

“Why did you not bring him home to his mother?” she moaned.

“Would you have had me fight and grapple with him in the public streets?” asked Nussooh.

## CHAPTER XI.

### COUSIN FITRUT.

ALONE in the streets with his humiliation, Kulleem's first thought was to take refuge at his aunt's, and it would have been well if he had done so; but, alas! in this crisis of his career an evil genius, in the person of his kinsman Fitrut, presented itself. This gentleman was connected with Nussooh; but a family quarrel had embittered their relations, and he had secretly heard and laughed over his cousin's proceedings since his illness. “Nussooh,” said he, “may order lacs of piety, but how about Kulleem?” When, therefore, he came upon Kulleem, bareheaded and shoeless, in the bazar, he saw at a glance what had occurred, and was more pleased than surprised.

“Hallo!” he cried, with an amused glance at the young man's disreputable figure, “are you going on pilgrimage?”

"Not on pilgrimage, but peregrinage,"\* responded Kulleem, falling in with his humour.

"Ah! I said you were too clever a fellow to follow in the wake of the Sheikh of the period," said Fitrut.

"No, indeed!" said Kulleem, pleased at the compliment. "You know what poets call a Sheikh."†

"My good cousin Nussooh," continued Fitrut, "treats his family, and yourself, its ornament, in a curious fashion. His temper has already alienated his relations. How his wife, poor thing, can put up with it, I can't imagine. I assure you we are extremely sorry for you; but what can we do? May I ask where you are going?"

"I thought of going to my aunt's," replied Kulleem.

"But perhaps His Excellency has warned her against you already," suggested the other. "How do you know she will receive you? You will hardly be wise to go there in this plight, and at such an hour. Come and sleep at my house, and you can go there in the morning. Here, wrap this shawl over your head, and we can turn down this lane."

Kulleem was nothing loth, for he had hitherto found all against him; and now that Fitrut told him his father was an unreasonable tyrant and himself an injured man, he thought him his best friend and counsellor. He had

\* I coin a word to preserve the *annominatio*.

† There is a play on the words here which is untranslatable. In fact, the son makes a pun on his father's name.

to choose between two paths—the straight and narrow path of religion, with the inconveniences of fasting and holiness, humility, and a fear of the future, recommended by his father, and Fitrut's highway, a continuous bazar, thronged and gay, and offering the delights of ease and freedom from control. It is hardly necessary to say that he preferred the latter; and Fitrut, who knew that nothing would annoy his cousin more than to hear that Kulleem had taken refuge with himself, was well pleased to secure him.

Kulleem set to work on a *Masnavi*\* descriptive of his family history, and, finding the want of his library impeded his progress, consulted Fitrut as to the best means of getting hold of his books. Fitrut declared that his father would never let him have the books if he could help it; but that he had no doubt of his own ability to steal his cousin's bed from under him while he was asleep, if necessary; and he undertook to go to the house and reconnoitre. When he returned with the news that his father had burned all Kulleem's books the day after he left the house, Kulleem's wrath knew no bounds, and his one idea was revenge; and the wily Fitrut took care to keep the flame alive. Various schemes of vengeance were propounded. Nothing was too villainous for Fitrut; and one day he said: "The village which your father bought is registered in your name, is it not? Why shouldn't you take possession?"

\* A poem which consists of rhyming distichs.

"My father's agents and servants are in possession already," replied Kulleem, "and I am only the nominal owner."

"Who is to prove that?" rejoined the other. "The receipt for the purchase money is in *your* name; the transaction is entered in the village accounts; and the Government demand stands against *you* in the treasury books."

"That may be true," objected Kulleem; "but it does not establish my claim, for the names are fictitious."

"No, but if you deny that they are fictitious, I don't see how the plea can be contested," urged Fitrut.

Kulleem still hesitated, and was met by the taunt, "These things require some knowledge of the world beyond the art of making poetry. A special mode of dealing must be adopted."

"As how?" said Kulleem.

"You are the nominal proprietor. I will purchase your right, and act on your deed of sale."

"Nonsense! I might as well sell you the Turkish Empire. '*Samarkand and Bukhara for the mole on my lady's cheek*,'" laughed Kulleem.

"You may laugh," said the other; "but how much will you take?"

Kulleem thought it was a capital joke, and said, "Oh, anything."

"Well, say something."

"A hundred rupees then."

"Come, I'll give you a thousand down."

"In God's name, sold!" cried Kulleem.

"In God's name, bought!" cried Fitrut.

And he produced a bag of rupees and counted out the money, and the deed of sale was drawn up and signed.

Kulleem now thought he had a mine of wealth, and, with a wholesome dread that the next trick might be at his own expense, resolved to set up for himself in Chandni Chauk. A city like Dehli, a fool like Kulleem, and a pocket full of money gratis! He took a house, and everything was provided on the instant—chandeliers, furniture, and servants. The very next day he had a poetical conversazioni, and then a *nach*.<sup>\*</sup> Invitations were sent out, and his friends trooped in like so many evil spirits. Even the Mirza was brazen-faced enough to come.

Two months of licence and dissipation soon left him bankrupt. He owed money to the tradesmen and wages to his servants. His friends deserted him, and, after vainly endeavouring to abscond, he was arrested for debt.

It happened that the very day on which he was brought up before the magistrate, the great case of *Nussooh v. Fitrut* was being tried, and thus father and

<sup>\*</sup> The word is commonly written "*nautch*." It means an entertainment at which professional female dancers exhibit their performances.

son once more came face to face. There was no desire or opportunity for communication between them; and as Kulleem was led off to gaol, he had the sorry satisfaction of knowing that the arts and perjury of Fitrut had robbed his father of his village. And yet the disagreeableness of only one night in prison, made him shameless enough to appeal to this very father. He wrote as follows: "I hardly know who I am, or to whom I write, and you will be as much puzzled as myself. My impertinence and disobedience have deprived me of the privileges of a son; so that this is not a letter from a son to his father, but a bond of repentance and a declaration of helplessness, which bears the signature of the sinful Kulleem. I am an outcast, and a criminal. My punishment is less than I deserve, and my apology comes too late. I have no one but God for my protector, *'who is the restrainer of anger and the forgiver of transgression.'* I chanced to see this sentence in a book which Ulleem got from a Missionary, *'Repentance is the eraser and sin the stain.'* Since, therefore, my repentance and remorse have erased my sin, I am once more your son; and I venture to ask your aid in my distress. I want seven hundred rupees. If you will not bestow it on me as an alms, pray lend it me. You are not ignorant of the merit of freeing a prisoner, or emancipating a slave. If I do not get the money by to-morrow, I am a lost man.—KULLEEM."

Kulleem was a poet, and word-magic his profession.

Whole assemblies would be in raptures at the recital of his compositions; and his insincere and hypocritical essay on repentance was, he thought, as good as an order for the money payable on demand. But how was he to find a messenger? He had struck up an acquaintance with one of the gaolers, who was a dabbler in the art of poetry; and, after much persuasion, this man promised to convey the missive on condition that the renowned Kulleem should write an ode, introducing his own and his son's names. These names were so uncouth that it was a never-ending puzzle to fit them into the rhythm, and the man was a block-head, and therefore difficult to please; but after a week's labour Kulleem succeeded in carrying out the gaoler's orders, and Nussooh received his son's communication.

He had no sooner read it than he generously counted out the money, and Kulleem was again set free. Yet even in this emergency he had imposed upon his father, for five hundred rupees would have sufficed for his release. With the two hundred rupees he had thus obtained, Kulleem set off to try his fortunes at Daulat-abad.