

A Persian Roseleaf

by
LT. COL. ANDREW HAGGARD.



CHAPTER XXXII.—(Continued.)

"If Nejumi could only be trusted to continue in the same amiable mood as he is at present," remarked Ibrahim as she looked at the girl. "I for one would rather that he remained. The Emir actually gave me the tobacco I am now smoking—times have changed indeed! He found the blessed weed among the German's merchandise."

"Smoke while you can, Cadi," laughed Mirza Ali sarcastically. "It is the tobacco of policy which he wishes to leave the fumes behind him; but if he were sure of his position you would get no smoke from him, save the smoke of a rifle fired into your body. Nor will you do so, I fear, when Yunes and his myrmidons arrive. But as nobody is secure in power nowadays, it is possible that even they may not last long at the top of the tree. Ask Rabeah Abdallah to tell you what hearkened to day the news was enough to make anyone think—"

"Why, what is it that you heard, my son?" inquired the Cadi anxiously, turning to Rotherham.

"Ah—my father," he replied. "I was called by the Emir Nejumi to come and read the blessed word before him this afternoon, and there were several of the other Emir's present. I soon saw that my reading was merely a pretence, that no one was listening to the 'Kalam as Sherif,' as all were too deeply interested in something else. So, closing my eyes and lowering my voice, I droned along, mumbling with my lips but listening with my ears. At times I myself forgot the words, but what I was listening to, that, while continuing to sway my body backwards and forwards, I pretended to fall asleep, but no one noticed me. And until I heard the gist of what was being said would I raise my tones again, from time to time. What I heard was indeed alarming, as an example of the Khalifa's present cruelty and high-handedness. And we must therefore be prepared for evil days, since Yunes, his relative, is coming. I do not wonder that Wad en Nejumi feels uncertain of the kind of reception he may expect at Omdurman. He could not conceal his anxiety to-day."

"But what is it, my son? What is it that they were saying? I am impatient to hear."

"They began by talking about the great Emir Zeki Tummah—his fate has been terrible, but it occurred some little time since."

"What! the commander-in-chief of all the forces of the east and south, who was not long since performing prodigies of valour in Abyssinia and the equatorial provinces of the west? Was the very most trusted friend?"

"Yes, he was, Abouya. Well, this great warrior and trusted friend of the Khalifa was, by his own confession, suddenly seized by Abdullah's brother, Yakub, and by the superior of all your Cadi, Ahmed Wad Ali. The learned Kadil of Isium, who had been a slave, after treacherously seizing Tummah while he was paying a friendly visit to Yakub, they bound him. He was taken to the Emir's palace, and only given a little bread and water at times, through a hole in the wall, so that he gradually died of starvation. Wad en Nejumi had a great many of them, Rabeah Abdallah, who was a slave, apparently a very large sum indeed was annexed by the Khalifa."

"I am horrified," my son, and especially to think that the wise Kadil of Isium had a hand in the deed. But what has become of the Emir Tummah's wives?—around a great many of them, Rabeah Abdallah, who was a slave, apparently a very large sum indeed was annexed by the Khalifa."

"Yes, he had a hundred and sixty-four of them. They have been distributed by the Khalifa among his present friends, except that is, those that had children, of whom there are twenty-seven living. These unhappy women have been married to slaves, in order that Zeki's offering might be degraded to the rank of slaves. But that is not all; the Emir's seven brothers have been all taken to the slaughter, and are now being put to death in the effort to make her reveal where she has hidden her money."

"Did you hear any more of these horrors?" inquired the Cadi with bated breath. "Surely the curse of God and of the holy Prophet—upon whom be peace—has fallen upon this country. And the old man bowed his head as if in prayer."

"I did, I grieve to say—a whole string of them; but I fear to weary you with their repetition."

"Tell Ibrahim as Sheikh of the retribution that has already fallen upon the Kadil of Isium, Rabeah Abdallah," here interposed the Persian, "and further about Askar Abu Kalam, the Sheikh of the Gimeh tribe, who supported the whole family of the Khalifa, including himself and his father, when they were in the direst poverty. It is well that he should have been taken, as he has already taken place, so that he, like we ourselves, may be prepared for any awful fate which may be in store for the rest of us."

"The Kadil of Isium has been walled up and starved to death in the very same place and manner as the Emir Tummah. The Khalifa wished him to disclose where he had hidden his gold, but he died without opening his lips."

"Or that I am glad," said the Cadi, "my master showed his wisdom to the last. But what of Abu Kalam? His youngest and most beloved wife Zuhra is celebrated as being a very beautiful woman in the whole length and breadth of the Soudan."

"She is his no longer," replied Rabeah Abdallah. "The daughter of the Emir, when the Emir Yunes of Dekeim was sent to punish the Gimeh, he tore that celebrated beauty from the Sheikh, to

whose neck she was clinging, while weeping bitterly. She was presented by Yunes to the Khalifa, in whose harem she now is, while the unhappy Abu Kalam has been exiled to distant Reggaf."

"And this Yunes is the man who is coming to govern us?" exclaimed Mirza Ali; "moreover, there is not the slightest doubt but that he will bring a horde of those western Arabs, the women of the unhappy Nile Valley people, to eat us all up."

"As they have already done in the fertile Gezirah, between the Blue and White Nile, interposed the Cadi. "Yes, we have heard how the Khalifa has allowed them to seize there upon the houses, fields, cattle, sheep and women of the unhappy Nile Valley people, who, after living there for centuries, have now been cast out in order of starvation."

"Had I known," resumed the Cadi fiercely, "that this was what was to be the outcome of the mission of Mahmud Ahmed, the so-called Mahdi of Mount Sinai, I would have strangled him with my own hands in his boyhood. You know, Rabeah Abdallah, that his father, Mahmud, was a man of noble birth, who lived here in the province of Dongola, on the island of Argo. Yes, I would have driven my spear through him and his wife, and his children, if I had only claimed to come of the Ashraf, the descendants of the Prophet—upon whom be peace!"

"We are changing with the times, it appears; but you lost your opportunity, Ibrahim, my friend," remarked the Persian drily, "and, unfortunately, it is too late. Had you only thought of using that spear a few years sooner, you would have saved the lives of thousands, dead already, and of many thousands who are yet to die a bloody death."

"Well, Seyyid el Hadji, I suppose that it was all forewritten, and as the old saying is, what cannot be cured must be endured. Therefore, since Allah is with the patient, let us be patient. He who has, or as our friend the fidi here proved himself during his wearying imprisonment in the saler. I suppose that you are patient, and hope for the impatience we Dongolawi used to display, and the foolish complaints we made, when formerly under Egyptian rule, and the higher officials here were well off! The Egyptian tax-gatherers, it is true, chastised us with whips, but they were always amenable to the east and south, who was not long since performing prodigies of valour in Abyssinia and the equatorial provinces of the west? Was the very most trusted friend?"

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brated German nationalist Ehrenberg, were gaily decorated with the flags of the Emir Yunes Wad ed Dekeim and of the various Emirs under the new ruler's orders."

While the many pennons waved in the breeze, displaying scrolls from the Koran upon their field, in front of the Muddiyah was assembled an army of thousands of men, whose brightly polished spears and rifles glistened in the morning sun. The strident music of the brass bands filled the air as the nabab-copper war drums—and the nugaras, consisting of hollow tree trunks covered at the top with a drum, and beaten at the same time as the horns of elephants' tusks called ombebas were blown with a dissonant and hideous noise, the effect of which was to excite the passions of the Emir Yunes, attended by his counsellors Arabi Wad Dattalia and Mussaid, was holding his first official reception, and since he was known by the title of Mismar ed Deem of the Iron nail of the Faith, not only were all military and civil, but all religious or quasi-religious officials expected to be present, and to pay their respects to the representative of Abdullah, the Ruler of the Soudan. Among all the Ulema, Imams, Marabouts and other dignitaries of the mosques, the fidi, Rabeah Abdallah, had, as in duty bound, taken his place, awaiting his turn to greet the Emir upon the receipt of the fidi, which he had, as Ibrahim as Sheikh, the Cadi or judge, was a religious official, he headed this group, which also contained the Mullahs. He now turned Mahmud, and looked towards the fidi, which he had a friendly feeling for the supposed Nimsawy or Austrian.

"At a little distance, upon each side of him, were seated his principal counsellors, while behind him, in a room, were black Bastingers, slaves armed with Remington rifles and sword-bayonets. These rifles had, presumably, been taken from the property of Egypt, and, as Rotherham looked at the jovial grinning features of the negroes, he felt almost as if he were in the presence of the men of the 6th Sudanese Battalion, which had fought so gallantly at Ginnesa, and a detachment of whom, commanded by the brave Major Gregory, had been subsequently under De Clinton's orders at Port Mokrakkeh. With these reminiscences, his heart felt within him. He vaguely wondered whether it would not be possible for him to utilize the slaves, whom he knew to be equally devoted to religious fanaticism and scrupulous to whom a manner to effect his escape. If, might, he thought, perhaps be possible to induce these rifle-bearing blacks to join him in raising a revolt, which would probably do anything for women, money and freedom. Reginald carefully scanned the features of their necked and striped tunics, and he determined upon the first opportunity to make friends with this burly Kadil, who bore the name of the warlike Shilluk tribe. The Shilluks and Dinkas, under their Mek, or King of an ancient royal house, had lived in the north-western part of the Soudan until the Emir Zeki Tummah had surprised them in peace time, and, after hard fighting, annexed the territory to the Khilafah. The fidi, who were all of their men, and carried off their women, and all their young ones as slaves. Lord Rotherham next turned his eyes upon the Emir, who was, he was surprised to observe what a pleasant and intelligent countenance this great Arab leader possessed. He was a man about forty years of age, with features, a moustache and short black beard, and in complexion of a light copper hue. The Emir wore a spotted turban, a jilbab, and a pair of trousers, which was ornamented with a rich tassel of red silk, was laid on the cushion of the divan at his side. He wore an ornamental sash of broad silk, composed of several folds, was a jembab or curved dagger, the handle of which was of silver and the metal case decorated with turquoise and pink coral. In order to show his zeal in the cause of religion, the Emir had determined to receive the religious functionaries of the various regions, and his followers were accordingly standing in front of a great group of other officials and Emirs, all of whom were unarmed, while the fidi, who were seen approaching them. By the Emir's instructions, he ordered Ibrahim as Sheikh, Mousa Ali, and Rabeah Abdallah to stand in front of him. They do so humbly, in a line, making the deepest salaams, touching the ground with their right hands, and placing it to their heads and breasts in token of submission. They then remained standing with downcast eyes and arms crossed. Yunes acknowledged their salute pleasantly and greeted the trio with "Salaam aleikum," to which they gave the orthodox reply. The Emir then spoke pleasantly to the Cadi and the Mullah upon indifferent subjects, but all the time he was looking at the fidi out of the corner of his eye. Before speaking to him, however, he inquired of the Cadi, but without severity of tone—

"Abouya, you have here, in your company the fidi of whom the Emir Wad en Nejumi has made an especial report to our master the Khalifa as a foreigner who was, now some two years ago, taken prisoner by the hands against the followers of the blessed Mahdi—upon whom be peace! What report have you to make of his behaviour? How have you found his heart disposed towards our benefactor and just ruler? and what opinion have you formed of his capacity for the manner of performing his duties in the arsenal as a religious teacher? Is he in truth a faithful follower of the sacred Koran, and is he also a capable and wisely imparting the 'Kalam as Sherif' to all true Tobevers?"

"Seyyid el Emir," replied the Cadi with a deep obeisance, "of the Nimsawy, Rabeah Abdallah el Fiki, I have naught but good to report. He has performed all his duties with our Lord the Khalifa has no more devoted adherent than this religious teacher. Moreover, when—no doubt in order to try

the hand of Allah in all that takes place, and especially in this sign of the favor in which I told you, a further advance of this favor I have instructed Abdel Kadil Salatin to write you a letter in your own tongue, to which I give you permission to reply in the same language. Thus you will perceive that the confidence which I have in Abdel Kadil is only equalled by that which I have in your own fidelity."

This letter was stamped at the end with the Khalifa's personal seal, upon which his name was inscribed. "Well, such a letter is indeed a mark of favor! How does it strike you, Rabeah Abdallah?" inquired the Emir. "I can scarcely contain my gratitude, my joy is so great!" exclaimed Reginald with a beaming face. "I have most ardently desired the joy of beholding the face of our Lord the Khalifa! It would be a pleasure to me, among other things, to see him, and to hear what you say, but he is good enough not to again interrupt me just now. I wish to ask a few questions of the Emir, and to pay their respects to the representative of Abdullah, the Ruler of the Soudan. Among all the Ulema, Imams, Marabouts and other dignitaries of the mosques, the fidi, Rabeah Abdallah, had, as in duty bound, taken his place, awaiting his turn to greet the Emir upon the receipt of the fidi, which he had, as Ibrahim as Sheikh, the Cadi or judge, was a religious official, he headed this group, which also contained the Mullahs. He now turned Mahmud, and looked towards the fidi, which he had a friendly feeling for the supposed Nimsawy or Austrian."

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"Seyyid el Emir," replied the Cadi with a deep obeisance, "of the Nimsawy, Rabeah Abdallah el Fiki, I have naught but good to report. He has performed all his duties with our Lord the Khalifa has no more devoted adherent than this religious teacher. Moreover, when—no doubt in order to try

the hand of Allah in all that takes place, and especially in this sign of the favor in which I told you, a further advance of this favor I have instructed Abdel Kadil Salatin to write you a letter in your own tongue, to which I give you permission to reply in the same language. Thus you will perceive that the confidence which I have in Abdel Kadil is only equalled by that which I have in your own fidelity."

This letter was stamped at the end with the Khalifa's personal seal, upon which his name was inscribed. "Well, such a letter is indeed a mark of favor! How does it strike you, Rabeah Abdallah?" inquired the Emir. "I can scarcely contain my gratitude, my joy is so great!" exclaimed Reginald with a beaming face. "I have most ardently desired the joy of beholding the face of our Lord the Khalifa! It would be a pleasure to me, among other things, to see him, and to hear what you say, but he is good enough not to again interrupt me just now. I wish to ask a few questions of the Emir, and to pay their respects to the representative of Abdullah, the Ruler of the Soudan. Among all the Ulema, Imams, Marabouts and other dignitaries of the mosques, the fidi, Rabeah Abdallah, had, as in duty bound, taken his place, awaiting his turn to greet the Emir upon the receipt of the fidi, which he had, as Ibrahim as Sheikh, the Cadi or judge, was a religious official, he headed this group, which also contained the Mullahs. He now turned Mahmud, and looked towards the fidi, which he had a friendly feeling for the supposed Nimsawy or Austrian."

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"Abouya, you have here, in your company the fidi of whom the Emir Wad en Nejumi has made an especial report to our master the Khalifa as a foreigner who was, now some two years ago, taken prisoner by the hands against the followers of the blessed Mahdi—upon whom be peace! What report have you to make of his behaviour? How have you found his heart disposed towards our benefactor and just ruler? and what opinion have you formed of his capacity for the manner of performing his duties in the arsenal as a religious teacher? Is he in truth a faithful follower of the sacred Koran, and is he also a capable and wisely imparting the 'Kalam as Sherif' to all true Tobevers?"

"Seyyid el Emir," replied the Cadi with a deep obeisance, "of the Nimsawy, Rabeah Abdallah el Fiki, I have naught but good to report. He has performed all his duties with our Lord the Khalifa has no more devoted adherent than this religious teacher. Moreover, when—no doubt in order to try

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