

had retired to rest. Zohair, too, had retired; but he sought sleep in vain. For hours he turned and groaned upon his bed; but sleep would not visit his eyelids. He thought over the events of the day; but he could not remember a single duty unperformed. He had prostrated himself at the rising, the setting and the meridian of the sun, as was his wont; he had performed his ablutions with the strictest observance of the customary ceremonies; he had been even more than usually fortunate in finding proper objects upon whom to bestow charity, and more than usually fortunate in hiding even from the recipients themselves from whom the aid they had received had come; even now his hospitality was indorsed by the presence of these strangers under his roof. Why, then, should sleep be denied him? "It must be," he said to himself, "that there is knowledge to be gained by studying the stars. I will arise and scan the heavenly page, if perchance I may read thereon aught new or wonderful."

So he arose, wrapped himself in a robe which lay at hand, and ascended to the roof. The night was most favorable for his purpose. The moon had not yet risen and the air was so clear that the faintest stars shone undimmed and bright, while the larger ones seemed to glow with an intensity he had never observed before. Stalwart Orion bending up from the south seemed leaning toward him as if eager to impart the lore of ages so soon as he should find a man good enough or wise enough to receive it. Arcturus at the north was sweeping away to the west as if hastening from the coming dawn. Nearly in the zenith "like a silken robe cunningly decked with gems," as Zohair was wont to observe, shimmered the Pleiades. Zohair took all this in at a glance. At the next he discovered that he was not alone; the old man had preceded him; and was now carefully examining the position and appearance of the last named constellation through a glass.* Then he withdrew his gaze from the heavens, dropped his head upon his breast, and sat for a long time as if lost in thought. At length he spoke: "The heavens still look threateningly upon me," he said: "There are portents of evil in the stars. And yet all the signs have hitherto told me that, though danger might threaten and adversity for a time overwhelm me, I should at length triumph over all obstacles, and live to a ripe old age in peace and happiness; but now that danger is now upon me—now that adversity has pressed me sore till I doubt if aught of joy can come to me more—even now I read naught but bodings of evil and omens of further misfortune. Often has the night drawn her skirt around me like the bending wave of the sea to make trial of my constancy. And I said to her (when she seemed to extend her sides, to draw on her unwieldy length, and to advance slowly with her breast), 'Dispel thy gloom, oh, tedious night, that the morning may rise, although my sorrows are so great that the morning light will not give me more comfort than thy shades. Oh, hideous night—a night in which the stars are prevented from rising as if they were fettered to a rock with strong bands.'"

Zohair was about to step forward to endeavor to comfort the old man when the latter rose to his feet, and stretching his hands abroad, with his face upturned, his gray locks falling weirdly about his shoulders, and his eyes bright and wild, he continued: "Yea I know that the

*This is no anachronism. There is ample evidence that magnifying glasses were used in very ancient times.