

breaking time<sup>1</sup> and supper were served up with a little extra care.<sup>2</sup>

His mother replied : ' Heaven knows what I suffer in cooking even the bread for our supper. At fast-breaking time, for the last three days, I have been seized with ague, so as not even to know what I am about. God bless the woman next door for cooking that, even as well as she does ! You really ought to have made some inquiry in the house before inviting anyone.'

Muhammad Aqil glanced towards his wife with a look of amazement, and said : ' What ! is she not even fit to help you in that ?'

Don't suppose that his wife had sufficient self-control to keep silent when she heard such a remark as this was. No sooner had the words caught her ear than she called out : ' Ask this old mother of yours whether she got her son married, or purchased a slave-girl for him. What ! toil over a kitchen fire in fast time ? Not I, Sir.'

Muhammad Aqil thought to himself : ' Now, if I make any kind of reply, there will be the same disgraceful scene as before.'

With a look of blank disappointment he held his peace, and fetched in some things for the fast-breaking from the bázár. So that matter was got over.

## CHAPTER II

BUT Muhammad Aqil was now confronted by a new calamity—namely, the Eed.<sup>2</sup> The poor man had commenced his preparations for Mizájdár bahu's new outfit a whole week before. Every day he brought home cloths of different kinds, bangles of different colours, embroidered shoes of this or that pattern ; nothing met with Mizájdár's approval, until at last there was only one day left before the Eed. In despair he went off and called at the house of Akbari khánam's aunt.

<sup>1</sup> During the fast a very light meal is taken directly after sunset.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, the great feast on the first day after the Ramazán. It is a day of thanksgiving and reconciliation, and all who can afford to do so wear new clothes. The word is spelt here according to the English pronunciation of it.

As soon as she heard his voice, she summoned him in to the ladies' apartments, and greeting him with blessings, affectionately made him sit down by her. Then she prepared some pawn, and having handed a leaf to him, she said : ' Tell me, is Akbari all well ?'

Muhammad Aqil replied : ' Madam, your sister's daughter is a woman of a marvellous constitution ; she quite takes my breath away. Her vivacity is something extraordinary, and her conversation is made up of contradictions.'

His Aunt said : ' My dear son, don't worry yourself about it. She is quite young now. When she has children, when she feels the burden of keeping house, her temper will get right of itself. And, after all, good people do manage to get on with bad people. God has endowed you, my son, with every kind of advantage. Don't let anything happen at which people might jeer. After all, it is your own honor which is at stake.'

Muhammad Aqil said : ' Yes, your honor, and simply on that consideration I do try to overlook a great deal. But just think of this : to-morrow is the Eed, and up to this moment she has not tried on her new bangles, nor made up her new costume. Would you come over for a moment and bring her to her senses ? I have said all I could, my mother has entreated her, but she won't listen to a word.'

His Aunt said : ' Very well. Your uncle has just gone to the mosque for prayers, but as soon as he returns I will ask him, and come over.'

Accordingly, the good aunt came to the house, and made the girl put on her new bangles, and did the cutting-out of the clothes. For greater speed, all the women sat down together to sew. The aunt said : ' Daughter, do you put the frills on to the trousers. Your mother-in-law will cut the trimmings, and, meanwhile, I will stitch the edging on to your mantle.'

When Akbari had finished putting on the frills, she said to her Aunt with a consequential air : ' Here, Lady, you have still two sides left, and I have already finished putting the frills on both legs.'

Her Aunt looked at the frills ; they were put on upside down.

Out of respect for Akbari's mother-in-law she did not say anything out loud, but she managed quietly to give Akbari two or three pinches, which brought tears into her eyes, and she made a gesture as much as to say: 'Good for nothing! Can't you see? You have put the frills on upside down.'

Akbari undid all her sewing, and began putting the frills on again. When she had done, her Aunt looked, and they were all in puckers. This time the Aunt lost her temper, and without letting Akbari's mother-in-law see, she ran the point of her needle into Akbari's hand; and after undoing the frills a second time, she put them on herself. In the end, after many groans and supplications,<sup>1</sup> Madam Mizájdár bahu's new costume was at last sewn together and completed. A good part of the night had gone. Akbari's aunt departed to her own home, and the people of the house, too, wished each other good-night and went to bed.

For joy of the Eed, the children woke up betimes in the morning. One took off the henna wrappings of the night, another shouted out for oilcake and gram flour,<sup>2</sup> another began demanding the Eed presents the instant he arose. Muhammad Aqil, too, as soon as his morning prayers were over, went off to the *hammadm*<sup>3</sup> for a bath, and came back, clean and spruce, shortly after day-break: He found all the boys sitting ready, with their new clothes on, to go to the Eedgáh.<sup>4</sup> But Mizájdár bahu, according to her usual custom, was fast asleep. Muhammad Aqil said to his little sister Mahmúda: 'Go, Mahmúda, and wake up your sister-in-law.'

At first Mahmúda hesitated; she was very much afraid of Mizájdár bahu, who, from the day she was married, had never once spoken kindly to her little sister-in-law, or let her come near her, or sit by her side. But in the joy of the Eed, at her brother's request, Mahmúda ran off, and said: 'Sister-in-law! Get up!'

Her sister-in-law did get up, and simultaneously caught Mahmúda a slap full in the face. Mahmúda began to cry. Her brother, hearing her voice, ran in and asked what had happened:

<sup>1</sup> Lit., 'after many a Lord! Lord!'

<sup>2</sup> For washing.

<sup>3</sup> Pronounce hummarm. The bath is what is known as 'a Turkish bath.'

<sup>4</sup> A wide enclosure generally built outside a town, at which all the Muslims assemble for prayer on the Eed.

'Sister-in-law struck me,' said Mahmúda, still crying.

Mizájdár called out: 'Oh what a liar! Oh what a good-for-nothing! She fell of herself as she was running, and puts it upon me!'

I need hardly say that Muhammad Aqil was very angry; but thinking it the best plan at the time, he restrained his indignation, and quieted Mahmúda with kisses and caresses. Then he said to his wife: 'Well! get up and bathe, and put your new clothes on. The day is far advanced; I am going to the Eedgáh.'

Mizájdár turned up her nose and frowned, and said: 'I don't bathe so early as this; it is cold. Go to your Eedgáh; have I said anything to the contrary?'

At this cross speech Muhammad Aqil was extremely annoyed; but Mizájdár was by nature so unlucky that she was for ever keeping her husband in a state of vexation with her.

Meanwhile, Muhammad Aqil's mother called to him: 'Son, dear, just go and fetch some milk from the bázár. You can easily go to the Eedgáh afterwards.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'All right, give me the money, and I will bring the milk; but if by the time I come back this girl has not changed her clothes, I will put them all on the kitchen fire.'

So saying, he went off to the bázár for the milk. But his mother had observed that his temper was very much disturbed. Moreover, his disposition was of that nature that, in the first place, he rarely yielded to passion; but when he did yield, he was apt to lose his reason completely. She must beware lest in very truth he should burn up all the new clothes. She hurried to her daughter-in-law, and said: 'Daughter, for God's sake, don't do anything to spoil the happiness of this one day of the whole year! Get up, and have your bath, and put on your new clothes.'

Mizájdár said: 'No, lady; I never bathe at this time. I will bathe later.'

But in the end, after many entreaties and protestations, the mother-in-law got her to bathe; and having dressed her hair, and put on her clothes, she had her set up like a bride before Muhammad Aqil came back:

When Muhammad Aqil saw what had been done, he was made

happy again ; and as he was starting for the Eedgáh, he asked Mahmúda what toy he should bring back with him for her from the bázár. Mahmúda said : ' Bring me a nice pretty book-rest—I will put my daily portion of scripture on it—and a tiny little box to hold my reed-pen and inkpot.'

Here Mizájdár called out of her own accord : ' And for me ?'

Muhammad Aqil said : ' Whatever you desire I am ready to bring.'

Mizájdár said : ' Maize cobs, and water-chestnuts, and berries of the jujube-tree, and some roasted pease-pods, and a whole lot of oranges, a drum, and a tambourine——'

Muhammad Aqil burst out laughing, and said : ' What will you do with a drum and a tambourine ?'

The silly Mizájdár replied : ' Play upon them. What else ?'

Then Muhammad Aqil understood that, even at her age, the silly girl was just like infants without discretion, having no higher ideas than those of eating and playing. All the pleasure he had experienced at her having put on her new clothes was turned to dust, and in that state of despondency he went to the Eedgáh.

No sooner was he gone than Mizájdár made a new move. She said to her mother-in-law : ' Send for a doolie for me ; I want to go to my mother's house.'

Her mother-in-law said : ' Goodness me ! What time is this for you to go ? It is only eight days since you came back from your mother's house after four months' absence. And to go away on the very day of the Eed is absolutely improper.'

Mizájdár said : ' I am feeling very agitated to-day. My heart is coming up the wrong way. My old friend Banno, the daughter of Básu the bangle-maker, is always in my thoughts.'

Her mother-in-law said : ' God help you, daughter ! Was there ever such a passion as you have for Banno ? If you want her so badly as all that, send for her to come here.'

Mizájdár said : ' Ah yes, you are a good hand at inviting when you can't help yourself. If she was to be invited at all, you might have sent for her yesterday to see me put on my new bangles.'

Her mother-in-law said : ' Goodness, child ! how was I to know

that you would be tickled with the thought of her all on a sudden ?'

Mizájdár said : ' Well, it's no good arguing. If you are going to send for a doolie, send for it. If not, I will get one brought by dear little Sulmati's father.'

Her mother-in-law said : ' Child ! has your reason been smitten ? You have not even asked your husband's leave. If you go, it's your own doing. I am not going to have my aged locks shorn off that I should send for a doolie without my son's permission.'

Mizájdár said : ' Husband, indeed ! and permission ! What ? Is no one nowadays to go and see her parents on the Eed, or the Baqar Eed ?'<sup>1</sup>

With these words, having procured a doolie through Maulan the greengrocer, she was off, and at her own home in no time.

Shortly afterwards Muhammad Aqil came back from the Eedgáh. As he burst into the house he called out : ' Here, Lady ! take your drum and your tambourine, and play upon them.' Then he looked round ; everyone was silent. He asked his mother : ' What has happened ? Is all well ?'

Mahmúda said : ' Sister-in-law has gone away.'

Muhammad Aqil was overwhelmed with amazement, and said : ' Eh ? How did she go ? Where has she gone to ? Why did you let her go ?'

His mother answered : ' All on a sudden, without a word from anyone, she began saying : " I am going to my mother's." She would not listen to any of my remonstrances, but got Maulan to fetch her a doolie, and off she went. I did all I could to stop her, but it was no use.'

While she was speaking Muhammad Aqil stood quivering with rage. His first impulse was to go off at once to his wife's home and chastize the good-for-nothing woman, and with this idea he moved towards the door ; but his mother, divining his intention, called to him as he was leaving. When he returned no answer, she said : ' Well done, son ! well done ! Here am I calling you,

<sup>1</sup> The other great festival of the year, instituted to commemorate the sacrifice of *Ishmael* (not *Isaac*) by Abraham. Baqar is pronounced Buckur.

and you hear me, and give no answer! Is *this* all the respect which is left to mothers in this thirteenth century ?<sup>1</sup>

As soon as he heard this, Muhammad Aqil retraced his steps. His mother said to him: 'Tell me, at least, my son, where you are going in this heat. You have only just come from the Eedgáh, and are you going outside again? By my life, you will make yourself ill.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'Madam, I am not going anywhere; only to the mosque to see the caretaker.'

His mother said: 'Don't be so silly, boy. I have not bleached my hair in the sun. What, Sir! do you dare invent stories to me? If you are going to see the caretaker, take off your jacket and scarf, and leave them here, and then you can sit in the mosque at your ease.'

Muhammad Aqil began to smile at these words, and his mother, taking his hand, made him sit down by her; and then, looking at his head, she said: 'Your hair has got full of dust from your going all that way to the Eedgáh and back. Lie down for a minute and put your head on this cushion, and I will make it tidy for you.'

In obedience to his mother, Muhammad Aqil lay down just for a little while; and Mahmúda, seeing him in that position, began to fan him. Partly from the fatigue of his walk to and from the Eedgáh, and now the pleasant cool air of the fan, but, above all, the delightful sensation of his mother's kind hand wandering over his head—however it was, Muhammad Aqil went fast to sleep.

When he woke up the sun had begun its downward course, and his own anger of the morning, too, had abated. His mother said to him: 'Now, wash your hands and face, and then say your afternoon prayers. The time is getting short. When you come back, I will tell you what I want you to do.'

✓ <sup>1</sup> The year 1869 A.D., in which the story was written, corresponded with 1285-86 of the Hegira, or Muhammadan era.

## CHAPTER III

WHEN Muhammad Aqil came back, after saying his prayers, his mother said: 'Now, I want you to go to your mother-in-law's house; and mind, I adjure you by my life not to create any disturbance or quarrel there.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'In that case, don't send me there.'

His mother said: 'Nay, my boy; ask God for kinder thoughts. Heavens! what a cruel tongue you have! Whom else *can* I send to your own wife's house? See, here is a rupee, which I want you to give as an Eed present to your sister-in-law Asghari; and here is an eight-anna piece for your aunt's son, Miyán Muslim<sup>1</sup>; and you had better take half of the toys, too. Mámá Azmat<sup>2</sup> will carry a tray of *siwaiyán*<sup>3</sup> and milk, and a basket of sweetmeats, and you must take her with you. Now, mind! not a word.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'And the drum, mother, and the tambourine? Shall I take them, too?'

His mother said: 'Hush! that's enough. Be off, now, and don't say a word on the subject when you get there.'

In due course Muhammad Aqil arrived at his mother-in-law's house. Akbari khánam and her girl friends were playing high jinks inside, so that the noise of their voices penetrated into the street. Mámá Azmat went inside.

As soon as Asghari caught sight of her, she said in a low voice: 'Sister dear! sister dear! be quiet; the Mámá from your husband's home has come.'

Azmat called out to Muhammad Aqil after she had gone inside: 'You may come in, young gentleman.'

Then Muhammad Aqil went into the house, and made his salaam to his mother-in-law, who wished him health and long life. Presently, Asghari also, having adjusted her veil, came out of her

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Meeyán Mooslim, the final 'n' of Meeyán like the French 'n' in 'rien,' or 'viande.'

<sup>2</sup> Pronounce Uzmut.

<sup>3</sup> A dish resembling vermicelli, always eaten on the Eed. It is boiled without milk, but eaten with milk as oatmeal porridge is in England. The final 'n' of *siwaiyán* is pronounced like the French 'n.'