

Mahmoud made an arithmetical calculation, that if he could kill one Afghan and lose only three of his own men, he would, after continuing this process long enough, have fifty thousand men when the Afghans had none left, so he began fighting. By some error of calculation, he found he was losing five to one, which would have put the boot on the wrong leg, so he sent to the Caliph for two hundred thousand men more. The Caliph, having an inexhaustible supply of men, whom he hired from all parts of the East, readily furnished them, and after several years of hard fighting the Afghans were annihilated, and Mahmoud had an army left. This filled his need of military glory.

He was styled the "Saviour of the Caliphate," and every day received some new ovation to his great mathematical genius and military skill.

The Caliph gave him a chief command in his armies, and told him he should have his daughter Alikea for his wife. So Mahmoud received the daughter of the Caliph as his wife and the government of a province. The fair Alikea was of a fatness beautiful to behold in the eyes of all true Mussulmen, but withal so fond of confectionery that she suffered much from indigestion, at which times she had a habit of reminding her husband, of the honour she had done him in marrying him. Mahmoud had become so used to power and rank that he ill-brooked these caprices of his wife, and so grew surly and cross in temper, venting his annoyance on any who might chance to come in his way. This continued until he became as odious in Bagdad as he had formerly been popular. Still he managed to impress the populace with a certain respect by the splendour of his dress and the profuseness of his expenditure, and by a judicious use of the knowledge acquired from consulting his magic ring, he had the reputation of great wisdom. All did not avail, he daily grew more miserable. At last, he found out that Alikea, whom he had begun systematically to neglect, amply repaid herself for his conduct, by giving her affections to a handsome Greek. It is needless to dwell on the particulars of this affair; suffice it to say, that Mahmoud, using the power he had, quietly had the Greek seized and beheaded. He proved to be that Dionysius, heretofore mentioned. "Gracious Heavens!" mentally exclaimed Mahmoud, "To be postponed to a mate."

Alikea, being the daughter of the Caliph, Mahmoud could not wreak on her the vengeance he desired, but she understood her advantages fully as well as he did his. A week had not elapsed, before he was suddenly arrested and taken into the presence of the Caliph.

"Mahmoud," began the Caliph, "I have long heard complaints of your cruelty, pride and ambition, but at last I find they end in treason. I find that a week since, you murdered your accomplice, Dionysius, who would have betrayed you, but fortunately the ties of blood prevail over those of marriage, and your wife has told all. You have conspired against me; your marriage is annulled; your lands and wealth forfeited; your rank and offices taken from you; but as I am merciful, I will spare your life, and only order your right hand to be struck off and your right eye put out."

Mahmoud would have remonstrated, but he was borne away, degraded from office, amid the hoots of a mob, and his right eye blinded and his right hand cut off. He was then dragged through the city at the tail of an ass and thrust out of the gates. Such was the wretched end of the distinguished career of Mahmoud the Fortunate, in Bagdad.

Maimed and blind, Mahmoud stood without the gates of Bagdad and revolved in his mind, what was left for him to do. Thought without action does not supply food, and soon hunger was added to his suffering. He asked for alms, but was spurned. Degraded and desperate, he threw himself into the Tigris, hoping to perish. He had hardly touched the water, however, before he was rescued by a person, who said to him in angry tones, "Are these the thanks I receive for sparing your life and filling your lap with plenty and your cup with fortune?" "Oh! Azreel!" cried Mahmoud, recognizing the stranger, "is it for this, that you spared my life? and

he touched his blind eye with his mutilated hand.

"Ungrateful wretch!" replied Azreel, "do you balance a day of pain against ten years of supreme fortune? I only gave you life. The rest has come by the decrees of a fortune which I do not control. Learn that life is not a path of roses. Live and learn."

Left alone, Mahmoud again considered how he was to support that life, which had become odious to him, but from which there seemed no escape. As he pondered, a small caravan came out of the city, and when it halted near him, night had already fallen. The company of which it was composed seemed very gay and talked loudly, as they made preparation for the evening meal. Mahmoud drew near, with the intention of asking charity, when his purpose was arrested by the voice of him, who seemed the chief of the party.

"By the holy Caaba, Benoni!" said he, "this day's work hath been worth a twelvemonth of plunder in the desert. This day have the free children of the desert put to naught the craft of cities. First, thou, oh rare Benoni! son of Zerubbabel of Jaffa, although thou art but a Jew and not of the true faith, hast wrought wonderfully. Thou hast sprinkled sand in the eyes of the Caliph, showed from the minaret of prosperity a mighty minister, Mahmoud, the favourite of fortune, and by the aid of the strong hand of Bedreddin hast gorged with wealth thy brotherhood."

"Mighty Bedreddin," replied an oily voice, "craft and force are husband and wife. Their heir is Success. It is true that my facile tongue swore to all that the Princess Alikea dictated against her husband; and thou, ready for the sequel, with thy followers, allowed no sharers in the pillage of Mahmoud's house."

"Benoni," said Bedreddin, "we are rich for life. How shall we spend and enjoy the vast wealth we have acquired? Damascus, the gem of the desert, seems to me the fittest place. I have many friends there, especially Nourreddin."

"It is agreed," said Benoni. "Nourreddin put us on this work, and will receive the province of Mahmoud."

Presently, their talk ended, and they composed themselves for the meal. Mahmoud knew that Nourreddin was the Governor of Damascus, and his enemy, and felt that he had been the victim of a vile plot. Quick of thought, and full of resource, with his mind bent on vengeance, he lurched into camp, and besought aid.

"Who art thou?" inquired Bedreddin.

"Abou-Said, the servant of Nourreddin of Damascus," answered Mahmoud. "Sped by my master on an important message, I was this day seized on the edge of the desert by some followers of Mahmoud the Fortunate, who robbed me, and when they found the letter I bore, struck off my hand, and put out my eye."

"By Heaven! thou hast been avenged in kind," cried Bedreddin, "for the same calamity has befallen that same Mahmoud."

Abou-Said, asked the Jew Benoni, soothingly, "thy letter must have been important to have won thee such hard usage."

"It was to one Bedreddin, a Sheikh," said Mahmoud.

"Ha!" cried Bedreddin. "Man, I am Bedreddin. What was in that letter? Dost thou know?"

"Worthy Chief," artfully answered Mahmoud,

"I do know; but I do not know that thou art Bedreddin. Hast thou one with thee called Benoni?"

"I am he," said Benoni.

Now Mahmoud had observed on Bedreddin's finger a certain ring, so he continued, "Chief, allow me to look at thy ring," and receiving it from Bedreddin and reading therein his name, he added, "Thou art, indeed, Bedreddin, as thy appearance and this ring declare. I give thee my confidence."

"Continue," cried Bedreddin.

"Know, then, Bedreddin, that Nourreddin has raised the standard of revolt and declared thee Caliph. He bids thee strike quick and hard, with the war-cry of 'Down with Haroun and Mahmoud.'"

"Gracious Heavens!" cried Benoni, "we are dead men. Make haste and let us fly to the ends of the earth. Haroun will be merciless when he learns this."

"He will know it to-morrow," insinuated Mahmoud.

"The arms of the Caliph are long, his feet are swift," said the Jew.

"Why not, then, follow my master's advice at once. You have enough here—some fifty men—to surprise the guard, slay Haroun and Mahmoud, and before sunrise become Caliph."

"When they find out our weakness they will revolt," said Bedreddin.

"Declare that your conspiracy embraces everybody, and each will suspect his neighbour and fear to strike."

"This is a most sagacious fellow," cried Benoni, with delight. "All he says is wisdom. This can be done. Bedreddin will be Caliph; Benoni, Grand Vizier. Thou, Abou-Said, shalt have a hundred pieces of gold."

Mahmoud made a lowly obeisance. "I thank thee, oh! most generous; but time flies. Let us act. Leave Mahmoud to me."

"Mahmoud is past thy vengeance. Abou-Said, he is degraded, mutilated and exiled."

"Where, then, is his wife?" asked Mahmoud.

"His wife has the palace of the Brazen Lions."

"Give me five men, I have a message from Nourreddin for her," said Mahmoud.

Their plans were speedily arranged, and mounting their steeds, they dashed through a small and badly guarded gate of the city and rode towards the palace of Haroun. When they reached that of the Brazen Lions, they halted, and, springing from their horses, in a moment overpowered the guard. Another minute brought them to the banquet hall, where Alikea was revelling in security.

Mahmoud and his comrades fell upon the banquetters, putting them all to death and setting fire to the palace. Without delay they proceeded to the palace of the Caliph. The guard at the outer gate was overthrown, and a fierce struggle ensued within. Whilst the tumult still raged, Haroun rushed out at the head of his private guards and threw himself into the midst of the conflict. The fortune of the day brought him face to face with Bedreddin, and scimiter clashed against scimiter.

"Down with the traitors," shouted Haroun.

"Live Bedreddin, and down with false Haroun and Mahmoud his slave," shrieked Bedreddin.

Hardly had he uttered the words when a scimiter, swung in the left hand of Mahmoud fell on the neck of Bedreddin, who sunk dead at the feet of Haroun. A yell of despair rose from the survivors of his party, who sought safety in flight. Haroun, turning to him, recognized Mahmoud in his preserver.

"What brought thee here?" sternly inquired the Caliph.

"Thy safety," replied Mahmoud.

The Caliph heard from Mahmoud that he had accidentally learned the plot and came to reveal it. The Caliph at once restored him to all his honours and wealth, and would have given him his wife, but she had been slain in the outbreak.

Mahmoud now thought himself again restored to permanent power, and was congratulating himself on it, when Azreel entered his apartment. "Come, Mahmoud," said he, "you have received a poisoned wound in this affray, and had better go quickly with me."

But Mahmoud was no longer of a mind to go, and so said. The next day made him repent his refusal. His agony was great and intolerable, and after a week of intense pain, Azreel, whom he had repeatedly called for, again returned.

"Wilt thou go?" said he.

"Yes," said Mahmoud, "I wish I had accepted thy first invitation or thy last. Every refusal has preceded some unexpected misfortune."

"Hast thou learned at last," said Azreel,

"that I am not more terrible than benignant. It is best for a man to die, when his time comes."

—But then, added he, sagely, "most of them do."

So the Caliph mourned over his preserver, and built a mausoleum to his memory, and the poet Fidele-Deedy made his epitaph, which, after giving him all the virtues, said—