

MARY

It was a summer evening, and she stood
Upon a balcony, her wistful gaze
Directed towards a lone and distant wood,
Dimly illumined with the sun's last rays—
A canopy of crimson and of gold
Floated above the ancient forest trees,
And on in silent majesty it rolled,
Like sunlit billows over Eastern seas.
And she was lovely as the evening star,
And aptly harmonized with that fair scene;
Her maiden thoughts were sadly wandering far,
From what she gazed on, to what once had been!

She was robed simply in the purest white,
And 'mid the dark luxuriance of her hair,
Like snow flakes thrown upon the lap of night,
Glistened some snowdrops delicately fair—
The light within her sleep-destroying eye
Seemed borrowed from the ever eluding hues
That graced the bosom of the evening sky,
And still in simple earnestness she mused—
Her little hands, as white as driven snow,
Were plunged amid the midnight of her hair,
Her brow was laughing in a rosy glow,
Her lips moved slightly, as she were at Prayer!
Praying, mayhap for one who years gone by
Was banished all unsmiling from her side,
Was Mary, as she watched the sunlight die,
And pondered in the quiet eventide!

AZREEL AND THE THREE BROTHERS.

By X. Y. Z., Montreal.

To be completed in four numbers.

THREE brothers went out to seek their fortunes. They were the sons of a wise and pious man, and well taught in all their duties to God and man. They came to the desert; when they stopped to rest under the palm-trees, at a well, they found lying in the shade an ancient man in sad coloured garments. He neither spoke to them nor looked upon them, but turned away his eyes as if to avoid seeing them. His camel grazed near by. Meaning to respect his evident desire to be alone, the young men busied themselves in making ready their simple mid-day meal, without troubling the elder traveller. When all was complete, moved to pity by the sorrowful countenance of the old man, they advised together as to whether it would not be best to show him that their feelings were kind towards him, and that they would gladly give him any aid in their power to comfort his sorrow. Finally, Mahmoud, the eldest of the three, drew near to him and with great respect solicited his attention.

"Venerable stranger," said Mahmoud, "pardon what may to you seem intrusion and presumption, but in your face we read that you have met some sad disaster, and we have been brought up to think it our duty never to pass by suffering without lending such help or solace, as our poor means might afford; such has been the teachings of our father: but even were such not the case, it were churlish in us to pass in the desert, in such a way, a respectable old man, without inviting him to partake with us of our humble repast. May we beg of you to do us this honour?"

All the time he spoke, the old man regarded him with a melancholy countenance, and when he became silent, replied in a touching voice, "Unhappy young man, little do you know whom you have invited to partake of your kindness."

"That would matter little, venerable father," interposed Ali, the second brother. The measure of bounty should be the wants and not the importance of the sufferer. It is not given to the poor and humble like us to help the great and powerful, but we may aid those who need."

"My son," answered the old man, "I am the most abhorred by the human race, and the author of their worst woes, if report say true."

At this Mahmoud took one step backward, and spoke not. Ali cast down his eyes in silence. After a moment's delay, Solyman, the youngest

brother, his heart opening with generous emotion, came forward, and said, "Old man whatever were your crimes—were you great and rich—you would still have friends and followers. If you are poor, old, and hated, you have the more need of sympathy and support, though it may be of forgiveness. It is not the part of man to judge, therefore if you need assistance, speak and we will do by you even as we would pray that others might do by us, were we in like case. Not merit, but want is the mother of charity."

At these words, Mahmoud and Ali recovered their speech, and added, "Our brother speaks wisely, his words are ours."

The old man paused. A somewhat grim smile stole over his face, and, regarding the young man steadily, he said:

"Know thou who I am! I am Azreel, the Angel of Death, upon whose face no man looketh and liveth."

At these words, the three brothers fell back a space, looking in each other's faces with dismay, for though of stout hearts, the meeting the inevitable Azreel in the first flush of youth and just starting on the journey of life, filled them with an undefined dread.

"Alas!" cried Mahmoud, "Is it for this that we have left our father's house, to meet on the first stage of our journey, with that Death who might have forgotten us, otherwise, until decay and weariness made him welcome."

"Nay" added Ali, "my heart asks not for so much. It only bids me not to perish utterly without leaving sign or memorial, son or daughter, nor the memory of good deeds wrought and fame achieved."

Solyman for a moment held his peace, then with a gentle sigh, he said: "The will of the Lord be done. With the giver of life be the issues of life and death. Resignation and mercy are all I ask."

"Even so be it" exclaimed the dread Azreel, raising himself from his recumbent posture, and revealing a form at once awful and majestic. "He who holds the Book of Life permits unto me a dispensation for a certain number of men. Unto two of you this may be given; over the third my icy breath must pass. Mahmoud! unto you it shall be granted by prayer to avert my impending stroke so long as you may wish."

"Unto you, Ali, this prayer now for the first time accorded, will twice again be granted."

"Gentle, happy Solyman! falling in the first flower of thy youth and innocence, at thine appointed time, unaware of the rugged road from which thy weary feet are betimes withdrawn, blessed of angels, receive in peace and purity, the predestined stroke."

As he uttered these words, a mist seemed to pass before the eyes of the three brothers; objects faded from their sight, and a dreamless sleep fell upon them. When Mahmoud awoke, the sun was sinking red behind the horizon. He rose, and as he did so, the sand fell from about him; even as the snow from the belated traveller of the wintry north. He turned, and at his side lay Ali nearly buried under a heap of the sand of the desert. He shook Ali, and raising him from his earthen mantle poured into his lips a few drops of crystal water and applied to his nose a small phial of pungent, aromatic herbs which soon brought him back to consciousness and life. They then united their efforts to withdraw the body of Solyman from a huge mound which reposed over the spot where that well-beloved youth had stood. It was in vain, the treacherous sand of the desert fell back upon the opening they made in the hillock and defied all their efforts. "It is useless," cried Mahmoud. "It was fated that here we should fall, and that this should be the burying-place of Solyman."

"He has perished beneath a pillar of sand driven by the hot wind of the desert," said Ali. "Could that scoffing infidel Mustapha the trader, see us, he would deride our story as a mirage and a dream, and insist that the Angel of Death was merely the sandstorm of the desert."

"Be it so" replied Mahmoud, "but we will soon have to use the privilege of redemption given us by the mighty Azreel, unless we speedily leave this spot." They hastily sought their camels which, led by a natural instinct, had es-

caped to a protected spot where they quietly grazed, and, mounting, pursued their journey. After some days they reached Bagdad, and taking lodgings at a caravanserai, went out to look for work. They walked that day, and asked many people for employment, but found no one who needed their services. It was the same the next day, and still the next. Finally, their slender store of money being gone, they sold their camels to pay for the necessities of life, and after a while, this sum also being expended, the brothers took counsel together as to what must be done. On that day they agreed to take different directions in search of work. Mahmoud took the street towards the Great Bazaar. He was young, tall, strong and of a handsome visage, but want and care had begun to show in his haggard face. He stood for a long time in the midst of the square, where were sold so many rich and costly stuffs, and where gold seemed flowing in a thousand channels all around him, but not one drop of all these streams fell upon him to lighten his burden of misery. To every passer-by he made humble suit. "Have you no burden to carry,—I am strong, I am faithful." But all shook their heads. At last, as the sun was declining, an old man, on a mule passed by. "Stay, Honourable Councillor!" cried Mahmoud. "Have you no burden for a miserable man? I am dying of hunger." The old man stopped. "I have no burden," replied he, "but I have relief." "I pray you, then give it to me," said Mahmoud. "If you will it so, handsome youth; but you know me not, it seems, though we are old acquaintances. I am Azreel, Lord of the Desert."

"Nay, dread Master," exclaimed Mahmoud. leave me, as thou didst promise me at the will. It is better to suffer than to die." "As you wish," answered Azreel. "I chanced to be passing, having to do with you wealthy merchant. I wish you better luck with your burdens. Fortune follow thee. Good day."

As he passed on unnoticed through the crowd, Mahmoud stood aghast. He had scarcely proceeded a hundred paces, when he stopped, and touching a splendidly dressed person on the shoulder, whispered in his ear. The man uttered a loud cry, and fell on his face. Those nearest ran to him and lifted him up, but they found that he was dead. A Cadi happened to be present. "It is the visitation of God," said he; "Man dies at the appointed time. Carry him to his house."

Among those who stood nearest the dead man was Mahmoud. He lifted the corpse in his arms, while another took the feet, and so they bore it as they were instructed by the Cadi, to whom the dead man was known. Reaching the door of a lofty and splendid mansion, they were speedily admitted and the body laid on a couch of mourning. After all had looked upon the deceased, and were departing amid the lamentations of the household, a grave old man, with a flowing beard, in the dress of a Sheikh, bade Mahmoud and the man who had assisted him in carrying the corpse to stay; having paid with ten pieces of gold and dismissed the other, turned to Mahmoud and offered him a like sum. Mahmoud had forgotten his hunger, but had not forgotten his early lessons of charity, so he put aside the purse of the old man, courteously thanking him for his generous intentions. "Who art thou," sternly inquired the Sheikh, "who refuseth pay for labour?"

"I am one too rich to take money for a work of charity. Give me thy blessing, father," replied Mahmoud.

"Art thou not he who to-day asked me in the Bazaar for work?" asked the Sheikh with surprise. "Even so," responded Mahmoud. "Thou art my guest, young man!" exclaimed the Sheikh, and without waiting for a reply, he called to the chief of his domestics. "O Yusef! show my friend his apartments, and render him all the consideration due his rank." The Sheikh then departed, and Hassan led the bewildered youth towards the interior of the house. "These are thy apartments, honourable son of a Sheikh, and these, thine attendants," said Yusef, ushering him into a magnificent suite of rooms, where six black slaves in gorgeous dresses stood waiting;