

leave it where it was, or send for a snake-charmer to buy it for a few pice! Yet these books are more poisonous than the snake, and to sell them would be as bad as to receive stolen goods."

CHAPTER X.

WHAT BEFELL KULLEEM.

KULLEEM, as we know, slipped out unperceived when his cousin Salihah arrived. He little thought he was leaving his home for ever. It was no new thing to him to run away from home; for, as a child, whenever anything was demanded of him which he did not like, he would run away to the bazar with all the servants in pursuit, or his mother would have to fetch him back in her *dooli*. Even now the fancy came to him that he might be followed, and he could hardly avoid looking back to listen; for with all his obstinacy he was a child in some things still. He was so vain of his reputation as a poet, that he was always expecting that some good appointment would be offered him by the Government; and as for the native states, he believed that the Chief of any one of them would receive him with open arms, and make him Prime Minister on the spot. A big elephant and a golden *howdah* were ready for him when-

ever he chose to go. With these foolish ideas in his head, *the ladder of pride in full view before him*, he directed his steps to the house of one Mirza Zahirdar Beg, as a loose horse gallops to his stable, and knocked at the door of what he believed to be the Mirza's home.

This fellow's grandfather, as he was supposed to be, had been orderly Jemadar to the English Resident at the time of the occupation; and the advantages of his position, and the circumstances of the times were such, that he made a fortune, and gradually acquired rank as one of the principal citizens of Dehli. During his life-time the Mirza's widowed mother and her son lived in his house, and were kindly treated; but when he died, his sons and grandsons repudiated the connection, and even attempted to withhold the pension of seven rupees a month which he had assigned by will for their support. This pittance, which was derived from the rent of shops in the bazar, was all the Mirza had for the support of himself, his mother, and his wife. He assumed the rôle of an injured man, and, much to their disgust, thrust his company on the late Jemadar's heirs, as their relation and equal, and aped their habits and style of life. By some means or other he contrived to dress in the height of fashion—embroidered shoes, a double-bordered turban, a flowered Dacca muslin tunic, with a vest of some delicate material, and long-cloth in the cold weather, at seven rupees a yard. In the afternoon

his costume was velvet or silk threaded with gold and silver tissue, a scarlet waist-band, long-flowing pantaloons or skin-close drawers, and withal a bunch of keys, for which there were no locks, dangling from his belt.

Kulleem had made his acquaintance at one of the poetical competitions, and, being no judge of character, and easily imposed on by appearances, had formed a close intimacy with him, and thought him the finest fellow in the world. In fact, the Mirza was installed as a constant *habitué* of the "Palace of Delight."

We left Kulleem knocking at the door. After a long delay two maids appeared, and asked who it was, and what he wanted at that hour of the night?

"I want the Mirza Sahib," angrily replied Kulleem.

"What Mirza?" they said.

"Mirza Zahirdar Beg, the owner of the house!" cried Kulleem.

"There is no such person here," they said, and were about to shut the door in his face, when he exclaimed:

"Is not this the Jemadar Sahib's house? And is not Mirza Zahirdar Beg his heir and successor?"

Hearing this, the idea struck them that perhaps he meant Mirza the fop, who was always calling himself the Jemadar's heir, and they said:

"The person you want lives in a mud hut at the back of the house near that stack of fuel"; and so saying, they closed the door.

Kulleem, rather taken aback by this discovery of his friend's false pretensions, found out the house and called the Mirza up, and asked for a lodging for the night.

"All right," said the Mirza; "come into the Mosque here. I'll be with you in a minute."

The Mosque turned out to be a deserted building, swarming with bats and paved with filth. Kulleem waited impatiently for his friend's return; and the latter, after a long delay, came to say that his wife was suddenly taken ill, and that he was obliged to attend to her. But he was curious to ascertain the reason of Kulleem's visit, and asked why he had thus honoured him.

Kulleem told him the whole story, and asked his advice, offering to do anything but return home.

"What is right at night may be wrong in the morning," sententiously observed the Mirza. "I will send over some bedding, and the best thing you can do is to make yourself comfortable here."

"Rather odd, isn't it," said Kulleem, "that you should have told me you had a grand mansion, halls of audience, private gardens, baths, and what not, when you haven't a room to put up a friend in for the night?"

"I am sorry," said the Mirza in return, "that you should have been in my company so long and have misunderstood me. The late Jemadar adopted me, and

I am his heir, as everybody knows; but my title is disputed, and to avoid unpleasantness I have given way at present. My self-respect prevented me troubling you with this story. But you must be tired of standing. I'll go and send the bedding, and nurse my wife."

"Well, I suppose there is no help for it," said Kulleem. "But send me over a lamp, please, for the darkness here is awful."

"Ah! I had thought of that," said the other; "but you had better not have a lamp, for the moths will be attracted, and there are a lot of swallows in the roof who will tumble on you from their roost, if there is a light. The moon will be up soon."

Kulleem had been too anxious to get away to think of his dinner, and was now famished; and, as the Mirza's ideas of hospitality did not apparently include the offer of a meal, he was driven to confess his hunger.

"You don't mean to say you want anything to eat?" said his friend. "Unfortunately I have nothing in the house, and the shops are all shut by this time. Stay. I'll run over to the baker's, and get half-a-pice worth of parched gram for you."

And off he went. When he came back there was about a handful left, which he made over to Kulleem, and without giving him time to remonstrate at the meagreness of his repast, rattled on:

"Lucky to find an oven open at this time of night,

wasn't it? Eat away, my good fellow! See how beautifully it is parched, and how nice and sweet it smells! Did you ever see such delicious gram before? Ah! I can tell you a story about Gram. Once on a time Gram went to the Court of the Archangel Michael, who, as you know, presides over the fruits and crops, and complained as follows: 'What fault have I committed that, directly I show my head above the ground, I am ill-used? Cutting and mowing is the first thing, and after that men pluck my sprouts and eat them raw. When I grow a little bigger the goats browse off me. When this is over the season of pod-picking begins, and by the time I am mature my stems and leaves fill the bellies of hungry cattle. As for my ripe grains, they are crushed between mill-stones and given to horses to eat, or parched in the oven, or boiled, or made into soap. In short, I suffer cruelties innumerable.' The attendant angels were so displeased at Gram's tirade that they ran to eat him up, and Gram made himself scarce, without waiting for the Archangel's orders. Sorry there's no salt and pepper, or you would have a feast indeed!"

All the seasoning Kulleem got was his friend's ingenious chatter; and before he could say another word the latter disappeared. Presently a dirty old drugget and a pillow were brought over, and Kulleem prepared to pass the night as best he could. He composed an ode in ridicule of the Mosque, and a satire on the

Mirza. Towards dawn he went to sleep, and the Mirza, or some other rascal, walked off with his cap and shoes and the drugget and pillow; and he woke in the forenoon to find himself minus everything but what he had got on, and plastered from head to foot with muck from the Mosque floor.

The Mirza was not to be seen, the Mosque was weird and desolate, and there was no water. Ashamed to be seen, he waited for someone to turn up who might call the Mirza. In the afternoon a boy came playing about the steps, and Kulleem jumped up to hail him; but the boy thought it was a demon, and fled for his life. As soon as it was dusk he ventured out, and knocked at the Mirza's door, and was told he had gone off early to the Kootoob; but he had no sooner asked the loan of a cap and shoes than a voice called out:

"Where are the drugget and pillow? Zuburdust, catch the rascal!"

Kulleem took the hint and ran; but Zuburdust Khan soon seized his prey, and forthwith dragged him off to the Kotwali as a common thief. At first he declined to give his name and address; and when he did, the Kotwal flatly refused to believe him, for he was acquainted with Nussooh, and knew that he had a son of some repute in the city as a poet. Kulleem produced his recent compositions in the Mosque to prove he was a poet; but his appearance was so much against him that the Kotwal was still incredulous, and, by way of

settling the matter, ordered two policemen to take him there and then to his father's house for identification, and, if his father acknowledged him, to let him go.

Kulleem's feelings may be better imagined than described. As it happened, Nussooh was in the Mosque of the Quarter in which his house was situated, conversing with his friends; and the policemen, recognizing him as they passed by, dragged their captive into the courtyard, and presented him to his father.

Nussooh's emotion at the sight of his son in this pitiable guise was a sufficient recognition of his parentage, and the policemen left him and went their way.

It was with a strange revulsion of feeling that Kulleem now found himself, as it were, arraigned before the father he had slighted and disobeyed, and in the presence of the very men whom he had so lately sneered at and reviled; but, when at length his unhappy and indignant father found words to remonstrate with him and to entreat him to return to his duty and allegiance to the Divine commands, all he said was, "Be good enough to let me send for my things." His father again implored him, in pity to his heart-broken mother, to return home. It was of no avail. With downcast eyes and dogged resolution Kulleem declared that he had purposely avoided an open rupture with his father; but, now that circumstances had brought them face to face, he told him once for all that he was unable to comply

with his wishes. He would leave Dehli, and make a name, as they should all hear in time.

Nussooh then rose with the intention of going home; and Kulleem, supposing he would lay hands upon him and compel him to accompany him, took to his heels and was soon out of sight.

Meanwhile, the news of Kulleem's arrival had already reached the house. Fahmeedah, half distracted, regardless of *pardah*, rushed to meet her husband at the door, screaming "Where is my Kulleem?"

"Your Kulleem, indeed!" returned Nussooh. "If he had been your Kulleem, he would not have left his home and treated us all thus shamefully, notwithstanding our entreaties."

"For God's sake let me see my darling son! I heard he was bareheaded and barefooted! His tender feet will have been lacerated by the stones! Curse the police and the Kotwal! To think my boy capable of theft!"

"Go in and sit down," sternly replied her husband. "This senseless uncontrollable love of yours has caused all the mischief."

"Oh! tell me where he is gone," sobbed the wretched mother, as they led her into the house.

"How can I tell you?" said her husband. "He has gone without my leave, and has covered us with infamy. To think that I should see a son of mine, in such a guise, a prisoner in the hands of the police!"

"Why did you not bring him home to his mother?" she moaned.

"Would you have had me fight and grapple with him in the public streets?" asked Nussooh.

CHAPTER XI.

COUSIN FITRUT.

ALONE in the streets with his humiliation, Kulleem's first thought was to take refuge at his aunt's, and it would have been well if he had done so; but, alas! in this crisis of his career an evil genius, in the person of his kinsman Fitrut, presented itself. This gentleman was connected with Nussooh; but a family quarrel had embittered their relations, and he had secretly heard and laughed over his cousin's proceedings since his illness. "Nussooh," said he, "may order lacs of piety, but how about Kulleem?" When, therefore, he came upon Kulleem, bareheaded and shoeless, in the bazar, he saw at a glance what had occurred, and was more pleased than surprised.

"Hallo!" he cried, with an amused glance at the young man's disreputable figure, "are you going on pilgrimage?"