

if so, he would advise his father to avoid oral communication for the present.

"You may be right," said his father; "but I have made up my mind to speak to him at once."

## CHAPTER VII.

### NUSSOOH SENDS FOR HIS ELDEST SON, KULLEEM.

ULLEEM found his brother in the men's apartments, and delivered his father's message.

The character of the eldest scion of the house, by name Kulleem, will have already dawned upon the reader. Among other peculiarities he was fond of reading and writing poetry, and had a quotation ready for every emergency. When Ulleem told him his father wished to see him, he remarked with a sneer:

"We seem to be highly favoured just now, as Sulleem will tell you. Sulleem! come here."

The boy had just peeped in, and, seeing his eldest brother, had drawn back. However, hearing him call, and taking courage from the presence of his other brother, he came into the room, and, anticipating the question he was sure to be asked, explained that he had had his hair cut off with his father's permission.

"So much for paternal affection," observed his brother. "I'll be bound you are sorry for it now."

"I wanted it done before, but you would not let me," boldly replied Sulleem.

"Ah! I remember; those *four elements* of deceit, as I call them, had persuaded you."

"You have no right to abuse my friends;—father said so."

"Before or after he was ill?" asked Kulleem.

"This very day," was the answer.

"Don't you see, boy, that he is off his head? I said from the first that the doctor's physic had affected his brain."

"Nonsense!" interposed the second brother. "He has just been talking with me for two hours, and he is as sane as ever—saner I may say."

Ignoring this remark, Kulleem went on: "I hear he is always praying now-a-days."

"Is that your definition of insanity?" returned Ulleem with indignation.

"Anyone can see that he is crazed. When he got well, he ought to have given an entertainment. Instead of that he is always in the mosque praying with saints of all sorts from the bazar. I am absolutely ashamed to see him, and have left off going in that direction. And the mean, peddling wretches he consorts with, if you meet them in the street, are too proud to bend their heads, or even raise the hand. They fling their salaam

at you from a distance, or want to shake hands,—'*Long hands and short sleeves*,' as the saying is. Sulleem, were you told to pray as well as shave?"

"Yes! and to give up cards, and lies, and bad company," innocently replied the boy.

"You might as well be told to die at once: '*Life means heart-alive*,' as they say."

On this Ulleem burst out laughing, and said: "I don't see much *heart-alive* in our amusements, I confess; and as to our friendships, they end in quarrelling and abuse. Tell me any two of your friends who do not quarrel."

"Anyhow, they are better than these fellows from the bazar, who think themselves gentlemen because they say their prayers," retorted Kulleem. "The poet says, '*Avoid those whose respectability consists in their religion*.'"

"I should say, avoid those whose respectability consists in their bad manners," rejoined Ulleem, with a keen remembrance of his own treatment.

Rather taken aback by this home-thrust, Kulleem took refuge in a sneer: "Bravo! it is easy to see *you* are ready to turn saint's disciple."

"Ready!" cried Ulleem. "I have just performed the operation!"

Then Kulleem turned to his youngest brother, and said, "Sulleem, what do *you* say?"

"I was before my brother," proudly said Sulleem; "for I had my head shaved early this morning."

"Having your head shaved is no certificate, you little fool. Yours is a case of *ex necessitate rei*, as they say; and as for Ulleem, when my father converted him, he thought he had converted a pretty bit of infidelity. Well, all I can say is, I am out of it."

"Till you have gone to father and joined our circle," put in Ulleem.

"Enough, my good fellow," replied Kulleem. "Put that idea out of your head; as someone says: '*Mine is not an intoxication which can be cured by acid.*'"

"If you will only go and see my father, he will explain matters," said Ulleem.

"Will he? Suppose I don't want to have them explained? As they say: '*What has an unprincipled tyrant to do with explaining?*'"

"How do you know what he wants to say?" urged his brother.

"*'The fiddle plays and you know the tune,'*" quoted Kulleem.

"No good will come of this obstinacy, and father will be greatly vexed," said Ulleem.

Kulleem had another bit of Persian ready: "*I can't help it if another is vexed without cause*"; and he added, "My father has no business to interfere with me. I have cut my horns and done with calf-hood. It is all very well for you, and Sulleem, and Humeedah; but I won't go to school, and be told to do this and that."

"No one wants you to go to school," replied Ulleem. "Why can't you go and have a talk with father?"

"*'Everyone knows what is best for himself,'*" quoted Kulleem. "Besides, I don't want to be dragged into an endless discussion."

"No discussion is endless where bigotry, prejudice, and pedantry are avoided," said his brother.

"My father has at present only one idea in his head—prayer and fasting. After a time we shall see, he will come round."

"No," gravely replied Ulleem. "You are older than I, and perhaps know better; but my father is terribly in earnest, and, so far as I can judge, except yourself, we shall all be with him. It is your own doing, if you prefer to keep to your dirty clothes."

Staggered by the tone of a brother who had hitherto tamely submitted to his dictation, Kulleem muttered that he would have a word or two with his mother, and soon see what this nonsense meant, when Sulleem remarked:

"Mother is very much annoyed just now."

"What about?" eagerly inquired his eldest brother.

"Don't you know," replied Sulleem, proud of his information, "that she has had a tremendous quarrel this morning with our eldest sister, because she struck Humeedah when she was saying her prayers? She slapped her face for her, I can tell you."

"Is this true?" said Kulleem, in amazement.

"You can see for yourself, if you like; she is in a room by herself, and has eaten nothing all day."

"The whole family is going mad!" exclaimed Kulleem. "The *jehad* has begun with a vengeance! Humeedah saying her prayers! Naeemah struck by her mother!"

"I don't see anything wonderful in Humeedah saying her prayers," remarked Ulleem; "she is old enough to understand."

"Bah! she ought to be at her dolls and games. Beat her with a stick, and she would say she understood logic and philosophy."

"But she hasn't been beaten," quietly returned his brother.

"But Naeemah has been beaten," stormed the angry senior. "Whose honour is safe now? The eldest daughter! Married and a mother! Piety and gentility indeed! '*Nor fit for the Kaaba nor the idol temple!*' Good-bye to such a creed! And after this you advise me to go to my father. If he were to show me similar kindness, as someone says, '*I'm not the one to shirk the combat.*' Naeemah will starve rather than give in. '*Here to-day and gone to-morrow*' is the poor girl's case."

Ulleem merely replied: "I prefer to wait for my mother's account, before I say whether she was right or wrong."

"If it had happened to yourself you would not have-

thought much about right or wrong. '*He knows to whom it happens,*' as they say."

"Anyhow, I see no great dishonour in being corrected by a parent," rejoined his brother.

"According to your pious notions," angrily replied Kulleem, "parents may treat their children as they please."

"I don't give a general opinion," said Ulleem. "All I say is, that, in this particular instance, mother may have good reason for what she did. You know how fond she is of her eldest daughter, and, to adopt your own style of argument, as they say, '*He who is always kind may be excused a single act of harshness.*'"

Kulleem would have capped this by another quotation, when a maid entered, and said to Ulleem:

"The master would be glad of an answer to his message."

"Say he is just coming," replied Ulleem: and, turning to his elder brother, he implored him to go at once.

Kulleem began arguing again, and eventually refused to go, or even to send a message to his father.

Ulleem was in despair. Though he had told his father that an interview with his eldest brother would be best deferred for the present, he had honestly tried to carry out his father's wishes; and he now saw that Kulleem's obstinate refusal would only widen the breach between them. He determined to consult his mother. She,

poor soul, was in great distress. She had been able to do nothing with the baby. She hadn't taken a morsel of food, and had spent her time at the door of the room in which her daughter was, peeping through the cracks and listening to her moans. As yet no one dared enter the room. Her old nurse, Bedārā, had indeed ventured to take the baby to its mother, but had been savagely ejected, baby and all; and then, to crown all, Salihah had sent to say she was engaged just now, but would come the first thing in the morning. And now that Ulleem brought the news of his eldest brother's disobedience, she had hardly strength to encounter the task of remonstrating with him. She then proceeded to tell her second son the events of the morning, and asked him if he thought she was justified in correcting his sister as she had.

Ulleem replied: "When I first heard of this just now, I said you probably had good reason for what you did; and now that I know the facts I am certain you did right. Let me go and speak to my sister."

"No, my boy," replied Fahmeedah; "your self-respect will only be injured. I have sent for Salihah, and we must await her arrival. Unfortunately, I did not tell her what had happened."

Ulleem at once offered to fetch his cousin; and while he was away Fahmeedah, having secured the necessary privacy, went to the men's apartments. She found her

son with a pack of cards in his hands, and could not help exclaiming:

"I wish the cards were burned! you can't live without them."

He had a quotation ready:

"*'Don't be idle, but do something,'* is what you mean."

"I mean," said his mother, "that if you want something to do, obey your father's summons. At least hear what he has to say."

"I know it already," he replied.

"You know you are doing wrong in thus disobeying your father."

"*'Wrong comes from wrong, and bad from bad,'* as they say," sneered Kulleem by way of answer, and to aggravate his mother.

"Keep your riddles to yourself," said the angry Fahmeedah. "I don't want to hear your nonsense."

"Naeemah at least understands such riddles," he retorted bitterly.

"God forgive her for a perverted understanding, and you too! I ask you, Kulleem, why will you not go to your father?"

"They tell me," replied he, "that he insists on our saying prayers and giving up all our amusements."

"Is not prayer the command of God?" asked his mother.

"I do not say it is not. I merely decline to comply

with my father's command. Why should new customs be introduced into the family? God is the same as he was before, and we too. I wish to be let alone. If anyone wants to be a saint, I don't interfere."

"But is it not the duty of parents to interfere for the good of their children, when the necessity arises?" urged Fahmeedah.

"Was it my father's duty before the cholera? Or has he had a special revelation since? If it is not a revelation, it must be the effect of his illness," sarcastically observed Kulleem.

"You have insinuated that he is deranged, before now. Go to him yourself, and you will see. Madmen don't usually concern themselves about the future."

For once he was not ready with an answer. He changed his ground, and exclaimed:

"Am I Sulleem, to be tutored and disciplined in this way? The advice of one's parents is all very well up to the age of ten; after that, children can think for themselves. It is too late for me to change now; if you wanted me to be a priest, you should have brought me up accordingly. I might have been to Mecca and back, or have taken a contract for the alms-tax, or have become renowned as a reader of the Koran. As it is, if I compare myself with other gentlemen's sons, I am as good as most of them, if not the best. In poetical competitions my odes always stand first; in chess I can hold my own with the best players; and in cards

I can make as much of a bad hand as most people. My pigeons are the best in the city. As for kite-flying, I can cut the strings of the largest kites with a *dhelchi*.\* In Zauk's words, '*What is there that I cannot do?*' My father has seen my odes, and knows their excellence. Yesterday it was 'Bravo! bravo!' To-day I am so ignorant that I must go to school. 'Say your prayers, don't associate with your friends, don't play cards,' is the order now. '*Gambler turned pilgrim,*' with a vengeance!"

His mother replied: "Kulleem, your father knows all this, and knows, too, how difficult it will be to persuade such a one as you to give up his bad habits. He blames himself and not his children; but it is none the less his duty to try and bring them into the right path, and clear himself from reproach in the future."

"I say again, let him do his duty by the younger ones, and leave me alone," doggedly replied her son.

"And have you reflected what is to be the end of all this?" inquired his mother.

"Oh! I daresay he'll be angry enough, but I shall keep out of the way, and you'll soon persuade him to come round."

"You are wrong in your calculations. If I thought this was to be the end of it, I wouldn't have troubled

\* This is the cheapest and smallest kind of kite, in the shape of a square. The skill of the kite-flyer is shown in drawing the string of his own kite across that of his rival's so as to cut it through.

myself to speak to you at all. Your father is in earnest; and I, for one, shall not oppose his wishes."

"Yes, you are all afraid of him," said Kulleem with a sneer. "A fig for such piety, say I, which is won by loaves and fishes. I swear I would have left home long ago, had I known things would come to this."

"Oh! Kulleem, you don't mean to leave home!"

"What is there to prevent me?" he asked. "As they say, '*My legs itch to start.*'"

"Won't you listen to your mother? Surely a mother's love claims some consideration."

So saying, Fahmeedah broke down in a burst of tears.

Soon after a letter was handed to Kulleem. She saw it was from her husband, and asked Kulleem what it contained.

He handed her the letter, which was as follows:

"My dear son, may God direct you. I have twice sent for you, but you have neither come nor sent an apology; and though nothing can excuse the disobedience of a son, yet surely some explanation was demanded by the usages of polite society. Allegiance is due, under God, to the head of the family from his dependents, as to a king; and, though I confess with shame that I have been a weak and faithless ruler hitherto, the time has come for me to exert my authority in removing the abuses which I have allowed to creep into my jurisdiction. I wished to speak to you on this subject, and hoped to have your co-operation as my eldest son. We have

passed our lives so far in neglect of the plain commands of God, and reflection will convince you that my anxiety is not unreasonable. I have been close to death, and have realised the fact that sooner or later I must give account to God not only for myself but for my family.

"I am aware that young men like you have their doubts in religious matters, and this is not a crime, for doubt suggests inquiry, and brings assurance in the end. Had you come to me, perhaps I might have helped you. Your desertion has thrown me on my own resources, for I know too well the effect of your example on the rest; but, please God, I shall persevere in the course I have marked out. I can only add that if you determine to refuse compliance with my wishes, I, for my part, shall be content to sever the ties which now connect us. Adieu."

Fahmeedah returned the letter to her son with the inquiry, "Kulleem, do you now think that your father is deranged?"

"Think!" replied he. "I am certain of it." As someone says, '*If he is not mad, he certainly is not sane.*' If to think himself a king is not madness, I don't know what is. Even *he* knows now that I do not intend to go to him."

"Alas! for your bad fate!" said his mother with a sigh.

"'*Bad it may be, but bad is the best,*'" quoted her incorrigible son.

His mother entreated him to read his father's letter carefully once more; but she had hardly finished speaking when Salihah's *dooli* was announced, and she hurried to the zenana to receive her niece.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### NAEEMAH AND SALIHAH.

"AND what is it all about?" said Salihah when her aunt came to her in the zenana. "Ulleem tells me there has been a quarrel, and says I must learn the rest from you."

Her aunt replied by telling her the whole story.

Salihah saw that she had a difficult task before her, and said cheerfully that she thought she could persuade her cousin to be reasonable, but that everyone must be kept out of the way during the interview, lest Naeemah's pride should again take fire. Her aunt knew as well as she did that wrong-doers are apt to detest the witnesses of their misconduct, and at once followed out the suggestion by ordering everybody out of that part of the house.

Salihah then passed quickly into the passages, calling "Naeemah! Naeemah!" as if she had just arrived, and wanted to see her cousin as usual. First she went