

punishment would be too bad for me. I cared nothing for my children's welfare, and have utterly neglected my duties! My dear Sulleem, you shall do all you wish. I will go with you myself to Huzrut Bee, and thank her for all her goodness, and for doing what I should have done myself. Henceforward you shall be dearer to me than all my children."

CHAPTER V.

FAHMEEDAH'S QUARREL WITH HER ELDEST
DAUGHTER NAEEMAH.

WHILE father and son were thus conversing, a very different scene was being enacted in the zenana, and this was nothing less than a quarrel between Fahmeedah and her favourite daughter Naeemah.

At this time Naeemah had been two years married, and had a baby a few months old. She was naturally ill-tempered, and the petting she had received from her earliest years had completely spoiled her: as the proverb says, "*It was the Kurela on the Neem.*"* It was unlikely such a girl could get on with her husband's family. Her first unveiling there was, so to speak, her last, for she soon returned to her mother's house. "*A burnt rope retains its twist,*" and she came back worse

* The proverb means bitterer and bitterer. The *Kurela* is a bitter parasite, and the *Neem* a bitter tree.

than she was before. When her son was born she became unbearable.

When, therefore, Fahmeedah undertook the reformation of her daughter's habits, she knew what was before her, and felt as if she had to put her hand in a hornet's nest. She thought of a hundred plans, but the very sight of Naeemah upset them. As it happened, Naeemah herself brought on the crisis.

Early that morning she had given her baby to Humeedah to hold while she herself washed and dressed; and Humeedah, finding that the hour of prayer was slipping by, put down the child and began her devotions. What was to be expected from the child of such a mother? It began to scream. Naeemah rushed in to see what was the matter, and, seizing her baby, went up to her sister and knocked her flat down upon the floor. A minute afterwards Fahmeedah came into the room, and, seeing her little daughter on the floor with the blood streaming from her face, asked in alarm what had happened.

"Happened, indeed!" screamed Naeemah. "I just gave her my baby to hold, and the slut put him down to say her prayers. I gave her a push, and some nail in the floor must have scratched her!"

"A push, indeed!" cried her mother. "She is covered with blood. Had you no pity for the poor child?"

"If she had any pity herself she wouldn't have set the baby crying in that way."

"She was quite right to put the child down. She had her prayers to say."

"Bother her prayers! Is she to love her prayers better than her nephew?"

"Naeemah, you are blasphemous. Think of God's anger, and mend your own ways before you sneer at hers."

"What ways?" cried the angry Naeemah.

"Why, here you are, a married woman, in your father's house still! Too ill-tempered to live with your husband's family!" replied her mother.

"The family may go to —! If you married me into such a family, you must take the consequences. I didn't want to be pushed into a well with my eyes open!"

"Hush, my dear! We shall see what you do with your own children, when the time comes!"

"I shan't take your advice, at any rate," sneered her daughter.

"I didn't offer it. I hope you'll ask God to help you."

"God, indeed! I can manage for myself."

Fahmeedah was now unable to control her indignation, and threatened:

"If you speak like that again, I shall box your ears!"

"A likely story! Strike your pet daughter, indeed!" laughed Naeemah in derision.

"I have done with pets and profanity, I can tell you."

"Oh! have you? And since when, may I ask?"

"Since God taught me," gravely replied her mother.

"All right! When I am as old as you I'll learn too!" jeered the daughter.

"Pray, how do you know you will live to be as old?"

"Is that an omen for my death?"

"Life and death do not come by omens. God ordains for us how long we have to live."

"That's a blessing! If you had your way you'd soon make an end of me! Humeedah is everybody now, and the rest of us are nothing. I should like to know why she is to take airs with her 'down-up' nonsense?"

To hear the divine ordinance of prayer called by this term was too much for Fahmeedah's patience, and, as she had before threatened, she slapped her daughter's face.

Naeemah's astonishment and fury passed all bounds. She would have killed her baby before their eyes if they had not torn it from her arms. Then she flung herself on the ground and rent her clothes to shreds; then tore out her hair by handfuls, and dashed her head against the wall like one possessed. Her yells were so fearful that they expected the police would arrive every moment, and the whole neighbourhood be aroused. With great

difficulty the women at length thrust her into a room by herself, and turned the key.

Nussooh's room was in another part of the house, away from the zenana, and he heard nothing unusual; but he was presently surprised by a visit from his wife, with signs of dismay and agitation on her countenance. On his asking what was the matter, she at once described the whole circumstances. After a long silence, Nussooh looked up, and said:

"Her blasphemy is awful. To think she should be the daughter of a Mohammadan family! She shan't remain in the house a day longer! If I had been there I could have drawn my sword! Better no children at all than such a child! Send her off to her husband's home immediately!"

But compunction now took the place of anger in the mother's heart, and she cried:

"Oh, no! I can't let her go in this fashion. Her reception there would be worse than ever."

"She shall pollute my house no longer, I tell you," said her husband.

"If you are so harsh, no one can live in the house with you at all," rejoined the wife.

"I am thinking of the house in which I must live hereafter. If you are so weak and vacillating, why did you agree with me to set about a reformation of our children?"

Fahmeedah burst into tears.

"How can I abandon my children in this way?" she moaned.

"I did not ask you to abandon them," he replied.

"But you want me to turn Naemah out of doors. I never struck her before. She has often said things like that, and I only laughed. I forgot the poor thing was a wife and mother."

"Choose which you will, God or your children," sternly replied Nussooh.

Fahmeedah's distress was a piteous sight, as she sobbed in desperation, "Must I sacrifice my children?"

Her husband's anger cooled at the sight of his wife's emotion. After a pause, he asked:

"What did she do when she was put into the room?"

"What else but weep and moan? I told them to open the door and put some water for the poor thing to drink. What shall I do? She refuses to touch anything; and her baby, too, will starve."

"This must be looked to," said Nussooh. "I will go and speak to her myself."

"For God's sake, no!" exclaimed his wife.

"I will speak gently to her, I promise you."

"A man's gentleness! Why, you talked of your sword a moment ago! Besides, your going will do no good in her excited state, and you will have the shame of being repulsed by your own daughter. I will send

for her friend and cousin Salihah to come and talk to her."

It would have been impossible to suggest a better plan, and Nussooh gladly agreed; for he now remembered that his sister-in-law's household, whatever he may have thought of it before, was one in which the duties of religion were not neglected. She had a large family, and was badly off; but, as Fahmeedah remarked, no one ever heard there a whisper of discontent or of envy at the fortune of others.

"Ah!" said Nussooh, "beggars here and princes hereafter"; adding after a time, with a qualm of conscience, "They must be badly off indeed. Can we do nothing to help them?"

"My sister's husband," said Fahmeedah, "has only twenty rupees a month* to live on, and yet they are never in debt in the bazar, and never seem to want anything. Whenever I ask her to come here she puts me off, and says she will come to my children's weddings."

"Curious that you two should be own sisters, and yet so different!" naively remarked her husband.

So far from being hurt, the good woman was so pleased at this recognition of her sister's virtues, that she almost forgot her troubles about Naemah, and replied:

"Ah! when I was a girl at home, we were just alike;

* Less than 10s. a week.

but when I married—you'll excuse my saying so—I became your pupil. Religion was tabooed in your mother's family, and by degrees I forgot my early training. When a bride leaves her home her mother entrusts her to the bridegroom's family, with the words, 'I give you this maid to wait on you'; but besides this my mother said to yours, 'Take care of her. She has been piously brought up: pray you see that she does not neglect her religious duties.' So far from this, I was left to please myself, and follow the fashions of my new zenana; and though I was ashamed of myself at first, I soon became as irreligious as the rest. Afterwards, beyond a few odd prayers when any of the children were ill, and so forth, I abandoned the worship of God entirely. Please God, things shall be different now."

And then, glancing at her husband, who seemed loath to continue the conversation, Fahmeedah went below to send a *dooli** for her niece.

* A *dooli* is a covered litter, in which ladies are carried through the streets.

CHAPTER VI.

NUSSOOH'S INTERVIEW WITH ULLEEM, HIS SECOND SON.

THAT same afternoon, when he had returned from prayers, Nussooh asked for his second son, Ulleem. He had just come back from college, and when he had changed his dress he waited on his father.

"Well, my boy," said Nussooh, "I hear you are working hard for your examination."

"Yes, Sir; the half-yearly examination is coming on, and I have several books to revise; but I am sorry to say I can't work at home, for the people who come to see my elder brother make too much noise. I generally study at a friend's house."

Nussooh betrayed his annoyance, but let the matter pass; and presently said in a serious tone:

"And are you preparing for the great examination?"