

## CHAPTER III.

FAHMEEDAH'S CONVERSATION WITH HER SECOND  
DAUGHTER, HUMEEDAH.

FAHMEEDAH replied: "She has noticed you at your devotions, and not long ago she said, 'Why does father wash his hands and face so often? And what does he do standing with his hands joined, whispering and muttering, and then bowing down and falling on his face?' I told her you were saying your prayers; and then she asked me what prayers were. This was the first pinch. I replied, 'Oh, my dear! prayer is the worship of God.' 'Who is God?' said she. 'And what is worship?'"

"I felt as if my hair would stand on end; and all I could say was, 'Surely you know who God is?' 'No, mother,' she said, 'I don't. I often hear you all swearing by God, but I don't know what you mean. Perhaps it is the name of something to frighten people by.' 'Hush, my dear!' said I. 'What are you saying?'"

God is our Maker: He feeds us, and if He pleases can put an end to our existence.' 'Did God really make you, mother,' she said, 'and father, and baby too?' 'Yes, darling,' I replied, 'He made all of us.' She remained thinking awhile, and then said, 'Mother, you said God feeds us; but is not our food cooked here for us every day?' I explained to her that God caused the rain to fall, and the corn and fruit to grow; and she asked, 'But why is God so kind to us? Are we related to Him in any way?' 'We are His servants and dependents,' I said. 'But, mother,' she went on, 'servants wait on their masters and serve them. What service do we do for God?' 'We say prayers and worship Him,' I replied, 'just as you saw your father doing.' 'But oughtn't we all to do it?' she asked.

I could only whisper, 'Yes, dear, we ought'; and then the child said reproachfully, 'Mother, dear, you don't say prayers, do you?' I could have sunk into the earth for shame, as I replied, 'You know, dear, some servants are idle and faithless. I am one of these.' And then she gravely said, 'Why didn't my father say his prayers before he was ill? Did not God feed him before?'"

It was now Nussooh's turn to wince. He was unable to restrain his tears any longer. Fahmeedah, too, was much moved, and she continued presently:

"I told her you had been a bad servant as well as myself; and then she asked if God was not very angry,

and the thought seemed to strike her that perhaps God would not provide food for us any longer, or send milk for her little sister, and she burst into tears. I thought she would never leave off, and I took her in my arms and fondled her, and tried to comfort her by saying that, though God might be angry, He never deprived His servants of their food. She was quiet after awhile, but her mind was still uneasy, and she said, 'But, mother, when our servants don't do their work, father cuts their pay or sends them away. We ought to do some service for God, oughtn't we? And I have never said any prayers.' And then she began to cry again, till I told her God was not angry with little children who were too young to pray. Presently she whispered, 'Mother dear, I get nicer things to eat than all the others—can't I do something for the good God? I do things for you, don't I, mother?' 'Yes, darling!' I said, 'you fan me sometimes, and bring things for me, and thread my needle, and mind baby.' 'Then why can't I do something for God? I could stand up and fold my hands like father does.' 'But, my child, father has to say things as well. He praises and thanks God, and confesses his sins, and asks for forgiveness; and he says it in Arabic too.' 'Oh!' she cried in a dejected tone, 'must we know Arabic to pray to God?' 'No, dear!' I said; 'God knows all languages. And not only this, He knows our thoughts and intentions, for He is present everywhere. He is in this house, though

we can't see Him.' On this she crept close to me, and drew on her veil, and hurriedly whispered, 'Mother, cover your head!' She said no more, but seemed oppressed with awe, and after a time went fast asleep in my arms, till my legs ached with carrying her. I laid her gently on the bed, and told Bedará to sit by and hold her hand, for fear she should wake up in a fright. Humeedah's talk has shaken my nerves. To think that a baby like that should have such notions. I can't think what has come to her."

Presently Nussooh observed: "It is the beauty of religion that it comes within the intelligence of young as well as old. It is not, like men's puzzles, a matter of ingenious contriving. The pity is that man shuts his eyes and forgets his Maker. And yet reason was given to him that he might study the works of God. As Sadi says, '*Every leaf is a page in the book of the Creator's knowledge.*' Humeedah has put us all to shame in the innocence of her childish instincts. She is an angel in the house: and thank God that for one at least of our little ones we need have no misgivings. Let us take her words as an omen of success, and carry out our good resolutions with cheerfulness and unanimity, for we must work together and show no signs of giving way."

"Please God, it shall be so," rejoined Fahmeedah.