

of his agency involved great labour. What with attending the different courts of justice, and looking after the Chief's cases, every day without fail, and then visits morning and evening to the various officials—when the poor Maulavi sáhib came home at night he was quite worn out with fatigue. Asghari said to him : 'Father dear, your honor's age is not equal to all this toil now. The time has come for your honor to think about retiring into private life. I read in a book once that a man should divide his life into three portions—the first portion for his childhood, the second for the administration of his worldly affairs, and the third for rest and remembrance of God. Your honor surely might well come home now and live comfortably.'

The Maulavi sáhib said : 'In the first place, the Chief would never let me go. And in the second place, there must be someone, at any rate, who could do the work in my place.'

'If your honor pleads that your strength is failing,' said Asghari, 'very likely the Chief will give in. And is not my dear brother fully competent to do the work?'

The Maulavi said : 'What does he know about the ways of the courts, and of the Darbár?'

Asghari said : 'Send for him to come here for a time, and let him be with you ; he will pick up all that when he sees how it is done. Why, he is a learned Arabic scholar. There are Hindus who begin doing Kachahri work after reading two or three books in Persian.'

Asghari's notion approved itself to the Maulavi sáhib, and shortly after she arrived in Dehli he summoned Muhammad Aqil to join him. After some little time Muhammad Aqil took the whole of his father's work upon his own shoulders, and greatly pleased the Chief by his diligence. Then the Maulavi sáhib said to the Chief : 'Now, if this boy may remain here in the service of your highness, it might please your highness to set *me* at liberty.'

"Not rarely the arbiters of homage
Set free the retainer in his old age."¹

The Chief was at heart a most liberal man. He allotted the Maulavi sáhib a pension of twenty rupees a month for his lifetime, and he appointed Muhammad Aqil as his successor on full pay.

¹ A quotation from the Gulistán of Saadi.

CHAPTER XXVI

As soon as Asghari got back to Dehli, she resumed her plans for Mahmúda: Husnára was now at her old home on a visit from Jhajjar, and Jamálára had come from her father-in-law's house at the same time in order to meet her younger sister. You will remember that the whole of the Hakím's family were devoted to Asghari. As soon as they heard of her arrival, both sisters were in a hurry to call on her. All kinds of greetings went on. Jamálára said : 'Mistress, I cannot tell you how my heart was set upon meeting you. To be sure, Husnára is your pupil, but I owe you more than any of your pupils. It was you who restored my desolated home to me.'

Asghari said : 'What merit have I?'

'Come, now, mistress,' said Jamálára. 'At all events, I shall never forget your kindness as long as I live. But what can I do? You do not accept any service that we people can render you. Were it not for that, if we gave you our skins to make your shoes of, even then maybe what is due to you would not be paid.'

'In the first place,' said Asghari, 'it was not so very much that I was able to do ; but if by virtue of your princely nature your honor has regarded any act of mine with approval, well, Begam sáhib, God has placed your honor in a position of unlimited power. To make poor people like us happy will be no great task to you.'

Husnára said : 'Eh, mistress ! what words are these from your lips?'

'Listen to me, sister Husnára,' said Asghari. 'The relations of mistress and pupil between us are all over now. They lasted only while you were at school. Now (God keep you !) you are a married woman. And here are you, noble from your very birth, and at present the crowning jewel of a noble family ; and there is she, the daughter and daughter-in-law of princes. At this moment there is not one other family of higher standing than you in the city. If anyone should reach *your* gate, and be denied, surely it is his *fate* that would be at fault.'

Husnára said : ' Come, mistress dear ; what is it ?'

Asghari said : ' Sister, it is a very difficult matter. Promise me that you will not let me be disappointed, and then I will tell you.'

Husnára and Jamálára thought that she was going to ask for a place in their household for some one or other. Both of them said : ' By Heaven, mistress ! for your sake we are ready heart and soul. It was our one great wish that you should make some request of us.'

Asghari said : ' It is a matter which seems great to me ; but if you two ladies are both prepared to help me heartily, it is no very great thing after all.'

Both sisters replied : ' Mistress, God knows if it is anything we can do we will not spare ourselves in the least.'

When Asghari had thus secured a distinct promise from them, she said : ' The one object of my ambition is this : that you will accept Mahmúda into your family as a daughter of the house.'

On hearing this, both sisters kept silence. Other topics of conversation were broached. When the two were about to get up to go, Asghari caught hold of Husnára's veil with one hand, and of Jamálára's veil with the other, and said : ' I intend to take my fee now by main force. I swear by Heaven I will not let you go until my prayer is granted.'

Husnára said : ' Why, mistress, what power do you think we have in the matter ? Arjumand is only a boy as yet. And, besides, in matters of this kind, while the parents are alive, how can sisters interfere ?'

Asghari said : ' When they are grown up and married, sisters, too, become on a level with their mother. Besides, family alliances are never entered into without the approval of all the members. It is not possible that you will not be consulted.'

Husnára said : ' Up to this time there has been no question of an engagement anywhere that we know of.'

Asghari said : ' Perhaps you are not aware, then, that a letter of proposal was sent to Ulwi Khán's house. That was subsequently withdrawn.'

Jamálára said : ' If you have heard so, mistress, no doubt one

was sent ; but not a word was ever said to us about the matter. I wonder what there was amiss with Ulwi Khán ? Heaven knows why the proposal should have been withdrawn.'

In this way the conversation again began to drift elsewhere. Asghari said : ' Ladies, my request is being left in the background. Be so good as to let me have an answer—" Yes " or " No. "'

Jamálára said : ' My dear mistress, how *can* we take your part ?'

Said Asghari : ' Wealth, good qualities, good looks, these are the three main things. As for wealth, there is none left to us poor people even to mention. As for good qualities, you, sister Husnára, know Mahmúda well ; you and she were companions for two whole years. Come, tell us the truth now ; are modesty, consideration for others, good manners, amiability, self-possession under all circumstances, every kind of accomplishment—reading, writing, needlework, cooking—I say, are all these things to be found in Mahmúda or not ? That she is my sister-in-law and my pupil has nothing to do with it. No, the girl herself was created full of all good qualities by God. Is it not so ? If I am telling falsehoods, do you speak, sister Husnára.'

' Mistress,' said Husnára, ' can anyone throw dust upon the moon ? Mahmúda begam, such was the will of God, has not her equal in any of the great houses. My goodness ! could any of them hold a candle to her ?'

' And as to good looks,' continued Asghari, ' a nose, two ears, two eyes, such as people ordinarily have, Mahmúda has also. She, too, is of Adam's stock, and as good as others are. When she reaches maturity her beauty will be more developed.'

' Mistress,' exclaimed Jamálára, ' do you call Mahmúda begam a child of Adam ? By Heaven ! she is a child of the Houris. For my part, I have never seen a really good-looking girl in any big house. It is a case of " tall shop and tasteless viands. " Here are we two sisters—I declare there are many slave girls handsomer than we are. And Mahmúda is " now the sun and now the moon. " Where does one ever see a woman of her beauty ?'

' In that case, sister,' said Asghari, ' what is there amiss in us except our poverty ? You may think it " little mouth and big words " of me to say so, but not so many generations have passed

since Ali Naqi Khán found mercy with God ; and, after all, we, as well as you, reckon him among our ancestors.'

Both sisters said : ' Mistress, you are the jewel of our family. Are you and we two ? One race, one blood !'

' Then why this hesitation ?' said Asghari. ' Make me happy by granting my request.'

Husnára said : ' All right, mistress ; I will mention the matter to my mother this very day.'

Asghari said : ' It is not the mentioning ; I can do that myself. What I want is that you should give me your hearty co-operation, and now that the proposal has been broached, that you will see it brought to a successful issue.'

Both sisters gave her their word, and said : ' Please God, mistress, it shall all be managed as you wish.'

This being settled, the two sisters took their leave for the time. The next day Asghari went herself to call on Sultána begam, and presented her with a kerchief of very fine shawl-work, worth 200 rupees, which she had brought from Siyálkot. Sultána begam said : ' Mistress, you quite put me to shame. I ought to be discharging my obligations to you, and not, on the contrary, to be taking presents from you.'

Asghari said : ' I had this kerchief made to order expressly for your honor, and I hope your honor will be pleased to accept it. For a whole year and a half I had it tied up in my bundle, hoping that I should one day come back to Dehli and lay it before your honor.'

Sultána begam said : ' I must take it, then, for the good luck it will bring me ; but, by Heaven, I do feel ashamed ! I would your honor had only asked something of *me* once in a way, so that my soul might be rejoiced.'

Having got this encouragement, Asghari stood up with clasped hands, and made known her desire. Sultána begam said : ' Very good, mistress ; but pray sit down, won't you ?'

Asghari said : ' I will only sit down *now*, when I have obtained my wish.'

Sultána begam caught her by the arm, and made her sit down, and then said : ' To arrange the affairs of one's sons and one's

daughters is no light matter. When people are buying a cup from the potter, worth the eighth of a farthing, they strike it to see how it rings before they take it. And *this* is a bargain, involving all that their whole lives are worth to them. One dare not conclude it without anxious thought, and much advice and deliberation. Your honor has mentioned this matter to me ; now I will consult the boy's father, and my elder sister, and one or two other members of the family, and then, whatever seems best, we shall see. At present Arjumand is but a boy ; what hurry is there for him to be married ?'

Asghari said : ' I have made a venture of my hopes far beyond my merits, just as in Egypt there was an old woman who ventured to bid for the patriarch Joseph with nothing in her hand but a hank of the cotton she had spun. Like her, I possess nothing, save poverty and humility, to offer in the transaction. Your honor's good nature is now my only resource.'

Although Sultána begam did not say anything, it was evident from her demeanour that she was not displeased at the proposal. When Asghari took leave, she said to Jamálára and Husnára as she passed them : ' The success of this matter is now in the hands of you two ladies.'

CHAPTER XXVII

AFTER Asghari had left both the sisters lauded Mahmúda to the skies. Sultána was already half won over, but it happened that Sháh Zamáni begam too had a daughter, Díldár Jahán, and Sháh Zamáni had cherished the idea of betrothing her own daughter to Arjumand. Luck was so far on their side that Sháh Zamáni had never actually spoken to her sister on the subject up to that date. When Asghari mooted the project of an engagement with Mahmúda, Sultána begam sent to inquire of Sháh Zamáni begam what was her opinion in the matter. Sháh Zamáni was greatly disconcerted when she heard about it. Her endeavour now was to arrange so that the proposal for Mahmúda should fall to the ground, and then she would secure a definite engagement with

Dildár Jahán: At the time she merely returned a verbal message that she would think over the matter and send an answer.

Next day she presented herself at the house in person, and when the conversation was brought round to this topic, she said: 'Sister, where are *you*? and where is the Maulavi sáhib? What bond is there between the earth and the sky? Who brought this message here?'

Sultána said: 'It was the mistress.'

Sháh Zamáni said: 'I shall go myself to the mistress at once.' Accordingly she took Husnára with her, and went to see Asghari, and said to her: 'Mistress, considering that you are a person of such great intelligence, did it never even occur to you that family alliances are usually made with people in one's own rank of life? The reason why the note came back from Ulwi Khán's house was that they would not accede to a gold bedstead. And what will you give to Mahmúda, I should like to know?'

Asghari said: 'Begam sáhib, I simply made a proposal on behalf of the girl's marriage. I left no message that there was any girl for sale. Although the code of morals in this city has greatly deteriorated, I have never yet heard of a betrothal being made a mercantile transaction. Pray, if a man gives his *daughter* away is he to make a profit out of her? There remains the question of rank, and certainly, if wealth be taken as the standard, it is manifestly the case that we are out of the reckoning. We have not even the fourth part of what Ulwi Khán has. But your honor is marrying a *boy*; what does the trousseau signify to you? When a *girl* is being given in marriage, her people may well be anxious, and wonder how their daughter will fare hereafter. Or, should the other side be poor, and reduced to supporting themselves by pawning the incoming bride's trousseau, I can understand such a family being anxious about it. But your honor is *taking* a daughter, not giving one, and in your honor's house there is everything provided of God's free gift. All that behoves your honor is to find a girl, and here is a girl brought up under your honor's own eyes; not a circumstance about her is concealed from your honor. And what there is good or bad in her nature your honor well knows.'

Sháh Zamáni said: 'What then? I still say that when betrothals are being made people look to equality.'

'I beg your pardon, Begam sáhib,' said Asghari, 'I forgot. We must not think of equality now. Those were the days of our equality when Ali Naqi Khán gave his own sister in marriage *into* this family, and now the very same family is not considered equal for a daughter to be taken from it! What, have maggots attacked this house? It lacks wealth, forsooth! But such proud boasting is not pleasing to God.'

Asghari had taken her up so briskly that Sháh Zamáni was at a loss for an answer. She said: 'Mistress, you are getting angry.'

Asghari said: 'Begam sáhib, is it in my power to be angry with you? I was in hopes that your honor would assist me in this matter, and not to find that you yourself are displeased at it.'

Sháh Zamáni said: 'Mistress, if I offend you I cannot help it, but the match is not an equal one.'

'As far as wealth goes,' said Asghari, 'our side is no match for yours. In birth we claim an equality. In accomplishments, please God! *your* side will not be adjudged equal to ours. What then? Your side fails in one point, and our side fails in one point: But a *bride* such as ours you may go, lamp in hand, over the whole world and search for but never find.'

'Mistress,' said Sháh Zamáni, 'why do you not invite proposals on behalf of Iqbálmánd Khán's boy?'

Asghari said: 'I heard there were negotiations on foot in your honor's family, and so I never entertained the idea. Besides, what lack is there of proposals? There are plenty of boys for the girls, and plenty of girls for the boys. The way I reasoned was this: here is a combination of wealth and ability; the latter quality is suitable for rich people, and they confer a certain grace upon it; if a betrothal be arranged it will be good for either party. However, if your honor disapproves, why not have him betrothed to Dildár Jahán?'

'Dildára,' said Sháh Zamáni, 'is still a child, and I wish to marry her elsewhere. Marriage between relations is not altogether free from objection.'

When she had said this Sháh Zamáni took her departure, but Husnára did not get up to go. Her aunt even said: 'Come, child!' but Husnára besought her to go first, saying that it was many years since she had met the mistress, and she wanted to have a talk with her. When Sháh Zamáni had left the house Husnára said: 'Mistress, my mother approves; it is *she* who is bent on spoiling the business. She may say what she likes to the contrary, but her real object is that the betrothal should be determined with Dildára.'

Asghari said: 'It is for Providence to decide now. After all, what does my opinion stand for against her? But, sister Husnára, it was not such a bad notion of mine. It seemed to me that the two exactly fitted each other. Think what a great house yours is, and only this *one* long-wished for son! Whatever there is of money and possessions all belongs to him. The mere keeping up of such a vast establishment demands great mental ability, and great tact too is necessary. Mahmúda comes of a poor family, but what of that? God keep her! Her courage and tact are such as befit princes. Suppose some girl with no tact came into your family, and brought cart-loads of trousseau with her, of what use would they be? She would find it difficult to manage her own wealth discreetly. How would she be able to rule your family? Mahmúda, so God has ordained, is capable of ruling a kingdom. Then, again, sister, one thing which ought to be considered is, for what purpose are alliances made? In this world we ought to extend our social intimacies as far as possible. If you have kept every fresh alliance that is made within the walls of your own house, what have you gained? Whenever one arranges a marriage it should be outside the family.'

'Mistress,' said Husnára, 'both my elder sister and I have spoken to our mother clearly on every point, and now I will go and tell her all you have just been mentioning as well. I am in good hopes that our side will win.'

And so Asghari, having fully coached her up in her part, allowed Husnára to take leave.

At the other house, when Sháh Zamáni came back, she said to Sultána: 'Sister, I have told the mistress plainly to her face that

it is no match between your family and hers, and that it behoves people not to let such proposals come from their lips without thinking.' But Sháh Zamáni was in this strait, that she herself could not advocate her own daughter's engagement with her own mouth. In her heart this engagement was what Sháh Zamáni desired, but she was under the impression that the agreement would be settled by the gentlemen of the family. For the present she could only dilate on the objection to Mahmúda on the score of poverty. In the end Sultána began retired apart from Sháh Zamáni, and took counsel with her own two daughters, when Husnára said: 'Mother, the real truth of the matter is that our good Aunt is designing to keep the betrothal for Dildára.'

Sultána said: 'Well, why not ask Arjumand himself about it—as if you were saying it in fun, you know.'

Jamálára called her brother, and said: 'How, brother! there is a discussion going on about your marriage. Have not *you* anything to say about it? Say on, would you like Dildár Jahán?'

Arjumand was too shy to say anything out loud before his mother, but by a gesture to his two sisters he expressed a denial. Jamálára and Husnára found a new argument in his refusal.

'Good looks, a good figure, good brains, and natural tact,' said Husnára; 'these things, sufficient even for a makeweight against Mahmúda, you will not find in any girl. Of course, if you want a gold bedstead to be provided, that is a thing which is beyond the reach of poor people like them.'

'Sister,' said Sultána, 'the chief thing to look at is the girl. By God's grace we have no lack of anything in the house as it is. What do we want with a big trousseau?'

'Well, then,' said Jamálára, 'why hesitate? Proceed with the matter in God's name.'

'And although they *are* badly off,' said Husnára, 'the mistress is a woman of many expedients. What if she does not *talk* much about it? When the time comes she will do a great deal more than is expected of her.'

Sultána said: 'Very well, when your father comes home we will see what he thinks about it.'

When the junior Hakím sáhib came in, Jamálára and Husnára

put Mahmúda's case before him just as pleaders in Kachahri plead the cause of their clients, with the result that he, too, approved of the betrothal with Mahmúda.

At once the two sisters rushed off, heedless of their dignity, to Asghari's house. Muhammad Kámil's mother, who was in absolute ignorance of all that was going on, called out to them: 'What is it, Begam sáhib? what makes you in such a hurry? You should hold up your skirts as you go.'

Husnára said: 'Nothing; we are only going to the mistress.'

The instant she saw Asghari Husnára cried out: 'My benison, mistress! my benison on you! And now see about giving me my reward.'

Asghari said: 'May God send His benison on all of you ladies! But as for a reward, with what face can I offer you anything? My prayers are all I have to give, and you know that I pray for you night and day.'

'That won't do, mistress,' said Husnára; 'I insist upon having my mouth sweetened by you to-day.'

'Very well,' said Asghari, 'but sit down; you shall have some sweetmeats.' Then she called Diyánat, and, taking out five rupees, gave them into her hand, and said: 'Go at once and fetch some of her best sweetmeats from the bellwoman's shop, and some lumps of delight from the corner of the Dariba, and some pearldrops from Sháh Tára's lane, and almonds from the Chándni Chowk, and roasted dál from the Nil ká katra,¹ and whipt cream from the Khánam's bázár.'

Meanwhile she entertained them both with pawn, but it was not long before the basket of good things arrived. Asghari, Akbari, Husnára, and Jamálára ate heartily of them together, and what was over they sent into the schoolroom. When the two latter ladies were about to depart, Asghari said: 'Up to this moment I have not spoken a word of this to the dear mother. I will now go and mention it to her, and, please God, the day after to-morrow is a good day, both of the month and of the week; the customary ceremonies shall then be performed.'

¹ Pronounce Neel ká kuttra; the meaning is 'Indigo mart,' but it is the name of a mohulla.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE two ladies took their departure. Asghari said to her mother-in-law: 'Mother dear, have you devised any plan for Mahmúda?'

Her mother-in-law said: 'What plan can I devise? If only a message would come from somewhere! My thoughts don't go beyond one place. I shall marry Mahmúda to Muhammad Sálíh.'

Asghari said: 'Where is Muhammad Sálíh, and where is Asghari? Brother! Muhammad Sálíh's age will not be much less than that of our own dear brother.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said: 'Yes, Aqil is six months older than Muhammad Sálíh; they were both born in the same year.'

'Well,' said Asghari, 'that is not much difference.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said: 'We are barely on calling terms anywhere else.'

'I have thought of a plan,' said Asghari; 'if your honour approves, we will talk it over.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother asked: 'What is it?'

Asghari replied: 'With the son of the Hakim Fatíh ullah Khán.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said: 'My goodness, daughter, to live in a hut and dream of palaces! Where is the Hakim ji's family—with such wealth at their command nowadays that there is no one in the city to compare with them? and where are we poor creatures, who have not even a decent cottage to live in? Would it ever enter their heads to mate with us? To propose anything so indiscreet would only result in our humiliation.'

Asghari said: 'If they are rich it is all for their own good. Do we, God forbid it! depend at all on their bounty? If they are revelling in puláos and *zardas*, we too are enamoured of our crushed grain and pulse. In birth we do not yield a jot to

¹ Really 'cousin.'

them. And as for worth—good heavens! there is more of that in our Mahmúda than ever fell to the lot of their elders, I expect.'

'Sister,' said Muhammad Kámil's mother, 'worth before wealth stands up with folded hands. If I could order the making of a gold bedstead, then perhaps I might set about making such a proposal. No, my dear, you may put that out of your thoughts altogether. Why, tell me, what was there amiss in Ulwi Khán? After they had sent a note to his house they recalled it. Sister, poor folk must rely on poor folk for their custom.'

Asghari said: 'Beauty alone is a fortune worth thousands. May any evil eye be averted! I say they may search among all their kindred for anyone better looking than our Mahmúda.'

'Sister,' said Muhammad Kámil's mother, 'you talk just like little girls. Even beauty is taken into account only when it appears in someone of equal rank. And then, is it a thing to say with one's own lips, "Our daughter has a pretty face"? Besides, for my part, I don't understand what curse there is upon beauty. I have seen very beautiful women who were not valued at the price of their shoe-leather, and there are hideous creatures who are cherished as the dearest of the dear.'

Said Asghari: 'Beauty too is a thing which people do well not to be infatuated with; but it often happens that people whose outward appearance is lovely are inwardly vicious and aggressive in their tempers. Being vain of their personal appearance, they take no pains to soften the asperities of their inner nature, and so their evil temper beats down the price of their beauty. You may compare them, say, with a horse—faultless in colour, and clean-limbed, free from all blemishes, and sound in every joint, but ill-broken and a biter, and given to kicking as well, rearing whenever he is mounted, and falling over; what use could a man make of such a brute though he bought him for his beauty? But if, in addition to his outward attractiveness, he is well trained, and clever in moving, and gentle withal, then he is an article beyond all price. Like our Mahmúda, whose beauty of face and sweetness of disposition are only to be matched, praise God, the one by the other.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said: 'For all that one must have something at least to give with her. Why, just now, one of the girls in your school was reading—

"Yá makun bá fllbánán dosti,
Yá dare -afraz bar bálá-e píl,"

which means, I take it, that either you should not cultivate the friendship of elephant riders, or, if you do, then you must raise the doorway of your house so that an elephant may go in and out. Where are we poor people to find the means of interchanging presents suitable to their rank? and what need have we to expose ourselves gratuitously to their laughter? Besides, say that the betrothal has actually been effected, and then the girl is looked down upon by all the people of her new home—"Your labour is lost, and your neighbours jibe."

'Esteem and contempt,' said Asghari, 'are not determined by the bride's trousseau. The affection between husband and wife is something of a very different texture. Did Jamálára take a small trousseau with her? And yet it was not her luck to remain a single day in her husband's home. You need not go so far as that for an instance. My elder sister had a trousseau quite as good as mine, and yet why are they quarrelling every day? It is a question of each individual's tact and good temper.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said: 'Yes, I admit that. True love between husband and wife does not depend on the trousseau. But all the relations and kinsfolk—will *they* be content without having their say? And suppose the boy takes no heed of their talk—what then? The mother-in-law and sisters-in-law can find opportunities to drop some ill-natured remark in the mere course of conversation. After all that does gall the feelings. A girl's parents have to lower their heads enough as it is, and to provide even a tolerable show of trousseau and presents is an extra calamity. No, sister, I don't see how *this* creeper is going to cover the trellis.'

'We may leave the kinsfolk out of the question,' said Asghari; 'she won't have many of them sitting with her daily. True, the

¹ This is a couplet from the Gulistán of Sa-adi. The meaning is given in the following lines.

constant naggings of a mother-in-law and sisters-in-law are a terrible thing to face ; but Husnára and Jamálára—is there any need to speak of taunts or sarcasms ? They will be kissing the dust off Mahmúda's feet. The world has not gone dark all on a sudden. Or do you suppose they will thrust pots herds over their eyes directly she is married ? Your honor can see for yourself how great an affection Husnára bears for Mahmúda. There is still Jamálára—God knows the secrets of her heart, but to all appearance she lays herself out to be kind to her whenever they are together. And, after all, I am here still alive ; if they behave badly to Mahmúda, with what faces will they appear before me ? And—one thing which counts for a hundred—I am perfectly certain of this : that mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law look which way the wind blows. If they see that the boy is in love with her, not one of them will dare to raise her eyebrows at Mahmúda.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said : ' Still, I don't see what you are aiming at. Am I to have her wedded over a cup of sherbet ?'

' No,' said Asghari, ' that is not my meaning. Besides, among the very poor, if even sherbet is not procurable, do they not arrange their sons' and daughters' affairs ? To give and make others give is a custom of the world everywhere. People stretch their limbs as far as they can see their sheet. It is according to one's means ; whatever can be managed is given, and what can't be managed is not given. But there is no sense whatever in letting a family drift into bankruptcy through hankering after display. There is a girl named Sulma who reads in my school. After the Mutiny her father received a reward from the Government of ten thousand rupees. He had saved the life of some English lady. Ten thousand rupees to him was so large a sum that he might have lived respectably upon it for the rest of his days. He only had one son and one daughter, whose marriage expenses were still to be defrayed by him. But, yielding to his vanity, he not only cleared off the ten thousand rupees given to him by the Government, but spent several hundreds more which he raised by loan. At the time there were grand shouts of applause on all sides. Now, there is such scarcity in the house that they are at a loss even for a meal. I, too, received an invitation to the wedding.

It quite took my breath away to see the preparations. Indeed—perhaps Sulma's mother may have taken it ill of me—I said to her : " Sister, marrying a son or daughter is *eyes' delight and hearts' comfort*, and *where has the ghee gone ? Into the khichri* ; but still, one has need to take some compassion on one's own pot also." That was all I said at the time, and afterwards I had some compunction lest Sulma's sister might have thought that the school-mistress, with whom *she* had nothing whatever to do, was interfering unwarrantably.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said : ' Yes, it is true. But we have to live in this world, bad luck to it ! What can we do ? Where can we go ? A thing must be done, whether it ought to be or not. If people would not do as the world does, no one would be made a laughing-stock, and no one would be held up to admiration. At the lecture which Maulavi Isháq sáhib gave, I heard that in the old times the Arabs used to put their girls to death the instant they were born.'

' You need not go so far off as that, dear mother,' said Asghari. ' In our own country the Rájputés were guilty of the same horrors. It has been put a stop to now since the English interfered, but still, there are rumours now and then of murders done secretly.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said : ' What is one to think ? It is revolting to the moral sense.'

Said Asghari : ' In poverty the moral sense does not count for much, and the majority of people in the world are very poor. If to be poor is a thing to be ashamed of, there are many in the world without shame. But, whether riches or poverty, each has his own lot. And how *should* all men be of one pattern ?'

' Heigh, heigh !' said the mother-in-law ; ' for my part, I wish some law against excessive expenditure on weddings were made by the English Government. Then we should be rid of the bother.'

Asghari said : ' I saw in the papers that the English are going to take some measures. Indeed, all the chief men of this city were summoned to a meeting about it ; and I heard that some limits to the expenditure had been fixed, the amount of the dowry being taken as the standard. But these are things which ought

really to be done by *us* people. If *we* were all agreed, we might put a stop to every expense which is superfluous.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said: 'But when you speak of expenses as superfluous, for those to whom God has given the means nothing is superfluous. I grant you, if a man has not a cowrie in his pocket, then everything for him is superfluous.'

Said Asghari: 'Let not your honor say so. The really necessary expenses at weddings are very small. An enormous amount of money goes in superfluities. Of course, in our family, we never think of having nautches and shows, and bands of music, and fireworks, or big-drums and kettle-drums; but among those who allow such things hundreds and thousands of rupees are sunk in them alone.'

Her mother-in-law said: 'The people who have nautches¹ and shows may look after their own affairs. But take people like us. What expenses that we incur are superfluous?'

Asghari: 'Are there not plenty? At the betrothal, the interchange of presents on festivals, the bridegroom's feast before the wedding, the henna, the bridegroom's procession, the bride's procession, the feast of the fourth day,² the bride's visits to her mother, and then the burdensome costumes, the jewelled ornaments—it is all superfluous.'

Mother-in-law: 'Why not say at once straight out that the wedding is superfluous to begin with?'

Asghari burst out laughing, and said: 'No, weddings are not superfluous. But all these accompanying formalities are mere useless padding.'

Mother-in-law: 'But it is not only the ceremonies. You call the dresses and jewellery superfluous.'

Asghari: 'As far as mere clothes and mere ornaments go, they are useful enough. But those heavily-embroidered costumes: I ask your honor, of what use are they? Why, my own are lying there simply rotting. I hate putting them on, worse luck! inside the house. Now and again I have worn them at weddings; or perhaps on the Eed they have been taken out for an hour or two.'

¹ Nautches are condemned by strict Musalmans.

² When the bride is taken in state to make her first call on her parents.

Except for that, there they are tied up in my bundle the whole year round. Putting them in the sun, when I have to do it, gives me a headache for the day which might well be avoided. And if you should want to sell them, you don't get the value of the material. People won't offer you the price even of the trimmings. And it is just the same with the made-up jewellery. Did your honor hear about the wedding of Maulavi Kifáyat ullah's daughter? *That* is the kind of wedding I would choose.'

Mother-in-law: 'What Maulavi Kifáyat ullah is that?'

Asghari: 'The superintendent of girl-school teachers.'

Mother-in-law: 'He is not a resident of the City, I fancy.'

Asghari: 'No, his home is somewhere near Agra. But he has brought his wife and children with him here. His daughter was betrothed within the City, and his wife was bent on their going back to their own home, and having the ceremony performed there; but the Maulavi sáhib managed to win her over to his views. One day they summoned a few of their intimate friends to the house. When the guests arrived, they learnt it was the daughter's wedding-day; and shortly after, the bridegroom's father made his appearance, bringing his boy with him. The wedding vows were recited according to the Muhammadan ritual, and with the blessing it was all over. Presents and trousseau were conspicuous by their absence. But after the wedding the Maulavi sáhib brought five hundred rupees in silver, and laid them before his daughter and son-in-law, and said: "One minute, brother. See, the portion destined for you by Providence out of my earnings was just this amount. If I had wished, I might have entertained a lot of wedding guests out of it; and, as the custom of the world is, I might have made up for you one or two grand suits of clothing. But when I thought it over, it seemed to me, under the circumstances, that it would be far better to give you the money in cash. Do you now take the sum, and make use of it in any way you like."'

After listening to this story, Muhammad Kámil's mother said: 'Yes, away from home the Maulavi sáhib could do as he pleased. Who was there to say him nay?'

Asghari: 'Who? Well, at any rate, there was his own wife.'

And must we always wait to be away from home? It is courage we want. The thing can be done well enough in the City if there is a man prepared to do it. He has only to think of his own business, and let those chatter who will.'

The mother-in-law: 'And is it this kind of dull, shabby wedding that you have designed for Mahmúda?'

Asghari: 'Most certainly I would not pay any attention to people's remarks. If I could have my own way, Mahmúda's wedding should be the counterpart of Maulavi Kifáyat ullah's daughter's. In fact, he *did* invite a few guests, and, in my opinion, even that was unnecessary.'

The mother-in-law: 'Nay, sister; for Heaven's sake, don't be so cruel. In my old age I have but this one child to give away in marriage. Shall I ever come back again from my grave to be at anyone's wedding?'

Asghari: 'But I don't say that anything of the kind is my intention. Only there is one thing that I am quite determined on, at least, in my own mind—that not a pice of debt shall be incurred, nor any property be mortgaged. Whatever money has been saved up, whatever has been put by expressly for her, and whatever, under Providence, may be in store for her at the time of the ceremony, *that*, I say, is quite enough.'

The mother-in-law: 'Extolled be the perfection of God! If only it could be so, what a good thing! But it depends on the other party's co-operation.'

Asghari: 'And suppose *they* should be willing?'

The mother-in-law: 'What nonsense, to think of their being willing! Why, he is their only son, granted after many prayers. Goodness knows what aspirations they have for him in their hearts. They will look about for some family equal in rank to their own, and then get him engaged, and satisfy all their ambitions.'

Asghari said: 'Ever since I came back from Siyálkot I have been engaged in arranging this matter. It is fixed all right on their side. Only just now Jamálára and Husnára came over here in a hurry to see me. The junior Hakím sáhib, too, has given his approval. Sháh Zamáni begam made all kinds of plans for

the benefit of her own daughter, but, by God's grace, not one was successful. And now there is no time to be lost. The day after to-morrow is a good day. From their side the sweetmeats will be sent, and then the *engagement* will be binding. We can see about the *marriage* afterwards.'

When Muhammad Kámil's mother heard this, she was lost in amazement. She said: 'It is an excellent match certainly, far beyond our merits. But it will be very difficult for us to make the preparations suitable to their rank.'

Said Asghari: 'God is the Causer of all causes. Since Mahmúda's lot has grappled with so high a family, God of His might will provide all that is necessary at the right time.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said: 'Wait till your father-in-law comes home. I will see what he thinks about the sweetmeats.'

In a little while the Maulavi sáhib came in, and when he heard about the proposed betrothal he was highly delighted, and said: 'By all means, let the sweetmeats arrive.'

Asghari at once sent off a verbal message to Husnára. On the appointed day five maunds of sweetmeats and one hundred rupees arrived. One maund and a quarter of sweetmeats and a hundred and twenty-five rupees were despatched. From both sides good wishes and congratulations followed.

CHAPTER XXIX

No sooner was the betrothal arranged than the Hakím sáhib began to manifest an impatience for the wedding. He sent a message to the Maulavi sáhib couched in these words: 'For a long time it has been my intention to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, and now I am delaying it solely for the completion of this rite. Life is uncertain. I should be glad if the marriage could take place in the month of Rajab.'

The Maulavi sáhib asked Asghari what he should do.

Asghari said: 'For the present you had better reply in the

following terms : "The matter is engaging my earnest attention. I am doing my best to make the necessary arrangements. If I find it possible in so short a time to get together the few things I desire to give—I, too, have still before me that last obligation of a Muslim—the sooner the marriage can take place the better."

In reply to this the Hakím sáhib sent another message to the effect that he had not sought the alliance with any expectation of dowry or trousseau, that all he begged of them was the bride, and that they need not trouble themselves about her appurtenances. To this they answered : 'Very well, the proposal for the wedding to take place in Rajab is agreeable to us also.' The twenty-seventh day of Rajab was fixed accordingly, and both parties began to make their arrangements.

At this juncture the Maulavi sáhib began to show signs of perturbation. At one minute he was assuring himself that he could raise a loan from Hazári Mal, and at the next he was debating in his mind whether he should sell the property known as the butter market, or only mortgage it. Asghari perceived that he was much disturbed in his mind. She asked him : 'What has your honor been projecting ?'

The Maulavi sáhib replied : 'I wish I could tell you. Here is the date of the wedding coming close upon my head, and any means of procuring the money for it I cannot conceive. I asked Hazári Mal ; even he put me off. Then I thought of parting with the butter market, but no purchaser comes forward.'

Asghari said : 'It will never, never do for your honor to borrow the money, and please do not sell any of your property either. There is nothing worse than being in debt. And it is easy enough to part with an estate, but very difficult to come by one.'

The Maulavi sáhib said : 'I am not to borrow, and I am not to sell. Do you suppose I am an alchemist ? or that I know the secret of the hidden hand ? Where is the money to come from ?'

'Let us first take stock of what there is in the house,' said Asghari ; 'most of the clothes have been ready some time ; a few trimmings are still wanting, but among my robes there are one or two very heavily-embroidered ones—we can take some of the broideries off them, and they will make good the deficiency.'

The copper vessels are in the house—we don't want to buy any ; as for the wooden articles, and all the little extras, I will give my own. They are lying doing nothing, and will only get spoilt, for I never use them. And then—well, your honor has some money in cash, at all events ?'

The Maulavi sáhib said : 'Only five hundred rupees.'

'Well,' said Asghari, 'that's plenty. At the time I started for Siyálkot the school fund amounted to four hundred rupees—that is in deposit. While I was away two hundred rupees more were made ; half of that my elder sister is entitled to, but Mahmúda's share is one hundred ; with that added to it, the school fund comes to five hundred. I wrote to Mahmúda's younger brother,¹ and asked him for three hundred ; my brother-in-law has written to promise two hundred. You may say that we have fifteen hundred rupees in cash at this moment. Then there are the bracelets which were given to me at Husnára's wedding—what use are they to me ? I had intended to put them upon Mahmúda at her wedding, but afterwards I thought to myself it would not do for them to be returned to the same house from which they came, so I shall sell them. I sent them to the bázár through Tamásha Khánam, and Panna Mal made an offer of thirteen hundred rupees for them. If by Mahmúda's good luck we should find someone in need of such articles, please God, they will realize fifteen hundred. Another idea has come into my head. Your honor might well go to Lahore in order to fetch my brother-in-law, and when asking the Chief to grant him leave, might mention the reason for it. The Chief is very generous. It is quite possible he may help. This has been the custom of old with Hindustani princes. They have always helped their faithful adherents on such occasions.'

So it happened that Asghari sent her father-in-law to Lahore. When the Maulavi sáhib went to pay his respects to the Chief, the Chief asked him : 'Maulavi sáhib, what has brought your honor here ?'

The Maulavi sáhib then submitted his request : 'Your servant's daughter is about to be married, and his object in presenting

¹ I.e., her own husband.

himself is to solicit the boon of a month's leave for Muhammad Aqil. And your servant does not venture to ask that any member of your Highness's family should take a part in the ceremony, but if the *agent*, who is in Dehli, might grace the assemblage with his presence as your Highness's representative, it would produce in my behalf a great accession of dignity among my fellow-citizens.'

The Chief not only granted Muhammad Aqil's leave, but also defrayed the expense of the Maulavi *sáhib's* journey to Lahore and back, and he sent an order to the agent at Dehli to join the wedding party as his representative, and to make a present, as a guest's offering, of the sum of five hundred rupees. Here was a fine windfall realized without anyone's stirring a finger, and all through Asghari's advice. On the other hand, through Tamásha Khánam's good offices, the jewelled bracelets at last found their way to the Nawáb Hátim Zamáni begam, who was captivated by them at the first sight, and blindly made over two bags of a thousand rupees each to secure them. Thus from all sides there was a perfect rush of money. Under Asghari's management the very finest costumes were made ready, and a fourfold stock of jewellery. Such a wedding had not taken place in the Maulavi's family, at any rate, for many generations, and even the bridegroom's relations were astonished when they saw the bride's outfit. The articles of every kind were not only numerous but costly, and everything of the newest fashion. Two of the costumes, indeed, came from the bridegroom's people—one, for the wedding itself, of stiff brocade, and one of an embroidered pattern for the ceremony of the fourth day. As for the jewels—taking trousseau and presents together, there was no end to them—rings and pins for the nose, ornaments of several kinds for the forehead, earrings, plain and jewelled, of all sorts and sizes, necklaces and chains and pendants for the throat, armlets and bracelets of every device, rings for the fingers, anklets and rings for the feet and toes. The number of dresses, of different fabrics and textures, amounted altogether to fifty. There were two hundred metal dishes, and other articles of furniture upon the same scale. In short, the marriage ceremony was performed amidst the greatest

display of pomp. Thus Mahmúda took leave of her old home, and in her father-in-law's house she received the title of Qamar Astáni begam.¹

CHAPTER XXX

THE HAKÍM FATIHULLAH KHÁN was a very sober, self-denying, and God-fearing man. For years he had cherished the desire of making the pilgrimage, but had been waiting to see Arjumand Khán well married. After the wedding he still remained for a time, bent upon watching the demeanour and behaviour of the bride. There was not much need for that in *her* case. Mahmúda had been polished upon Madam Asghari's lathe. There was not an uneven speck left on her surface. No matter what test he applied, the Hakím *sáhib* found his son's bride to be thoroughly educated, and of great natural ability, and full of tact. Like a melon, sweet of itself, and topped with the finest white sugar—to begin with, Mahmúda was good by her very nature, and she had benefited besides by Asghari's teaching and advice. What need to ask the result?

In short, the Hakím *sáhib* was satisfied beyond a doubt that Qamar Astáni would sustain the fortunes of his house to perfection. He forthwith commenced making preparations for his journey to Arabia in the most determined manner. He had bound himself to a pilgrimage; he now resolved to make it a migration. All the convertible property and cash which he possessed he put aside to take with him, but he had all the house property, shops, markets, warehouses, villages, and sarais registered in his son's name. This was not done without the remonstrances, as the custom is, of his own and his wife's relations; but the Hakím *sáhib* had God's message ringing in his ear, and was deaf to everything else. With the name of God on his lips he stood up to go upon his mission, and he bequeathed all his worldly possessions to his son and daughter-in-law.

Although Mahmúda was now a married woman, she regarded

¹ 'Lady Full Moon on the threshold.'

Asghari with greater respect and reverence, if possible, than before, and sought her advice upon the minutest points. It was now that Asghari found the opportunity of putting her natural ability to the proof. With a vast establishment, and business of the most important nature to be dealt with, she directed everything with such consummate ability that Arjumand Khán became, by her means (God preserve me from lying!), like one of the kings or wazirs of the age. No Chief's court could vie with his in Dehli—no, nor in the country for many miles round.

How much further am I to continue this narrative? Already so much has been written, and yet, if you ask me truly, it is not one chitack out of a maund to what I could tell you. All this time Asghari has been living in a state of poverty. As the proverb says: 'Without clothes no woman can go bathing; what is she to *wring out*?'¹ But now, God keep her! power and affluence have fallen to her lot. The fullest scope and opportunity have been given her for the exercise of her administrative tact and ingenuity. The things which she achieved under these conditions—for all that she was a woman—will no doubt remain in the world as memorials of her to the last day; but unfortunately I have not the leisure to set them down in writing. Still, if there be anyone willing to accept instruction—who can listen to a word, and understand it, what has been already set down is not to be despised. All kinds of new ideas, and all sorts of lessons, are contained herein. We may call it a story for children, but in sooth it is a sermon for their elders. Before I bring the book to a conclusion, however, there is one other fact which I am bound to record, which is that, while she was still of tender years, Asghari became a mother. All this while I have not made any mention of her children. She had several, but, as God willed, few of them survived their birth. The only one who lived to maturity was a son, Muhammad Akmal, who in later days was united in marriage to Mahmúda's only daughter Mas-úda. This boy came after several other children, and, before he was born, one son

¹ A woman must have *two* suits of clothes to go bathing. The proverb is equivalent to our 'making bricks without straw.'

named Muhammad Adil, and one daughter named Batúl, had died.

There was no lack of pains taken in the children's bringing up. They were guarded alike from cold and from heat; the very times for feeding them were fixed, and the quantity of food given was by measure; the utmost care was taken to prevent their putting into their mouth anything unwholesome or fit to be thrown away; when their teeth began to come their gums were lanced lest the child should not win through the trouble of teething; at four years of age they were vaccinated to preserve them from small-pox; in a word, everything was done for them that human ingenuity could suggest, but in the face of God's decree the wisdom of the best of us avails nothing. Muhammad Adil was four years old when he died. He had an attack of indigestion. Some medicine was given to stop the purging. Fever supervened, and brought on inflammation of the brain. The mother had to give up her boy whom she had nursed so carefully through his infancy. While this sore was still fresh in her heart, Batúl, who had reached the age of seven, was taken ill. It was an outbreak of diarrhœa, so violent that, before its course could be checked, it carried away her life. All kinds of medicines were administered, but when does death yield to medicine? In the course of a single week the little girl gradually lost her strength, and faded away. The shock of *her* death fell upon Asghari very heavily. In the first place she was a girl, and then—whether because she was doomed to die early I do not know—she was so passionately attached to her mother that she would not be away from her for a moment. When her mother was at her devotions she would sit upon the prayer carpet; she would accompany her to bed, and get up with her at the same moment; even if it was her mother's medicine she must needs taste it; and such was her application to study that, at that early age, she had already begun the tenth portion of the vernacular translation of the Qur-án:

When Muhammad Adil died, the women about her commenced their efforts to sap Asghari's faith: One of them would say: 'He was begotten under some malign influence; you must get Mihr Ali Sháh the faqír to cure him'; and another: 'Someone

overlooked his milk; have a wave-offering placed on the cross-ways'; and another: 'It is the rickets; have him exorcised by Ramazán Sháh'; and another: 'There is something wrong with the house; get Mír Alím¹ to drive a nail into the floor for you'; and another: 'You have been travelling hither and thither; some night-hag has seized hold of him; go to Kachocha.'² Twists and amulets, and spells and charms, and fetishes, from all quarters of the world, were prescribed by this or that person. But, bravo, Asghari! *you* never ceased to be thankful to God for His mercy; no, not even when two of your children in succession were taken from you! To all suggestions of the kind she returned the same answer: 'If it be God's will He is at no loss, even so, to show me His bounty.'

CHAPTER XXXI

WHEN the news of Batúl's death reached him, Dúrandesh Khán sáhib was very greatly distressed, and it was with a troubled heart that he wrote to his daughter the following letter:

'To my dear child, Asghari Khánam, after my blessing,

'Be it known:

'I have only just learnt, by letter from Dehli, that Batúl has been taken from you. It would be impossible for me to pretend that this has not caused me pain, and yet my reason has not gone so far astray that I should give way to useless repining, like those who are without knowledge. My great trouble is for *you*. If this blow should seem to have fallen upon you with terrible severity, it is no wonder. But in every state of life it behoves God's servants to take counsel of their reason. God, in His mercy, has given us our reason for this very purpose—that we should get help from it, whether in sorrow or in joy. The facts of the world are such that we cannot avoid the necessity of

¹ Pronounce Uleem.

² A village in Oudh where is the tomb of a very eminent Saint, named Saiyid Ashraf Jahángír.

pondering over them, and this kind of meditation is not devoid of profit. This earth and sky, the mountains and forests, and rivers, men, and beasts, and trees—all the thousands and thousands of different things that are in the world, they constitute one vast machine of which the world is the habitation. The sun's issuing in the daytime with steadfast regularity, and afterwards the coming on of night, and the gleaming of the moon and of the stars; the summer heat at one time, the winter at another, and the rains at another, and through the influence of rain the production of fruits and flowers of many forms and many colours—every detail of the universe is sufficient by itself to occupy a man's thoughts for years. And to any human being his own condition is no small subject for meditation. How a man is born, and how he is nurtured and grows, and how there pass over him the different stages of boyhood and manhood and old age, and how at last he sets forth upon a journey *beyond* this world—that, indeed, is a deep and difficult theme to entertain. The whole of this vast machinery has been set in motion by God for some good purpose, and will continue so to be in motion for as long as He wills. This world is only some seven or eight thousand years old, and now its time is but short, for the resurrection is at hand, and all that we see around us is hastening to destruction. It has been proved by statistics that three and a half thousand human beings die in every hour—that is to say, about one person at every moment—and an equal number, no doubt, are being born. You may easily reckon that in a single month many hundreds of thousands of persons are dying, and are being born into the world, and then consider that this has been going on uninterruptedly for seven thousand years, which means that an incalculable number of persons have already died in this world up to the present. What we call "death," therefore, is something normal and inevitable. The greatest and mightiest kings, the most famous scholars, the cleverest physicians, even great prophets—men who had power to raise the dead to life—could not escape from death themselves. Whoever is born into this world must one day die: such is God's imperative decree. So that if on any particular day this decree be put in force against ourselves, or against someone near and

dear to us, we have no excuse for complaint or lamentation. These remarks are not mere platitudes. Think over them well, and when you realize what the true meaning of death is, I am certain you will consider as I do—that to grieve for the death of anyone is futile and unprofitable.

Our grief at a person's death depends upon the strength of our attachment for him. If I hear that the Emperor of China is dead, the news does not affect me in the least, for the simple reason that there was never any tie between him and myself. And if anyone outside the family should die, even in the mohulla, unless I had some special interest in him, it would cause me very little concern. It is only when we are connected with the person by some tie that we really grieve at his death, and the stronger the tie the greater the grief. If a female cousin of my maternal grandmother's sister-in-law's sister's daughter-in-law die it is nothing to me; the relationship is too distant. In fact, it is not merely relationship that has to be considered, for grief makes its presence equally felt in the case of friendship or intimacy. Thus one needs to settle which person it is in the world for whom we have the greatest attachment, and for that there is no fixed rule. We may imagine the closest relationship, and constant quarrels and disagreements. Such relations are out of the reckoning. And, on the other hand, an outsider, with whom there is no connection by blood or marriage, but strong affection and a community of interest, is often valued more than relations. But we may take it that each individual, according to his bent, has some special attachment of his own. Now, all these ties of the world's making are based upon considerations of self-interest and profit. For if my nearest relation should set himself to oppose my interest, it is certain he would lose my affection; and if an outsider should bestir himself for my benefit, it is certain he would be esteemed as dear as any relation. And it does not necessarily follow that the benefits which create ties of this kind should be such as can be estimated in rupees and pice, although, no doubt, this is frequently the case. Sometimes a tie is created by the mere expectation of some advantage. I have many friends who do not give me anything, but the mere prospect of their being willing to

help me, in the event of my requiring their assistance, becomes a reason for my attaching myself to them. I might pursue this topic to any length, and it is one which might be discussed at great length with advantage, but it was my sole intention in this letter to deal with the subject of parental ties, and if I have leisure, please God, I will some day write a book about worldly attachments and send it you.

The ties which bind parents to their children are common to all beings. No father or mother is exempt from them, not even in the brute creation. From this it is evident that these ties are not based merely upon self-interest and advantage. Nay, rather, it is in harmony with the scheme which the All-wise Ruler of the universe has ordained for the government of the world that parents *must needs* have a love for their own offspring. For several years children depend wholly upon others for their nourishment and support. In order that they should be properly nourished, God has planted in the parents such a love for their offspring that they are constrained by its promptings to cherish them, and bring them up, until such time as they are big enough and old enough to fare for themselves in the world. That is to say, parents are the body-servants of their children for the purpose of attending to their wants. Yes, *to bring their offspring up properly*, that is the sole tie which has been conferred upon parents by God's ordinance. If we go beyond this, all those worries, such as the longing to have children, and when there are none the recourse to doctors and medicines, to charms and amulets, or religious exercises; or, supposing there are children, the anxiety that they should be boys and not girls, or, whichever they are, that they should be long-lived—all these are merely the flashes of *human* desire. And now we have to consider *why* this hankering for offspring, which man has created for himself in excess of God's will, should exist, and what is the cause of it. Undoubtedly it is due to motives of self-interest and advantage, but these motives are not all of the same kind. Some people think that their posterity will hand their name down to future generations, some look forward to being assisted by their children in their own old age, and some cherish the notion that after their

death their children will inherit their estate, and manage their property. We have only to examine these fancies to perceive how absurd and erroneous they are.

'What is meant by transmitting one's name to posterity? Simply this: When people see a man, they are to know that he is the son of *So-and-so*, or the grandson of *So-and-so*. In the first place, when I myself am no longer in the world, what is it to me whether anyone knows my name or not? But, further, it is a question how far one's name is handed down. Ask anyone the names of his ancestors. Perhaps in most cases he will be able to tell you as far back as his grandfather; beyond that, even their own posterity cannot tell you what mighty man was their great-grandfather, or their great-great-grandfather. Besides, what object have they in digging up the bones of their dead ones? Thus, if we assume that the name is transmitted, it is only for a generation or two at the most, and then who cares? But it is a mere conceit to grant even that. Here am I, living in the Hills for the last ten years. I know thousands of men here, and thousands know me, but I doubt if any of them know who my father was; nor am I acquainted with their fathers, nor does the necessity for giving or seeking information on the subject ever arise.

'The second reason for parents' desiring offspring is the advantage which they look forward to in being tended by their children in their old age. This assumption, also, is the merest folly. What assurance have I that I shall be alive when my children are grown up? or that they will survive until old age comes upon me? And if this coincidence be granted, even then the children's being of any help to their parents is altogether problematical. I do not find so many instances in these days of children bent on showing respect to their parents, or anxious to render them any service. Nay, so far from respect and service, most children nowadays cause their parents annoyance and discomfort. People long to have children, but when they come they are a source of sorrow to their parents from first to last. Think of the plague it is to rear them when they are infants. At one time their eyes give trouble; then it is a pain in the chest; another time they are teething; another time they catch the

small-pox. After many woes they grow out of that stage; then there comes the anxiety of clothing and feeding them. No matter what a man's circumstances are—he may be in service or out of employ—but whether he has money in his purse or not he must give to them, wherever it comes from. If the father and mother go without their meals, so they may; but the children, even if they cannot buy their own sweeties, must have a halfpenny-worth of parched gram every day.¹ Whenever the Eed comes round, or the Baqar Eed, or there is a fair, or a festival, "Now, brother, some new clothes," "Four halfpence to buy sweeties with"—if you get off with *that* you are lucky. And now the parents desire that their boy should be learning something, and go to school; and the boy is such a cub that he runs miles away from the very mention of books, and nothing will induce him to go to school until four of his schoolmates drag him there by force; and when he has got there, if the master loses sight of him for a moment, he will be out on the crossways, or playing tipcat by the edge of the canal, or throwing up dust in the streets. When he grows a little older, he begins to set his parents at defiance; he makes friends with idle and dissolute youths; he does not scruple to go to nautches, nor shrink from evil company; he wanders about bringing disgrace on the family name. And some there are who in this way go utterly to the bad, and become thieves, or gamblers, or drunkards. Then, when the daughters are old enough to be married, you go through the list of all the houses in the city without being able to find a suitable betrothal. The professional match-maker is worn off her legs. Your acquaintances have given up the job in despair. You have spoken to the heads of all the branches of your family one by one, but no one will help you. Your very life becomes a burden. The wretched mother goes about paying vows to the saints. She stands and listens for some "omen of the voice."² She celebrates a doll's marriage. All the five times she ends her prayers with the cry, "O God, from Thy hidden store send someone!" And

¹ *I.e.*, independently of their regular meals.

² *I.e.*, some chance word or phrase not intended for the listener, but striking a chord in his inner consciousness.

when, after many tears, the betrothal has at last been arranged, it is with such a family that here is the poor mother without a tag of silver to her name, and the parents on the other side insist on ear-rings of the most elaborate pattern. By hook and by crook, after pawning all you are worth, the marriage becomes an accomplished fact. But, "The guests are not fain for the fine bird you've slain." The trousseau goes the round of the family, and is scoffed at by everyone. "Tchut!" says the bridegroom's mother. "Fancy their giving things like these! Why will people *have* daughters if they are so poor?" There is not a single article which they approve of. One sarcastic remark leads up to another. And when Mr. *your son-in-law* honours your house with a visit, there is no end to his arrogance. Until he has seen that his father-in-law has put his shoes¹ where he can easily step into them again he won't even wash his hands; you need not mention dinner. Then perhaps before the ceremony of the fourth day is over, the bride and bridegroom are ready to shoe-beat each other. You have given away your daughter in good faith, and secured for her nothing in return but a quarrel. Nor is this a grief which passes in a single day. No, a wheel of misfortune has been set going for the rest of your life. As soon as such a daughter has children, her mother becomes an unpurchased slave, a nurse without wages. She has spent all her days moiling and toiling to bring up her own children, and now, when she hoped that fate had in store for her a year or two of the rest she had prayed for, she has to undertake the nursing of her daughter's little ones.

'And suppose it is your *son* who has married and brought home his bride—the discord, the quarrels, which she brings into the house by the bushel! She does not value her mother-in-law so high as her shoe-leather. She is always driving her sisters-in-law to the verge of despair. She has no reserve before her elder brother-in-law, and no respect for her father-in-law. A woman—and she knocks their turbans off the heads of the men. God take them under His protection! And what think you of the undutiful son? When his wife has created all this disturb-

¹ The shoes are taken off before people enter a room that has a carpet.

ance in the house, the renegade takes her part, and actually quarrels with his own parents! Until at last the wretched father and mother are driven out of their house, and forced to hire a lodging for themselves elsewhere. *That* is the goal to which the young folk of this age bring their parents, and few indeed are they to whom their children are a source of comfort. When in our folly we are importunate to have children, we know not what we are doing. It is as though we invited trouble and calamity in our prayers.

'There is only one more theory to dispose of—viz., that there ought to be someone to inherit the property, and *therefore* a man must wish for children. How perverted, and senseless, and weak, and flimsy an argument this is you can see at a glance. When a man himself has bid adieu to the world, what does it matter whether his estate is taken charge of by sons, or whether it reverts to Government as unclaimed property? The riches of this world are of no value in the world to come, if we except, indeed, what a man may give himself "in the way of God"¹ before he dies, or what may be given for him "in the way of God" after his death. But if I have not employed my riches in this way personally, and have left so important a duty to be discharged by my heirs, there is no greater fool in the world than I. Children who obtain gratis all that their parents have heaped together are most unlikely to be frugal in their expenditure of it. A man knows the value of that money which he has earned by the strength of his arm and the sweat of his brow; and to the money which comes to anyone as a free gift you may well apply the proverb, *Wealth without toil, and a heart without compassion*. No doubt the children will scatter their inheritance freely enough upon nautches and shows, and gadding about, and sight-seeing; but when it comes to having a prayer offered in their father's name over a small heap, even of millet, for distribution to the poor, *that* is quite out of the question. Are there not hundreds and thousands of instances in the world of people accumulating riches all their life long by meannesses and stinginess, and the instant their heirs have got hold of it, so great has been their extravagance that

¹ *I.e.*, to widows and orphans and the very poor.

the savings of a father's lifetime have disappeared in a few days ?

"Oh the farce of it! and *who* squandered? and *who* was he who saved!"¹

'From this statement of the case it will be apparent to you that all that exuberance of sentiment which men of their own perversity have developed in excess of the parental tie works infinite harm to themselves. Our orders are to observe this tie so far : as long as children are in need of our assistance, we must devote ourselves to their welfare ; but in doing this we are not to give place in our hearts to the hope that, when they are grown up, they will *compensate* us for our efforts by their devotion to us.² To entertain this hope is the height of folly. Rather, we ought to consider that God, who is our Supreme Master, has imposed upon us this *duty* of attending to their needs, and that, in bringing up our children properly, we are performing His behest. This orchard is God's, and we are the gardeners of the orchard appointed by Him. If the Lord of the orchard give an order to prune, or to cut down any tree, what right has the gardener to say, "I have tended this tree with great labour, why should it be cut down?" or "Why should its branches be cut off?" All the ties which exist in the world have but one purpose—that men should be *of use* the one to the other. We have been sent into this world for some good reason for a few days only, and while we are here, God has made us fathers, or sons, or brothers, to other men, in order that we should help others, and that others should help us, and that we should serve the full period of lifetime allotted to us amidst goodwill and kindness. This world is not our home. We shall have to go and *live* elsewhere. Nor is anyone here our

¹ The original of this line occurs in a poem of Háfiz, but is commonly quoted without reference to its context.

² The tendency of human nature to demand compensations is the theme of a quatrain by Háli (India's greatest living poet), of which the following is an almost word for word translation :

'There is in the *self* of man, by nature, this disease,
That he seeks a compensation for each effort he makes.
Deeds, which I had done purely for God's sake,—when I looked,
There was hidden in *them* even some selfish aim.'

own, nor do we belong to anyone here. If we are fathers, it is but for a little while ; and if we are sons, that, too, is but for a little while. If we see anyone dying, what subject is it for lamentation ? We might lament in one case—if *we* were to be left here for ever. But we ourselves have the same journey before us. And we know not at what hour the summons may come, and the day of our departure be fixed. And, what is more awful still, we know that death is not merely the fitting of the life out of the body, as though the soul had moved from one dwelling into another. No, but when man arrives at that bourn, he will have to give an account of every little thing that he has done. The tongue must answer for every lie, and slander, and oath, and foul saying, and foolish word. The eye will receive its retribution for every glance of envy or covetousness. The ear will suffer chastisement for having listened to calumny, or to seductive strains. If the hand have been stretched out in violence or theft, it will be cut off. If the foot have wandered from the right way, it will be made fast in the stocks. A time of great peril will it be. God alone, of His mercy, send our boat across the flood ! *then* may we reach the shore. If there be anyone who has found peace for himself from thoughts like these, *he* may have leisure to grieve for the death, or rejoice at the birth, of his fellows. But who is there in this world who has already attained to such security about his future ? Oh, Asghari ! take heed to yourself, and make preparation for that day, in which nothing of your own, except your own deeds, will avail you. And pray that the Lord of all things, through the favour of His loving servant Muhammad (on him be the blessing of God, and His peace !) may grant to all of us in the end a happy issue. And now my blessing upon you !

'The sinner,
'DÚRANDESH KHÁN.'

THE END