreme reason which is above all ordinary justice; had it not been so, his anger would have struck at hazard, like that of the bandits whom he had unloosed. In a few moments the flame had devoured the bazaars with their cedar roofs, and the palaces with their sculptured terraces, their frail columns. The richest houses in Cairo opened in their devastation to the people. A terrible night, wherein the exercise of sovereign power took on itself the appearance of revolt, wherein the vengeance of heaven made use of the weapons of hell.

The burning and pillage of the city lasted for three days. The inhabitants of the richest districts took up arms to defend themselves, and a detachment of Greek soldiers and *ketamis*, troops from Barbary under the command of Argevan, fought against the prisoners and the populace who obeyed the orders of Hakem. Argevan spread the report that Hakem was an impostor; that the true Caliph was with the army on the plains of Ghizeh, and a terrible battle was waged in the squares and gardens amid the burning buildings. Hakem had withdrawn to the heights of Karafah, and there, in the open air, held that bloody tribunal, in which, tradition says, he was assisted by the angels, having beside him Adam and Solomon, one acting as witness for men, the other for the genii. There were brought to him all the men whom the public hatred marked down; judgment was pronounced in a few words, and their heads fell to the joyful shouts of the mob. In those three days, several thousands perished. The fighting in the centre of the town was no less frightful. At last, Argevan was caught by a lance between the shoulders by one named Reidan, who brought his head to the Caliph's feet. From that

THE BURNING OF CAIRO

moment the resistance ceased. It was said that at the very moment when, uttering a fearful cry, the vizier fell, the guests of the Moristan, endowed with that second sight peculiar to the insane, cried out that in the air they saw Eblis (Satan) who, leaving the mortal remains of Argevan, called to himself and rallied in the air the devils who till then had been housed in the bodies of his supporters. The fighting begun on earth was continued in space: the ranks of those eternal enemies were re-formed, and fought again with the forces of the elements. It was with reference to this that some Arab poet has said:

“Egypt! Egypt! Thou knowest them, these fearful struggles between the good and evil spirits, when Typhon with the stifling breath absorbs the air and the light; when the plague takes toll of thy hard-labouring peoples; when the yearly floods of the Nile grow less, and the grasshoppers in thick clouds devour in one day all the verdure of the fields.

“Not enough is it that Hell should send these dreadful plagues; it peoples the earth with cruel and greedy souls, who, in human form, hide the perverse nature of serpents and jackals.”

When the fourth day came, and the town was half-burned down, the *sherifs* gathered in the mosques, raising their Korans in the air and crying: “Oh, Hakem! Oh, Allah.” But their heart was not in their prayer. The old man who had already saluted the divinity in Hakem presented himself before the Prince and said: “Lord, it is enough: in the name of thy ancestor, Moezzeldin, let the destruction cease.” Hakem would have questioned this strange creature who only appeared at hours of portent, but the old man had already disappeared in the crowd of those who stood by.

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

Hakem took his usual steed, a grey donkey, and set off through the town with words of reconciliation and mercy. From then he began to reform the severe edicts against the Christians and Jews, dispensing the first from carrying upon their shoulders a heavy wooden cross, and the latter from wearing a yoke upon their necks. By treating all forms of religion with equal tolerance, he hoped to incline people's minds gradually to accept his new doctrine. He founded a system of conferences, principally in a building called the *House of Wisdom*, and several doctors began publicly to uphold the divinity of Hakem. But the human mind is so inclined to reject beliefs which have not been consecrated by time, that only thirty thousand of the inhabitants of Cairo could be numbered among the elect. There was one named Almoschadjar who said to Hakem's disciples: "He whom you invoke in the place of God could not create a fly, or prevent a fly from troubling him." The Caliph heard of this and gave the man a hundred gold pieces, as a proof that he would not lay compulsion upon men's consciences. Others said: "Several members of the house of the Fatimites have been stricken by this illusion. It was so with Hakem's grandfather, Moezzeldin, who hid himself for several days and gave out that he had been rapt to heaven. Later he withdrew into a place underground, and it was said that he had disappeared from this earth without dying as other men must do." Hakem listened to these words and they gave him food for long meditation.

THE TWO CALIPHS

VI

THE TWO CALIPHS

The Caliph had returned to his palace on the shores of the Nile and resumed his accustomed mode of life, henceforth recognised by all and freed from his enemies. For some time matters had taken their accustomed course again. One day he went to the room of his sister Setalmulc, and told her to make ready for their marriage, which he wished to celebrate in secret from fear of arousing public indignation, the populace not being yet sufficiently convinced of Hakem's divinity not to be shocked by such a violation of established laws. The only witnesses of the ceremony were to be the eunuchs and the slaves, and it was to take place in the palace mosque. As for the feasts which were a necessary accompaniment to this union, the inhabitants of Cairo were accustomed to see lanterns studing the darkness of the seraglio, and to hear the sounds of music carried by the night breeze from the other side of the river, and either would not notice them or would be in no way astonished. When the time should be ripe, and men's minds suitably disposed, Hakem would proclaim aloud this mystical religious marriage.

When the evening came, the Caliph, disguised according to his custom, went out and made his way to the Mokatam observatory to consult the stars. The heavens had no reassurance for Hakem: the conjunctions of the planets were unfavourable; confused bunches of stars foretold that he would be in peril of death. But being, as God, conscious of his eternity, he was little disturbed by these threats of the heavens, which concerned only his perishable outward body.

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

But his heart was torn by a great sadness, and, giving up his accustomed tour, he went back to the palace in the early hours of the night.

As he crossed the river in his barge, he was surprised to see the palace gardens lighted up as if for some celebration. He went in. Lanterns hung from all the trees like precious fruits of ruby, sapphire and emerald; perfumed fountains shot forth their silvery jets beneath the foliage; water flowed in the marble watercourses, and from the alabaster pavement delicate spirals of bluish smoke carried the odour of the richest perfumes to mingle with the scents of the flowers. The harmonious strains of hidden musicians alternated with the song of the birds who, deceived by the brightness, thought a new day had come, and in the blazing background, amid a dazzling light, the façade of the palace was outlined in streamers of fire.

Hakem was astounded. "Who," he wondered, "dares to give a feast in my house when I am away? What unknown guest's arrival is being celebrated at this hour? The gardens should be silent and deserted. Now, I have had no hashish and cannot be the plaything of some hallucination." He went on. Dancing girls, dressed in marvellous costumes, were swaying like serpents on the centre of a Persian carpet surrounded by lamps, so that none of their movements and poses might be lost. They did not seem to see the Caliph. At the palace door he met a host of slaves and pages carrying iced fruits and confections in golden dishes, and silver ewers filled with sherbet. Though he walked beside them, elbowed them and was elbowed by them, nobody paid the slightest attention to him. At last the strangeness of it all began to fill him with a secret fear. He felt that he had passed to the condition of a shade, an invisible spirit, and went on from

THE TWO CALIPHS

room to room, passing through the groups as though he had worn upon his finger the magic ring of Gyges.

When he reached the threshold of the last room, a torrent of light almost overwhelmed him; thousands of candles, set in silver candelabras, glittered and sparkled like bouquets of fire. The instruments of the musicians concealed in the tribunes resounded with triumphal energy. Trembling, the Caliph drew near, and hid himself among the folds of an enormous brocade door hanging. Then, at the other end of the room, he saw Setalmulc, and sitting beside her, on the divan, a man sparkling with precious stones, studded, as it were, with diamonds which glittered in the midst of a blaze of prismatic flashes and rays. It seemed as though to array this new Caliph, the treasures of Haroun-al-Rashid had been exhausted.

You may imagine Hakem's stupor at this astounding sight: he sought the dagger at his girdle that he might throw himself upon this usurper; but some irresistible force held him back. The vision seemed to be a warning from Heaven, and his trouble increased when he perceived that in the young man who was sitting next his sister his own features might have been recognised. He realised that this was his *ferouer*, or double, and for an Oriental to see his own spectre is a sign of the most foreboding augury. The shade compels the body to follow it before the next day is done.

Here, the apparition was the more threatening, because the *ferouer* was doing something which Hakem himself had intended to do. The action of this phantom Caliph wedding Setalmulc, whom the true Caliph had himself determined to marry . . . was there not here some enigmatic meaning, a symbol terrible, and pregnant with mystery? Was not this some jealous divinity, seeking to usurp his place in Heaven by

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

taking Setalmulc from her brother, separating a couple which Providence had itself ordained? Was this the race of *dives*, by such means trying to prevent the alliance of higher spirits, that it might substitute its own most impious progeny? All these ideas passed through Hakem's brain at once. In his wrath, he would have brought about an earthquake, a flood, a rain of fire or some other cataclysm; but he remembered that, being bound to a statue of earthly clay, he could employ no other than human measures.

Perceiving that he could not manifest himself in any such victorious manner, Hakem slowly withdrew, and went back to the door which looks upon the Nile. There he found a stone bench, sat down upon it and remained some time buried in reflection, trying to find some meaning in the strange scene which he had just witnessed. After a few minutes, the postern opened, and through the darkness Hakem vaguely saw two shadows, one of which seemed to stain the night more darkly than the other. With the help of those vague emanations from earth, sky and water which, in the East, prevent the darkness from ever being absolutely opaque, he saw that the first was a young Arab, and the second, a gigantic Ethiopian.

When they reached that part of the shore which juts out into the water, the young man knelt down, the black stood beside him, and the sweep of a sword flashed through the shadow as though it had been lightning. But, to the Caliph's great surprise, no head fell, and the negro, bending down to the other's ear, seemed to be murmuring some few words, after which the young man rose, calm, tranquil, without any particular sign of delight, as though some other than himself were concerned. The Ethiopian put back his sword in its scabbard, and the young man went to the

THE TWO CALIPHS

edge of the river, in the direction of Hakem, doubtless to find a boat in which he had come. There he came face to face with the Caliph, who pretended to wake up and said: "Peace be with you, Yousouf. What do you here?"

"To you also be peace," replied Yousouf, who still regarded his friend as just a chance-acquired comrade, and nothing more. He was not surprised to find his friend asleep on the shore, for the children of the Nile often sleep upon their river's banks throughout the burning summer nights.

Yousouf took him upon the boat, and they let themselves drift with the current, along the eastern shore. Already the ruddy band of dawn gave colour to the neighbouring plain, lighting up the still existing ruins of Heliopolis on the edge of the desert. Hakem seemed to be dreaming, and, looking carefully at his companion's features when the day made them more distinct, he perceived a certain resemblance to himself that he had never before noticed, for he had always met his friend by night, or seen him through the drunken eyes of orgy. He could no longer doubt that this was the *ferouer*, the double, the apparition of the night before. It was perhaps he who had been made to play the part of the Caliph during his stay at the Moristan. This natural explanation still left him with one reason for wonder.

"We are as like as brothers," he said to Yousouf. "Sometimes it is enough to explain such a chance happening for two people to have come from the same part of the world. Where were you born, my friend?"

"I was born at the foot of the Atlas, at Ketama, in the Maghreh, among the Berbers and Kabyles. I never knew my father, who was called Dawas. He was killed shortly after my birth. But my grandfather,

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

a very old man, was one of the sheiks of that country buried in the sands."

"My ancestors, too, came from that country," said Hakem; "perhaps we come from the same tribe . . . but what does it matter? Our friendship needs no bond of blood to make it lasting and sincere. Tell me why I have not seen you for several days."

"What are you asking me?" said Yousouf. "These days, or rather these nights, for I have spent the days in slumber, have passed like delightful dreams, all full of marvels. After the authorities surprised and separated us in the *okel*, I again met upon the Nile that delightful vision whose reality I can no longer doubt. Often, setting her hand upon my eyes, to prevent me from recognising the gate, she took me through magnificent gardens, into halls of gorgeous splendour, where the genius of the architect had outdone even those fantastic marvels which the phantasy of hashish raised in the clouds. What a strange destiny is mine! My waking hours are still more filled with dreams than those I spend in slumber. In that palace no one seemed to be astonished at my presence, and, when I passed, all heads were bowed respectfully before me. Then that strange woman, making me sit at her feet, intoxicated me with words and gaze. Each time she raised her long-lashed eyelids I thought I saw a new paradise open before me. The inflections of her melodious voice plunged me into ineffable ecstasy. My soul, caressed by that enchanting melody, seemed to melt away in delight. Slaves brought us exquisite repasts, conserves of roses, sherbets made with snow which her lips hardly touched, for a creature so perfect and so heavenly must only live on perfumes, dew and sunbeams. Once, moving with magic words a flag in the pavement covered with mysterious seals, she took me down into

THE TWO CALIPHS

cellars where her treasures were kept and showed them to me, saying that they should be mine had I but love and courage enough. There I saw more marvels than there are in the mountain of Kaf where the genii keep their treasures: elephants of rock crystal, golden trees on which sing jewelled birds with beating wings; peacocks spreading their tails studded with diamond suns; masses of camphor carved in the round and with a net of filigree to hold them; tents of velvet and brocade with poles of massive silver; then in cisterns, thrown like grain into the silo, piles of gold and silver coins, heaps of pearls and carbuncles."

Hakem, who had listened attentively to this description, said to his friend Yousouf:

"Do you know, my brother, what you saw there was the treasure of Haroun-al-Rashid which the Fatimites captured, and can only be in the Caliph's palace."

"I did not know; but by the beauty and the wealth of my unknown beauty, I had guessed that she must be of the highest rank: what, I know not, perhaps a relative of the grand-vizier, the wife or the daughter of a mighty lord. But what need have I to know her name? She loved me; was not that enough? Yesterday when I reached the meeting-place as usual, there met me slaves who bathed me, perfumed me and dressed me in clothes so magnificent that the Caliph Hakem himself could not have worn more splendid. The garden was all illuminated, and everything seemed ready for a marriage feast. She whom I love bade me sit beside her on the divan, and let her hand fall into mine, as she gazed at me with longing and with languor. Suddenly she paled as though some fatal apparition, some dark vision which she alone could see, had come to cast a shadow over the feast. She dismissed her slaves with a gesture, and said to me in a breathless voice:

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

‘I am lost. Behind the curtain of the door I have seen the shining of azure eyes that do not forgive. Do you love me enough to die?’ I assured her of my boundless devotion. ‘It must be,’ she continued, ‘as if you had never existed, your passage upon earth must leave no trace, you must be annihilated, your body broken up into tiny particles so that not a single atom of you can be found. Otherwise he upon whom I depend will invent for me tortures that would affright even the *dives*, and cause the damned souls in Hell to shudder with terror. Follow this negro; he will do with your life what it is fitting to do.’ And outside the postern, the negro made me kneel down as though to cut off my head; two or three times he swung the sword in his hand; then, seeing my firmness, told me it was all a game, and that the princess had wished to know whether I was indeed as brave and devoted as I pretended to be. ‘See that you are at Cairo to-morrow evening,’ he added, before he went back into the garden, ‘by the Lovers’ Fountain, and a new meeting shall be arranged for you.’”

After this story Hakem could no longer be in doubt concerning the circumstances which had upset his plans. But he was astonished to find that he felt no anger, either at his sister’s treason or at the love which the Caliph’s sister felt for a young man of low degree. Was this because, after so many bloody executions, he was weary of punishment, or was it that consciousness of his divinity inspired in him that tremendous fatherly affection which a god must feel for his creatures? Unrelenting where evil was concerned, he was vanquished by the omnipotent charms of youth and love. Was Setalmulc guilty because she had refused a marriage in which preconceived ideas made her see a crime? Was Yousouf any more so because he loved

THE TWO CALIPHS

a woman whose rank he did not know? The Caliph decided to appear that same evening at the new rendezvous which had been given to Yousouf, that he might express forgiveness and give his blessing to this marriage. With this idea in mind he continued to secure further confidences from Yousouf. Something of gloom still affected his spirit; but it was now his own destiny which troubled him. "Things are turning against me," he said to himself, "and even my will no longer defends me." When he took leave of Yousouf, he said to him: "I miss our pleasant evenings at the *okel*. We will go there again, for the Caliph has just withdrawn the orders against hashish and fermented liquors. We shall soon meet again, my friend."

When Hakem was back again in his palace, he called for Abou-Arous, the captain of the watch, who, with a force of a thousand men, was on duty through the night, and re-established the countersign—it had been abandoned during the troublous period—which ensured that all the gates of Cairo should be closed at the hour when he went to his observatory, and that one only should be opened at a given signal when it should please him to return. This evening, he had himself attended so far as the end of the street called Derbal-Siba; there mounted the donkey which his attendants had ready for him at the house of the eunuch Nesim, the usher of the gate, and went out into the country, followed only by a servant and the young slave who always went with him. When he had climbed the mountain, without even going into the observatory tower, he looked at the stars, clapped his hands one against the other, and cried: "Oh, fatal sign, thou hast appeared at last!" Then he met some Arab horsemen who recognised him and asked alms from him. He sent his servant with them to the eunuch Nesim,

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

so that they should be given a present; then, instead of going to the tower, he made his way to the necropolis which lies to the left of Mokatam, and there went to the tomb of Fokkai, near the place called *Maksaba* because of the rushes that grow there. There, three men fell upon him with daggers; but hardly had he been struck than one of them, recognising his features in the moonlight, turned against the others, and fought with them until he fell beside the Caliph, crying: "Oh, my brother." Such at least was the story of the slave who escaped from this butchery, and fled to Cairo to warn Abou-Arous; but when the guards arrived on the scene of the murder, they found naught but the bloodstained garments, and *Kamar*, the Caliph's grey donkey, which had its hocks cut.

VII

THE DEPARTURE

The story of the Caliph Hakem was finished. The sheik stopped and gave himself to deep reflection. I myself was moved by the story of this passion, not so painful certainly as that of Golgotha, but I had recently visited the scene of it, having often, when I was at Cairo, seen Mokatam, where the ruins of Hakem's observatory are still standing. I said to myself that, whether god or man, the Caliph Hakem, so greatly slandered by Coptic and Mussulman historians, had certainly desired to bring about the reign of reason and justice. I saw in a new light the events related by El-Macin, Makrisi, Novaïri, and other authors whom I had read at Cairo, and I deplored the fate which condemns prophets, reformers, Messiahs, whoever

THE DEPARTURE

they may be, first to violent death, and later to human ingratitude.

“But you have not told me,” I said to the sheik, “who were the enemies who ordered Hakem’s death.”

“You have read the historians,” said he; “do you not remember how Yousouf, the son of Dawas, when he came to the meeting-place fixed at the Lovers’ Fountain, there met slaves who led him to a house where the Sultana Setalmulc waited for him, having gone there in disguise. It was she who made him promise to kill Hakem, saying that the Caliph wished to kill her, and promising to marry the young man when the deed was done. She ended with the words which history has handed down to us: “Go to the mountain. There he will come without fail and there remain alone, keeping with him only the man who serves him. He will go into the valley; run after him then and kill him; kill also the servant and the young slave, if they are there.” Then she gave him one of those daggers with a point like a lance, which are called *yafours*, and armed the two slaves too, who were appointed to assist him or to kill him if he betrayed his oath. It was only when he had first struck the Caliph that Yousouf recognised the companion of his nightly adventures, and turned against the two slaves, being horrified at what he had done. But he, in turn, was stricken down by them.”

“And what became of the two corpses, which, the historians say, disappeared, since only the donkey and Hakem’s seven tunics were found, with their buttons not even undone?”

“Did I say there were any corpses? Such is not our tradition. The stars promised the Caliph a life of eighty years, if he escaped that danger on the night of the 27th *schawal*, 411 of the Hegira. Do you not

STORY OF THE CALIPH HAKEM

know that for sixteen years after his disappearance the people of Cairo never ceased to say that he was alive?"

"I have certainly heard such things," I replied; "but the frequent appearances of Hakem were attributed to impostors like Scherout, Sikkin and others, who were not unlike him and played this part. That is what usually happens in the case of those marvellous sovereigns whose life becomes the subject of popular legend. The Copts say that Jesus Christ appeared to Hakem, who asked forgiveness for his impiety, and for long years did penance in the desert."

"Our books," said the sheik, "say that Hakem did not die of the wounds he received. They say that he was found by some unknown old man, and survived the fatal night on which his sister would have assassinated him. Wearied of the throne, he withdrew into the desert of Ammon, and there formulated the teaching which was afterwards spread abroad by his disciple Hamza. His disciples, chased from Cairo after his death, withdrew to the Lebanon, and there founded the Druse people."

This legend set my head in a whirl, and I made up my mind to ask the sheik other details about Hakem's religion; but the tempest which had kept me at Beyrouth abated, and I had to leave for Saint John of Acre where I hoped to interest the Pasha in favour of the prisoner. So I only saw the sheik again to wish him good-bye, without venturing to speak about his daughter, and even without telling him that I had already seen her at the house of Madame Carlès.

PART IV
THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

I
THE PACKET

A MAN who travels upon Arab and Greek ships must expect the kind of erratic voyage which will recall to him the wandering destinies of Ulysses and Telemachus; the very slightest wind will carry him off to every corner of the Mediterranean. The European, therefore, who wishes to go from one point on the Syrian coast to another must wait for the English packet which alone provides a service between the ports of Palestine. Every month, a simple brig, not even a steamer, goes up and down between the famous cities which used to be called Beryta, Sidon, Tyre, Ptolemais and Cæsarea but have retained neither their names nor their ruins. England does not even pay the compliment of despatching a steamboat to these queens of the sea and of commerce, whose sole heir she has become. But the social distinctions so dear to this free people are strictly observed upon the deck, just as though the ship were one of the finest type. The first class is forbidden to passengers of a lower order, or, in other words, those whose purses are not so well lined, and it sometimes astonishes Orientals when they see merchants in the places of honour, while sheiks, sherifs and even emirs, have to mingle with servants and soldiers. Usually, the heat

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

is too great for one to sleep in the cabins, and every traveller, carrying his bed upon his back, like the paralytic in the Gospel, picks out a place for rest and slumber on the deck. For the rest of the time, he stays squatting on his mattress or his rug, with his back against the rail, smoking his pipe or his narghile. The Franks alone spend the day marching up and down the deck, much to the surprise of the Levantines, who cannot understand all this scurrying like squirrels. It is difficult to get about the deck, without stumbling over the legs of some Turk or Bedouin, who jumps up wildly, puts his hand on his dagger, and lets out a stream of curses, promising to meet you in another place. The Mussulmans who are travelling with their seraglio, and have not paid enough for a separate cabin, are obliged to leave their wives in a kind of pen, railed off somewhere in the stern, in which they are packed together like lambs. If they happen to be sea-sick, the husband must go and find his wife, take her below, and then bring her back to the fold. There is nothing to equal the patience of a Turk when he is obliged to fulfil one of his thousand family duties beneath the scornful eye of an infidel. Morning and evening he goes to the common barrel to fill the copper vessels for the religious ablutions; renews the water in the narghiles, and looks after the children when the waves become too much for them, always endeavouring to keep his wives or slaves as far as possible from dangerous contact with the Franks. There are no such precautions on ships which carry only Levantine passengers. Levantines, though they may belong to different religions, observe a kind of etiquette with one another, especially in matters which concern women.

The lunch bell had just been rung when the English missionary, who, like myself, had embarked for Acre,

THE PACKET

showed me that part of the coast which is supposed to be the very place where Jonah left the belly of the whale. A little mosque records the respect of the Mussulmans for this Biblical tradition, and apropos of this I started one of those religious discussions which are no longer the fashion in Europe, but which arise so easily between travellers in countries like these where religion is obviously all-important.

“Fundamentally,” I said to him, “the Koran is only a summary of the Old and New Testaments, written in other terms, with the addition of some regulations which are peculiar to the locality. The Mussulmans honour Christ as a prophet, if not as God; they revere the *Kadra Myriam* (the Virgin Mary) and also our angels, prophets and saints. Whence comes, then, the tremendous gulf which still separates them from the Christians and renders relations between them so uncertain?”

“So far as my religion is concerned,” said the clergyman, “I do not believe it is true. I think that one day the Protestants and the Turks will come to an agreement. Some kind of intermediary religion will be formed, a kind of Oriental Christianity.”

“Or a kind of Anglican Islam,” said I. “But why should there be no such fusion with Catholicism?”

“Because in the eyes of an Oriental the Catholics are idolaters. It is no use your trying to make them believe that you pay no worship to the painted or carven figure, but to the divine person it represents; that you *honour*, but do not adore the angels and saints: they do not understand any such distinction. Besides, what idolatrous people ever did adore wood and metal themselves? So to them you appear both idolaters and polytheists, while the different Protestant communions . . .”

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

Our discussion, which I am only summing up here, continued after lunch, and the last words reached the ear of a short bright-eyed man with a black beard. He was dressed in a Greek cloak, the hood of which, pulled over his head, hid his headdress, the only guide to rank and nationality in the Orient.

We remained undecided for a long time.

“Oh, Holy Virgin!” he cried, “the Protestants will do no more than anyone else. The Turks will always remain Turks.” (He pronounced the word *Turs*.)

The unceremonious interruption and the Provençal accent of this person made me pleasantly aware of the fact that I was speaking to a compatriot. I turned in his direction and addressed a few words to him, to which he replied with great volubility.

“No, Sir, there is nothing to be done with the *Turs*; they are a dying people! Sir, quite recently I was at Constantinople, and I asked myself: ‘Where are the *Turs*?’ . . . There are none left.”

This paradox, together with his pronunciation, made me more and more certain that I was speaking to a Son of the Canebière. Only that word *Tur*, which he used at every moment, troubled me a little.

“You go rather far,” I replied. “I have myself seen a great number of *Turks*.”

I was careful to pronounce the last word with emphasis on the last two letters, but the Provençal paid no heed to my lesson.

“You think those were *Turs* you saw?” said he, pronouncing the syllable in a still more flutelike voice. “They are not real *Turs* at all; I mean the Osmanli *Turs*. Not every Mussulman is a *Tur*.”

After all, a Southerner considers his own pronunciation excellent and a Parisian’s very silly; I was more

THE PACKET

ready to accept my companion's pronunciation than his paradox.

"Are you really sure," I asked him, "that what you say is true?"

"Well, Sir, I have just been to Constantinople, and there the people are either Greeks, Armenians, Italians or Marseillais. All the *Turs* who can be discovered are made into cadis, ulemas, pashas, or else they are sent to Europe to show themselves."

I turned to the missionary, but he had left us, and was walking about in the stern.

"Sir," said my companion, taking me by the arm, "what do you think the diplomats will do when the *rayas* come and say to them: 'See what a misfortune has come upon us; there is not a single *Tur* left in the whole empire . . . we don't know what to do. Here are all the keys'?"

The boldness of this supposition made me laugh heartily. My acquaintance continued imperturbably:

"Europe will say: 'There must be one somewhere. Have another look. . . . Is it possible? No more pashas, no more viziers, no more muchirs, no more nazirs. . . . Why, it will upset all our diplomatic calculations. Whom are we to address? What shall we do to continue to pay our dragomans?'"

"It will indeed be embarrassing," I said.

"Yes, and the Pope will say, 'Oh, my God, what is to be done? Who will look after the Holy Sepulchre? Now there are no more *Turs*.'" "

A Marseillais, developing a paradox, does not let you escape him in a hurry. This particular one seemed glad to have found an opportunity of contradicting an unguarded expression one of his fellow-citizens had ventured to make: "You are going to Constantinople? You will see a good many *Turs* there."

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

When I rejoined the clergyman, he welcomed me rather coldly. I realised that being a first-class passenger he did not think it right and proper that I should have a conversation with one of the second-class. Henceforth, I had lost the right to enjoy the honour of his society; he was doubtless sorry beyond measure that he had ever had anything to do with one who behaved so incorrectly. Perhaps, in view of my Levantine dress, he had forgiven my not wearing yellow gloves and polished boots, but to be ready to chat with the first comer . . . that was decidedly improper. He never spoke to me again.

II

THE POPE AND HIS WIFE

Thereafter, having no reason to be careful, I made up my mind to enjoy to the full the company of my acquaintance from Marseilles, who, in view of the few opportunities for amusement which are to be found upon an English packet, became a priceless companion. This man had travelled far and seen much; his business forced him to stop first at one port and then at another, and, of course, brought him into relations with all sorts of people. "The Englishman doesn't wish to talk any more," said he; "perhaps he is sea-sick. Ah yes, look at him bolting into his cabin. He must have had too much lunch."

He stopped and, after a guffaw, began again:

"He reminds me of a deputy at home, who was very fond of a good dinner. One day, when he had a dish of throistles, somebody planted an owl on him. 'Ah,' said he, 'that's a nice fat one!' When he had finished,

THE POPE AND HIS WIFE

we told him what he had been eating. Sir, it had the same effect on him as a heavy roll at sea."

My Provençal obviously did not belong to the best society, but I had crossed the Rubicon. The barrier between the first and second classes was passed. I no longer belonged to the world *comme il faut*, and I must resign myself to my fate. Perhaps the clergyman who had so rashly admitted me to his acquaintance was comparing me to Milton's fallen angels. I must admit that this did not worry me very much; the forepart of the packet was infinitely more entertaining than the stern. Upon mattresses and carpets full of holes, the most varied types of people, dressed in most attractive-looking rags, jostled one another, radiant in the splendour of that glorious sun which covered them with a golden mantle. The bright eyes, the white teeth, the care-free laugh of the mountain-folk; the patriarchal aspect of the poor Kurdish families, grouped in the shadow of the sails as though they were in tents in the desert; the imposing seriousness of emirs and sherifs, richer in ancestors than in piastres, who, like Don Quixote, seemed to say, "Wherever I seat myself, there is the place of honour"—all these things, beyond a doubt, were well worth the company of a few silent tourists, and a certain number of ceremonious Orientals.

As we talked, the Marseillais led me to the place where he had stretched his mattress. It was beside another occupied by a Greek priest and his wife, who were making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. They were two excellent tempered old people who had already become close friends with the Marseillais. They possessed a raven which perched on their feet and knees, and shared their meagre lunch. The Marseillais made me sit down beside him, and took from a box a huge sausage and a bottle of European shape.

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

“If you had not just lunched,” said he, “I would offer you some of this; but you must taste it; it is Arles sausage, Sir, and would give a dead man appetite. Look at the sort of stuff they give you in the first class, the preserved beef and vegetables which they keep in tin boxes. Is that as good as a fine round of sausage, all juicy as you cut it? You could cross the desert with that in your pocket; you could give the Arabs a treat with it, and they’d tell you they’d never eaten anything better.”

To prove his assertion, the Marseillais cut off two slices and offered them to the pope and his wife, who did not fail to do justice to such a dainty. “My word,” he went on, “it does give you a thirst. Here’s some wine from the Camargue which is better than the Cyprus wine—that is, of course, as a regular drink. But we need a cup. When I’m alone, I drink out of the bottle.”

From underneath his garments the pope drew a kind of silver cup covered with embossed ornament of ancient work. It had traces of gilding inside, and was perhaps a chalice from some church. The blood of the grape rattled merrily into the silver-gilt cup. It was so long since I had drunk any red wine—French wine I should say—that I unceremoniously emptied the cup. The pope and his wife were not to make acquaintance with my new friend’s wine.

“You see these good people,” he said to me, “they have perhaps a century and a half between them, and they wished to see the Holy Land before they died. They are going to celebrate their golden wedding at Jerusalem. They once had children, but now the children are dead, and all they have left is that raven. Dear me! it’s all the same to them. They are going to thank the good God for the raven.”

THE POPE AND HIS WIFE

The pope, who realised that we were talking about him, smiled benevolently beneath his black hat. The good old woman, in her long blue woollen dress, reminded me of the austere Rebecca.

The packet slowed down, and some of the passengers, standing up, pointed out a white point upon the shore; we had reached Seyda, the ancient Sidon. The mountain of Elijah, sacred to the Turks as well as to the Christians and the Druses, could clearly be seen at the left of the town, and the imposing mass of the French *khan* soon attracted our attention. The walls and towers show traces of the English bombardment in 1840, which dismantled all the maritime towns of Lebanon. Moreover, all the harbours, from Tripoli to Saint John of Acre, had been filled up by the orders of Fakardin, prince of the Druses, so as to prevent a raid by Turkish soldiers. Consequently, these famous towns were nothing but ruin and desolation. Nature, however, does not associate herself with these, so frequently renewed, curses of the Bible. She always delights to set a frame of delightful greenery about these ruins. The gardens of Sidon flourish still as they did in the days of the worship of Astarte. The modern town is built a mile away from the old one, whose ruins surround a hillock surmounted by a square tower dating from the Middle Ages, and itself a ruin.

Many passengers disembarked at Seyda, and as the packet was to stay a few hours there, I went on shore together with the Marseillais. The pope and his wife also landed, for they could bear the sea no more, and had decided to finish their pilgrimage by land.

In a caique we passed by the arches of the bridge which joins the fort, built upon an island, to the town; we were rowed through the midst of the frail craft which alone are able to take shelter actually in the

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

harbour, because of their small draught, and we landed at an ancient jetty whose great stones lie in confusion amid the waves. The waves break over the ruins, and the only way of landing dryfoot is to be carried by almost naked *hamals*. We laughed at the embarrassment of the missionary's two Englishwomen, who writhed in the arms of copper-hued tritons, themselves as fair but rather more clothed than the Nereids of Galatea's Triumph. The tame raven of the poor Greek family beat its wings and cried; a mob of young rascals, who had made *machlabs* for themselves out of camel's-hair sacks, threw themselves upon the luggage; some offered to act as guides, shrieking two or three French words at us. The eye is glad to rest upon boats laden with the oranges, figs, and huge grapes of the promised land; and a little farther, a penetrating odour of frying, groceries, and salting-places indicates the nearness of the shops. The visitor passes between the buildings of the navy and those of the customs, and finds himself in a street, with stalls on either side, which leads to the gate of the French *khan*. We are now upon our own soil. The tricolour floats above the building, which is the largest in all Seyda. The great square courtyard, shaded by acacias, with a fountain in the centre, is surrounded by two rows of galleries—the lower one composed of shops, the upper with offices for business people. I was shown the Consulate on the left-hand side, and while I went up to it the man from Marseilles went with the pope to the Franciscan monastery, which is at the far end of the building. This French *khan* is quite a town; in the whole of Syria we have none which is more important. Unfortunately, our trade does not correspond with the proportions of the place from which it is carried on.

I was quietly chatting with M. Conti, our Vice-

THE POPE AND HIS WIFE

Consul, when the Marseillais arrived in a state of great excitement, full of complaints about the Franciscans, and using Voltairian language about them. They had refused to take in the pope and his wife. "That," said M. Conti, "is because they never take anyone who has not come to them with a letter of introduction."

"Ah, very convenient!" said the man from Marseilles. "But I know them; that's just the sort of thing monks always do. When some poor devil comes to them, they have always the same story to tell. People with money pay eight piastres a day in all these monasteries. There is no definite charge, but that's what they pay, and when they have that they are sure to receive a good welcome anywhere."

"But poor people, too, come with introductions," said M. Conti, "and the Fathers take them in for nothing."

"Doubtless," said the man from Marseilles, "and after three days they show them the door. And how many poor do they take in each year? You know that nobody in France can get a passport for the Orient unless he can prove that he has money enough for the journey."

"That is quite true," I said to M. Conti, "and fits in very well with those maxims of equality which apply to every Frenchman . . . when he has money in his pocket."

"You doubtless know," he replied, "that according to the terms of the capitulations with the Porte, the Consuls are obliged to repatriate those of their nationals who have not money enough to return to Europe. It costs the State a great deal."

"So," said I, "we are done with the crusades and pilgrimages, and we have a religion of the State."

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

“All this,” cried the Marseillais, “does not find a lodging for these good people.”

“I would gladly recommend them,” said M. Conti, “but in any case you must understand that a Catholic monastery cannot take in a Greek priest and his wife. There is a Greek monastery here where they can go.”

“Ah,” said the Marseillais, “that’s even worse. These poor devils are schismatic Greeks. In every religion, the nearer the beliefs to one another, the more the adherents detest each other. Bless me! I’ll go and knock up some Turk. They have one good point at least: they offer their hospitality to all and sundry.”

M. Conti had a great deal of trouble in restraining the man from Marseilles. He was even good enough to take upon himself the sheltering of the pope, his wife and the raven, which showed its sympathy with its master’s troubles by dismal croakings.

This Consul of ours is not only an excellent man, but a learned Orientalist; he showed me two works translated from manuscripts which had been lent to him by the Druses. You see the doctrine is not now kept so secret as it used to be. Knowing that I was interested in the subject, M. Conti was good enough to have a long talk with me about it during dinner. Then we went to see the ruins, to which one comes through delightful gardens, the finest all along the Syrian coast. The ruins on the north are no more than dust and fragments; only the foundations of a wall go back to Phœnician times, the remainder belongs to the Middle Ages. Saint Louis reconstructed the city, and rebuilt a square castle which the Ptolemies built in the first place. The cistern of Elijah, the sepulchre of Zabulon, and a few tombs, with the remains of pilasters, and paintings, complete the picture of all that Seyda owes to the past.

THE POPE AND HIS WIFE

When we came back, M. Conti showed us a house on the seashore, which Bonaparte lived in during the campaign in Syria. The painted wall-paper, with martial emblems, was put up at his request, and two libraries, with Chinese vases placed on the top of the shelves, contained the books and plans which the hero was always consulting. He went to Syria to establish relations with the emirs of Lebanon. A secret treaty put in his pay six thousand Maronites and six thousand Druses who were to halt the army of the Pasha of Damascus on its way to Acre. Unfortunately, the intrigues of the European rulers, and some of the monasteries which were opposed to the principles of the Revolution, discouraged the people, and the princes of Lebanon, who are always politic, allowed their official co-operation to depend upon the result of the siege of Saint John of Acre. Thousands of the native inhabitants had already joined themselves to the French army, out of hatred for the Turks; but in such a state of affairs, mere numbers could do nothing. The siege train was captured by the English fleet, which succeeded in getting its own engineers and gunners into Acre. It was a Frenchman called Phélippeaux, a former schoolfellow of Napoleon, who directed the defence. Perhaps an old school rivalry decided the fate of the world.

III

LUNCH AT SAINT JOHN OF ACRE

The packet was again under sail; the mountains of Lebanon became lower and more distant as we drew nearer to Acre; the shore was now sandy and devoid of vegetation. Soon we saw the harbour of *Sour*, the

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

ancient Tyre, where we only stopped long enough to pick up a few passengers. This town is much less important than Seyda. It is built on the shore, and the island upon which Tyre was situated when Alexander besieged it is now covered only by gardens and pastures. The jetty which the conqueror built there, now completely engulfed by the sands, shows no traces of human labour; it is simply an isthmus a quarter of a league long. But if antiquity reveals itself here only in ruined red or gray pillars, the Christian era has left more important traces. There are still to be seen the foundations of the ancient cathedral, built in the Syrian style, which was divided into three semi-circular naves, separated by pilasters. Here used to be the tomb of Frederick Barbarossa, who was drowned in the Kasamy, near Tyre. The famous fresh-water wells of Ras-el-Ain which are mentioned in the Bible, and are real artesian wells, whose construction is attributed to Solomon, are still to be seen a league from the town, and the aqueduct with its tremendous arches, which took their water to Tyre, stands out against the skies. That is all that is left of Tyre, with its transparent vases, its splendid purple, its precious woods, that once were famous throughout all the world. Now, in the place of its great commerce, there is nothing more than an insignificant trade in grain harvested by the Metualis, and sold by the Greeks, who are very many here.

Night was falling as we entered the harbour of Saint John of Acre. It was too late to go ashore, but in the clear starlight all the details of the gulf, which sweeps so gracefully between Acre and Kaiffa, stood out more sharply by reason of the contrast between land and sea. Some leagues beyond the horizon are the peaks of Anti-Lebanon which go down to the left,

LUNCH AT SAINT JOHN OF ACRE

while, on the right, the rugged ridges of the Carmel range extend as far as Galilee. Of the sleeping town itself we could see only the crenellated walls, the square towers and the domes of the mosque, with but a single minaret. Apart from that Mussulman detail, Acre might still be the feudal city of the Templars, the last stronghold of the Crusades.

When day came, this illusion was shattered by the sight of the masses of shapeless ruins which are the result of all the sieges and bombardments which have succeeded one another even until recent years. At daybreak the man from Marseilles woke me up to show me the morning star rising over the village of Nazareth, which is only eight leagues away. There is no escaping the emotion of such a memory. I suggested to the Marseillais that we should make that short journey.

"It is a pity," said he, "that the Virgin's house is no longer there, but you will remember that the angels carried it in one night to Loretto, near Venice. Here they show you where it used to be, and that is all. It is not worth the trouble of going to see that there is nothing there any more."

Moreover, I was at that moment particularly anxious to go and see the Pasha. My new friend, out of his experience of Turkish customs, was able to give me advice as to how I should present myself, and I told him how I had made the Pasha's acquaintance at Paris.

"Do you think he will recognise me?" I asked him.

"Oh, certainly; but you will have to put on European dress, otherwise you will have to take your turn to be seen, and you may not manage it to-day."

I took his advice, but retained the tarboosh, for my hair was shaved in the Eastern style.

"I know your Pasha," said the Marseillais, while I was changing my clothes. "At Constantinople they

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

call him *Guezluk*, which means the man with the spectacles.”

“Quite right,” said I, “he used to wear spectacles when I knew him.”

“Well, you see what the Turks do. That nickname has become his name, and it will remain in his family. His son will be called *Guezluk-Oglou*, and all his descendants also. Most proper names originated in a similar way. It is usually a sign that a man having obtained a high position by his own merit, his children accept the heritage of a surname that has often been bestowed in irony, for it recalls either something ridiculous about him—a physical defect, or the trade he followed before his rise in the world.”

“That,” said I, “follows from the Mussulman principles of equality. A man’s humility does him honour. Is not that a Christian principle too?”

“Listen,” said the man from Marseilles. “Since the Pasha is a friend of yours, you must do something for me. Tell him that I wish to sell him a musical clock which plays all the Italian operas. On the top of it there are birds which flap their wings and sing. It is a little wonder. The *Turs* like things of that sort.”

“We were quickly ashore, and I was soon tired of wandering about the narrow, dusty streets until it was time to present myself to the Pasha. Apart from the bazaar with pointed arched roof, and the mosque of Djeddar Pasha which had recently been restored, there is not much to see in the town; one would need to have been trained as an architect to recognise the plans of the churches and monasteries of the Crusades. The sites are still indicated by the foundations, but only a gallery which stands beside the harbour is still intact to represent the remains of the palace of the Grand Masters of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem.

LUNCH AT SAINT JOHN OF ACRE

The Pasha was living outside the town, in a summer pavilion near the gardens of Abdullah, at the end of an aqueduct which crosses the plain. When, in the courtyard, I saw the horses and slaves of the visitors, I recognised that the man from Marseilles had been right when he made me change my clothes. In Levantine dress I should have cut a poor figure, but in my black clothes all eyes turned to me.

Under the peristyle, at the foot of the staircase, was an enormous pile of slippers, left by those who had gone in. The *serdarbachi*, who received me, tried to make me take my boots off, but I refused, and so gave him a high opinion of my importance. Consequently, I only stayed a moment in the waiting-room. Besides, the Pasha had been given the letter I had brought with me, and he gave orders that I was to be introduced, though it was not my turn.

Then my welcome became more ceremonious. I expected to be welcomed like a European, but the Pasha simply made me sit beside him on a divan that went round part of the room. He pretended that he could only speak Italian, although I had heard him speak French at Paris, and when he had uttered the correct formula, "Is your *kief* good?" (Are you very well?), he sent for a long pipe and coffee. Still we talked nothing but commonplaces. Then the Pasha repeated, "Is your *kief* good?" and called for another cup of coffee. I had gone through the streets of Acre all morning without coming upon the smallest *trattoria*; I had even refused a piece of bread and sausage which the Marseillais offered me, since I laid some store on Mussulman hospitality. But what confidence is to be placed in the friendship of the great? The conversation dragged on without the Pasha offering me anything more than coffee without sugar, and tobacco

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

smoke. A third time he repeated, "Is your *kief* good?" and I rose to take my leave. At that moment, twelve o'clock chimed on the clock above my head, and a tune began. Then, almost immediately afterwards, a second, with a different tune; and a third and a fourth one after the other, with the comical result that might be expected. Accustomed as I was to the strange ways of the Turks, I could not understand why so many clocks should be collected in one room. The Pasha seemed delighted with the harmony, and was undoubtedly proud to prove his love for progress to a European. I thought of the commission with which the man from Marseilles had entrusted me. It seemed to me that it would be the more difficult to fulfil, since each of the four clocks was placed squarely in the middle of a wall. Where could a fifth be put? I did not mention the matter.

Nor did this seem the moment to speak of the matter of the Druse sheik imprisoned at Beyrouth. I kept this delicate business for another call, when perhaps the Pasha would welcome me with more warmth. Saying that I had business in the town, I then withdrew. When I was in the courtyard, an officer came to tell me that the Pasha had ordered two cavasses to accompany me wherever I wished to go. I did not overestimate the importance of this attention, which usually ends in one's having to give a big baksheesh to the said attendants.

When we were in the town again, I asked one of them where I could get lunch. They looked at one another with astonished eyes, obviously thinking that this was not lunch-time. As I insisted, they asked me for a *colonnate* (Spanish piastre) to buy some fowls and rice. Where could they cook it? In a guardroom. That appeared to me both an expensive and a complicated

LUNCH AT SAINT JOHN OF ACRE

process. Finally, they thought of taking me to the French Consulate; but I found that our agent lived across the gulf, on the other slope of Mount Carmel. At Saint John of Acre, as in the towns of the Lebanon, the Europeans have houses in the mountains, at such a height that they do not feel the great heat or the effect of the scorching winds of the plain. But I felt that I had not courage enough to go and ask for lunch so far above the level of the sea. As for calling at the monastery, I knew that I should not be welcomed without letters of recommendation. The only resource left to me was to go in search of the man from Marseilles, who would probably be at the bazaar.

He was, in fact, just selling a Greek merchant an assortment of those old watches, shaped like onions, of which our fathers were so fond. The Turks prefer them to the flat type. The fatter they are, the dearer; and the Nuremberg *eggs* are regarded as almost priceless. Old European muskets also find a sale anywhere in the Orient, for the Orientals will only have flintlocks. "That is my line," said the man from Marseilles. "In France I buy all this old stuff cheap, and here I sell it for as much as I can get. Old jewellery and old shawls also sell very well here. From the Orient they come, and back to the Orient they go. In France people do not realise the value of beautiful things; everything depends on fashion. Look here, if you wish to speculate, you cannot do better than buy Turkish weapons, pipes, amber mouthpieces, and all the other odds and ends that travellers bring back from the Orient at different times—buy them in France, and then come and sell them back here. When I see a European buying materials, costumes, weapons and so forth here, I say inwardly: 'You poor fool! It would cost you less at some curiosity shop in Paris.'"

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

“My dear fellow,” I said to him, “I don’t care a straw about any of that: have you a piece of your Arles sausage left?”

“I should think so indeed! It lasts a long time. I see what’s the matter with you. You have had no lunch. Good! We will go to a *cafedji’s*, and get you some bread.”

Unfortunately, in all the town there was nothing to be had but unleavened bread, baked on plates of sheet iron, and exactly like sea biscuit or pancake. I have never been able to endure this indigestible food unless I ate very little of it, and made up with other things. It was more difficult with the sausage, and I only made a poor lunch.

We offered some sausage to the cavasses, but they refused it on religious grounds. “Poor things,” said the man from Marseilles, “they think it is pork. They don’t know that Arles sausage is made of mule.”

IV

THE ADVENTURE OF A MAN FROM MARSEILLES

It was long past the time for the siesta; everybody had gone to sleep, and the two cavasses, thinking that we should do the same, had stretched themselves out on benches in the café. I was very anxious to give the slip to these hampering attendants and go and make my *kief* outside the town in the shade; but the Marseillais told me that it would not be proper, and that we should find no more shade or coolness outside than between the thick walls of the bazaar where we were. We began to talk to pass the time away. I told him my position, my plans, my idea of settling down in

THE ADVENTURE OF A MAN FROM MARSEILLES

Syria, of marrying a woman of the country and, since I could not choose a Mussulman woman, unless I changed my religion, how I had been led to think about a young Druse girl who suited me in every respect. There are moments when, like King Midas's barber, one feels that one must get rid of one's secrets somewhere. The man from Marseilles, a frivolous fellow, perhaps did not merit so much confidence, but at bottom he was very good-hearted, and this he showed by the interest he took in my situation.

"I must admit," I told him, "that I had hoped to receive a less ceremonious welcome from the Pasha, since I used to know him at Paris. I even counted to some extent upon the hope that this circumstance would enable me to be of service to the Druse sheik, the father of the pretty girl I have told you about. Now I see only too well what I have to expect."

"Are you joking?" said the Marseillais. "Are you really going to so much trouble all for the sake of a little girl from the mountains? Why, what do you imagine the Druses are? What is a Druse sheik compared with a European, a Frenchman who belongs to good society? Just recently Mr. Parker, the son of an English Consul, married one of those women, an Ansarian, from Tripoli, and nobody in his family would have any more to do with him. Yet she, too, was the daughter of a sheik."

"But the Ansarians are not the Druses."

"Look here! It is just a young man's fancy. I have spent a long time at Tripoli; I was doing business there with one of my compatriots who had set up a silk factory in the Mountain. He knew those Druses very well, and they are a people who, both men and women, lead a very strange sort of life."

I began to laugh, for I realised that he was referring

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

to sects related to the Druses only by origin, and I asked the man from Marseilles to tell me what he knew.

“They are *scamps*,” he whispered in my ear, with the comical expression of a Southerner who understands by that term something particularly naughty.

“Possibly,” said I, “but the girl I am talking about does not belong to any such sect, in which there may exist degenerate traces of the original beliefs of the Druses. She is what they call a woman scholar, an *akkalé*.”

“Yes, that’s just it! Those I knew used to call their priestesses *akkals*; it is the same word pronounced differently. Well, do you know what those priestesses are used for? They are set upon the holy table to represent the *Kadra* (the Virgin). And you may take it from me that they are dressed in the simplest attire, without a stitch of any kind upon them, and the priest prays away, and says that the image of maternity is to be adored. It is like the Mass, except that on the altar there is a large vessel containing wine from which he drinks, and which is afterwards passed round to all who are present.”

“Do you believe,” said I, “these lies invented by people of other religions?”

“Do I believe them? I believe them all the more because, in the district of Kadmous, on Christmas Day, I myself saw all the men who happened to meet a woman upon the roads prostrate themselves before her and embrace her knees.”

“Well, that is only a trace of the ancient worship of *Astarte*, mixed up with some Christian ideas.”

“Well, what do you think of their method of celebrating the Epiphany?”

“The feast of the Kings?”

THE ADVENTURE OF A MAN FROM MARSEILLES

“ Yes, but in their case this feast is also New Year’s Day. On that day, the *akkals* (initiates), both men and women, gather in what they call their temples, and at a particular point in the service the lights are put out, and I leave you to imagine what fine games go on then.”

“ I don’t believe a word of it. Exactly the same things were said about the *agapes* of the early Christians. And what European has ever seen these ceremonies, since only the initiates are allowed to go into the temples ?”

“ Who ? Why, my friend at Tripoli, the silk spinner. He had business relations with one of these *akkals*. The *akkal* owed him money, and my friend said : ‘ I will let you off if you arrange for me to be present at one of your meetings.’ The other made a host of difficulties, saying that if they were discovered, they would both be stabbed. But when a Marseillais once gets an idea into his head, he never lets go of it. They arranged to meet on the day of the feast; the *akkal* explained to my friend all the mummeries he would have to perform; and properly attired, knowing the language quite well, he did not run any great risk. So they arrived before one of those *khaloués*, a sort of santon’s tomb, a square chapel with a little dome, surrounded by trees and built on the rocks. You may have seen some of them in the mountains.”

“ I have seen them.”

“ But at the hour of worship there are always armed men about to prevent the approach of the inquisitive.”

“ Then ?”

“ Then they waited for the rising of a star they call *Sockra*, which is the star of Venus. They pray to it.”

“ Another trace, undoubtedly, of the worship of Astarte.”

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

“Wait. Then they began to count the shooting stars. When they reached a certain number, they began to draw auguries, and, finding them favourable, they all went into the temple and the ceremony began. During the prayers the women entered one by one, and, at the moment of sacrifice, the lights were put out.”

“And what became of the Marseillais?”

“He had been told what he had to do. There is no question of choice; it is like getting married with one’s eyes shut.”

“Well, it is their way of getting married, that is all; and seeing that there is a definitely religious aspect about the whole affair, I cannot say I find it so very terrible. Indeed, the custom must be very advantageous to ugly women.”

“You do not understand. They are already married, and every man has to bring his wife with him. Even the chief sheik himself, the one they call the *mekkadam*, cannot refuse to take part in this levelling practice.”

“I am beginning to be anxious about your friend.”

“My friend was delighted with the lot which fell to him. He said to himself: ‘What a pity it is that I can never know whom I have loved for a moment. These people really have some foolish notions.’”

“They probably do not wish any man to be quite sure who his father is. That is only pushing the doctrine of equality a little further. The Orient is more advanced in communism than we are.”

“My friend,” continued the Marseillais, “had a most ingenious idea; he cut a piece off the dress of the woman beside him, telling himself: ‘To-morrow morning, when it is light, I shall know with whom I have been dealing.’”

“Oh! Oh!”

THE ADVENTURE OF A MAN FROM MARSEILLES

“Sir,” continued the man from Marseilles, “when day broke, each man went out without a word, after the celebrants had invoked the blessing of the good God . . . or was it, perhaps, the devil . . . upon the children who should be born from these marriages. So my friend set himself to watch the women, each of whom had put on her veil again. Soon he saw one who had lost a part of her dress. He followed her to her house without seeming to do so, and a little later went in as any passer-by might do. He asked for drink—a thing which is never refused in the mountains—and found himself surrounded by children and grandchildren. It was an old woman.”

“Why should he have wished to probe so deeply into the matter? Would it not have been better to keep the illusion? The ancient mysteries had a more pleasant legend, that of Psyche.”

“You believe I am telling you a fable, but everybody at Tripoli knows all about it. Now, what have you to say to these good pious folk and their ceremonies?”

“Your imagination runs away with you,” I said to the Marseillais; “the custom of which you speak only prevails in a sect with which the others will have nothing to do. It would be as unjust to attribute such customs to the Ansarians and the Druses as to credit Christianity with certain similar follies attributed to the Anabaptists or the Waldenses.”

For some time we went on talking in this strain. It annoyed me, in the sympathy that I had begun to feel for the people of Lebanon, that my companion should be so much mistaken, and I did all I could to undeceive him, though I gladly welcomed the precious information which came from his own observation.

The majority of travellers only notice the odd details of the life and customs of certain peoples. The

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

general meaning escapes them, and indeed can only be acquired by deep study. How pleased I was that I had set out by making myself thoroughly acquainted with the history and religious doctrines of so many of the peoples of the Lebanon, whose character inspired esteem in me. In my desire to settle among them, such information was not indifferent to me and I needed it to rebut the majority of European notions.

Generally speaking, the only people in Syria who interest us are the Maronites, Catholics like ourselves, and after them, the Greeks, Armenians and Jews, whose ideas are less far removed from our own than those of the Mussulmans. We never give a thought to the fact that there exists a series of intermediate religions, which can easily be assimilated to the principles of Northern civilisation, and so gradually bring the Arabs to accept it.

Syria is certainly the only point in the East where Europe can set its foot definitely, with the idea of establishing trade relations. Half at least of the Syrian population is made up either of Christians or of peoples well disposed to those ideas of reform which enlightened Mussulmans are to-day bringing into the foreground.

V

DINNER WITH THE PASHA

The day was now well advanced, and the coolness of the breeze from the sea brought to an end the slumbers of the townspeople. We left the café, and I began to be uneasy about dinner; but the cavasses, whose jabberings I scarcely understood—they were more in Turkish than in Arabic—kept on repeating,

DINNER WITH THE PASHA

“*Ti sabir?*” as if they had been Molière’s Levantines.

“Ask them what it is they are so anxious to tell me,” I said to the man from Marseilles.

“They say it is time to go back to the Pasha’s.”

“For what?”

“To dine with him.”

“My word!” said I. “I had given up the idea. The Pasha did not ask me.”

“That went without saying, the moment he sent someone to accompany you.”

“But, in these parts, people usually dine at midday.”

“Not the Turks. They take their principal meal at sunset, after the evening prayer.”

I said good-bye to the Marseillais and went back to the Pasha’s pavilion. As we crossed the plain, covered with wild vegetation burned by the sun, I admired the site of the ancient town, once so mighty and magnificent, but now reduced to that shapeless strip of land which goes out into the waves, on which have accumulated the débris of three terrible bombardments in fifty years. At every moment one’s foot strikes against the fragments of shells and cannon balls with which the soil of the plain is strewn.

When we returned to the pavilion where I had been received that morning, there were no more piles of shoes at the bottom of the staircase, no more visitors crowding the *mababim* (entrance hall). I was taken through the room with the clocks, and in the next room I found the Pasha, smoking, sitting upon the window-ledge. He got up, without ceremony, and held out his hand like a Frenchman. “How did you get on? Did you have a good walk in our beautiful town?” he said in French. “Did you see everything there is to see?” His welcome was so different from that of

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

the morning, that I could not prevent myself from showing some surprise.

“You must excuse me,” he said, “if this morning I received you in my capacity as Pasha. Those excellent people in the audience chamber would never have forgiven me if I had shown any departure from the prescribed etiquette, in favour of a *Frangui*. At Constantinople everybody would understand, but here we are *in the provinces*.”

After pronouncing these last words with considerable stress, the Pasha told me that he had lived for a long time at Metz in Lorraine as a student at the preparatory Artillery school there. Thus he set me entirely at my ease, providing me with an opportunity to talk to him about some of my friends who had been his school-fellows. During this conversation, the harbour gun which marks the time of sunset, sounded from the town. A great noise of drums and fifes announced the hour of prayer to the Albanians in the courtyards. The Pasha left me for a moment, doubtless to go and fulfil his religious duties. Then he returned and said: “We are going to dine in European style.”

And, indeed, chairs and a high table were brought, instead of turning a stool upside down, and putting on it a metal tray, with cushions around, as is usually done. I felt appreciative of the Pasha's kindness in this, yet I must own I do not like this gradual invasion of the Orient by European customs, and I protested to the Pasha that he was treating me like a common tourist.

“But you have come to see me in European dress,” said he.

The retort was fair enough, but I felt I had been right. Whatever one may do, and however far one may count upon the kindness of a Turk, it must never be supposed that there can be an immediate fusion

DINNER WITH THE PASHA

between his mode of life and ours. The European customs which he adopts in certain circumstances become a kind of neutral ground on which he comes to meet us without yielding anything of himself. He consents to imitate our manners just as he makes use of our language, but only when he is dealing with us. He resembles that character in the ballet who is half a peasant and half a noble; to Europe he shows the "gentleman" side, but he is always an out-and-out Osmanli to the Asiatic.

Besides, the feeling of the people turns this policy into a necessity.

On the whole, I still found the Pasha of Acre a splendid fellow, full of politeness and affability, but keenly concerned by the attitude of the Powers towards Turkey. He told me that he had just given up the high position of Pasha of Tophana at Constantinople because he was tired of Consular intrigues. "Just think," said he, "a great city wherein a hundred thousand people are not subject to the law of the land: there is not a thief, an assassin, a scoundrel who does not succeed in placing himself under the protection of some Consulate or other. There are twenty sets of laws, each of which nullifies another, yet the Pasha is always held responsible. Here, we are not much better off, with seven or eight different races, who have their own sheiks, their cadis and their emirs. Provided they pay their tribute, we agree to leave them alone in their mountains. Well . . . for three years we have not had a para."

I saw that the moment had not yet arrived when it would be opportune to raise the question of the Druse sheik imprisoned at Beyrouth, and changed the subject. After dinner I hoped that the Pasha would at least follow the ancient custom and entertain me with a bevy

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

of dancing girls, for I was sure he would not push his French courtesy so far as to introduce me to his wives; but I had to suffer Europe to the end. We went down to a billiard-room where I had to knock the balls about until one o'clock in the morning. As far as I could, I let myself be beaten, and the Pasha roared with delight, remembering his amusements at the Metz school.

“A Frenchman—a Frenchman allowing himself to be defeated!” he cried.

“I admit,” said I, “that Saint John of Acre is not favourable to our arms; but here you are fighting alone, and the former Pasha of Acre had English guns.”

Finally, we parted. I was taken to a very large room, lighted by a candle, placed in the middle of the floor, in a huge candlestick. This brought us back to local customs. The slaves made a bed for me with cushions on the floor, and over them were placed sheets sewn on one side to the coverings. In addition, I was favoured with a large nightcap of padded yellow silk which had ribs like a melon.

VI

CORRESPONDENCE (FRAGMENTS)

Here I interrupt the account of my journey—I mean this collection, day by day and hour by hour, of local impressions which have no value other than that of scrupulous accuracy. There are moments when the pulse of life beats faster regardless of the laws of time, like a clock gone mad, whose chain is broken. At other moments, there is nothing but a dragging succession of inappreciable sensations, or sensations which are not

CORRESPONDENCE (FRAGMENTS)

worth the trouble of recording. Shall I tell you of my wanderings in the mountains, in places where everything was bare and dry, among men whose faces all look alike except when one studies them closely, whose serious behaviour and uniform mode of life are much less picturesque than those of the noisy populations of the cities; with their greater contrasts. For some time, I have felt that I was living in a bygone age, brought back to life again by magic; the feudal age with its unchanging institutions surrounds me, like the stone of the castle keep which has preserved them.

Rugged mountains, dark abysses, in which the fires of noon take the form of circles of mist; rivers and torrents, famous like ruins, along which still roll the columns of temples and the broken idols of gods; eternal snows which crown the tops of mountains whose base spreads out into the burning desert; valleys in the distance, half-filled by the sea's blue waves; perfumed forests of cedar and cinnamon; awe-inspiring cliffs of rock, and the sound of a hermitage bell; fountains made famous by the Biblical Muse, where maidens gather at eventide, bearing slender vases on their heads: this is indeed a fatherland, a holy land, for the European. Damascus, the Arab city, may blossom at the desert's edge, and hail the rising sun from the spires of its minarets; Lebanon and Carmel are the heritage of the Crusades; they must belong, if not to the cross alone, at least to that liberty which the cross symbolizes.

I must explain to you the changes which the space of a few months has wrought in my wandering destinies. You remember how kindly the Pasha of Acre welcomed me when I visited him. I ultimately told him the whole story of my determination to marry the daughter of

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

the sheik Escherazy, and the assistance I hoped from him. At first he laughed, with that simple naturalness of the Oriental, and said: "Have you really made up your mind?"

"Absolutely," said I. "You see—I can say this to a Mussulman—all through this business there can be traced a definite chain of predetermined events. In Egypt the idea of marriage was put into my head; the thing seemed so simple, so pleasant, so easy, so free from all the trammels which are so much a drawback in Europe, that I accepted and mulled over the idea; but I must admit I am rather a strange creature, and though no doubt many Europeans do not bother about such things, there has always seemed to me something revolting about this buying of girls from their parents. The Copts and the Greeks who make bargains of this sort with Europeans know quite well that there is nothing serious about these marriages, although a sort of religious sanction is accorded to them. I hesitated, I thought about the matter, and finally bought a slave with the money I should have spent upon a wife. But one cannot mix with impunity in the affairs of a world to which one does not belong. I can neither send this woman away, nor sell her, nor leave her behind without feeling scruples, nor can I marry her without making a fool of myself. But she is a chain around my neck. It is I who am the slave. As you see, it is fate that keeps me here."

"If that is all," said the Pasha, "give her to me in exchange for a horse, or anything else you like, if you will not take money; we do not feel about these things in the same way."

"For the freedom of the sheik Escherazy," said I. "At least that would be a price worth taking."

"No," said he, "mercy is not for sale."

CORRESPONDENCE (FRAGMENTS)

“ Well, you see. I am thrown back again into my previous state of doubt. I am not the first Frank who has ever bought a slave; usually the poor girl is left at some convent; she is converted with great *éclat*, and the honour of her conversion is reflected upon her master and the Fathers who have instructed her; then she becomes a nun or anything else she can, which is often the same thing as being very miserable. I should find it the cause of most frightful remorse.”

“ What is it you really wish to do ? ”

“ Marry the girl I have told you about, and give her the slave as a wedding present, as a dowry; they are friends, and can live together. Moreover, I may tell you that it was she herself who put the idea in my head. Whether I can carry it out or not depends upon you.”

I am giving you in no particular order the arguments I brought forward to excite the Pasha's kindness to my own advantage. “ There is practically nothing I can do,” he said at last. “ The Pashalik of Acre is not what it used to be; it has been split up into three distinct governments and I have only a nominal authority over that of Beyrouth. But suppose I succeed in setting free the sheik; he will accept that act of kindness without any gratitude. You don't know those people. I grant you that some consideration is due to him. During the recent disturbances, his wife was killed by the Albanians. Resentment has led him into imprudent actions and still makes him a dangerous man. If he will promise to be quiet in the future, we will see what can be done.”

I did all I could to keep the Pasha in this good frame of mind, and secured a letter for the Governor of Beyrouth, Essad Pasha. The latter, with whom the

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

Armenian, my old travelling companion, had been of some assistance, agreed to send his prisoner to the Druse *kaimakan*, thus reducing his offence, which previously had been aggravated by that of rebellion, to that of simply refusing to pay taxes. In this case it would be easy to come to an arrangement.

You see, the Pashas themselves are not all-powerful in this country, or else Mehmet's extreme kindness to me would have broken down all obstacles. Perhaps he wished to place me under an obligation to him more delicately by disguising his intervention with the lower officials. The fact is, that I had only to present myself to the *kaimakan* as coming from him, to receive an excellent welcome. The sheik had already been moved to Deir-Khamar, where this official actually lives, the heir to a part of the ancient authority of the Emir Bechir. As you know, to-day there is one *kaimakan* (governor) for the Druses and another for the Maronites. Thus is created a mixed authority which depends ultimately upon the Turkish Government; but its institution spares the national feeling of the two peoples, and their aspirations towards self-government.

All sorts of people have described Deir-Khamar and its cluster of flat-roofed houses grouped upon a mountain as steep as the staircase of some ruined Babel. Beit-Eddin, the ancient residence of the Emirs of the Mountain, stands upon another peak which almost seems to touch the first, but is separated from it by a valley. If, from Deir-Khamar, you look at Beit-Eddin, you think you are looking at a fairy castle; its pointed arcades, its bold terraces, its colonnades, pavilions and turrets present a mixture of every style, more impressive in the mass than satisfactory

CORRESPONDENCE (FRAGMENTS)

from the point of view of detail. This palace is indeed symbolic of the policy of the emirs who used to live in it. Its columns and paintings are pagan; its towers and arches, Christian; its domes and kiosks, Mussulman. Temple, church and mosque are all mixed up together in the one building.

It was there that the sheik Escherazy had been provisionally lodged; doubtless happy to be no longer under the constraint of a foreign law. It was certainly more pleasant to sleep beneath the roof of the old palace of his princes, and he had been allowed to have his daughter with him, another favour which he could not secure at Beyrouth. But the *kaimakan*, who was responsible for the prisoner, or else for the money he owed, kept him under close guard.

I obtained permission to visit the sheik, as I had done at Beyrouth. Since I had found a lodging at Deir-Khamar, I had only to cross the intervening valley to reach the huge terrace of the palace, from which, between the mountain peaks, a fragment of blue sea glitters in the distance. The echoing passages, the deserted halls which once were filled with pages, slaves and soldiers, recalled to my mind those castles, despoiled by the fall of the Stuarts of their royal splendour, of which Walter Scott writes. And the majesty of the natural scenery appealed no less strongly to me. I felt that I must explain myself quite openly to the sheik, and not hide from him the reasons which had induced me to try to be useful to him. Nothing is worse than to have gratitude showered upon one, undeserved.

When, with considerable hesitation, I made a start, he tapped his forehead with his finger.

“*Énte medjnoun ?*” (Are you mad?) said he.

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

“*Medjnoun*,” I said, “is the surname of a famous lover, and far be it from me to decline it.”

“Have you seen my daughter?” he cried.

At that moment, the expression on his face was such, that I could not help thinking of a story which the Pasha of Acre had told me when we were talking about the Druses. The recollection was decidedly none too pleasing. A *kyaya* had told him the following tale: “I was sleeping, when at midnight I heard a knocking at the door, and a Druse came in bearing a sack upon his shoulders. ‘What have you there?’ I asked. ‘My sister had a love affair, and I have killed her. In this sack is her *tantour*’ (the jewelled cornet which the Druse women wear upon their heads). ‘But there are two *tantours*.’ ‘Yes, because I killed the mother too, for she knew of the matter. Strength and power are only in the hands of God most high.’” The Druse had brought the jewels of his victims to satisfy the justice of the Turks. The *kyaya* had him arrested and said to him: “Go and sleep and I will speak to you to-morrow.” The next day he said to the Druse: “I suppose you have not slept?” “On the contrary,” said the other, “for the year that I have been suspecting this dishonour, I have never slept; but sleep came to me this night.”

The memory of this story came to me like a flash; there could be no hesitation. Doubtless, I had nothing to fear on my own account; but the prisoner had his daughter with him: might he not suspect that more had happened than that I had simply seen her unveiled? I explained to him my visits to Madame Carlès’ house, which were certainly justified by the presence there of my slave; her friendship for his daughter; the chance which had introduced me to her. I passed hastily over the subject of the veil which might

CORRESPONDENCE (FRAGMENTS)

have been deranged by chance. In any case I do not think he can have doubted my sincerity. "With every people in the world," I added, "a daughter is asked in marriage from her father, and I do not understand why you are surprised. From the relations which I have in this country, you can judge that my position is not inferior to your own. As regards religion, I would not agree to change mine for the finest marriage in the world; but I know yours, I know that it is very tolerant, and that it admits every possible form of worship and every known revelation as a different, but equally holy, manifestation of the Divinity. I share those opinions fully, and, without ceasing to be a Christian, I believe I can . . ."

"Oh, wretched man," cried the sheik, "it is impossible. *The pen is broken, the ink is dry, the book is sealed.*"

"What do you mean?"

"Those are the very words of our law. Henceforth no one can enter our communion."

"I thought initiation was open to all."

"Open to the *djabels* (ignorant) of our own people, who rise by study and by virtue, but not to strangers, for our people alone is the elect of God."

"Yet you do not condemn the others."

"Neither does the bird condemn the animals which trail along the ground. The word was preached to you, and you would not hear it."

"When?"

"In the days of *Hamza*, the prophet of our lord Hakem."

"But could we hear it?"

"Certainly, for he sent missionaries (*days*) into all the *iles* (regions)."

"But how can that be our fault? We were not born then."

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

“ You existed in other bodies, but you had the same spirits. That spirit, immortal like our own, has remained closed to the divine word. Thereby it showed its inferior nature. Your fate is sealed for all eternity.”

It is not easy to get the better of a young man who has studied philosophy in Germany, and read Kreutzer's *Symbolism* in the original text. I granted the worthy *akkal* his doctrine of transmigration, and, starting from that point, said:

“ When, about the year 1000 of the Christian era, the *days* sowed the word throughout the world, they made proselytes, did they not, in other places besides these mountains? What is there to prove that I am not descended from one of those proselytes? Shall I tell you where the plant called *al iledj* (a symbolic plant) grows?”

“ Was it sown in your land?”

“ It grows only in the heart of those believers for whom Hakem is the true God.”

“ That is indeed the sacramental phrase; but you may have learned it from some renegade.”

“ Shall I recite to you the Druse catechism from beginning to end?”

“ The Franks have stolen many of our books, but the knowledge acquired by infidels can only come from evil spirits. If you are one of the Druses of the other *iles*, you must have your black stone (*horse*). Show me that, and we will recognise you.”

“ Later, you shall see it,” I said, though I had no inkling of what he was talking. I broke off the interview and, promising to come and see him again, returned to Deir-Khamar.

That same evening I asked the *kaimakan*, as though out of a stranger's simple curiosity, what the *horse*

CORRESPONDENCE (FRAGMENTS)

was. He made no difficulty about telling me that it was a stone, cut in the form of an animal, that every Druse carries upon him as a sign whereby he may be recognised. It had been found upon the dead, and so had given rise to the idea that they worshipped a calf, which was just as absurd as to believe that the Christians worshipped a lamb or a pigeon, which were but symbols. These stones, which at the time of the early missionaries were distributed to all the faithful, were handed down from father to son.

All I had to do then was to get hold of one and convince the *akkal* that I was descended from some ancient believer, but I could not bear the thought of such a lie. The *kaimakan*, whose position rendered him more enlightened, and more susceptible to European ideas than his compatriot, gave me details which suddenly enlightened me. I understood everything, divined everything in a single moment; my wild dream is becoming my life; the impossible has realised itself.

Make a good search. Put together the most fantastic notions, or give it up. Now learn something which until now I had only vaguely imagined: the Druse *akkals* are the freemasons of the Orient.

No other reason is needed to explain the ancient assertion of the Druses that they are descended from certain knights of the Crusades. What their great Emir Fakardin declared at the court of the Medicis, when he was seeking the help of Europe against the Turks, what is so frequently recalled in the letters-patent of Henri IV and Louis XIV with regard to the peoples of Lebanon, is true, at least in part. During the two centuries of the occupation of the Lebanon by the Knights Templars, they laid the foundations of a profound institution. In their need to dominate

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

nations of different race and different religion, they certainly established a system of masonic affiliation, with an imprint of local custom. The Oriental ideas which, consequently, found their way into their order were partly the cause of the accusations of heresy which were brought against the Templars in Europe. Freemasonry, as you know, has come down to us from the teachings of the Templars, and there we have the connection established. That is why the Druses speak of their European co-religionists, scattered through different countries, principally in the mountains of Scotland (*djebel-el-Scouzia*). By that they mean the companions and masters of the Scotch rite, as well as the Rosicrucians, whose degree corresponds to that of the ancient Templars.

But I myself am one of the *sons of the widow*, a *lewis* (son of a master). I was brought up to feel horror for the murder of Adoniram, and admiration for the holy Temple whose columns were made of the cedar of Lebanon. Seriously, masonry has greatly degenerated among us; but you see it may still be useful on a journey. In short, no longer shall the Druses consider me an infidel; I am a *mutadarassin*, a student. In masonry this would correspond to the degree of apprentice; then I must become a companion (*refik*), then a master (*day*). For us the *akkal* is the Rosicrucian, or what they call a knight (*kaddosch*). There is much else of close relation to our lodges, but I spare you the details.

You see now what was to happen. I produced my title, having fortunately among my papers one of those handsome masonic diplomas full of cabbalistic signs familiar to the Orientals. When the sheik again asked me for my black stone, I told him that the French

CORRESPONDENCE (FRAGMENTS)

Templars, who had been burned, were not able to hand their stones to the freemasons, who had become their spiritual successors. It would be necessary to make sure of this fact, which is so far only a probability, but this stone must be the *bobomet* (little idol) which is referred to in the trial of the Templars.

From this point of view my marriage became an affair of political importance. It might perhaps lead to a renewal of the bonds which formerly attached the Druses to France. These good people complain that our protection extends only over the Catholics, whereas formerly the kings of France used to include the Druses in their sympathies, as descendants of the crusaders and, in a measure, Christians. English agents profit by this situation to urge their own claims, and hence arise the quarrels between the two rival peoples, Druses and Maronites, who used to be united under the same princes.

The *kaimakan* finally allowed sheik Escherazy to return to his home, and did not conceal from him the fact that it was to my influence with the Pasha of Acre that he owed this happy result. The sheik said to me: "If you wished to make yourself useful, you have only done what any man should do; if it was for your own self-interest, there is no need for me to thank you."

In some respects his doctrine surprises me; but when one is able to understand it, it turns out to be pure and full of nobility. The *akkals* recognise neither virtues nor vices. The good man has no merit; he simply rises in the scale of beings, as the wicked man sinks. Transmigration itself entails reward or punishment. It is never said of a Druse that he is dead, but that he has passed over.

THE AKKALS—ANTI-LEBANON

The Druses do not give alms, because alms, in their opinion, are degrading to him who accepts them. But they practise hospitality, as an exchange, either in this life or in another.

They consider vengeance binding upon them; all injustice must be punished, and pardon degrades him to whom it is accorded.

A man, according to them, does not make progress by humility but by knowledge; he is bound to make himself as much like God as possible.

Prayer is not compulsory; it is of no avail in obtaining pardon for sin.

It is man's duty to repair the evil he has done, not because he has done ill, but because the evil, by the force of things, will one day return upon himself.

The order of *akkals* is something like the Chinese literary class. The nobles (*sberifs*) are obliged to go through the tests of initiation; peasants (*sa lems*) may become equal or superior to them, if they equal or surpass them in this way.

Sheik Escherazy was one of these.

I presented the slave to him with the words: "This is your daughter's servant." He looked at her with interest, and considered her gentle and pious. Since then the two women have remained together.

All four of us left Beit-Eddin on mules; we crossed the plain of Bekea, and after reaching Zakle, came to Balbek in Anti-Lebanon. For a few hours I dreamed amid these magnificent ruins which need no description from me after that of Volney and Lamartine. Soon we reached the ridge of mountains beside the Hauran. There we stayed in a village where vines and mulberry-trees are cultivated, a day's journey from Damascus. The sheik took me to his humble house,

CORRESPONDENCE (FRAGMENTS)

the roof of which was transpierced and supported by an acacia-tree (Hiram's tree). At certain hours this house is filled with children: it is a school. Such is the finest title which can be given to the dwelling of an *akkal*.

You will understand that I cannot describe for you the rare interviews I had with my fiancée. In the East the men live together and the women by themselves, except in very rare instances. But that delightful child has given me a red tulip and planted in the garden a small acacia which is to grow as our love grows. It is a custom of the country.

Now I am studying to reach the dignity of a *réfik* (companion), which I hope shortly to attain. Then we shall marry.

From time to time I make a trip to Balbek. There, at the Maronite Bishop's house, I met Father Planchet, who was going his rounds. He was not too severe upon me, but he told me that my marriage would be no marriage at all. But since I have been brought up in the opinions of the philosophers, I do not bother too greatly about the opinion of a Jesuit. But why cannot *mixed marriages* be introduced to the Lebanon? I must think about it.

PART V
EPILOGUE

I

CONSTANTINOPLE

My friend, man proposes, but God disposes. It was doubtless predetermined from all eternity that I should marry neither in Egypt nor in Syria, countries where such unions are so simple that they seem almost absurd. Just when I was beginning to make myself worthy to marry the sheik's daughter, I was suddenly seized by one of those Syrian fevers which, if they do not carry you off, last for months and years. There is only one remedy—to leave the country. I hastened to escape from those valleys of the Hauran which are at once damp and dusty, wherein flow the rivers which water the plain of Damascus. I hoped to recover my health at Beyrouth, but there I could only manage to find strength enough to go on board the Austrian packet from Trieste, which took me first to Smyrna and then to Constantinople. So I set foot again on European soil. The climate here is much like that of our southern towns.

Returning health makes my regrets stronger and stronger. But what can I do? If I go back to Syria later, the doctors say I shall have a recurrence of the fever which I was unfortunate enough to suffer from. But if I bring here the woman of my choice, would not that mean exposing her to those terrible illnesses

EPILOGUE

which, in northern countries, carry off three-quarters of the women of the Orient who are transplanted there?

After I had long thought over the whole question, with that calmness of mind which convalescence gives, I decided to write to the Druse sheik to take back my promise, and to release him from his promise to me.

II

GALATA

From the foot of the tower of Galata—with Constantinople before me, its Bosphorus and its seas—again I turn my gaze towards Egypt, now long vanished from my sight.

Beyond the peaceful horizon which surrounds me, over this land of Europe, Mussulman indeed, but already like my own homeland, I still feel the glory of that distant mirage which flames and raises clouds of dust in my memory, like the image of the sun which, when one has gazed upon it fixedly, pursues the tired eye, though it has plunged into the shade again.

My surroundings add force to this impression: a Turkish cemetery, beneath the walls of Galata the Genoese.

Behind me is an Armenian barber's shop, which is also a café; and huge red and yellow dogs, lying on the grass in the sun, covered with wounds and scars from their nightly battles. On my left a genuine santon, wearing his felt hat, sleeping that sleep of the blest which is for him a foreshadowing of paradise. Down below is Tophana, with its mosque, its fountain and its batteries of guns commanding the entrance to the harbour. From time to time I hear the psalms

GALATA

of the Greek liturgy chanted by nasal voices, and over the road which goes to Pera I see long funeral processions led by popes who wear upon their brows crowns of imperial shape. With their long beards, their robes of spangled silk, and their ornaments of imitation jewels, they look like phantoms of the sovereigns of the Later Empire.

For the moment there is nothing very gay. Let us go back to the past. What I mostly regret to-day are not the huge Egyptian onions whose absence the Hebrews bemoaned in the land of Canaan, but a friend, and—a woman; one taken from me only by the tomb, the other lost to me for ever.

But why should I bring together here two names which can meet only in my memory, for impressions which are entirely personal to myself? Because, when I reached Constantinople I heard the news of the death of the French Consul-General, of whom I have already spoken and who welcomed me at Cairo so kindly. He was a man well known to all the scholars of Europe, a diplomat and a man of learning—two things which rarely go together. He had thought it his duty to take seriously one of those Consular positions which usually do not oblige their holders to acquire any special knowledge.

In fact, in accordance with the usual laws of promotion in the diplomatic service, a Consul at Alexandria, one fine day, finds himself promoted to the position of Minister Plenipotentiary in Brazil; a Chargé d'affaires at Canton becomes Consul-General at Hamburg. What need is there to learn the language, to study the manners of a country, to make acquaintances and investigate possible openings for our trade? The very most such a man can be expected to think about is the situation, the climate and the other

EPILOGUE

advantages of the house he is trying to secure as an improvement upon the one he already occupies.

When I met the Consul at Cairo, he thought of nothing but research into Egyptian antiquities. One day when he was talking to me about pyramids and underground chambers I said to him: "You ought not to bother so much about tombs? Are you trying to obtain a Consular post in the next world?"

It never occurred to me, then, that I was saying something cruel. "Do you not see," he answered, "the state of my health? I can hardly breathe. But I should like to see the pyramids. That is why I came to Cairo. My residence at Alexandria on the coast was not so dangerous . . . but the air which surrounds us here, full of dust and ashes, will kill me."

As a matter of fact, Cairo, at that moment, was not at all healthy, and on me it had the effect of an extinguisher placed on burning coals. The *khamsin* blew through the streets all the heat of Nubia. Only at night could we regain our strength, and only night permitted us to suffer the following day.

This is the unfortunate counterpart of the glory of Egypt; now, as ever, the fatal breath of Typhon seems to triumph over the work of kinder gods.

Is it the effect of the fever which I have myself suffered in Syria which makes me a prey to such sad feelings when I think of that death?

Everything overwhelms me at once. I wrote to the Consul of Beyrouth begging him to find out what had become of those who were dear to me. His information was very vague. A new revolt had broken out in the Hauran. Who can tell what has become of the good Druse sheik, his daughter and the slave I left in their household? Perhaps I shall learn when the post comes.

PERA

III

PERA

The account of my journey from Beyrouth to Constantinople is necessarily very short. I embarked upon the Austrian packet and, the day after my departure, we called at Larnaca, a port of Cyprus. Unfortunately, there as elsewhere, we were not allowed to land, unless we went into quarantine. The coasts are bare here as everywhere in the archipelago. But in the interior of this island there are said to be vast meadows, thick forests, and shady woods, which were once consecrated to the goddess of Paphos. The ruins of her temple still exist, and the village which surrounds them is the residence of a Bishop.

The following day we sighted the gloomy mountains of the Anatolian coast, and stopped at the port of Rhodes. I saw the two rocks whereon it is supposed the feet of the colossal statue of Apollo once rested. Judging according to human proportions, this bronze must have been twice as high as the towers of Notre Dame. Two forts, built by the knights, defend the entrance.

The next day we crossed the eastern part of the archipelago, never losing land from sight even for a moment. For several hours we had on our left the island of Cos. Here and there we could see delightful stretches of green and towns with white houses, where it must indeed be pleasant to stay. The Father of Medicine did not choose a bad place in which to dwell.

I can never cease to be astonished by the pink hues which, morning and evening, touch the high rocks and mountains. Yesterday I saw Patmos, the island of Saint John, flooded by these sweet rays.

EPILOGUE

Perhaps that is why the Apocalypse sometimes has such attractive descriptions. Day and night the Apostle dreamed of monsters, destruction and war; but evening and morning he announced in joyful colours the marvels of the coming reign of Christ and of the New Jerusalem, sparkling with light.

At Smyrna we were kept in quarantine for ten days. Certainly it was in a delightful garden, with a splendid view of the great gulf which is like the roads at Toulon. We lived in tents, which were hired out to us.

On the eleventh day, when we were set free, we had a whole day to go about the streets of Smyrna, and I was sorry that I could not go to Bournabat, where the country-houses of the business people are. It is two leagues away, and, I am told, a delightful place.

Smyrna is almost European. When one has seen the bazaar, just like every other bazaar in the Orient, the citadel, and the caravan bridge across the ancient Meles, which gave a surname to Homer, the best plan is to visit the street of Roses, where, through the windows and at the doorways, may be seen young Greek women, who never fly when a man has seen them, like Virgil's nymph.

We went back to the packet after hearing one of Donizetti's operas at the Italian theatre.

It took us a whole day to reach the Dardanelles, leaving on our left the shores of Troy—and Tenedos, and so many other famous places which now form but a misty line on the horizon.

After the straits, which seem like a broad river, the traveller spends a day in the Sea of Marmora, and, at dawn on the following day, he enjoys the magnificent spectacle of the harbour of Constantinople, beyond all doubt the most beautiful in the world.

THE NIGHTS OF RAMADAN

PART I

STAMBOUL AND PERA

I

BALIK-BAZAR

WHAT a strange city Constantinople is. Splendour and misery, joy and tears, a despotism greater than any that may be found elsewhere, yet, at the same time, a greater liberty. Here, four different peoples dwell together, and do not hate each other with more than a becoming hatred. Turks, Armenians, Greeks and Jews all live together in Constantinople as children of the same soil, and they seem to put up with one another better than men of different parties, or countrymen of different provinces, in our own land.

It may perhaps have been the very last act of fanaticism and savagery to be laid at the account of the ancient Muslim traditions that Fate decided I should witness. At Pera I had rediscovered one of my oldest friends. He was a French painter, and for three years he had lived in magnificent style upon the proceeds of his portraits and his paintings—a proof that Constantinople is not so much at variance with the Muses as people would seem to believe. We had left Pera, the Frankish city, to go the bazaars of Stamboul, the Turkish city.

After we had passed through the fortified Galata

STAMBOUL AND PERA

gate, we had to go down a long winding street. On either side were taverns and pastry-cooks, barbers and butchers, even Frankish cafés like our own, with tables piled high with Greek and Armenian newspapers—five or six of them are published in Constantinople alone, without counting the Greek papers from Morea. The traveller who wishes to understand a few words must have recourse to his knowledge of the classics, for so he may come to understand a little of this vivid language which seems to be acquiring fresh vigour every day. Most of the newspapers make such a point of abandoning the modern patois, and trying to adopt the style of the ancient language, that they become almost unintelligible. There are Wallachian and Serb papers too, printed in Roumanian, which is much easier than Greek for us to understand, because it contains so many Latin words. We stopped for a few moments in one of these cafés to take a *gloria sucré*; one never can get it in the Turkish cafés. Farther down the hill we reach the fruit market, with its magnificent proofs of the fertility of the country round Constantinople. Farther still, through winding streets, crowded with people, we come to the landing-stage, whence we must take boat for the Golden Horn, a gulf a quarter of a league in width and about a league in length, the most wonderful and the safest harbour in all the world, which divides Stamboul from the suburbs of Pera and Galata.

The little square is always packed with people, and on the harbour side there is a wooden landing-stage, with graceful *caïques* all along it. The rowers wear smart long-sleeved silken shirts, and their fish-shaped boats glide swiftly along, threading their way easily between the hundreds of ships of every nation that crowd the entrance to the port.

BALIK-BAZAR

In ten minutes we reached the jetty on the farther side, and Balik-Bazar, the fish market. There we came upon a most extraordinary sight. In one of the narrow alley-ways of the market a number of men were gathered in a ring. At first we thought they must be watching a juggler's show, or perhaps a bear-dance, and we pushed our way through the crowd. Upon the ground lay a headless body, clothed in blue jacket and trousers, and the head, with a cap upon it, had been placed between the slightly parted legs. One of the Turks turned round. Seeing that we were Franks, "It seems," said he, "that even heads with hats upon them may come to grief." The Turkish prejudice against caps and hats is explained by the fact that Mussulmans are forbidden to wear any head-dress with a peak to it, for when they pray they must touch the ground with their foreheads, yet without removing their head-dress. We hurried disgustedly away and made for the bazaars. There, an Armenian invited us to take sherbet in his shop, and told us the story of this strange execution.

The headless body which we had seen, had, for three days, lain exposed in Balik-Bazar, a matter of little satisfaction to the fish-merchants. It appeared that it was that of an Armenian, a certain Owaghim, who, three years before, had been surprised with a Turkish woman. In such a case there is but one choice—between death and apostasy. A Turk would only receive a beating. Owaghim became a Mussulman. Afterwards he repented of his cowardice, withdrew to the Greek islands, and abjured his new religion.

Three years later, when he imagined that the whole business would be forgotten, he returned to Constantinople, dressed as a Frank. But some fanatics denounced him, and the Turkish authorities, although

STAMBOUL AND PERA

at that time inclined to tolerance, were compelled to enforce the law. The European Consuls appealed on his behalf, but nothing could be done. In the East the law is at the same time both civil and religious: the Koran and the Civil Code are one. Turkish justice is obliged to reckon with the still violent fanaticism of the lower classes. First an offer was made to Owaghim, that if he would again abjure he should be set free. He refused. The authorities went even further. He was allowed an opportunity to escape. Strangely enough, he refused again, saying that he could only live at Constantinople and that, either he would die of grief if he left it again, or of shame if he stayed there at the price of a new apostasy. So the execution took place. Many of the adherents of his own religion regarded him as a saint and burned candles in his honour.

This episode affected us greatly. Fate seemed to have so arranged things that nothing else could have happened. The evening of the third day upon which the body had been exposed at Balik-Bazar, three Jews, as is the custom in such cases, loaded it upon their shoulders and threw it into the Bosphorus among the drowned dogs and horses which the sea casts up upon the shore.

Yet, even after this sad affair, which I had the misfortune to see with my own eyes, I would not seek to cast doubt upon the progressive tendencies of New Turkey. There, as in England, the law imprisons not only the will but the intelligence of all, until a time shall come when a better interpretation is set upon it. To-day only apostasy and adultery can give rise to such melancholy occurrences.

We went through the splendid bazaars which form the centre of Stamboul. They are like a labyrinth,

BALIK-BAZAR

solidly built in stone in the Byzantine style, and are a splendid place of refuge from the mid-day heat. Enormous galleries, some with round arches, others with pointed, with carved pillars and colonnades, are given over, each to a different kind of merchandise. Especially worthy of admiration are the dresses and slippers for women, the embroidered and pleated materials, shawls, carpets, furniture encrusted with gold, silver and mother-of-pearl, jewellery, and, more particularly, the weapons which are set out for sale in that part of the bazaar called Beseştain.

At one end of this almost subterranean town is a very lively square surrounded by buildings and mosques, called the Serasker Square. It is a kind of promenade in the centre of the city, and is especially frequented by women and children. In Stamboul the women are more closely veiled than at Pera; clothed in a green or violet *feredje*, their faces covered with a heavy veil, it is seldom that any more is to be seen of them than the eyes and upper part of the nose. The Armenian and Greek women cover their features with a much lighter material.

The whole of one side is occupied by scribes, miniaturists and booksellers, and the square is given a character entirely its own by the graceful mosques, with their courtyards planted with trees, frequented by thousands of pigeons which settle in the square itself; the cafés, the stalls piled up with jewels, the Serasker Tower, dominating the whole city, and beyond, the gloomy walls of the old seraglio, where the Sultana-Mother now lives.

STAMBOUL AND PERA

II

THE SULTAN

As I went down again towards the harbour, I saw the Sultan drive past in a most extraordinary kind of carriage. It had two wheels and was drawn by two horses in tandem harness. From its broad square-topped hood there fell a velvet shade with a golden fringe. The Sultan was wearing a plain frock-coat buttoned up to the neck, such as the Turks have affected since the Reform, and the only distinguishing mark he bore was the imperial cypher embroidered in diamonds upon his scarlet fez. His pale, distinguished face was marked by a shade of melancholy. Mechanically, I took off my hat to greet him, not indeed because I was afraid of being treated like the Armenian of Balik-Bazar, but really from a foreign sense of politeness. The Sultan looked at me with some attention, for my action had betrayed my ignorance of the local custom: the Sultan is not to be saluted.

My companion, whom I had lost sight of in the crowd for a few moments, said to me: "Let us follow the Sultan. Like ourselves he is going to Pera, but he will take the bridge of boats which crosses the Golden Horn. The way is longer, but it saves taking the ferry, and just now the sea is rather stormy."

So we decided to follow the carriage, which was slowly going down a long street with mosques and exquisite gardens on either side. At its end, after a few turnings, is the *Fanar* quarter, where the rich Greek merchants and the Turkish princes live. Several of the houses in this part of the town are real palaces, and a few churches, with their interiors adorned

THE SULTAN

with frescoes, seem to take shelter beneath the lofty mosques in the very heart of Stamboul, the essentially Turkish city.

As we went along, I spoke to my friend of the impression which the unexpected appearance of Abdul-Medjid had caused me, and the penetrating gentleness of his glance, which seemed to reproach me for having saluted him as one would salute some ordinary monarch. The pale, long face, the almond-shaped eyes, casting through their long lashes a glance of surprise softened by good-humour, the dignified attitude, the alertness of the body, had all given me a charming opinion of the Sultan. How, I thought, could such a man possibly have ordered the execution of the poor wretch whose decapitated body we had seen at Balik-Bazar?

“There was nothing else he could do,” my friend said. “The Sultan’s power is more limited than that of a constitutional monarch. He is compelled to take into account the influence of the ulemas, who decide both the judicial and religious regulation of the people, and he must reckon, too, with the people themselves, for their methods of protest take the form of revolts and conflagrations. Certainly he can enforce his will by the aid of the armed forces under his direct control, forces which have often constrained his own ancestors; but whom will he then have to defend him against poison, the weapon of those in close attendance upon him, or assassination, a weapon which is available to anyone? Every Friday he is compelled to go in public to one of the mosques in the city, where he must perform his devotions, so that each quarter in turn may look upon its ruler. To-day he is going to the *Pera teke*, the monastery of the dancing dervishes.”

My friend told me more about the situation of this prince, which explained, to some extent, the melan-

STAMBOUL AND PERA

choly to which his features bore witness. He is, perhaps, the only Turk who has reason to complain of the inequality of rank. When the Mussulmans set at the head of their nation a man who is at once above all and different from all, they acted in accordance with a thoroughly democratic principle.

The Sultan alone, of all people in the Empire, is forbidden to take a legal wife. This is because it is feared that certain families might thereby acquire too great an influence. Neither may he take a foreign wife. So he is denied the four legitimate wives whom the Prophet allowed to every believer who has the means to support them. His Sultanas, whom he may not call his wives, are really only slaves by origin, and as all the women of the Turkish Empire, whether Armenians or Greeks, Catholics or Jews, are held to be free, his harem can only be recruited from non-Islamic countries, the sovereigns of which have no official relations with him.

In those days when the Porte was at war with Europe, the Sultan's harem was admirably supplied. There was no lack of pale, fair beauties; witness the fair French Roxelane with turned-up nose, who had a real existence besides that of the stage. Her coffin, draped in cashmeres and shaded by plumes, rests near that of her husband in the mosque of Solimanieh. To-day, the unfortunate Sultan must go without such European brides, whether French, or of any other country. If he should take it into his head to abduct even one of the gay ladies of Pera, who proudly dress up in the latest European fashions when they go out for their Sunday walks, he would be overwhelmed by diplomatic communications from Ambassadors and Consuls, and there might even result a war more protracted than that which was caused long ago by the rape of Helen.

THE SULTAN

When the Sultan, in Pera, passes through the vast host of Greek women who crowd to see him, he must turn his eyes aside from all temptation, for etiquette will not permit him a temporary mistress, and he has not the right to take a woman of free birth into his harem. He must very quickly tire of the Circassians, Malays or Abyssinians, the only women who comply with the required conditions of servitude, and long for a few fair English girls, or a few witty Frenchwomen, but they are forbidden fruit.

My friend also told me the actual number of women in the seraglio. It is very different from what is generally supposed in Europe. The Sultan's harem contains no more than thirty-three *cadines*, or ladies, of whom only three are considered as favourites. The rest of the women in the seraglio are *odaleuks*, or women of the bedchamber. Europe gives an entirely incorrect meaning to the term *odalisque*. There are also dancing and singing girls, who could be raised to the rank of Sultanas only by some whim of their master, and this would be contrary to custom. So the Sultan, who is compelled to take a slave for his wife, is himself the son of a slave—a fact which the Turks do not hesitate to make quite clear at times of popular discontent.

In the course of this conversation we kept on saying: "Poor Sultan, poor Sultan." He got out of his carriage at the Fanar quay, for it is impossible to pass by carriage over the bridge of boats which crosses the Golden Horn at one of its narrowest parts. Two lofty arches permit the passage of boats. He mounted a horse, and having reached the other side, took the track which runs by the side of the outer walls of Galata, through the little graveyard, shaded by enormous cypresses, and so came to the main street of

STAMBOUL AND PERA

Pera. The dervishes, drawn up in their courtyard, awaited him, but we were not allowed to go in. In this *teke*, or monastery, is the tomb of the famous Comte de Bonneval, the famous renegade who commanded the Turkish armies for many years, and fought against the Christian forces in Germany. Throughout his campaigns, his wife, a Venetian who had accompanied him to Constantinople, acted as his aide-de-camp.

While we were waiting outside the monastery gate, a funeral procession, led by Greek priests, came up the street towards the boundary of the suburb. The Sultan's guards ordered the priests to turn back again, because their master might appear at any moment, and it would be unbecoming that he should meet a funeral. There was a few moments' indecision. Then the archimandrite, seeming proud as Charlemagne in his imperially shaped crown, and the long Byzantine vestments with their embroidered fringe, spoke sharply to the captain of the escort, and turning indignantly to his priests, beckoned them to continue their way. If the Sultan had indeed appeared at that moment, it would have been for him to wait until the body had passed.

I mention this as an example of that tolerance for different forms of worship which is typical of Constantinople.

III

THE GREAT CEMETERY

I find it somewhat embarrassing to have to speak so often of funerals and cemeteries in connection with this gay and splendid city of Constantinople, where everything seems so full of life and vigour. The gaily-

THE GREAT CEMETERY

painted houses and the graceful mosques, with their domes of zinc and delicate minarets, should only inspire thoughts of pleasure and sweet reverie. But, in this country, even death itself puts on an air of festival. The Greek procession which I have already mentioned had none of the funereal trappings which one associates with the burial of our own people. The popes, with their air of cheerfulness, their vestments blazing with embroidery; then the young clergy, in long, brightly coloured robes; the friends, dressed in their very finest attire, and, in the midst of them all, the dead girl, young still, pale as wax, yet with colour upon her cheeks, laid upon a bed of flowers, crowned with roses, clothed in her most gorgeous dress of silk and satin, with many diamond jewels, though these probably do not go with her to the grave—such was the impression I got from the procession, and it was melancholy rather than heartrending.

From the monastery of the dancing dervishes the view extends over the Little Cemetery, whose mysterious avenues, with their huge cypress-trees, go down in the direction of the sea until they reach the navy buildings. Facing the monastery, there is a café which the dervishes, who are men essentially lively, and given to conversation, like to frequent. Set out in front of it are tables and stools, where one may drink coffee and smoke a *narghile* or a long wooden pipe. It is amusing to watch the Europeans who pass. The carriages of wealthy Englishmen and of Ambassadors often go that way, and the gilded carriages, or *arabas* of the native ladies. These *arabas* would be like laundry carts, if it were not for the decoration afforded by paint and gilding. They are drawn by oxen, and the one good point in their favour is that they can easily contain a whole harem on its way to the

STAMBOUL AND PERA

country. The husband never accompanies his wives on these excursions, which are usually made upon a Friday, the Turkish Sunday.

I gathered from the animation and the character of the crowd, that everybody was going to some festival or other, probably beyond the outskirts of the town. My friend, who was going to dine with some Armenians who had commissioned a picture from him, had left me, after telling me about a Viennese restaurant upon the heights of Pera. Beyond the monastery and the green open space on the other side of the street, one might imagine oneself in some quarter of Paris. For a quarter of a league one comes upon nothing but the splendid shops of dressmakers, jewellers, pastry-cooks and hosiers; English and French hotels, reading-rooms and cafés. The majority of the Consulates are in this street. There is the huge palace of the Russian Embassy, all built of stone. In case of need, it might easily be transformed into an effective fortress commanding the three suburbs of Pera, Tophana and Galata. The French Embassy is not so happily situated. It is in a street which goes down to Tophana, but though it has cost several millions, it is not yet finished.

Farther to the left along the street, which broadens as one proceeds, is the Italian theatre. It is only open twice a week. Then come fine middle-class houses, with gardens; the buildings of the Turkish University and its schools; and still farther, the French hospital.

Beyond this point, the suburb comes to an end, and the road, now wider, is encumbered by the stalls of all kinds of street-sellers with their fruits, water-melons, fish and the rest. The wine-shops begin to appear more openly than in the city itself. Usually they are enormous places. To begin with, there is a vast hall

THE GREAT CEMETERY

as large as the inside of a theatre, with a high gallery protected by a balustrade of turned wood. On one side there is a counter where white and red wine are dispensed to those who ask for them, in glasses with handles, which the customer carries to his own table. On the other side is an enormous kind of cooking-range, laden with highly seasoned meats, which he must also carry off for himself. The little tables do not reach so high as the knees, and it is necessary to learn how to eat at them. The crowd which gathers in places of this sort is made up entirely of Greeks, who are to be recognised by their tarbooshes, which are smaller than those of the Turks, and Armenians who wear a monstrous *kalpack*, which looks like a grenadier's shako, blown out at the top. No Mussulman would dare to be seen entering these haunts of Bacchus.

Because, especially among the lower classes, different races are distinguished by different head-dresses, it should not be assumed that Turkey is so much a country of inequalities as it used to be. In olden times, not only head-dress but shoes indicated the religion of every inhabitant. Only the Turks were allowed to wear yellow boots or slippers; the Armenians had to wear red ones, the Greeks blue, and the Jews black. Again, only Mussulmans were permitted striking and gorgeous attire. Even houses shared in these distinctions. Those of the Turks were marked by their bright colouring, while others could only be painted in dark shades. This is all changed now: every subject of the Empire has the right to adopt the semi-European costume of the Reform, and to wear upon his head the red *fezzi*, which is almost hidden beneath voluminous folds of blue silk—so voluminous indeed that they make the wearer look as though he had blue hair.

I was convinced of this fact, when I saw a host of

STAMBOUL AND PERA

people so attired, making their way, on foot or on horseback, to the European promenade at Pera, which the true Turk seldom visits. Polished shoes, in the case of very smart people of every nationality, have abolished the ancient inequality in the matter of foot-gear. But it should be remarked that fanaticism persists longer among the *rayas* than among the Mussulmans. Custom and poverty tend to keep up the use of the old costumes which used to distinguish the different races.

Who could continue to believe Constantinople an intolerant city after looking upon the animated picture of the Frankish promenade? Carriages of every kind pass each other at the outskirts of the suburb; horses wheel and turn; smartly dressed women pass in the direction of a wood which goes down to the seashore, or else, to the left, to the Buyukdere road, where are the country-houses of business-men and bankers. If you continue on your way, you quickly reach a sunken foot-path, with thickets on either side, shaded by pine-trees and larches, from which, through occasional clearings, you may see the sea and the mouth of the straits which separate Scutari from Seraglio point, at the extreme end of Stamboul. Leander's Tower, which the Turks call the Maiden's Tower, rises between the two towns, in the middle of an arm of the sea which seems, to your left, to continue as a river. It is a narrow square building set upon a rock, and from afar it looks like a watch-tower. Beyond, the Princes Islands may vaguely be seen at the entrance of the Sea of Marmora.

I need hardly say that this wood, picturesque, mysterious and refreshing, is a cemetery. The fact has to be accepted—all the pleasure-grounds of Constantinople are situated among the tombs. Through

THE GREAT CEMETERY

the trees, look at those white phantoms standing in a row, a sunbeam making one or other stand out more clearly from time to time. They are plain little white marble columns, the height of a man, with a ball for a head surmounted by a turban. To complete the illusion, some are painted and gilded, and the form of the turban indicates the rank or age of the deceased. Some are no longer in the latest fashion. Several of these figurative stones have their heads broken. This is because they stood above the graves of janissaries, and when that hated corps was done away with, the anger of the people did not confine itself to the living; they went to all the cemeteries to decapitate the monuments of the dead.

The women's tombs also have columns over them, but, in place of a head, they bear a sculptured and gilt representation of flowers. You hear the noisy laughter which re-echoes beneath the gloomy trees. It is that of widows, mothers and sisters, who gather beside the tombs of those they love.

In this country religious faith is so strong, that when once tears have been shed at the actual moment of separation, those who are left behind think only of the happiness which the departed must be enjoying in Mohammed's paradise. Families bring their dinner to the graveside; children fill the air with their merry shouts; and a portion of the repast is always set aside for the departed, and placed in an opening devised for the purpose in the front of the tomb. The stray dogs, who are seldom far away on these occasions, begin to realise that they will not have long to wait for their supper, and while they wait, content themselves with the remains of the dinner which the children throw to them. But it should not be thought that the family imagines the dead man will profit by the plateful

STAMBOUL AND PERA

of food that is set aside for him: it is merely an old custom that goes back to ancient times. Formerly sacred serpents fed upon these pious offerings, but dogs, too, are sacred at Constantinople.

When I left the wood, which goes round an artillery barracks of enormous proportions, I found myself once more on the Buyukdere road. An uncultivated stretch of ground covered with turf stretches before the barracks, and there I assisted at a scene which cannot be dissociated from that which had gone before; some hundreds of dogs were howling impatiently on the grass. Soon afterwards I saw some gunners appear, two by two, carrying enormous cauldrons on long poles between their shoulders. The dogs expressed their delight by howls of joy. Hardly had the cauldrons been set down when the animals pounced upon the food they contained, and the soldiers had to busy themselves pushing them away with their long poles when they made too much of an obstruction. "They are serving soup to the dogs," said an Italian who was passing. "They are in luck's way." As a matter of fact, I believe it was only the scraps left from the soldiers' food. The favour enjoyed by dogs at Constantinople is largely due to the fact that they clean up the refuse which is generally thrown into the street. The pious foundations which make provision for them; the troughs of water which they find at the entrances to mosques and beside the fountains, are doubtless based upon this fact.

Now we were to see something more attractive. After the façade of the barracks, we reached the entrance to the Great Cemetery, an immense stretch of level ground shaded by sycamores and pine-trees. First are the tombs of the Franks, among them many with English inscriptions and coats-of-arms, all on long flat

THE GREAT CEMETERY

stones upon which anyone may sit without hesitation, as on a marble bench. A kiosk-shaped café built in a clearing looks out over the sea. From it one may see the Asiatic shore, with its many painted houses and mosques, just as clearly as though one were looking from one bank of the Rhine to the other. The horizon comes to an end with the truncated summit of the Bithynian Olympus, the outline of which seems to be merged in the clouds. On the left are the buildings of the Sultan's summer palace, with their long Greek colonnades, decorated roofs and gilded gates shining in the sun.

We go farther still and reach the part of the cemetery reserved for the Armenians. The flat tombs are covered with the regular characters of their language, and upon the marble are carved the emblems of the occupation which each man followed during his life-time. In one place jewels, in another hammers and squares, in another a balance, and elsewhere other instruments. The women all have bouquets of flowers.

But let us turn away from these things which Europeans always find distressing. The crowd is tremendous; the women are not veiled; their clear-cut features shine with joy and well-being, under the Levantine head-dresses, as well as from under European bonnets and hats. A few only of the Armenian women wear a strip of light gauze over their faces, a veil which rests charmingly upon their well-shaped noses, and though it scarcely hides their features, it offers those among them who are not so young an opportunity for indulging in a little coquetry. Where is this merry and brightly attired host going? To Buyukdere.

STAMBOUL AND PERA

IV

SAN-DIMITRI

Many of the crowd decide to stay at one or other of the delightful cafés which stand beside the road. There is one upon the left, whose broad verandahs look out, on the one hand, over the Great Cemetery, and, on the other, over a vast extent of undulating ground covered with lightly constructed buildings and gardens. Beyond, the lace-like horizon of Stamboul, with its mosques and minarets, appears once more. This effect of embroidery, which in course of time becomes almost monotonous, is noticeable in almost every view one has of the entrance to the Bosphorus.

This particular café is a meeting-place for those of high Society. It might almost be a *café chantant* from our own Champs-Élysées. At rows of tables on either side of the road sit the fashionable and smart ladies of Pera. Everything is served in the French manner—ices, lemonade and mocha. The only piece of local colour is afforded by the presence of three or four storks which, as soon as you have asked for coffee, come and take post in front of your table like so many marks of interrogation. However, they would never venture to make an attack upon the sugar bowl with the beaks which, at the end of those long necks, seem to tower above the table. They wait respectfully. So these tame birds go from table to table collecting sugar or biscuits.

At a table near my own there sat a man of a certain age, with hair as white as his cravat, dressed in black clothes perhaps a little out of fashion, with a ribbon in his buttonhole of all kinds of strange colours. He had

SAN-DIMITRI

taken possession of every newspaper in the café, setting the *Journal de Constantinople* upon the *Echo de Smyrne* and the *Portofoglio Maltese* upon the *Courrier d'Athènes*. In fact, he had commandeered just those papers which, at that moment, would have delighted me by giving me all the European news. Superimposed upon this mass of newspapers, he was reading, with great attention, the *Moniteur Ottoman*.

I ventured, apologetically, to draw one of the papers towards me; he glanced at me with one of those ferocious glances which I have never encountered save from the habitués of the oldest cafés in Paris.

"I shall have finished with the *Moniteur Ottoman* in a moment," said he.

I waited some minutes. He was merciful, and finally handed the paper to me with a gesture that savoured of the eighteenth century.

"Sir," said he, "this evening we are keeping high festival. The *Moniteur* announces the birth of a princess, and this event, which will delight all His Highness's subjects, happens to coincide with the opening of Ramadan."

Thenceforth, I was no longer surprised at everybody's air of celebration, and I waited patiently, sometimes watching the road with its constant stream of carriages and horsemen; sometimes looking through the Frankish newspapers which my neighbour passed me as soon as he had done with them.

Doubtless he appreciated both my politeness and my patience, for, as I was preparing to leave, he said:

"Where are you going? To the ball?"

"Is there a ball?" said I.

"You can hear the band from here."

And indeed, the strident chords of some Greek or Wallachian orchestra did reach my ears. But that was

STAMBOUL AND PERA

no proof that there was dancing, for most of the Constantinople wineshops and cafés have musicians who play even during the day.

“Come with me,” said the stranger.

Perhaps two hundred yards from the kiosk we had just left, we came to a magnificently decorated gate. It was the entrance of a triangularly shaped garden, situated at a cross-roads. Little groups of trees, bound together by garlands, green summer-houses surrounding the tables—to a Parisian it seemed nothing very marvellous. But my guide was delighted. We entered the building, and found several rooms filled with customers: the orchestra was continuing its valiant exertions, with one-stringed fiddles, reed flutes, tambourines and guitars, and there was a certain originality about the tunes it played. I asked where the ball was.

“You must wait,” said the old man. “The ball cannot begin before sunset. The police insist on that. But, as you see, you will not have long to wait.”

He took me to a window. The sun was rapidly going down behind the violet background to the Golden Horn. Just at that moment a tremendous noise seemed to arise from all sides at once. It was the cannon of Tophana, followed by the guns of every vessel in harbour. They were hailing the double festival. At the same time a magical transformation seemed to have been worked upon the distant picture of Stamboul and its monuments. As darkness fell, long fiery chaplets began to outline the domes of the mosques and to trace upon their cupolas arabesques which took the form of legends in ornate lettering: the minarets, like a thousand masts, thrusting themselves heavenwards above the buildings, bore rings of light outlining the delicate balconies which they

SAN-DIMITRI

support. The chants of the *muezzins*, usually so soft and sweet, to-day resounded from every side like songs of triumph. We returned to the hall; the dance had begun.

A large open space had been cleared in the centre of the hall, and from the back of it there entered fifteen dancers. They wore red head-dresses, embroidered waistcoats and brightly-coloured girdles. All were men.

The first seemed to be the leader. The others held hands, swinging their arms backwards and forwards, while the first regulated his steps in harmony with his neighbour's by means of a handkerchief, of which each held an end. It was almost as though he were the head attached to the flexible neck of some serpent of which his companions formed the rings.

Clearly it was a Greek dance, with the balancings of the hips, the interlacing movements and the garlanded steps which that type of choreography prescribes. When they had finished, I was just beginning to express my tiredness of these men's dances—of which I had seen too many in Egypt—when there appeared an equal number of women, who went through the same movements. Most of them were pretty and extremely graceful, with their Levantine costumes, their little red caps festooned in gold, the flowers and tinsel of their head-dresses, and the long braids of hair, adorned with sequins, which reached to their feet. They were by no means without admirers among the assembly, but they were only young Ionian girls who had come with their friends or brothers, and any attempt at seduction would have met with a knife thrust.

“In a moment or two, I will show you something better than this,” said the obliging old gentleman, whose acquaintance I had only just made.

STAMBOUL AND PERA

After drinking some sherbet, we left this establishment, the *Mabille* of the Pera Franks.

Stamboul, illuminated, blazed afar upon the horizon, which was now darker, and its profile with a thousand graceful curves stood out clearly, reminding me of those designs pricked out with a pin that children love to hold before a light. It was too late to go there, for the gulf cannot be crossed after nightfall.

“Agree with me,” said the old man, “that Constantinople is the true abode of liberty. In a moment you will be convinced of it. Provided that you respect the dogs—a wise precaution in any case—and light your lantern when the sun has set, you are as free here all night as you might be in London . . . and as one is not in Paris.”

He had taken from his pocket a tin lantern, whose linen sides pulled out like the folds of a bellows, and put a candle into it. “Notice,” he went on, “how many people there still are in the long cypress avenues of the Great Cemetery.” And, indeed, silken dresses, or *féredjés*, of fine material were moving here and there, brushing past the thickets; mysterious chucklings, stifled laughter, came to us through the shadows of the hedges. The effect of the lanterns fluttering everywhere in the hands of the promenaders made me think of the Nuns’ act in *Robert*, as if these thousands of flat stones, lighted up momentarily, might have suddenly arisen; but no, all was gay and peaceful, only the breeze from the sea rocked the doves sleeping in the yew-trees and the cypresses. I thought of Goethe’s line:

Thou sleepest upon the tombs, Immortal Love !

We kept on our way towards Pera, stopping occasionally to admire the wonderful view of the valley that

SAN-DIMITRI

goes down to the gulf, and the illuminations which crowned the bluish distance, where the tops of the trees fell away in the shadow, and sometimes the sea seemed to shine, reflecting the coloured lanterns hanging from the masts of the vessels. "Do you realise," said the old man, "that at this moment you are talking to one who was once a page of the Empress Katharine II?"

"Highly respectable," thought I, "for he must go back at least as far as the last years of the last century."

"I ought to say," added the old man, with a shade of affectation, "that our sovereign (for I am a Russian) was, at that period, somewhat . . . what I become to-day."

He sighed. Then he began to speak at length about the Empress—her wit, her delightful grace, her kindness. "It was Katharine's never-ending dream," he added, "to see Constantinople. Sometimes she would talk about coming here disguised as a German woman of the middle-class. But certainly she would have preferred to fight her way here, and that was why she despatched Orloff's expedition to Greece, that expedition which prepared the way, however distantly, for the revolution of the Hellenes. The war in the Crimea had no other purpose, but the Turks defended themselves so well that she could only succeed in getting possession of that one province—a possession finally guaranteed by treaty.

"You must have heard of the celebrations that were held in my country: several of your noble adventurers took part in them. Only French was spoken at the court; the philosophy of the Encyclopedists, tragedies from the Paris stage, and light verse, were the only things people talked about. The Prince de Ligne had arrived full of enthusiasm for the *Iphigénie en Tauride* of Guymond de la Touche. The Empress

STAMBOUL AND PERA

immediately presented him with that part of the ancient Taurus where, it was believed, there had been found the ruins of the temple raised by the cruel Thoas. The prince was greatly troubled to know what to do with this present of a few square leagues, occupied by Mussulman farmers, who did nothing but smoke and drink coffee all day long. As the war had made them too poor to continue this method of passing the time, the Prince de Ligne was obliged to provide them with funds so that they might lay in a new stock. They parted on the best of terms.

“That was mere generosity. Orloff was more magnificent. When the sandy countryside offended his sovereign’s eyes, he had huge pine forests cut down and brought for fifty leagues. They only continued to give shade during the stay of the imperial court.

“Katharine, however, never consoled herself for having lost the opportunity of visiting the coast of Asia. To pass the time during her stay in the Crimea, she asked M. de Ségur to teach her how to write French verse. What caprices that woman had! When she had found out all the difficulties, she shut herself up in her study for four hours, and when she came out again, all she had done was to produce two very moderate alexandrines:

*Dans le sérail d’un khan, sur des coussins brodés,
Dans un kiosque d’or, de grilles entouré . . .*

and she could get no further.”

“But there is a certain Oriental colour about the verses,” I observed. “They even indicate a certain desire to know what she might expect from Turkish gallantry.”

“The Prince de Ligne considered the rhymes abominable, and this discouraged the Empress from

SAN-DIMITRI

further essays in French prosody. . . . I am telling you things I only know from hearsay. They happened at a time when I was in my cradle; it was only the close of that great reign which I beheld myself. After the Empress's death, I undoubtedly inherited the violent desire to see Constantinople that she had had. I left my family, and arrived here with very little money. I was twenty years old; my teeth were good, and I had an admirably shaped leg. . . ."

V

AN ADVENTURE IN THE SERAGLIO

My old companion sighed; then, gazing steadily at the sky, he said to me: "I am going on with my story, but first I must show you the queen of the festival which is now beginning for Stamboul, and will last for thirty nights." With his finger he pointed to a tiny crescent in the sky; it was the new moon, the moon of Ramadan, faintly outlined against the horizon. The celebrations do not begin until it has been clearly espied from the minarets or hills close to the town. The news of its arrival is transmitted by signal.

"What did you do, when you had arrived at Constantinople?" I said, perceiving that the old man took pleasure in recalling these memories of his youth.

"Constantinople, Sir, was then more glorious than it is to-day: the taste of the East still reigned supreme in houses and buildings that have since been rebuilt after the European fashion. Morals were severe in those days, but it was the very difficulty of an intrigue that gave it its greatest charm."

"Please continue," I said, for I found his conversa-

STAMBOUL AND PERA

tion most interesting, and he seemed to be stopping again.

“I shall not mention, Sir, some most charming relations upon which I entered with individuals of no particular importance from the point of view of rank. In affairs of this kind, danger exists only in appearance—that is, unless one is so stupidly imprudent as to visit a Turkish lady in her own home, or to enter that home on the sly. I forbear from boasting of the adventures of such a nature upon which I have engaged. Only the last is capable of interesting you.

“My parents were greatly troubled by my leaving them, and their persistence in refusing me sufficient means to enable me to stay longer at Constantinople compelled me to take a position in a Galata business house. I kept the accounts of a rich Armenian jeweller. One day, there came in several women with their attendant slaves, and these wore the livery of the Sultan.

“In those days the ladies of the seraglio were allowed to conduct any business they wished in the shops of the Frankish merchants, for the danger of any lack of respect towards them would have entailed so great a risk that no one would have dared show it. Moreover, Christians were hardly considered to be men. . . . When the French Ambassador himself visited the seraglio, he had to dine by himself, and afterwards the Sultan would say to his chief Vizier: ‘Have you fed the dog?’ ‘Yes, the dog has been fed,’ the Vizier would reply. ‘Very well then, let him be put outside!’ These words became a regular formula. . . . The interpreters translated them to the Ambassador in the form of a compliment, and that was all.”

I cut short these digressions, asking my companion

AN ADVENTURE IN THE SERAGLIO

to continue his story of the visit of the ladies of the seraglio to the jeweller.

“You must understand that, on these occasions, the beautiful creatures were always accompanied by their natural guardians, under the command of the *kislar-aga*. Moreover, what one could see of these ladies could present a charm only to the imagination, for they were as carefully masked and draped as dominos at a ball. The one who seemed to be the chief had several ornaments shown to her, and after selecting one prepared to go off with it. I remarked that the mount needed cleaning, and that a few little stones were missing.

“‘Well,’ said she, ‘when shall I send for it? . . . I need it for a feast when I have to appear before the Sultan.’

“I bowed respectfully, and with a voice that trembled slightly, told her that it was impossible to say definitely when the work would be finished.

“‘Then,’ said the lady, ‘send it by one of your young people to the palace of Bechik-Tasch, when it is ready.’ She looked around her with a somewhat preoccupied air. . . .

“‘I will go myself, your Highness,’ I answered, ‘for an ornament of such a value cannot be entrusted to a slave or even to a clerk.’

“‘Well,’ she said, ‘bring it, and you shall be paid.’

“Here, more than elsewhere, a woman’s eye is eloquent, for it is all of her that may be seen in public. In the expression of the princess’s as she spoke to me I imagined I could discern a particular shade of kindness. My appearance and my age indeed were sufficient justification. . . . Sir—I may say so now without conceit—I was, in my time, one of the handsomest men in Europe.”

STAMBOUL AND PERA

As he uttered these words, he drew himself up, and his figure assumed a certain elegance that I had not remarked before.

“When the ornament was finished,” he continued, “I went to Bechik-Tasch by the very Buyukdere road upon which we stand at this moment. I entered the palace by the courtyard on the countryside. For a while I was kept waiting in the reception-room, and then the princess gave order that I was to be taken to her. When I had given her the ornament and been paid for it, I was about to retire, when an official asked me whether I should not like to be present at some tight-rope dances which were being given in the palace, of which the performers had entered before me. I agreed, and the princess had dinner served to me: she was even good enough to inquire how I had been served. Doubtless there was some danger for me in the realisation that one of such high rank should deal with me in such an agreeable manner. . . . When night had fallen, the lady had me taken into a still richer apartment, and coffee and narghiles were brought. . . . Musicians had taken their places in a lofty gallery, with balusters all round it, and it looked as though they waited for some unusual occurrence which their music was to accompany. It seemed clear to me that the Sultana had prepared this feast especially for me, but she remained half lying upon a sofa at the end of the room, as though she were an empress. She seemed absorbed in the contemplation of the performances that were taking place before her. I could not understand such timidity, or the formal reserve which prevented her from avowing her feelings for me, and came to the conclusion that greater boldness on my part was called for. . . .

“I had just seized her hand—she abandoned it to me

AN ADVENTURE IN THE SERAGLIO

without too much resistance—when a great tumult seemed to break out around us. ‘The janissaries! the janissaries!’ cried the servants and the slaves. The Sultana seemed to question her officers, and then gave an order which I did not hear. The two tight-rope dancers and I were taken by a secret stairway to a low room, where we were left for some time in the darkness. Above our heads, we could hear the hurried steps of the soldiers, then a kind of scuffle which froze our blood. It was clear that a door which had hitherto protected us was being broken open, and that our hiding-place would soon be discovered. Some of the Sultana’s officers rushed down the staircase, and lifted a kind of trap-door in the room where we were, crying: ‘Get down there . . . all is lost.’ Suddenly, our feet, which had expected to find steps, completely lost all footing. We had, all three, taken a dive into the Bosphorus. . . . The palaces which stand on the seashore, especially that of Bechik-Tasch, which you may have seen upon the European shore, a quarter of a league from the town, are partially built on piles. The lower rooms are floored with planks of cedar, immediately above the surface of the water, which are lifted when the ladies of the seraglio wish to go swimming. It was into one of these baths that we had been plunged in utter darkness. The traps had been closed above our heads, and it was impossible to raise them again. Besides, the steady tramp of feet and the clatter of weapons could still be heard. Hardly could I, by trying to keep myself above water, breathe a little air from time to time. Having no further hope of getting back again into the palace, I tried to swim to the outside. But when I reached the outer limit, I found everywhere a kind of grating formed by the piles. Probably it served to prevent the

STAMBOUL AND PERA

women from swimming away from the palace, when they took their baths, or showing themselves outside it.

“Imagine to yourself, my dear Sir, the awkwardness of such a situation. . . . Over my head a floor sealed in every part; six inches of air below the boards, and the water mounting little by little with that almost imperceptible movement of the Mediterranean, which rises, a foot or two, every six hours. It needed very little to assure me that I should soon be drowned. With the strength of one in desperate straits, I shook the piles which surrounded me like a cage. From time to time I heard the sighs of the two unfortunate tight-rope dancers who, like myself, were trying to force a way out. At last I found a pile that seemed less solid than the others. Rotted perhaps by the damp, or made of wood older than the rest, it seemed to be giving way under my hand. By a desperate effort I succeeded in breaking off a decayed fragment, and squeezing through, thanks to the slender figure which distinguished me in those days. Then, hanging on to the outer piles, I succeeded, in spite of my weariness, in reaching the shore. What happened to my two companions in misfortune I do not know. Terrified by the dangers of every kind that I had run, I hastily left Constantinople.”

I could not refrain from saying to my friend, after having condoled with him upon the danger he had run, that I suspected him of having somewhat glossed over a few circumstances in his story.

“Sir,” he replied, “I have nothing more to say upon that matter. In no circumstances would anything induce me to betray the kindness . . .”

And there he stopped. I had already heard something of these sombre adventures attributed to certain

AN ADVENTURE IN THE SERAGLIO

ladies of the old seraglio towards the end of the last century. . . . I respected the discretion of this Buridan whom age had now chilled.

VI

A GREEK VILLAGE

We had reached a hill which dominates San-Dimitri. This is a Greek village which lies between the Great and the Little Cemeteries. The road that goes down to it has wooden houses on either side, extremely pleasing to look upon, and in some respects reminiscent of the Chinese style in the method of their construction and external ornamentation.

I thought that this road might be a short cut back to Pera. We should have to go down as far as a valley through which flows a brook. The bank of this brook serves as a road whereby one may go down to the sea. Both sides are bordered by many casinos and cabarets.

"Where would you like to go?" said my companion.

"I should not be sorry to go to bed."

"But nobody ever goes to sleep except during the day at Ramadan. Let us finish the night . . . then, when dawn comes, it will be fit and proper to take to our beds. If you will allow me, I will take you to a house where baccarat is played."

The façades of the houses between which we were descending, with their verandahs coming right out over the street, their barred windows lighted up within, and their walls painted and shining with brilliant colour, did indeed suggest gatherings no less merry than those we had just left.

STAMBOUL AND PERA

One who would depict the customs of Constantinople must not be too easily deterred from certain descriptions of a somewhat delicate nature. The fifty thousand Europeans who live within the suburbs of Pera and Galata—Italians, French, English, Germans, Russians or Greeks—have not a single moral bond between them, not even that of unity of religion, for sects are more divided among themselves than the most contrary forms of religion. Besides, in a town where feminine society leads so reserved a life, it would be impossible to see even the face of a woman born in the country, if it were not for certain casinos or clubs, the membership of which, it must be owned, is somewhat mixed. Ships' officers, young people engaged in commerce, the varied personnel of the embassies—all these scattered and isolated elements of European society feel the need of some place where they can meet, so to speak, on neutral ground, far more than at the evening parties given by ambassadors, dragomans and bankers. This explains the frequency of the subscription balls which are often given in the suburb of Pera.

But here we were in a village that was wholly Greek, the Capua of the Frankish population. I had passed through this village in broad daylight without the slightest suspicion that it might hide so many different kinds of nocturnal diversion, casinos, vauxhalls, and even gambling dens. The patriarchal appearance of fathers and husbands, as they sat upon benches or worked at carpentry, tiling or weaving; the modest demeanour of the women clothed in the Greek manner; the care-free merriment of the children; the streets full of chickens and pigs; the cafés with their lofty balustraded balconies, looking out over the misty valley; the brook with its grassy banks—all seemed, together with the greenness of the pine-trees and the houses

A GREEK VILLAGE

of carven timber, like some peaceful landscape of the Lower Alps. What should make one think that, at night, it was different, since no light filtered through the window trellises? Yet, after curfew, many of these houses were lighted up within, and both dancing and games of chance would continue there from night till morning. Without going back so far as the tradition of the Greek *betairæ*, the thought might come into one's mind that sometimes youth might set garlands above these painted doors, as in the days of Alcimadurus of old. But he whom we saw pass was not a Greek lover crowned with flowers, but a man who looked like an Englishman, probably a sailor, dressed all in black with a white cravat and gloves, and before him went a fiddler. Solemnly he marched behind the fiddler whose business it was to enliven his passage, though he himself seemed melancholy enough. We came to the conclusion that it must be some boatswain, some *bosseman*, disbursing his pay freely after a voyage.

My guide stopped before a house as discreetly dark outside as the others, and rapped softly upon a polished door. A negro came and opened it with some show of fear, but seeing that we wore hats, he greeted us and called us *effendis*.

The house we had entered, although it was full of charm and fine enough, did not correspond with the general idea one has of a Turkish interior. But times have changed, and the proverbial immobility of the ancient East is beginning to show signs of yielding before the onslaughts of civilisation. The "Reform," which has set the tarboosh upon the Osmanli's head, and imprisoned him in a frock-coat buttoned up to the neck, has brought to the house in which he dwells that soberness in matters of ornament which is so

STAMBOUL AND PERA

pleasing to the modern taste. So, no more tufted arabesques, ceilings moulded in the form of honeycomb or stalactite, no more dog-tooth carving, no more panels of cedar—only smooth walls, flat coloured and polished, with simply moulded cornices; a few plain running designs going round the wooden wainscot, a few flower pots with curves and curls growing out of them—all in a style, or rather an absence of style, which but faintly recalls the ancient taste of the East, which was so fanciful and so fairylike.

In the first room, servants were busy; in another, more ornate, I was rather surprised by the sight which met my eyes. In the centre of the room was a kind of round table covered with a thick cloth. This was surrounded by some of those ancient-looking beds, which, in this country, are called *tandours*. Upon these beds, half-sitting, half-lying, forming, as it were, the spokes of a wheel, were a number of women, their feet stretched out towards the centre, where, hidden by a cloth, there was a warming pan. The majestic and venerable stoutness of these ladies, their splendid dresses, their fur-bordered jackets and superannuated head-dresses, showed that they had reached an age at which none need be ashamed of the title of matron, which the Romans took in such good part. They had simply brought their daughters or their nieces to the party, and were awaiting its end, just as the mothers of dancers at the Opera wait in the vestibule. Most of them came from houses near by, to which they would only return at the break of day.

FOUR PORTRAITS

VII

FOUR PORTRAITS

The third decorated room, which in our part of the world would be the drawing-room, was furnished with divans covered in silk of bright and varied colours. Upon the divan at the end of the room there sat enthroned four beautiful creatures, each of whom, either by a happy chance or by deliberate choice, represented a distinct Oriental type.

She who occupied the middle of the divan was a Circassian. This might have been divined immediately from the blackness of her great eyes and its contrast with the soft paleness of her skin; by her aquiline nose with its delicate, fine bridge; her longish neck; tall, slender figure, and graceful hands and feet—all signs distinctive of her race. A host of tiny plaits of hair as black as jet, which heightened the colour of her painted cheeks, escaped from beneath a head-dress made of gold-flecked laces twisted in the form of a turban. The costume was completed by an embroidered jacket bordered with tinsel and silken festoons, the mingled colours of which seemed to form a chain of flowers round the material; a girdle of silver, and broad trousers of shimmering rose-coloured silk. It was as striking as it was graceful. In accordance with custom her eyes were accentuated by lines of *surmeb*, which made them seem larger and gave them greater brilliance; her long finger-nails and the palms of her hands had the orange hue of henna. The same treatment had been given to her bare feet, which were as carefully looked after as her hands. She folded them upon the divan, and from time to time the silver rings around her ankles tinkled.

STAMBOUL AND PERA

By her side there sat an Armenian, whose dress, less richly barbaric, more nearly resembled the present Constantinople fashions. She wore a fez like those which men wear, but it was completely enveloped in what seemed like a mass of thick blue silk hair, which issued from the tuft at the top of it. It was set on the back of her head and displayed a profile, slightly aquiline, with features that were proud, yet of a calmness that seemed almost animal. She was wearing a kind of green velvet spencer, with a thick border of swansdown, whose whiteness gave an air of elegance to a neck surrounded with fine lacés, from which hung silver aigrettes. Her waist was girdled by jewelled plates, upon which great filigree buttons stood out. By an affectation that was utterly modern, her feet, which had relinquished their slippers to the carpet, wore silk embroidered stockings.

Unlike her companions, who allowed their tresses, interspersed with ribbons and little pieces of metal, to fall freely over their shoulders and backs, the Jewess, who was seated beside the Armenian, carefully concealed hers, as her law ordains, beneath a kind of white bonnet, round like a ball, which reminded me of the head-dress women wore in the fourteenth century—that of Christine of Pisa may give an idea of it. Her costume, more severe in style, was composed of two tunics worn one above the other, the upper one going no farther than the knee. Its colours were softer, and its embroidery less startling than those of the other women. Her countenance, delicately regular and of a resigned kind of sweetness, reminded me of a type of Jew which is peculiar to Constantinople and in no way resembles the types with which we are familiar. Her nose had not that pronounced hook which, for us, signs a face with the name of Rebecca or of Rachel.

FOUR PORTRAITS

The fourth, seated at the end of the divan, was a fair young Greek with the pure profile which the sculptors of antiquity have made familiar to us. A Smyrna *taktikos*, with festoons and tassels of gold, set coquettishly over one ear, and surrounded by two huge tresses of twisted hair that formed a turban round her head, made an excellent accompaniment to an intelligent face, illuminated by blue eyes in which thought seemed to shine—a contrast with the motionless, blank splendour of her rivals' large black eyes.

“Here,” said the old man, “you have a perfect sample of the four feminine peoples who form the Byzantine population.”

We greeted these beautiful creatures, and they replied by a salutation in the Turkish manner. The Circassian rose, clapped her hands, and a door opened. I saw a further room, wherein gamesters, in different styles of attire, surrounded a green table.

“This is nothing more or less than Pera's *Frascati*,” said my companion to me. “We shall be able to take a hand or two while waiting for supper.”

“I prefer this room,” I answered, little anxious to mingle with that crowd, brightened by several Greek costumes.

Two little girls came in, holding, one a crystal fruit dish placed upon a salver, the other a jug of water and glasses: she held, too, a napkin with an edging of silver lace. The Circassian, who seemed to be playing the part of *khanoum*, or mistress, advanced towards us, took a spoon of silver-gilt which she dipped into the rose preserve, and then set before my mouth with a most charming smile. I knew that the proper thing to do in such circumstances was to swallow the spoonful, and follow it down with a glass of water: finally, the little girl offered me the napkin to wipe my mouth.

STAMBOUL AND PERA

So everything was observed that good manners, even in the best Turkish houses, could require.

"I feel," said I, "as if I were beholding a scene from *The Thousand and One Nights*, and dreaming the dream of *The Sleeper Awakened*. I should be quite ready to call these beautiful creatures: Charmer of Hearts, Tempest, Violet and Flower of Jasmine. . . ."

The old man was just going to tell me their real names, when we heard a violent noise at the door, accompanied by the metallic clash of arms being grounded. There was great excitement in the gaming-room, and several people there seemed to be running away or trying to hide themselves.

"Are we with the Sultanas?" I said, remembering the story the old man had told me. "Shall we be cast into the sea?"

His complete calmness somewhat reassured me. "Listen," said he.

Someone was coming up the staircase, and the sound of confused voices could be heard in the outer rooms where the matrons were. A police-officer entered alone, and I heard the word *franguis* as we were pointed out. Then he went into the gaming-room, where those of the players who had not escaped were continuing their game quite unperturbed.

It was simply a patrol of *cavas* (police), whose duty it was to find out if there were any Turks or military cadets in the house. Obviously, those who had run away belonged to one or other of these categories. But the patrol had made so much noise on its arrival that one could not help believing that it had been bribed to see nothing, and find nothing in contravention of the law. The same thing happens, indeed, in many countries.

It was now supper-time. The lucky, or the unlucky,

FOUR PORTRAITS

players, no longer opponents now that their battle was over, surrounded a table on which a European meal was served. The only difference was that the women did not share in this reunion, but took their places on a dais. At the other end of the room an orchestra played during the repast, as is the custom in the East.

This mingling of civilisation and Byzantine tradition constitutes not the least attraction of those pleasant nights which have been brought into being by that close contact between Europe and Asia, of which Constantinople is the brilliant centre. It is thus that the tolerance of the Turks has been made possible. As a matter of fact, the feast at which we were then assisting was as harmless as any evening party at a Marseilles café. The girls who contributed to the success of the party were engaged, for a few piastres, to give strangers some idea of the local beauties. There was nothing whatever to make one think that they had been brought together with any other purpose than that of appearing beautiful, and that they might show off the dresses of their own countries. With the break of dawn, everyone went his own way, and we left the village of San-Dimitri to its normal calm and tranquillity. Nothing could be externally more virtuous than this idyllic countryside in the light of dawn, with its wooden houses, their doors opening here and there, and revealing the work of the morning proceeding normally within them.

We went our ways. My companion went to his home at Pera, and I, still overwhelmed by the marvels of that night, went to walk in the neighbourhood of the monastery of the dervishes, from which one may enjoy that perfect view of the entrance to the straits. Soon the sun rose, bringing to life again the distant line of shore and promontory, and at that moment

STAMBOUL AND PERA

there came to me the boom of the cannon at the port of Tophana. From the little minaret above the monastery I heard a sweet and melancholy voice: "*Allab akbar! Allab akbar! Allab akbar!*"

A strange emotion swept over me. Yes, God is great! God is great! . . . And those poor dervishes, ever repeating that same sublime verse from the top of their minaret, seemed to reproach me—me, with a night ill spent. The muezzin continued to repeat: "God is great! God is great!"

"God is great! Mohammed is His Prophet: cast your sins at the feet of Allah! Such are the terms of that eternal complaint. . . ." For me, God is everywhere, no matter by what name men may call Him, and I should have been unhappy if I had had to reproach myself for the commission of any real sin; but all that I had done was to enjoy myself, as do all the Franks of Pera, on one of those festival nights, in which men of every religion join together in that cosmopolitan city. Why, then, should I be afraid of the eye of God? The perfume of the dew-soaked earth made answer to the sea-breeze that passed, before it reached me, over the gardens of Seraglio Point upon the other shore. The sun's glorious orb showed me in the distance that magic land of the Bosphorus, which grips the attention everywhere, because of the steepness of its shores and the variety of its landscapes. I admired it for an hour, and then felt weary, and I went back, now in broad daylight, to the hotel kept by the Misses *Péchefté*, where I was staying, whose windows look out upon the Little Cemetery.

PART II

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

I

ILDIZ-KHAN

WHEN I had rested, I inquired how best I might find a way to take part in the nocturnal celebrations in the Turkish city. My friend, the painter, whom I saw again during the day, knew all there was to be known about the manners of the country, and he told me that the only thing to do was for me to take up my abode in Stamboul, and that would be far from easy.

We took a caique to cross the Golden Horn, and disembarked at that same jetty by the fish market, where, the evening before, we had witnessed a scene of bloodshed. All the shops were closed. The Egyptian bazaar, which is near by, where groceries, colours and chemicals are sold, was hermetically sealed. Farther still, only the dogs inhabited and traversed the streets, astonished—during these first days of Ramadan—that they no longer received their daily pittance from a shop near the bazaar kept by an Armenian merchant who was an acquaintance of my friend. His shop was shut up, but as he was not subject to Mussulman law, he permitted himself the privilege of staying awake during the day, and going to bed as usual at night, though he showed no signs of such behaviour to the outside world.

We were able to dine with him, for he had taken

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

the precaution of buying supplies of food the evening before; otherwise he would have had to go to Pera for them. At the outset, he thought it was absurd of me to think of going to live in Stamboul, seeing that no Christian was permitted to take up his domicile there: he might only visit the city during the day. There was not an hotel, not an inn, not even a caravansery, that he might stay at; the only exception being made for Armenians, Jews and Greeks, who are subjects of the Empire.

However, I would not give up my idea, and I told him how, at Cairo, I had created for myself an opportunity of living outside the Frankish quarter, by dressing in the native manner and giving myself out as a Copt. "Well," said he, "there is but one thing you can do here, and that is to pretend to be a Persian. In Stamboul we have a caravansery called Ildiz-Khan (The Khan of the Star), and there are received all the Asiatic merchants who belong to different Mussulman communions. They belong not only to the sect of Ali; there are Guebres, Parsis, Koraites, Wahabis—such a babel of languages indeed that the Turks cannot possibly tell from what part of the East these men may come. So long as you do not speak a Northern tongue, which they might recognise by the pronunciation, you may be able to stay with them."

We went to Ildiz-Khan. It is in the highest part of the town, near the *Burnt Column*, one of the most interesting relics of the ancient Byzantium. The caravansery, built entirely of stone, looked exactly like a cavern, when one entered it. Three balconies, one above the other, stood on each of the four sides of the courtyard, and the apartments, with arched vaults, were all arranged in the same way—a large room which served as a storehouse, and a smaller room with boarded

ILDIZ-KHAN

floor where a bed might be set up. The tenant was allowed to keep a camel or a horse in the common stable.

Since I had neither beast nor merchandise, I was obliged to pass for a merchant who had already disposed of all his goods and had come to lay in a new stock. The Armenian had had business relations with merchants from Mosul and Basra and introduced me to them. We called for pipes and coffee and explained the whole matter to them. They had no objection to my joining their party, provided I adopted their manner of dress. As I already had several items of their costume, notably a camel's-hair *machlab*, which I had used in Egypt and in Syria, I only needed one of those caps of stiff Astrakhan which the Persians wear, and this the Armenian procured for me.

Several of these Persians spoke the Frankish jargon of the Levant, which always provides a means of mutual understanding, however short a time one may have lived in business centres. Consequently I did not find it a very difficult matter to become on terms of friendship with my neighbours. I was commended to the attentions of everybody who lived on the same balcony, and my only cause for anxiety was due to their too great eagerness to entertain me and go everywhere with me. Each floor of the khan had its own cook, who also performed the functions of host, so that we were in a position to dispense entirely with the world outside. However, when the evening came, the Persians who, like the Turks, had slept all day so that they might celebrate each single night of Ramadan, took me with them to see the festival which was to last for thirty moons.

If, to one who looked upon it from the heights of Pera, the town had seemed magnificently illuminated,

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

its streets now seemed to me still more splendid. On every side the eyes were dazzled by shops, all open and decorated with garlands and vases of flowers, radiant with mirrors and candles; the merchandise artistically set out; coloured lanterns hanging outside; painting and gilding refurbished; pastrycooks, confectioners, toy shops and jewellers displaying all their treasures. The streets were filled with women and children even more than with men, for the men spent the greater part of their time in the mosques and cafés.

Not that the taverns were closed: a Turkish festival is a festival for all the world, but only Catholic, Greek, Armenian or Jewish *rayas* might frequent these establishments. The outer door must always be shut, but if you gave it a push you might then quench your thirst with a good glass of Tenedos wine for the sum of ten paras (a halfpenny).

On all sides were the stalls of those who sold fritters, fruits or cobs of cooked maize, whereon a man might feed himself a whole day for ten paras; and there were *baklavas* too, a kind of cake soaked in butter and sugar, which women, especially, delight in. Most glorious of all was the Serasker Square. Triangular in shape, with the illuminations of its two mosques on either hand and those of the Ministry of War at the base, it gave full room to the cavalcades and processions of different kinds that crossed it. A host of roving merchants had set up their pitches before the houses, and a dozen cafés assailed one with the varied advertisements of spectacles, clowns and shadow-plays.

A VISIT TO PERA

II

A VISIT TO PERA

Since I, unlike the Mussulmans, was under no obligation to sleep all day and spend the whole night in pleasure during the blessed month of Ramadan—that combination of Lent and Carnival—I often went to Pera to keep in touch with the Europeans. One day my eyes were startled by the sight of a theatre bill posted on the walls, announcing the opening of a theatrical season. An Italian company was about to open for three months, and the name which shone forth in large letters as that of the dramatic star of the moment was that of the *Ronzi-Tacchinardi*, that prima donna of Rossini's best period to whom Stendhal devoted several fine pages. Alas, Ronzi was no longer young. She came to Constantinople as the famous tragedienne Mlle. Georges had done, some years before, who, after appearing at the Pera theatre and also before the Sultan, had gone to play in the Crimea, to play *Iphigenia in Tauris* in that very place where once the temple of Thoas rose. Eminent artists, like great geniuses of every kind, have a profound feeling for the past. They enjoy the pleasures of adventure, and the Eastern sun seems to draw them to itself, as though they felt themselves to be endowed with the nature of eagles. Donizetti was to conduct the orchestra, by special permission of the Sultan, to whom he had been for some time master of the music.

It is true that this high-sounding name was only that of the brother of the composer whom we so much admire, but it did not, for that, shine the less upon the bill with a particular attraction for the Europeans,

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

and the Frankish city could think of nothing else but the forthcoming production. Tickets, distributed beforehand among the hotels and cafés, had become difficult to obtain. I decided to go and see the editor of the principal French newspaper at Constantinople, whose offices were at Galata. He seemed delighted to see me, kept me to dinner, and then was kind enough to allow me to share his box. "If," he said, "you have not forgotten your former occupation as a 'feuilletoniste,' you shall be our dramatic critic, and you can visit the theatre whenever you will." I accepted, perhaps a little imprudently, for when one lives in Stamboul it is not very convenient to have to find one's way back there in the middle of the night when the play is over.

They were presenting *Buondelmonte*. The auditorium upon the heights of Pera is much longer than it is wide; the boxes are arranged in the Italian manner, without galleries, and they were almost all occupied by Ambassadors and bankers. The stalls were filled with Armenians, Greeks and Franks: only in the orchestra were a few Turks to be seen, and these had doubtless been sent by their parents at an early age to Paris or Vienna, for even if some prejudice does not intervene to forbid a Mussulman to attend our theatres, there can be no doubt that he gets very little satisfaction out of our music. Their own music proceeds by quarter tones and is equally incomprehensible to us, unless it is, so to speak, translated into our own musical system. Only Greek and Wallachian airs seem to be understood by everybody. Donizetti commissioned his brother to collect as many of these as possible, and doubtless made use of them in his operas.

The editor of the Constantinople paper wished to

A VISIT TO PERA

introduce me to the French Ambassador, but I declined that honour, for I feared an invitation to dinner, having been warned against such an eventuality.

This dignitary spent all summer at Therapia, a village on the Bosphorus, six leagues from Constantinople. In order to get there, it would have been necessary to hire a caique with six oarsmen for half a day, which would have cost about twenty francs. Clearly a dinner offered by the Ambassador is expensive enough. . . . Further disadvantages attaching to such an invitation would be the inconvenience of having to return by sea late at night, sometimes when the weather is bad, in a fish-shaped vessel, no thicker than one's hand, accompanied by an untiring choir of porpoises dancing ironically on the crests of the waves, in the hope of supping at the expense of the belated guests of the Ambassador of France.

The play went off as it would have done in any Italian theatre. The Ronzi was covered with bouquets, recalled twenty times, and must have been content with Byzantine enthusiasm. Then everyone re-lighted his lantern, the Ambassadors and bankers called for their carriages, others mounted their horses, and I . . . I prepared to go back to Ildiz-Khan, for at Pera it would be impossible to find a lodging for a single night.

I was too well acquainted with the long road to Stamboul over the bridge of boats which crosses the Golden Horn to be afraid to venture upon it in the pure Ramadan moonlight, one of those lovely nights which are as glorious as our own dawns. The dogs, which police the streets with such efficiency, attack none but those who, despite the regulations, are so imprudent as to dispense with a lantern. I set off across the Pera cemetery by a road which leads to the

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

Galata gate next to the naval headquarters: the fortified part of the city comes to an end there, but one cannot cross the Golden Horn without going through it. A knock at the door, and the porter opens it to you; you give him a baksheesh, answer the guards' greeting with an *aleikoum al salam*, and then, at the end of a street which goes down to the sea, come to that magnificent bridge, a quarter of a league in length, which the Sultan Mahmoud built.

Once upon the other shore, I was glad to find myself again among the illuminations in honour of the feast, a joy all the more intense because I had walked that night for a league through cypresses and tombs.

The *Fanar* quay, crowded with strolling fruit-sellers, pastrycooks, and Greeks selling aniseed and rosolio, is a favourite haunt of the sailors whose ships are anchored by hundreds in the bay. In the streets that branch out from the quay one may still see taverns and cafés lighted by transparencies and lanterns; then the lights grow fewer and the noise grows less, and a quarter of the town is reached that seems calm and unfrequented, for the festival is kept only in the business sections of the city. Soon the lofty arches of the Aqueduct of Valens come into sight, their enormous stone masses towering above the humble Turkish houses all built of wood. Sometimes its course may be traced on terraces fifty feet above the street which winds about it, or follows it for a while before it climbs up to the hills or goes down towards the sea.

Stamboul is a very hilly town, and art has done little there to offset the disadvantages of nature. But when one reaches the end of the long Street of the Mosques, the principal artery of the city, at the end of which are the great bazaars, the position has improved. At night particularly it is remarkable, with its magnificent

A VISIT TO PERA

gardens, its carven balconies, its marble fountains with their gilded railings, its kiosks, gateways and the countless minarets which stand out against the dim light of a bluish sky. Here and there the eye is caught by an inscription in gold, a lacquer painting, a grill with brilliantly tinted bars, a sculptured marble, or some ornament heightened by colour. These enhance the beauty of the dark green gardens in which creeping vines rustle upon their lofty trellises. At last the solitude seems to end, the air is filled with happy sounds, the shops glitter again. Crowded and wealthy quarters present themselves in all their splendour; the toy merchants display upon their shelves a thousand quaint inventions, to the delight of fond mothers and proud fathers, whose greatest pleasure is to go home with a Punch made in France, playthings from Nuremberg, or else, perhaps, some delightful little Chinese toys which have come all the way by caravan. Of all the people in the world the Chinese best know how to amuse a child.

III

CARAGUEUZ

Among all these toys, the most remarkable is that strange little figure called *Caragueuz*, which is well known in France by reputation. It is almost unbelievable that anything so indecent should be placed without hesitation in the hands of the young. Yet it is the one thing which fathers and mothers most frequently think fit to give their children. The East does not share our ideas either of education or morality. It seeks to develop the senses: we endeavour to extinguish them. . . .

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

When I reached the Serasker Square, a large crowd was pressing before a Chinese shadow theatre with a transparent sign before it, upon which appeared in big letters: *CARAGUEUZ, The Martyr to Chastity*.

A terrifying paradox this, to one acquainted with the creature. The two words which I have just translated must have shrieked with fright to find themselves brought into conjunction with such a name. However, I went in, and risked the chances of some unpleasant experience.

At the door of this *cheb-bazi* (nocturnal entertainment) were four actors, who were to take part in the second piece, for after *Caragueuz*, we were promised the *Husband of the Two Widows*, a farce-comedy, of the class known as *taklid*.

The actors, wearing jackets embroidered with gold, had, beneath their smart tarbooshes, long plaited hair like that of women. Their eyelids darkened, their hands stained red, with spangles stuck upon their faces and patches upon their bare arms, they gave a hearty welcome to the public and smiled graciously upon the *effendis* who paid more for their admission than did the vulgar herd. An *irmelikalten* (a gold piece worth a shilling) secured for the spectator an expression of gratitude and a reserved seat in the front row. However, no one was compelled to pay more than ten paras, and I must add that the price of admission also conferred the right to a regular ration of coffee and tobacco. Sherbet and refreshments of other kinds had to be paid for separately.

As soon as I had taken my seat upon one of the benches, a young boy, elegantly dressed and with his arms bare to the shoulders—the modest charm of his features would have justified one in taking him for a girl—came and asked whether I would have a *chibouk*

CARAGUEUZ

or a narghile, and when I had decided, he brought me a cup of coffee in addition.

The room gradually filled with people of every class. There was not a single woman to be seen, but many children had been brought in the charge of servants or slaves. Most of them were well dressed, and doubtless their parents had wished them to enjoy the spectacle on this festive occasion, but they did not accompany them. In Turkey, the man does not allow himself to be hampered by either wife or child: each goes his own way, and after early childhood the little boys no longer go out with their mothers. The slaves to whom the children are entrusted are, moreover, considered as part of the family. They are given no laborious work, and perform only domestic duties, just as was the case in antiquity. Simple *rayas* envy their lot, and if they have any intelligence they almost always succeed in gaining their freedom after a few years' service, with the pension that is customary in such cases. It makes one ashamed to realise that Christian Europe, in obliging its colonial slaves to hard labour, has been more cruel than the Turks.

We return to the play. When the room was sufficiently filled, an orchestra in a gallery performed a kind of overture. Meanwhile, one of the corners of the room unexpectedly grew light. A white screen of transparent gauze, with festoon-like ornaments around it, showed where the Chinese shadows would appear. The lights that had previously illuminated the room were put out, and when the orchestra stopped a shout of joy went up on all sides. There was a silence, then behind the screen a rattling like that of pieces of wood being shaken in a sack. The marionettes, as usual, were introducing themselves

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

to the accompaniment of this sound, which all the children welcomed with transports of delight.

Just then a spectator, probably a member of the troop, shouted to the actor whose business it was to make the marionettes talk:

“What are you giving us to-day?”

“It is written up above the door for all to read who can.”

“But I have forgotten what the *hodja* taught me . . . (This is the priest whose duty it is to instruct the children in the mosques.)

“Well, to-night we are to have the illustrious *Caragueuz*, the martyr to chastity.”

“How do you expect to be able to justify such a title?”

“By counting on the intelligence of people of taste, and imploring the assistance of Ahmad of the Black Eyes.”

Ahmad is the pet name which the Faithful give to Mohammed. As for the “black eyes,” we may remark that this is the literal meaning of the name *cara-gueuz*. . . .

“Promises enough!” replied the speaker; “it remains to be seen whether you can carry them out!”

“Do not worry!” said the voice from the stage. “My colleagues and I are beyond all criticism.”

The orchestra began to play again; then behind the gauze there appeared a scene which represented one of the squares of Constantinople, with a fountain and houses in the foreground. In turn there appeared a kavass, a dog, a water-carrier, and other mechanical personages, whose clothes were definitely coloured, and who were not the simple silhouettes of the Chinese shadows we know.

Soon a Turk came out of a house, followed by a

CARAGUEUZ

slave carrying a travelling bag. He seemed uneasy, and, making up his mind suddenly, went and knocked at another house in the square, crying: "Caragueuz! Caragueuz! My best of friends, are you asleep again?"

Caragueuz put his nose out of the window, and with his appearance, a cry of delight came from the audience; then after asking time to dress, he soon appeared again and embraced his friend.

"Listen," said the friend, "I am going to ask a great service of you: I am compelled to go to Broussa on important business. You know that I am married to a very beautiful woman, and I own I cannot bear the thought of leaving her alone, when I have so little confidence in my own people. . . . Well, my friend, to-night I have had an idea. I appoint you guardian of her virtue. I know the delicacy of your character and the depth of your affection for me. I am glad to be able to give you this proof of my esteem."

"Oh, wretched man," said Caragueuz. "What folly is this? Just look at me for a moment."

"Well?"

"Well! Don't you realise that the moment your wife sets eyes on me, she will not be able to resist the need of belonging to me?"

"Nothing of the sort," said the Turk. "She loves me, and if there be any seduction to which she might yield it will not come from you, my poor friend—first, because your honour is involved, and then . . . Ah, by Allah, you are so strangely made. . . . Well, I count on you."

The Turk disappears. "Oh, how blind men are!" cries Caragueuz. "Me! strangely made. Say rather: Too well made! too handsome! too seducing! too dangerous!"

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

“Well,” he continued in a monologue, “my friend has committed his wife to my care, and I must accept the responsibility. Go to his house as he told me; seat myself on his divan. . . . Then . . . his wife, curious like all the rest of them, will wish to see me . . . and the moment her eyes light upon me, she will be overcome by admiration, and lose all restraint. No, I will not go . . . I will stay at the portal of this dwelling like a spahi on sentry go. A woman is so slight a thing . . . and a real friend so rare a blessing.”

This phrase called forth genuine approval from the masculine audience. It was framed in a couplet, plays of this kind being mixed up with songs, like many of our own. In the refrains the word *bakkaloum* often occurs; it is the favourite expression of the Turks and means: “What does it matter?” or “It’s all the same to me!”

Caragueuz, through the light veil which softened the colours of the setting and the characters, was perfectly clearly defined, with his dark eyes, finely drawn eyebrows, and most striking features. His conceit of himself, in this matter of seduction, did not appear to surprise the spectators.

After the couplet, he seemed plunged in reverie. “What shall I do?” he said to himself: “watch before the door, no doubt, until such time as my friend returns. . . . But the woman may steal a glance at me through the *moucharabys* (shutters). Or she may be tempted to go to the bath with her slaves. . . . No husband, alas! can prevent his wife from going out for that purpose. . . . Then she will be able to admire me at her leisure. . . . Oh, imprudent friend, what made you charge me with this watchdog’s duty?”

Here the play becomes fantastic. Caragueuz, to

CARAGUEUZ

hide himself from the glances of his friend's wife, lies upon his belly, saying: "I shall look like a bridge." In order to understand how comical this is, it is necessary to take into account his peculiar construction. Imagine Punch using his belly as an arch and imitating a bridge with hands and feet. But Caragueuz has no hump upon his shoulders. There pass a crowd of people, horses, dogs, a patrol, and finally, an *arabas* drawn by oxen, and filled with women. The unfortunate Caragueuz gets out of the way in time to avoid being used as a bridge by this heavy means of transport.

A scene more comic to behold than easy to describe follows that in which Caragueuz, to hide from the glances of his friend's wife, tries to *look like a bridge*. In order to explain it properly we should need to revert to the comedy of the latin *atellanes*. Caragueuz himself is no other than the PUNCHINELLO of Osques, of whom such excellent examples are to be seen at the museum of Naples. In this scene, so eccentric that at home people would hardly tolerate it, Caragueuz lies on his back and tries to look like a stake. The crowd passes by and everybody says: "Who has put that stake there? There was none there yesterday. Is it oak; is it pine? Then come laundrymaids on their way back from the fountain, and hang their linen upon Caragueuz. He is delighted to perceive that his idea has been successful. A moment later, slaves arrive on their way to water their horses: a friend meets them and invites them to go with him into a tavern . . . but where are the horses to be tethered? "Ah, there's a stake," and the horses are tethered to Caragueuz.

Soon, merry songs, provoked by the agreeable warmth of Tenedos wine, are heard within the

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

tavern. The horses begin to fidget impatiently. Caragueuz, tugged in all directions, calls the passers-by to his aid, and painfully explains that he is the victim of a mistake. He is freed and put upon his feet again. At that identical moment his friend's wife leaves her house to go to the bath. He has no time to hide, and the woman's admiration knows no bounds, a fact which the audience is perfectly able to appreciate.

"Oh, what a handsome man!" cries the lady. "I have never seen his like."

"Excuse me, *hanoum* (madam)," says Caragueuz, virtuous as ever, "I am not the sort of man who should be spoken to . . . I am a night watchman, one of those who strike with their halberds to warn the public if there happens to be a fire in the neighbourhood."

"Then what are you doing here at this hour of the day?"

"Though I am a good Mussulman, I am a miserable sinner. I have allowed *giaours* to take me to a tavern. Then, I know not how, they left me dead drunk here. Mohammed forgive me for having broken his holy laws!"

"Poor man . . . you must be ill. Come into my house and take a little rest there." And the lady tried to take Caragueuz by the hand, as earnest of her hospitality.

"Touch me not, *hanoum*," cries our hero in terror. "I am impure! Moreover, I am not in a fit state to enter a good Mussulman house . . . I have been defiled by contact with a dog."

To understand this heroic fiction to which Caragueuz's threatened delicacy gave rise, you must know that the Turks, though they respect the lives of dogs,

CARAGUEUZ

and even provide for their feeding by pious foundations, yet regard it as an impurity to touch them or be touched by them.

“And how did that happen?” says the lady.

“Heaven has punished me justly. This night, during my terrible debauch, I ate some raisin preserve, and when I woke up—there on the public way—I was horrified to feel a dog licking my face. . . . That is the truth: may Allah forgive me!”

Of all the devices which Caragueuz invents to repel the advances of his friend’s wife, this appears to be the most successful.

“Poor man,” says she, compassionately. “In truth no one may touch you before you have taken five ablutions, each of a quarter of an hour, meanwhile reciting verses from the Koran. Go hence to the fountain, and let me find you here when I come back from the bath.”

“What forwardness is this of the women of Stamboul,” cries Caragueuz, once more alone. “Beneath the *feredje* that hides their face, they gather greater daring to insult the modesty of honest men. No, I refuse to allow myself to be caught by these tricks, by that honey-sweet voice, that eye which burns through the openings in her mask of gauze. Why do not the police compel these hussies to cover their eyes as well?”

It would take too long to describe all the other misfortunes of Caragueuz. The comedy of the scene consists in the situation wherein the guardianship of a wife is confided to the one being who seems the complete antithesis of those to whom the Turks usually give their confidence. The lady comes out of the baths, and again finds the unfortunate guardian of her virtue at his post. Divers misadventures have kept

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

him in the same place. But she has not been able to refrain from speaking to the other women who were at the bath with her of the handsome, well-built stranger whom she has met in the street. So that a crowd of bathers hurry upon the heels of their friend. The embarrassment of Caragueuz when he finds himself a prey to these new Menades may well be imagined.

His friend's wife tears her garments, pulls out her hair, and spares not a single method to overcome his virtue. He is just about to succumb . . . when suddenly a carriage arrives which separates the crowd. It is a carriage of the old French style, that of an Ambassador. Caragueuz clutches at this last hope; he implores the Frankish Ambassador to take him under his protection, to allow him to climb into his carriage so that he may escape the temptations that assail him. The Ambassador gets down: he is wearing a very fetching costume, a three-cornered hat perched upon an enormous wig, an embroidered coat and waistcoat, short breeches, sword at the thrust. He tells the ladies that Caragueuz is under his protection, that he is his best friend . . . (Caragueuz embraces him effusively and hastily climbs into the carriage, which drives away, carrying with it the dream of the poor bathers.)

The husband returns and congratulates himself when he learns that Caragueuz's chastity has kept his wife pure for him. The play shows the triumph of friendship.

I should not have dealt with this popular play in so much detail, if it did not in some degree represent the manners of the country. Judging by the Ambassador's costume, we may conclude that it dates back to the last century and, like our harlequinades, is played in its traditional form. Caragueuz is always an actor in these farces, though he does not always play the

CARAGUEUZ

principal part in them. I have every reason to believe that the customs of Constantinople have changed since the "Reform." But in the days that preceded the accession of the Sultan Mahmoud, it is reasonable to believe that the weaker sex protested in its own way against the oppression of the stronger. This would explain the complaisance with which the women were prepared to yield to the especial qualities of Caragueuz.

In the modern plays, this gentleman almost always belongs to the opposition. He is either the scoffer of the middle-classes or a man of the people whose commonsense finds something to criticise in the acts of the lesser authorities. When the police regulations, for the first time, decreed that after nightfall no one should go out without a lantern, Caragueuz made his appearance with a lantern, suspended in an unusual manner, impudently jeering at the authorities because the regulation did not say that there must be a candle in the lantern. When he had been arrested by the kavass, and released again after it had been ascertained that he was right, he appeared once more with a lantern containing a candle that he had neglected to light. . . . This pleasantry is like those which our popular legends attribute to Jean de Calais, a fact which goes to prove that all peoples are much the same. Caragueuz is allowed freedom of speech; he has always defied the rod, the sabre and the rope.

After the interval, during which fresh tobacco and various refreshments were handed round, the gauze veil, behind which the marionettes had appeared, suddenly fell, and real actors appeared upon the stage to play *The Husband of the Two Widows*. In this play there were three women and one man, but all the parts were played by men. However, in women's

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

dress, the young men of the Orient, with that completely feminine grace, that delicacy of complexion, and a boldness in imitation which we could never rival, succeed in producing a complete illusion. Usually they are either Greeks or Circassians.

First of all, a Jewess appeared, one of those who deal in second-hand clothes and assist the intrigues of the women into whose houses they are admitted. She was counting up the money she had made, and hoping to make more out of a new piece of business, in which she was associated with a young Turk called Osman, who had fallen in love with a rich widow, the principal wife of a *bimbachi* (colonel) who had been killed at the war. Since every woman has the right of remarriage after three months of widowhood, there was every reason to believe that the lady would choose the lover whom she had already favoured during the lifetime of her husband. Several times already he had offered her, by the good offices of the Jewess, emblematic bouquets.

So the Jewess makes haste to introduce the happy Osman, whose presence in the house is henceforth free from danger.

Osman hopes that there may be no delay in *lighting the torch*, and urges his beloved to consider his proposal. . . . But oh, the ingratitude, or perhaps rather the eternal fickleness, of woman! She refuses to consent to the wedding, unless Osman promises to marry the *bimbachi's* second wife as well.

“By *Tcheytan*” (the Devil)! says Osman to himself, “it is a more serious matter, this taking of two wives. . . . But, Light of mine Eyes,” he says to the widow, “who can have put such an idea into your head? You are making a demand which is not at all usual.”

“I will explain,” says the widow. “You have

CARAGUEUZ

always told me that I am young and beautiful. . . . Well, in this house there is a woman, not so young and not so beautiful as I, who by her tricks succeeded in getting my late husband first to marry her and then to love her. . . . She imitated me in every respect, and ended by giving him more pleasure than I did. Well then, sure as I am of your affection, when you marry me, I wish you to take this ugly creature as your second wife. Through the power which she acquired by craft over my first husband—he was a very weak-minded creature—she caused me so much suffering, that I am determined she shall suffer now, that she shall weep to see me preferred before her, to find herself the object of your disdain, in a word to be more wretched than I was.”

“Madam,” replies Osman, “the portrait of this woman that you have drawn for me hardly inclines me in her favour. I understand that she is a very unpleasant person . . . and that I must combine the happiness of wedding you with the disadvantages of a second marriage which I may find extremely irksome. . . . You are aware that, according to the law of the Prophet, the husband must give himself *equally* to his wives, whether he contents himself with a small number, or goes so far as four . . . which I shall dispense myself from doing.”

“Well, I have made a vow to *Fathima* (the Prophet’s daughter), and I will only marry a man who will do what I tell you.”

“Madam, I crave your leave to think about the matter.”

“What an unfortunate fellow I am,” says Osman to himself, once left alone, “to marry two wives, one beautiful and the other ugly. One must indeed pass through bitterness to arrive at pleasure. . . .”

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

The Jewess returns, and he tells her the position.

"What is this you say?" replies the Jewess. "But the second wife is charming! You should give no heed to a woman when she is talking about her rival. It is true that she whom you love is fair, and the other dark. Do you dislike dark women?"

"I have no such prejudices," says the lover.

"Then," says the Jewess, "are you so much afraid of possessing two equally charming women? For though their complexions are of different shades, one is as good as the other. . . . I know what I am talking about."

"If you speak the truth," says Osman, "that law of the Prophet which obliges every husband to share himself equally between his wives will not be such a strain."

"You shall see her," says the Jewess. "I have told her that you are in love with her, and that when she has seen you pass down the street and stop beneath her windows, you were always thinking about her."

Osman hastens to reward the intelligent messenger, and soon the second widow of the *bimbachi* appears. She is, in fact, very beautiful, though perhaps somewhat bronze of hue. She appears flattered by the young man's attentions, and does not repulse his suggestion of marriage. "You loved me in silence," says she, "and I have been told that you were too shy to declare yourself. This timidity quite touches me. Now I am free, and prepared to fall in with your wishes. Send for the *cadi*."

"There are no difficulties in the way," says the Jewess; "but this unfortunate young man owes money to the *great lady*" (the first).

"What!" cried the second, "does that hideous and evil creature play the usurer?"

CARAGUEUZ

“Alas, yes! . . . and it was I who acted as intermediary in this affair, out of the eagerness with which I always try to do things for young people. Thanks to my intervention, this poor boy was saved from a false step, and as he cannot pay back the money the *hanoum* will only acquit him of his debt if he agrees to marry her.”

“Such,” says the young man, “is the sad truth.”
(The lady was quite touched.)

“But what a pleasure you will take,” continues the Jewess, “in seeing that crafty woman despised and disdained by the man who loves you.”

It is not in the nature of any woman, proud and sure of her own charms, to doubt the result in such a case. So she, too, agrees to the double marriage, and the *cadi* is sent for.

The contract is signed. Thereafter the question is to know which of the two wives shall have the precedence. The Jewess brings the happy Osman a bouquet, which is to be the sign of the choice which the young man must make the first night of his marriage. Imagine the embarrassment of the young man when each of his wives stretches forth her hand to receive the pledge of his preference. But at the moment when he is hesitating between the dark beauty and the fair, the slaves rush in with the terrifying announcement that they have seen a ghost. Then there is a most dramatic scene. The *bimbachi* enters with a stick. The husband so little mourned is not dead, as everybody had thought. He had been missing, and so had come to be counted as dead, but really he had only been taken prisoner. The signing of a treaty of peace between the Russians and the Turks had given him back to his country . . . and to his affections. It did not take him long to realise

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

what was happening, and he administered a severe drubbing to everybody present. After the first few blows, the Jewess and the lover make their escape, and the cadi, who is not so active, must take the punishment they have escaped, amid the most tumultuous applause of the audience.

Such is the scene, whose highly moral ending delights every husband present at its performance.

These two plays may give some idea of the state of the drama in Turkey. It is impossible to avoid seeing in them that element of primitive comedy which is apparent in Greek and Latin plays. But it goes no farther. The organisation of Mussulman society is opposed to the establishment of a serious theatre. A theatre is impossible without women, and nothing would induce husbands to allow their wives to appear in public. The marionettes, even the actors who appear in the shows given in the cafés, only perform for the amusement of those who frequent such establishments, and such people are not given to generosity. A wealthy man gives performances in his own house. He invites his friends, and his wives invite theirs, and the performance is given in one of the large rooms of the house. Consequently, there is no chance of establishing a well-equipped theatre, except in the houses of people of considerable wealth. The Sultan himself, though he is very fond of theatrical performances, has no permanently built theatre, but it often happens that the ladies of the seraglio, hearing of some brilliant performance that has been given at the Pera theatre, wish to enjoy it in their turn, and then the Sultan engages the company for one or several evenings.

Immediately, on such occasions, a temporary theatre is constructed at the Summer Palace, and it is erected against one of the façades of that building. The

CARAGUEUZ

windows of the *cadines* (ladies), closely barred, become the boxes, and from them come occasional bursts of laughter, or signs of approval. In the hall, which takes the form of an amphitheatre between these boxes and the stage, are none but male guests, diplomatic personages, and others specially invited for these gala performances.

Recently, the Sultan was sufficiently curious to have one of Molière's comedies played before him. It was *M. de Pourceaugnac*. It had a tremendous effect. Interpreters explained the situations as they arose to those courtiers who did not understand French. The majority, however, of Turkish statesmen do have some knowledge of our language. French is the universal language of diplomacy, and when the Turkish officials wish to correspond with foreign Governments, they are obliged to make use of our language. This is the reason for the existence of Turkish and Egyptian colleges at Paris.

As for the women of the seraglio, they are real scholars. Every woman in the Sultan's household is given a serious education in history, poetry, music, painting and geography. Many of these ladies are either artists or poets, and verses or lyrical pieces which owe their origin to these charming recluses are frequently the vogue at Pera.

IV

THE WATER-DRINKERS

It is well to devote a moment to the performances of the Serasker Square, to those uncouth forms of entertainment which may be found repeated everywhere in

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

the crowded quarters of the city. To us Europeans they seem pervaded by an utterly inexplicable quality of mysticism. Who, for instance, is this Caragueuz, this extraordinary combination of phantasy and indecency, who appears in public only on these occasions of religious festival? Is he any other than a stray memory of the god of Lampsacus, of Pan, the universal father, whom Asia mourns unto this day? . . .

When I left the café, I walked about the square, thinking of what I had seen. Then I felt thirsty, and looked about for a stall where I might buy something to drink.

In this land where fermented or spirituous liquors may not be sold openly, a strange occupation has arisen, that of the hawkers of *water*, by measure or by the glass.

Upon the stalls of these unusual barkeepers there may be seen a host of vessels and cups. They contain a liquid which is more or less highly valued. Water comes to Constantinople through the Aqueduct of Valens, and is stored in the reservoirs built by the Byzantine emperors, where it often acquires a disagreeable flavour. So, by reason of the scarcity of this commodity, there has grown up at Constantinople a school of water-drinkers, who, so far as this liquid is concerned, are veritable *gourmets*.

In shops of this sort, you can buy the waters of different countries and different years. The Nile water is the most esteemed: it is the only water that the Sultan drinks, and is a part of the tribute paid to him from Alexandria. It is considered favourable to fecundity. The water of the Euphrates, somewhat bitter and a little sharp to the taste, is recommended to the weak and debilitated. Danube water, strong in salts, is favoured by those of an energetic tempera-

THE WATER-DRINKERS

ment. Then there are waters of different years. The Nile water of 1833 is highly appreciated: it is very expensive and sold in bottles corked and sealed.

A European, who is not an adept in Mohammed's teachings, is naturally not very enthusiastic about water. I remember, at Vienna, once hearing a Swedish doctor declare that water was a stone, in its frozen state just a simple crystal which, in sub-polar climates, could be liquefied only by a degree of heat relatively high, but still incapable of melting other stones. To corroborate this doctrine, he made experiments upon waters from rivers, lakes and springs, and demonstrated, from the residue produced by evaporation, that they contained substances injurious to human health. It is only right to say that the doctor's principal aim was, by deprecating the use of water, to secure from the Government an imperial patent for the establishment of a brewery. Monsieur de Metternich seemed impressed by the doctor's arguments. Moreover, since Metternich himself was a great cultivator of vines, there was some sense in his agreement.

Whatever scientific justification there may be for such a hypothesis, it made a lively impression upon me; I have serious objections to the swallowing of liquid stone. The Turks manage well enough, it is true, but to what a host of strange diseases, fevers, plagues and scourges of every sort they are exposed!

Such considerations forbade me to take advantage of refreshments of this sort. I left those who cared for them to their water debauches, though their water might be old and of a choice "vintage," and stopped before a stall upon which there glittered flagons that seemed to hold lemonade. For a piastre (twopence halfpenny) I bought one. As soon as I had put it to

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

my lips, I was compelled to spit the first mouthful out again. The merchant laughed at my innocence (later you shall know what this liquid was), and I was compelled to return to Ildiz-Khan to find a more agreeable kind of refreshment.

It was already day, and the Persians, who had come back earlier, had been asleep for some time. Excited by my night's entertainment, I could not succeed in getting to sleep. In the end I dressed myself again, and went back to Pera to call upon my friend the painter.

I was told that he had moved and was living at Kouroukscheme, with some Armenians who had commissioned him to paint them a religious painting. Kouroukscheme is on the European shore of the Bosphorus, a league away from Pera. I had to take a caique at the Tophana jetty.

There is nothing more delightful than this quay of the Frankish city. From Pera one goes down by hilly streets which come out from the main street, and then, passing the different Consulates and Embassies, one finally reaches a market-place crowded with fruiterers' stalls, on which are displayed the splendid produce of the Asiatic coast. Cherries are to be found there at almost every season, for the cherry grows wild in this climate. At the season of my visit, there were water-melons, prickly pears and grapes: enormous Cassaba melons from Smyrna, the best in all the world, extended every passer-by an invitation to a simple but delightful lunch. The most distinctive feature of the place is a delightful fountain in the old style, with carven approaches supported by little columns, and sculptured and painted arabesques. Around the square itself, and in the street which leads to the quay, are a number of cafés, upon whose fronts

THE WATER-DRINKERS

I noticed signs, though without a light behind them, which bore in letters of gold that same name of Caragueuz, as greatly beloved here as in Stamboul.

Although Tophana forms a part of the Frankish quarter, there are many Mussulmans about, mostly porters (*hamals*) or sailors (*caidjis*). A battery of six guns stands prominently upon the quay: its business is to salute the vessels which enter the Golden Horn, and to proclaim the rising and the setting of the sun to the three parts of the town: Pera, Stamboul and Scutari, which have the water between them.

Scutari stands majestically upon the other side of the Bosphorus, its domes, minarets and kiosks seeming to adorn the azure sky, like its rival Stamboul.

I had no difficulty in finding a boat with two rowers. It was glorious weather, and the boat, light and cleanly built, cut through the water at an astonishing speed. The respect which the Mussulmans pay to all animal life explains the fact that the channel of the Bosphorus, which cuts like a river between the rich coasts of Europe and Asia, is always covered with water-fowl, which fly over or float by thousands upon the blue waters, animating the long picture of palaces and villas.

As we leave Tophana, the two shores, seeming much nearer to one another than they really are, are nothing but one long continuous line of brightly painted houses, adorned by ornaments and gilded railings.

Soon we come to a succession of colonnades upon the left shore, which stretches for a quarter of a league. These are part of the buildings of the new palace of Bechik-Tasch. They are built entirely in the Greek style, and painted in white oils; the railings are gilded. The chimneys take the form of Doric columns, and the whole building gives an impression of majesty and

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

grace. Gilded barges are moored to the quays, whose marble steps go down to the waters' edge. Beyond, vast gardens follow the slopes of the hills. The umbrella pine everywhere stands high above the other vegetation. But there are no palms, for at Constantinople the climate is too severe. Then comes a village, with a harbour full of those large boats called *caiques*; then an older seraglio, that lately occupied by Mahmoud's sister, the Sultana Esmé. This is in the Turkish style of the eighteenth century, with festoons and stonework ornamentation, kiosks adorned with trefoils and arabesques which seem like huge cages with bars of gold; sharply gabled roofs and little columns painted in the brightest colours. . . . They make one dream of the mysteries of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

In a caique, the passenger lies upon a mattress in the stern, while the rowers, with their strong arms and bronzed shoulders, attractively clothed in wide silken shirts with satin ribbons, drive their boat fiercely through the water. These men have charming manners, and, even at their work, assume attitudes which have an artistic beauty of their own.

As the boat passes the European shore of the Bosphorus, we see a long succession of country-houses, mainly occupied by officials of the Sultan. Then a new harbour, filled with boats. This is Kouroukscheme.

I kept the boat so that I might return in it that evening (this is the usual custom); the rowers went into a café, and as I entered the village, it seemed to me that one of Decamps' pictures had come to life before me. The sun was drawing diamonds upon the painted shops and whitewashed walls: the blue-green vegetation afforded rest to eyes wearied of the glaring

THE WATER-DRINKERS

light. I went into a tobacconist's shop to buy some latakieh, and inquired for the Armenian house where I hoped to find my friend.

It was very kindly pointed out to me. The family, which, at that moment, was patronising French art, was one of considerable standing among the Armenians. I was escorted to the gate, and soon I found the artist installed in a magnificent hall, rather like that in the Turkish café in the Boulevard du Temple, the Oriental decoration of which is much more correct than is generally imagined.

Several French people were present in this hall, admiring the designs for the frescoes which the painter proposed. There were several attachés from the French Embassy, a Belgian prince, and the hospodar of Wallachia, who had come for the celebrations at Constantinople. We went to the chapel where the greatest part of the decoration was already to be seen. The whole of the space behind the site of the high-altar was taken up by a huge painting of the Adoration of the Magi. The paintings at the sides were only sketched in. The family which had commissioned the work, being possessed of several houses both at Constantinople and in the country, had handed over the house, with the servants and the horses, to the painter. He invited us to take a trip into the surrounding country. There was a Greek festival at Arnaut-Keuil, a league away; then, as it was Friday (the Turkish Sunday), we might go a further league, and, crossing the Bosphorus, visit the Sweet Waters of Asia.

Although the Turks usually sleep all day during the month of Ramadan, this is not in obedience to any religious precepts, and they only do so that they may not have to think about food, since it is forbidden to eat before sunset. On Fridays, therefore, they manage to

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

snatch themselves away from slumber, and take their usual walks in the country, usually to the Sweet Waters of Europe, which are situated at the far end of the Golden Horn, or those of Asia, which were the purpose of our walk.

We first went to Arnaut-Kueil; but the feast had not yet begun, though there were a good number of people about, and many strolling traders. In a narrow valley, shaded by pine-trees and larches, enclosures had been arranged and stages set up for dancing and theatricals. The centre of the feast was a grotto with a fountain sacred to Elijah, the water of which only begins to flow each year on the day of some saint whose name I have forgotten. Glasses of this water are handed around to all the faithful who are there. Several hundreds of Greek women pressed around the holy fountain, but the time for the miracle had not yet come. Others walked about in the shade or gathered in groups upon the grass. Among them I noticed the four beauties whom I had seen in the gaming-house at San-Dimitri, but they no longer wore the distinctive costumes which they had put on to show the spectators the ideal type of the four races of Constantinople. But they were covered with paint and wore patches. An old woman was with them, and the pure light of the sun was much less favourable to them than artificial light had been. The attachés from the Embassy seemed to be quite well acquainted; they chatted with them and called for sherbet.

THE PASHA OF SCUTARI

V

THE PASHA OF SCUTARI

While we were resting beneath a huge sycamore, a Turk of mature age, dressed in a long frock-coat closely buttoned, and wearing a fez with a blue silk tuft, came and sat on the bench which went round the tree. He wore a little *nichan* which was hardly noticeable. With him there was a young boy dressed like himself on a small scale, who greeted us with that serious air which is customary in Turkish children when, their childhood over, they are no longer in their mothers' care. The Turk, noticing our approval of his son's politeness, also greeted us, and called a *cafedji* who had a stall near the fountain. A moment later we were surprised to see pipes and refreshments brought, which the unknown stranger begged us to accept. We were hesitating, when the coffee-seller said: "You may well accept; it is a gentleman of great rank who offers you this courtesy. He is the Pasha of Scutari." One never refuses anything a Pasha offers.

I was surprised to find myself the only one who was ignored on this occasion; and my friend remarked upon the fact to the *cafedji*, who replied: "I never serve a *kafir*."

"*Kafir!*" I cried, for it was an insult. "You are a *kafir* yourself, you son of a dog!"

It never occurred to me that the man, who was doubtless a faithful *Sunnite* Mussulman, was addressing his insult to the Persian clothes I wore, which made me appear like a *Shiite*, or follower of Ali.

A few sharp words passed between us, for it never

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

does to leave the last word to a rude fellow in the Orient. If you do, he thinks you afraid, and may even strike you, whilst the coarsest insults only end in the triumph of one or the other in the opinion of the bystanders. But, as the Pasha looked on with astonishment, my companions, who had, at first, done nothing but laugh at the man's mistake, explained that I was a Frank. I only mention this scene to show the fanaticism which still exists among the lower classes, which, though it has considerably calmed down so far as Europeans are concerned, is always strong between the different sects. Moreover, it is very much the same with the Christians: a Roman Catholic would rather have a Turk than a Greek.

The Pasha was highly amused, and began to chat with the painter. We re-embarked after these refreshments, at the same time as himself, and as our boats had to pass before the Sultan's summer palace, which is on the Asiatic side, he gave us leave to visit it.

This summer seraglio, which should not be confused with the other, on the European side, is the most delightful residence in the world. Great gardens, laid out in terraces, reach right to the top of the mountain, from which Scutari can be clearly seen on the right, and, in the far distance, the bluish silhouette of the Bithynian Olympus. The palace is built in the eighteenth-century style. Before we went in, we had to change our boots for slippers which we were lent; then we were taken to see the apartments of the Sultanas, then, of course, unoccupied.

The lower rooms are built upon piles, most of which are of precious woods. We were even told of aloes wood piles, which are better able to resist the decay which the sea-water produces. When we had visited the huge rooms on the ground-floor which

THE PASHA OF SCUTARI

nobody lives in, we were taken to the apartments. In the middle was a great hall, out of which opened twenty or so smaller rooms with separate doors, like those in the galleries of a bath-house.

We were allowed to go into all the rooms, each of which was furnished with a divan, a few chairs, a mahogany chest of drawers, and a marble mantelpiece with a pillared clock upon it. One might have imagined oneself in the room of any Parisian lady, if the furniture had been completed by a bed, but in the Orient divans are used instead of beds.

Each of these rooms was that of a *cadine*. I was struck by their symmetry and perfect uniformity; and was told that the most absolute equality reigned among the Sultan's ladies. The painter gave me the following example: When His Highness orders boxes of sweets, usually from a French confectioner at Pera, they have to be made up of sweets exactly alike. One comfit too many, one sugar-plum of a peculiar shape; too many pastilles or too few lozenges, and there would be serious complications in the relations between these beautiful creatures. Like all other Mussulmans, whoever they may be, they are believers in strict equality.

In the principal room a musical clock was made to play for us. It played several airs from the Italian operas. Mechanical birds, singing nightingales, peacocks spreading their tails, added to the attraction of this little masterpiece. On the second floor were the quarters of the *odaleuk*, who are divided into singing and serving women. Higher still were the rooms of the slaves. In the harem there is the same order as in a well-kept boarding-house. The oldest established of the *cadines* has authority over the others, but she is always subject to the Sultana-Mother

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

whom, from time to time, she must go and consult at the old seraglio in Stamboul.

So much I learned of the interior arrangements of the seraglio. Everything goes along much more simply than the depraved imagination of Europeans usually supposes. The question of numbers in wives has, with the Turks, no other interest than that of reproduction. The Caucasian people, so handsome and so full of energy, has greatly diminished for some physiological reason which is difficult to determine. The wars of the last century, especially, greatly weakened the purely Turkish section of the population. The very courage of this people has decimated it, as was the case with the Franks in the Middle Ages.

It would seem that the Sultan, for his part, is ready to help forward the repopulation of the Turkish Empire, judging by the number of births of princes and princesses which are made known to the city by the booming of cannon and the illuminations of Stamboul.

We were shown the cellars, kitchens, reception rooms and concert hall. Everywhere things are arranged so that the women can take part, without being seen, in all the amusements designed for those who are invited by the Sultan. There are railed boxes everywhere which, like tribunes, look out upon the rooms, so that the ladies of the harem can, in spirit, associate themselves with matters of politics or with pleasure.

We admired the bath-room, which was made of marble, and the private mosque of the palace. Then we were taken out through a peristyle which leads to the gardens. It is adorned by columns, and closed in by a conservatory with arbutus-trees, and plants and flowers from India. So Constantinople, which is cold,

THE PASHA OF SCUTARI

because of its mountainous position and the frequent storms which come from the Black Sea, has its hot-houses for tropical plants, just as we do in our more northern lands.

We went round the gardens again, and were taken into a pavilion, where we were served with fruit from the garden, and conserves. The Pasha invited us to this feast, but himself ate nothing, for the moon of Ramadan had not yet risen. We were quite overwhelmed by his politeness, and somewhat embarrassed, because we had no way of showing our gratitude except in words.

“You will be able to say,” he said, in reply to our thanks, “that you have taken a meal with the Sultan.”

Without making too much of the honour of so kind a reception, one may at least see in it much goodness of heart, and that absence of religious prejudice which is now almost complete in Turkey.

VI

THE DERVISHES

When we had sufficiently admired the apartments and the gardens of the seraglio, we gave up the idea of going to see the Sweet Waters of Asia, for this would have obliged us to go up the Bosphorus for a league, and since we were near Scutari, we decided to visit the monastery of the howling dervishes.

Scutari is much more representative of Mussulman orthodoxy than Stamboul, where the population is more mixed and the town itself more European. The Asiatic Scutari still clings to the old traditions of the Turks; the costume of the “Reform” is hardly known

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

there; green and white turbans are still to be seen. In a word, it is the Faubourg Saint-Germain of Constantinople. The houses, fountains and mosques seem to belong to a more ancient style; new discoveries in sanitation, paving or pebbling, the foot-paths, lanterns, carriages which one sees at Stamboul, are here considered dangerous innovations. Scutari is the refuge of the old Mussulmans who, persuaded that European Turkey will soon become the prey of the Christians, wish to be sure of a peaceful tomb on Anatolian soil. They think that the Bosphorus will be the line separating the two empires and the two religions, and that in Asia they will enjoy complete security.

There is nothing remarkable in Scutari beyond its large mosque and its graveyard with enormous cypresses; its towers, kiosks, fountains and hundreds of minarets would not otherwise distinguish it from any other Turkish city. The monastery of the *howling* dervishes is not far from the mosque; it is built in an older style of architecture than the *téké* of the Pera dervishes, who are *dancing* dervishes.

The Pasha, who had gone as far as the town with us, tried to dissuade us from going to see these monks whom he called madmen; but the curiosity of travellers is worthy of respect. He realised this, and left us with an invitation to come and see him again.

One curious thing about the dervishes is that they are more tolerant than any other religious institution. The orthodox Mussulmans, who are obliged to recognise their existence as a corporation, really only suffer them.

The common people love and support them. Their enthusiasm, their good temper, the easy-going nature of their character and principles, please the

THE DERVISHES

crowd much more than the stiffness of the imans and mullahs. The latter regard them as pantheists, and often attack their doctrines, though they cannot absolutely convict them of heresy.

There are two philosophical systems connected with the Turkish religion and the teaching which follows from it. One is entirely Aristotelian, and the other entirely Platonic. The dervishes follow the latter. We should not be astonished at this connection between the Greeks and the Mussulmans, because it is only through Mussulman translations that we ourselves know the latest of the philosophical books of the ancient world.

Even if the dervishes are pantheists, as the genuine Osmanlis suggest, this does not prevent them from having an incontestable religious title. They were established, they say, by Orchan, the second Sultan of the Turks. Seven masters founded their order, the figure being an entirely Pythagorean one which shows whence their ideas come. The general name is *mewelevis*, from that of their original founder; that of dervishes, or *durvesch*, simply means *poor*. Actually they are a sect of Mussulman communists.

Several belong to the *munasibi* who believe in the transmigration of souls. According to them, every man who is not fit to be re-born in human form, after his death enters the body of the animal which most resembles him either as regards temper or temperament. The gap which is left by this emigration of human souls is filled by that of beasts which either by their intelligence or their fidelity are worthy to rise in the animal scale. This idea, which clearly springs from an Indian tradition, explains the various foundations for the benefit of animals in monasteries and mosques; for respect is due to animals not only because they may

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

have been men, but also because they may become men. It also explains why no Mussulman will eat pork, because this animal, both as regards its shape and its appetites, seems nearer to the human kind.

The *eschrakis*, or enlightened ones, give themselves up to the contemplation of God, in number, form and colour. Generally speaking, they are more reserved, more agreeable and more elegant than the others. People prefer to learn from them, and they try to develop their pupils' strength by exercises requiring vigour and grace. Their teaching clearly comes from Pythagoras and Plato. They are poets, musicians and artists.

Among them there are also a few *hairētis*, or astonished ones (this is, perhaps, the word from which we get our own word *heretic*), who represent the spirit of scepticism or indifference. These are genuine Epicureans. Their principle is that lying cannot be distinguished from truth, and that it is imprudent to try to find any definite idea among the subtleties of human malice. Passion may deceive you, make you bitter, make you unjust in good as in evil, so that it is better to do nothing and say: "*Allah bilour . . . bize haranouk!*" ("God knows, but we do not"; or, "God knows what is the best").

Such are the three philosophical opinions which are prominent, here as, indeed, they are almost everywhere, but, among the dervishes, we do not find the hatreds which these opposing principles excite in society. The *eschrakis*, spiritual dogmatists, live in peace with the *munasibi*, who are materialistic pantheists; and the *hairētis*, who are sceptics, take good care not to wear out their lungs arguing with the others. Each lives in his own way, the way best suited to his temperament. Some make use of food,

THE DERVISHES

often immoderately; others, intoxicating drink and narcotics; others, love. Among the Mussulmans the dervish is the most highly favoured of men, provided that his private virtues, his enthusiasm and devotion, are recognised by his brothers.

The holiness which he professes, the poverty which, in principle, he embraces, and which is sometimes relieved only by the voluntary gifts of the faithful; the patience and modesty which are quite commonly his attributes, set him on a plane of morality as far above that of other men, as he has set himself below other men on the natural plane. A dervish may drink wine and other liquors if they are offered to him, for he is not allowed to pay for anything. If, when he goes down a street, he feels a desire for any curious object, an ornament offered for sale in a shop, the merchant usually gives it to him, or lets him take it away. If he meets a woman, and happens to be very greatly respected by the people, it is said that he may approach her without impurity. Certainly this would hardly happen to-day in great cities, where the police have no great opinion of the qualities of the dervishes; but the principle behind all these liberties is, that the man who gives up all things can receive all things, since his virtue consists in owning nothing of his own: that of the faithful is to compensate him by gifts and offerings.

For this same reason of peculiar holiness the dervishes are dispensed from the pilgrimage to Mecca; they may eat pork and hare, and even touch dogs, which is forbidden to other Turks, in spite of the reverence they all have for the memory of the dog of the Seven Sleepers.

When we entered the courtyard of the *téké* (monastery), we saw a large number of these animals, to which

THEATRES AND FESTIVALS

lay-brothers were distributing their evening meal. For that purpose very ancient and highly valued donations have been made. On the walls of the courtyard, which was planted with acacias and plane-trees, were little contrivances in painted and carved wood, hanging, like brackets, at a certain height. These were places for the birds, which might come and take possession of them as they pleased, and remained perfectly free.

There was nothing new to me in the show given by the howling dervishes. I had already seen others like it at Cairo. These good people spend several hours dancing and stamping their feet upon the ground around a garlanded mast called a *Sary*; this performance produces much the same impression as a farandole might do, in which everybody stayed in the same place. In different keys, they chant a never-ending litany, of which the refrain is: "*Allah hay!*" or "God liveth!" The public is allowed to be present at these performances, in high tribunes with wooden balusters. After an hour of this exercise, some of the dervishes enter into a state of excitement which makes them *melbous* (inspired). They roll on the ground and enjoy beatific visions.

Those we saw had long hair beneath felt hats, shaped like a flower-pot upside down; their dress was white, with black buttons. They were called *kadris*, from the name of their founder.

One of those present told us that he had seen the exercises of the dervishes of the Pera *téké*, who are mainly dancers. As at Scutari, one goes into a huge wooden hall, with galleries and tribunes to which the public are freely admitted, though it is the proper thing to offer a small alms. At the Pera *téké* all the dervishes wear white robes pleated like the Greek

THE DERVISHES

fustanelles. In public performances their business is to spin round on their own axes as long as possible. All of them are clothed in white, except the chief, who wears blue. Every Tuesday and Friday the session begins with a sermon, after which all the dervishes bow before their superior, then take up positions in the hall in such a way that they can turn round without touching one another. The white skirts whirl, the head, with its felt cap, spins round, and each monk seems to be flying. Some of them play sad airs upon a reed flute. To the whirlers, as to the howlers, there comes a certain magnetic moment of exaltation which seems to produce a peculiar state of ecstasy.

There is no reason why an educated man should be astonished by these strange practices. These dervishes represent the uninterrupted tradition of the cabires, dactyles and corybantes, who danced and shrieked in this same place for so many centuries in antiquity. These convulsive movements, encouraged by drink and other intoxicants, allow man to reach a strange state where God, touched by his love, consents to reveal himself in exquisite dreams, the foretaste of Paradise.

As we were going down from the dervish monastery to the harbour, we saw the risen moon shining upon the huge cypresses in the Scutari cemetery, and, on the heights, the houses, brilliant in their colour and gilding, of the upper town of Scutari, which is called the *City of Silver*.

The Sultan's summer palace, which we had visited during the day, stood out clearly on the shore to the right, with its festooned walls painted in white, and touched with pale gold. We crossed the market-place, and in twenty minutes the caiques landed us at Tophana on the European shore.

PART III

THE STORY-TELLERS

A LEGEND IN A CAFÉ

I SHOULD give but an imperfect idea of the pleasures of Constantinople during Ramadan and the principal delights of its nights, if I said nothing about the marvellous stories recited or declaimed by professional story-tellers attached to the chief cafés of Stamboul. To translate one of these legends, is to give a finish to the opinions which one should form of a literature which is both learned and popular, which enshrines traditions and religious legends considered from the point of view of Islam.

The Persians, who had taken me under their protection, regarded me as a *taleb* (scholar), and they took me to the cafés behind the mosque of Mayezid, where the opium smokers used to gather. To-day this is no longer allowed; but business men who do not belong to Turkey are accustomed to frequent this district, which is far removed from the noise and tumult of the central part of the city.

You sit down; a narghile or a long pipe is brought, and you listen to stories which, like the serials in our newspapers, go on as long as possible. This is in the interest both of the proprietor of the café and the story-teller.

Although, when I was very young, I took up the study of the languages of the Orient, I only know the most indispensable words; yet I was always interested

THE STORY-TELLERS

by the vigorous character of the story, and with the help of my companions from the caravansery I at least succeeded in discovering what it was all about.

I can therefore give a pretty good idea of the effect of one of these picturesque stories in which the Oriental genius for tradition takes delight. I may say that our café is situated in the working quarter of Stamboul, near the bazaars. In the streets about it are the workshops of founders, carvers, engravers, who make or repair the beautiful weapons offered for sale in the Besestain. Then, too, there are those who make utensils of iron and copper, while different other trades are related to the various kinds of merchandise which are to be found on the stalls of the different parts of the great bazaar.

Consequently, to one of our men-about-town, the gathering would have appeared rather vulgar, though a few better dressed people were to be seen here and there on the benches and daïs.

It seemed that the story-teller we were to hear was a man of some renown. Besides those who were drinking coffee, a great host of simple listeners pressed outside. Silence was called for, and a young man, with a pale face, sparkling eyes and delicate features, with long hair escaping like that of the santons from beneath a cap not unlike a tarboosh or fez, came and sat down on a stool in a space of from four to five feet that was left. Coffee was brought to him, and everybody listened religiously, for, as was customary, each part of the story was to last for half-an-hour. These professional story-tellers are not poets, but rather rhapsodists; they arrange and develop a subject already treated in different ways or based upon ancient legends. In this way we find the adventure of Antar, Abou-Zeyd or Medjnoun revived with a thousand additions

A LEGEND IN A CAFÉ

or changes. This time we were to have a story intended to depict the glory of those ancient associations of workers to which the Orient has given birth.

“Praise be to Allah,” he said, “and to his favourite Ahmad, whose black eyes shine with so soft a splendour. He alone is the apostle of truth.”

Everybody cried: “*Amin!*”

THE STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING AND SOLIMAN PRINCE OF THE GENII

I

ADONIRAM

THAT he might serve the purposes of the great king Soliman Ben-Daoud, his servant Adoniram had, for ten years, bade farewell to sleep, to pleasure and the joys of the feast. The chief of those legions of workmen who, like innumerable swarms of bees, assisted in the building of those hives of gold, of cedar, of marble and of bronze which the king of Jerusalem intended for Adonai and the magnification of his own greatness, Master Adoniram spent his nights working upon his plans, and his days in modelling the colossal figures which were to adorn the building.

Not far from the unfinished temple, he had set up forges, where the sound of the hammer was heard without ceasing; underground foundries, where the molten bronze flowed along a hundred channels in the sand, and took the form of lions, tigers, winged dragons, cherubim, and even of those strange, lost genii . . . a race long lost in the distant past, half vanished from the memory of men.

There were more than a hundred thousand artisans at Adoniram's command, to carry out his vast conceptions: there were thirty thousand founders; the masons and the hewers of stone made up an army of eighty thousand men; threescore and ten thousand

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

labourers helped to carry the materials from place to place. Split up into a host of battalions, carpenters dispersed among the mountains, hewed down the age-old pines which stretch to the Scythian deserts, and the cedars on the tablelands of Lebanon. With his three thousand three hundred overseers, Adoniram maintained discipline and kept order among the masses of workers so that they worked without confusion.

Yet the restless soul of Adoniram watched with a kind of disdain over works even so great as these. To him it seemed a puny task to accomplish one of the seven marvels of the world. The further the work progressed, the more evident the weakness of the human race appeared to him, the more he lamented the insufficiency and the limited means at the disposal of his contemporaries. Eager to conceive, and yet more eager to carry out, Adoniram's fancy dreamed of giant tasks; his brain, like a fiery furnace, gave birth to wondrous monstrosities. His work seemed marvellous indeed to the princes of the Hebrews, and he alone thought scornfully of the labours to which he felt himself reduced.

He was a dark, mysterious creature. The king of Tyre, who had employed him, had sent him as a gift to Soliman. But no man knew what Adoniram's native land might be; no man could solve the mystery of his origin; no man could say where he had mastered the elements of a knowledge, so deep, so varied and so practical. It seemed that he was able to create anything, predict anything and do anything. But where he came from; to what people he belonged—this was a secret, and the best kept of all secrets: he would allow no one to question him upon the matter. His dislike for his fellows made him a stranger and alone among the lineage of the children of Adam;

ADONIRAM

his bold and striking genius set him far above the heads of men, who could never think of him as a brother. He had within him something of the spirit of light and of the genius of darkness.

He cared naught for women; they looked at him when none was watching and never spoke his name: he despised men; they could not meet the fire in his glance. He thought as little of the terror inspired by his majestic appearance, his tall strong figure, as of the impression created by his strange fascinating beauty. His heart was silent; only the activity of the artist animated hands that were fit to mould the world, and bowed shoulders that were meet to lift it.

If he had no friends, he had devoted slaves, and he had taken one companion, one only—a child, a young artist sprung from one of those Phœnician families, which had lately carried their lascivious divinities to the eastern shores of Asia Minor. Pale faced, a careful artist, a docile lover of nature, Benoni had passed his childhood in the schools, his youth beyond Syria, in those fertile regions where the Euphrates, still a modest rivulet, sees upon its banks only the shepherds whispering their songs in the shade of laurels starred with roses.

One day, at the hour when the sun begins to go down over the sea, one day when Benoni, standing before a block of wax, was delicately modelling a heifer, trying to get the elastic mobility of the muscles, Master Adoniram drew near, looked long upon the almost finished work, and frowned.

“Wasted labour!” he cried; “patience, good taste—nonsense! Not a scrap of genius! Not an element of will! Everything is in process of degeneration. Even now, isolation, diversity, contradiction, lack of

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

discipline, the instruments which always bring about the fall of an enervated people, are paralysing your miserable imaginations. Where are my men? my founders, my furnace-men, my smiths? Disappeared! At this hour, these stone cold furnaces should be roaring with a flame interminably fed; the clay should have received the imprint of the models my hands have formed. A thousand arms should be bending over the furnace; and here we are—alone.”

“Master,” said Benoni, softly, “these common men have not the genius which fires you; they need rest. The art which holds us captive, leaves their minds free. They have taken a holiday for the day. The command of Soliman the Wise has made this holiday a duty. Jerusalem is holding high festival.”

“Festival! What care I for festivals? Rest! I have never known the meaning of it. But idleness I cannot bear. What is this work we are about?—a tinsel temple, a palace for pride and sensual delight, a jewel that a firebrand would bring to ashes. And this they call creating for all time. One day, drawn by the greed for vulgar gain, hordes of conquerors, banded against this enfeebled people, will, in a few hours, pull down this fragile building, and nothing but a memory will be left. The things we have modelled will melt in the light of the torches like the snows of Lebanon when summer comes. And posterity when they pass through these deserted plains will say: ‘They were a poor and feeble nation, those Hebrews.’”

“What say you, Master?—a palace so magnificent . . . a temple, the richest, the vastest, the most substantial . . .”

“Vanity! Vanity! as my lord Soliman says, out of vanity. Know you what it was the sons of Enoch

ADONIRAM

made?—a nameless work which alarmed the Creator himself? He sent an earthquake and destroyed it, and, from the scattered materials of it, Babylon was built—a pretty town where ten chariots can drive at once upon the thickness of the walls. Do you know what a monument is? Have you ever seen the pyramids? They will last until the day when the mountains of *Kaf*, which engirdle the earth, shall fall into the abyss. No sons of Adam built them.”

“Yet it is said . . .”

“It is a lie: the Deluge left its mark upon their summit. Listen: two miles from here, as you go up the Kedron, there is a block of rock six hundred cubits square. Give me a hundred thousand skilled men with hammer and chisel, and out of that enormous mass I will carve the monstrous head of a sphinx . . . smiling and gazing implacably up at Heaven. And, above his clouds, Jehovah shall see it and grow pale with astonishment. There would be a monument for you. A hundred thousand years might pass, and the children of men would still say: ‘There a great people marked their passing by.’”

“My lord,” said Benoni shuddering, “whence has this rebel genius come?”

“These hills, which they call mountains, make me laugh. Still, if they were set one upon another, and colossal figures were carved at their corners—that would be something worth while. In the base there might be made a cavern vast enough to hold a legion of priests: they might put the ark there with its golden cherubim and the bits of stone they call tables. Then Jerusalem would have a temple. What we are doing is to lodge God like a rich banker from Memphis.”

“Your thoughts always lead you into impossible phantasies.”

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

“ We are born too late. The world is old, and old age is feeble. You are right. Decadence and decay ! you make a frozen copy of nature, you busy yourself like a housewife weaving a veil; your stupid mind becomes in turn the slave of a cow, a lion, a horse, a tiger, and the only aim in your work is, by imitation, to compete with a heifer, a lioness, a tigress, a mare. Those creatures do as much as you and more, for with form they transmit life. My child, that is not art. Art consists of creation. When you design one of those ornamentations which run along the friezes, do you content yourself with copying the flowers and leaves which cling to the soil? No, you invent, you allow your style to follow the fancies of your imagination, and mingle together the wildest phantasies. Very well, beside your man and your existing animals, why do you not try to find some unknown forms, beings without a name, incarnations before which man has recoiled, fearsome couplings, forms that are fit to command respect, gaiety, astonishment and terror? Do you remember the old Egyptians, the bold and simple artists of Assyria? Did not they tear from flanks of granite the sphinxes, the dog-headed monkeys, the basalt gods whose appearance angered old Daoud’s Jehovah? When, from age to age, men see those dreadful symbols, they will say that once indeed there were bold spirits. Did those men think of form? They scorned it, and, strong in their own inventions, they might cry to him who created all things: ‘ These creatures of granite, you know not what they are, and dare not give them life.’ But the manifold God of nature has bent you beneath his yoke; you are limited by matter, and your degenerate genius plunges into the vulgarity of form. Art is lost.”

ADONIRAM

“Whence,” said Benoni to himself, “comes this Adoniram, whose spirit passes beyond the bounds of mortal man?”

“Let us get back to the toys which are within the humble reach of the great King Soliman,” continued Adoniram, passing his hand over his broad forehead, and brushing back a forest of black, bushy hair. “Forty-eight brazen oxen of a fair size, as many lions, birds, palm-trees and cherubim. Surpassing nature in power of expression, perhaps, all that. I mean them to uphold a sea of bronze, ten cubits across, cast from a single stream, five cubits deep and with a border around it of thirty cubits, with mouldings for a decoration. But I have models to finish. The mould for the basin is ready. I am afraid it may crack with the heat of the sun; we ought to hurry; yet you see, my friend, the workmen have gone to the feast and leave me to my own devices. A feast, say you? What feast? On what occasion?”

Here the story-teller stopped, his half-hour was over. Then everyone was free to call for coffee, sherbet or tobacco. Some started a conversation on the merits of the story and its promise. One of the Persians near me said that he thought the story had been taken from the *Soliman-Nameh*.

During this *pause*, for so this moment of rest allowed the story-teller is called, while each evening's entertainment is called a *session*, a little boy whom he had brought with him went round the crowd, holding out to everyone in turn a wooden bowl which he took back filled with money to his master's feet. Then the story-teller continued with Benoni's reply to Adoniram.

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

II

BALKIS

“Several centuries before the Hebrews were taken into captivity in Egypt, Saba, the famous descendant of Abraham and Ketura, came and settled in the pleasant lands we call the Yemen, and there founded a city which, at first, was called after him, but is now known by the name of Mareb. Saba had a brother called Iarab, who bequeathed his name to the stony deserts of Arabia. His descendants carry their tents from one place to another, while the posterity of Saba continues to reign over the Yemen, a rich empire which now obeys the laws of Queen Balkis, the heiress of Saba in the direct line, as of Jochtan and the patriarch Heber, whose father was descended from Sem, the common father of the Hebrews and Arabs.”

“You begin your story interminably like an Egyptian book,” interrupted Adoniram impatiently, “and continue in the monotonous strain of Moussa-Ben-Amran (Moses), the wordy liberator of the seed of Jacoub. Men of words now take the place of men of action.”

“As those who dole out maxims succeed the inspired poets. In short, Master, the Queen of the South, the Princess of the Yemen, the divine Balkis, who has come to hear the wisdom of my lord Soliman, and admire the marvels of our skill, to-day is coming to Solime. Our workmen have flocked to meet her in the King’s train; the countryside is crowded with people, and the workshops are empty. I was one of the first to go. I looked upon the procession and returned to you.”

BALKIS

“Tell them that their masters are at hand, and they will fly to their feet . . . idleness, servility!”

“But mostly curiosity, and this you would understand, if . . . The stars of heaven are not so many as the warriors who accompany the Queen. Behind her follow sixty white elephants laden with towers, which blaze with silk and gold; a thousand Sabeans, with skins made golden by the sun, come then with camels that bend their knees beneath the weight of the baggage and presents of the princess. The Abyssinians come next, bearing light arms, whose hue is that of beaten copper. And everywhere a swarm of Ethiopians, black as ebony, leading the horses and the camels, obedient to every order and seeing to everything. Then—— But what use is it for me to tell you, since you will not deign to listen?”

“The Queen of the Sabeans,” murmured Adoniram dreamily; “a race degenerate indeed, but of pure blood, unmingled. What does she at this court?”

“Have I not told you, Adoniram? She comes to see a great king, to put his far-famed wisdom to the test, perhaps to find a weak place in it. She thinks, they say, of marrying Soliman-Ben-Daoud, hoping thereby to bear an heir worthy of her stock.”

“Madness!” cried the artist, furiously. “Madness! Slaves’ blood, blood of the vilest creatures! Soliman’s veins are full of it. Does the lioness unite with the dull domestic dog? For so many centuries has this people sacrificed on high places and yielded itself to strange women; its bastard generations have lost the vigour and the energy of their ancestors. Who is this peaceful Soliman? The son of a camp-follower and Daoud the old shepherd. Why, Daoud himself was a descendant of Ruth, a loose woman who fell at the feet of an Ephrata farmer from the land of Moab.

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

You admire this great people, my son; they are no more than a shadow, the race of warriors is extinct. This nation, at its zenith, is drawing near to its fall. Peace has enervated them; good living and the love of women make them prefer gold to iron, and the cunning disciples of a subtle, sensual monarch will henceforth be good for nothing other than to peddle merchandise and spread usury throughout the world. Would Balkis descend to such ignominies—she, the daughter of the patriarchs? Tell me, Benoni, she comes, does she not? This very evening she passes through the walls of Jerusalem.”

“To-morrow is the day of the Sabbath. Faithful to her religion, she has refused to enter a foreign city to-night, when the sun is not shining. She has had tents set up on the banks of the Kedron, and in spite of all the prayers of the King, for he has been to see her in splendid pomp, she insists on spending the night in the country.”

“Praised be her prudence! Is she still young?”

“Hardly can it be said that she is even young yet. Her beauty is overpowering. I glanced at her as one glances at the rising sun, which soon burns you and makes you lower your eyes. Every one who saw her fell prostrate; I like the rest. And when I rose again, I carried her image with me. But, Adoniram, night is falling, and I hear the workmen coming in a host to have their wages, for to-morrow is the Sabbath.”

Then there came the many leaders of the artisans. Adoniram set guardians at the entrance to the workshops, and, opening his huge chests, set to paying the workmen, who came before him one by one whispering in his ear mysterious words, for so many were they that it would have been hard to tell how much each man should have.

BALKIS

Now, on the day when they were enrolled, they each received a pass-word which they might not communicate to any other under pain of death, and this they swore with a solemn oath. The masters had a pass-word, the companions also had a pass-word, and neither had the same as that of the apprentices.

Then, as they passed before Adoniram and his overseers, they pronounced in a low voice the sacramental word, and Adoniram gave to each of them a different wage, according to the hierarchy of their duties.

When the ceremony was ended by the light of resin torches, Adoniram, who had determined to spend the night engaged upon his secret labours, dismissed the young Benoni, put out his torch, and going to his underground workshop, disappeared into the depth of the darkness.

At dawn the following day, Balkis, the Queen of the Morning, entered by the eastern gate of Jerusalem at the same moment as the first of the sun's beams. Awakened by the clatter of her attendants, the Hebrews ran to their doors, and the workmen followed the procession with noisy clamour. Never had been seen so many horses, so many camels, nor so rich a legion of white elephants with their attendant host of black Ethiopians.

Delayed by the interminable ceremonial of etiquette the great King Soliman had finished robing himself in magnificent garments, and was just, with difficulty, escaping from the hands of the officers of his wardrobe, when Balkis, leaving her litter at the vestibule of the palace, first saluted the sun, which was already rising in glory over the mountains of Galilee, and then went in.

Chamberlains, with tower-shaped head-dresses upon their heads, and long gilded staves in their hands, received the queen, and brought her to the room where

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

Soliman-Ben-Daoud was seated in the midst of his court, upon a high throne from which he hastened to descend, with all due dignity, to go and meet his august visitor.

The two sovereigns saluted one another with all that show of veneration which kings profess and like to inspire towards the royal majesty; then they sat down side by side, whilst the slaves laden with the presents of the Queen of Saba passed before them. There were gold, cinnamon, myrrh and, above all, incense, for in this the Yemen had a great trade; then, elephants' tusks, sachets of aromatic plants, and precious stones. She offered also to the monarch a hundred and twenty talents of pure gold.

Soliman was then approaching old age; but contentment, keeping his features in a state of perpetual serenity, had saved his face from the wrinkles and marks of deep passion. His full lips, projecting eyes, separated by a nose like a tower of ivory, as he himself had said by the mouth of the Shulamite, denoted the immutable peace and ineffable repose of a monarch content with his own majesty. Soliman was like a golden statue, with hands and face of ivory.

His crown was of gold, and his robe of gold; the purple of his mantle, a present from Hiram, prince of Tyre, was interwoven with a thread of gold; gold blazed upon his girdle and glittered on the hilt of his sword: his golden shoes rested on a carpet edged with gold; his throne was made of gilded cedar.

Seated at his side, the fair Queen of the Morning, wrapped in a cloud of linen draperies and transparent gauzes, seemed like a lily that has come by accident into a bed of jonquils. A clever piece of coquetry, which she made more effective still by asking pardon for the simplicity of her morning robes.

BALKIS

“Simplicity of dress,” she said, “befits the wealthy, and is not unbecoming to greatness.”

“The beauty of the divine,” said Soliman, “may trust in its own power, but the man who is conscious of his weakness should neglect no precaution.”

“What delightful modesty, enhancing the glory which surrounds the invincible Soliman—Ecclesiastes, the sage, the arbiter of kings, the immortal author of that tender love-song the *Sir Hasirim*, and so many other flowers of poetry.”

“What! exquisite Queen,” said Soliman blushing with delight. “Have you indeed deigned to glance at . . . my feeble attempts?”

“You are a great poet,” cried the Queen of Saba.

Soliman puffed out his golden chest, raised his golden arm, and passed his hand complacently over his ebony beard, divided into several tresses, and tied with little knots of gold.

“A great poet!” repeated Balkis, “so that men pardon you while they smile at the errors of the moralist.”

This conclusion, which was hardly expected, prolonged the lines of Soliman’s august face, and caused a certain commotion in the crowd of courtiers who were nearest. These were Zabud, the prince’s favourite, laden with precious stones, Sadoc the high priest, with his son Azariah, comptroller of the palace, a haughty man with his inferiors; then Ahia, Elioreph, the high chancellor, Josaphat, the master of the archives, and rather deaf. Standing, in a dark-coloured robe, was Ahias of Silo, an upright man, feared for his prophetic genius, and somewhat dull and taciturn. Quite close to the sovereign, seated in the middle of three mountainous cushions, was the old Banaias, the peacefully inclined commander-in-chief of the tranquil armies

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

of the placid Soliman. Decked in golden chains and jewelled suns, bent beneath a load of honours, Banaïas was the demi-god of war. Once the King had bade him kill Joab and the high priest Abiathar, and Banaïas had stabbed them both. Ever since that day he seemed to the wise Soliman worthy of the greatest confidence; the King ordered him to kill his younger brother, the prince Adoniah, son of King Daoud, and Banaïas strangled the brother of the wise Soliman.

Now, lulled to sleep by glory, weighed down by years, Banaïas, in his dotage, followed the court everywhere, hearing nothing, understanding nothing, keeping his failing life within him by warming his heart in the light of the smile which his King allowed to shine upon him. His faded eyes never ceased to follow the King's glance: in his old age the ancient wolf-hound had become a lap-dog.

When from the adorable lips of Balkis these striking words had fallen, throwing the court into consternation, Banaïas, who had not understood a single one of them, but who accompanied with an admiring cry each word the King or his guest uttered, Banaïas, alone, amid the general silence, cried with a benign smile: "Charming! Divine!"

Soliman bit his lips, and murmured in a manner that could not be mistaken: "What a fool!" "Words to be remembered!" went on Banaïas, perceiving that his master had spoken.

Then the Queen of Saba burst out laughing.

With a presence of mind which everyone thought remarkable, she chose that particular moment to present one after the other three riddles for the famous wisdom of Soliman to solve, for he was the cleverest of mortals in the art of guessing riddles and

BALKIS

unravelling charades. It was the custom of those days: courts used to busy themselves with science, but they gave it up deliberately, and the solving of riddles became an affair of statesmanship. By his skill therein, a prince or sage was judged. Balkis had come two hundred and sixty leagues to put Soliman to this test.

Soliman interpreted the three enigmas without hesitation, thanks to the high priest Sadoc, who, the evening before, had bought the solutions with ready money from the high priest of the Sabeans.

“Through your mouth, wisdom speaks,” said the Queen with a certain emphasis.

“Some indeed suppose it.”

“But, noble Soliman, the cultivation of the tree of wisdom is not without its dangers. In the long run, one becomes apt to seek too eagerly for praise; to flatter men to please them, to lower oneself to material things to gain the suffrages of the crowd.”

“Have you then noticed in my works . . . ?”

“Ah, my lord, I have read them with much attention; and as I am anxious to learn, my desire to submit to you certain obscure points, certain contradictions, certain . . . sophisms—or such they seem to my eyes, doubtless on account of my lack of knowledge—my desire is not unconnected with the purpose of this long journey.”

“We will do our best,” said Soliman, not without a certain air of self-sufficiency, “to uphold our ideas against so redoubtable an enemy.”

As a matter of fact, he would have given a great deal to have been able to go out all by himself, and take a walk beneath the sycamores of his villa at Mello. Eager not to miss anything of so striking a spectacle, the courtiers were stretching out their necks and open-

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

ing wide their eyes. What could be worse than having to run the risk of ceasing to be infallible in the presence of his subjects? Sadoc seemed alarmed: the prophet Ahas of Silo scarcely repressed a frigid smile, and Banaias, playing with his decorations, manifested a stupid joy which threw ridicule upon the King's side at the outset. The attendants of Balkis were silent and imperturbable, like so many Sphinxes. Now, the Queen of Saba combined the majesty of a goddess with the most entrancing beauty. Eyes as dark as those of a gazelle enhanced the charm of a countenance that was itself perfection. So large were they, so long, that even from the side they seemed to be looking straight at those at whom they simply glanced. A mouth that ever seemed to hesitate between laughter and love; a supple form whose exquisite grace might be divined through the thin veils that covered it; an expression in which were united that delicacy, that air of mockery and assurance, which are the characteristics of those of high degree, to whom the exercise of power is an ordinary thing. Conceive of all these in one person, and you will understand the embarrassment of Soliman, checked and yet fascinated, desirous of gaining the victory by his wits, yet already half vanquished in his heart. Those great black eyes, gentle and mysterious, calm and penetrating, that mocked him from a face as keen and clear as newly cast bronze, troubled him in spite of himself. It seemed as though the ideal, mystic figure of the goddess Isis had come to life beside him.

Then they embarked upon those heated, quick discussions upon philosophical points which the books of the Hebrews describe. They were a custom of the period.

“Do you not counsel,” said the Queen, “selfishness

BALKIS

and hardness of heart when you say: 'If you accept responsibility for your friend, you have fallen into a trap; take the garment from him who has pledged himself for another'? And in another proverb, you sing the praises of riches and the power of gold."

"Elsewhere I extol poverty."

"That is a contradiction. Ecclesiastes encourages man to work, calls shame upon the idle, and then cries: 'What shall save man from all his labours? Is it not better to eat and drink?' In your proverbs you brand debauchery, and in Ecclesiastes you praise it."

"You must be joking. . . ."

"No, I will quote you: 'I have found that there is nothing better than rejoicing and the enjoyment of wine; that labour is a foolish care, for men die, like to the beasts, and their end is the same.' That, O wise one, is your teaching."

"I speak in figures, and the basis of my teaching . . ."

"This is it; and others, alas, found it before you. 'Take pleasure with women all the days of thy life, for that is thy lot in labour . . .' etc. . . . You often say the same thing. So I have come to the conclusion that it suits you to materialise your people so that you may make them slaves more obedient to your commands."

Soliman had had his reasons, but he did not care to produce them before his subjects, and shifted impatiently upon his throne.

"Finally," said Balkis, with a smile accompanied by a languishing glance, "you are cruel to our sex; and what woman is there who would dare to love the austere Soliman?"

"O Queen, my heart has outpoured itself like the dew of spring upon the flowers of the passion of love in the Song of Songs."

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

“An exception of which the Shulamite must be proud; but as you have felt the weight of years, you have become sterner.”

Soliman repressed a sour grimace. “I see,” said the Queen, “that you are going to make some gallant and polite remark. Take care! Ecclesiastes will hear you, and you know what he says: ‘Woman is bitterer than death; her heart is a snare, and her hands are fetters. The servant of God will flee her, and the fool will be ensnared.’ Do you follow these austere maxims yourself, and is it the misfortune of the daughters of Sion that the heavens have bestowed on you that beauty which you yourself so sincerely describe in the words: ‘I am the flower of the fields and the lily of the valleys’?”

“Queen, that is but another metaphor.”

“O King, it is only my own opinion. I pray you, think upon these difficulties I have raised, and shed light upon the darkness of my judgment, for surely I am wrong, whereas wisdom, as you yourself have aid, dwells ever within you. ‘They shall know,’ you say, ‘the power of my spirit; the most mighty shall be astonished when they see me, and the faces of the princes shall bear witness to their admiration. When I am silent, they shall wait until I speak; when I speak, they shall look upon me with attention; and when I hold discourse, they shall set their hands upon their lips.’ Great King, a part of these truths I have come to realise already: your intelligence has delighted me, your appearance has surprised me, and I doubt not that my face has borne witness to my admiration. I wait upon your words; they shall find me attentive, and during your discourse, your servant shall set her hands upon her lips.”

“Madam,” said Soliman with a deep sigh, “what

BALKIS

can the wise man do when he is near you? Since he has heard you speak, Ecclesiastes would dare to maintain but one of all his theories, for of that he feels the truth in himself: 'Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.'"

The courtiers expressed their admiration at the King's reply. "Ah," said the Queen to herself, "a pedant will have pedants for his servants. If only he could be cured of this mania for writing! For all that, he is gentle, pleasant and well enough preserved."

Soliman, putting off his answers to the Queen's problems till another time, tried, quite contrary to his usual custom, to turn the conversation away from himself. "Your Serenity," he said to the Queen, "has there a very handsome bird of some species unknown to me."

Six little negroes, dressed in scarlet, who sat at the Queen's feet, were charged with the care of this bird which never left its mistress. One of the pages held it upon his wrist, and the princess of Saba often looked at it.

"We call it *Hud-Hud*,"* she said. "The ancestor of this bird, which lives for many years, was, we are told, brought by the Malays from a far-off land which they alone have seen, and we no longer know. It is most useful to send upon commissions to the spirits of the air and those who dwell therein."

Soliman, though he did not quite understand this simple statement, bowed like a king who has understood perfectly, and put out his thumb and first finger to play with the bird *Hud-Hud*; but the bird, while it replied to his advances, did not in any way further the King's efforts to take hold of it.

"*Hud-Hud* is a poet," said the Queen, "and consequently worthy of your sympathies. But, like myself,

* The hoopoe, a bird of omen among the Arabs.

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

she is rather severe, and often she, too, moralises. Would you believe it—she has taken it into her head to doubt the sincerity of your passion for the Shulamite?”

“Divine bird, how you surprise me!” said Soliman.

“‘That pastoral of the Song is certainly very tender,’ Hud-Hud said one day, nibbling at a golden scarab, ‘but would not the great King who addresses such plaintive elegies to his wife, the daughter of Pharaoh, have shown his love better by living with her, than by compelling her to live far from him in the city of Daoud, with no better consolation for the sorrows of her neglected youth than strophes . . . even though, in truth, they are the most perfect in the world?’”

“What sufferings you bring back to my memory! Alas, that daughter of the night was a worshipper of Isis. Could I, without sin, open to her the gates of the holy city; set her beside the ark of Adonai, and let her draw near that august temple which I am raising to the God of my fathers?”

“It is a delicate subject,” Balkis observed; “you must forgive Hud-Hud. Birds are sometimes thoughtless, and mine prides herself upon being a connoisseur, especially in matters of poetry.”

“Really?” said Soliman-Ben-Daoud. “I should like to know . . .”

“Spite, my lord—just spite, I assure you. Hud-Hud thinks fit to find fault with your comparison of your lover’s beauty with that of the steeds in Pharaoh’s chariot; of her name with that of an oil, her hair with herds of goats, her teeth with sheep close-cropped and with young, her cheeks to the half of a pomegranate, her breasts to two kids, her head to Mount Carmel, her navel to a cup wherein there is always liquor, her

BALKIS

belly to a heap of wheat, and her nose to the tower of Lebanon which looks towards Damascus."

Soliman was hurt, and his golden arms fell upon the arms of the chair, which were golden also. The bird, puffing itself out, beat the air with its wings of green and gold.

"The answer I have to make to the bird which so well serves your fondness for mockery is that the taste of the Orient allows these licences; that genuine poetry always tries to find expression in images; that my subjects find my verses excellent, and the richer the metaphors, the more they enjoy them."

"Nothing is more dangerous to a nation than the metaphors of kings," continued the Queen of Saba. "When they come from an august pen, such metaphors, which are apt to be too bold, find more imitators than critics, and your sublime phantasies may lead poets to go astray for ten thousand years. Does not the Shulamite, taking a leaf from your own book, compare your hair to the branches of palm-trees, your lips to lilies that distil myrrh, your figure to that of the cedar, your legs to columns of marble, and your cheeks, my lord, to little beds of aromatic flowers, planted by perfumers? So much so, that I always imagined King Soliman to be a kind of peristyle, with a botanical garden hanging over an entablature shaded by palm-trees."

Soliman smiled with a certain amount of bitterness. He would have liked to wring the bird's neck, as, with a strange persistence, it pecked his chest somewhere in the neighbourhood of the heart.

"Hud-Hud is trying to make you understand that the source of poetry is in the heart," said the Queen.

"I realise it only too well," replied the King, "since I have had the pleasure of looking upon you. Let us cease this discussion. Will my Queen do her

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

unworthy servant the honour of visiting Jerusalem, my palace, and especially the temple which I am building to Jehovah on Mount Sion?"

"The world has resounded with the story of its marvels, and my impatience is proportionate to its splendour. It will be exactly what I most desire, if we delay no longer the pleasure I had promised myself."

At the head of the procession, as it went slowly through the streets of Jerusalem, there were forty-two drums which sounded with a dull roar like thunder; behind them came the musicians, wearing white robes, under the direction of Asaph and Idithmes; fifty-six cymbal-players, twenty-eight flautists, as many performers upon the psaltery and cithara, not to speak of the trumpets, which instrument Gideon had made fashionable beneath the walls of Jericho. Then, in three rows, came the thurifers, walking backwards, waving their censers to and fro, with the perfumes of the Yemen. Soliman and Balkis lay at ease upon a huge palanquin, borne by threescore and ten Philistines conquered in battle.

The *session* was ended. Those who had been present, separated, discussing the different incidents in the story, and we arranged to meet again the following day.

III

THE TEMPLE

Newly rebuilt by the magnificent Soliman, the story-teller continued, the city was arranged upon a plan that could not have been more perfect: streets were set out by rule and line, the square houses were all

THE TEMPLE

exactly alike, so that they looked just as monotonously regular as a bee-hive.

“In these beautiful broad streets,” said the Queen, “the cold wind from the sea, which nothing can stop, must sweep the passers-by like blades of straw; and during the hot weather, the sun, since it finds no obstacle in its way, must roast them till they are as hot as a furnace. At Mahreb, the streets are narrow, and pieces of material stretched across the public way from house to house, encourage the breezes, cast a shade upon the ground, and keep it cool.”

“But at the cost of symmetry,” said Soliman. “Here we are at the peristyle of my new palace. It has taken thirteen years to build.”

They went round the palace, and it met with the approval of the Queen of Saba, who declared it rich, convenient, original, and in excellent taste.

“The plan is admirable,” said she, “the arrangement perfect, and, I must admit, the palace of my ancestors, the Hemiarites, built in the Indian style, with square columns, and figures in the place of capitals, does not approach it either in grace or elegance. Your architect is a great artist.”

“It was I who gave all the orders, and have paid the workmen,” said the King with pride.

“But who made the plans? who is the genius who has brought your scheme to such a noble fruition?”

“A certain Adoniram—a queer, half-wild fellow. He was sent to me by my friend the King of the Tyrians.”

“Shall I not see him, my lord?”

“He flees society, and hates to be praised. But what will you say, Queen, when you have seen the temple of Adonai? That is no common craftsman’s work. It was I who gave directions and determined

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

the materials that should be used. Adoniram had to follow the flights of my poetic imagination. They have been working on it for five years, and it will be another two before it is finished."

"So seven years will be enough to find a shelter worthy of your God, though it took thirteen to construct a suitable establishment for his servant?"

"Time does not enter into the matter," objected Soliman.

Balkis had admired the palace extremely, and just as extremely she found fault with the temple.

"You have tried to do too much," she said, "and the artist has not been granted so much liberty. Taken as a whole, it seems heavy, and it is overloaded with detail. There is too much wood, too much cedar everywhere, great beams . . . The boarded aisles look as though they were supporting the upper courses of stone, and so one gets the idea that it lacks solidity."

"My idea," said the Prince, "was to prepare for the magnificence of the interior by a striking contrast."

The Queen had now reached the inner part.

"Heavens!" she cried, "what sculptures! What wonderful statues, what strange, imposing figures of animals. Who cast, who carved, these marvels?"

"Adoniram. He excels in statuary."

"His genius is universal. But, those cherubim seem too heavy, over-gilded, too big for the hall. They seem to overwhelm it."

"I wished them to be so: each of them has cost six score talents. You see, Queen, everything here is of gold, and gold is the most precious of all things. The cherubim are of gold; the columns of cedar, a gift from my friend Hiram, are covered with plates of gold; there is gold on all the walls, and on those golden

THE TEMPLE

walls there will be golden palms and a frieze of pomegranates of solid gold, and I am having two hundred shields of pure gold hung along the golden partitions. Altars, tables, candlesticks, vases, floors, and ceilings, all will be covered with plates of gold.

"It seems a great amount of gold," the Queen objected modestly.

Soliman the King replied:

"Is anything too splendid for the ruler of men? I mean to astound posterity. But let us go into the sanctuary. It is still without a roof, but the foundations of the altar have been laid, opposite my throne which is almost finished. As you see, there are six steps; the seat is of ivory, carried upon two lions, with a dozen cubs couching at the feet. The gold has still to be burnished, and we are waiting for the daïs to be set up. Noble Princess, will you not be the first to sit upon this still virgin throne, and from it look upon the work as a whole. Only you will suffer from the rays of the sun, for the canopy is not yet in position."

The Princess smiled, and took the bird Hud-Hud upon her wrist. The courtiers looked at it with keen curiosity.

No bird is more famous or more respected in all the Orient. Not for the fineness of its black beak, or its scarlet cheeks; not for the softness of its hazel eyes, or the magnificent crest of tiny golden feathers which crowns its pretty head; not for the long tail as black as jet, or the glory of the green-gold wings, enhanced by stripes and fringes of a brighter gold, or for the spurs of tender pink, the purple claws, was the lively Hud-Hud beloved by the Queen and her subjects. Beautiful without consciousness of the fact, faithful to its mistress, good-natured to all who loved it, the

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

hoopoe had all the beauty of that simple grace which does not strive after effect. The Queen, as we have seen, consulted this bird whenever she was in difficulties.

Soliman, who was anxious to find his way into the good graces of Hud-Hud, chose this moment to try and get the bird upon his wrist; but it seemed in no way inclined to go. Balkis, smiling artfully, called her favourite to her, and seemed to whisper a few words. Quick as an arrow, Hud-Hud disappeared in the blue sky.

Then the Queen sat down, and the courtiers grouped themselves about her. There was a few moments' conversation. The Prince explained to his guest the scheme for a sea of bronze which Adoniram had designed, and the Queen of Saba, filled with admiration, again requested that this man should be presented to her. At the King's command, people went everywhere to try and find the sombre Adoniram.

While they were running to the forges, and about the buildings, Balkis, who had made the King of Jerusalem sit near her, asked him how the canopy for his throne was to be decorated.

"It will be decorated like everything else," replied Soliman.

"If you show this exclusive fondness for gold, are you not afraid of seeming to scorn the other materials that Adonai has created? Do you think that nothing in the world is finer than this metal? Allow me to suggest a change, and you yourself shall decide whether it is for the better or not."

Suddenly the air grew darker, and the sky was covered with black dots which grew larger as they approached; clouds of birds descended upon the temple, gathered and came down, pressing one against the

THE TEMPLE

other, forming a splendid, trembling foliage. Their outspread wings seemed like rich bouquets of green and scarlet, jet black and azure. This living canopy spread itself out under the clever direction of the hoopoe, which flew about among the feathered host. A delightful tree had taken shape over the heads of the two Princes, and of that tree each bird became a leaf. Soliman, perplexed yet enchanted, found himself sheltered from the sun beneath this living roof, which quivered, supported itself with a beating of wings, and cast over the throne a thick shade, whence came the sweet, soft music of singing birds. After this, the hoopoe, for whom the King still felt a trace of dislike, came and rested obediently at the Queen's feet.

"What does my lord think of this?" asked Balkis.

"Marvellous," cried Soliman, trying to attract the hoopoe, which obstinately kept at a distance, a fact which the Queen did not fail to notice with some degree of interest.

"If this fancy pleases you," continued the Queen, "I offer you with pleasure this little canopy of birds, provided you do not insist that I should gild them. All you need to do is to turn the bezel of this ring, whenever it pleases you to summon them. This is a precious ring. I have it from my fathers, and Sarahil, my nurse, will scold me when she finds I have given it to you."

"Ah, great Queen," cried Soliman, kneeling before her, "you are worthy to command men, kings, and elements alike. May Heaven and your own kindness grant that you accept the half of a throne where you will find at your feet the most obedient of your subjects."

"Your suggestion is flattering," said Balkis, "and we will speak of it again."

They both went down from the throne, with the

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

procession of birds accompanying them, forming different ornamental figures above their heads.

When they came to the site where the foundations of the altar had been laid, the Queen perceived an enormous vine root, pulled up, and thrown on one side. Her face became thoughtful, she made a gesture of surprise, the hoopoe uttered plaintive cries, and the cloud of birds flew away as fast as it could.

A certain severity came into Balkis's eyes; her majestic figure appeared to grow taller, and in a solemn prophetic voice she said: "The ignorance and levity of men! the vanity of pride! You have made the tomb of your fathers a monument for your own glory. This trunk of a vine, this venerable wood . . ."

"Queen, it was in our way. It was pulled up to make room for the altar of porphyry and olive wood, which is to have four golden Seraphs to adorn it."

"You have profaned, you have destroyed the first vine plant, that which was planted by the hands of the father of the race of Sem, the patriarch Noah."

"Is it possible?" replied Soliman, profoundly humiliated. "How can you tell?"

"Instead of maintaining that greatness is the source of knowledge, I have believed the contrary, O King, and I have made of study a fervent religion. Listen, O man blinded by vain splendour. This wood, which your impiety condemns to perish, do you know what destiny the immortal powers hold in store for it?"

"Speak."

"It is to be the instrument of torture whereon the last Prince of your race shall be nailed."

"Let it then be sawn asunder, this impious wood, and burned to ashes."

"Fool! who can wipe out what has been written in the Book of God? What success would your wisdom

THE TEMPLE

have, were it to take the place of the divine wisdom? Prostrate yourself before decrees which your material mind cannot fathom; that torture alone will save your name from oblivion, and shed upon your house the light of an immortal glory."

Soliman the Great tried in vain to hide his uneasiness under an appearance of mockery and amusement. Then men came saying that the sculptor Adoniram had at last been found.

Soon, Adoniram, announced by the shouts of the crowd, appeared at the entrance to the temple. Benoni accompanied his master and his friend, who came forward with keen eye and thoughtful brow, untidy, like an artist who has been roughly torn away from his inspirations and his labours. No trace of curiosity weakened the noble expression of strength in the features of this man, less imposing, by his great stature, than by the serious, bold, dominating character of his handsome face.

He halted, calmly and proudly, without familiarity yet without disdain, a few steps from Balkis, who could not meet that sharp, eagle-like glance without a feeling of confused shyness.

But she quickly mastered this involuntary feeling. A rapid consideration of the position of this master-workman, standing before her, with arms bare and chest uncovered, brought her to herself. She smiled at her own embarrassment, pleased perhaps to feel herself so young, and condescended to speak to the craftsman.

He answered, and his voice struck the Queen like the echo of some fugitive memory, though she did not know him, and had never seen him before.

Such is the power of genius, that beauty of the soul. Souls cling to it, and cannot be torn away from it.

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

Adoniram's conversation made the Princess of the Sabeans forget everything about her; and while the artist pointed out the work that was being planned, Balkis, in spite of herself, followed him, as the King and the courtiers followed the divine Princess.

She never wearied of questioning Adoniram about his work, his country and the place of his birth.

"Madam," he replied with some embarrassment, fixing a piercing gaze upon her, "I have travelled through many lands; my native land is everywhere the sun shines; my first years were spent along the mighty slopes of Lebanon, from which Damascus can be seen, far off upon the plain. Nature and man have carved those mountainous countries, that bristle with threatening cliffs and ruins."

"It is not in such desert places," said the Queen, "that men learn the secrets of the arts in which you excel."

"There, at least, thought grows mightier, the imagination awakes from slumber, and, by dint of meditation, a man learns to conceive. Solitude was my first master; since then, upon my travels, I have only made use of the lessons I learned from it. I have turned my gaze upon the past; I have looked upon its monuments, and I have shunned the society of human beings."

"And why, master?"

"A man finds little to please him in the company of his fellows . . . and I felt lonely."

This mingling of greatness and of sorrow moved the Queen. She lowered her eyes, and gave herself over to reflection.

"You see," continued Adoniram, "I deserve little credit for practising the arts; my apprenticeship cost me nothing. I found my models in the deserts; I

THE TEMPLE

simply reproduce my own impressions of those unknown fragments, those terrible and splendid figures of the gods of the old world."

"More than once already"—Soliman interrupted with a firmness that the Queen had not yet seen in him—"more than once, Master, I have reprovèd in you, as an idolatrous tendency, this fervent worship of the monuments of an unclean theogony. Keep your thoughts to yourself, and let neither bronze nor stone show any trace of them to the King."

Soliman bowed, hiding a bitter smile.

"My lord," said the Queen to console him, "the master's thoughts doubtless rise above considerations which might disturb the conscience of the Levites. In his artist's soul, he tells himself that everything that is beautiful glorifies God, and with a simple piety he seeks the beautiful."

"Am I to know," said Adoniram, "what they were in their day, these gods, dead and turned to stone by the genii of other days. Who should be disturbed by them? Soliman, the King of Kings, demanded prodigies from me, and I could not fail to remember that the ancestors of the world have left wonders behind them."

"If your work is beautiful and sublime," said the Queen quickly, "it will be orthodox, and posterity will copy you in its turn, that it too may be orthodox."

"Great Queen, Queen truly great, your intelligence is as pure as your beauty."

"These fragments," Balkis hastily interrupted, "were they many upon the slopes of Lebanon?"

"Whole cities buried in a shroud of sand that the wind raises and puts back again; and underground chambers of superhuman workmanship known to me alone. Working for the birds of the air and the stars

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

of the sky, I wandered here and there, sketching figures on the rocks, and carving them in the mass. One day . . . But am I not exhausting the patience of my august hearers?"

"No, your story fascinates me."

"Shaken by the mallet which buried my chisel in the entrails of the rock, the earth sounded hollow beneath my feet. With a lever, I rolled the rock back. It masked the entrance to a cavern, and into the cavern I rushed. It was cut in the solid rock, supported by huge columns covered with mouldings, strange designs, and their capitals served as roots for the ribs of arches marvellously bold. Through the arcades of this forest of stone, motionless and smiling, as they had been for millions of years, were legions of colossal figures. All were different, and their appearance filled me with a mad terror. There were men, giants who have disappeared from our world, symbolic animals belonging to vanished species; all the magnificence which a delirious imagination would hardly dare to conceive in dreams. There I lived for months and years, seeking inspiration from those spectres of a dead world, and there I received the tradition of my art, amid those marvels of primitive genius."

"The fame of those nameless works has come down to our own time," said Soliman thoughtfully. "There, they say, in those accursed lands, rise the fragments of that impious city submerged by the waters of the Flood, the vestiges of the evil Enochia, built by the giant lineage of Tubal; the city of the sons of Cain. Anathema upon that art of sin and darkness. Our new temple reflects the brightness of the sun, its lines are simple and pure; and order, unity of plan, express the uprightness of our faith in terms of style, in this abode which I am building for the Eternal.

THE TEMPLE

Such is our will; it is that of Adonai himself, who told it to my father.

“King,” cried Adoniram wildly, “your plans have been followed in the main. God will recognise your obedience, but I have determined that the world shall marvel at your greatness.”

“O man of skill and cunning. Tempt not your lord the King. It was to this end that you have cast these monsters, that command both admiration and terror; these giant idols which rebel against the types made sacred by the Hebraic rite. But take care: the strength of Adonai is with me, and my offended might shall grind Baal to powder.”

“Be merciful, O King,” the Queen of Saba said softly, “with this man who has wrought the monument of your glory. Centuries pass away, and human destiny progresses as the will of the Creator would have it progress. To interpret His works more nobly is not to slight Him, and is there really need for us eternally to reproduce the frigid stillness of those hieratic forms the Egyptians have handed down to us; to leave, as they did, the statue half buried in a sepulchre of granite from which it cannot free itself, and represent slave genii enfeathered in the stone? Great Prince, we should dread, as a dangerous negation, the idolatry of routine.”

Offended by this opposition, but under the spell of a charming smile from the Queen, Soliman allowed her to compliment the genius whom he himself admired, not without despute, for, usually indifferent to praise, Adoniram now welcomed it with a new delight.

The three great personages were then at the outer peristyle of the temple, situated upon a high, quadrangular plateau, from which could be seen great stretches of rough and mountainous country. A

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

great crowd covered the fields and the ground near the city built by Daoud (David). That they might look upon the Queen of Saba from near or far, the whole people had invaded the neighbourhood of the palace and the temple; the masons had left the quarries of Gilboa; the carpenters had deserted their distant sawmills; the miners had come up to the surface. The Queen's renown, as she passed from one district to another, had set these crowds of workers in movement and brought them all towards the centre of their work.

There they were, pell-mell, women, children, soldiers, merchants, workmen, slaves and peaceful citizens of Jerusalem; plains and valleys could hardly hold their huge assembly, and for more than a mile the Queen's eye rested, astonished, upon a sea of human heads which stretched in an amphitheatre back to the horizon. Clouds, coming before the sun which flooded the scene, cast upon this living sea occasional patches of shade.

"Your people," said Queen Balkis, "are more numerous than the sand of the sea."

"People of every land have come to see you; and indeed it astounds me that the whole world does not this day besiege Jerusalem. Thanks to you, the countryside is deserted; the town is abandoned, even by the indefatigable workmen of Master Adoniram."

"Truly," interrupted the Princess of Saba, who was trying to find some way of paying honour to the artist, "in any other country, workers like those of Adoniram would themselves be masters. They are the soldiers of this leader of an army of artists. Master Adoniram, we would review your workmen, congratulate them, and compliment you in their presence."

Soliman the Wise, at these words, raised both arms above his head in astonishment.

THE TEMPLE

“What?” he cried, “collect the workmen of the temple, scattered among the crowd, dispersed upon the hillsides, and mingling everywhere with the others? They are many, and one might try in vain to bring together in a few hours so many men, coming, as they do, from every land, speaking different tongues, from the Sanskrit of the Himalayas to the obscure, guttural jargon of Lybia.”

“Do not let that trouble you, my lord,” Adoniram said simply; “the Queen could ask nothing impossible, and a few minutes will be enough.”

So saying, Adoniram, standing at the outer gate, upon a block of granite that was near at hand, turned towards that innumerable host and gazed upon it. He made a sign, and the waves of that sea grew pale, for all raised and held up to him their fresh faces.

The crowd was attentive and wondering. Adoniram raised his right arm, and, with his open hand, traced a horizontal line in the air, then from its middle brought down a perpendicular, sketching two right angles, as though with a plummet hanging from a rule, and so the sign with which the Syrians depict the letter T, handed down to the Phœnicians by the peoples of India, who called it *tha*, and afterwards taught to the Greeks, who call it *tau*.

In these ancient idioms, by hieroglyphic analogy designing the tools of the mason’s profession, the T was a rallying sign.

So, hardly had Adoniram traced it in the air, than a singular movement appeared in the host of people. That human sea became troubled, agitated, waves rose in different parts, as if a whirlwind had suddenly fallen upon it. At first, there was only general confusion; people scurried in different directions. Soon groups began to mark themselves out, grew

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

larger, came apart; spaces were cleared; legions began to form in order; a part of the multitude was pushed back; thousands of men, under the orders of unknown leaders, formed up like an army in three principal bodies, subdivided into distinct cohorts, in close order and in depth.

Then, while Soliman was trying to understand this magic power of Adoniram, the mass broke, and a hundred thousand men in their ranks advanced silently upon Master Adoniram from three sides at once. Their heavy regular steps shook the countryside. In the centre were the masons and all who worked in stone: first the masters, then the companions, and, behind them, the apprentices. On their right, in the same order, the carpenters, the joiners, the sawyers and the hewers. On their left, the founders, the chisellers, the smiths, the miners, and all who worked in metals.

More than a hundred thousand craftsmen, on they came, like great waves breaking upon the shore.

Soliman, troubled, drew back two or three paces; turned round and saw behind him the glittering but feeble cortège of priests and courtiers.

Tranquil and serene, Adoniram stood beside the two monarchs. He stretched out his arm: the host halted, and bending low before the Queen, he said: "Your orders are obeyed."

Almost would she have cast herself upon the ground before this terrible and occult power, so sublime did Adoniram seem to her in his strength and simplicity.

But she recollected herself, and with a gesture, greeted the army of the gathered guilds. Then, taking from her neck a magnificent collar of pearls, to which was attached a sun of precious stones, framed in a triangle of gold, a symbolic ornament, she seemed to

THE TEMPLE

offer it to the craftsmen, and then went towards Adoniram, who, bent before her, trembled, as he felt the precious gift fall over his shoulders and half-bared chest.

At that moment, a tremendous shout went up from the depths of the crowd, in answer to the Queen of Saba's generous action. While the artist's head was near the radiant countenance and fast beating bosom of the Princess, she said to him in a low voice: "Master, be on your guard. Take care."

Adoniram lifted his great startled eyes to her, and Balkis was astonished at the penetrating sweetness in that proud gaze.

"Who," thought Soliman, as in a dream, "is this mortal who commands men as the Queen commands the dwellers in the air? With a wave of the hand, he assembles an army; my people are at his beck and call, and my rule is confined to a wretched herd of courtiers and priests. With a movement of his eyelids, he could be king in Israel."

These thoughts prevented him from watching the face of Balkis, who was following with her eyes the true leader of this nation, a king by his intelligence and genius, the peaceful patient arbiter of the destinies of the Lord's elect.

They returned to the palace in silence; the existence of the people had just been revealed to Soliman the Wise, who thought he knew everything, yet had not suspected this one fact. Beaten upon the field of doctrine; vanquished by the Queen of Saba, who commanded the creatures of the air; vanquished by a craftsman who commanded men, Ecclesiastes, looking into the future, thought upon the destiny of kings, and said: "These priests, once my teachers, now my counsellors, whose duty it is to tell me all, have dis-

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

guised all, and hidden my ignorance from me. Oh, the blind trust of kings! Oh, the vanity of wisdom! Vanity! Vanity!"

While the Queen, too, was given over to her thoughts, Adoniram went back to his workshop, resting familiarly upon his pupil Benoni, who was intoxicated with enthusiasm and declaiming upon the unparalleled graces and intelligence of Balkis the Queen.

But, more now than ever, the master kept silence. Pale and breathing heavily, he sometimes struck his broad chest with his clenched fist. Back in the sanctuary of his workshop, he shut himself up alone, glanced at a roughly sketched out statue, found it unworthy, and smashed it to pieces. At last, he threw himself upon an oaken bench, and covering his face with both hands, cried in a stifled voice: "Adorable and fatal Goddess! Alas, why must my eyes have seen that pearl of Arabia?"

IV

MELLO

It was at Mello, a town perched upon the top of a hill from which there is a view over the valley of Josaphat at its greatest breadth, that King Soliman had determined to give a feast to the Queen of the Sabeans. There is a greater warmth about such hospitality in the open. The coolness of the fountains, the splendour of the gardens, the comforting shade of sycamores, tamarinds, laurels, cypresses, acacias and terebinths awaken tender feelings in the heart. So Soliman was glad to do the honours of his country retreat; for, in general, sovereigns prefer to keep

MELLO

their fellow sovereigns to themselves, apart, rather than to appear in company with their rivals, and so invite the comments of the people of their capitals.

The verdant valley is dotted with white tombs, watched over by pine and palm trees, and even the lower slopes of the hills are covered with them. Soliman said to Balkis:

“What subject for meditation more befits a king than the spectacle of our common end? Here, by your side, is pleasure, perhaps even happiness, and there, nothingness and oblivion.”

“A man may gain a respite from the weariness of life in the contemplation of death.”

“But now, Madam, I dread it; it brings separation. May I not learn too soon that it consoles!”

Balkis glanced furtively at her host, and saw that he was really moved. In the soft evening light, she thought him handsome.

Before they entered the banqueting hall, the august host and his guest looked at the house in the twilight, and breathed the voluptuous perfumes of the orange-trees which embalmed the onset of night.

This airy mansion was built in the Syrian style. Borne upon a forest of slender pillars, its turrets, pierced so that the light passed through them, its pavilions of cedar, adorned with splendid panelling, stood out against the sky. Through the open doors could be seen curtains of Tyrian purple, divans covered with silk woven in India, rosettes incrustated with coloured stones, furniture of lemon and sandal wood, vases from Thebes, basins of porphyry or lapis, filled with flowers, silver tripods wherein there burned aloes, myrrh and benjamin, vines climbing around the pillars and playing between the walls. It was a place that seemed the very home of love. But Balkis was

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

wise and prudent; her reason protected her against the seductions of the enchanted Mello.

“It is not without timidity that I go with you through this little castle,” said Soliman. “Since it has been honoured by your presence it seems a poor place. Doubtless the cities of the Hemiarites are richer.”

“No indeed; but in our country, the slenderest columns, the pierced mouldings, the figurines, the campaniles are all made of marble. What you make of wood, we make of stone. Besides, our ancestors did not seek glory in trifles. They accomplished a work which will make their memory forever blessed.”

“What was that work? The story of great enterprises exalts man’s thoughts.”

“Well, first I must tell you that the prosperous, fertile country of the Yemen was once barren and dry. Heaven gave it neither rivers nor streams. My ancestors triumphed over nature, and created an Eden amid the deserts.”

“Tell me the story of that marvellous work.”

“In the heart of the lofty mountain ranges which rise in the east of my states, and on whose slopes stands the city of Mareb, there once were torrents, brooks which wasted their water in the air, vanished in abysses and deep valleys, before ever they reached the plain, and that was utterly dry. Working for two centuries, our ancient kings succeeded in concentrating all these watercourses upon a tableland several leagues across, and there they hollowed out the bed of a lake, over which our boats now sail as though it were the sea. It was necessary to prop up the rugged mountain with buttresses of granite higher than the pyramids of Ghizeh, with arches so great that armies of horsemen and elephants pass beneath

MELLO

them easily. This huge, inexhaustible reservoir pours itself in silver cascades into the aqueducts and broad channels which, divided into several reaches, carry the water across the plain, and irrigate half our provinces. To this sublime work I owe the richness of the harvests, the fruitful industries, the many meadows, the age-old trees and mighty forests which are at once the wealth and the delight of our sweet land of the Yemen. Such is, my lord, our sea of bronze, though I would not depreciate yours which is a delightful invention."

"A noble idea!" cried Soliman, "and one which I should be proud to imitate, were it not that God, in His mercy, has given us the blessed and abundant waters of the Jordan."

"I forded it yesterday," said the Queen. "My camels were almost up to their knees in it."

"It is dangerous to change the order of nature," declared Soliman the Wise, "and to create, in despite of Jehovah, an artificial civilization, commerce, industry, and populations which are continually dependent upon the work of man. Our Judea is dry; it has no more inhabitants than it can support, and the arts by which it lives come naturally from the soil and the climate. If your lake, that bowl hewn out of the mountains, bursts its bonds; if those Cyclopean buttresses collapse—and one day that will happen—your people, deprived of water, will die, burned up by the sun, devoured by famine in the midst of that countryside which is the work of man's hands."

Balkis remained silent, impressed by the apparent depth of this remark.

"Already," the King continued, "I am quite sure, the tributaries on the mountain are carving out ravines, trying to free themselves from their stony prisons, and undermining those prisons all the time. The

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

earth is subject to earthquakes; time uproots the rocks; water percolates and slips away like a snake. Besides, filled with such a mass of water, that magnificent lake of yours, which could be made before the water was there, would be impossible to repair. Queen, your ancestors have bequeathed to the peoples who came after them a future bounded by the strength of this building of stone. Barrenness would have made them industrious; they would have benefited by a soil whereon they now are doomed to perish helpless and dismayed, with the leaves of their trees, whose roots, one day, will find no moisture from your canals. Man must not tempt God, nor try to improve upon His works. What He does is well done."

"That precept," replied the Queen, "comes from your religion, which your priests are spoiling with their doctrine of God's jealousy. What they are doing is to immobilise everything, to keep society in swaddling clothes, and man's independence in their own hands. Does God plough and sow the fields? Did God found cities and build palaces? Did He bring us the iron, the gold, the copper and all those metals which sparkle in the temple of Soliman? No. He has given genius and the power to act to His creatures; He smiles upon our efforts, and, in our poor creations, recognises the emanation of His own soul, with which He has given light to our souls. By making Him a jealous God, you limit His omnipotence, deify your own faculties and materialise His. O King, the prejudices of your religion will one day hamper the progress of the sciences, the energy of genius; and when men are belittled, they will belittle God to suit themselves, and end by denying Him."

"Clever," said Soliman with a bitter smile—"clever, but specious."

MELLO

The Queen continued:

“Then, do not sigh when my finger touches upon your secret wound. You are alone in this kingdom and you suffer: your ideas are noble and bold, and the hierarchic constitution of this people weighs heavily upon you. You say to yourself; and it satisfies you little: ‘I will leave to posterity the statue of a king too great for so puny a people.’ But if you look at my empire, it is another matter. My ancestors effaced themselves that they might make their people great. Thirty-eight successive monarchs added a few stones to the lake and aqueducts of Mareb. Future ages will have forgotten their names, but their work will continue to be the glory of the Sabean, and, if ever it crumbles, and if the earth, with it, takes back again its rivers and its streams, my country’s soil, fertilised by a thousand years of cultivation, will continue to bring forth; the great trees which shade our plains will retain the moisture, preserve the coolness, and protect the ponds and fountains. The Yemen, once conquered from the desert, will keep the name of Arabia the Happy till the end of time. If you had been more free, you might have been great, for the glory of your people and the happiness of men.”

“I see the noble heights to which you summon my soul. It is too late. My people are rich; conquest and gold procure for them what Judea does not furnish. As for wood with which to build, I have in my prudence concluded treaties with the King of Tyre; the cedars and pines of Lebanon fill my saw-mills; and on the seas, our ships rival those of the Phœnicians.”

“You console yourself for your falling short of greatness by the fatherly solicitude of your administration,” said the Princess with a mournful kindness.

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

There was a moment's silence after this remark. The darkness hid the emotion upon Soliman's features. He said softly: "My soul has entered into yours, and my heart goes with it."

A little uneasy, Balkis glanced furtively around her; the courtiers had withdrawn. Over their heads, the stars were shining through the foliage, strewing it with flowers of gold. Laden with the perfume of lilies, tuberoses, wistarias, and mandragores, the evening breeze sang through the branches of the myrtles; the incense of the flowers seemed to have taken voice; the wind was like a perfumed breath. Far away, the doves were cooing; the splashing of the fountains gave an accompaniment to the concert of nature; fire-flies and luminous butterflies seemed like tiny specks of greenish light in a warm atmosphere pregnant with voluptuous emotion. The Queen felt an intoxicating languor stealing over her; Soliman's tender voice found its way to her heart, and bound her with a spell.

Did Soliman please her, or did she dream of him as she would have loved him. Since she had made him modest, she began to take a greater interest in him. But that sympathy which had arisen in the calm atmosphere of argument, mingled, as it was, with an element of pity, and consequent upon her victory as a woman, was neither spontaneous nor eager. Mistress of herself, as she had been of the thoughts and impressions of her host, she was making her way to love, if indeed she gave a thought to it, through friendship, and this road is very long.

Soliman, entranced and subdued, driven in turn from ill-humour to admiration, from discouragement to hope, and from anger to desire, had already received more than one wound, and for a man to love too soon is to run the risk of being alone in love. Besides, the

MELLO

Queen of Saba was reserved; her power had always dominated everybody, even the magnificent Soliman. Adoniram* had attracted her attention for a moment; she had not understood him: her imagination had discovered a mystery in him, but that keen momentary curiosity had certainly faded. Yet, when she saw him for the first time, that inflexible woman had said to herself: "This is a man."

It may be that this vision, no longer present but still recent, had lowered King Soliman's prestige in her eyes. Once or twice, when she had been on the point of speaking about the artist, she refrained, and changed the subject.

However this may have been, the son of Daoud took fire immediately—the Queen found nothing strange in this; he hastened to tell her so, therein only following an example that many others had set; but he was able to express himself gracefully; the hour was propitious, Balkis at an age to love, and, by virtue of the darkness, softened and interested.

Suddenly, torches cast their ruddy beams through bushes, and supper was announced. "What an annoying nuisance!" thought the King. "What an opportune diversion!" thought the Queen.

The meal had been served in a pavilion built in the bright, fantastic style of the peoples who live upon the banks of the Ganges. The octagonal hall was lighted by coloured candles, and lamps in which burned perfumed oil; their shaded light came from amid bouquets of flowers. On the threshold, Soliman

* Adoniram is also called Hiram, the name which has been preserved by the traditions of mystical societies. *Adoni* is only a name given to mark excellence; it means master or lord. This Hiram should not be confused with the King of Tyre who happened to bear the same name.

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

offered his hand to his guest, who put forward her little foot, then quickly drew it back again in surprise. The hall was covered by a carpet of water in which the table, the divans and candles were reflected.

“Why do you hesitate?” said Soliman with pretended astonishment.

“Balkis determined to show herself superior to fear, and with a charming gesture, raised her robe and went forward boldly.

But her foot met only with a solid surface. “Queen,” said Soliman, “now you see. Even the most prudent of creatures is deceived when she judges only by appearances. I determined to astonish you, and at last I have succeeded. You are walking upon a floor of crystal.”

She smiled, shrugging her shoulders with a movement which was rather more graceful than admiring, regretting perhaps that she could not have been astonished in some other way.

During the banquet, the King was gallant and attentive; his courtiers surrounded him, and he reigned amid them with such incomparable majesty that the Queen could not help feeling a certain degree of respect for him. At Soliman’s table etiquette was observed with all rigidity and solemnity.

The dishes were exquisite and varied, but served with a great deal of salt and spices. Balkis had never tasted flavourings so marked. She supposed that they were to the liking of the Hebrews, and consequently was not a little surprised to find that people who dared seasonings so strong abstained from drinking anything. Not a cupbearer was present; not a drop of wine or hydromel; not a drinking-cup upon the table.

The Queen’s lips burned, her palate was dry, but

MELLO

as the King did not drink, she dared not ask for drink, her dignity as a princess would not suffer it.

When the repast was over, the courtiers gradually disappeared into the depths of a dimly lighted gallery. Soon the beautiful Queen of the Sabeans was alone with Soliman. He was more gallant than ever; his eyes were tender. His eagerness verged upon insistence.

Overcoming her embarrassment, the Queen, smiling and with downcast eyes, rose and announced her intention of retiring. "What!" cried the King, "would you leave your humble slave thus, without a word, without a hope, without a sign of your compassion? That union for which I have hoped, that happiness without which henceforth I cannot live, that ardent humble love which seeks its recompense—will you spurn them beneath your feet?"

He had seized a hand, seeking to draw it to him gently, but the Queen resisted. Certainly, more than once, Balkis had thought of this alliance; but she was determined to retain both her freedom and her power. She insisted then upon retiring, and Soliman was constrained to give way. "So be it," said he, "leave me, but I set two conditions upon this retirement."

"State them."

"The night is sweet, and your conversation sweeter still. Will you grant me but another hour?"

"I agree."

"Secondly, when you leave here, you will take with you nothing that belongs to me."

"Granted! and with all my heart," said Balkis laughing.

"Laugh, my Queen; but I have known those of great wealth to yield to the strangest temptations."

"Excellent. You are most ingenious in saving your self-esteem. No deceit; a treaty of peace."

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

“An armistice, I still dare to hope.”

They resumed their conversation, and Soliman, like a well-bred nobleman, was at pains to make the Queen talk as much as possible. A fountain, murmuring gently at the other end of the room, accompanied them.

Now, if there is a time when it is a mistake to talk overmuch, it is when one has eaten without drinking, and done honour to a too highly seasoned supper. The pretty Queen of Saba was almost dying of thirst; she would have given one of her provinces for a cup of fresh water.

Yet she dared not show this keen desire. And always the clear, fresh, silvery fountain sang its mocking song beside her, casting into the air pearls which fell into the basin with a very cheerful sound. Her thirst grew greater: the Queen, in her distress, could hold out no longer.

Continuing her discourse, and seeing Soliman pre-occupied, and seemingly wearied, she began to walk about the room, and twice, as she passed close to the fountain, she did not dare . . .

The desire became irresistible. She returned more slowly to the fountain, suddenly made up her mind, and furtively dipped her hollowed hand into the water. Then turning aside, she hastily swallowed a mouthful of pure water.

Soliman rose, came over, seized the glistening, damp hand, and in a voice as brisk as it was resolute, said:

“A Queen is never faithless to her word, and by the terms of our agreement you belong to me.”

“Which means?”

“You have stolen my water, and as you yourself have very wisely observed, ‘Water is very scarce in this my realm.’”

MELLO

“Ah, my lord, this is a trap, and I would not have a deceitful husband.”

“It only remains for him to prove that he is still more generous. If, in spite of this formal engagement, he gives you back your freedom . . .”

“My lord,” interrupted Balkis, with downcast head, “we owe our subjects the example of loyalty.”

“Madam,” replied Soliman, the most courteous of Princes whether past or future, falling on his knees, “that word is your ransom.”

Quickly rising again, he struck a gong. Twenty servants hastened forward with different kinds of refreshment, and with his courtiers around him, Soliman said deliberately and with majesty:

“Offer your Queen to drink.”

At these words the courtiers threw themselves upon the ground before the Queen of Saba, and adored her.

But she, quivering and confused, feared lest she had gone farther than she had intended.

* * * * *

During the pause which followed this part of the story, a strange incident occupied the attention of the audience. A young man, who, judging by his complexion—the colour of a new halfpenny—was an Abyssinian (Habesch), dashed into the middle of the circle and began to dance a kind of *bamboula*, accompanying himself in bad Arabic with a song of which I could only catch the refrain. This song started off in a burst with the words: “*Yaman! Yamani!*” accented by those repetitions of syllables peculiar to the Arabs of the South. “*Yaman! Yaman! Yamani! . . . Selam-Aleik Belkiss-Makedal! Makeda! . . . Yamani! Yamani!*” All of which meant: “Yemen!

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

O land of the Yemen ! Hail to thee, Balkis the great !
O land of the Yemen !”

This outburst could only be explained by the relation which formerly existed between the people of Saba and the Abyssinians, who come from the western shores of the Red Sea, and formed a part of the empire of the Hemiarites. Undoubtedly, the admiration of this listener, who had hitherto kept silence, was the result of hearing the story, which entered into the traditions of his country. Perhaps, too, he was glad that the great Queen had escaped from the trap which the wise King Soliman had laid for her.

As his monotonous chanting went on so long that the customers became tired of it, some of them cried out that he was *melbous* (crazy), and he was gently escorted towards the door. The coffee-house keeper, anxious about the five or six paras (less than a half-penny) which this customer owed him, hurriedly followed him outside. Everything was pleasantly settled, and the story-teller soon began his story again amid the most religious silence.

V

THE SEA OF BRONZE

After great labour, and many sleepless nights, Master Adoniram had finished his models, and hollowed in the sand the moulds for his colossal figures. With deep excavations and skilful borings, the tableland of Sion had been prepared for the bronze sea which was to be cast *in situ*, and strengthened with buttresses of masonry which were later to give place to the lions and gigantic sphinxes which were to act as supports.

THE SEA OF BRONZE

It was upon bars of solid gold, which will not yield to the particular degree of heat at which bronze melts, placed at different points, that the outer part of the mould of this huge basin was placed. The molten mass, passing, through several channels, into the space between the two surfaces, was to imprison these pegs of gold, and unite with those infusible and precious supports.

The sun had travelled seven times around the earth, since the ore had begun to boil in the furnace capped by a lofty, massive tower of brickwork, which stood sixty cubits above the ground, and ended in an open cone, from which escaped eddies of reddish smoke, and blue flames bespangled with sparks.

One excavation, between the moulds and the base of the great furnace, was to serve as a bed for the river of fire, when the moment should come to open with iron bars the entrails of the volcano.

Night was chosen for the great work of casting the metals, for at night the operation can be carefully followed; then the bronze, white and luminous, is a lantern to itself, and if the shining metal goes astray, if it escapes through some crack or falls through some hole, it is discovered in the darkness.

While waiting for the solemn trial which was to immortalise or to bring discredit upon the name of Adoniram, the whole of Jerusalem was in a ferment. From every part of the kingdom, leaving their daily tasks, the workmen came, and the evening before the fatal night, as soon as the sun set, the hills and mountains of the neighbourhood were covered with spectators.

Never had any founder, on his own account, and in the face of so many difficulties, engaged upon so formidable a task. At any time the business of casting

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

is full of interest, and often, when important work was being done, King Soliman had deigned to pass the night at the forges with his courtiers, who were always eager for the honour of accompanying him.

But the casting of the sea of bronze was a work for giants, a challenge thrown down by genius in the face of human prejudice, of nature, and the most expert opinion, for all the experts had declared success impossible.

So people of every age, and from every corner of the land, attracted to the spectacle of such a mighty contest, came early upon the hill of Sion, whose outskirts were guarded by legions of workers. Silent patrols went through the crowd, keeping order and maintaining silence—an easy task, for by the King's command, proclamation had been made at the sound of the trumpet, ordering the most complete silence under pain of death; a precaution that was essential in order that commands might be transmitted quickly and with certainty.

Already the evening star was going down over the sea, darkened by the reddish clouds from the furnace. The moment was at hand. Followed by the chief of his workmen, Adoniram, by torchlight, was giving a final glance to the preparations and going here, there and everywhere. Beneath the great pent-house built against the furnace could be seen the smiths, with leather helmets upon their heads, the brims brought down over their faces, wearing long white robes with short sleeves. They were busied in snatching from the open maw of the furnace, with long iron forks, viscous masses of half-vitrified scum, dross which they dragged away to a distance. Others, perched on scaffolding raised upon great beams, poured from the top baskets of coal into the fire, which roared with

THE SEA OF BRONZE

the impetuous blast of the ventilators. On every hand, swarms of companions, armed with picks, stakes and pincers, were going about, casting long shadows behind them. They were almost naked: girdles of striped material covered their loins; their heads were wrapped in woollen caps, and their legs protected by pads of wood covered with thongs of leather. Blackened by coal dust, they seemed red, in the reflection from the fire, and looked like demons or spectres.

A fanfare announced the arrival of the court. Soliman appeared with the Queen of Saba, and was conducted by Adoniram to a throne which had been improvised for the noble guests. The artist was wearing a breastplate of buffalo hide; an apron of white woollen stuff fell to his knees; his sinewy legs were protected by gaiters of tiger skin, and his feet were bare, for he could walk unharmed upon the red-hot metal.

“You appear to me in your might,” said Balkis to the king of the workmen, “like the god of fire. If your enterprise succeeds, none this night can call himself greater than Master Adoniram.”

The artist, in spite of his preoccupations, was about to reply, when Soliman, always wise, and sometimes jealous, stopped him.

“Master,” he said in a commanding tone, “do not waste your precious time; go back to your labours, and do not let your presence here make us responsible for some accident.”

The Queen saluted him with a gesture, and he disappeared.

“If he accomplishes this task,” thought Soliman, “with what a magnificent monument he will honour the Temple of Adonai; but at the same time, what glory he will add to a renown that is already to be dreaded.”

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

A few moments later they saw Adoniram again before the furnace. The fire, which threw light upon him from below, made him seem taller, and his shadow mounted upon the wall, against which was set a great sheet of bronze, whereon the master struck twenty times with a hammer. The vibrations of the metal resounded for a great distance, and the silence became even deeper than before. Suddenly, armed with picks and levers, ten phantoms rushed into the workings, hollowed out beneath the fire of the furnace that faced the throne. The roaring died away and ceased, and only the dull sound of iron points could be heard as they forced their way through the calcined clay which closed the orifice through which the molten bronze would pour. Soon the place they were attacking became violet, turned purple and then red, grew lighter and took on an orange hue; a white point appeared in the centre, and all the workers, save two, withdrew. These, under Adoniram's charge, busied themselves in thinning the crust around the point of light, taking care not to pierce it. The master watched them anxiously.

During these preparations, Adoniram's faithful companion, the young Benoni who was so devoted to him, went about the groups of workmen, noticing each man's zeal, seeing that the orders were carried out, and judging everybody by himself.

And it happened that this young man, rushing in terror to the feet of Soliman, threw himself upon the ground at the King's feet and said: "Lord, stop this work of casting. We are betrayed! All is lost!"

Custom forbade anyone thus to draw near the Prince without authority, and the guards approached the bold young man. Soliman sent them away, and

THE SEA OF BRONZE

leaning over Benoni, as he knelt upon the ground, said quietly: "Explain yourself, and in a few words."

"I was going around the furnace. Behind the wall there stood a man, motionless, who seemed to wait. There came a second, who said softly to the first: '*Vehmamiab!*' And the first man answered him: '*Eliael!*' Then there came a third, who likewise said: '*Vehmamiab!*' and to him also was answered: '*Eliael!*' Then one cried:

"'He has given the carpenters in bondage to the miners.'

"And the second: 'He has subordinated the masons to the miners.'

"And the third: 'He has wished to rule over the miners.'

"Then the first began again: 'He gives his strength to strangers.'

"And the second: 'He has no country of his own.'

"And the third added: 'It is true.'

"'The companions are brothers,' the first continued.

"'The guilds enjoy equal rights,' went on the second.

"'It is true,' added the third.

"Then I knew that the first was a mason, because he said: 'I have mingled the limestone with the brick, and the lime will turn to dust.' And the second was a carpenter, for he said: 'I have prolonged the cross-bars of the beams, and the fire will reach them.' And the third is a worker in metals. These were his words: 'From the poisoned lake of Gomorrha I have taken bitumen and sulphur, and have mixed them with the casting.'

"At that moment a shower of sparks lighted up their faces. The mason is a Syrian and is called Phanor; the carpenter is a Phœnician and is called

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

Amrou; the miner is a Jew of the tribe of Reuben, his name is Methousael. Great King, I have flown to your feet: stretch out your sceptre, and let the work stop."

"It is too late," said Soliman thoughtfully. "See, the crater is opening. Keep silence, do not disturb Adoniram, and tell me those three names again."

"Phanor, Amrou, Methousael."

"God's will be done."

Benoni gazed steadfastly upon the King and disappeared like a flash of lightning. Meanwhile, the clay was falling around the yawning mouth of the furnace, under the redoubled efforts of the miners, and the weakened wall became so full of light that it seemed as if the workers were on the point of surprising the sun in the depths of his nightly retreat. At a sign from Adoniram, the workers drew back, and the master, while the hammers were falling upon the bronze, raised an iron club and buried it in the transparent wall, turned it in the wound he had made, and violently snatched it forth. That moment a torrent of liquid, swift and white-hot, poured into the channel and went on like a golden serpent striped with crystal and silver, until it came to a basin hollowed in the sand, from which, when it came forth, the molten mass dispersed, and went its way along a number of trenches.

Suddenly a purple, gory light illumined the faces of the countless host of spectators on the hillsides, a light which forced itself through the darkness of the clouds and reddened the crest of the distant rocks. Jerusalem, emerging from the darkness, seemed the prey of some great burning. The profound silence gave this solemn spectacle the fantastic appearance of a dream.

As the casting began, a shadow fled to the side of

THE SEA OF BRONZE

the bed into which the molten metal was to flow. A man had dashed forward, and, despite the commands of Adoniram, dared to cross the channel through which the fire was to pass. At he set foot there, the molten metal reached him. He fell and disappeared in a second.

Adoniram thought only of his work. Terrified at the thought of an explosion, he dashed forward at the peril of his own life, plunged an iron fork into the victim's breast, caught him, raised him, and with a superhuman effort, cast him aside like a block of dross, and the luminous body faded as it died. He had not time enough to recognise his companion, the faithful Benoni.

While the molten bronze flowed onwards to fill the cavities of the sea of bronze, whose vast outline appeared already like a golden diadem upon the gloomy earth, hosts of workmen carrying great fire-pots, deep pockets with long iron handles, plunged them one after another in the basin of liquid fire, and ran about, pouring the metal into the moulds which were to form lions, oxen, palms and the enormous cherubim destined to support the sea of bronze. It was astonishing, the amount of fire which they poured into the earth. Lying upon the ground, the bas-reliefs took on the clear and ruddy forms of horses, winged bulls, dog-faced monkeys, monstrous chimeras, to which the genius of Adoniram had given birth.

"A marvellous spectacle!" cried the Queen of Saba. "Oh, the greatness, the power of this mortal's genius, who makes the elements obedient to his will, and conquers nature itself."

"He is not yet the master," said Soliman bitterly; "Adonai alone is all-powerful."

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

VI

THE APPARITION

Suddenly, Adoniram perceived that the river of metal was overflowing its banks; the yawning spring was vomiting forth torrents; the over-laden sand began to crumble. He looked at the sea of bronze; the mould was running over; a crack appeared at the top of it; the molten metal began to overflow on every side. So terrible a cry he uttered, the air was filled with it, and the echoes were repeated through the mountains. Thinking that the earth was vitrifying because it was overheated, Adoniram seized a flexible pipe which ran to a reservoir of water, and with a hasty hand, directed the column of water upon the base of the weakening buttresses of the mould. But the molten metal, now well started, streamed even so far as this. The two liquids battled together; a mass of metal surrounded the water, imprisoned, embraced it. To get free, the water turned to steam, and burst its bonds. There was a tremendous roar; the molten stream flung itself into the air in great bright fireworks to twenty cubits high; it seemed like the bursting forth of the crater of a furious volcano. This noise was followed by cries and frightful groanings; for this shower of stars spread death in all directions: each drop of molten metal was a burning dart which penetrated a body and destroyed it. The ground was strewn with dying, and a fearful scream of terror succeeded the silence. The terror was at its height, and everyone turned to run away. The fear of danger cast into the fire those whom the fire was pursuing . . . the countryside, lighted up with a

THE APPARITION

dazzling purple light, was like that frightful night when Sodom and Gomorrah went up in flames, kindled by Jehovah's thunderbolts.

Adoniram, at his wits' end, ran hither and thither, trying to rally his workmen, and close the mouth of that inexhaustible abyss; but he heard nothing but complaints and curses; he found none but corpses; the others had fled. Soliman alone remained motionless upon his throne, the Queen staying calmly at his side. The diadem and the sceptre still shone in the darkness.

"Jehovah has punished him," said Soliman to his guest, "and He punishes me by the death of my subjects, for my weakness, my complaisance towards a monster of pride."

"The vanity which sacrifices so many victims is criminal," said the Queen. "My lord, you might have perished in that infernal trial: the bronze was raining all around us."

"And you were there! That vile instrument of Baal placed so precious a life in danger. Let us go, your peril alone brought me anxiety."

Adoniram, passing near them, heard this. He went away and sobbed with grief. Farther along, he came upon a group of workmen who heaped curses, calumnies and contempt upon him. He was joined by the Syrian Phanor, who said to him: "You are great, fortune has betrayed you, but the masons had no hand therein."

Amrou the Phœnician came up in turn and said: "You are great, and would have conquered, if all had done their duty like the carpenters."

And the Jew Methousael said to him: "The miners have done all they should; it was the strangers who by their ignorance brought the enterprise to ruin.

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

Courage, a greater work than this shall avenge this defeat."

"Ah," thought Adoniram, "these are the only friends I have."

It was easy for him to avoid meeting anyone; for all turned aside from him, and the darkness favoured these desertions. Soon the light from the fires and from the molten metal, which reddened as its surface cooled, shed a light only upon distant groups, which gradually disappeared in the shadows. Adoniram, at the end of his strength, sought Benoni.

"He, too, is abandoning me," he murmured sadly.

The master stayed alone beside the furnace.

"Dishonoured," he cried bitterly, "that is my reward for an austere life, a life laborious and devoted to the glory of an ungrateful Prince. He condemns me, and my brothers go back upon me. And that woman, that Queen . . . she was there, she saw my shame; and her disdain, that too, I had to suffer. But where is Benoni, at this hour of torment? Alone! I am alone, accursed. The future is closed to me. Adoniram, smile at thy deliverance, and seek it in this fire, thy element and thy rebellious slave." Calm and resolute, he drew near the river, whose fiery stream of dross and molten metal still rolled onward. Here and there it sputtered and sputtered, as it came upon some drop of moisture. Perhaps the lava was quivering above the corpses. Thick eddies of violet and tawny smoke rose from it in serried columns, casting a veil over the abandoned scene of this horrible disaster. There the dethroned giant fell to the ground, and buried himself in thought, his eyes fixed upon those flaming eddies which might bend down and stifle him if the wind blew them in his direction.

Sometimes strange forms, fugitive and flaming,

THE APPARITION

seemed to stand out from the blazing, terrible flames of fiery vapour. Adoniram's dazzled eyes could glimpse amid giant limbs and blocks of gold, gnomes who faded away in smoke, or vanished in a shower of sparks. These phantasies could not dissipate his grief or his despair. But soon they took possession of his disordered imagination, and it seemed to him that from the heart of the flames there came to him a grave and sonorous voice which called his name. Three times the eddying fire called the name of Adoniram.

Yet there was none beside him. Eagerly he scanned the burning turf and murmured: "The voice of my people calls me."

Without looking away, he raised himself upon one knee, stretched out his hand, and in the very middle of the ruddy smoke, he saw a vague, colossal, human form, which seemed to grow more solid in the flames, to come together, then break up again and fade away. Everything around it quivered and blazed; it alone remained steady; sometimes dark in the luminous vapour, sometimes clear and shining amid a mass of sooty vapour. It stood out, this shape, it took form and grew as it drew near him, and Adoniram, terror-stricken, asked himself what this bronze, endowed with life, might be.

The phantom approached, and Adoniram gazed upon it in a kind of stupor. Its huge form was clothed in a dalmatic without sleeves; its bare arms were adorned by rings of iron; its brazen head, framed in a square-shaped beard, plaited and tressed in row upon row. Its head was covered by a mitre of silver-gilt, and in its hand it held a hammer. Great shining eyes looked gently down on Adoniram, and in a voice that seemed to come from brazen depths, the figure said: "Rise, my son, and let your soul have life again.

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

Come, follow me. I have seen the sufferings of my seed and have taken pity upon it."

"Spirit, who are you?"

"The shade of the father of your fathers, the forefather of those who work and suffer. Come: when my hand has been passed over your brow, you will breathe in the flame. Be fearless, as you were strong."

Suddenly, Adoniram felt himself wrapped in a penetrating heat which gave him strength without consuming him; the air he breathed was finer; an irresistible power drew him towards the fire into which his mysterious companion had already plunged.

"Where am I? What is your name? Where do you take me?" he murmured.

"To the centre of the earth . . . the soul of the inhabited world; the palace of Enoch far beneath the ground; Enoch our Father, whom the Egyptians call Hermes, and Arabia honours under the name of Edris."

"Immortal Powers!" cried Adoniram. "My lord, do you speak truly? Can you be . . ."

"Your ancestor as man and artist, your master and your patron. I was Tubal-Cain."

The farther they went into the depths of silence and night, the more Adoniram doubted himself and the reality of his impressions. Little by little, as he was drawn out of himself, he yielded to the charm of the stranger, and his soul, utterly attached to the force which governed him, was entirely under the spell of his mysterious guide.

To regions damp and cold had succeeded a warm and rarefied atmosphere; the life of the inside of the world manifested itself in quakings and strange rumblings; dull, regular periodical beatings announced the nearness of the heart of the world. Adoniram felt

THE APPARITION

it beating with a growing strength; he was astonished to find himself moving through infinite space; he sought for some support but found none, and blindly followed the shade of Tubal-Cain, who went on in silence.

After a few moments which seemed to him as long as the life of a patriarch, he saw a luminous point in the distance. This grew and grew, came nearer, stretched out before him in a long perspective, and the artist beheld a world peopled with shadows, which moved about engaged in occupations he did not understand. Finally, these mysterious lights came at last, and faded away beneath the shining mitre, and upon the dalmatic of the son of Cain.

In vain Adoniram tried to speak: his voice seemed soundless in his oppressed bosom; but he breathed again when he found himself in a broad gallery of measureless depth—broad indeed, for its walls could not be seen, and it was supported upon an avenue of pillars so high that their tops disappeared in the space above him, and the roof they bore could not be seen at all.

Suddenly he trembled. Tubal-Cain was speaking. "Your feet are standing upon the great emerald which is a root and a pivot for the mountain of Kaf; you have reached the realm of your fathers. Here in undisputed power reigns the lineage of Cain. Beneath these granite fortresses, amid inaccessible caverns, we found liberty at last. Here the jealous tyranny of Adonai has no power more; here man can eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and live."

Adoniram drew a long sweet breath. It seemed to him that an overwhelming weight, which in life had always pressed upon him, had just vanished for the first time.

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

Suddenly the life of the place became evident; people appeared in these underground chambers: work filled them with life and movement; there was the joyous sound of metal, mingled with the noise of rushing waters and impetuous winds; the illumined vault above stretched like a great sky from which torrents of white and azured light streamed over the vastest and strangest workshops, and broke into all the colours of the rainbow as it touched the ground.

Adoniram passed through a host of beings engaged upon labours whose purpose he did not understand: the light, that celestial dome, in the bowels of the earth, astounded him; he stopped. "This is the sanctuary of fire," said Tubal-Cain. "Hence goes forth the heat that warms the earth which, but for us, would perish with cold. Here we prepare the metals, and distribute them in the veins of the planet, after we have liquefied their vapours.

"Brought together and interlaced over our heads, the lodes of these different elements set free contrary spirits, which catch fire, and send forth the bright light, the light which seems dazzling to your imperfect eyes. Brought together by these currents, the seven metals form a vapour and become clouds of green, of azure, of purple, of blue, of gold, vermilion and silver which move about in space, and produce the alloys of which the greater part of minerals and precious stones are made. When it grows cold in the dome, the same clouds, condensed, send forth a shower of rubies, emeralds, topazes, onyxes, turquoises, and diamonds, and the currents of the earth carry them away with piles of dross—those granite, quartzes, limestones which, raising up the surface of the globe, stud it with mountains. These matters solidify when they come near the realm of men . . . and the coolness

THE APPARITION

of Adonai's sun, a wretched furnace which has not strength enough even to roast an egg. What would become of the life of man, if we did not secretly send to him the element of fire, imprisoned in stone, as well as the iron, which can draw a spark from it?"

These explanations satisfied and astonished Adoniram. He drew near the workmen without understanding how they were able to work upon rivers of gold, silver, copper, and iron, separate them, dam them up, and pass them through a sieve as though they were but water.

"These elements," said Tubal-Cain, in answer to his thoughts, "are made liquid by this central heat; the temperature in which we live here is almost as hot again as that of the furnaces in which you melt your metals."

Adoniram, dismayed, wondered that he was alive.

"This temperature," continued Tubal-Cain, "is that natural to souls which have been brought forth from the element of fire. Adonai placed an imperceptible spark in the centre of the mould of mud which he thought fit to make man, and that spark has been sufficient to give warmth to the block, to give it life and thought; but, above there, that soul must fight against the cold; hence, the narrow limits of your faculties; then it happens that the spark is called back by the attraction from the centre, and you die."

This explanation of creation called forth a movement of disdain from Adoniram.

"Yes," continued his guide; "he is a god, cunning rather than mighty, jealous rather than generous, the god Adonai. He created man out of mud, in despite of the genii of fire; then, terrified by his own work and their complaisance for the wretched creature, he condemned man to die, without having compassion

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

on their tears. That is the principle of the difference that divides us: all life upon earth which proceeds from the fire is attracted by the fire which dwells at the centre. It was our intention that in return the central fire should be attracted to the circumference, and shed its brightness to the outside world; for such an interchange of principles would be eternal life."

"Adonai, who reigns outside the worlds, walled in the earth, and intercepted that external attraction. So it is that the earth, like its inhabitants, will die. It is already growing old; coolness is going deeper and deeper into it; whole species of animals and plants have disappeared; the peoples are growing less, the length of life is growing shorter, and out of the seven primitive metals, the earth, whose marrow is congealing and drying up, now has but five.* The sun itself is growing paler. In five or six thousand years, it must go out. But it is not from me alone, my son, that you should hear these mysteries; you shall learn them from the lips of men, your ancestors."

* The traditions upon which the different scenes of this legend are based are not peculiar to the Orient. They were known in Europe during the Middle Ages. Upon this subject Lapeyrière's *History of the Pre-Adamites*, Klimius's *Iter Subterraneum*, and a host of writings upon the Cabbala and alchemical medicine may be consulted. The Orient is still in the same position. The reader must therefore not be astonished by the strange scientific hypotheses contained in this story. The majority of these legends are also to be found in the Talmud, in the books of the neo-platonists, in the Koran and in the Book of Enoch, recently translated by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

THE UNDERGROUND WORLD

VII

THE UNDERGROUND WORLD

They went together into a garden lit by the tender light from a gentle fire, peopled by unknown trees, whose foliage, formed of little tongues of flame, sent forth, not shade, but brighter light upon the emerald soil, diapered with flowers of queer shapes, and colours of a surprising brightness. Blossoming from the fire within the land of metals, these flowers were its most fluid and purest emanations. These arborescent growths of flowering metal glistened like precious stones, and breathed forth perfumes of amber, benjamin, myrrh and incense. Near by, streamlets of mineral oil wound in and out, fertilising the cinnabar, the rose of this underground country. Here strode about a few giant old men, built in the measure of that exuberant and healthy nature. Beneath a canopy of burning light Adoniram beheld a row of figures of tremendous stature, seated one behind the other, with the sacred robes, the sublime proportions and majestic aspect of the figures he once had seen in the caverns of Lebanon. This, he guessed, was the vanished dynasty of the princes of Enochia. Round about them, squatting upon their haunches, the dog-headed monkeys, the winged lions, the griffins, the smiling and mysterious sphinxes, creatures condemned and swept away in the Deluge, yet made immortal in the memory of men. These androgynous slaves, like inert monuments, obedient yet filled with life, supported the massive thrones.

Motionless like rest itself, the princely sons of Adam seemed to dream and wait.

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

When he had reached the far end of the line, Adoniram went still farther forward, directing his footsteps towards a huge square stone as white as snow. He was about to step upon that indestructible block of loadstone.

“Stay,” cried Tubal-Cain, “we are beneath the mountain of Serendib, and you are about to tread upon the grave of the unknown, the first-born of this earth. Adam sleeps beneath this shroud which saves him from the fire. He will not rise until the last day of the world; his captive tomb contains our ransom. But listen, our common father calls you.”

Cain was kneeling in a painful attitude; he rose. His beauty was superhuman; his eye sad, and his lips pale. He was naked, but around his troubled brow was wound a golden serpent for a diadem. The wanderer seemed still oppressed.

“May slumber and death be with you, my son. It is because of me that you must suffer, you of the race of toilers and oppressed. Eve was my mother; Eblis, the angel of light, set in her womb the spark that gives me life, and has regenerated my seed. Adam, formed from the soil and trusted only with a soul in fetters, Adam brought me up. Child of the *Eloims*,* I loved that first essay of Adonai, and set the spirit of the powers that dwell in me at the service of weak and ignorant men. In his old age I nourished him who had nourished me, and watched over the childhood of that Abel whom they called my brother. Alas, Alas!

“Before I taught the world what murder is, I had known ingratitude, injustice and the bitterness that

* The *Eloims* are primitive genii whom the Egyptians call the gods of Ammon. According to the Persian tradition Adonai or Jehovah (the god of the Hebrews) was only one of the *Eloims*.

THE UNDERGROUND WORLD

makes the heart corrupt. Working without ceasing, snatching our nourishment from a miserly soil, inventing, for the good of mankind, the plough which makes the earth bring forth, bringing to birth again in the womb of abundance for their sakes, the Eden they had cast away, I sacrificed my life for them. Yet Adam did not love me. Eve remembered that she had been cast forth from Paradise because she had brought me into the world, and her heart, blinded by self, was all given to her precious Abel. And he, pampered and disdainful, looked upon me as the servant of them all. Adonai was with him; what did he need more? So, while I watered with the sweat of my brow the earth whereof he felt himself the king, he, idle and beloved, pastured his flocks, and slept beneath the sycamores. I made my complaint, and our parents invoked the judgment of God. We offered him sacrifices, and mine, made of the sheaves of corn which I had brought to being, the first-fruits of the summer—mine was rejected with contempt. So does that jealous God eternally reject a genius inventive and productive, and give power and the right to oppress to vulgar minds. The rest you know; but what you do not know is that Adonai's sentence, condemning me for ever to sterility, gave as a wife to Abel, Aclinia our sister, who loved me. So arose that first conflict between the djinns, or children of the Eloims, sprung from the element of fire, and the sons of Adonai, engendered of the slime.

“I extinguished Abel's torch. Later Adam's progeny was renewed in the posterity of Seth; and, to wipe out my crime, I made myself the benefactor of the sons of Adam. It is to our seed, a greater than their own, that they owe their arts, their industries, and the elements of their sciences. And teaching them,

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

we made them free. Adonai has never pardoned me, and that is why he holds it an unpardonable sin that I broke a vessel of clay, he who, in the waters of the Flood, drowned so many thousands of men, he who, to decimate them, has raised up so many tyrants."

Then there came a voice from Adam's tomb. "It was you," said that deep voice, "that brought forth the sin of murder. In my children God pursues the blood of Eve from which you came and which you have shed. It is because of you that Jehovah raised up priests who have sacrificed men, and kings who have immolated both priests and soldiers. And one day he will raise up emperors to scourge the peoples, priests and kings themselves, and the posterity of the nations will say: 'These are the sons of Cain.'"

The son of Eve writhed in despair.

"He, too," he cried, "has never forgiven me."

"Never," answered the voice, and from the depths of the abyss came his complaint: "Abel, my son, Abel, Abel! What hast thou done with thy brother Abel?"

Cain rolled upon the ground, which shook beneath him, and convulsions of despair rent his chest.

Such is the torture of Cain, for that he shed blood.

Filled with respect, with love, with compassion, and with horror, Adoniram turned away.

"What have I done, I?" said the venerable Enoch, shaking a head which wore a high tiara. "Men were wandering like sheep: I taught them to hew stones, to make buildings, to come together in cities. I was the first to show them how to live together in accord. They were brutes when I brought them together; and I left a nation in my city of Enochia, whose ruins still astound races that have degenerated. It is due

THE UNDERGROUND WORLD

to me that Soliman is raising a temple in the honour of Adonai, and that temple will destroy him, for the God of the Hebrews, my son, has recognised my genius in the work of your hands."

Adoniram looked upon that great shade. Enoch's beard was long and plaited; his tiara, decorated with red bands and a double row of stars, was surmounted by a point that ended in a vulture's beak. Two bandelets with fringes fell down over his hair and upon his tunic. In one hand he held a long sceptre, and in the other a square. His colossal stature was greater than that of Cain his father. Beside him stood Irad and Maviael, with simple fillets upon their hair. Rings encircled their arms. One had formerly imprisoned fountains; the other had squared cedars. Mathusael had invented written characters, and left behind him books which later Edris seized and buried in the earth, the books of the *Tau*. Upon his shoulders, Mathusael wore a priestly pallium; a parazonium protected his loins, and upon his shining girdle the symbolic T which rallies the workers, sons of the genii, of fire, blazed in lines of fire.

Whilst Adoniram was looking upon the smiling features of Lamech, whose arms were covered by folded wings, whence came two long hands that rested upon the heads of two young men who lay at his feet, Tubal-Cain, leaving his protégé, seated himself upon his iron throne.

"You see the venerable face of my father," he said to Adoniram. "They, whose hair he is caressing, are the sons of Ada: Jabel who set up tents, and taught men how to sew the skins of camels, and Jubal, my brother, who was the first to stretch the strings of lute and harp, and pluck sweet music from them."

"Son of Lamech and of Sella," said Jubal, in a

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

voice as tuneful as the evening wind, "you are greater than your brothers, and you reign over your fathers. It is from you that come the arts of war and peace. You smelted the metals, you lighted the first forge. By giving to the human race gold, silver, copper and steel, you have replaced by them the Tree of Knowledge. Gold and iron will raise men to the height of power, and will be fatal enough to avenge us upon Adonai. Honour to Tubal-Cain!"

A terrific shout was the answer to this exclamation, repeated far into the distance by the legions of gnomes, who went on with their work with new ardour. The hammers resounded beneath the vaults of the eternal workshops, and Adoniram, in this world where workers were kings, felt a happiness and pride beyond all bounds.

"Child of the seed of the Eloims," said Tubal-Cain to him, "recover your courage; your glory is in servitude. Your ancestors made the industry of men a fearsome thing, and it was for this that we have been condemned. For two thousand years we have been fighting, and none could destroy us, for the essence of immortality is in us, and we were conquered, only because the blood of Eva runs in our veins. Your ancestors, my descendants, were preserved from the waters of the Flood. For while Jehovah, purposing our destruction, was gathering those waters in the reservoirs of heaven, I called the fire to our aid, and directed its rapid currents to the surface of the globe. By my orders, the flame melted the stones, and formed long galleries to which we might retire. These subterranean passages ended in the plain of Ghizeh, not far from that place where the city of Memphis has since been raised. And to protect those galleries against the invasion of the waters I brought together

THE UNDERGROUND WORLD

the race of giants, and with our hands we built a great pyramid which shall last while the world itself lasts. Its stones were cemented with impenetrable bitumen; and no other opening was made in it, except a narrow passage closed by a small door, which I myself sealed on the last day of the ancient world.

“Underground dwellings were carved out of the rock; we reached them by going down into an abyss; they stretched along a low gallery that ended where I had imprisoned water in a great river that the men and flocks buried in these retreats might have refreshment. Beyond that river I gathered, in a vast space lighted by the rubbing together of contrary metals, the vegetables and fruits which feed upon the earth.

“There, sheltered from the waters, lived the feeble remnant of the lineage of Cain. All the trials which we had undergone and overcome, we had to undergo again before we reached the light, when the waters had gone back to their beds. The way was perilous, the climate of those interior regions devastating. On our way there and on our return, we left some of our companions at each stage of the journey. At the end, I alone survived, with the son my sister Noema had given me.

“I opened the door of the pyramid and looked upon the earth again. What change was there! Desert; ill-looking animals and stunted plants; a sun pale and without heat, and masses of barren mud with reptiles crawling. Suddenly a freezing wind, laden with poisoned exhalations, entered my lungs and seemed to scorch them. Suffocated, I exhaled it, then had to breathe once more, lest I should die. I know not what cold poison circulated through my veins, my strength failed me, my legs gave way, the night

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

descended upon me, a fearful shivering took possession of me. The climate of the earth was changed, the frozen soil no longer gave forth heat enough to give life to that which it had borne before. Like a dolphin taken from the bosom of the sea, and thrown upon the sand, I felt my agony, and knew my hour had come.

“By a supreme instinct of self-preservation, I tried to fly, and, going back into the pyramid, lost consciousness. It was my tomb; then my delivered soul, drawn by the fire within, came down to find the spirits of my fathers. My son, whose youth was not yet past, was still growing. He lived, but his growth ceased.

“He became a wanderer, as the destiny of our race will have it, and the wife of Ham,* the second son of Noah, found him more beautiful than the sons of men. He knew her, and she brought forth Kous, the father of Nimrod, who taught his brethren the art of hunting and founded Babylon. They set to work to build the tower of Babel, and at that Adonai recognised the blood of Cain, and began his persecutions anew. The seed of Nimrod was again dispersed. My son’s voice shall end this painful story for you.”

Adoniram looked anxiously around him for the son of Tubal-Cain.

“You will not see him,” continued the prince of the spirits of fire; “my son’s soul is invisible, for he died after the Deluge, and his bodily form belongs to the earth. So it is with his descendants, and your own father, Adoniram, wanders through the inflamed air which you are breathing. Yes, your father.”

“Your father—yes, your father,” repeated, like an

* A tradition of the Talmud tells us that it was Noah’s wife who mingled the blood of the genii with that of men, yielding to the seductions of a spirit descended from the *dives*.

THE UNDERGROUND WORLD

echo, tenderly, a voice which passed like a kiss over Adoniram's forehead.

The artist turned aside and wept.

"Be consoled," said Tubal-Cain, "he is more fortunate than I. He left you in the cradle, and, as your body does not yet belong to the earth, he enjoys the happiness of seeing its image. But listen to the words of my son."

Then a voice spoke.

"Alone among the mortal genii of our race, I have seen the world both before and after the Deluge, and I have looked upon the face of Adonai. I hoped for the birth of a son, and the cold wind of the earth, grown old, lay heavy upon my chest. One night God appeared to me. His face cannot be described. He said:

"'Hope!

"Since I had no experience, and was alone in an unknown world, I answered timidly:

"'O Lord, I fear.'

"'That fear shall be your salvation,' he replied. 'You must die; your name shall be unknown to your brothers, and shall not be spoken down the ages: from you shall be born a son whom you may never see. From him shall arise beings who shall be lost among the crowd like stars that wander over the firmament. You, who come from the stock of giants, I have humiliated your body; your descendants shall be born weak; their life shall be short, and loneliness shall be their portion. In their bosoms the soul of the genii shall retain its precious spark, and their greatness shall be their torture. Greater than man, they shall be man's benefactors, yet they shall be the objects of man's disdain, and only honoured in the tomb. Scorned during their sojourn upon earth, they shall possess the

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

bitter consciousness of their strength, and shall expend it for the glorification of others. Sensible to the sufferings of humanity, they shall strive to prevent them, but none shall listen. Made obedient to powers that are unworthy and vile, they shall fail to overcome these tyrants whom they despise. With all the greatness of their souls, they shall be the toys of wealth and fortunate stupidity. They shall bring fame upon the peoples, and shall have no part in it during their lives. Giants in intelligence, torches of knowledge, organs of progress, lights of the arts, instruments of liberty, they alone shall remain slaves, disdained by others, solitary. With tender hearts, they shall be the victims of envy; with souls burning with energy, they shall be paralysed in well-doing. And even among themselves, they shall not be recognised.'

“‘O cruel God,’ I cried, ‘at least let their lives be short, and let their souls break through the bondage of their bodies.’

“‘No, for they shall feed on hope, for ever fruitless, yet for ever revived, and the more they labour with the sweat of their brows, the more ungrateful men shall be. They shall give joy, and receive naught but suffering; the burden of the labours which I have set upon the children of Adam shall lie heavily upon their shoulders; poverty shall be ever with them, and their families shall be their companion in hunger. Whether they submit or rebel, they shall be constantly dishonoured, they shall work for all, and shall expend in vain their genius, their industry and the strength of their arms.’

“Jehovah had spoken. My heart was broken: I cursed the day when I had become a father, and I died.”

THE UNDERGROUND WORLD

The voice faded away, leaving behind it a long-drawn-out sigh.

“You see; you understand,” said Tubal-Cain, “and our example lies before you. Genii of well-doing, authors of the greater part of the intellectual conquests of which man is so proud; in his eyes we are accursed demons and spirits of evil. Son of Cain, submit to your fate; bear it with brow unmoved, and may the vengeful God be conquered by your constancy. Be great in the presence of men and before us. I saw you near to fall, my son, and determined to sustain your virtue. The spirits of fire shall come to your aid. Dare all things; from you shall come about the fall of Soliman, that faithful servant of Adonai. From you shall spring a race of kings which shall restore upon earth, in defiance of Jehovah, the neglected worship of fire, the sacred element. When you shall be no longer on the earth, the tireless army of workers shall rally to your name, and the ranks of those who labour and who think shall one day bring to naught the blind power of kings, the despotic ministers of Adonai. Go, my son, fulfil your destiny.”

At these words, Adoniram felt himself lifted. The garden of metals with its sparkling flowers, its trees of light, the huge radiant workshops of the gnomes, the blazing streams of gold, silver, cadmium, mercury and naphtha, all blended together below him into one broad beam of light, a rapid river of fire. He realised that he was flying through space with the speed of a star. Gradually, all grew dark; the realm of his ancestors seemed for a moment like a motionless planet in a darkened sky, a cool wind blew against his face; he felt a shock, glanced about him, and found that he was lying on the sand, at the foot of the mould of the sea of bronze, surrounded by half-cooled lava,

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

which still cast a reddish light into the mists of night.

“A dream !” he said to himself; “was this a dream ? No, it is only too true, this is the end of my hopes, the ruin of my plans, and dishonour awaits me with the dawn.”

But the vision seemed so clear that he suspected even the doubt which came upon him. While he was thinking, he raised his eyes and saw before him the huge shade of Tubal-Cain. “Genius of fire,” he cried, “take me back with you to the depth of the abyss. The earth will hide my shame.”

“Is it so that you obey my instructions ?” replied the shade in a severe tone. “No more empty words, the night is advancing; soon the flaming eye of Adonai will go through the earth, and you must hasten.

“Weak child, should I have abandoned you in so dangerous an hour ? Have no fear; your moulds are full: the molten metal, when it suddenly bursts forth, making larger the orifice of the furnace sealed with stones that were not proof enough against the fire, spent its overflow over the edges. You thought there was a crack, lost your senses, threw water upon it, and the stream of metal broke into fragments.”

“How shall I free the edges of this basin from the splashes of metal which have adhered to them ?”

“The metal is porous and does not conduct the heat as steel would do. Take a piece of the casting, warm it at one end, cool it at the other, and strike it with a club. The piece will break exactly between the hot part and the cold. Earth and crystals are the same.”

“Master, I listen.”

“By Eblis, you would do better to understand. Your basin is still hot; suddenly cool the part that overflows, and break off the overflow with your hammer.”

THE UNDERGROUND WORLD

“It would need a strength . . .”

“It needs a hammer. That of Tubal-Cain opened up the crater of Etna to give an outflow to the dross from our workshops.”

Adoniram heard the sound of a falling piece of iron, bent down and picked up a heavy hammer, perfectly balanced for the hand. He would have expressed his gratitude, but the shade had vanished, and the first rays of dawn had begun to banish the brightness of the stars.

A moment later, the birds beginning their morning song took flight at the sound of Adoniram's hammer, which, striking with redoubled blows upon the edges of the basin, alone disturbed that profound silence which comes before the dawn.

* * * * *

This session had made a great impression upon the audience. It had treated of the mysteries of the mountain of *Kaf*, which always excite the interest of the Orientals. To me it had seemed as classic as the descent of Æneas to Hades.

VIII

THE POOL OF SILOAM

Once again the story teller began:

It was the hour at which Tabor casts its morning shadow over the hilly road to Bethany: a few white, translucent clouds wandered over the plains of the sky, softening the morning light; the dew still gave an azure hue to the meadows; the murmur of the breeze made an accompaniment to the song of the birds in the trees which stand beside the footpath

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

to Moria. From far away could be seen the linen tunics and delicate robes of a procession of women as, crossing a bridge over the Kedron, it made for the banks of the rivulet which feeds the pool of Siloam. Behind it marched eight Nubians bearing a rich palanquin, and two camels, laden, which moved their heads gracefully as they went along.

The litter was empty; for at dawn the Queen of Saba, with her women, had left the tents where she insisted upon staying with her train outside the walls of Jerusalem, and now, the better to enjoy the charm of this fresh countryside, she had abandoned it.

Young and beautiful for the most part, those who followed Balkis were going early to the fountain to wash their mistress's linen, and she, dressed as simply as themselves, went gaily before them with her nurse, the young people chattering happily behind.

"Your arguments do not convince me, my daughter," the nurse was saying. "To me this marriage seems a grave act of folly, and if there be any excuse for such a mistake, it can only be the pleasure that is secured thereby."

"What an edifying system of morality! If only Soliman the Wise could hear you . . ."

"Is he then so wise, since, being no younger young, he covets the rose of the Sabeans?"

"Flatterer! My good Sarahil, you begin too early in the day."

"Do not arouse a severity which is still asleep. I might say . . ."

"Well, say it."

"That you are in love with Soliman; and you would deserve it."

"I know not," answered the young Queen, laughing. "I have examined myself carefully upon this

THE POOL OF SILOAM

point, and probably the King is not altogether indifferent to me."

"If it were so, you would not have gone into a point so delicate with so much care. No, you are thinking about a marriage . . . of policy, and you throw flowers upon the barren pathway of convenience. Soliman has made your States, like those of all his neighbours, tributary to his power, and you imagine that you may set them free by giving yourself a master whom you expect to make a slave. But take care."

"What is there to fear? He worships me."

"He professes towards his own noble person a passion too strong to allow his feelings with regard to you to go beyond the desire of the senses, and nothing is more fragile. Soliman is wary, ambitious and cold."

"Is he not the greatest Prince in all the world, the noblest offshoot of the race of Sem from which I, too, am descended? Is there upon the earth a Prince more worthy than he to provide the dynasty of the Hemiarites with descendants?"

"The lineage of the Hemiarites, our ancestors, comes down farther than you realise. Do you see the children of Sem commanding the dwellers in the air? Besides, I hold fast to the predictions of the oracle; your destiny is not yet accomplished, and the sign by which you shall recognise your husband has not yet appeared; the hoopoe has not yet made known the will of the eternal powers which protect you."

"Does my fate depend upon the will of a bird?"

"A bird which is unique, whose intelligence is not to be found in any species which we know; whose soul, the high priest tells me, comes from the element of fire. She is no earthly creature. She belongs to the djinns."

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

"Truly," said Balkis, "Soliman tries in vain to tame her, and presents his shoulder or his wrist to her without any response."

"I fear that she will never rest there. In the days when animals were obedient, and their race is no more, they did not obey men created from the slime. They depend only upon the *dives*, or djinns, the children of the air or of fire. Soliman is of the race which Adonai made out of clay."

"Yet the hoopoe obeys me."

Sarahil smiled and shook her head. A princess of the blood of the Hemiarites, a relative of the late King, the Queen's nurse had sounded the depths of the natural sciences. Her prudence equalled her discretion and her kindness.

"Queen," she said, "there are secrets which, at your age, you may not know—secrets which the daughters of our house must never know before their marriage. If passion leads them astray, and they fall, the mysteries are for ever kept from them, so that the common herd of men shall be for ever ignorant. Let it be enough for you to know this: Hud-Hud, this famous bird, will only accept as master him who is destined to be the husband of the princess of Saba."

"You will make me curse this feathered tyranny."

"And so, perhaps, save you from a tyrant armed with a sword."

"Soliman has had my word, and unless I am prepared to draw his just resentment upon us . . . Sarahil, the die is cast; the time is drawing near, and this very evening . . ."

"The power of the Eloims (the gods) is great," murmured the nurse.

To break off the conversation, Balkis turned aside, and began to gather some of the hyacinths, mandra-

THE POOL OF SILOAM

gores and cyclamens which formed a pattern upon the green fields. The hoopoe, which had flown after her, hopped coquettishly around, as though she would have asked forgiveness.

The delay allowed the women to rejoin their sovereign. They were talking about the temple of Adonai, whose walls they could see, and the sea of bronze which had been the sole subject of conversation for four days.

The Queen seized upon this new topic, and the attendants, anxious to hear her views, surrounded her. Tall sycamores, which spread aloft green arabesques upon an azure ground, surrounded the charming group with a translucent shade.

“Nothing,” Balkis told them, “could equal the astonishment which overwhelmed us last evening. Soliman himself was silent with alarm. Three days before, everything was lost, and Master Adoniram had fallen with the ruins of his work. His glory, betrayed, rolled away before our eyes with the streams of rebellious lava; the artist was plunged again into nothingness. Now his victorious name resounds upon the hillsides; his workmen have raised a heap of palms before the threshold of his house, and he is greater than ever in Israel.”

“The tumult of his triumph,” said one of the young Sabeans, “even reached our tents, and, troubled by the remembrance of the recent catastrophe, O Queen, we trembled for your life. Your daughters have not heard what happened.”

“Without waiting for the molten metal to cool, Adoniram, so I was told, called back the disheartened workmen as soon as morning came. The mutinous chiefs surrounded him. With a few words he calmed them, and for three days they set to work, freeing the

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

moulds to hasten the cooling of the basin which they had believed broken. Their purpose was shrouded in mystery. On the third day these countless craftsmen, working before the dawn, raised the brazen bulls and lions with levers which the heat was still great enough to char. These great masses were dragged beneath the basin, and set in position with a skill which verges on the miraculous; the sea of bronze, emptied and freed from its supports, settled down upon its four-and-twenty caryatids; and while Jerusalem was still deploring all this waste of money, the masterpiece dazzled the astonished eyes of those who wrought it. Suddenly the barriers which the workmen had set up were torn down: the crowd rushed forward; the noise of it went even to the palace. Soliman feared a sedition; he went, and I went with him. A vast host of people were hard upon our heels. A hundred thousand workmen, wild with delight, with palms about their heads, welcomed us. Soliman could not believe his eyes. The whole city was shouting Adoniram's name to the heavens."

"What a triumph! How happy he must be!"

"He? How strange a genius! How deep and full of mystery that soul! At my request he was sought, his name was called; the workmen rushed in all directions—in vain. Disdainful of his victory, Adoniram hid himself; he would receive no praise. The star had eclipsed itself. 'Come,' said Soliman, 'the people's king has ceased to favour us.' But I, when I left that battlefield of the genius, my heart was sad, and my thoughts filled with the memory of that mortal, great indeed in his works, but greater still by his absence at such a moment."

"I saw him pass the other day," said one of the virgins of Saba; "the flame of his eyes passed across

THE POOL OF SILOAM

my cheeks and made them flush. He has the majesty of a king."

"His beauty," said one of her companions, "is greater than that of the children of men; his stature is glorious and his appearance overpowering. So I imagine the gods and genii to be."

"More than one of you, I suppose, would gladly join her destiny to that of the noble Adoniram?"

"O Queen, what are we compared to one so great? His soul is in the clouds, and that proud heart would not descend to one of us."

The pool of Siloam was surrounded by jasmines in flower, with terebinths and acacias standing over them, among them a few palm-trees bending down their pale heads. There grew marjoram, grey irises, thyme, and verbena, with the glowing rose of Sharon. Beneath these groves of gay-starred shrubs were ancient benches before which bubbled the springs of fresh water which fed the fountain. These resting-places were bedecked with vines that clung to the branches above. The apios with their reddish perfumed clusters, the blue wistarias, climbed in graceful scented festoons to the tops of the pale and trembling ebony-trees.

Just at the moment when the Queen of Saba's procession reached the neighbourhood of the fountain, a man seated on the edge of the pool, wherein, deep in thought, he was abandoning a hand to the caresses of the water, rose, and would have gone away. Balkis was before him; he raised his eyes to heaven, and turned away more quickly.

But she, more quickly still, placed herself in his way. "Master Adoniram, why would you avoid me?"

"I have never sought the company of men, and I dread the countenances of kings."

"Does mine at this moment seem so terrible?"

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

said the Queen with a penetrating softness which made the young man look up at her.

What he saw was far from reassuring him. The Queen had taken off the insignia of greatness, and the woman, in the simplicity of her morning attire, was even more to be feared. She had gathered her hair under a long flowing veil; her transparent white robe, lifted by the inquisitive breeze, allowed him to glimpse a bosom moulded like a perfect chalice. In this simple dress, Balkis's youth seemed tenderer, more gay, and respect could no longer hold in check either admiration or desire. That touching grace, which knew not of itself; the childlike face and virginal expression, made a new and even deeper impression upon Adoniram's heart.

"Why do you keep me here?" he said bitterly. "My sufferings are all that I can bear, and you have only greater suffering to offer me. Your mind is fickle and your favour fleeting. You only hold out a trap that you may the more cruelly torment those whom it takes captive. Farewell, Queen, who forget so quickly, and do not tell your secret thoughts."

After the last few words, uttered in a tone of great sadness, Adoniram glanced at Balkis. A sudden trouble seized upon her. Nature gave her insistence; the habit of command made her self-willed. She would not have him leave her. Arming herself with all her coquetry she answered: "Adoniram, you are ungrateful."

But he was stern, and would not yield. "Truly," he said, "I should not have forgotten. For one hour in my life I was visited by despair, and in that hour you scorned me before my master, my enemy."

"He was there," murmured the Queen ashamed and repentant.

THE POOL OF SILOAM

“Your life was in danger; I ran to shield you with my body.”

“So much solicitude in so great a danger,” said the Queen, “and for what a reward!”

No woman, with the candour and sweet nature of the Queen, could fail to be touched, and the contempt she knew she had deserved from this great man whom she had served so ill, cut her to the quick.

“As for Soliman-Ben-Daoud,” went on the sculptor, “for his opinion I cared little—a parasite, a servile, envious creature, a travesty beneath the purple. My power is beyond the reach of any fancy of his. And, for the rest who vomited injuries upon me, a hundred thousand madmen with neither strength nor virtue, for them I cared less than for a swarm of buzzing flies. But you, Queen, you the only one among that host for whom I had respect, you whom my esteem had set so high. My heart, that heart which none before had reached, is broken, and I am not greatly sorry. But the society of human beings has become hateful to me. What do I care henceforth for the praises or the outrages which follow so close upon each other’s heels, and mingle on the same lips like wormwood and honey?”

“You do not welcome the repentant sinner; must I implore your mercy? Is it not enough . . . ?”

“No, it is success that you are flattering: if I were down again, your foot would crush my forehead.”

“Now? No, a thousand times no.”

“Well, let me smash my work to pieces, mutilate it, and bring shame upon my head again. I will come back to you, the crowd yelling on my heels, and if you still are faithful, my dishonour will be the greatest day in all my life.”

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

“Go then, and do it,” cried Balkis with an eagerness which she had not time to repress.

Adoniram could not restrain a cry of delight, and the Queen realised the consequences of so terrible a promise. Adoniram stood majestically before her, no longer in the dress that all the workers wore, but in the hierarchic costume of the rank he held at the head of the host of those who laboured with him. A white tunic pleated about his body, with a broad girdle adorned with ornaments of gold, made him seem still taller than he was. Upon his right arm was twined a serpent of steel, and on its head a glittering carbuncle: half-veiled by a conical head-dress, from which depended two broad bandelets that fell upon his chest, his brow seemed to disdain a crown.

For a moment, the Queen, overpowered, forgot the rank of this bold man; then reflection came to her, and she checked herself, but she could not put aside the strange respect by which she felt herself dominated.

“Sit down,” she said, “and let us be more calm, lest your defiant spirit should be stirred again. I hold your glory dear. Destroy nothing. That sacrifice, you offered it, and for me it is as good as made. My honour would be compromised thereby, and, master, you know that my reputation is henceforth bound up with the dignity of Soliman.”

“I had forgotten it,” murmured the artist indifferently. “I seem to have heard that the Queen of Saba was to marry the descendant of a Moabite adventuress, the son of the Shepherd Daoud and of Bathsheba, the adulterous widow of the captain Uriah. A fine marriage indeed, and one that will undoubtedly regenerate the divine blood of the Hemiarites.”

Anger reddened the maiden's cheeks, the more so

THE POOL OF SILOAM

because her nurse, Sarahil, who had now apportioned the work among the Queen's attendants, bending in a line over the pool, had heard this reply. And she was so against this design of Soliman.

"So this union does not meet with Adoniram's approval?" returned Balkis with assumed disdain.

"Quite the contrary, as you well see."

"How is that?"

"Had it displeased me, I should have dethroned Soliman already, and you would treat him as you treated me; you would not give him another thought, because you do not love him."

"What makes you think so?"

"You feel yourself superior to him; you have humiliated him. For this he will not forgive you, and aversion does not engender love."

"Such boldness . . ."

"One only fears . . . that which one loves."

The Queen felt a terrible desire to make herself feared.

The thought of the future resentment of the King of the Hebrews, with whom she had taken such liberties, had hitherto failed to impress her, and her nurse had exhausted all her eloquence upon the subject. But now the objection seemed better founded.

"I do not care to listen to your insinuations against my host, my . . ."

Adoniram interrupted her.

"Queen, I do not love men, and I know them. This one I have dealt with for many long years. Beneath the fleece of a lamb, he is a tiger muzzled by the priests, and gently he is biting through his muzzle. So far, he has contented himself with the assassination of his brother Adonias: that is not much, but he has no other relations."

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

“Really,” said Sarahil, throwing oil upon the flame, “one might think that Master Adoniram was jealous of the King.”

For a moment that woman had been looking at him closely.

“Madam,” replied the artist, “if Soliman were not of a race inferior to my own, I might perhaps lower my gaze and look upon him; but the Queen’s choice shows me that she was not born for another . . .”

Sarahil opened astonished eyes, and, standing behind the Queen, drew in the air before the artist’s eyes a mystic sign he did not understand, but which made him tremble.

“Queen,” he cried again, pronouncing each word with the utmost clearness, “my accusations, since they leave you indifferent, have swept my doubts away. Hereafter, I shall abstain from doing anything which might disparage in your mind that King who has no place in it.”

“Master, what is your purpose in pressing me like this? Even if I do not love King Soliman . . .”

“Before this conversation,” the artist said in a low voice full of emotion, “you thought you did love him.”

Sarahil went away and the Queen turned aside in confusion.

“Ah, I pray you, madam, let us leave this subject. I am bringing a thunderbolt about my head. One word that strays upon your lips means life or death for me. Oh, do not speak. I have striven to reach this supreme instant, and now I let it pass. Leave me my doubt; my courage is defeated, I am trembling. I must prepare to make this sacrifice. So much grace, so much youth and beauty shine in you, alas . . . and in your eyes, what am I? No, no, lest I should

THE POOL OF SILOAM

lose the happiness I have never hoped to gain, do not breathe the word that will kill. This weak heart of mine has never beaten; it breaks in its first moment of anguish, and I feel that I must die."

Balkis was hardly less moved; a furtive glance at Adoniram showed her this man, so full of energy, so mighty and so proud, now pale, respectful, powerless, with death upon his lips. Victorious and touched, happy and trembling, she forgot the world. "Alas," stammered this royal maiden, "I, too, have never loved before."

Her voice died away, and Adoniram, fearing lest he should wake and find it all a dream, did not dare to break the silence.

Soon Sarahil came back, and they both realised that they must speak, or betray themselves. The hoopoe was hovering about the sculptor, who fastened on this subject. "What is this bird of such gorgeous plumage?" he said, seeming to think of other things. "Have you had it long?"

It was Sarahil who replied, and she did not take her eyes from the sculptor Adoniram. "That bird is the last scion of a breed which, like the other dwellers in the air, obeyed the race of genii. Preserved by some miracle unknown to us, the hoopoe has obeyed the Hemiarite princes from time immemorial. And with its aid, the Queen, whenever she wills, can bring the birds of the air together."

This confidence produced a strange effect upon Adoniram's face. He gazed upon Balkis with a mingling of joy and tenderness.

"She is a creature of strange likes and dislikes. In vain has Soliman heaped caresses and dainties upon her. The hoopoe obstinately runs away from him, and he has never been able to get her to rest upon his wrist."

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

Adoniram thought for a moment. Then inspiration came to him, and he smiled. Sarahil became more watchful still.

He rose, uttered the name of the hoopoe, which perched upon a bush, stayed motionless, and looked sideways at him. Stepping forward, he traced in the air the mysterious *Tau*, and the bird, spreading its wings, flew above his head, then settled quietly upon his wrist.

“My suspicions were well-founded,” said Sarahil; “the oracle is accomplished.”

“O sacred shades of my ancestors! O Tubal-Cain my father, you did not deceive me. Balkis, spirit of light, my sister, my wife, I have found you at last. You and I alone upon this earth have the power to command this winged messenger of the genii of fire from whom we are descended.”

“What, my lord, is Adoniram . . . ?”

“The last of the sons of Kous, the grandson of Tubal-Cain, whose child you are by Saba, the brother of Nimrod the Hunter, the ancestor of the Hemiarites . . . and the secret of our origin must remain hidden from the children of Sem, who were made from the slime of the earth.”

“I must bow before my master,” said Balkis, holding out her hand to him, “since destiny has decreed that I may welcome no other love than that of Adoniram.”

“Ah,” said he, falling upon his knees, “I would receive so precious a gift only from Balkis herself. My heart went forth to meet yours, and from the hour when you appeared to me, I have been your slave.”

This conversation would have gone on for long, had not Sarahil, with the prudence of age, interrupted it. “Put off these tender avowals; a difficult time awaits you, and more than one danger threatens you.

THE POOL OF SILOAM

By the power of Adonai, the sons of Noah are masters of the earth, and their power extends over your mortal existences. Soliman is absolute in his domain, and our land is tributary to him. His armies are redoubtable; his pride tremendous. Adonai protects him, and he has many spies. Let us try to find a way to leave this place, and, until then, prudence. Do not forget, my daughter, that Soliman expects you this evening at the altar of Sion. To break with him at once would be to irritate him and arouse his suspicions. Ask a delay for this day only, saying that the auguries have been unfavourable. To-morrow the high priest will find you another excuse. You must endeavour to charm away the great Soliman's impatience. And you, Adoniram, leave your hand-maidens; the morning is advanced; already the new wall beside the springs of Siloam is covered with soldiers, and the sun, which seeks us out, will direct their glances to us. When the disk of the moon shall pierce the skies above the slopes of Ephraim, cross the Kedron, and come to our camp so far as the olive grove which hides its tents from those who live upon the two hills. There, we will take counsel of wisdom and reflection."

They parted regretfully; Balkis rejoined her train, and Adoniram followed her with his eyes until the moment when she disappeared among the foliage of the oleanders.

IX

THE THREE COMPANIONS

When the next session began, the story-teller continued:

Soliman and the high-priest of the Hebrews had

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

been talking for some time beneath the parvise of the temple.

“There is nothing else to do,” said the high priest Sadoc to his King ill-humouredly, “and you can but receive my agreement to this new delay. How can we celebrate a marriage when there is no bride?”

“Worthy Sadoc,” said the Prince with a sigh, “these delays affect me more than they do you, yet I suffer them patiently.”

“All very well, but I am not in love,” said the Levite, passing his pale, shrivelled hand, lined with blue veins, over his long forked white beard.”

“Therefore you should be calmer.”

“What?” cried Sadoc, “for four days men-at-arms and Levites have been standing by; the free-will sacrifices are prepared; the fire is burning uselessly upon the altar, and when the solemn moment arrives, everything has to be put off. Priests and King alike are at the mercy of the whims of a foreign woman, who brings forward one excuse after another, and laughs at our credulity.”

What most humiliated the high-priest was that every day he had to dress himself to no purpose in his pontifical vestments, and then to take them off again without having made the hieratic splendours of the ceremonies of Israel dazzle the eyes of the court of the Sabeans. Now, in the inner parvise of the temple, he was parading this gorgeous costume before the troubled eyes of Soliman.

For this august ceremony Sadoc had put on his robe of linen, his embroidered girdle, his ephod open at each shoulder; his tunic of gold, hyacinth and scarlet, doubly dyed, on which glittered two onyxes whereon the lapidary had engraved the names of the twelve tribes. Hanging by ribbons of hyacinth and rings

THE THREE COMPANIONS

of chiselled gold, the rational sparkled on his chest. it was square, a hand's length, and bordered with a row of sardonyxes, topazes, and emeralds; a second row of carbuncles, sapphires and jasper; a third row of ligurite, of amethysts and agates, and a fourth of chrysolites, onyxes and beryls. The tunic of the ephod was of violet open in the middle, and bordered by little pomegranates in hyacinth and purple, alternating with tiny bells of pure gold. The pontiff's brow was encircled by a tiara which ended in a crescent. It was made of pearl embroidered linen, and on the front, attached to it by a hyacinth coloured ribbon, was a blade of burnished gold, upon which were engraved the words: ADONAI IS HOLY.

It required two hours and six Levite servers to dress Sadoc in these sacred vestments, fastened by little chains, mystical knots and jewelled pins. It was a sacred costume, and none but Levites were allowed to touch it. Its design had been laid down by Adonai himself to Moussa-Ben-Amran (Moses) his servant.

For four days the pontifical attire of the successors of Melchisedech had received a daily affront upon the shoulders of the worthy Sadoc, who was all the more irritated because, since he was to bless, against his better judgment, the wedding of Soliman with the Queen of Saba, it was to be expected that his reward would be correspondingly great.

This union seemed to him a danger to the religion of the Hebrews and the power of the priesthood. Queen Balkis was a clever woman. In his opinion the Sabeian priests had allowed her to learn a great many things which no well-brought-up sovereign ought to know; and he was suspicious about the influence of a Queen who was versed in the difficult art of making the

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

birds obedient to her. These mixed marriages which expose the faith to the permanent attacks of an unbelieving spouse are never satisfactory to any pontiff. And Sadoc, who had, with great difficulty, moderated the pride in knowledge to which Soliman was prone, persuading him that he had nothing more to learn, trembled lest the monarch should find out how very little he really knew.

This idea was the more justified, since Soliman himself had already made it the subject of reflection, and had decided that his own ministers were both less subtle and more despotic than those of the Queen. Ben-Daoud's confidence was shaken. For some days he had kept secrets from Sadoc, and no longer consulted him. It is unfortunate that, in countries where religion is subordinated to its priests, and personified in them, the day the pontiff makes a mistake—and all mortals are liable to error—faith is involved in his fall, and God himself is eclipsed with his proud and baleful supporter.

Circumspect, distrustful, but not over-intelligent, Sadoc had hitherto maintained his position without much difficulty, since he was fortunate enough to have few ideas. Stretching the interpretations of the law to suit the passions of the Prince, he justified those passions with dogmatic complacency—an unworthy complacency indeed, but punctilious so far as the observance of form was concerned. Consequently, Soliman bore the yoke with docility. And to think that a girl from the Yemen and some cursed bird would perhaps upset the edifice which had been built up by such a prudent system of education!

To accuse them of magic would be to admit the power of the occult sciences, so scornfully denied. Sadoc was in a quandary. He had other worries too.

THE THREE COMPANIONS

Adoniram's power over the workmen made the high-priest uneasy. He was rightly alarmed by any occult or cabbalistic power. None the less, Sadoc had constantly prevented his royal pupil from dismissing the only artist who was capable of building a temple for Adonai which should be the most magnificent in the world, and attract to the foot of the altar of Jerusalem the admiration and the offerings of all the people of the Orient. Sadoc was waiting until Adoniram should have finished his work before getting rid of him, contenting himself meanwhile with feeding Soliman's distrust and suspicion. For some days the situation had been growing worse. In the middle of all the splendour of an unhopèd-for, impossible, miraculous triumph, Adoniram had disappeared. This absence astonished all the court, except, apparently, the King, who had not mentioned the matter to his high-priest, an unaccustomed reticence.

Consequently, the worthy Sadoc, finding himself useless, and determined to remain necessary, was reduced to combining with vague prophetic declamations an oracular reticence with which he hoped to impress the imagination of his master. Soliman was fond of speeches, mainly because they offered him an opportunity of summing up their meaning in three or four proverbs. Now, in the present circumstances, the sentences of Ecclesiastes, far from shaping themselves upon the homilies of Sadoc, only expatiated upon the utility of the master's eye, distrust, and on the unhappiness of a king who is delivered over to trickery, to lying and self-interest. And Sadoc, troubled, could only take refuge in the depths of the unintelligible.

"Although you speak most brilliantly," said Soliman, "it was not that I might enjoy your eloquence

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

that I came to find you at the temple: woe to the king who takes words for his sustenance! Three unknown men are coming here; they will ask to speak with me, and they will be heard, for I know their purpose. I have chosen this place in which to give them audience; it was important that their coming should be kept secret."

"Who are these men, my lord?"

"Men who know what kings do not know: there is much to be learned from them."

Soon, three workmen were brought into the inner parvise of the temple, and threw themselves at Soliman's feet. Their attitude was constrained, and their eyes were anxious.

"Let truth be on your lips," said Soliman, "and do not think to deceive your King; your most secret thoughts are known to him. You, Phanor, a simple workman of the guild of masons, you are the enemy of Adoniram because you loathe the supremacy of the miners: that you might bring to naught your master's work, you mingled stones that would burn with the bricks of his furnaces. Amrou, companion among the carpenters, you plunged the beams into the flames, that you might weaken the bases of the sea of bronze. As for you, Methousael, miner of the tribe of Reuben, you soured the molten metal by throwing sulphurous matters into it, which you gathered on the shores of the lake of Gomorrha. All three of you vainly aspire to the title and the wages of the masters. You see, I know the mysteries of your most secret actions."

"Great King," said Phanor in terror, "this is some calumny of Adoniram, who has desired our death."

"Adoniram has heard nothing about a plot which

THE THREE COMPANIONS

is known to me alone. Know this, that nothing escapes the wisdom of those whom Adonai protects."

Sadoc's astonishment showed Soliman that his high-priest placed very little reliance upon Adonai's favour.

"It will be useless, then, for you to try and hide the truth from me," the King went on. "What you are going to reveal is known to me, and I am but trying your fidelity. Let Amrou be the first to speak."

"My lord," said Amrou, no less frightened than his accomplices, "I have watched most carefully the studios, the workshops and the yards. Adoniram has not once been there."

"And I," said Phanor, "thought that I would hide, when night fell, in the tomb of Absalom-Ben-Daoud, upon the road which goes from Moria to the camp of the Sabeans. About the third hour of the night, a man, dressed in a long robe and wearing a turban like those of the people of the Yemen, passed before me. I went forward and saw that it was Adoniram; he was going in the direction of the Queen's tents, and as he had seen me I did not dare to follow him."

"My lord," Methousael began, "all things are known to you and wisdom is in your mind. I will speak in all sincerity. If my revelations are such that they must cost the lives of those who know of such fearful mysteries, send my companions away that my words may be visited upon myself alone."

As soon as the miner was alone in the presence of the King and the high-priest, he prostrated himself and said: "Lord, stretch out your sceptre that I die not."

Soliman stretched out his hand and said: "Your good faith saves you. Fear nothing, Methousael of the tribe of Reuben."

"My forehead covered with a caftan, and my face stained with a dark dye, I mingled in the darkness

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

with the black eunuchs who are about the Princess. In the shadow Adoniram came to her feet, and talked with her a long while, and the evening wind brought to my ears the sound of their words. An hour before the dawn I slipped away. Adoniram was still with the Princess."

Soliman restrained an anger, the signs of which Methousael divined in his eyes.

"O King," he cried, "I was bound to obey; but grant that I may add nothing."

"Continue, I command you."

"Lord, the fame of your glory is dear to your subjects. I will perish, if it must be so, but my master shall not be the plaything of perfidious strangers. The high-priest of the Sabeans, the Queen's nurse and two of her women are in the secret of her love. If I understood rightly, Adoniram is not what he appears to be, and he, too, like the Princess, possesses magic powers. She commands the dwellers in the air, and he the spirits of fire. None the less, these favoured beings fear your power over the genii, a power with which you are endowed, unknown to yourself. Sarahil spoke of a ring whose marvellous properties she explained to the astonished Queen, and they deplored an act of imprudence on Balkis's part with regard to it. I could not quite catch the whole of this conversation, for they had lowered their voices, and I was afraid to go too near. Soon Sarahil, the high-priest, and the attendants withdrew, bowing the knee to Adoniram, who, as I have said, remained alone with the Queen of Saba. O King, may I find grace in your eyes, for deceit has not touched my lips."

"By what right do you think you may sound the purposes of your master? Whatever our decree

THE THREE COMPANIONS

may be, it shall be just. Let this man be shut in the temple with his companions; he shall not speak with them until the moment when we decide upon their fate."

Who could paint the stupor of the high-priest Sadoc while the mutes, quick and discreet executioners of Soliman's will, took away the terrified Methousael. "You see, worthy Sadoc," said the monarch bitterly, "your prudence has effected nothing; deaf to our prayers, scarcely touched by our sacrifices, Adonai has not vouchsafed to enlighten his servants, and I by my own strength alone have unveiled the plots of my enemies. Yet they command occult powers. They have gods faithful to them—and mine abandons me."

"Because you disdain Him and seek a union with a strange woman. O King, banish this impious desire from your heart, and your adversaries shall be delivered over unto you. But how may we seize this Adoniram who makes himself invisible, and this Queen whom hospitality protects?"

"To avenge himself upon a woman is beneath the dignity of Soliman. As for her accomplice, you shall see him in a moment. This very morning, he sought an audience with me, and I await him here."

"Adonai favours us, O King; let him not leave these walls alive."

"If he comes to us without fear, you may be sure that his defenders are not far away; but let there be no blind precipitation; those three men are his mortal enemies. Envy and cupidity have soured their hearts. Perhaps they have slandered the Queen. I love her, Sadoc, and not upon the shameful evidence of those three villains shall I do that Princess the injury of believing her soiled by a degrading passion. But,

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

dreading the clandestine plots of Adoniram, whose power is so great among the people, I have had that mysterious person watched."

"So you suppose he had not seen the Queen?"

"I am sure that he has spoken with her in secret. She is inquisitive, keen upon the arts, ambitious for renown, and my vassal. She plans to take away the artist, and employ him in her own country upon some magnificent enterprise, or else to enrol, by his good offices, an army to set up against my own, and so to free herself from the tribute she now must pay? I do not know. But as for their pretended loves, have I not the Queen's word? Yet, I agree, one only of these suppositions is enough to show that this man is dangerous. I shall take precautions."

As he spoke in this firm tone before Sadoc, who was filled with distress to see his altar scorned, and his influence vanished, the mutes appeared again with their white spherical head-dresses, their coats of tortoise-shell with broad belts from which hung a dagger and a great curved sabre. They exchanged a sign with Soliman, and Adoniram appeared upon the threshold. Six of his men had brought him so far; he whispered a few words to them, and they withdrew.

X

THE INTERVIEW

Adoniram came slowly forward, his countenance quite calm, to the great chair upon which the King of Jerusalem was sitting. After a respectful salutation, the artist waited, as etiquette demanded, until Soliman should bid him speak.

THE INTERVIEW

“Well, master,” said the Prince, “at last, yielding to our wishes, you condescend to allow us to congratulate you upon an unhopèd-for triumph, and to express our gratitude. The work is worthy of me; worthy of you, and even more. Your reward cannot be great enough; choose it yourself; what do you wish from Soliman?”

“Permission to depart, my lord. The work is nearly done; it can be finished without me. It is my destiny to go about the earth; I am summoned to other climes, and I give back into your hands the authority with which you invested me. The monument I leave behind me is my reward, and the honour of having served as an interpreter to the noble plans of so great a king.”

“Your request distresses us. I hoped that you might stay among us in an exalted position at my court.”

“My character, my lord, would ill repay your kindness. Nature has made me independent, and of myself I have chosen loneliness. I care not for honours to which I was not born, and I should often try your patience. And kings are apt to change their moods. Envy surrounds them and attacks them; fortune is inconstant; that I know too well already. What you call my triumph and my glory, did they not almost cost me my honour, perhaps my life?”

“I did not admit the failure of your enterprise until your own voice proclaimed its fatal result, and I dare not boast a power greater than yours over the spirits of fire.”

“If such spirits do indeed exist, there is none who governs them. Besides, these mysteries are more within the reach of the worthy Sadoc than of a simple craftsman. I know not what happened on that

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

terrible night: the course of the operation upset all my calculations. Only, my lord, in an hour of anguish, I had to wait in vain for any consolation, any support from you, and that is why, on the day of my success, I no longer cared for your praises."

"That, master, is but resentment and pride."

"No, my lord, it is the humble and sincere truth. From that night on which I cast the sea of bronze to the day whereon I laid it bare, my merits neither gained nor lost. Success makes all the difference . . . , and, as you have seen, success is in the hand of God. Adonai loves you, he was touched by your prayers, and it is I, my lord, who should congratulate you, and cry: 'Thank-you.'"

"Who will deliver me from this man's irony?" thought Soliman. "You are doubtless leaving me to work marvels somewhere else?"

"Even until a little while ago, my lord, I would have sworn it. Worlds were whirling in my blazing head; in my dreams I saw granite blocks, underground palaces with forests of pillars, and the time our work here took was a burden to me. Now, my fervour grows more dim; I am rocked by weariness; leisure seems to smile upon me, and I think my career is at an end."

Soliman thought that he could see a tender light shining from Adoniram's eyes. His countenance was grave, his aspect sad, his voice more penetrating than usual; and Soliman, troubled, said to himself: "This man is very handsome."

"Where do you expect to go, when you leave this realm of mine?" he asked with assumed carelessness.

"To Tyre," the artist replied without hesitation. "I promised my protector, the good King Hiram, who loves you like a brother and treated me with the

THE INTERVIEW

kindness of a father. With your good pleasure, I wish to take him a plan, with an elevation, of the palace, the temple and the sea of bronze, as well of the two great columns, Jakin and Booz, which adorn the great door of the temple."

"As you will. Five hundred horsemen shall be your escort, and twelve camels shall bear the presents and the treasure which are yours."

"That is too kind of you. Adoniram will take with him only his mantle. It is not, my lord, that I refuse your gifts. You are generous, the gifts are considerable, but my sudden departure would deplete your treasury without advantage to myself. Allow me to be frank. This wealth I accept, but I leave it in your hands. When I need it, I will send you word."

"In other words," said Soliman, "Master Adoniram wishes to make us his tributary."

The artist smiled and said:

"You have guessed my thoughts, my lord."

"Perhaps he hopes to treat with us one day and to lay down his own conditions."

Adoniram and the King exchanged keen, distrustful glances.

"In any case," said the artist, "I can ask nothing that is not worthy of the great-heartedness of Soliman."

"I imagine," said Soliman, weighing the effect of his words, "that the Queen of Saba has some scheme in her head, in which she proposes to make use of your talents."

"My lord, she has not spoken of this to me."

This answer brought other suspicions into the King's mind.

"But," said Sadoc, "she is not insensible to your genius. Will you go away without bidding her farewell?"

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

“Farewell . . .” repeated Adoniram, and Soliman saw a strange light flash in his eye. “Farewell! If the King allows me, I shall have the honour to take leave of her.”

“We hoped,” said the Prince, “to keep you here for the approaching ceremonies of our marriage; for you know . . .”

Adoniram’s brow flushed crimson, and he said without bitterness:

“It is my intention to go to Phœnicia at once.”

“Since you demand this, master, you are free. I accept your resignation.”

“From sunset to-day,” said the artist. “I have still to pay the workmen, and I ask you, my lord, to give orders to your comptroller Azarias, to send the necessary money to the counter set up at the foot of Jakin’s column. I will pay as usual, without announcing my departure, so as to avoid the tumult of farewells.”

“Sadoc, give this order to your son Azarias. One word more: who are the three companions called Phanor, Amrou and Methousael?”

“Three poor good fellows, ambitious but devoid of natural talent. They are eager to possess the title of master, and have pressed me to give them the password, so that they may claim a greater wage. But, in the end, they saw reason, and lately, I have had to congratulate myself upon their goodwill.”

“Master, it is written: ‘Fear the wounded serpent that draweth back.’ You should know men better; they are your enemies; it was they who, by their tricks, caused the accidents which almost ruined the casting of the sea of bronze.”

“How do you know this, my lord?”

“Thinking that all was lost, and sure of your own

THE INTERVIEW

prudence, I tried to find out the hidden causes of the catastrophe, and as I wandered about among the groups, these three men, believing themselves alone, spoke."

"Their crime has meant the destruction of many. Such an example is dangerous; and it is for you to decide upon their fate. That accident cost me the life of a child I loved, a clever artist; Benoni has never since been seen. And justice, my lord, is the privilege of kings."

"It shall be done to all. Live in happiness, Master Adoniram; Soliman will not forget you."

Adoniram, thoughtful, seemed undecided and confused. Suddenly yielding to a moment of emotion:

"Whatever happens, my lord, be for ever sure of my respect, my grateful memories, the uprightness of my heart. And if suspicion enters your mind, say to yourself: 'Like nearly all men, Adoniram was not the master of his fate; he could but fulfil his destiny.'"

"Farewell, master . . . fulfil that destiny."

With these words, the King stretched out a hand to him. The artist bowed over it with due humility, but he did not press his lips to it, and Soliman trembled.

"Ah well!" murmured Sadoc, as Adoniram disappeared. "Ah well! What are your commands, my lord?"

"The most profound silence, father; henceforth my trust shall be in myself alone. Know this: I am the King. To obey under peril of disgrace; to keep silence under fear of death: such is your lot. Come, old man, tremble not. The sovereign who shows you secrets that he may warn you is a friend. Call for the three workmen shut up in the temple; I wish to question them again."

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

Amrou and Phanor appeared with Methousael. Behind them stood the sinister mutes, sabre in hand.

“I have weighed your words,” said Soliman severely, “and I have seen Adoniram, my servant. Is it justice or envy which animates you against him? How should three plain companions dare to judge their master? If you were men of note and chiefs among your brethren, your witness would be less suspect. But no; greedy, ambitious to possess the title of master, you could not obtain it, and resentment embitters your hearts.”

“My lord,” said Methousael, prostrating himself, “it is your will to try us. But, should it cost me my life, I shall declare that Adoniram is a traitor. By compassing his end, I wished to save Jerusalem from the tyranny of a perfidious man who would have enslaved my country to the foreigner. My imprudent frankness is the surest guarantee of my fidelity.”

“It would ill-become me to believe unworthy men, the slaves of my servants. Death has made vacancies in the corporation of masters. Adoniram himself asks to retire, and I, like him, seek to find among the leaders men worthy of my confidence. This evening, when the wages have been paid, seek from him initiation among the masters. He will be alone. Try to make him hear your arguments. So I shall know that you are hard-working, eminent in your art, and that you enjoy the esteem of your brothers. Adoniram is an enlightened man, and his decisions have the force of law. Has God yet abandoned him? has he shown his reprobation by one of those sinister warnings, one of those terrible strokes by which his invisible arm lays low the guilty? Well, let Jehovah judge between you. If Adoniram’s favour picks you out, I shall regard it as a secret sign that Heaven takes your side,

THE INTERVIEW

and I shall watch Adoniram. If not, if he denies you the degree of master, to-morrow you shall appear with him before me; I will hear the accusation and the defence between you and him, and the ancients of the people shall decide. Go then, think upon my words, and may Adonai give you light."

Soliman rose from his place, and, leaning upon the shoulder of the impassive high-priest, went slowly away.

The three men drew together with a common idea.

"We must get the password from him," said Phanor.

"Or he must die," added Amrou the Phœnician.

"He shall give us the password of the masters, or die," cried Methousael.

Their hands united in a triple oath. Near the threshold, Soliman, turning round, watched them, breathed heavily and said to Sadoc: "Now, for pleasure! Let us seek the Queen."

XI

THE KING'S SUPPER

The story-teller continued:

The sun was just going down. The hot breath of the desert scorched the countryside, still lighted by the reflection of a mass of coppery clouds; only the shade of the hill of Moria gave a little coolness to the dried-up bed of the Kedron; the leaves hung dying, and the burnt-up blossoms of the oleanders drooped, faded and shrivelled. Chameleons, salamanders and lizards ran about among the rocks; no song came from the thickets, and the brooks had ceased to murmur.

Thoughtful and cold throughout that burning,

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

oppressive day, Adoniram, as he had told Soliman, had gone to take his leave of his royal lover, who had prepared herself for a separation which she herself had required. "To go with me," she had said, "would be to affront Soliman, to humiliate him before his people, and to add outrage to the pain which the eternal powers have compelled me to cause him. To stay here when I have gone, my dear husband, would be to ask for death. The King is jealous of you, and my flight would leave no other victim but yourself to the mercy of his resentment."

"We must share the destiny of the children of our race, that bids us wander dispersed over the face of the earth. I have promised the King to go to Tyre. Let us be honest now that your life is no longer at the mercy of a lie. This very night I will go to Phœnicia, where I shall stay but a short time and then come to rejoin you in the Yemen, by the frontiers of Syria and the deserts of Arabia, going through the defiles of the Cassanite mountains. Alas, dear Queen, must I leave you already, leave you in a strange land, at the mercy of an amorous despot?"

"Be not afraid, my lord. My soul is utterly yours. My servants are faithful, and danger shall disappear before my prudence. The night which hides my flight will be dark and stormy. As for Soliman, I hate him. He covets my land; he has surrounded me with spies; he has tried to seduce my servants, to suborn my officers, to treat with them for the surrender of my fortresses. If he had ever secured any rights over my person, I should never have seen my happy Yemen again. He dragged from me a promise, it is true; but what is the breaking of my words compared with his disloyalty? Am I not free to deceive him, he who an hour ago, sent me word, with ill-disguised

THE KING'S SUPPER

threats, that his love is boundless and his patience at an end?"

"Let us raise the guilds against him."

"They are waiting for their pay. They will not move. Why run the risk of perils so great? This declaration, far from alarming, satisfies me. I foresaw it, and have been awaiting it impatiently. Go in peace, my beloved; Balkis will never belong to anyone but you."

"Farewell then, Queen. I must leave this tent where I have found a happiness of which I never dreamed. I must cease to gaze upon her who is my life. Shall I ever see you again? These fleeting moments will have passed like a dream."

"No, Adoniram; soon we shall be together always. My dreams, my presentiments, agreeing with the oracle of the genii, assure me that our seed shall live, and I take with me the precious pledge of our mating. Your knees shall receive the son who is to give us new birth, and free the Yemen and all Arabia from the feeble yoke of Soliman's heirs. A double attraction summons you; a double affection attaches you to her who loves you, and you will return."

"Adoniram, touched, pressed his lips to a hand on which the Queen's tears had fallen, and summoning his courage he looked upon her for the last time; then, turning away with an effort, let the curtain of the tent fall behind him, and went back to the banks of the Kedron.

It was at Mello that Soliman, divided between anger, love, suspicion and remorse, a prey to the keenest anxiety, awaited the smiling, desolate Queen, while Adoniram, trying to bury his jealousy in the depth of his grief, went to the temple to pay his workmen before he took up the staff of exile. Each thought

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

that he was triumphing over his rival, and counted upon a mystery which hardly deceived either. The Queen disguised her purpose, and Soliman, who knew it only too well, himself kept up the deception, trusting to his ingenious capacity for self-esteem to find fresh doubts for him.

From the heights of the terraces of Mello, he watched the train of the Queen of Saba, threading its way along the footpath from Emathia, and above Balkis, the dark walls of the temple where Adoniram still was supreme, whose sharp, notched ridges stood out brightly over the dark clouds. A cold sweat bathed the brow and the pale cheeks of Soliman; his wide-opened eyes seemed to devour space. The Queen entered, accompanied by her principal officers and servants, who mingled with those of the King.

During the evening, the Prince seemed preoccupied; Balkis appeared cold and almost ironic: she knew that Soliman was in love with her. Supper was eaten in silence; the King's glances, furtive or affectedly turned away, seemed afraid to meet those of the Queen, which in turn cast down or lifted with their languishing, restrained flame, caused Soliman again to feel illusions of which he wished to remain master. His absorbed manner denoted that he had something on his mind. He was a son of Noah, and the Princess noticed that, faithful to the traditions of the father of the vine, he sought in wine the determination which he could not find in himself. The courtiers withdrew, mutes replaced the Prince's officers, and as the Queen was served by her own people, she put Nubians, to whom the Hebrew language was unknown, in the place of the Sabeans.

"Madam," said Soliman-Ben-Daoud gravely, "some explanation between us seems to be called for."

THE KING'S SUPPER

"My dear lord, that was my own desire."

"I had thought that, faithful to her given word, the Princess of Saba, more than a woman, was a queen . . ."

"And you find that it is not so," Balkis interrupted hastily. "I am more than a queen, my lord—I am a woman. But who is not subject to error? I thought you wise, then I thought you in love. It is I who am most cruelly deceived."

She sighed.

"You know only too well that I love you," said Soliman, "otherwise you would not have taken unfair advantage of your power over me and trampled beneath your feet a heart that finally rebels."

"Those are the very reproaches I intended to make to you. It is not me you love, my lord, it is the queen. And frankly, am I of an age at which to seek a marriage of convenience? I wished to fathom your heart: more delicate than the queen, the woman, casting aside all reasons of state, sought to enjoy her power, to be loved. Such was her dream. Putting off the moment when she must fulfil a promise suddenly snatched from her, she put you to the test; she hoped that you might seek a victory only over her heart, and she was wrong. You have proceeded by threats, by summonses; you have engaged in political chicanery with my servants, and already you are more their sovereign than I am myself. I hoped to find a husband, a lover; and now I find I have to dread a master. You see, I speak sincerely."

"If Soliman had been dear to you, would you not have forgiven faults occasioned only by his impatience to belong to you? No, you think of him only as an object of hatred; it was not for him that . . ."

"Stay, my lord, and do not add an affront to the

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

suspicious that have wounded me. Distrust excites distrust; jealousy puts fear into a heart, and, I am afraid, the honour which you meant to do me would have cost my repose and liberty dearly."

The King was silent, for he dared not, lest he should lose everything, venture further upon the evidence of a vile and treacherous spy.

The Queen continued with friendly, charming grace:

"Listen, Soliman, be true; be yourself; be kind. My illusion is still dear to me. My mind is torn by doubt, but I feel how sweet it would be to be reassured."

"Ah, Balkis, how all care would leave you, if you could read into the heart which loves you and you alone. Forget my suspicions and your own; and consent to give me happiness at last. Oh, fatal power of kings! Why am I not a poor Arab of the desert at the feet of Balkis, daughter of the herdsmen?"

"Your desire agrees with my own, and you have understood me. Yes," she added, bringing her frank, child-like, yet passionate face near that of the King—"yes, it is the austerity of the Hebrew marriage which chills my blood and frightens me. Love, and love alone, would have drawn me on, if . . ."

"If? . . . finish, Balkis; your voice inspires and fires me."

"No, no . . . what was I going to say, and what sudden intoxication? . . . These mild wines are treacherous, and I feel that I am all disturbed."

Soliman made a sign: the mutes and the Nubians filled up the cups, and the King drank his at a draught, observing with satisfaction that Balkis did the same.

"You must admit," continued the Princess gaily, "that marriage according to the Jewish rite was not

THE KING'S SUPPER

established for the use of queens, and that there are certain annoying conditions attached to it.”

“Is it that which makes you undecided?” asked Soliman, gazing at her with eyes which seemed oppressed by a certain languor.

“It is indeed. Apart from the unpleasantness of having to prepare for it by fastings which make one ugly, is it not painful to have to yield one's hair to the scissors, and to be wrapped in head-dresses for all the rest of one's days? But, indeed,” she added, allowing her magnificent ebony tresses to fall around her, “we have nothing very much to lose.”

“Our women,” said Soliman, “are allowed to replace their hair by tufts of cock's feathers, pleasantly waved.”*

The Queen smiled with some scorn. “Then,” she continued, “with you, a man buys a wife like a slave or a servant; it is even necessary that she should come and humbly offer herself at her betrothed's door. Then, religion must play its part in this contract, which savours of the market, and the man, when he receives his bride, stretches out his hand over her and says, *Mekudescheth-li*; in good Hebrew: ‘Thou art consecrate to me.’ Besides, you can easily repudiate her, betray her, and even stone her on the slightest pretext. The more I should be proud to be beloved by Soliman, the more I should fear to be his bride.”

“Beloved!” cried the Prince, getting up from the divan on which he was lying. “Beloved creature, never did woman exercise more absolute power than you. I was angry, and you soothe me at your will. I was oppressed by sinister doubts; I strive to banish them.

* In the Orient, even to-day, young married Jewesses are obliged to substitute feathers for their hair, which must be cut short at the ears and hidden beneath their head-dress.

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

You deceive me. I feel it, yet I conspire with you to play with Soliman."

Balkis turned with a voluptuous movement, and raised her cup above her head. The two slaves filled the goblets, and retired.

The banqueting hall was deserted; the light from the lamps, growing dimmer, cast mysterious lights upon Soliman. He was pale, his eyes were on fire, his lips trembling and discoloured. A strange languor seized him. Balkis looked at him with a strange smile.

Suddenly he summoned all his strength, and leaped from his couch.

"Woman," he cried, "think not that you can play longer with the love of a king. Night protects us with its veils, mystery surrounds us, a burning flame runs through my every vein; rage and passion make me drunk. This is my hour, and if you are in earnest, you will no longer withhold from me a happiness so dearly bought. Reign and be free; but do not reject a prince who gives himself to you, who is consumed by desire for you, who, at this moment, would fight the powers of hell for you."

Confused and quivering, Balkis answered with downcast eyes:

"Leave me time to know what I am doing. Language such as this is new to me."

"No," interrupted Soliman wildly, draining the cup from which so much boldness seemed to come to him; "no, my endurance is at an end. For me it is a question of life or death. Woman, you shall be mine, I swear it. If you have deceived me, I will be avenged; if you love me, my eternal love shall purchase my forgiveness."

He stretched out his arms to take the girl into them, but only a shadow yielded to his embrace. The

THE KING'S SUPPER

Queen had quietly drawn back, and the arms of the son of Daoud fell heavily at his sides. His head fell forward; he kept silence, and, suddenly faltering, sat down. His astonished eyes stayed open with difficulty; he felt desire die away within him, and his head swam. His pale face, framed in its black beard, expressed a vague terror; his lips opened, but no sound came from them, and his head, weighed down by the turban, fell upon the cushions of the bed. Strangled by invisible yet mighty bonds, he tried to shake them off, but his limbs no longer obeyed the effort of his will.

The Queen approached him, gravely and slowly; with alarm he saw her, her cheek resting upon her bended fingers, supporting the elbow with her other hand. She watched him, and he heard her voice saying:

“The narcotic is at work.”

The black pupils of Soliman's eyes turned in the white orbits of his great sphinx-like eyes, but he did not move.

“Well,” she continued, “I obey, I yield, I am yours.”

She knelt down, and touched Soliman's ice-cold hand. He sighed deeply.

“He still can hear,” she murmured. “Listen, O King of Israel, you who mingle love with slavery and treason for the sake of your power—listen. I am escaping you. But if the woman has played with you, the Queen has not deceived you. I love, but not you; my destiny would not allow it. Sprung from a race superior to yours, I was compelled to choose a husband of my own blood, and so obey the genii who watch over me. Your power is as naught beside theirs; forget me. Let Adonai choose a wife for you. He is great and generous: has he not given you wisdom,

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

and well rewarded your services on this occasion? I leave you to him, and take from you the useless assistance of the spirits you disdain, and which you did not know how to command."

And Balkis, seizing the finger on which she saw the talismanic ring she had given to Soliman, tried to take it off, but the hand of the King, who was breathing with difficulty, contracted with a supreme effort, clenched, and Balkis strove in vain to open it.

She was about to speak again, when Soliman's head fell back, the muscles of his neck loosened, his mouth opened, his half-closed eyes went dull; his soul had flown to the country of dreams.

The palace of Mello was asleep, all but the servants of the Queen of Saba, who had made their host drowsy. In the far distance, the thunder growled; the black skies were threaded by flashes of lightning; the winds unloosed, poured rain upon the mountains.

An Arab courser, black as the grave, was waiting for the Princess, who gave the signal to retire, and soon the procession, winding through the ravines about the hill of Sion, went down into the valley of Josaphat. It forded the Kedron, whose flood waters were already rising to protect the flight, and, leaving on the right Mount Tabor with the lightning flashing about its summit, came to the corner of the Garden of Olives, and the road over the hills to Bethany.

"We will take this road," the Queen said to her guards. "Our horses are agile enough. By this time the tents have been folded, and our people are on their way to the Jordan. At the second hour we shall find them beyond the salt lake, and from there we shall reach the defiles of the mountains of Arabia."

Giving her horse its rein, she smiled at the storm,

THE KING'S SUPPER

thinking that her beloved Adoniram, now doubtless on the road to Tyre, shared with her its displeasure.

Just as they started off upon the road to Bethany, the lightning showed them a group of men who crossed it silently and halted, terrified by the noise of this procession of spectres riding through the night.

Balkis and her train passed before them, and one of the guards who had gone forward to see what they were, said in a low voice to the Queen:

“They are three men who carry a dead man wrapped in a shroud.”

XII

MACBENACH

During the pause which followed this story, the audience were greatly excited by contrary opinions. Some refused to admit the tradition which the storyteller had followed. They asserted that the Queen of Saba had really borne a son to Soliman and to no one else. The Abyssinian, especially, considered his religious convictions outraged by the suggestion that his sovereigns were only descended from a workman.

“You have lied,” he cried to the rhapsodist. “The first of our Abyssinian kings was called *Menelik*, and he was indeed the son of Soliman and Belkis-Makeda. His descendant still rules over us at Gondar.”

“Brother,” said a Persian, “let us listen to the end, otherwise you will have yourself thrown out as you were the other night. From our point of view, the legend is orthodox enough, and if your little Abyssinian *Prester John* insists that he is descended from Soliman, we will grant him that it is by some Ethiopian

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

black woman, and not by Queen Balkis, who was of our colour.”

The coffee-house keeper interrupted the furious reply which the Abyssinian had upon his lips, and with some difficulty re-established calm.

The story-teller resumed his tale.

While Soliman was welcoming the Queen of the Sabceans at his country-house, a man, passing over the heights of Moria, looked thoughtfully down upon the twilight that was fading away in the clouds, and the torches which were beginning to blaze like constellations of stars beneath the shadows of Mello. He sent a last thought to his love, bade farewell to the rocks of Solime, and the banks of the Kedron which he would never see again.

The weather was cloudy, and the sun, becoming paler, saw night upon the earth. At the sound of hammers striking upon the brazen gongs to call the workmen, Adoniram tore himself away from his thoughts, passed through the host of assembled workers, and, to preside over the payments, went into the temple, whose eastern door he partly opened, taking up his post at the foot of the column Jakin.

The lighted torches under the peristyle sent up showers of sparks when some drops of tepid rain touched them, and the panting workmen gaily offered their bosoms to its caresses.

It was a mighty crowd, and Adoniram, in addition to the book-keepers, had other men to help to pay, each according to his proper order. The three degrees were distinguished by a secret word instead of the manual signs which would have taken too long. Each man received his wage when he pronounced the proper password.

The secret word of the apprentices had hitherto

MACBENACH

been JAKIN, the name of one of the bronze columns; the secret word of the companions, BOOZ, the name of the other pillar; and the word of the masters, JEHOVAH.

Arranged in categories, and drawn up in lines, the workmen presented themselves at the counters, before the overseers, over whom Adoniram presided. He touched the hand of each, and in his ear they whispered a word. This last day the password had been changed. The apprentice said TUBAL-CAIN; the companion, SCHIBBIOLETH; and the master, GIBLIM.

Little by little, the crowd grew thinner, the place was deserted, and when the last man to be paid had withdrawn, it was realised that everybody had not come forward, for there was still money in the chest.

“To-morrow,” said Adoniram, “you will send out and discover whether any of the workers are sick, or if death has come to any of them.”

As soon as all had gone away, Adoniram, vigilant and zealous even on this last day, took a lamp and went his accustomed rounds through the deserted workshops, and into the different parts of the temple, to make sure that his commands had been obeyed, and the fires extinguished. His steps sounded sadly upon the flagstones: once again, he looked upon his work, and stopped for a long time before a group of winged cherubim, young Benoni's last work.

“The dear child!” he murmured with a sigh.

This pilgrimage over, Adoniram found himself in the great hall of the temple. The thick darkness around his lamp rolled away in reddish spirals, marking the ribs high up in the roofs, and the walls of the hall, wherein were three doors, looking to the north, the west and the east.

The first, that of the north, was reserved for the

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

people; the second was the entrance for the King and his warriors; the eastern door was that of the Levites, and outside it stood the bronze columns of Jakin and Booz.

Before going out by the western door, which was nearest to him, Adoniram looked down towards the dark end of the hall, and his imagination, fired by the many statues which he had just been looking at, called forth from the shadows the phantom of Tubal-Cain. Steadily, he tried to pierce the darkness; but the chimera grew larger as it faded away, reached the top of the temple, and disappeared in the depth of the walls, like the shadow of a man lighted by a torch and moving away. A plaintive cry seemed to echo through the beams of the roof.

Then Adoniram turned, and made ready to go. Suddenly a human form stepped from behind a pillar, and, in a furious voice, said:

“If you would leave this place, give me the password of the masters.”

Adoniram had no weapons; the object of everyone's respect, and accustomed to secure obedience by a sign alone, he never even thought of defending his sacred person.

“Wretch,” he answered, recognising the companion Methousael, “away with you. Only when treason and crime are honoured shall you be received among the masters. Fly with your accomplices before the justice of Soliman falls upon your heads.”

Methousael heard this, and, raising his hammer with a strong arm, brought it down heavily on Adoniram's skull. The artist faltered; by an instinctive movement, he tried to escape by the second door, that on the north. There stood the Syrian Phanor, who said to him:

MACBENACH

“If you would leave this place, give me the password of the masters.”

“You have not served for seven years,” answered Adoniram in a weak voice.

“The password!”

“Never!”

Phanor, the mason, buried his chisel into Adoniram's side, but he could not repeat the blow, for the architect of the temple, aroused by the pain, ran like a flash to the eastern door, to escape his assassins.

But there, Amrou the Phœnician, companion among the carpenters, was waiting for him, and he, in turn, cried:

“If you would leave this place, give me the password of the masters.”

“It was not thus I gained it,” Adoniram answered with difficulty, for he was exhausted. “Ask it from him who sends you.”

As he tried to force a passage for himself, Amrou plunged the point of his compasses into Adoniram's heart.

At that moment the storm burst, signalled by a tremendous burst of thunder.

Adoniram lay upon the pavement, and his body covered three flag-stones. At his feet, the murderers stood together holding each other by the hand.

“This was a great man,” murmured Phanor.

“In the tomb, he will not need a greater space than you,” said Amrou.

“May his blood fall upon Soliman-Ben-Daoud!”

“Let us rather give thought to ourselves,” replied Methousael; “the King's secret is our secret. Let us do away with the proof of this murder; the rain is falling, and the night is dark. Eblis protects us. Let us take this body far from the city, and bury it in the earth.”

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

So they wrapped up the body in a long apron of white skin, and, raising it in their arms, went silently down to the banks of the Kedron, making their way to a solitary hillock beyond the road to Bethany. As they reached there, anxious and with fear at their hearts, they suddenly came upon an escort of horsemen. Crime is fearful: they halted; men who are fleeing are always timid . . . and at that moment the Queen of Saba passed in silence before the startled assassins who were carrying the remains of her husband Adoniram.

Then they went farther, and hollowed out a hole in the earth in which they put the body of the artist. Methousael, plucking a young branch from an acacia-tree, planted it in the freshly moved soil beneath which their victim rested.

Meanwhile, Balkis was dashing on through the valleys; the lightning split the heavens open, and Soliman slept.

His wound was the more cruel for he had to waken.

The sun had made its journey round the world, before the lethargic effect of the philter he had drunk was dissipated. Tormented by terrible dreams, he fought against visions, and it was with a violent shock that he returned again to the realm of life.

He rose in wild astonishment; his roving eyes seemed to be in search of their master's reason. At last he remembered.

The empty cup was before him; the Queen's last words came back to his mind; he saw her no more and became anxious; a sunbeam that played ironically upon his forehead made him tremble; he realised everything, and uttered a cry of rage.

It was in vain he questioned everyone. Nobody had seen her go, and her people had disappeared in the

MACBENACH

plain, only the traces of her camp had been found. "This then," cried Soliman, casting a look of wrath at Sadoc the high-priest, "this is the help your god sends to his faithful servants! Was it this he promised me? He delivers me as a plaything to the spirits of the abyss, and you, you imbecile, who reign in his name through my lack of power, you have abandoned me, without foreseeing anything, preventing anything. Who will give me winged legions to reach that perfidious Queen. Spirits of the earth and the fire, rebellious powers, spirits of the air, will you obey me?"

"Blaspheme not," cried Sadoc. "Jehovah alone is great, and he is a jealous god."

In the midst of this disorder there appeared the prophet Ahias of Silo, dark, terrible and burning with divine fire—Ahias, poor and feared, whose greatness was only of the spirit. To Soliman he spoke: "God marked the brow of Cain the murderer with a sign, and he declared: 'Whosoever shall seek the life of Cain shall be punished seven times.' And Lamech, the son of Cain, having shed blood, it was written: 'The death of Lamech shall be avenged seventy times seven.' Now hear, O King, what the Lord has bade me say to you: 'He who has shed the blood of Cain and Lamech shall be chastised seven hundred times seven times.'"

Soliman bowed his head; he remembered Adoniram, knew that his orders had been carried out, and remorse drew from him the cry: "Wretches! what have they done? I never said that they should kill him."

Abandoned by his God, at the mercy of the genii, disdained and betrayed by the Princess of the Sabeans, Soliman in despair looked down upon the disarmed hand, upon which the ring he had received from

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

Balkis still shone. The talisman gave him a gleam of hope. When he was alone, he turned the bezel towards the sun, and towards him came all the birds of the air, save Hud-Hud, the magic hoopoe. Three times he called the hoopoe and forced her to obey, then bade her take him to the Queen. At once the bird took flight again, and Soliman, stretching out his arms to her, felt himself lifted from the ground, and carried in the air. Fear took possession of him, he withdrew his hand, and came to earth again. The hoopoe went on across the valley, and at the top of a hillock perched upon the frail bough of an acacia-tree, and Soliman could not compel her to leave it.

Then, mastered by a wild frenzy, King Soliman dreamed of raising countless armies and putting the kingdom of Saba to fire and sword. Often he shut himself up alone to curse his fate and to conjure spirits. An afrit, genius of the abyss, was constrained to serve him and go with him in his solitudes. To forget the Queen, and stamp out his fatal passion, Soliman sent everywhere for strange women whom he married with unholy rites, and they initiated him into the idolatrous worship of images. Soon, to bend the genii to his will, he peopled the high places and, not far from Tabor, built a temple to Moloch.

So was fulfilled the prophecy which the shade of Enoch had uttered in the realm of fire to his son Adoniram, in these words: "You are destined to avenge us, and this temple which you are raising to Adonai shall bring about the fall of Soliman."

But the King of the Hebrews did still more, so the Talmud tells us, for the noise of the murder of Adoniram being spread about, the people in their wrath demanded justice, and the King ordered that nine

MACBENACH

masters should make sure that the artist was truly dead, by finding his body.

Seventeen days went by. The investigations made in the neighbourhood of the temple produced nothing, and the masters searched in vain through all the country-side. And then, one day, one of them, wearied by the heat, thought to grasp a branch of an acacia-tree from which some strange unknown bird of brilliant plumage had just flown, that so he might climb more easily. He was surprised to find that the whole tree gave way beneath his hand, and was not fully rooted in the ground. The earth had recently been moved, and the astonished master called to his companions.

At once the nine set to digging with their nails, and found the shape of a grave. And one of them said to his brothers:

“Perhaps the murderers were felons who wished to learn the password of the masters from Adoniram. Perhaps they succeeded; would it not be prudent to change the word?”

“What word shall we choose?” said another.

“If we find our master here,” said a third, “the first word which one of us shall utter shall be the password. It shall immortalise the memory of the crime, and the oath we swear here to avenge it, we and our children after us, upon those murderers and their posterity while the earth shall endure.”

The oath was sworn; their hands were joined above the grave, and they began to dig with eagerness.

When they had recognised the corpse, one of the masters took it by one finger, and the skin stayed in his hand; so too a second; a third seized it by the wrist, in the manner of the masters to the companions, and still the skin came away, whereupon he cried:

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

MAK BENACH, which means: THE FLESH LEAVES THE BONES.

Immediately they agreed that this, henceforth, should be the word of the masters and the rallying cry of the avengers of Adoniram, and God's justice has determined that this word, through many centuries, should rally the peoples against the lineage of kings.

Phanor, Amrou and Methousael had taken to flight; but, recognised as false brothers, they perished at the hands of workmen in the States of Maaca, the King of the country of Geth, where they had hidden themselves under the names of Sterkin, Oterfut, and Hoben.

Nevertheless, the guilds, by a secret inspiration, still continued to seek the vengeance which had been denied them upon *Abiram* or the murderer. And the posterity of Adoniram was sacred in their eyes; long afterwards they swore by *the sons of the widow*, for so they called the descendants of Adoniram and the Queen of Saba.

On the express order of Soliman-Ben-Daoud, the illustrious Adoniram was buried beneath the very altar of the temple he had raised; and it was for this that Adonai left the Ark of the Hebrews and brought to slavery the successors of Daoud.

* * * * *

Greedy for honours, might and pleasure, Soliman married five hundred wives, and finally constrained the reconciled genii to serve his designs against the neighbouring nations, by the virtue of the famous ring, once carved by Irad, father of Maviael the Cainite, and owned in turn by Enoch, who used it to command the stones, then by the patriarch Jared,

MACBENACH

and Nimrod, who bequeathed it to Saba, the father of the Hemiarites.

This ring of Soliman's made the genii, the winds and all the animals obedient to him. Surfeited with power and pleasures, the wise Soliman kept on repeating: "Eat, drink and love; for all the rest is but vanity."

Yet, by a strange contradiction, he was not happy. This King, whom material things had brought so low, aspired to become immortal.

By artifice, and with the help of his great knowledge, he hoped to secure this immortality by observing certain conditions: in order to purify his body from mortal elements without encompassing its dissolution, it must sleep the profound sleep of the dead for two hundred and twenty-five years, beyond the reach of attack from any corrupting principle. After that, the exiled soul would return to its envelope, which would be made young again with the splendid virility whose blossoming is marked by the age of thirty-three years.

When he had grown old and feeble, as soon as he saw the signs of an approaching end in the failing of his strength, Soliman ordered the genii whom he had made his slaves to build for him, in the mountain of Kaf, an inaccessible palace, and in the middle of it a massive throne of gold and ivory, raised upon four pillars made from the lusty trunk of an oak.

There, Soliman, the prince of the genii, had determined to pass this time of trial. The last days of his life were spent in charming away, by magic signs, by mystic words, and by the virtue of the ring, all the animals, all the substances, all the elements, all the substances endowed with the power to decompose matter. He laid a spell upon the vapours of the

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

clouds, the dampness of the earth, the rays of the sun, the breath of the winds, the butterflies, the insects and larvæ. He laid a spell upon the birds of prey, the bat, the owl, the rat, the noisome fly, the worm, and the family of insects which creep and gnaw. He laid a spell upon metal; upon stones, alkalis and acids, even the emanations that come from plants.

Having done all this, when he was sure that he had withdrawn his body from all the agents of destruction, pitiless ministers of Eblis, he had himself carried for the last time to the heart of the mountains of Kaf, and there, gathering the genii together, he set them tremendous tasks, enjoining upon them, under pain of the most fearful punishments, to respect his slumbers and watch over him.

Then he seated himself upon his throne, and there settled himself comfortably, and his limbs, little by little, grew cold; his eyes grew dim; his breathing stopped, and he went to sleep in death.

And his genii slaves continued to serve him, to carry out his orders and to prostrate themselves before their master, for whose awakening they waited.

The winds respected his face; the larvæ which engender worms could not draw near him; the birds and quadrupeds of prey were forced to remain away from him: the water turned aside its vapours, and, by the strength of the spells, the body remained intact for more than two centuries.

Soliman's beard grew and rolled down to his feet; his nails pierced the leather of his gloves and the golden material of his shoes.

But how shall human wisdom, in its narrow limits, bring about the INFINITE? Soliman had forgotten to charm one insect, the most insignificant of all . . . he had forgotten the mite.

MACBENACH

Mysteriously, invisibly, the mite advanced. It settled itself in one of the pillars that upheld the throne, and gnawed there slowly, slowly, without ever stopping. Not the acutest ears could have heard that atom scratching, as every year it scattered behind it a few grains of tiny dust.

It worked for two hundred and twenty-four years. Then suddenly the pillar that had been gnawed away, broke beneath the weight of the throne, which crashed to the ground with a tremendous noise.*

It was the mite which vanquished Soliman, and the first to know of his death; for the King of Kings, thus cast upon the flag-stones, never woke.

Then the humbled spirits recognised their mistake, and recovered their liberty.

And here endeth the story of the great Soliman-Ben-Daoud, which is to be welcomed with respect by all true believers, for it is shortly told by the sacred hand of the Prophet, in the thirty-fourth *fatihat* of the Koran, the mirror of wisdom and fountain of truth.

THE END OF THE STORY OF SOLIMAN AND THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

* According to the Orientals, the powers of nature can only act by virtue of a common agreement. It is this agreement between all creatures that makes the power of Allah himself. It is interesting to observe the similarity between the mite which triumphed over Soliman's ambitious arrangements, and the legend of Edda. Odin and Freya had, in the same way, put a spell upon all creatures so that they should respect the life of Balder, their child. But they forgot the mistletoe, and this humble plant caused the death of the son of the gods. It was for this reason that the mistletoe was sacred in the religion of the Druids, which succeeded that of the Scandinavians.

STORY OF THE QUEEN OF THE MORNING

The story-teller had finished his tale, which had lasted nearly two weeks. I have been afraid to take away from its interest by speaking of what I saw at Stamboul between the evening sessions. Nor have I thought it necessary to relate the little stories, interpolated here and there, as the custom is, either when the audience was not yet fully assembled, or as a diversion from the more dramatic incidents. The *cafedjis* often go to considerable expense to secure the services of one or other story-teller of renown. As the session never lasts longer than an hour and a half, they can appear in several cafés the same night. They also give *sessions* in the harems, when the husband, having made certain of the interest of a story, wishes his family to enjoy the pleasure he himself has had. To make the arrangements, prudent people apply to the syndic of the guild of story-tellers, who are called *Khassideens*, for it sometimes happens that dishonest story-tellers, dissatisfied with their takings in the café or the amount paid them in some private house, disappear in the middle of an interesting situation, and leave the audience desolated, because they will never know the end of the story.

I was very fond of the café which my friends the Persians used to frequent, because of the variety of its customers and the freedom of speech which reigned there; it reminded me of the *Café de Surate* of the good Bernadin de Saint-Pierre. And, in fact, much more tolerance is to be met with in these cosmopolitan gatherings of merchants from every part of Asia than in the cafés which are solely frequented by Turks or Arabs. Every evening the story which we had been told was discussed by the different groups of customers; for in an Eastern café the conversation is never general, and except for the remarks of the

MACBENACH

Abyssinian, who, being a Christian, seemed to be rather too fond of Noah's juice of the grape, nobody had ever cast doubt upon the principal points in the tale. They are, in fact, in conformity with the general beliefs of the Orient, only there is some trace in them of that spirit of popular opposition which distinguishes the Persians and the Arabs of the Yemen. Our story-teller belonged to the sect of Ali, which is, so to speak, the Catholic tradition of the Orient, while the Turks, who support the sect of Omar, represent a type of Protestantism, which they have placed in the ascendant, by their conquest of the peoples of the south.

PART IV
THE BAÏRAM

I

THE SWEET WATERS OF ASIA

WE had not abandoned our plan of going one Friday to the Sweet Waters of Asia. This time we took the land route which goes on farther to Buyukdere.

On the way, we stopped at a country-house, where B***-Effendi lived, one of the Sultan's high officials. He was an Armenian, who had married a relative of the Armenians with whom my friend lived. A garden with rare plants lay before the entrance to the house, and two very pretty little girls, dressed like miniature sultanas, were playing among the flowers under the watchful eye of a negress. They came and embraced the painter, and went with us to the house. A lady in Levantine costume welcomed us, and my friend said to her: "*Kalimere, kokona!*" (Good-day, madam). He spoke to her in Greek, for she was herself a Greek, though married to an Armenian.

I must admit that, after a year's absence from my own country, it was very delightful to me to find a family in every respect European, except for the dress of the women, who, fortunately for local colour, did not go beyond the latest Constantinople fashions.

Madame B*** made her little girls bring us a

THE SWEET WATERS OF ASIA

collation; then we went into the chief room in the house, where there were several Levantine ladies. One of them seated herself at the piano, and played one of the latest pieces from Paris; it was an act of politeness we greatly appreciated as we admired fragments of one of Halévy's latest operas.

There were newspapers on the tables, and plays and books of verse; the writings of Victor Hugo and Lamartine. This seemed strange to one coming from Syria, but it is nothing to be surprised at when we remember that Constantinople is almost as interested in the literary and artistic productions of Paris as St. Petersburg.

While we were looking through the illustrated books and albums, M. B*** came home; he wished to keep us for dinner, but as we had made up our minds to go to the Sweet Waters we declined. M. B*** was good enough to go with us as far as the Bosphorus.

We stayed some time on the shore, waiting for a caïque. While we were going along the quay, we saw a man of majestic appearance coming along. His complexion was like that of a mulatto, and he was splendidly dressed in the Turkish fashion, but in the ancient style, not that of the *reform*. When he saw M. B*** he stopped. M. B*** greeted him with respect, and we left them to talk for a moment. My friend told me that he was a personage of importance, and that we must be careful, when he left us, to make a fine *salamalek*, raising the hand to the chest and the mouth, in the Oriental way. I did as he told me, and the mulatto replied very graciously.

I was sure that it was not the Sultan, whom I had already seen. "Who is he?" I asked, when he had left us.

THE BAÏRAM

“He is the *kislar-aga*,” the painter replied with a kind of admiration, not unmixed with fear.

Then I understood. The *kislar-aga* is the chief of the eunuchs of the seraglio, the man most feared after the Sultan, and more than the first vizier. I was sorry that I had not been able to make his closer acquaintance. He seemed very polite, but also very sure of his own importance.

Then the attachés came; we left B***-Effendi, and a caique with six rowers carried us over to the Asiatic side.

It took us nearly an hour and a half to come to the Sweet Waters. Upon both shores, on either hand, we admired the crenellated castles which, on the Black Sea side, defend Pera, Stamboul and Scutari from invasions from Trebizond or the Crimea. They have Genoese walls and towers, like those which separate Pera from Galata.

When we had passed the castles of Asia and Europe, our boat entered the river of the Sweet Waters. High vegetation, from which, every now and again, water-fowl kept rising, bordered the mouth of this river, which reminded me a little of the lower part of the Nile where, near the sea, it empties itself into the lake of Pelusa. But here, nature is calmer and greener, more like the nature of the north, and translates the splendours of the Egyptian delta, somewhat as Latin translates Greek . . . at the expense of strength.

We went ashore in a delightful meadow with running streams. The skilfully cleared woods cast occasional shadows over the tall grass. A few tents, set up by those selling fruits and refreshments, made the scene look something like an oasis where the roving desert tribes halt. The meadow was full of people. The variegated shades of the dresses gave a warmth to the

THE SWEET WATERS OF ASIA

green, like bright flowers upon a lawn in spring. In the middle of the largest clearing, we could see a fountain of white marble, in that peculiar style resembling a Chinese pavilion which is so popular at Constantinople.

Their delight in water drinking has made these people devise a type of building as charming as one can possibly imagine. This was not a spring like that at Arnaout-Keuil, where one must wait the good pleasure of a saint, who only allows the fountain to flow upon his feast-day. That is good enough for *giaours*, who are ready to wait patiently until a miracle permits them to quench their thirst with clear water. At the fountain of the Sweet Waters of Asia, there is no such delay. I know not what Mussulman saint has made these waters flow with an abundance and a clearness unknown to the Greek saints. We had to pay a *para* for a glass of this water, which, if one drinks it on the spot, costs about ten *piastres* when the expenses of the journey are counted in. Carriages of every kind, most of them gilded and harnessed to oxen, had brought the ladies of Scutari to the Sweet Waters. Near the fountain there were only women and children, chatting freely, laughing and teasing one another in the most delightful way, in that delicious Turkish language, whose soft syllables sound like the cooing of doves.

If the women are more or less hidden beneath their veils, they do not try too cruelly to hide themselves from the curiosity of the Franks. The police regulations which keep on commanding them to make their veils thicker, to remove from infidels any outward appearance which might arouse the senses, inspire a reserve in them which would not easily yield to any ordinary attempt at seduction.

THE BAÏRAM

It was extremely hot, and we had seated ourselves beneath an enormous plane-tree, surrounded by rustic divans. We tried to sleep; but this midday siesta is out of the question for a Frenchman. The painter, seeing that we could not sleep, told us a story.

It concerned the adventures of an artist friend of his, who had come to Constantinople to make his fortune with the help of a daguerreotype camera.

He used to frequent the places where people most assembled, and one day came with his apparatus to the shade of the Sweet Waters.

A child was playing on the grass, and the artist had the good fortune to get a perfect image on his plate; then, in his delight at such a success, he showed it to the curious, who are never lacking on these occasions.

Out of a very natural curiosity, the mother herself came up, and was astonished to see her child so clearly reproduced. She thought it was magic.

The artist did not know Turkish, so he did not understand a single word of the lady's compliments. But a negress who was with her made a sign to him. The lady got into an *arabas* and went towards Scutari.

The painter took under his arm the case of his daguerreotype, an instrument which is by no means easy to carry, and followed the *arabas* for a league.

When they came to the first houses in Scutari, the *arabas* drew up, and the woman got out at an isolated kiosk, which looked over the sea.

The old woman made a sign to him not to show himself, and, when night had fallen, took him into the house.

The artist appeared before the lady, who explained that she had brought him there so that he might use his apparatus for taking her portrait in the same way that he had done to reproduce her child's face.

THE SWEET WATERS OF ASIA

“Madam,” replied the artist, or at least tried to make her understand, “this apparatus can only be used in sunlight.”

“Well, we will wait for the sun,” said the lady.

Happily for the morals of the Mussulmans, she was a widow.

The next morning, the artist, taking advantage of a fine sunbeam which came through the barred window, set himself to work to reproduce the features of the beautiful lady of Scutari. She was very young, though she was the mother of a fine big boy, for women in the Orient generally marry when they are about twelve years old. While he was polishing his plates, they heard a knocking at the outer door.

“Hide yourself,” cried the lady, and assisted by her servant, she hastily pushed the man and the daguerreotype with him into a narrow little cupboard in her bedroom. There the unfortunate fellow had time to indulge in some very sad reflections. He did not know that the lady was a widow, and naturally thought that the husband had unexpectedly returned from a journey. There was another hypothesis, no less dangerous; it might be that the police, the evening before, had noticed the entry of a *giaour*, and had now made their appearance on the scene. But he listened, and as the wooden houses of the Turks have only very slight partitions, was somewhat reassured to hear nothing but the chattering of women’s voices.

As a matter of fact, the lady was receiving a visit from one of her friends, but the visits which the women of Constantinople pay one another usually last a whole day; for these beautiful ladies with nothing to do try to kill time in any way they can. It would be dangerous to show himself; the visitor might be old or ugly; besides, though Mussulman women are

THE BAÏRAM

compelled to content themselves with a share in a husband, they are never free from jealousy whenever an affair of the heart is in question. The unfortunate fellow had met with approval.

When evening came, the importunate friend, having first dined, and then, later, taken refreshments and talked scandal for a long time, finally departed, and the Frenchman could be brought out of his narrow hiding-place.

It was too late to begin the long and difficult business of portraiture over again. Besides, the artist had been hungry and thirsty for several hours. The sitting had to be postponed till the next day.

On the third day he was in the position of the sailor whom a popular song supposes to have been kept for a long time by a certain president's wife in the time of Louis XV.; he was beginning to be bored.

There is not much variety about the conversation of these Turkish ladies. Besides, when one does not understand the language, it is difficult to find distraction for long in their company. He succeeded in making the required portrait, and gave the lady to understand that more important business called him back to Pera. But it was impossible for him to leave the house in broad daylight, and, when evening came, a magnificent repast which the lady had prepared for him kept him there just as firmly as gratitude for her charming hospitality. However, the following day, he made it quite clear that he wished to leave. Again, he had to wait until the evening. But his daguerreotype had been hidden, and he could not go away without that precious instrument, the like of which was not to be found in the city in that time. Besides, it was his bread-winner. The women of Scutari are somewhat savage in their

THE SWEET WATERS OF ASIA

love affairs, and this one gave the artist to understand—he finally succeeded in understanding a few words of the language—that if he tried to leave her, she would call the neighbours, and say that he had secretly forced his way into the house, to make an attack upon her honour.

This inconvenient attachment finally exhausted the young man's patience. He abandoned his daguerreotype and climbed through the window while the lady was asleep.

The sad part of the story is that his friends at Pera, when they had not set eyes on him for three days, gave notice to the police. These discovered something of what had happened at the Sweet Waters of Asia. Some country people had seen the *arabas* and the young artist following it. The house was known, and the poor Turkish lady would have been killed by the populace for having shown hospitality to a *giaour*, if the police had not smuggled her away secretly. She got clear of the matter with fifty blows of the rod, and the negress twenty-five, for the law never applies to the slave more than half the penalty which attaches to a free person.

II

THE EVE OF THE GREAT BAÏRAM

The Baïram of the Turks is like our New Year's Day. European civilisation, which is gradually finding its way into their customs, attracts them more and more in such details as are compatible with their religion; and the women and children are delighted with ornaments, trifles and playthings which come from France or Germany. Again, though the Turkish

THE BAÏRAM

ladies make delightful conserves, the best sweets, bonbons and cardboard boxes come from Paris. On our way back from the Sweet Waters we went through the main street of Pera, which, that day, was like our Rue des Lombards. It was pleasant to stop at the chief confectioner's, Madame Meunier's, to take some refreshment, and watch the crowd. Important people, wealthy Turks, came to make their own purchases, for in this country it is not wise to give a servant the task of buying one's sweets. Madame Meunier enjoys the special confidence of the *effendis* (gentlemen of distinction), and they know that she would not give them unreliable sweets. Rivalries, jealousies and hatreds sometimes give rise to crimes in Mussulman society, and if bloody struggles have become rare, poison is still, in certain cases, the final argument of the women, who, so far, are much less civilised than their husbands.

At a given moment, all the Turks disappeared, carrying their packages with them, like soldiers at retreat, for the hour called them to one of the *Namaz*, prayers which are offered at night in the mosques.

These good people do not content themselves during the nights of Ramadan with simply listening to story-tellers and watching *Caragueuz* being played; they have definite times for prayer, called *rikats*, during which they recite each time ten verses from the Koran. Twenty *rikats* a night must be said, either in the mosques, which is the best, or at home, or in the street if one has no home, and this is the case with many people who only sleep in the cafés. A good Mussulman must, consequently, have recited two hundred verses each night, or six thousand verses in the thirty nights. Stories, plays and jaunts are only relaxations after the performance of this religious duty.

THE EVE OF THE GREAT BAÏRAM

The confectioner told us a story which may serve to give an idea of the naïveté of some of the Turkish officials. She had had some boxes of toys sent to her from Nuremberg by the Danube boat. The customs duty is paid according to the declared value of the goods, but, at Constantinople as in other places, in order to avoid fraud, the customs officers have the right to retain the merchandise, and pay the declared value, if they imagine that it is worth more.

When she unpacked the boxes of Nuremberg toys, all the customs officials raised cries of delight. The toys were declared at ten thousand piastres, but the officials insisted that they were worth at least thirty thousand. So they kept the boxes, which were thus adequately paid for, and conveniently sold, without any expense for display or unpacking. Madame Meunier accepted the ten thousand piastres, laughing at the simplicity of the officials. They divided among themselves the wooden soldiers, dolls and monkeys-on-sticks—not to give them to their children, but for their own amusement.

Just as I was leaving the shop, I tried to find my handkerchief, and came across the flask which I had previously bought in the Serasker square. I asked Madame Meunier what this might be which I had bought as something to drink, though the first mouthful had been too much for me. Was it bitter lemonade, a bavaroise gone sour, or some drink peculiar to the country?

The confectioner and her young ladies burst out laughing when they saw the flask; but I could not drag any explanation out of them. The painter told me, on the way back, that liquors of this sort are only sold to Turks of a certain age. Generally speaking, in this country, the senses begin to be dulled after the age

THE BAÏRAM

of thirty. Now every husband is compelled, when the last quarter of the Baïram moon has almost waned, to fulfil the most important of his duties. There are some to whom the exploits of Caragueuz have not proved sufficiently exciting.

The eve of Baïram had come; the charming moon of Ramadan was going where the old moons and the snows of the past year all go—a subject which gave cause for reverie to our old poet François Villon. As a matter of fact, it is only at this stage that the serious feasts begin. The sun which rises to inaugurate the month of Schewal must dethrone the proud moon from this usurped splendour, which, for thirty days, has made of it a real midnight sun, assisted, indeed, by illuminations, lanterns and fireworks. The Persians who lived with me at Ildiz-Khan warned me when the time came for the burial of the moon and the enthronement of the sun, which gave rise to an extraordinary ceremony.

That night, a great movement of troops took place. They formed a line between Eski-Seraglio, where the Sultana-mother lives, and the great seraglio, which stands upon the point called after it. From the castle of the Seven Towers and the palace of Belisarius, as far as Saint Sophia, the people from every quarter poured towards these two points.

How shall I describe the magnificence of this privileged night? How shall I explain the strange motive which, that night, makes the Sultan the only happy man in all his empire? For a month, all the faithful have had to renounce all thoughts of love. But one more night, and they will be able to send to one of their wives, if they happen to have more than one, the bouquet which is the sign of preference. If they have only one, the bouquet comes to her by right.

THE EVE OF THE GREAT BAÏRAM

But upon the Sultan, since he is padishah and caliph, is conferred the right to anticipate the first day of the moon of *Lailat-ul-id*, which is that of the following month, and appears only on the first day of the great Baïram. He has a night's advantage of his loyal subjects, wherein to procreate an heir, who, on this occasion, must be presented to him by a new wife.

This was the meaning of the ceremony which used to take place, I was told, between the old seraglio and the new. The Sultan's mother, or his aunt, had to bring to her son a virgin slave, whom she herself had bought at the bazaar, and led in pomp in a state carriage.*

A long procession of carriages was soon passing through the crowded quarters of Stamboul, following the main street as far as Saint Sophia, near which is the gate of the great seraglio. Twenty carriages contained all His Highness's relations, as well as the pensioned Sultanas who had borne a prince or a princess. The screened carriages do not prevent people from distinguishing the shape of the white-veiled heads or the outer garments of these ladies. There was one whose hugeness astounded me. By some privilege, doubtless due to her rank or age, her head was covered only by a very fine gauze veil through which could be seen features that had once been beautiful. The future *cadine* was doubtless in the principal carriage, but it was impossible to distinguish her from the other ladies. A large number of footmen carried torches and firepots on either side of the procession.

The carriages drew up in that magnificent square by the seraglio gate, which has a splendid fountain,

* This ceremony has not taken place for some time.

THE BAÏRAM

ornamented with marble, carving, gilded arabesques a Chinese roof and shining bronze.

Upon the door of the seraglio may still be seen the niches between the columns where heads used to be exposed, the famous *seraglio heads*.

III

FEASTS IN THE SERAGLIO

I am obliged to forgo any attempt to describe the ceremonies which take place inside the palace, since it is my practice not to speak of things I could not see with my own eyes. But I had some knowledge of the place. Any stranger can visit the principal residences and mosques, on certain fixed days, by paying two or three thousand Turkish piastres. This is such a large sum that the average tourist often hesitates to pay it. But, as for this price, any number of people can go round; those who wish to see the place form parties, or wait until some European of importance agrees to pay for them. I was able to visit all these monuments when the Crown Prince of Prussia passed through Constantinople. On such occasions, it is customary to admit all the Europeans who present themselves.

Without venturing upon a description which can be read in every travel book, I may perhaps indicate the position of the various buildings and gardens of the seraglio which occupies the triangle of land between the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus. It is quite a city, surrounded by high crenellated walls with towers, and connected with the great wall which the Greeks built, which follows the seashore to the

FEASTS IN THE SERAGLIO

castle of the Seven Towers, and entirely encloses the enormous triangle upon which Stamboul stands.

Among the buildings of the seraglio, many are quite ancient; kiosks, mosques or chapels, as well as some that are more modern and built almost in the European style. Little terraced gardens, with flower-beds, arbours, marble-bedded rivulets, pathways of mosaic, clipped arbutus-trees and beds of rare flowers adorn that part of the garden where the ladies take their exercise. Other gardens on the English plan, with lakes and waterfowl, lofty plane-trees, willows and sycamores, surround the kiosks in the older part. During the daytime, anybody of recognised position, or who has any business with the officials, may go through those parts of the seraglio which are not reserved for women. I often used to go there, either on my way to the library or the Treasury. The library, which is quite easy of access, contains a great number of interesting books and manuscripts, notably a Koran engraved on very thin sheets of lead, which are of such admirable quality that they can be turned over like the pages of an ordinary book. It is ornamented with enamel, and extremely gorgeous. In the Treasury may be seen the imperial jewels that have been preserved for centuries. In one of the rooms are all the portraits of the Sultans painted in miniature, first by Bellini of Venice, and afterwards by other Italian painters. The last, that of Abdul-Medjid, was painted by a Frenchman, Camille Rogier, to whom we owe a fine series of modern Byzantine costumes.

So the old customs of a retired and grim existence which are attributed to the Mussulmans have given place to the progress which comes with modern ideas. Besides the principal entrance, specially called the

THE BAÏRAM

PORTE, two huge courtyards come before the main buildings of the seraglio. The farther one, with low galleries all round it, is often given over to the exercises of the pages, who have competitions in gymnastics and horsemanship. The first, to which anybody is admitted, has a somewhat rustic appearance, with its trees and trellises. There is one remarkable thing about it. This is an enormous marble mortar, which, from a distance, looks like the top of a well. This mortar is destined for a very special purpose. If by chance the mufti, who is the head of the religion, should fail in his duty, his body is to be pounded in it with an iron pestle of appropriate size. Every time this personage comes to see the Sultan, he is obliged to pass before this huge mortar, in which it may be his fate to end his days. The healthy fear which results from this practice is the reason why, so far, not a single mufti has had to submit himself to this torture.

The crowd was so large that I could not even get into the first courtyard. I gave up the attempt, though the general public are allowed to go so far and see the ladies of the old seraglio get down from their carriages. The flares and torches showered sparks on peoples' clothes, and a considerable body of servants rained blows upon the front rows of the spectators in order to keep them in their proper place. So far as I could discover, there was nothing more to see than a parade and a reception. The Sultan's new slave was to be received in their apartments by the Sultanas who numbered three, and the *cadines* who numbered thirty; and then there was nothing to prevent the Sultan from spending the night with the amiable virgin on the eve of Baïram. In this practice we cannot fail to admire the wisdom which has foreseen

FEASTS IN THE SERAGLIO

the possibility of a favourite, who might perhaps be barren, taking for herself the love and favours of the head of the state.

The religious duty which is imposed upon the Sultan this night is based upon the necessity for him to carry on his race. And the reason for the obligation imposed upon the ordinary Mussulman this first night of Bāīram is precisely the same.

The abstinence for a whole month which probably renews a man's strength, the partial fast which serves to purify him, must have been prescribed for reasons of health like those which are found in the law of Moses. We have to remember that the Orient has given us medicine, chemistry and precepts of hygiene which go back thousands of years; and it is a matter for regret that our northern religions seem only to provide us with a very imperfect imitation. I should be very sorry if any of my readers should find, in the picture of the strange customs which I have previously drawn, any intention of accusing the Mussulmans of libertinage.

Their beliefs and their customs are so different from ours that we cannot judge them except from the standpoint of our relative degeneracy. It is sufficient to say that Mussulman law sees no sin in that warmth of the senses, which is essential to the very existence of southern populations which have been so often decimated by plague and war. If we realised the dignity and even the chastity of the relations which exist between a Mussulman and his wives, we should give up all those ideas of voluptuous married life which were created by our eighteenth-century writers.

THE BAÏRAM

IV

THE ATMEÏDAN

The following morning was the first day of Baïram. Guns from all the forts and ships roared forth at day-break, drowning the call of the Muezzins who hail Allah from the tops of a thousand minarets. This time the feast was to be at the Atmeïdan, a square famous for the memory of the Emperors of Byzantium who have left their monuments there. The square is oblong, and still keeps its old shape of a hippodrome, with the two obelisks round which the chariots used to turn in the days of the Byzantine contests between *greens* and *blues*. The best preserved obelisk, whose pink granite is covered with hieroglyphs that are still distinct, is supported by a marble pedestal round which are bas-reliefs which represent the Greek emperors surrounded by their court, battles and ceremonies. They are not very well done, but their existence proves that the Turks are not so much the enemies of sculpture as we, in Europe, usually suppose.

In the middle of the square is a strange column made of three serpents interlaced, and this, it is said, was once a tripod in the temple of Delphi.

On one side of the square is the mosque of the Sultan Ahmed. There His Highness Abdul-Medjid was to come for the great prayer of the Baïram.

The next day, which was the first day of Baïram, perhaps a million of the inhabitants of Stamboul, Scutari, Pera and the surrounding country filled the immense triangle which has its apex at Seraglio point. Thanks to the nearness of my lodging, I was able to be present at the passing of the procession on its way

THE ATMEÏDAN

to the Atmeïdan square. This procession, which went round the streets by Saint Sophia, lasted at least an hour. But there was nothing very interesting to a Frank in the costumes of the troops, for, apart from the red fez which they all wore, they were dressed in what is practically European uniform. The *mirlivas* (generals) wore uniforms like our own, with golden palms embroidered over every seam. But there were blue frock-coats everywhere; not a single dress-coat was to be seen.

Many Pera Europeans mingled with the crowd, for in the days of Bairam all religions have a share in the rejoicings of the Mussulmans. It is at least a civil festival, even for those who cannot take part wholeheartedly in the ceremonies of Islam. The Sultan's band, under the direction of Donizetti's brother, played some very fine marches, but in unison, according to Oriental custom. The chief sight in the procession was the passing of the *icoglans*, or body-guard, who wore helmets adorned with huge crests and great blue plumes. They looked like a forest on the march, like that of which we read in *Macbeth*.

Then the Sultan appeared, very simply dressed, with no more ornament than a diamond aigrette. But his horse was so covered with gold embroidery and diamonds, that it was dazzling to look upon. Several horses, similarly caparisoned in harness sparkling with precious stones, were led by sayces behind their sovereign. The viziers, seraskers, kasiaskers, the principal ulemas, and a whole host of officials accompanied the head of the state, and the procession was brought to an end by more soldiers.

The cortège, when it reached the great Atmeïdan square, soon disappeared into the vast courtyards and gardens of the mosque. The Sultan got down from

THE BAÏRAM

his horse, and was received by the imans and mullahs, who awaited him at the door and on the steps. In the square were a great number of carriages, for all the great ladies of Constantinople were gathered there, looking on at the ceremony through the gilded gratings of the doors. The most distinguished of them had been granted the favour of occupying the tribunes high up within the mosque.

I could not see what was going on inside; but I had heard that the principal ceremony was the sacrifice of a sheep. The same practice is followed on this day in every Mussulman household.

The square was crowded with games, sports and amusements of all kinds. After the sacrifice, everybody rushed to the food and refreshment stalls. Pastries, sweetened creams, fried dishes and *kebabs*—a dish beloved by the people, which is made of grilled mutton, eaten with parsley and slices of unleavened bread—were distributed to all and sundry at the cost of the principal citizens. Furthermore, anyone might go into any house and enjoy the meals which were being served there. Rich or poor, all the Mussulmans who have houses of their own, treat, as well as they can, those who come to them, without concerning themselves either about their position in life or their religion. It was, indeed, a custom followed by the Jews at the feast of the Passover.

The second and third day of Baïram were only a continuation of the feasts on the first.

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I have not endeavoured to give a picture of Constantinople; its palaces, its mosques, its baths and its climate have been so many times described: all I have tried to do has been to give an idea of a walk through

THE ATMEÏDAN

its streets and squares at the principal festivals. This city, now as always, is the mysterious seal which unites Europe to Asia. If, outwardly, it is the most beautiful city in the world, one may criticise, as so many travellers have done, the poverty of certain quarters, and the filthiness of many others. Constantinople is like the scenery in a theatre: it must be looked at from the front without going behind the scenes. There are finical Englishmen who are content to go round Seraglio point, and down the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus in a steamer, and then say: "I have seen everything worth seeing." That is going too far. But we may perhaps regret that Stamboul, which has partly lost its former appearance, is not yet, either from the point of view of healthiness or public order, comparable to the capitals of Europe. It is doubtless very difficult to make regular streets on the hills of Stamboul and the lofty promontories of Pera and Scutari, but they *could* be made with a better system of construction and paving. The painted houses, the zinc domes, the tapering minarets are always charming to a poet. But the twenty thousand wooden houses, so often visited by fire; the cemeteries, where doves coo upon the yew-trees, but where jackals often dig up the dead when the great storms have loosened the soil, form the reverse of this Byzantine medal, which may still be cleaned up, if one so desires, by following the learned and delightful descriptions of Lady Montague.

But, in any case, nothing can depict the efforts which the Turks are making to-day to set their capital on a level with every form of European progress. No artistic process, no point of material improvement, is unknown to them. We have only to deplore the spirit of routine which is peculiar to certain classes,

THE BAĪRAM

and rests upon a too great respect for old customs. In this respect the Turks are as great sticklers for form as the English.

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Glad of having had the opportunity of seeing at Stamboul itself the thirty days of Ramadan, I took advantage of the return of the Scheban moon to give notice for the quarters which had been let to me at Ildiz-Khan. One of the Persians who had taken a liking to me, and always called me the *Myrza* (learned man), insisted upon giving me a present when I was about to leave. He took me down into a cellar, full, according to him, of precious stones. I thought it must be Aboul-casem's treasure; but the cellar contained nothing but stones and pebbles of a very ordinary sort.

"Come," said he to me, "here you have carbuncles, here amethysts, there garnets, turquoises and opals; choose whatever you would like me to give you."

I thought he was mad; but, anyhow, I chose the opals. He took an axe, and broke into two pieces a white stone the size of a paving-stone. Immediately I was dazzled by the brightness of the opals enclosed in this stony bed. "Here you are," he said, offering me one of the fragments of the stone.

When I reached Malta, I thought I would like to find out the worth of some of the opals enclosed in the block of chalk. Most of them, the most brilliant and apparently the largest, were friable, but I was able to have five or six cut, and they have left me an excellent souvenir of my friends of Ildiz-Khan.

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THE ATMEÏDAN

MALTA.

At last I can escape from the ten days' quarantine which I had to spend at Malta before I could get back again to the smiling shores of Italy and France. To have to spend so long in the dusty casemates of a fortress is a very harsh penance for a few fine days passed amid the splendid horizons of the Orient. This was my third quarantine, but at least those at Beyrouth and Smyrna were spent under the shade of tall trees, on the shore of a sea broken by rocks, and bounded in the distance by the bluish outline of coasts and islands. Here, our only horizon was the basin of a dock, and the terraced rocks of Valetta, with a few bare-kneed Scottish soldiers walking about. What a mournful impression! I am going back to the land of cold and storm, and already the Orient is no more to me than one of those morning dreams which are so soon followed by the preoccupations of the day.

What is there still for me to say to you, my friend? What interest have you found in these diffuse, unfinished letters, mingled with fragments from my diary, and legends picked up haphazard? But that very shapelessness is a guarantee of my sincerity; what I have written, I have seen and felt. Was it wrong of me to relate in this simple way a host of details, which are usually disdained by those who write accounts of scientific or picturesque travel?

And have I to defend myself for my successive admiration of the different religions of the countries I have visited? Yes, I was a pagan in Greece, a Mussulman in Egypt, a pantheist among the Druses, and a devotee of the star-gods of Chaldea when I was on the sea; but at Constantinople I realised the greatness of that universal tolerance practised by the Turks to-day.

THE BAÏRAM

These Turks have one of the most beautiful legends I know. Four fellow-travellers—a Turk, an Arab, a Persian and a Greek—wished to have a little feast together. Each of them contributed ten paras. But then arose the question of what they should buy. *Uzum*, said the Turk. *Ineb*, said the Arab. *Inghur*, said the Persian. *Staphidion*, said the Greek. Each wishing to have his own choice preferred over that of the others, they were coming to blows, when a dervish who happened to know all four languages, called a grape-seller, and it was discovered that this was what each of them had called for.

When I was at Constantinople, I was very much touched to see good dervishes assisting at Mass. The word of God seemed good to them in any language. Besides, they compel no one to whirl like a top to the strains of a flute, though they themselves consider this the most sublime manner in which Heaven can be honoured.

THE END

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