

vant talking: it was the tale of the Mahdi and British valour and hopeless fighting, and a red martyrdom set like a fixed star in a sunless sky. What did it matter—what did it all matter, in this grave tremendous quiet wherein his soul was hastening on?

The voices receded; he was alone with the immeasurable world; he fell asleep.

IV

WHEN he woke again it was to find at his bedside a kavass from Imshi Pasha at Cairo. He shrank inwardly. The thought of the Pasha merely nauseated him, but to the kavass he said: "What do you want, Mahommed?"

The kavass smiled; his look was agreeably mysterious, his manner humbly confidential, his tongue officially deliberate.

"*Effendina chök yasha*—May the great lord live for ever! I bring good news."

"Leave of absence, eh?"—rejoined Dimsdale feebly, yet ironically; for that was the thing he expected now of the Minister, who had played him like a ball on a racquet these three years past.

The kavass handed him a huge blue envelope, saluting impressively.

"May my life be thy sacrifice, effendi," he said, and salaamed again. "It is my joy to be near you."

"We have tasted your absence and found it bitter, Mahommed," Dimsdale answered in kind, with a touch of plaintive humour, letting the envelope fall from his fingers on the bed, so little was he interested in any fresh move of Imshi Pasha. "More tricks," he said to himself between his teeth.