

enslaved them in the pursuit of thy own selfish lusts. Men pined in cold and starvation around thee, while thou wast physicking for surfeit, or reposing beneath costly quilts. Thou hast wasted the wealth I gave thee in luxury and ostentation.

“My commands were not harsh or unreasonable, for cruelty is not my attribute. Thy disobedience is without excuse. Would that during life thou hadst felt even a passing concern for the salvation thou now so passionately desirest! Would that, in place of the world’s paltry interests, thou hadst thought of the neglect of thy religion and its consequences!

“I am aware that thy repentance is bitter now, but it comes too late. Thou art speechless. I grant thee time to prepare thy defence, and to try to find a plea for thine acquittal.”

CHAPTER II.

NUSSOOH’S AWAKENING.

HIS father’s recital was no sooner ended than Nussooh awoke from his dream. He was lying as before, and his wife was fanning him. He had slept from eight till two; but when she asked him how he felt and told him how anxious they had all been, he made no response. She supposed his weakness and prostration made him disinclined to speak. Nevertheless, the general uneasiness was relieved, and the family began to talk of the festivities they would have to celebrate his recovery.

Nussooh was wrapt in the recollection of his dream, which he believed was a special message sent by God in his behalf. Every syllable of what he had heard was impressed upon his memory; and the more he reflected the more he was driven to admit that he himself was guilty of all the sins laid to his father’s charge—nay, more, that there was no comparison between them; for his father had been regular in his

attention to his religious duties, and was known for his austerity and self-denial; whereas he, the son, had altogether disregarded the worship of God, and was, in fact, utterly irreligious. Of course he had observed the Eeds, for these were occasions of rejoicing, when men would parade the bazar in brand-new clothes, or ride their horses through the crowds, or loll in borrowed or hired vehicles with forerunners to shout "Make way."

As to the Friday* service, Nussooh was one of those who went to the mosque if his clothes were clean and the day was not too hot, or the sky too cloudy, or if he wanted to meet his acquaintance; and anyhow, the observance of Friday was a matter about which opinions differed. He had altogether neglected "the five times of prayer." Morning, noon, and night prayers he had never said all his life; and as to the afternoon, there was taking the air, going to the bazar, calling, visiting, and what not, to be got through. Evening prayer was indeed left, but how was he to find time for that? The rosy tints of twilight would be fading away before he could return from his rambles.

As for duties which involved some little personal trouble, he had simply shirked them. When *Rajab*† came, and Lent approached, it was easy to feign indisposition, and resort to a physician (one of the gentle-

* This is the day on which the *Khutbah* is read in the Mosque. It is not a Sabbath in the Jewish sense.

† The seventh month of the lunar year.

men who make such a fuss about the difficulty of living this short life, that according to their account no one was ever well), and get a certificate of inability to fast.

The alms-tax* on his property was comfortably evaded by a temporary deed of transfer to his wife before the year ended; or he invested his money in such a way as to be exempt, or contracted with his tenants to pay the dues.

He could not recall a single honestly good deed, and confessed within himself that he had eluded obedience to the divine commands by every turn and shift. Stricken with remorse he cried: "O God! that I should have been the vilest of thy creatures! Would that I had never been born, or born without the power of committing sin, or that I had died an infant! Why did I live so long? Why have I recovered now? Shame on me if I ever wilfully transgress again!"

And then he thought of his wife and children. In ruining himself he had ruined them. God had made him the head of a family, and entrusted him with the care of the souls and bodies of its members; but he had betrayed his trust. And as his children were, so would their children be. He had sown the seeds of an ever-spreading jungle of iniquity. What account was he to render before the great Tribunal? He wept with anguish at the thought of his misused life and wasted oppor-

* The *zakât* is payable on property which has been held one complete year.

tunities, and vowed that henceforward he would devote himself to the reformation of his household. Alas! that here piety and religion were unknown and unfamiliar. He would have all against him. *When the drums beat, who listens to the parrot? Gram parching in the oven was not more helpless.* His wife, Fahmeedah, indeed, he remembered with satisfaction, was to some extent an educated woman. About the time of her marriage female education had begun to be talked of, and he had read with approval some books which had appeared on the subject. The consequence was that he had himself taught her to read and write, and she had made fair progress till her increasing family and the cares of a large household interrupted her studies. Intelligent as she was, both by name and nature, her husband was assured that he would have no difficulty in persuading her to adopt his views. The chief trouble, he foresaw, would be with the elder children. One son and daughter were married; and, though still under the paternal roof, it would be impossible to insist upon their obedience in matters of this sort, and they would be sure to retort that they lived as they were taught, and that it was unfair to ask them to give up habits which, right or wrong, had now become part of their nature.

Nussooh was not the man to let his determination sleep. One morning, when he had scarcely recovered strength to move, he told his wife to order water for his bath, as he intended to get up.

"Nonsense!" said Fahmeedah, "you are not well enough to leave your bed yet. When you can use your limbs and get about as usual, you can go to the Hummam."

"I tell you I must perform my devotions; my illness has caused all kinds of irregularity, and things can't go on in this way any longer."

"Devotions!" exclaimed his wife. "Do you mean to say you have vowed to turn saint when you get well?"

Her surprise at the bare idea was a bitter pill to Nussooh, and he sighed:

"Ah! it would have been better for us all if I had been devout!"

"Oh! if you haven't made a vow, you need not mind: the prayers won't run away. Wait till you get well," she laughingly replied.

Nussooh was exceedingly vexed at his wife's levity, and would have scolded her but that he remembered her ideas were but the reflex of what his own had been. He had no one but himself to thank for her profanity. He replied with gentleness:

"Alas! that my evil companionship has taught you to trifle with the commands of God!"

No more was said. Observing her husband's mood, Fahmeedah ceased her dissuasions; and Nussooh had no sooner bathed and dressed than he stood up to pray. It was a painful sight to see him tottering and falling as he tried, in his feebleness, to go through the pre-

scribed attitudes of adoration; but for the first time in his life he felt he had been engaged in genuine worship.

It was not till the tenth week that he regained his strength. He was now a changed man. There was no longer any self-pleasing and worldliness. He made his religious duties his first consideration, and his temper became mild and courteous to those about him. Before his illness he had been the bugbear of the household. He had no sooner entered a room than everybody was in a fright. If anything was wrong, the storm fell upon all alike. If the dishes had too much or too little salt, the whole family lost their meal, and such was the smashing of the crockery that all the neighbours knew that the dinner had gone wrong. He was always scolding and nagging at the children. Now they might beat a kettle over his head, and he would take no notice. Everybody was puzzled. All took it for granted that, when he got well, his temper would be worse than ever, and they wondered when the outbreak would come. But no—instead of an increase of savagery, he became tender-hearted. He ate contentedly what was put before him, and wore the clothes laid out for him without finding fault. And, as his treatment of others changed, so they too became different. Respect and affection began to take the place of dislike; and the family squabbles seemed to be charmed away.

His attention to his religious duties at first created some surprise; and though the novelty soon wore off,

a certain effect was produced by his example, which emboldened him to delay no longer the execution of his projects of reform. As it happened, Fahmeedah herself opened the subject by asking him one day if he was not tired of the solitude of his apartment, and of the meditations he now so constantly indulged in; and she went on to say that she and all the rest were at a loss to account for his altered habits and apparent indifference to society.

“And what reason do people assign for this change in my behaviour of which you speak?” inquired Nussooh.

“They say it is the cholera, and that the sight of so many deaths, and at last your own seizure and illness, have made you melancholy. Your eldest son says the medicine the doctor gave you has gone to your head.”

“Gone to my head! Indeed, no! I have kept my senses from first to last, and know everything that went on,” remarked her husband; “but now listen to what I have to tell you.”

Nussooh then related to his wife the circumstances of his dream in detail. The minds of women are softer and more impressionable than those of men, and this is one reason why they are readily influenced by religious instruction.

Fahmeedah was thoroughly alarmed, and equally with her husband saw in what had occurred a divine warning for their future amendment; but, less confident than he

of the clemency of God, she despaired of forgiveness for their past neglect of duty. Touched by the sincerity of her fears and grief, Nussooh comforted her by the assurance of the infinitude of God's mercy, and of the certainty of the pardon which followed true repentance, and invited her to join him in his supplications for divine assistance in the reformation of their household.

When they began to talk of their children, Nussooh was vehement in his self-reproaches.

"Alas!" said he, "that I, who should have been their guide to virtue, have shown them the path to ruin: that I should have been their enemy and not their friend! I have been the embodiment of a bad example. Would that my evil shadow had never fallen on their heads! Whatever they do that is bad is of my teaching; and they cannot well be worse than they are."

"Look at our eldest son!" he continued in the bitterness of his spirit; "he is always on the strut, like a fantail, neck and nape all in one! His clothes look as if they had been sown on the coxcomb's body! There are gathers in his pantaloons, and his cap is no bigger than a saucer! The second ne'er-do-weel is always on the roof flying his pigeons till he is driven off to school. He is kite-flying all the afternoon, and quail-fighting is his holiday amusement. The third is a positive nuisance to the neighbourhood. All are equally foul-mouthed, vicious, and unmannerly. As for the girls, they think of nothing but their dolls and dresses, and

their language is abominable. But we have to thank ourselves. What was the use of nagging and finding fault? We should have checked the mischief at the first."

"It was all my foolish fondness," cried Fahmeedah; "for, when you reproved them, I encouraged them. Children follow the mother's lead."

"It was not more your fault than mine," said her husband. "I had the authority as master and failed to exercise it. But, tell me, what are we to do now?"

"We cannot do anything that I can see," replied his wife.

"What! would you leave them alone in their evil courses?" cried he. "God forbid! They would but become worse."

"It is all very well to say, 'God forbid'; but in my judgment they are beyond reform. Can you teach old parrots to talk? Can you bend into shape a seasoned piece of wood? What can I do? My daughters treat and despise me as a companion: my sons care less than nothing for what I say. I may call and call, but they never once turn to look behind them."

"But surely," said he, "you admit that it is a mother's duty to look to her children's interests. Do you remember one day, when I was taking one of the children to see the doctor, you made me wait to have the child properly cleaned and dressed, lest the doctor should say you were a slattern mother? How will it be when these children of ours take their impure and sin-stained

souls into the presence of the Almighty? What answer will you give? If we have been foolish in the past, that is no reason why we should neglect the future. The end may be the same in not succeeding in our endeavours, and in not endeavouring at all; but the fact of our having endeavoured will be a plea for our forgiveness."

But Fahmeedah was still despondent. She knew, she said, every vein and fibre of her elder children's bodies, and was hopeless of persuading them to change the habits which had grown up with them from infancy. No amount of beating, she urged, would shape cold iron.

"Yes," said her husband, taking the cue from her own words, "hard substances need strong solvents. Our measures must accord with our determination."

And then the mother's instincts took alarm, and she exclaimed:

"Oh! no harshness, please. It will only make them turn against us more. And, besides, what will people say?"

"What do I care for what people say?" replied her husband. "I have my duty to do, and I must do it. You need not be alarmed, however; for I, too, am disposed to think that compulsion will be ineffective; and, for that matter, it is I rather who deserve harsh treatment than my children. A due admixture of kindness and severity will be the best mode of dealing with them;

as a poet says, '*Lancet and ointment both the surgeon tries.*' Our children are human, and, therefore, rational; and I hope, God willing, to make them understand that their own good for time and for eternity is my object. But I can do nothing without your assistance."

"And you shall have it," she heartily responded; "but I confess I am absolutely powerless with regard to the elder children."

"Then do you undertake the little ones," replied Nussooh, "and leave me to deal with my sons."

"Willingly," said his wife; "I shall have no difficulty with them, for *it is easy work pinching wax noses.* I wish you could have heard the talk I had with Humeedah the other day. The darling is only six years old, but she has the brains of sixty."

"Tell me what occurred," said Nussooh.