The Scapegoat

by Hall Caine

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By Hall Caine

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PREFACE

Within sight of an English port, and within hail of English ships as they pass on to our empire in the East, there is a land where the ways of life are the same to-day as they were a thousand years ago; a land wherein government is oppression, wherein law is tyranny, wherein justice is bought and sold, wherein it is a terror to be rich and a danger to be poor, wherein man may still be the slave of man, and women is no more than a creature of lust—a reproach to Europe, a disgrace to the century, an outrage on humanity, a blight on religion! That land is Morocco!

This is a story of Morocco in the last years of the Sultan Abd er-Rahman. The ashes of that tyrant are cold, and his grandson sits in his place; but men who earned his displeasure linger yet in his noisome dungeons, and women who won his embraces are starving at this hour in the prison-palaces in which he immured them. His reign is a story of yesterday; he is gone, he is forgotten; no man so meek and none so mean but he might spit upon his tomb. Yet the evil work which he did in his evil time is done to-day, if not by his grandson, then in his grandson's name—the degradation of man's honour, the cruel wrong of woman's, the shame of base usury, and the iniquity of justice that may be bought! Of such corruption this story will tell, for it is a tale of tyranny that is every day repeated, a voice of suffering going up hourly to the powers of the world, calling on them to forget the secret hopes and petty jealousies whereof Morocco is a cause, to think no more of any scramble for territory when the fated day of that doomed land has come, and only to look to it and

see that he who fills the throne of Abd er-Rahman shall be the last to sit there.

Yet it is the grandeur of human nature that when it is trodden down it waits for no decree of nations, but finds its own solace amid the baffled struggle against inimical power in the hopes of an exalted faith. That cry of the soul to be lifted out of the bondage of the narrow circle of life, which carries up to God the protest and yearning of suffering man, never finds a more sublime expression than where humanity is oppressed and religion is corrupt. On the one hand, the hard experience of daily existence; on the other hand, the soul crying out that the things of this world are not the true realities. Savage vices make savage virtues. God and man are brought face to face.

In the heart of Morocco there is one man who lives a life that is like a hymn, appealing to God against tyranny and corruption and shame. This great soul is the leader of a vast following which has come to him from every scoured and beaten corner of the land. His voice sounds throughout Barbary, and wheresoever men are broken they go to him, and wheresoever women are fallen and wrecked they seek the mercy and the shelter of his face. He is poor, and has nothing to give them save one thing only, but that is the best thing of all—it is hope. Not hope in life, but hope in death, the sublime hope whose radiance is always around him. Man that veils his face before the mysteries of the hereafter, and science that reckons the laws of nature and ignores the power of God, have no place with the Mahdi. The unseen is his certainty; the miracle is all in all to him; he throngs the air with marvels; God speaks to him in dreams when he sleeps, and warns and directs him by signs when he is awake.

With this man, so singular a mixture of the haughty chief and the joyous child, there is another, a woman, his wife. She is beautiful with a beauty rarely seen in other women, and her senses are subtle beyond the wonders of enchantment. Together these two, with their ragged fellowship of the poor behind them, having no homes

and no possessions, pass from place to place, unharmed and unhindered, through that land of intolerance and iniquity, being protected and reverenced by virtue of the superstition which accepts them for Saints. Who are they? What have they been?

CHAPTER I

ISRAEL BEN OLIEL

Israel was the son of a Jewish banker at Tangier. His mother was the daughter of a banker in London. The father's name was Oliel; the mother's was Sara. Oliel had held business connections with the house of Sara's father, and he came over to England that he might have a personal meeting with his correspondent. The English banker lived over his office, near Holborn Bars, and Oliel met with his family. It consisted of one daughter by a first wife, long dead, and three sons by a second wife, still living. They were not altogether a happy household, and the chief apparent cause of discord was the child of the first wife in the home of the second. Oliel was a man of quick perception, and he saw the difficulty. That was how it came about that he was married to Sara. When he returned to Morocco he was some thousand pounds richer than when he left it, and he had a capable and personable wife into his bargain.

Oliel was a self-centred and silent man, absorbed in getting and spending, always taking care to have much of the one, and no more than he could help of the other. Sara was a nervous and sensitive little woman, hungering for communion and for sympathy. She got little of either from her husband, and grew to be as silent as he. With the people of the country of her adoption, whether Jews or Moors, she made no headway. She never even learnt their language.

Two years passed, and then a child was born to her. This was Israel, and for many a year thereafter he was all the world to the lonely woman. His coming made no

apparent difference to his father. He grew to be a tall and comely boy, quick and bright, and inclined to be of a sweet and cheerful disposition. But the school of his upbringing was a hard one. A Jewish child in Morocco might know from his cradle that he was not born a Moor and a Mohammedan.

When the boy was eight years old his father married a second wife, his first wife being still alive. This was lawful, though unusual in Tangier. The new marriage, which was only another business transaction to Oliel, was a shock and a terror to Sara. Nevertheless, she supported its penalties through three weary years, sinking visibly under them day after day. By that time a second family had begun to share her husband's house, the rivalry of the mothers had threatened to extend to the children, the domesticity of home was destroyed and its harmony was no longer possible. Then she left Oliel, and fled back to England, taking Israel with her.

Her father was dead, and the welcome she got of her half-brothers was not warm. They had no sympathy with her rebellion against her husband's second marriage. If she had married into a foreign country, she should abide by the ways of it. Sara was heartbroken. Her health had long been poor, and now it failed her utterly. In less than a month she died. On her deathbed she committed her boy to the care of her brothers, and implored them not to send him back to Morocco.

For years thereafter Israel's life in London was a stern one. If he had no longer to submit to the open contempt of the Moors, the kicks and insults of the streets, he had to learn how bitter is the bread that one is forced to eat at another's table. When he should have been still at school he was set to some menial occupation in the bank at Holborn Bars, and when he ought to have risen at his desk he was required to teach the sons of prosperous men the way to go above him. Life was playing an evil game with him, and, though he won, it must be at a bitter price.

Thus twelve years went by, and Israel, now three-and-twenty, was a tall, silent, very sedate young man, clear-headed on all subjects, and a master of figures. Never once

during that time had his father written to him, or otherwise recognised his existence, though knowing of his whereabouts from the first by the zealous importunities of his uncles. Then one day a letter came written in distant tone and formal manner, announcing that the writer had been some time confined to his bed, and did not expect to leave it; that the children of his second wife had died in infancy; that he was alone, and had no one of his own flesh and blood to look to his business, which was therefore in the hands of strangers, who robbed him; and finally, that if Israel felt any duty towards his father, or, failing that, if he had any wish to consult his own interest, he would lose no time in leaving England for Morocco.

Israel read the letter without a throb of filial affection; but, nevertheless, he concluded to obey its summons. A fortnight later he landed at Tangier. He had come too late. His father had died the day before. The weather was stormy, and the surf on the shore was heavy, and thus it chanced that, even while the crazy old packet on which he sailed lay all day beating about the bay, in fear of being dashed on to the ruins of the mole, his father's body was being buried in the little Jewish cemetery outside the eastern walls, and his cousins, and cousins' cousins, to the fifth degree, without loss of time or waste of sentiment, were busily dividing his inheritance among them.

Next day, as his father's heir, he claimed from the Moorish court the restitution of his father's substance. But his cousins made the Kadi, the judge, a present of a hundred dollars, and he was declared to be an impostor, who could not establish his identity. Producing his father's letter which had summoned him from London, he appealed from the Kadi to the Aolama, men wise in the law, who acted as referees in disputed cases; but it was decided that as a Jew he had no right in Mohammedan law to offer evidence in a civil court. He laid his case before the British Consul, but was found to have no claim to English intervention, being a subject of the Sultan both by birth and parentage. Meantime, his dispute with his cousins was set at rest for ever by the Governor of the town, who, concluding that his father had left neither will nor

heirs, confiscated everything he had possessed to the public treasury—that is to say, to the Kaid's own uses.

Thus he found himself without standing ground in Morocco, whether as a Jew, a Moor, or an Englishman, a stranger in his father's country, and openly branded as a cheat. That he did not return to England promptly was because he was already a man of indomitable spirit. Besides that, the treatment he was having now was but of a piece with what he had received at all times. Nothing had availed to crush him, even as nothing ever does avail to crush a man of character. But the obstacles and torments which make no impression on the mind of a strong man often make a very sensible impression on his heart; the mind triumphs, it is the heart that suffers; the mind strengthens and expands after every besetting plague of life, but the heart withers and wears away.

So far from flying from Morocco when things conspired together to beat him down, Israel looked about with an equal mind for the means of settling there.

His opportunity came early. The Governor, either by qualm of conscience or further freak of selfishness, got him the place of head of the Oomana, the three Administrators of Customs at Tangier. He held the post six months only, to the complete satisfaction of the Kaid, but amid the muttered discontent of the merchants and tradesmen. Then the Governor of Tetuan, a bigger town lying a long day's journey to the east, hearing of Israel that as Ameen of Tangier he had doubled the custom revenues in half a year, invited him to fill an informal, unofficial, and irregular position as assessor of tributes.

Now, it would be a long task to tell of the work which Israel did in his new calling: how he regulated the market dues, and appointed a Mut'hasseb, a clerk of the market, to collect them—so many moozoonahs for every camel sold, so many for every horse, mule, and ass, so many floos for every fowl, and so many metkals for the purchase and sale of every slave; how he numbered the houses and made lists of

the trades, assessing their tribute by the value of their businesses—so much for gun-making, so much for weaving, so much for tanning, and so on through the line of them, great and small, good and bad, even from the trades of the Jewish silversmiths and the Moorish packsaddle-makers down to the callings of the Arab water-carriers and the ninety public women.

All this he did by the strict law and letter of the Koran, which entitled the Sultan to a tithe of all earnings whatsoever; but it would not wrong the truth to say that he did it also by the impulse of a sour and saddened heart. The world had shown no mercy to him, and he need show no mercy to the world. Why talk of pity? It was only a name, an idea a mocking thought. In the actual reckoning of life there was no such name as pity. Thus did Israel justify himself in all his dealings, whatever their severity and the rigour wherewith they wrought.

And the people felt the strong hand that was on them, and they cursed it.

“Ya Allah! Allah!” the Moors would cry. “Who is this Jew—this son of the English—that he should be made our master?”

They muttered at him in the streets, they scowled upon him, and at length they insulted him openly. Since his return from England he had resumed the dress of his race in his country—the long dark gabardine or kaftan, with a scarf for girdle, the black slippers, and the black skull-cap. And, going one day by the Grand Mosque, a group of the beggars; who lay always by the gate, called on him to uncover his feet.

“Jew! Dog!” they cried, “there is no god but God! Curses on your relations! Off with your slippers!”

He paid no heed to their commands, but made straight onward. Then one blear-eyed and scab-faced cripple scrambled up and struck off his cap with a crutch. He picked it up again without a look or a word, and strode away. But next morning, at early prayers, there was a place empty at the door of the mosque. Its accustomed occupant lay in the prison at the Kasbah.

And if the Muslimeen hated Israel for what he was doing for their Governor, the Jews hated him yet more because it was being done for a Moor.

“He has sold himself to our enemy,” they said, “against the welfare of his own nation.”

At the synagogue they ignored him, and in taking the votes of their people they counted others and passed him by. He showed no malice. Only his strong face twitched at each fresh insult and his head was held higher. Only this, and one other sign of suffering in that secret place of his withering heart, which God's eye alone could see.

Thus far he had done no more to Moor and Jew than exact that tenth part of their substance which the faiths of both required that they should pay. But now his work went further. A little group of old Jews, all held in honour among their people—Abraham Ohana, nicknamed Pigman, son of a former rabbi; Judah ben Lolo, an elder of his synagogue; and Reuben Maliki, keeper of the poor-box—were seized and cast into the Kasbah for gross and base usury.

At this the Jewish quarter was thrown into wild hubbub. The hand that was on their people was a daring and terrible one. None doubted whose hand it was—it was the hand of young Israel the Jew.

When the three old usurers had bought themselves out of the Kasbah, they put their heads together and said, “Let us drive this fellow out of the Mellah, and so shall he be driven out of the town.” Then the owner of the house which Israel rented for his lodging evicted him by a poor excuse, and all other Jewish owners refused him as tenant. But the conspiracy failed. By command of the Governor, or by his influence, Israel was lodged by the Nadir, the administrator of mosque property, in one of the houses belonging to the mosque on the Moorish side of the Mellah walls.

Seeing this, the usurers laid their heads together again and said, “Let us see that no man of our nation serve him, and so shall his life be a burden.” Then the two Jews

who had been his servants deserted him, and when he asked for Moors he was told that the faithful might not obey the unbeliever; and when he would have sent for negroes out of the Soudan he was warned that a Jew might not hold a slave. But the conspiracy failed again. Two black female slaves from Soos, named Fatimah and Habeebah, were bought in the name of the Governor and assigned to Israel's service.

And when it was seen at length that nothing availed to disturb Israel's material welfare, the three base usurers laid their heads together yet again, that they might prey upon his superstitious fears, and they said, “He is our enemy, but he is a Jew: let the woman who is named the prophetess put her curse upon him.” Then she who was so called, one Rebecca Bensabbot, deaf as a stone, weak in her intellect, seventy years of age, and living fifty years on the poor-box which Reuben Maliki kept, crossed Israel in the streets, and cursed him as a son of Beelzebub predicting that, even as he had made the walls of the Kasbah to echo with the groans of God's elect, so should his own spirit be broken within them and his forehead humbled to the earth. He stood while he heard her out, and his strong lip trembled at he words; but he only smiled coldly, and passed on in silence.

“The clouds are not hurt,” he thought, “by the bark of dogs.”

Thus did his brethren of Judah revile him, and thus did they torture him; yet there was one among them who did neither. This was the daughter of their Grand Rabbi, David ben Ohana. Her name was Ruth. She was young, and God had given her grace and she was beautiful, and many young Jewish men, of Tetuan had vied with each other in vain for he favour. Of Israel's duty she knew little, save what report had said of it, that it was evil; and of the act which had made him an outcast among his own people, and an Ishmael among the sons of Ishmael she could form no judgment. But what a woman's eyes might see in him, without help of other knowledge, that she saw.

She had marked him in the synagogue, that his face was noble and his manners

gracious; that he was young, but only as one who had been cheated of his youth and had missed his early manhood, the when he was ignored he ignored his insult, and when he was reviled he answered not again; in a word, the he was silent and strong and alone, and, above all that he was sad.

These were credentials enough to the true girl's favour, and Israel soon learnt that the house of the Rabbi was open to him. There the lonely man first found himself. The cold eyes of his little world had seen him as his father's son, but the light and warmth of the eyes of Ruth saw him as the son of his mother also. The Rabbi himself was old, very old—ninety years of age—and length of days had taught him charity. And so it was that when, in due time, Israel came with many excuses and asked for Ruth in marriage, the Rabbi gave her to him.

The betrothal followed, but none save the notary and his witnesses stood beside Israel when he crossed hands over the handkerchief; and, when the marriage came in its course, few stood beside the Chief Rabbi. Nevertheless, all the Jews of the quarter and all the Moors of Tetuan were alive to what was happening, and on the night of the marriage a great company of both peoples, though chiefly of the rabble among them, gathered in front of the Rabbi's house that they might hiss and jeer.

The Chacham heard them from where he sat under the stars in his patio, and when at last the voice of Rebecca the prophetess came to him above the tumult, crying, “Woe to her that has married the enemy of her nation, and woe to him that gave her against the hope of his people! They shall taste death. He shall see them fall from his side and die,” then the old man listened and trembled visibly. In confusion and fierce anger he rose up and stumbled through the crooked passage to the door, and flinging it wide, he stood in the doorway facing them that stood without.

“Peace! Peace!” he cried, “and shame! shame! Remember the doom of him that shall curse the high priest of the Lord.”

This he spoke in a voice that shook with wrath. Then suddenly, his voice failing

him, he said in a broken whisper, “My good people, what is this? Your servant is grown old in your service. Sixty and odd years he has shared your sorrows and your burdens. What has he done this day that your women should lift up their voices against him?”

But, in awe of his white head in the moonlight, the rabble that stood in the darkness were silent and made no answer. Then he staggered back, and Israel helped him into his house, and Ruth did what she could to compose him. But he was woefully shaken, and that night he died.

When the Rabbi's death became known in the morning, the Jews whispered, “It is the first-fruits!” and the Moors touched their foreheads and murmured “It is written!”

CHAPTER II

THE BIRTH OF NAOMI

Israel paid no heed to Jew or Moor, but in due time he set about the building of a house for himself and for Ruth, that they might live in comfort many years together. In the south-east corner of the Mellah he placed it, and he built it partly in the Moorish and partly in the English fashion, with an open court and corridors, marble pillars, and a marble staircase, walls of small tiles, and ceilings of stalactites, but also with windows and with doors. And when his house was raised he put no haities into it, and spread no mattresses on the floors, but sent for tables and chairs and couches out of England; and everything he did in this wise cut him off the more from the people about him, both Moors and Jews.

And being settled at last, and his own master in his own dwelling, out of the power of his enemies to push him back into the streets, suddenly it occurred to him for the first time that whereas the house he had built was a refuge for himself, it was

doomed to be little better than a prison for his wife. In marrying Ruth he had enlarged the circle of his intimates by one faithful and loving soul, but in marrying him she had reduced even her friends to that number. Her father was dead; if she was the daughter of a Chief Rabbi she was also the wife of an outcast, the companion of a pariah, and save for him, she must be for ever alone. Even their bondwomen still spoke a foreign dialect, and commerce with them was mainly by signs.

Thinking of all this with some remorse, one idea fixed itself on Israel's mind, one hope on his heart—that Ruth might soon bear a child. Then would her solitude be broken by the dearest company that a woman might know on earth. And, if he had wronged her, his child would make amends.

Israel thought of this again and again. The delicious hope pursued him. It was his secret, and he never gave it speech. But time passed, and no child was born. And Ruth herself saw that she was barren, and she began to cast down her head before her husband. Israel's hope was of longer life, but the truth dawned upon him at last. Then, when he perceived that his wife was ashamed, a great tenderness came over him. He had been thinking of her; that a child would bring her solace, and meanwhile she had thought only of him, that a child would be his pride. After that he never went abroad but he came home with stories of women wailing at the cemetery over the tombs of their babes, of men broken in heart for loss of their sons, and of how they were best treated of God who were given no children.

This served his big soul for a time to cheat it of its disappointment, half deceiving Ruth, and deceiving himself entirely. But one day the woman Rebecca met him again at the street-corner by his own house, and she lifted her gaunt finger into his face, and cried, “Israel ben Oliel, the judgment of the Lord is upon you, and will not suffer you to raise up children to be a reproach and a curse among your people!”

“Out upon you, woman!” cried Israel, and almost in the first delirium of his pain he

had lifted his hand to strike her. Her other predictions had passed him by, but this one had smitten him. He went home and shut himself in his room, and throughout that day he let no one come near to him.

Israel knew his own heart at last. At his wife's barrenness he was now angry with the anger of a proud man whose pride had been abased. What was the worth of it, after all, that he had conquered the fate that had first beaten him down? What did it come to that the world was at his feet? Heaven was above him, and the poorest man in the Mellah who was the father of a child might look down on him with contempt.

That night sleep forsook his eyelids, and his mouth was parched and his spirit bitter. And sometimes he reproached himself with a thousand offences, and sometimes he searched the Scriptures, that he might persuade himself that he had walked blameless before the Lord in the ordinances and commandments of God.

Meantime, Ruth, in her solitude, remembered that it was now three years since she had been married to Israel, and that by the laws, both of their race and their country, a woman who had been long barren might straightway be divorced by her husband.

Next morning a message of business came from the Khaleefa, but Israel would not answer it. Then came an order to him from the Governor, but still he paid no heed. At length he heard a feeble knock at the door of his room. It was Ruth, his wife, and he opened to her and she entered.

“Send me away from you!” she cried. “Send me away!”

“Not for the place of the Kaid,” he answered stoutly; “no, nor the throne of the Sultan!”

At that she fell on his neck and kissed him, and they mingled their tears together. But he comforted her at length, and said, “Look up, my dearest! look up! I am a proud man among men, but it is even as the Lord may deal with me. And which of us shall murmur against God?”

At that word Ruth lifted her head from his bosom and her eyes were full of a sudden

thought.

“Then let us ask of the Lord,” she whispered hotly, “and surely He will hear our prayer.”

“It is the voice of the Lord Himself!” cried Israel; “and this day it shall be done!”

At the time of evening prayers Israel and Ruth went up hand in hand together to the synagogue, in a narrow lane off the Sok el Foki. And Ruth knelt in her place in the gallery close under the iron grating and the candles that hung above it, and she prayed: “O Lord, have pity on this Thy servant, and take away her reproach among women. Give her grace in Thine eyes, O Lord, that her husband be not ashamed. Grant her a child of Thy mercy, that his eye may smile upon her. Yet not as she willeth, but as Thou willest, O Lord, and Thy servant will be satisfied.”

But Israel stood long on the floor with his hand on his heart and his eyes to the ground, and he called on God as a debtor that will not be appeased, saying: “How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? My enemies triumph over me and foretell Thy doom upon me. They sit in the lurking-places of the streets to deride me. Confound my enemies, O Lord, and rebuke their counsels. Remember Ruth, I beseech Thee, that she is patient and her heart is humbled. Give her children of Thy servant, and her first-born shall be sanctified unto Thee. Give her one child, and it shall be Thine—if it is a son, to be a Rabbi in Thy synagogues. Hear me, O Lord, and give heed to my cry, for behold, I swear it before Thee. One child, but one, only one, son or daughter, and all my desire is before Thee. How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord?”

The message of the Khaleefa which Israel had not answered in his trouble was a request from the Shereef of Wazzan that he should come without delay to that town to count his rent-charges and assess his dues. This request the Governor had transformed into a command, for the Shereef was a prince of Islam in his own country, and in many provinces the believers paid him tribute. So in three days' time

Israel was ready to set out on his journey, with men and mules at his door, and camels packed with tents. He was likely to be some months absent from Tetuan, and it was impossible that Ruth should go with him. They had never been separated before, and Ruth's concern was that they should be so long parted, but Israel's was a deeper matter.

“Ruth,” he said when his time came, “I am going away from you, but my enemies remain. They see evil in all my doings, and in this act also they will find offence. Promise me that if they make a mock at you for your husband's sake you will not see them; if they taunt you that you will not hear them; and if they ask anything concerning me that you will answer them not at all.”

And Ruth promised him that if his enemies made a mock at her she should be as one that was blind, if they taunted her as one that was deaf, and if they questioned her concerning her husband as one that was dumb. Then they parted with many tears and embraces.

Israel was half a year absent in the town and province of Wazzan, and, having finished the work which he came to do, he was sent back to Tetuan loaded with presents from the Shereef, and surrounded by soldiers and attendants, who did not leave him until they had brought him to the door of his own house.

And there, in her chamber, sat Ruth awaiting him, her eyes dim with tears of joy, her throat throbbing like the throat of a bird, and great news on her tongue.

“Listen,” she whispered; “I have something to tell you—”

“Ah, I know it,” he cried; “I know it already. I see it in your eyes.”

“Only listen,” she whispered again, while she toyed with the neck of his kaftan, and coloured deeply, not daring to look into his face.

Their prayer in the synagogue had been heard, and the child they had asked for was to come.

Israel was like a man beside himself with joy. He burst in upon the message of his wife, and caught her to his breast again and again, and kissed her. Long they stood together so, while he told her of the chances which had befallen him during his absence from her, and she told him of her solitude of six long months, unbroken save for the poor company of Fatimah and Habeebah, wherein she had been blind and deaf and dumb to all the world.

During the months thereafter until Ruth's time was full Israel sat with her constantly. He could scarce suffer himself to leave her company. He covered her chamber with fruits and flowers. There was no desire of her heart but he fulfilled it. And they talked together lovingly of how they would name the child when the time came to name it. Israel concluded that if it was a son it should be called David, and Ruth decided that if it was a daughter it should be called Naomi. And Ruth delighted to tell of how when it was weaned she should take it up to the synagogue and say, “O Lord: I am the woman that knelt before Thee praying. For this child I prayed, and Thou hast heard my prayer.” And Israel told of how his son should grow up to be a Rabbi to minister before God, and how in those days it should come to pass that the children of his father's enemies should crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread. Thus they built themselves castles in the air for the future of the child that was to come.

Ruth's time came at last, and it was also the time of the Feast of the Passover, being in the month of Nisan. This was a cause of joy to Israel, for he was eager to triumph over his enemies face to face, and he could not wait eight other days for the Feast of the circumcision. So he set a supper fit for a king: the fore-leg of a sheep and the fore-leg of an ox, the egg roasted in ashes, the balls of Charoseth, the three Mitzvoth, and the wine, And by the time the supper was ready the midwife had been summoned, and it was the day of the night of the Seder.

Then Israel sent messengers round the Mellah to summon his guests. Only his

enemies he invited, his bitterest foes, his unceasing revilers, and among them were the three base usurers, Abraham Pigman, Judah ben Lolo, and Reuben Maliki. “They cursed me,” he thought, “and I shall look on their confusion.” His heart thirsted to summon Rebecca Bensabbot also, but well he knew that her dainty masters would not sit at meat with her.

And when the enemies were bidden, all of them excused themselves and refused, saying it was the Feast of the Passover, when no man should sit save in his own house and at his own table. But Israel was not to be gainsaid. He went out to them himself, and said, “Come, let bygones be bygones. It is the feast of our nation. Let us eat and drink together.” So, partly by his importunity, but mainly in their bewilderment, yet against all rule and custom, they suffered themselves to go with him.

And when they were come into his house and were seated about his table in the patio, and he had washed his hands and taken the wine and blessed it, and passed it to all, and they had drunk together, he could not keep back his tongue from taunting them. Then when he had washed again and dipped the celery in the vinegar, and they had drunk of the wine once more, he taunted them afresh and laughed. But nothing yet had they understood of his meaning, and they looked into each other's faces and asked, “What is it?”

“Wait! Only wait!” Israel answered. “You shall see!”

At that moment Ruth sent for him to her chamber, and he went in to her.

“I am a sorrowful woman,” she said. “Some evil is about to befall—I know it, I feel it.”

But he only rallied her and laughed again, and prophesied joy on the morrow. Then, returning to the patio, where the passover cakes had been broken, he called for the supper, and bade his guests to eat and drink as much as their hearts desired.

They could do neither now, for the fear that possessed them at sight of Israel's

frenzy. The three old usurers, Abraham, Judah, and Reuben, rose to go, but Israel cried, “Stay! Stay, and see what is come!” and under the very force of his will they yielded and sat down again.

Still Israel drank and laughed and derided them. In the wild torrent of his madness he called them by names they knew and by names they did not know—Harpagon, Shylock, Bildad, Elihu—and at every new name he laughed again. And while he carried himself so in the outer court the slave woman Fatimah came from the inner room with word that the child was born.

At that Israel was like a man distraught. He leapt up from the table and faced full upon his guests, and cried, “Now you know what it is; and now you know why you are bidden to this supper! You are here to rejoice with me over my enemies! Drink! drink! Confusion to all of them!” And he lifted a winecup and drank himself.

They were abashed before him, and tried to edge out of the patio into the street; but he put his back to the passage, and faced them again.

“You will not drink?” he said. “Then listen to me.” He dashed the winecup out of his hand, and it broke into fragments on the floor. His laughter was gone, his face was aflame, and his voice rose to a shrill cry. “You foretold the doom of God upon me, you brought me low, you made me ashamed: but behold how the Lord has lifted me up! You set your women to prophesy that God would not suffer me to raise up children to be a reproach and a curse among my people; but God has this day given me a son like the best of you. More than that—more than that—my son shall yet see—”

The slave woman was touching his arm. “It is a girl,” she said; “a girl!”

For a moment Israel stammered and paused. Then he cried, “No matter! She shall see your own children fatherless, and with none to show them mercy! She shall see the iniquity of their fathers remembered against them! She shall see them beg their bread, and seek it in desolate places! And now you can go! Go! go!”

He had stepped aside as he spoke, and with a sweep of his arm he was driving them all out like sheep before him, dumbfounded and with their eyes in the dust, when suddenly there was a low cry from the inner room.

It was Ruth calling for her husband. Israel wheeled about and went in to her hurriedly, and his enemies, by one impulse of evil instinct, followed him and listened from the threshold.

Ruth's face was a face of fear, and her lips moved, but no voice came from them.

And Israel said, “How is it with you, my dearest joy of my joy and pride of my pride?”

Then Ruth lifted the babe from her bosom and said “The Lord has counted my prayer to me as sin—look, see; the child is both dumb and blind!”

At that word Israel's heart died within him, but he muttered out of his dry throat, “No, no, never believe it!”

“True, true, it is true,” she moaned; “the child has not uttered a cry, and its eyelids have not blinked at the light.”

“Never believe it, I say!” Israel growled, and he lifted the babe in his arms to try it.

But when he held it to the fading light of the window which opened upon the street where the woman called the prophetess had cursed him, the eyes of the child did not close, neither did their pupils diminish. Then his limbs began to tremble, so that the midwife took the babe out of his arms and laid it again on its mother's bosom.

And Ruth wept over it, saying, “Even if it were a son never could it serve in the synagogue! Never! Never!”

At that Israel began to curse and to swear. His enemies had now pushed themselves into the chamber, and they cried, “Peace! Peace!” And old Judah ben Lolo, the elder of the synagogue, grunted, and said, “Is it not written that no one afflicted of God shall minister in His temples?”

Israel stared around in silence into the faces about him, first into the face of his wife, and then into the faces of his enemies whom he had bidden. Then he fell to laughing hideously and crying, “What matter? Every monkey is a gazelle to its mother!” But after that he staggered, his knees gave way, he pitched half forward and half aside, like a falling horse, and with a deep groan he fell with his face to the floor.

The midwife and the slave lifted him up and moistened his lips with water; but his enemies turned and left him, muttering among themselves, “The Lord killeth and maketh alive, He bringeth low and lifteth up, and into the pit that the evil man diggeth or another He causeth his foot to slip.”

CHAPTER III

THE CHILDHOOD OF NAOMI

Throughout Tetuan and the country round about Israel was now an object of contempt. God had declared against him, God had brought him low, God Himself had filled him with confusion. Then why should man show him mercy?

But if he was despised he was still powerful. None dare openly insult him. And, between their fear and their scorn of him, the shifts of the rabble to give vent to their contempt were often ludicrous enough. Thus, they would call their dogs and their asses by his name, and the dogs would be the scabbiest in the streets, and the asses the laziest in the market.

He would be caught in the crush of the traffic at the town gate or at the gate of the Mellah, and while he stood aside to allow a line of pack-mules to pass he would hear a voice from behind him crying huskily, “Accursed old Israel! Get on home to your mother!” Then, turning quickly round, he would find that close at his heels a negro of most innocent countenance was cudgelling his donkey by that title.

He would go past the Saints' Houses in the public ways, and at the sound of his

footsteps the bleached and eyeless lepers who sat under the white walls crying “Allah! Allah! Allah!” would suddenly change their cry to “Arrah! Arrah! Arrah!” “Go on! Go on! Go on!”

He would walk across the Sok on Fridays, and hear shrieks and peals of laughter, and see grinning faces with gleaming white teeth turned in his direction, and he would know that the story-tellers were mimicking his voice and the jugglers imitating his gestures.

His prosperity counted for nothing against the open brand of God's displeasure. The veriest muck-worm in the market-place spat out at sight of him. Moor and Jew, Arab and Berber—they all despised him!

Nevertheless, the disaster which had befallen his house had not crushed him. It had brought out every fibre of his being, every muscle of his soul. He had quarrelled with God by reason of it, and his quarrel with God had made his quarrel with his fellow-man the fiercer.

There was just one man in the town who found no offence in either form of warfare. The more wicked the one and the more outrageous the other, the better for his person.

It was the Governor of Tetuan. His name was El Arby, but he was known as Ben Aboo, the son of his father. That father had been none other than the late Sultan. Therefore Ben Aboo was a brother of Abd er-Rahman, though by another mother, a negro slave. To be a Sultan's brother in Morocco is not to be a Sultan's favourite, but a possible aspirant to his throne. Nevertheless Ben Aboo had been made a Kaid, a chief, in the Sultan's army, and eventually a commander-in-chief of his cavalry. In that capacity he had led a raid for arrears of tribute on the Beni Hasan, the Beni Idar, and the Wad Ras These rebellious tribes inhabit the country near to Tetuan, and hence Ben Aboo's attention had been first directed to that town. When he had returned from his expedition he offered the Sultan fifteen thousand dollars for the

place of its Basha or Governor, and promised him thirty thousand dollars a year as tribute. The Sultan took his money, and accepted his promise. There was a Basha at Tetuan already, but that was a trifling difficulty. The good man was summoned to the Sultan's presence, accused of appropriating the Shereefian tributes, stripped of all he had, and cast into prison.

That was how Ben Aboo had become Governor of Tetuan, and the story of how Israel had become his informal Administrator of Affairs is no less curious. At first Ben Aboo seemed likely to lose by his dubious transaction. His new function was partly military and partly civil. He was a valiant soldier—the black blood of his slave-mother had counted for so much; but he was a bad administrator—he could neither read nor write nor reckon figures. In this dilemma his natural colleague would have been his Khaleefa, his deputy, Ali bin Jillool, but because this man had been the deputy of his predecessor also, he could not trust him. He had two other immediate subordinates, his Commander of Artillery and his Commander of Infantry, but neither of them could spell the letters of his name. Then there was his Taleb the Adel, his scribe the notary, Hosain ben Hashem, styled Haj, because he had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, but he was also the Imam, or head of the Mosque, and the wily Ben Aboo foresaw the danger of some day coming into collision with the religious sentiment of his people. Finally, there was the Kadi, Mohammed ben Arby, but the judge was an official outside his jurisdiction, and he wanted a man who should be under his hand. That was the combination of circumstances whereby Israel came to Tetuan.

Israel's first years in his strange office had satisfied his master entirely. He had carried the Basha's seal and acted for him in all affairs of money. The revenues had risen to fifty thousand dollars, so that the Basha had twenty thousand to the good. Then Ben Aboo's ambition began to override itself. He started an oil-mill, and wanted Israel to select a hundred houses owned by rich men, that he might compel each house to take ten kollahs of oil—an extravagant quantity, at seven dollars for

each kollah—an exorbitant price. Israel had refused. “It is not just,” he had said.

Other expedients for enlarging his revenue Ben Aboo had suggested, but Israel had steadfastly resisted all of them. Sometimes the Governor had pretended that he had received an order from the Sultan to impose a gross and wicked tax, but Israel's answer had been the same. “There is no evil in the world but injustice,” he had said. “Do justice, and you do all that God can ask or man expect.”

For such opposition to the will of the Basha any other person would have been cast into a damp dungeon at night, and chained in the hot sun by day. Israel was still necessary. So Ben Aboo merely longed for the dawn of that day whereon he should need him no more.

But since the disaster which had befallen Israel's house everything had undergone a change. It was now Israel himself who suggested dubious means of revenue. There was no device of a crafty brain for turning the very air itself into money—ransoms, promissory notes, and false judgments—but Israel thought of it. Thus he persuaded the Governor to send his small currency to the Jewish shops to be changed into silver dollars at the rate of nine ducats to the dollar, when a dollar was worth ten in currency. And after certain of the shopkeepers, having changed fifty thousand dollars at that rate, fled to the Sultan to complain, Israel advised that their debtors should be called together, their debts purchased, and bonds drawn up and certified for ten times the amounts of them. Thus a few were banished from their homes in fear of imprisonment, many were sorely harassed, and some were entirely ruined.

It was a strange spectacle. He whom the rabble gibed at in the public streets held the fate of every man of them in his hand. Their dogs and their asses might bear his name, but their own lives and liberty must answer to it.

Israel looked on at all with an equal mind, neither flinching at his indignities nor glorying in his power. He beheld the wreck of families without remorse, and heard the wail of women and the cry of children without a qualm. Neither did he delight in

the sufferings of them that had derided him. His evil impulse was a higher matter—his faith in justice had been broken up. He had been wrong. There was no such thing as justice in the world, and there could, therefore, be no such thing as injustice. There was no thing but the blind swirl of chance, and the wild scramble for life. The man had quarrelled with God.

But Israel's heart was not yet dead. There was one place, where he who bore himself with such austerity towards the world was a man of great tenderness. That place was his own home. What he saw there was enough to stir the fountains of his being—nay, to exhaust them, and to send him abroad as a river-bed that is dry.

In that first hour of his abasement, after he had been confounded before the enemies whom he had expected to confound, Israel had thought of himself, but Ruth's unselfish heart had even then thought only of the babe.

The child was born blind and dumb and deaf. At the feast of life there was no place left for it. So Ruth turned her face from it to the wall, and called on God to take it.

“Take it!” she cried—“take it! Make haste, O God, make haste and take it!”

But the child did not die. It lived and grew strong. Ruth herself suckled it, and as she nourished it in her bosom her heart yearned over it, and she forgot the prayer she had prayed concerning it. So, little by little, her spirit returned to her, and day by day her soul deceived her, and hour by hour an angel out of heaven seemed to come to her side and whisper “Take heart of hope, O Ruth! God does not afflict willingly. Perhaps the child is not blind, perhaps it is not deaf, perhaps it is not dumb. Who shall ye say? Wait and see!”

And, during the first few months of its life, Ruth could see no difference in her child from the children of other women. Sometimes she would kneel by its cradle and gaze into the flower-cup of its eye, an the eye was blue and beautiful, and there was nothing to say that the little cup was broken, and the little chamber dark. And sometimes she would look at the pretty shell of its ear, and the ear was round and

full as a shell on the shore, and nothing told her that the voice of the sea was not heard in it, and that all within was silence.

So Ruth cherished her hope in secret, and whispered her heart and said, “It is well, all is well with the child. She will look upon my face and see it, and listen to my voice and hear it, and her own little tongue will yet speak to me, and make me very glad.” And then an ineffable serenity would spread over her face and transfigure it.

But when the time was come that a child's eyes, having grown familiar with the light, should look on its little hands, and stare at its little fingers, and clutch at its cradle, and gaze about in a peaceful perplexity at everything, still the eyes of Ruth's child did not open in seeing, but lay idle and empty. And when the time was ripe that a child's ears should hear from hour to hour the sweet babble of a mother's love, and its tongue begin to give back the words in lisping sounds, the ear of Ruth's child heard nothing, and its tongue was mute.

Then Ruth's spirit sank, but still the angel out of heaven seemed to come to her, and find her a thousand excuses, and say, “Wait, Ruth; only wait, only a little longer.”

So Ruth held back her tears, and bent above her babe again, and watched for its smile that should answer to her smile, and listened for the prattle of its little lips. But never a sound as of speech seemed to break the silence between the words that trembled from her own tongue, and never once across her baby's face passed the light of her tearful smile. It was a pitiful thing to see her wasted pains, and most pitiful of all for the pains she was at to conceal them. Thus, every day at midday she would carry her little one into the patio, and watch if its eyes should blink in the sunshine; but if Israel chanced to come upon her then, she would drop her head and say, “How sweet the air is to-day, and how pleasant to sit in the sun!”

“So it is,” he would answer, “so it is.”

Thus, too, when a bird was singing from the fig-tree that grew in the court, she would catch up her child and carry it close, and watch if its ears should hear; but if

Israel saw her, she would laugh—a little shrill laugh like a cry—and cover her face in confusion.

“How merry you are, sweetheart,” he would say, and then pass into the house.

For a time Israel tried to humour her, seeming not to see what he saw, and pretending not to hear what he heard. But every day his heart bled at sight of her, and one day he could bear up no longer, for his very soul had sickened, and he cried, “Have done, Ruth!—for mercy's sake, have done! The child is a soul in chains, and a spirit in prison. Her eyes are darkness, like the tomb's, and her ears are silence, like the grave's. Never will she smile to her mother's smile, or answer to her father's speech. The first sound she will hear will be the last trump, and the first face she will see will be the face of God.”

At that, Ruth flung herself down and burst into a flood of tears. The hope that she had cherished was dead. Israel could comfort her no longer. The fountain of his own heart was dry. He drew a long breath, and went away to his bad work at the Kasbah.

The child lived and thrived. They had called her Naomi, as they had agreed to do before she was born, though no name she knew of herself, and a mockery it seemed to name her. At four years of age she was a creature of the most delicate beauty. Notwithstanding her Jewish parentage, she was fair as the day and fresh as the dawn. And if her eyes were darkness, there was light within her soul; and if her ears were silence, there was music within her heart. She was brighter than the sun which she could not see, and sweeter than the songs which she could not hear. She was joyous as a bird in its narrow cage, and never did she fret at the bars which bound her. And, like the bird that sings at midnight, her cheery soul sang in its darkness.

Only one sound seemed ever to come from her little lips, and it was the sound of laughter. With this she lay down to sleep at night, and rose again in the morning. She laughed as she combed her hair, and laughed again as she came dancing out of her chamber at dawn.

She had only one sentinel on the outpost of her spirit, and that was the sense of touch and feeling. With this she seemed to know the day from the night, and when the sun was shining and when the sky was dark. She knew her mother, too, by the touch of her fingers, and her father by the brushing of his beard. She knew the flowers that grew in the fields outside the gate of the town, and she would gather them in her lap, as other children did, and bring them home with her in her hands. She seemed almost to know their colours also, for the flowers which she would twine in her hair were red, and the white were those which she would lay on her bosom. And truly a flower she was of herself, whereto the wind alone could whisper, and only the sun could speak aloud.

Sweet and touching were the efforts she sometimes made to cling to them that were about her. Thus her heart was the heart of a child, and she knew no delight like to that of playing with other children. But her father's house was under a ban; no child of any neighbour in Tetuan was allowed to cross its threshold, and, save for the children whom she met in the fields when she walked there by her mother's hand, no child did she ever meet.

Ruth saw this, and then, for the first time, she became conscious of the isolation in which she had lived since her marriage with Israel. She herself had her husband for companion and comrade, but her little Naomi was doubly and trebly alone—first, alone as a child that is the only child of her parents; again, alone as a child whose parents are cut off from the parents of other children; and yet again, once more, alone as a child that is blind and dumb.

But Israel saw it also, and one day he brought home with him from the Kasbah a little black boy with a sweet round face and big innocent white eyes which might have been the eyes of an angel. The boy's name was Ali, and he was four years old. His father had killed his mother for infidelity and neglect of their child, and, having no one to buy him out of prison, he had that day been executed. Then little Ali had

been left alone in the world, and so Israel had taken him.

Ruth welcomed the boy, and adopted him. He had been born a Mohammedan, but secretly she brought him up as a Jew. And for some years thereafter no difference did she make between him and her own child that other eyes could see. They ate together, they walked abroad together, they played together, they slept together, and the little black head of the boy lay with the fair head of the girl on the same white pillow.

Strange and pathetic were the relations between these little exiles of humanity I One knew not whether to laugh or cry at them. First, on Ali's part, a blank wonderment that when he cried to Naomi, “Come!” she did not hear, when he asked “Why?” she did not answer; and when he said “Look!” she did not see, though her blue eyes seemed to gaze full into his face. Then, a sort of amused bewilderment that her little nervous fingers were always touching his arms and his hands, and his neck and his throat. But long before he had come to know that Naomi was not as he was, that Nature had not given her eyes to see as he saw, and ears to hear as he heard, and a tongue to speak as he spoke, Nature herself had overstepped the barriers that divided her from him. He found that Naomi had come to understand him, whatever in his little way he did, and almost whatever in his little way he said. So he played with her as he would have played with any other playmate, laughing with her, calling to her, and going through his foolish little boyish antics before her. Nevertheless, by some mysterious knowledge of Nature's own teaching, he seemed to realise that it was his duty to take care of her. And when the spirit and the mischief in his little manly heart would prompt him to steal out of the house, and adventure into the streets with Naomi by his side, he would be found in the thick of the throng perhaps at the heels of the mules and asses, with Naomi's hand locked in his hand, trying to push the great creatures of the crowd from before her, and crying in his brave little treble, “Arrah!” “Ar-rah!” “Ar-r-rah!”

As for Naomi, the coming of little black Ali was a wild delight to her. Whatever Ali did, that would she do also. If he ran she would run; if he sat she would sit; and meanwhile she would laugh with a heart of glee, though she heard not what he said, and saw not what he did, and knew not what he meant. At the time of the harvest, when Ruth took them out into the fields, she would ride on Ali's back, and snatch at the ears of barley and leap in her seat and laugh, yet nothing would she see of the yellow corn, and nothing would she hear of the song of the reapers, and nothing would she know of the cries of Ali, who shouted to her while he ran, forgetting in his playing that she heard him not. And at night, when Ruth put them to bed in their little chamber, and Ali knelt with his face towards Jerusalem, Naomi would kneel beside him with a reverent air, and all her laughter would be gone. Then, as he prayed his prayer, her little lips would move as if she were praying too, and her little hands would be clasped together, and her little eyes would be upraised.

“God bless father, and mother, and Naomi, and everybody,” the black boy would say.

And the little maid would touch his hands and hi throat, and pass her fingers over his face from his eyelids to his lips, and then do as he did, and in her silence seem to echo him.

Pretty and piteous sights! Who could look on them without tears? One thing at least was clear if the soul of this child was in prison, nevertheless it was alive; and if it was in chains, nevertheless it could not die, but was immortal and unmaimed and waited only for the hour when it should be linked to other souls, soul to soul in the chains of speech. But the years went on, and Naomi grew in beauty and increased in sweetness, but no angel came down to open the darkened windows of her eyes, and draw aside the heavy curtains of her ears.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEATH OF RUTH

For all her joy and all her prettiness, Naomi was a burden which only love could bear. To think of the girl by day, and to dream of her by night, never to sit by her without pity of her helplessness, and never to leave her without dread of the mischances that might so easily befall, to see for her, to hear for her, to speak for her, truly the tyranny of the burden was terrible.

Ruth sank under it. Through seven years she was eyes of the child's eyes, and ears of her ears, and tongue of her tongue. After that her own sight became dim, and her hearing faint. It was almost as if she had spent them on Naomi in the yearning of dove and pity. Soon afterwards her bodily strength failed her also, and then she knew that her time had come, and that she was to lay down her burden for ever. But her burden had become dear, and she clung to it. She could not look upon the child and think it, that she, who had spent her strength for her from the first, must leave her now to other love and tending. So she betook herself to an upper room, and gave strict orders to Fatimah and Habeebah that Naomi was to be kept from her altogether, that sight of the child's helpless happy face might tempt her soul no more.

And there in her death-chamber Israel sat with her constantly, settling his countenance steadfastly, and coming and going softly. He was more constant than a slave, and more tender than a woman. His love was great, but also he was eating out his big heart with remorse. The root of his trouble was the child. He never talked of her, and neither did Ruth dwell upon her name. Yet they thought of little else while they sat together.

And even if they had been minded to talk of the child, what had they to say of her? They had no memories to recall, no sweet childish sayings, no simple broken speech, no pretty lisp—they had nothing to bring back out of any harvest of the past of all the dear delicious wealth that lies stored in the treasure-houses of the hearts of happy parents. That way everything was a waste. Always, as Israel entered her

room, Ruth would say, “How is the child?” And always Israel would answer, “She is well.” But, if at that moment Naomi's laughter came up to them from the patio, where she played with Ali, they would cover their faces and be silent.

It was a melancholy parting. No one came near them—neither Moor nor Jew, neither Rabbi nor elder. The idle women of the Mellah would sometimes stand outside in the street and look up at their house, knowing that the black camel of death was kneeling at their gate. Other company they had none. In such solitude they passed four weeks, and when the time of the end seemed near, Israel himself read aloud the prayer for the dying, the prayer Shema' Yisrael, and Ruth repeated the words of it after him.

Meantime, while Ruth lay in the upper chamber little Naomi sported and played in the patio with Ali, but she missed her mother constantly. This she made plain by many silent acts of helpless love that knew no way to speak aloud. Thus she would lay flowers on the seats where her mother had used to sit, and, if at night she found them untouched where she had left them, her little face would fall, and her laughter die off her lips; but if they had withered and some one had cast them into the oven, she would laugh again and fetch other flowers from the fields, until the house would be full of the odour of the meadow and the scent of the hill.

And well they knew, who looked upon her then, whom she missed, and what the question was that halted on her tongue; yet how could they answer her? There was no way to do that until she herself knew how to ask.

But this she did on a day near to the end. It was evening, and she was being put to bed by Habeebah, and had just risen from her innocent pantomime of prayer beside Ali, when Israel, coming from Ruth's chamber, entered the children's room. Then, touching with her hand the seat whereon Ruth had used to sit, Naomi laid down her head on the pillow, and then rose and lay down again, and rose yet again and rose yet again lay down, and then came to where Israel was and stood before him. And at

that Israel knew that the soul of his helpless child had asked him, as plainly as words of the tongue can speak, how often she should lie to sleep at night and rise to play in the morning before her mother came to her again.

The tears gushed into his eyes, and he left the children and returned to his wife's chamber.

“Ruth,” he cried, “call the child to you, I beseech you!”

“No, no, no!” cried Ruth.

“Let her come to you and touch you and kiss you, and be with you before it is too late,” said Israel. “She misses you, and fills the house with flowers for you. It breaks my heart to see her.”

“It will break mine also,” said Ruth.

But she consented that Naomi should be called, and Fatimah was sent to fetch her.

The sun was setting, and through the window which looked out to the west, over the river and the orange orchards and the palpitating plains beyond, its dying rays came into the room in a bar of golden light. It fell at that instant on Ruth's face, and she was white and wasted. And through the other window of the room, which looked out over the Mellah into the town, and across the market-place to the mosque and to the battery on the hill, there came up from the darkening streets below the shuffle of the feet of a crowd and the sound of many voices. The Jews of Tetuan were trooping back to their own little quarter, that their Moorish masters might lock them into it for the night.

Naomi was already in bed, and Fatimah brought her away in her nightdress. She seemed to know where she was to be taken, for she laughed as Fatimah held her by the hand, and danced as she was led to her mother's chamber. But when she was come to the door of it, suddenly her laughter ceased, and her little face sobered, as if something in the close abode of pain had troubled the senses that were left to her.

It is, perhaps, the most touching experience of the deaf and blind that no greeting can ever welcome them. When Naomi stood like a little white vision at the threshold of the room, Israel took her hand in silence, and drew her up to the pillow of the bed where her mother rested, and in silence Ruth brought the child to her bosom.

For a moment Naomi seemed to be perplexed. She touched her mother's fingers, and they were changed, for they had grown thin and long. Then she felt her face, and that was changed also, for it was become withered and cold. And, missing the grasp of one and the smile of the other, she first turned her little head aside as one that listens closely, and then gently withdrew herself from the arms that held her.

Ruth had watched her with eyes that overflowed, and now she burst into sobs outright.

“The child does not know me!” she cried. “Did I not tell you it would break my heart?”

“Try her again,” said Israel; “try her again.”

Ruth devoured her tears, and called on Fatimah to bring the child back to her side. Then, loosening the necklace that was about her own neck, she bound it about the neck of Naomi, and also the bracelets that were on her wrists she unclasped and clasped them on the wrists of the child. This she did that Naomi might remember the hands that had been kind to her always. But when the child felt the ornaments she seemed only to know, by the quick instinct of a girl, that she was decked out bravely, and giving no thought to Ruth, who waited and watched for the grasp of recognition and the kiss of joy, she withdrew herself again from her mother's arms, and bounded into the middle of the room, and suddenly began to laugh and to dance.

The sun's dying light, which had rested on Ruth's wasted face, now glistened and sparkled on the jewels of the child, and glowed on her blind eyes, and gleamed on her fair hair, and reddened her white nightdress, while she danced and laughed to her mother's death. Nothing did the child know of death, any more than Adam himself

before Abel was slain, and it was almost as if a devil out of hell had entered into her innocent heart and possessed it, that she might make a mock of the dying of the dearest friend she had known on earth.

On and on she danced, to no measure and no time, and not with a child's uncertain step which breaks down at motion as its tongue breaks down at speech, but wildly and deliriously. The room was darkening fast, but still across the nether end, by the foot of the bed, streamed the dull red bar of sunlight with the little red figure leaping and prancing and laughing in the midst of it.

With an awful cry Ruth fell back on the pillow and turned her eyes to the wall. The black woman dropped her head that she might not see. And Israel covered his face and groaned in his tearless agony, “O Lord God, long hast Thou chastised me with whips, and now I am chastised with scorpions!”

Ruth recovered herself quickly. “Bring her to me again!” she faltered; and once more Fatimah brought Naomi back to the bedside. Then, embracing and kissing the child, and seeming to forget in the torment of her trouble that Naomi could not hear her, she cried, “It's your mother, Naomi! your mother, darling, though so sick and changed! Don't you know her, Naomi? Your mother, your own mother, sweet one, your dear mother who loves you so, and must leave you now and see you no more!”

Now what it was in that wild plea that touched the consciousness of the child at last, only God Himself can say. But first Naomi's cheeks grew pale at the embrace of the arms that held her, and then they reddened, and then her little nervous fingers grasped at Ruth's hands again, and then her little lips trembled, and then, at length, she flung herself along Ruth's bosom and nestled close in her embrace.

Ruth fell back on her pillow now with a cry of Joy; the black woman stood and wept by the wall and Israel, unable to bear up his heart any longer was melted and unmanned. The sun had gone down, and the room was darkening rapidly, for the twilight in that land is short; the streets were quiet, and the mooddin of the

neighbouring minaret was chanting in the silence, “God is great, God is great!”

After awhile the little one fell asleep at her mother's bosom, and, seeing this, Fatimah would have lifted her away and carried her back to her own bed; but Ruth said, “No; leave her, let me have her with me while I may.”

“No one shall take her from you,” said Israel.

Then she gazed down at the child's face and said, “It is hard to leave her and never once to have heard her voice.”

“That is the bitterest cup of all,” said Israel.

“I shall not return to her,” said Ruth, “but she shall come to me, and then, perhaps—who knows?—perhaps in the resurrection I shall hear it.”

Israel made no answer.

Ruth gazed down at the child again, and said, “My helpless darling! Who will care for you when I am gone?”

“Rest, rest, and sleep!” said Israel.

“Ah, yes, I know,” said Ruth. “How foolish of me! You are her father, and you love her also. Yet promise me—promise—”

“For love and tending she shall never lack,” said Israel. “And now lie you still, my dearest; lie still and sleep.”

She stretched out her hand to him. “Yes, that was what I meant,” she said, and smiled. Then a shadow crossed her face in the gloom. “But when I am gone,” she said, “will Naomi ever know that her mother who is dead had wronged her?”

“You have never wronged her,” said Israel. “Have done, oh, have done!”

“God punished us for our prayer, my husband,” said Ruth.

“Peace, peace!” said Israel.

“But God is good,” said Ruth, “and surely He will not afflict our child much

longer."

"Hush! Hush! You will awaken her," said Israel, not thinking what he said. "Now lie still and sleep, dearest. You are tired also."

She lay quiet for a time, gazing, while the light remained, into the face of the sleeping child, and listening, when the light failed, to her gentle breathing. Then she babbled and crooned over her with a childish joy. "Yes, yes, father is right, and mother must lie quiet—very quiet, and so her little Naomi will sleep long—very long, and wake happy and well in the morning. How bonny she will look! How fresh and rosy!"

She paused a moment. Her laboured breathing came quick and fast. "But shall I be here to see her? shall I?"

She paused again, and then, as though to banish thought, she began to sing in a low voice that was like a moan. Presently her singing ceased, and she spoke again, but this time in broken whispers.

"How soft and glossy her hair is! I wonder if Fatimah will remember to wash it every day. She should twist it around her fingers to keep it in pretty curls. . . . Oh, why did God make my child so beautiful?. . . . Dear me, her morning frock wanted stitching at the sleeves, it's a chance if Habeebah has seen to it. Then there's her underclothing. . . . Will she be deaf and blind and dumb always? I wonder if I shall see her when I. . . . They say that angels are sent. . . . Yes, yes, that's it, when I am there—there—I will go to God and say, 'O Lord! my little girl whom I have left behind, she is. . . . You would never think, O Lord, how many things may happen to one like her. Let me go—only let me watch over her—O Lord, let me be her guar—'"

Her weakness had conquered her, and she was quiet at last. Israel sat in silence by the post of the bed. His heart was surging itself out of his choking breast. The black woman stood somewhere by the wall. After a time Ruth seemed to awake as from

sleep. She was in great excitement.

“Israel, Israel!” she cried in a voice of joy, “I have seen a vision. It was Naomi. She was no longer deaf and blind and dumb. She was grown to be a woman, but I knew her instantly. Not a woman either, but a young maiden, and so beautiful, so beautiful! Yes, and she could see and hear and speak.”

Israel thought Ruth had become delirious, and he tried to soothe her, but her agitation was not to be overcome. “The Lord hath seen our tears at last,” she cried. “He has put our sin beneath His feet. We are forgiven. It will be well with the child yet.”

Israel did not try to gainsay her, and at sight and sound of her joy, seeing it so beautiful, yet thinking it so vain, he could not help at last but weep. Presently she became quiet again, and then again, after a little while, she woke as from a sleep.

“I am ready now,” she said in a whisper, “quite ready, sweet Heaven, quite, quite ready now.”

Then with her one free hand she felt in the darkness for Israel, where he sat beside her, and touching his forehead she smoothed it, and said very softly, “Farewell, my husband!”

And Israel answered her, “Farewell!”

“Good-night!” she whispered.

And Israel drew down her hand from his forehead to his lips and sobbed, and said, “Good-night, beloved!”

Then she put her white lips to the child's blind eyes, and at that moment the spirit of the Lord came to her, and the Lord took her, and she died.

When lamps had been brought into the room, and Fatimah saw that the end had come, she would have lifted Naomi from Ruth's bosom, but the child awoke as she was being moved, and clasped her little fingers about the dead mother's neck and

covered the mouth with kisses. And when she felt that the lips did not answer to her lips, and that the arms which had held her did not hold her any longer, but fell away useless, she clung the closer, and tears started to her eyes.

CHAPTER V

RUTH'S BURIAL

The people of Tetuan were not melted towards Israel by the depth of his sorrow and the breadth of shadow that lay upon him. By noon of the day following the night of Ruth's death, Israel knew that he was to be left alone. It was a rule of the Mellah that on notice being given of a death in their quarter, the clerk of the synagogue should publish it at the first service thereafter, in order that a body of men, called the Hebra Kadisha of Kabranim, the Holy Society of Buriers, might straightway make arrangements for burial. Early prayers had been held in the synagogue at eight o'clock that morning, and no one had yet come near to Israel's house. The men of the Hebra were going about their ordinary occupations. They knew nothing of Ruth's death by official announcement. The clerk had not published it. Israel remembered with bitterness that notice of it had not been sent. Nevertheless, the fact was known throughout Tetuan. There was not a water-carrier in the market-place but had taken it to each house he called at, and passed it to every man he met. Little groups of idle Jewish women had been many hours congregated in the streets outside, talking of it in whispers and looking up at the darkened windows with awe. But the synagogue knew nothing of it. Israel had omitted the customary ceremony, and in that omission lay the advantage of his enemies. He must humble himself and send to them. Until he did so they would leave him alone.

Israel did not send. Never once since the birth of Naomi had he crossed the threshold of the synagogue. He would not cross it now, whether in body or in spirit. But he was still a Jew, with Jewish customs, if he had lost the Jewish faith, and it was one

of the customs of the Jews that a body should be buried within twenty-four hours, at farthest, from the time of death. He must do something immediately. Some help must be summoned. What help could it be?

It was useless to think of the Muslimeen. No believer would lend a hand to dig a grave for an unbeliever, or to make apparel for his dead. It was just as idle to think of the Jews. If the synagogue knew nothing of this burial, no Jew in the Mellah would be found so poor that he would have need to know more. And of Christians of any sort or condition there were none in all Tetuan.

The gall of Israel's heart rose to his throat. Was he to be left alone with his dead wife? Did his enemies wish to see him howk out her grave with his own hands? Or did they expect him to come to them with bowed forehead and bended knee? Either way their reckoning was a mistake. They might leave him terribly and awfully alone—alone in his hour of mourning even as they had left him alone in his hour of rejoicing, when he had married the dear soul who was dead. But his strength and energy they should not crush: his vital and intellectual force they should not wither away. Only one thing they could do to touch him—they could shrivel up his last impulse of sweet human sympathy. They were doing it now.

When Israel had put matters to himself so, he despatched a message to the Governor at the Kasbah, and received, in answer, six State prisoners, fettered in pairs, under the guard of two soldiers.

The burial took place within the limit of twenty-four hours prescribed by Jewish custom. It was twilight when the body was brought down from the upper room to the patio. There stood the coffin on a trestle that had been raised for it on chairs standing back to back. And there, too, sat Israel, with Naomi and little black Ali beside him.

Israel's manner was composed; his face was as firm as a rock, and his dress was more costly than Tetuan had ever seen him wear before. Everything that related to the burial he had managed himself, down to the least or poorest detail. But there was

nothing poor about it in the larger sense. Israel was a rich man now, and he set no value on his riches except to subdue the fate that had first beaten him down and to abash the enemies who still menaced him. Nothing was lacking that money could buy in Tetuan to make this burial an imposing ceremony. Only one thing it wanted—it wanted mourners, and it had but one.

Unlike her father, little Naomi was visibly excited. She ran to and fro, clutched at Israel's clothes and seemed to look into his face, clasped the hand of little Ali and held it long as if in fear. Whether she knew what work was afoot, and, if she knew it, by what channel of soul or sense she learnt it, no man can say. That she was conscious of the presence of many strangers is certain, and when the men from the Kasbah brought the roll of white linen down the stairway, with the two black women clinging to it, kissing its fringe and wailing over it, she broke away from Israel and rushed in among them with a startled cry, and her little white arms upraised. But whatever her impulse, there was no need to check her. The moment she had touched her mother she crept back in dread to her father's side.

“God be gracious to my father, look at that,” whispered Fatimah.

“My child, my poor child,” said Israel, “is there but one thing in life that speaks to you? And is that death? Oh, little one, little one!”

It was a strange procession which then passed out of the patio. Four of the prisoners carried the coffin on their shoulders, walking in pairs according to their fetters. They were gaunt and bony creatures. Hunger had wasted their sallow cheeks, and the air of noisome dungeons had sunken their rheumy eyes. Their clothes were soiled rags, and over them, and concealing them down to their waists and yet lower, hung the deep, rich, velvet pall, with its long silk fringes. In front walked the two remaining prisoners, each bearing a great plume in his left hand—the right arm, as well as the right leg, being chained. On either side was a soldier, carrying a lighted lantern, which burnt small and feeble in the twilight, and last of all came Israel himself,

unsupported and alone. Thus they passed through the little crowd of idlers that had congregated at the door, through the streets of the Mellah and out into the marketplace, and up the narrow lane that leads to the chief town gate.

There is something in the very nature of power that demands homage, and the people of Tetuan could not deny it to Israel. As the procession went through the town they cleared a way for it, and they were silent until it had gone. Within the gate of the Mellah, a shocket was killing fowls and taking his tribute of copper coins, but he stopped his work and fell back as the procession approached. A blind beggar crouching at the other side of the gate was reciting passages of the Koran, and two Arabs close at his elbow were wrangling over a game at draughts which they were playing by the light of a flare, but both curses and Koran ceased as the procession passed under the arch. In the market-place a Soosi juggler was performing before a throng of laughing people, and a story-teller was shrieking to the twang of his ginbri; but the audience of the juggler broke up as the procession appeared, and the ginbri of the storyteller was no more heard. The hammering in the shops of the gunsmiths was stopped, and the tinkling of the bells of the water-carriers was silenced. Mules bringing wood from the country were dragged out of the path, and the town asses, with their panniers full of street-filth, were drawn up by the wall. From the market-place and out of the shops, out of the houses and out of the mosque itself, the people came trooping in crowds, and they made a long close line on either side of the course which the procession must take. And through this avenue of onlookers the strange company made its way—the two prisoners bearing the plumes, the four others bearing the coffin, the two soldiers carrying the lanterns, and Israel last of all, unsupported and alone. Nothing was heard in the silence of the people but the tramp of the feet of the six men, and the clank of their chains.

The light of the lanterns was on the faces of some of them, and every one knew them for what they were. It was on the face of Israel also, yet he did not flinch. His head was held steadily upward; he looked neither to the right nor to the left, but strode

firmly along.

The Jewish cemetery was outside the town walls, and before the procession came to it the darkness had closed in. Its flat white tombstones, all pointing toward Jerusalem, lay in the gloom like a flock of sheep asleep among the grass. It had no gate but a gap in the fence, and no fence but a hedge of the prickly pear and the aloe.

Israel had opened a grave for Ruth beside the grave of the old rabbi her father. He had asked no man's permission to do so, but if no one had helped at that day's business, neither had any one dared to hinder. And when the coffin was set down by the grave-side no ceremony did Israel forget and none did he omit. He repeated the Kaddesh, and cut the notch in his kaftan; he took from his breast the little linen bag of the white earth of the land of promise and laid it under the head; he locked a padlock and flung away the key. Last of all, when the body had been taken out of the coffin and lowered to its long home, he stepped in after it, and called on one of the soldiers to lend him a lantern. And then, kneeling at the foot of his dead wife, he touched her with both his hands, and spoke these words in a clear, firm voice, looking down at her where she lay in the veil that she had used to wear in the synagogue, and speaking to her as though she heard: “Ruth, my wife, my dearest, for the cruel wrong which I did you long ago when I suffered you to marry me, being a man such as I was, under the ban of my people, forgive me now, my beloved, and ask God to forgive me also.”

The dark cemetery, the six prisoners in their clanking irons, the two soldiers with their lanterns the open grave, and this strong-hearted man kneeling within it, that he might do his last duty, according to the custom of his race and faith, to her whom he had wronged and should meet no more until the resurrection itself reunited them! The traffic of the streets had begun again by this time, and between the words which Israel had spoken the low hum of many voices had come over the dark town walls.

The six prisoners went back to the Kasbah with joyful hearts, for each carried with

him a paper which procured his freedom on the day following. But Israel returned to his home with a soured and darkened mind. As he had plucked his last handful of the grass, and flung it over his shoulder, saying, “They shall spring in the cities as the grass in the earth,” he had asked himself what it mattered to him though all the world were peopled, now that she, who had been all the world to him, was dead. God had left him as a lonely pilgrim in a dreary desert. Only one glimpse of human affection had he known as a man, and here it was taken from him for ever.

And when he remembered Naomi, he quarrelled with God again. She was a helpless exile among men, a creature banished from all human intercourse, a living soul locked in a tabernacle of flesh. Was it a good God who had taken the mother from such a child—the child from such a mother? Israel was heart-smitten, and his soul blasphemed. It was not God but the devil that ruled the world. It was not justice but evil that governed it.

Thus did this outcast man rebel against God, thinking of the child's loss and of his own; but nevertheless by the child itself he was yet to be saved from the devil's snare, and the ways wherein this sweet flower, fresh from God's hand, wrought upon his heart to redeem it were very strange and beautiful.

CHAPTER VI

THE SPIRIT-MAID

The promise which Israel made to Ruth at her death, that Naomi should not lack for love and tending, he faithfully fulfilled. From that time forward he became as father and mother both to the child.

At the outset of his charge he made a survey of her condition, and found it more terrible than imagination of the mind could think or words of the tongue express. It was easy to say that she was deaf and dumb and blind, but it was hard to realise

what so great an affliction implied. It implied that she was a little human sister standing close to the rest of the family of man, yet very far away from them. She was as much apart as if she had inhabited a different sphere. No human sympathy could reach her in joy or pain and sorrow. She had no part to play in life. In the midst of a world of light she was in a land of darkness, and she was in a world of silence in the midst of a land of sweet sounds. She was a living and buried soul.

And of that soul itself what did Israel know? He knew that it had memory, for Naomi had remembered her mother; and he knew that it had love, for she had pined for Ruth, and clung to her. But what were love and memory without sight and speech? They were no more than a magnet locked in a casket—idle and useless to any purposes of man or the world.

Thinking of this, Israel realised for the first time how awful was the affliction of his motherless girl. To be blind was to be afflicted once, but to be both blind and deaf was not only to be afflicted twice, but twice ten thousand times, and to be blind and deaf and dumb was not merely to be afflicted thrice, but beyond all reckonings of human speech.

For though Naomi had been blind, yet, if she could have had hearing, her father might have spoken with her, and if she had sorrows he must have soothed them, and if she had joys he must have shared them, and in this beautiful world of God, so full of things to look upon and to love, he must have been eyes of her eyes that could not see. On the other hand, though Naomi had been deaf, yet if she could have had sight her father might have held intercourse with her by the light of her eyes, and if she felt pain he must have seen it, and if she had found pleasure he must have known it, and what man is, and what woman is, and what the world and what the sea and what the sky, would have been as an open book for her to read. But, being blind and deaf together, and, by fault of being deaf, being dumb as well, what word was to describe the desolation of her state, the blank void of her isolation—cut off, apart, aloof, shut

in, imprisoned, enchained, a soul without communion with other souls: alive, and yet dead?

Thus, realising Naomi's condition in; the deep infirmity of her nature, Israel set himself to consider how he could reach her darkened and silent soul. And first he tried to learn what good gifts were left to her, that he might foster them to her advantage and nourish them to his own great comfort and joy. Yet no gift whatever could he find in her but the one gift only whereof he had known from the beginning—the gift of touch and feeling. With this he must make her to see, or else her light should always be darkness, and with this he must make her to hear, or silence should be her speech for ever.

Then he remembered that during his years in England he had heard strange stories of how the dumb had been made to speak though they could not hear, and the blind and deaf to understand and to answer. So he sent to England for many books written on the treatment of these children of affliction, and when they were come he pondered them closely and was thrilled by the marvellous works they described. But when he came to practise the precepts they had given him, his spirits flagged, for the impediments were great. Time after time he tried, and failed always, to touch by so much as one shaft of light the hidden soul of the child through its tenement of flesh and blood. Neither the simplest thought nor the poorest element of an idea found any way to her mind, so dense were the walls of the prison that encompassed it. “Yes” was a mystery that could not at first be revealed to her, and “No” was a problem beyond her power to apprehend. Smiles and frowns were useless to teach her. No discipline could be addressed to her mind or heart. Except mere bodily restraint, no control could be imposed upon her. She was swayed by her impulses alone.

Israel did not despair. If he was broken down today he strengthened his hands for tomorrow. At length he had got so far, after a world of toil and thought, that Naomi knew when he patted her head that it was for approval, and when he touched her

hand it was for assent. Then he stopped very suddenly. His hope had not drooped, and neither had his energy failed, but the conviction had fastened upon him that such effort in his case must be an offence against Heaven. Naomi was not merely an infirm creature from the left hand of Nature; she was an afflicted being from the right hand of God. She was a living monument of sin that was not her own. It was useless to go farther. The child must be left where God had placed her.

But meanwhile, if Naomi lacked the senses of the rest of the human kind, she seemed to communicate with Nature by other organs than they possessed. It was as if the spiritual world itself must have taught her, and from that source alone could she have imbibed her power. To tell of all she could do to guide her steps, and to minister to her pleasures, and to cherish her affections, would be to go beyond the limit of belief. Truly it seemed as if Naomi, being blind with her bodily eyes, could yet look upon a light that no one else could see, and, being deaf with her bodily ears, could yet listen to voices that no one else could hear.

Thus, if she came skipping through the corridor of the patio, she knew when any one approached her, for she would hold out her hands and stop. Nay; but she knew also who it would be as well as if her eyes or ears had taught her; for always, if it was her father, she reached out her hands to take his left hand in both of hers, and then she pressed it against her cheek; and always, if it was little Ali, she curved her arms to encircle his neck; and always, if it was Fatimah, she leapt up to her bosom; and always, if it was Habeebah, she passed her by. Did she go with Ali into the streets, she knew the Mellah gate from the gate of the town, and the narrow lanes from the open Sok. Did she pass the lofty mosque in the market-place, she knew it from the low shops that nestled under and behind and around. Did a troop of mules and camels come near her, she knew them from a crowd of people; and did she pass where two streets crossed, she would stand and face both ways.

And as the years grew she came to know all places within and around Tetuan, the

town of the Moors and the Mellah of the Jews, the Kasbah and the narrow lane leading up to it, the fort on the hill and the river under the town walls, the mountains on either side of the valley, and even some of their rocky gorges. She could find her way among them all without help or guidance, and no control could any one impose upon her to keep her out of the way of harm. While Ali was a little fellow he was her constant companion, always ready for any adventure that her unquiet heart suggested; but when he grew to be a boy, and was sent to school every day early and late, she would fare forth alone save for a tiny white goat which her father had bought to be another playfellow.

And because feeling was sight to her, and touch was hearing, and the crown of her head felt the winds of the heavens and the soles of her feet felt the grass of the fields, she loved best to go bareheaded whether the sun was high or the air was cool, and barefooted also, from the rising of the morning until the coming of the stars. So, casting off her slippers and the great straw hat which a Jewish maiden wears, and clad in her white woollen shawl, wrapped loosely about her in folds of airy grace, and with the little goat going before her, though she could neither see nor hear it, she would climb the hill beyond the battery, and stand on the summit, like a spirit poised in air. She could see nothing of the green valley then stretched before her, or of the white town lying below, with its domes and minarets, but she seemed to exult in her lofty place, and to drink new life from the rush of mighty winds about her. Then coming back to the dale, she would seem, to those who looked up at her, with fear and with awe, to leap as the goat leapt in the rocky places; and as a bird sweeps over the grass with wings outstretched, so with her arms spread out, and her long fair hair flying loose, she would sweep down the hill, as though her very tiptoes did not touch it.

By what power she did these things no man could tell, except it were the power of the spiritual world itself; but the distemper of the mind, which loved such dangers, increased upon her as she grew from a child into a maid, and it found new ways of

strangeness. Thus, in the spring, when the rain fell heavily, or in the winter, when the great winds were abroad, or in the summer, when the lightning lightened and the thunder thundered, her restless spirit seemed to be roused to sympathetic tumults, and if she could escape the eyes that watched her she would run and race in the tempest, and her eyes would be aglitter, and laughter would be on her lips. Then Israel himself would go out to find her, and, having found her in the pelting storm without covering on her head or shoes on her feet, he would fetch her home by the hand, and as they passed through the streets together his forehead would be bowed and his eyes bent down.

But it was not always that Naomi made her father ashamed. More often her joyful spirit cheered him, for above all things else she was a creature of joy. A circle of joy seemed to surround her always. Her heart in its darkness was full of radiance. As she grew her comeliness increased, though this was strange and touching in her beauty, that her face did not become older with her years, but was still the face of a child, with a child's expression of sweetness through the bloom and flush of early maidenhood. Her love of flowers increased also, and the sense of smell seemed to come to her, for she filled the house with all fragrant flowers in their season, twining them in wreaths about the white pillars of the patio, and binding them in rings around the brown water-jars that stood in it. And with the girl's expanding nature her love of dress increased as well; but it was not a young maid's love of lovely things; it was a wild passion for light, loose garments that swayed and swirled in native grace about her. Truly she was a spirit of joy and gladness. She was happy as a day in summer, and fresh as a dewy morning in spring. The ripple of her laughter was like sunshine. A flood of sunshine seemed to follow in the air wheresoever she went. And certainly for Israel, her father, she was as a sunbeam gathering sunshine into his lonely house.

Nevertheless, the sunbeam had its cloud-shapes of gloom, and if Israel in his darker hours hungered for more human company, and wished that the little playfellow of

the angels which had come down to his dwelling could only be his simple human child, he sometimes had his wish, and many throbs of anguish with it. For often it happened, and especially at seasons when no winds were stirring, and blank peace and a doleful silence haunted the air, that Naomi would seem to fall into a sick longing from causes that were beyond Israel's power to fathom. Then her sweet face would sadden, and her beautiful blind eyes would fill, and her pretty laughter would echo no more through the house. And sometimes, in the dead of the night, she would rise from her bed and go through the dark corridors, for darkness and light were as one to her, until she came to Israel's room, and he would awake from his sleep to find her, like a little white vision, standing by his bedside. What she wanted there he could never know, for neither had he power to ask nor she to answer, whether she were sick or in pain, or whether in her sleep she had seen a face from the invisible world, and heard a voice that called her away, or whether her mother's arms had seemed to be about her once again and then to be torn from her afresh, and she had come to him on awakening in her trouble, not knowing what it is to dream, but thinking all evil dreams to be true fact and new sorrow. So, with a sigh, he would arise and light his lamp and lead her back to her bed, and more scalding than the tears that would be standing in Naomi's eyes would be the hot drops that would gush into his own.

“My poor darling,” he would say, “can you not tell me your trouble, that I may comfort you? No, no, she cannot tell me, and I cannot comfort her. My darling, my darling.”

Most of all when such things befell would Israel long for some miracle out of heaven to find a way to the little maiden's mind that she might ask and answer and know, yet he dared not to pray for it, for still greater than his pity for the child was his fear of the wrath of God. And out of this fear there came to him at length an awful and terrible thought: though so severed on earth, his child and he, yet before the bar of judgment they would one day be brought together, and then how should it

stand with her soul?

Naomi knew nothing of God, having no way of speech with man. Would God condemn her for that, and cast her out for ever? No, no, no! God would not ask her for good works in the land of silence, and for labour in the land of night. She had no eyes to see God's beautiful world, and no ears to hear His holy word. God had created her so, and He would not destroy what He had made. Far rather would He look with love and pity on His little one, so long and sorely tried on earth, and send her at last to be a blessed saint in heaven.

Israel tried to comfort himself so, but the effort was vain. He was a Jew to the inmost fibre of his being, and he answered himself out of his own mouth that it was his own sinful wish, and not God's will, that had sent Naomi into the world as she was. Then, on the day of the great account, how should he answer to her for her soul?

Visions stood up before him of endless retribution for the soul that knew not God. These were the most awful terrors of his sleepless nights, but at length peace came to him, for he saw his path of duty. It was his duty to Naomi that he should tell her of God and reveal the word of the Lord to her! What matter if she could not hear? Though she had senses as the sands of the seashore, yet in the way of light the Lord alone could lead her. What matter though she could not see? The soul was the eye that saw God, and with bodily eyes had no man seen Him.

So every day thereafter at sunset Israel took Naomi by the hand and led her to an upper room, the same wherein her mother died, and, fetching from a cupboard of the wall the Book of the Law, he read to her of the commandments of the Lord by Moses, and of the Prophets, and of the Kings. And while he read Naomi sat in silence at his feet, with his one free hand in both of her hands, clasped close against her cheek.

What the little maid in her darkness thought of this custom, what mystery it was to

her and wherefore, only the eye that looks into darkness could see; but it was so at length that as soon as the sun had set—for she knew when the sun was gone—Naomi herself would take her father by the hand, and lead him to the upper room, and fetch the book to his knees.

And sometimes, as Israel read, an evil spirit would seem to come to him, and make a mock at him, and say, “The child is deaf and hears not—go read your book in the tombs!” But he only hardened his neck and laughed proudly. And, again, sometimes the evil spirit seemed to say, “Why waste yourself in this misspent desire? The child is buried while she is still alive, and who shall roll away the stone?” But Israel only answered, “It is for the Lord to do miracles, and the Lord is mighty.”

So, great in his faith, Israel read to Naomi night after night, and when his spirit was sore of many taunts in the day his voice would be hoarse, and he would read the law which says, “Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind.” But when his heart was at peace his voice would be soft, and he would read of the child Samuel sanctified to the Lord in the temple, and how the Lord called him and he answered—

“And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; and ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the Ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep, that the Lord called Samuel, and he answered, Here am I. And he ran unto Eli and said, Here am I, for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. And the Lord called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel rose and went to Eli and said, Here am I for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not my son; lie down again. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him.”

And, having finished his reading, Israel would close the book, and sing out of the Psalms of David the psalm which says, “It is good for me that I have been in trouble,

that I may learn Thy statutes."

Thus, night after night, when the sun was gone down, did Israel read of the law and sing of the Psalms to Naomi, his daughter, who was both blind and deaf. And though Naomi heard not, and neither did she see, yet in their silent hour together there was another in their chamber always with them—there was a third, for there was God.

CHAPTER VII

THE ANGEL IN ISRAEL'S HOUSE

When Israel had been some twenty years at Tetuan, Naomi being then fourteen years of age, Ben Aboo, the Basha, married a Christian wife. The woman's name was Katrina. She was a Spaniard by birth, and had first come to Morocco at the tail of a Spanish embassy, which travelled through Tetuan from Ceuta to the Sultan at Fez. What her belongings were, and what her antecedents had been, no one appeared to know, nor did Ben Aboo himself seem to care. She answered all his present needs in her own person, which was ample in its proportions and abundant in its charms.

In marrying Ben Aboo, the wily Katrina imposed two conditions. The first was, that he should put away the full Mohammedan complement of four Moorish wives, whom he had married already as well as the many concubines that he had annexed in his way through life, and now kept lodged in one unquiet nest in the women's hidden quarter of the Palace. The second condition was, that she herself should never be banished to such seclusion, but, like the wife of any European governor, should openly share the state of her husband.

Ben Aboo was in no mood to stand on the rights of a strict Mohammedan, and he accepted both of her conditions. The first he never meant to abide by, but the second she took care he should observe, and, as a prelude to that public life which she intended to live by his side, she insisted on a public marriage.

They were married according to the rites of the Catholic Church by a Franciscan friar settled at Tangier, and the marriage festival lasted six days. Great was the display, and lavish the outlay. Every morning the cannon of the fort fired a round of shot from the hill, every evening the tribesmen from the mountains went through their feats of powder-play in the market-place, and every night a body of Aissawa from Mequinez yelled and shrieked in the enclosure called the M'salla, near the Bab er-Remoosh. Feasts were spread in the Kasbah, and relays of guests from among the chief men of the town were invited daily to partake of them.

No man dared to refuse his invitation, or to neglect the tribute of a present, though the Moors well knew that they were lending the light of their countenance to a brazen outrage on their faith, and though it galled the hearts of the Jews to make merry at the marriage of a Christian and a Muslim—no man except Israel, and he excused himself with what grace he could, being in no mood for rejoicing, but sick with sorrow of the heart.

The Spanish woman was not to be gainsaid. She had taken her measure of the man, and had resolved that a servant so powerful as Israel should pay her court and tribute before all. Therefore she caused him to be invited again; but Israel had taken his measure of the woman, and with some lack of courtesy he excused himself afresh.

Katrina was not yet done. She was a creature of resource, and having heard of Naomi with strange stories concerning her, she devised a children's feast for the last day of the marriage festival, and caused Ben Aboo to write to Israel a formal letter, beginning “To our well-beloved the excellent Israel ben Oliel, Praise to the one God,” and setting forth that on the morrow, when the “Sun of the world” should “place his foot in the stirrup of speed,” and gallop “from the kingdom of shades,” the Governor would “hold a gathering of delight” for all the children of Tetuan and he, Israel, was besought to “lighten it with the rays of his face, rivalled only by the sun,” and to bring with him his little daughter Naomi, whose arrival “similar to a

spring breeze," should "dissipate the dark night of solitude and isolation." This despatch written in the common cant of the people, concluded with quotations from the Prophet on brotherly love and a significant and more sincere assurance that the Basha would not admit of excuses "of the thickness of a hair."

When Israel received the missive, his anger was hot and furious. He leapt to the conclusion that, in demanding the presence of Naomi, the Spanish woman, who must know of the child's condition desired only to make a show of it. But, after a fume, he put that thought from him as uncharitable and unwarranted, and resolved to obey the summons.

And, indeed, if he had felt any further diffidence, the sight of Naomi's own eagerness must have driven it away. The little maid seemed to know that something unusual was going on. Troops of poor villagers from every miserable quarter of the bashalic came into the town each day, beating drums, firing long guns, driving their presents before them—bullocks, cows, and sheep—and trying to make believe that they rejoiced and were glad. Naomi appeared to be conscious of many tents pitched in the marketplace, of denser crowds in the streets, and of much bustle everywhere.

Also she seemed to catch the contagion of little Ali's excitement. The children of all the schools of the town, both Jewish and Moorish, had been summoned through their Talebs to the festival; there was to be dancing and singing and playing on musical instruments and Ali himself, who had lately practised the kanoon—the lute, the harp—under his teacher, was to show his skill before the Governor. Therefore, great was the little black man's excitement, and, in the fever of it, he would talk to every one of the event forthcoming—to Fatima, to Habeebah, and often to Naomi also, until the memory of her infirmity would come to him, or perhaps the derisive laugh of his schoolfellows would stop him, and then, thinking they were laughing at the girl, he would fall on them like a fury, and they would scamper away.

When the great day came, Ali went off to the Kasbah with his school and Taleb, in

the long procession of many schools and many Talebs. Every child carried a present for the rich Basha; now a boy with a goat, then a girl with a lamb, again a poor tattered mite with a hen, all cuddling them close like pets they must part with, yet all looking radiantly happy in their sweet innocency, which had no alloy of pain from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Israel took Naomi by the hand, but no present with either of them, and followed the children, going past the booths, the blind beggars, the lepers, and the shrieking Arabs that lay thick about the gate, through the iron-clamped door, and into the quadrangle, where groups of women stood together closely covered in their blankets—the mothers and sisters of the children, permitted to see their little ones pass into the Kasbah, but allowed to go no farther—then down the crooked passage, past the tiny mosque, like a closet, and the bath, like a dungeon, and finally into the pillared patio, paved and walled with tiles.

This was the place of the festival, and it was filled already with a great company of children, their fathers and their teachers. Moors, Arabs, Berbers, and Jews, clad in their various costumes of white and blue and black and red—they were a gorgeous, a voluptuous, and, perhaps, a beautiful spectacle in the morning sunlight.

As Israel entered, with Naomi by the hand, he was conscious that every eye was on them, and as they passed through the way that was made for them, he heard the whispered exclamations of the people. “Shoof!” muttered a Moor. “See!” “It's himself,” said a Jew. “And the child,” said another Jew. “Allah has smitten her,” said an Arab “Blind and dumb and deaf,” said another Moor “God be gracious to my father!” said another Arab.

Musicians were playing in the gallery that ran round the court, and from the flat roof above it the women of the Governor's hareem, not yet dispersed, his four lawful Mohammedan wives, and many concubines, were gazing furtively down from behind their haiks. There was a fountain in the middle of the patio, and at the farther

end of it, within an alcove that opened out of a horseshoe arch, beneath ceilings hung with stalactites, against walls covered with silken haities, and on Rabat rugs of many colours, sat Ben Aboo and his Christian bride.

It was there that Israel saw the Spaniard for the first time, and at the instant of recognition he shivered as with cold. She was a handsome woman, but plainly a heartless one—selfish, vain, and vulgar.

Ben Aboo hailed Israel with welcomes and peace-blessings, and Katrina drew Naomi to her side.

“So this is the little maid of whom wonderful rumours are so rife?” said Katrina.

Israel bent his head and shuddered at seeing the child at the woman's feet.

“The darling is as fair as an angel,” said Katrina, and she kissed Naomi.

The kiss seemed to Israel to smite his own cheeks like a blow.

Then the performances of the children began, and truly they made a pretty and affecting sight; the white walls, the deep blue sky, the black shadows of the gallery, the bright sunlight, the grown people massed around the patio, and these sweet little faces coming and going in the middle of it. First, a line of Moorish girls in their embroidered hazzams dancing after their native fashion, bending and rising, twisting and turning, but keeping their feet in the same place constantly. Then, a line of Jewish girls in their kilted skirts dancing after the Jewish manner tripping on their slippered toes, whirling and turning around with rapid motions, and playing timbrels and tambourines held high above their heads by their shapely arms and hands. Then passages of the Koran chanted by a group of Moorish boys in their jellabs, purple and chocolate and white, peaked above their red tarbooshes. Then a psalm by a company of Jewish boys in their black skull-caps—a brave old song of Zion sung by silvery young voices in an alien land. Finally, little black Ali, led out by his teacher, with his diminutive Moorish harp in his hands, showing no fear at all, but only a negro boy's shy looks of pleasure—his head aside, his eyes gleaming, his white teeth

glinting, and his face aglow.

Now down to this moment Naomi, at the feet of the woman, had been agitated and restless, sometimes rising, then sinking back, sometimes playing with her nervous fingers, and then pushing off her slippers. It was as though she was conscious of the fine show which was going forward, and knew that they were children who were making it. Perhaps the breath of the little ones beat her on the level of her cheeks, or perhaps the light air made by the sweep of their garments was wafted to her sensitive body. Whatsoever the sense whereby the knowledge came to her, clearly it was there in her flushed and twitching face, which was full of that old hunger for child-company which Israel knew too well.

But when little Ali was brought out and he began to play on his kanoon, his harp, it was impossible to repress Naomi's excitement. The girl leaped up from her place at the woman's feet, and with the utmost rapidity of motion she passed like a gleam of light across the patio to the boy's side. And, being there, she touched the harp as he played it, and then a low cry came from her lips. Again she touched it, and her eyes, though blind, seemed for an instant to flame like fire. Then, with both her hands she clung to it, and with her lips and her tongue she kissed it, while her whole body quivered like a reed in the wind.

Israel saw what she did, and his very soul trembled at the sight with wild thoughts that did not dare to take the name of hope. As well as he could in the confusion of his own senses he stepped forward to draw the little maiden back but the wife of the Governor called on him to leave her.

“Leave her!” she cried. “Let us see what the child will do!”

At that moment Ali's playing came to as end, and the boy let the harp pass to Naomi's clinging fingers, and then, half sitting, half kneeling on the ground beside it, the girl took it to herself. She caressed it, she patted it with her hand, she touched its strings, and then a faint smile crossed her rosy lips. She laid her cheek against it and

touched its strings again, and then she laughed aloud. She flung off her slippers and the garment that covered her beautiful arms, and laid her pure flesh against the harp wheresoever her flesh might cling, and touched its strings once more, and then her very heart seemed to laugh with delight.

Now, what is to follow will seem to be no better than a superstitious saying, but true it is, nevertheless, and simple sooth for all it sounds so strange, that though Naomi was deaf as the grave, and had never yet heard music, and though she was untaught and knew nothing of the notes of a harp to strike them yet she swept the strings to strange sounds such as no man had ever listened to before and none could follow.

It was not music that the little maiden made to her ear, but only motion to her body, and just as the deaf who are deaf alone are sometimes found to take pleasure in all forms of percussion, and to derive from them some of the sensations of sound—the trembling of the air after thunder, the quivering of the earth after cannon, and the quaking of vast walls after the ringing of mighty bells—so Naomi, who was blind as well and had no sense save touch, found in her fingers, which had gathered up the force of all the other senses, the power to reproduce on this instrument of music the movement of things that moved about her—the patter of the leaves of the fig-tree in the patio of her home, the swirl of the great winds on the hill-top, the plash of rain on her face, and the rippling of the levanter in her hair.

This was all the witchery of Naomi's playing, yet, because every emotion in Nature had its harmony, so there was harmony of some wild sort in the music that was struck by the girl's fingers out of the strings of the harp. But, more than her music, which was perhaps, only a rhapsody of sound, was the frenzy of the girl herself as she made it. She lifted her head like a bird, her throat swelled, her bosom heaved, and as she played, she laughed again and again.

There was something fascinating and magical in the spectacle of the beautiful fair face aglow with joy, the rounded limbs (visible through the robes) clinging to the

sides of the harp, and the delicate white fingers flying across the strings. There was something gruesome and awful, as well, for the face of the girl was blind, and her ears heard nothing of the sounds that her fingers were making.

Every eye was on her, and in the wide circle around every mouth was agape. And when those who looked on and listened had recovered from their first surprise, very strange and various were the whispered words they passed between them. “Where has she learnt it?” asked a Moor. “From her master himself,” muttered a Jew. “Who is it?” asked the Moor. “Beelzebub,” growled the Jew. “God pity me, the evil eye is on her,” said an Arab. “God will show,” said a Shereef from Wazzan. “They say her mother was a childless woman, and offered petitions for Hannah's blessing at the tomb of Rabbi Amran.” “No,” said the Arab; “she sent her girdle.” “Anyhow, the child is a saint,” whispered the Shereef. “No, but a devil,” snorted the Jew.

“Brava, brava, brava!” cried the new wife of Ben Aboo, and she cheered and laughed as the girl played. “What did I tell you?” she said, looking toward her husband. “The child is not deaf, no, nor blind either. Oh, it's a brave imposture! Brava, brave!”

Still the little maiden played, but now her brow was clouded, her head dropped, her eyelashes were downcast, and she hung over the harp and sighed audibly.

“Good again!” cried the woman. “Very good!” and she clapped her hands, whereupon the Arabs and the Moors, forgetting their dread, felt constrained to follow her example, and they cheered in their wilder way, but the Jews continued to mutter, “Beelzebub, Beelzebub!”

Israel saw it all, and at first, amid the commotion of his mind and the confusion of his senses, his heart melted at sight of what Naomi did. Had God opened a gateway to her soul? Were the poor wings of her spirit to spread themselves out at last? Was this, then, the way of speech that Heaven had given her? But hardly had Israel overflowed with the tenderness of such thoughts when the bleating and barking of

the faces about him awakened his anger. Then, like blows on his brain, came the cries of the wife of the Governor, who cheered this awakening of the girl's soul as it were no better than a vulgar show; and at that Israel's wrath rose to his throat.

“Brava, brava!” cried the woman again; and, turning to Israel, she said, “You shall leave the child with me. I must have her with me always.”

Israel's throat seemed to choke him at that word. He looked at Katrina, and saw that she was a woman lustful of breath and vain of heart, who had married Ben Aboo because he was rich. Then he looked at Naomi, and remembered that her heart was clear as the water, and sweet as the morning, and pure as the snow.

And at that moment the wife of the Governor cheered again, and again the people echoed her, and even the women on the housetops made bold to take up her cry with their cooing ululation. The playing had ceased, the spell had dissolved, Naomi's fingers had fallen from the harp, her head had dropped into her breast, and with a sigh she had sunk forward on to her face.

“Take her in!” said the wife of Ben Aboo, and two Arab soldiers stepped up to where the little maiden lay. But before they had touched her Israel strode out with swollen lips and distended nostrils.

“Stop!” he cried.

The Arabs hesitated, and looked towards their master.

“Do as you are bidden—take her in!” said Ben Aboo.

“Stop!” cried Israel again, in a loud voice that rang through the court. Then, parting the Arabs with a sweep of his arms, he picked up the unconscious maiden, and faced about on the new wife of Ben Aboo.

“Madam,” he cried, “I, Israel ben Oliel, may belong to the Governor, but my child belongs to me.”

So saying, he passed out of the court, carrying the girl in his arms, and in the dead

silence and blank stupor of that moment none seemed to know what he had done until he was gone.

Israel went home in his anger; but nevertheless, out of this event he found courage in his heart to begin his task again. Let his enemies bleat and bark “Beelzebub,” yet the child was an angel, though suffering for his sin, and her soul was with God. She was a spirit, and the songs she had played were the airs of paradise. But, comforting himself so, Israel remembered the vision of Ruth, wherein Naomi had recovered her powers. He had put it from him hitherto as the delirium of death, but would the Lord yet bring it to pass? Would God in His mercy some day take the angel out of his house, though so strangely gifted, so radiant and beautiful and joyful, and give him instead for the hunger of his heart as a man this sweet human child, his little, fair-haired Naomi, though helpless and simple and weak?

CHAPTER VIII

THE VISION OF THE SCAPEGOAT

Israel's instinct had been sure: the coming of Katrina proved to be the beginning of his end. He kept his office, but he lost his power. No longer did he work his own will in Tetuan; he was required to work the will of the woman. Katrina's will was an evil one, and Israel got the blame of it, for still he seemed to stand in all matters of tribute and taxation between the people and the Governor. It galled him to take the woman's wages, but it vexed him yet more to do her work. Her work was to burden the people with taxes beyond all their power of paying; her wages was to be hated as the bane of the bashalic, to be clamoured against as the tyrant of Tetuan, and to be ridiculed by the very offal of the streets.

One day a gang of dirty Arabs in the market-place dressed up a blind beggar in clothes such as Israel wore, and sent him abroad through the town to beg as one that

was destitute and in a miserable condition. But nothing seemed to move Israel to pity. Men were cast into prison for no reason save that they were rich, and the relations of such as were there already were allowed to redeem them for money, so that no felon suffered punishment except such as could pay nothing. People took fright and fled to other cities. Israel's name became a curse and a reproach throughout Barbary.

Yet all this time the man's soul was yearning with pity for the people. Since the death of Ruth his heart had grown merciful. The care of the child had softened him. It had brought him to look on other children with tenderness, and looking tenderly on other children had led him to think of other fathers with compassion. Young or old, powerful or weak, mighty or mean, they were all as little children—helpless children who would sleep together in the same bed soon.

Thinking so, Israel would have undone the evil work of earlier years; but that was impossible now. Many of them that had suffered were dead; some that had been cast into prison had got their last and long discharge. At least Israel would have relaxed the rigour whereby his master ruled, but that was impossible also. Katrina had come, and she was a vain woman and a lover of all luxury, and she commanded Israel to tax the people afresh. He obeyed her through three bad years; but many a time his heart reproached him that he dealt corruptly by the poor people, and when he saw them borrowing money for the Governor's tributes on their lands and houses, and when he stood by while they and their sons were cast into prison for the bonds which they could not pay to the usurers Abraham or Judah or Reuben, then his soul cried out against him that he ate the bread of such a mistress.

But out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness, and out of this coming of the Spanish wife of Ben Aboo came deliverance for Israel from the torment of his false position.

There was an aged and pious Moor in Tetuan, called Abd Allah, who was rumoured

to have made savings from his business as a gunsmith. Going to mosque one evening, with fifteen dollars in his waistband, he unstrapped his belt and laid it on the edge of the fountain while he washed his feet before entering, for his back was no longer supple. Then a younger Moor, coming to pray at the same time, saw the dollars, and snatched them up and ran. Abd Allah could not follow the thief, so he went to the Kasbah and told his story to the Governor.

Just at that time Ben Aboo had the Kaid of Fez on a visit to him. “Ask him how much more he has got,” whispered the brother Kaid to Ben Aboo.

Abd Allah answered that he did not know.

“I'll give you two hundred dollars for the chance of all he has,” the Kaid whispered again.

“Five bees are better than a pannier of flies—done!” said Ben Aboo.

So Abd Allah was sold like a sheep and carried to Fez, and there cast into prison on a penalty of two hundred and fifty dollars imposed upon him on the pretence of a false accusation.

Israel sat by the Governor that day at the gate of the hall of justice, and many poor people of the town stood huddled together in the court outside while the evil work was done. No one heard the Kaid of Fez when he whispered to Ben Aboo, but every one saw when Israel drew the warrant that consigned the gunsmith to prison, and when he sealed it with the Governor's seal.

Abd Allah had made no savings, and, being too old for work, he had lived on the earnings of his son. The son's name was Absalam (Abd es-Salem), and he had a wife whom he loved very tenderly, and one child, a boy of six years of age. Absalam followed his father to Fez, and visited him in prison. The old man had been ordered a hundred lashes, and the flesh was hanging from his limbs. Absalam was great of heart, and, in pity of his father's miserable condition he went to the Governor and begged that the old man might be liberated, and that he might be imprisoned instead.

His petition was heard. Abd Allah was set free, Absalam was cast into prison, and the penalty was raised from two hundred and fifty dollars to three hundred.

Israel heard of what had happened, and he hastened to Ben Aboo, in great agitation, intending to say “Pay back this man's ransom, in God's name, and his children and his children's children will live to bless you.” But when he got to the Kasbah, Katrina was sitting with her husband, and at sight of the woman's face Israel's tongue was frozen.

Absalam had been the favourite of his neighbours among all the gunsmiths of the market-place, and after he had been three months at Fez they made common cause of his calamities, sold their goods at a sacrifice, collected the three hundred dollars of his fine, bought him out of prison, and went in a body through the gate to meet him upon his return to Tetuan. But his wife had died in the meantime of fear and privation, and only his aged father and his little son were there to welcome him.

“Friends,” he said to his neighbours standing outside the walls, “what is the use of sowing if you know not who will reap?”

“No use, no use!” answered several voices.

“If God gives you anything, this man Israel takes it away,” said Absalam.

“True, true! Curse him! Curse his relations!” cried the others.

“Then why go back into Tetuan?” said Absalam.

“Tangier is no better,” said one. “Fez is worse,” said another. “Where is there to go?” said a third.

“Into the plains,” said Absalam—“into the plains and into the mountains, for they belong to God alone.”

That word was like the flint to the tinder.

“They who have least are richest, and they that have nothing are best off of all,” said Absalam, and his neighbours shouted that it was so.

“God will clothe us as He clothes the fields,” said Absalam, “and feed our children as He feeds the birds.”

In three days' time ten shops in the market-place, on the side of the Mosque, were sold up and closed, and the men who had kept them were gone away with their wives and children to live in tents with Absalam on the barren plains beyond the town.

When Israel heard of what had been done he secretly rejoiced; but Ben Aboo was in a commotion of fear, and Katrina was fierce with anger, for the doctrine which Absalam had preached to his neighbours outside the walls was not his own doctrine merely, but that of a great man lately risen among the people, called Mohammed of Mequinez, nicknamed by his enemies Mohammed the Third.

“This madness is spreading,” said Ben Aboo.

“Yes,” said Katrina; “and if all men follow where these men lead, who will supply the tables of Kaids and Sultans?”

“What can I do with them?” said Ben Aboo.

“Eat them up,” said Katrina.

Ben Aboo proceeded to put a literal interpretation upon his wife's counsel. With a company of cavalry he prepared to follow Absalam and his little fellowship, taking Israel along with him to reckon their taxes, that he might compel them to return to Tetuan, and be town-dwellers and house-dwellers and buy and sell and pay tribute as before, or else deliver themselves to prison.

But Absalam and his people had secret word that the Governor was coming after them, and Israel with him. So they rolled their tents, and fled to the mountains that are midway between Tetuan and the Reef country, and took refuge in the gullies of that rugged land, living in caves of the rock, with only the table-land of mountain behind them, and nothing but a rugged precipice in front. This place they selected for its safety, intending to push forward, as occasion offered, to the sanctuaries of

Shawan, trusting rather to the humanity of the wild people, called the Shawanis, than to the mercy of their late cruel masters. But the valley wherein they had hidden is thick with trees, and Ben Aboo tracked them and came up with them before they were aware. Then, sending soldiers to the mountain at the back of the caves, with instructions that they should come down to the precipice steadily, and kill none that they could take alive, Ben Aboo himself drew up at the foot of it, and Israel with him, and there called on the people to come out and deliver themselves to his will.

When the poor people came from their hiding-places and saw that they were surrounded, and that escape was not left to them on any side, they thought their death was sure. But without a shout or a cry they knelt, as with one accord, at the mouth of the precipice, with their backs to it, men and women and children, knee to knee in a line, and joined hands, and looked towards the soldiers, who were coming steadily down on them. On and on the soldiers came, eye to eye with the people, and their swords were drawn.

Israel gasped for his breath, and waited to see the people cut in pieces at the next instant, when suddenly they began to sing where they knelt at the edge of the precipice, “God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble.”

In another moment the soldiers had drawn up as if swords from heaven had fallen on them, and Israel was crying out of his dry throat, “Fear nothing! Only deliver your bodies to the Governor, and none shall harm you.”

Absalam rose up from his knees and called to his father and his son. And standing between them to be seen by all, and first looking upon both with eyes of pity, he drew from the folds of his selham a long knife such as the Reefians wear, and taking his father by his white hair he slew him and cast his body down the rocks. After that he turned towards his son, and the boy was golden-haired and his face was like the morning, and Israel's heart bled to see him.

“Absalam!” he cried in a moving voice; “Absalam, wait, wait!”

But Absalam killed his son also, and cast him down after his father. Then, looking around on his people with eyes of compassion, as seeming to pity them that they must fall again into the hands of Israel and his master, he stretched out his knife and sheathed it in his own breast, and fell towards the precipice.

Israel covered his face and groaned in his heart, and said, “It is the end, O Lord God, it is the end—polluted wretch that I am, with the blood of these people upon me!”

The companions of Absalam delivered themselves to the soldiers, who committed them to the prison at Shawan, and Ben Aboo went home in content.

Rumour of what had come to pass was not long in reaching Tetuan, and Israel was charged with the guilt of it. In passing through the streets the next day on his way to his house the people hissed him openly. “Allah had not written it!” a Moor shouted as he passed. “Take care!” cried an Arab, “Mohammed of Mequinez is coming!”

It chanced that night, after sundown, when Naomi, according to her wont, led her father to the upper room, and fetched the Book of the Law from the cupboard of the wall and laid it upon his knees, that he read the passage whereon the page opened of itself, scarce knowing what he read when he began to read it, for his spirit was heavy with the bad doings of those days. And the passage whereon the book opened was this—

“Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats: one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat. . . . Then shall he kill the goat of the sin-offering that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail. And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins. . . . And when he hath, made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat: and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send

him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness. And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited."

That same night Israel dreamt a dream. He had been asleep, and had awakened in a place which he did not know. It was a great arid wilderness. Ashen sand lay on every side; a scorching sun beat down on it, and nowhere was there a glint of water. Israel gazed, and slowly through the blazing sunlight he discerned white roofless walls like the ruins of little sheepfolds. "They are tombs," he told himself, "and this is a Mukabar—an Arab graveyard—the most desolate place in the world of God." But, looking again, he saw that the roofless walls covered the ground as far as the eye could see, and the thought came to him that this ashen desert was the earth itself, and that all the world of life and man was dead. Then, suddenly, in the motionless wilderness, a solitary creature moved. It was a goat, and it toiled over the hot sand with its head hung down and its tongue lolled out. "Water!" it seemed to cry, though it made no voice, and its eyes traversed the plain as if they would pierce the ground for a spring. Fever and delirium fell upon Israel. The goat came near to him and lifted up its eyes, and he saw its face. Then he shrieked and awoke. The face of the goat had been the face of Naomi.

Now Israel knew that this was no more than a dream, coming of the passage which he had read out of the book at sundown, but so vivid was the sense of it that he could not rest in his bed until he had first seen Naomi with his waking eyes, that he might laugh in his heart to think how the eye of his sleep had fooled him. So he lit his lamp, and walked through the silent house to where Naomi's room was on the lower floor of it.

There she lay, sleeping so peacefully, with her sunny hair flowing over the pillow on either side of her beautiful face, and rippling in little curls about her neck. How sweet she looked! How like a dear bud of womanhood just opening to the eye!

Israel sat down beside her for a moment. Many a time before, at such hours, he had

sat in that same place, and then gone his ways, and she had known nothing of it. She was like any other maiden now. Her eyes were closed, and who should see that they were blind? Her breath came gently, and who should say that it gave forth no speech? Her face was quiet, and who should think that it was not the face of a homely-hearted girl? Israel loved these moments when he was alone with Naomi while she slept, for then only did she seem to be entirely his own, and he was not so lonely while he was sitting there. Though men thought he was strong, yet he was very weak. He had no one in the world to talk to save Naomi, and she was dumb in the daytime, but in the night he could hold little conversations with her. His love! his dove! his darling! How easily he could trick and deceive himself and think, She will awake presently, and speak to me! Yes; her eyes will open and see me here again, and I shall hear her voice, for I love it! "Father!" she will say. "Father—father—"

Only the moment of undeceiving was so cruel!

Naomi stirred, and Israel rose and left her. As he went back to his bed, through the corridor of the patio, he heard a night-cry behind him that made his hair to rise. It was Naomi laughing in her sleep.

Israel dreamt again that night, and he believed his second dream to be a vision. It was only a dream, like the first; but what his dream would be to us is nought, and what it was to him is everything. The vision as he thought he saw it was this, and these were the words of it as he thought he heard them—

It was the middle of the night, and he was lying in his own room, when a dull red light as of dying flame crossed the foot of the bed, and a voice that was as the voice of the Lord came out of it, crying "Israel!"

And Israel was sorely afraid, and answered, "Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth."

Then the Lord said, "Thou has read of the goats whereon the high priest cast lots, one lot for the sin offering and one lot for the scapegoat."

And Israel answered trembling, "I have read."

Then the Lord said to Israel, “Look now upon Naomi, thy child, for she is as the sin-offering for thy sins, to make atonement for thy transgressions, for thee and for thy household, and therefore she is dumb to all uses of speech, and blind to all service of sight, a soul in chains and a spirit in prison, for behold, she is as the lot that is cast for justice and for the Lord.”

And Israel groaned in his agony and cried, “Would that the lot had fallen upon me, O Lord, that Thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest, for I alone am guilty before Thee.”

Then said the Lord to Israel, “On thee, also, hath the lot fallen, even the lot of the scapegoat of the enemies of the people of God.”

And Israel quaked with fear, and the Lord called to him again, and said, “Israel, even as the scapegoat carries the iniquities of the people, so cost thou carry the iniquities of thy master, Ben Aboo, and of his wife, Katrina; and even as the goat bears the sins of the people into the wilderness, so, in the resurrection, shalt thou bear the sins of this man and of this woman into a land that no man knoweth.”

Then Israel wrestled no longer with the Lord, but sweated as it were drops of blood, and cried, “What shall I do, O Lord?”

And the Lord said, “Lie unto the morning, and then arise, get thee to the country by Mequinez and to the man there whereof thou hast heard tidings, and he shall show thee what thou shalt do.”

Then Israel wept with gladness, and cried, saying, “Shall my soul live? Shall the lot be lifted from off me, and from off Naomi, my daughter?”

But the Lord left him, the red light died out from across the bed, and all around was darkness.

Now to the last day and hour of his life Israel would have taken oath on the Scriptures that he saw this vision, and he heard this voice, not in his sleep and as in a dream, but awake, and having plain sight of all common things about him—his

room and his bed; and the canopy that covered it. And on rising in the morning, at daydawn, so actual was the sense of what he had seen and heard, and so powerful the impression of it, that he straightway set himself to carry out the injunction it had made, without question of its reality or doubt of its authority.

Therefore, committing his household to the care of Ali, who was now grown to be a stalwart black lad his constant right hand and helpmate, Israel first sent to the Governor, saying he should be ten days absent from Tetuan, and then to the Kasbah for a soldier and guide, and to the market-place for mules.

Before the sun was high everything was in readiness, and the caravan was waiting at the door. Then Israel remembered Naomi. Where was the girl, that he had not seen her that morning? They answered him that she had not yet left her room, and he sent the black woman Fatimah to fetch her. And when she came and he had kissed her, bidding her farewell in silence, his heart misgave him concerning her, and, after raising his foot to the stirrup, he returned to where she stood in the patio with the two bondwomen beside her.

“Is she well?” he asked.

“Oh yes, well—very well,” said Fatimah, and Habeebah echoed her. Nevertheless, Israel remembered that he had not heard the only language of her lips, her laugh, and, looking at her again, he saw that her face, which had used to be cheerful, was now sad. At that he almost repented of his purpose, and but for shame in his own eyes he might have gone no farther, for it smote him with terror that, though she were sick, nothing could she say to stay him, and even if she were dying she must let him go his ways without warning.

He kissed her again, and she clung to him, so that at last, with many words of tender protest which she did not hear, he had to break away from the beautiful arms that held him.

Ali was waiting by the mules in the streets, and the soldier and guide and muleteers

and tentmen were already mounted, amid a chattering throng of idle people looking on.

“Ali, my lad,” said Israel, “if anything should befall Naomi while I am away, will you watch over her and guard her with all your strength?”

“With all my life,” said Ali stoutly. He was Naomi's playfellow no longer, but her devoted slave.

Then Israel set off on his journey.

CHAPTER IX

ISRAEL'S JOURNEY

MOHAMMED of Mequinez, the man whom Israel went out to seek, had been a Kadi and the son of a Kadi. While he was still a child his father died, and he was brought up by two uncles, his father's brothers, both men of yet higher place, the one being Naib es-sultan, or Foreign Minister, at Tangier, and the other Grand Vizier to the Sultan at Morocco. Thus in a land where there is one noble only, the Sultan himself, where ascent and descent are as free as in a republic, though the ways of both are mired with crime and corruption, Mohammed was come as from the highest nobility. Nevertheless, he renounced his rank and the hope of wealth that went along with it at the call of duty and the cry of misery.

He parted from his uncles, abandoned his judgeship, and went out into the plains. The poor and outcast and down-trodden among the people, the shamed, the disgraced, and the neglected left the towns and followed him. He established a sect. They were to be despisers of riches and lovers of poverty. No man among them was to have more than another. They were never to buy or sell among themselves, but every one was to give what he had to him that wanted it. They were to avoid swearing, yet whatever they said was to be firmer than an oath. They were to be

ministers of peace, and if any man did them violence they were never to resist him. Nevertheless they were not to lack for courage, but to laugh to scorn the enemies that tormented them, and smile in their pains and shed no tear. And as for death, if it was for their glory they were to esteem it more than life, because their bodies only were corruptible, but their souls were immortal, and would mount upwards when released from the bondage of the flesh. Not dissenters from the Koran, but stricter conformers to it; not Nazarenes and not Jews, yet followers of Jesus in their customs and of Moses in their doctrines.

And Moors and Berbers, Arabs and Negroes, Muslimeen and Jews, heard the cry of Mohammed of Mequinez, and he received them all. From the streets, from the market-places, from the doors of the prisons, from the service of hard masters, and from the ragged army itself, they arose in hundreds and trooped after him. They needed no badge but the badge of poverty, and no voice of pleading but the voice of misery. Most of them brought nothing with them in their hands, and some brought little on their backs save the stripes of their tormentors. A few had flocks and herds, which they drove before them. A few had tents, which they shared with their fellows; and a few had guns, with which they shot the wild boar for their food and the hyena for their safety. Thus, possessing little and desiring nothing, having neither houses nor lands, and only considering themselves secure from their rulers in having no money, this company of battered human wrecks, life-broken and crime-logged and stranded, passed with their leader from place to place of the waste country about Mequinez. And he, being as poor as they were, though he might have been so rich, cheered them always, even when they murmured against him, as Absalam had cheered his little fellowship at Tetuan: “God will feed us as He feeds the birds of the air, and clothe our little ones as He clothes the fields.”

Such was the man whom Israel went out to seek. But Israel knew his people too well to make known his errand. His besetting difficulties were enough already. The year was young, but the days were hot; a palpitating haze floated always in the air, and

the grass and the broom had the dusty and tired look of autumn. It was also the month of the fast of Ramadhan, and Israel's men were Muslims. So, to save himself the double vexation of oppressive days and the constant bickerings of his famished people, Israel found it necessary at length to travel in the night. In this way his journey was the shorter for the absence of some obstacles, but his time was long.

And, just as he had hidden his errand from the men of his own caravan, so he concealed it from the people of the country that he passed through, and many and various, and sometimes ludicrous and sometimes very pitiful were the conjectures they made concerning it. While he was passing through his own province of Tetuan, nothing did the poor people think but that he had come to make a new assessment of their lands and holdings, their cattle and belongings, that he might tax them afresh and more fully. So, to buy his mercy in advance, many of them came out of their houses as he drew near, and knelt on the ground before his horse, and kissed the skirts of his kaftan, and his knees, and even his foot in his stirrup, and called him Sidi (master, my lord), a title never before given to a Jew, and offered him presents out of their meagre substance.

“A gift for my lord,” they would say, “of the little that God has given us, praise His merciful name for ever!”

Then they would push forward a sheep or a goat, or a string of hens tied by the legs so as to hang across his saddle-bow, or, perhaps, at the two trembling hands of an old woman living alone on a hungry scratch of land in a desolate place, a bowl of buttermilk.

Israel was touched by the people's terror, but he betrayed no feeling.

“Keep them,” he would answer; “keep them until I come again,” intending to tell them, when that time came, to keep their poor gifts altogether.

And when he had passed out of the province of Tetuan into the bashalic of El Kasar, the bareheaded country-people of the valley of the Koos hastened before him to the

Kaid of that grey town of bricks and storks and palm-trees and evil odours, and the Kaid, with another notion of his errand, came to the tumble-down bridge to meet him on his approach in the early morning.

“Peace be with you!” said the Kaid. “So my lord is going again to the Shereef at Wazzan; may the mercy of the Merciful protect him!”

Israel neither answered yea nor nay, but threaded the maze of crooked lanes to the lodging which had been provided for him near the market-place, and the same night he left the town (laden with the presents of the Kaid) through a line of famished and half-naked beggars who looked on with feverish eyes.

Next day, at dawn, he came to the heights of Wazzan (a holy city of Morocco), by the olives and junipers and evergreen oaks that grow at the foot of the lofty, double-peaked Boo-Hallal, and there the young grand Shereef himself, at the gate of his odorous orange-gardens, stood waiting to give audience with yet another conjecture as to the intention of his journey.

“Welcome! welcome!” said the Shereef; “all you see is yours until Allah shall decree that you leave me too soon on your happy mission to our lord the Sultan at Fez—may God prolong his life and bless him!”

“God make you happy!” said Israel, but he offered no answer to the question that was implied.

“It is twenty and odd years, my lord,” the Shereef continued, “since my father sent for you out of Tetuan, and many are the ups and downs that time has wrought since then, under Allah's will; but none in the past have been so grateful as the elevation of Israel ben Oliel, and none in the future can be so joyful as the favours which the Sultan (God keep our lord Abd er-Rahman!) has still in store for him.”

“God will show,” said Israel.

No Jew had ever yet ridden in this Moroccan Mecca; but the Shereef alighted from his horse and offered it to Israel, and took Israel's horse instead and together they

rode through the market-place, and past the old Mosque that is a ruin inhabited by hawks and the other mosque of the Aissawa, and the three squalid fondaks wherein the Jews live like cattle. A swarm of Arabs followed at their heels in tattered greasy rags, a group of Jews went by them barefoot and a knot of bedraggled renegades leaning against the walls of the prison doffed the caps from their dishevelled heads and bowed.

That day, while the poor people of the town fasted according to the ordinance of the Ramadhan, Israel's little company of Muslimeen—guests in the house of the descendants of the Prophet—were, by special Shereefian dispensation, permitted as travellers to eat and drink at their pleasure. And before sunset, but at the verge of it, Israel and his men started on their journey afresh, going out of the town, with the Shereef's black bodyguard riding before them for guide and badge of honour, through the dense and noisome market-place, where (like a clock that is warning to strike) a multitude of hungry and thirsty people with fierce and dirty faces, under a heavy wave of palpitating heat, and amid clouds of hot dust, were waiting for the sound of the cannon that should proclaim the end of that day's fast. Water-carriers at the fountains stood ready to fill their empty goats' skins, women and children sat on the ground with dishes of greasy soup on their knees and balls of grain rolled in their fingers, men lay about holding pipes charged with keef, and flint and tinder to light them, and the mooddin himself in the minaret stood looking abroad (unless he were blind) to where the red sun was lazily sinking under the plain.

Israel's soul sickened within him, for well he knew that, lavish as were the honours that were shown him, they were offered by the rich out of their selfishness and by the poor out of their fear. While they thought the Sultan had sent for him, they kissed his foot who desired no homage, and loaded him with presents who needed no gifts. But one word out of his mouth, only one little word, one other name, and what then of this lip-service, and what of this mock-honour!

Two days later Israel and his company reached before dawn the snake-like ramparts of Mequinez the city of walls. And toiling in the darkness over the barren plain and the belt of carrion that lies in front of the town, through the heat and fumes of the fetid place, and amid the furious barks of the scavenger dogs which prowl in the night around it, they came in the grey of morning to the city gate over the stream called the Father of Tortoises. The gate was closed, and the night police that kept it were snoring in their rags under the arch of the wall within.

“Selam! M'barak! Abd el Kader! Abd el Kareem!” shouted the Shereef's black guard to the sleepy gate-keepers. They had come thus far in Israel's honour, and would not return to Wazzan until they had seen him housed within.

From the other side of the gate, through the mist and the gloom, came yawns and broken snores and then snarls and curses. “Burn your father! Pretty hubbub in the middle of the night!”

“Selam!” shouted one of the black guard. “You dog of dogs! Your father was bewitched by a hyena! I'll teach you to curse your betters. Quick! get up,—or I'll shave your beard. Open! or I'll ride the donkey on your head! There!—and there!—and there again!” and at every word the butt of his long gun rang on the old oaken gate.

“Hamed el Wazzani!” muttered several voices within.

“Yes,” shouted the Shereef's man. “And my Lord Israel of Tetuan on his way to the Sultan, God grant him victory. Do you hear, you dogs? Sidi Israel el Tetawani sitting here in the dark, while you are sleeping and snoring in your dirt.”

There was a whispered conference on the inside, then a rattle of keys, and then the gate groaned back on its hinges. At the next moment two of the four gatemen were on their knees at the feet of Israel's horse, asking forgiveness by grace of Allah and his Prophet. In the meantime, the other two had sped away to the Kasbah, and before Israel had ridden far into the town, the Kaid—against all usage of his class and

country—ran and met him—afoot, slipperless, wearing nothing but selham and tarboosh, out of breath, yet with a mouth full of excuses.

“I heard you were coming,” he panted—“sent for by the Sultan—Allah preserve him!—but had I known you were to be here so soon—I—that is—”

“Peace be with you!” interrupted Israel.

“God grant you peace. The Sultan—praise the merciful Allah!” the Kaid continued, bowing low over Israel's stirrup—“he reached Fez from Marrakesh last sunset; you will be in time for him.”

“God will show,” said Israel, and he pushed forward.

“Ah, true—yes—certainly—my lord is tired,” puffed the Kaid, bowing again most profoundly. “Well, your lodging is ready—the best in Mequinez—and your mona is cooking—all the dainties of Barbary—and when our merciful Abd er-Rahman has made you his Grand Vizier—”

Thus the man chattered like a jay, bowing low at nigh every word, until they came to the house wherein Israel and his people were to rest until sunset; and always the burden of his words was the same—the Sultan, the Sultan, the Sultan, and Abd er-Rahman, Abd er-Rahman!

Israel could bear no more. “Basha,” he said “it is a mistake; the Sultan has not sent for me, and neither am I going to see him.”

“Not going to him?” the Kaid echoed vacantly.

“No, but to another,” said Israel; “and you of all men can best tell me where that other is to be found. A great man, newly risen—yet a poor man—the young Mahdi Mohammed of Mequinez.”

Then there was a long silence.

Israel did not rest in Mequinez until sunset of that day. Soon after sunrise he went out at the gate at which he had so lately entered, and no man showed him honour.

The black guard of the Shereef of Wazzan had gone off before him, chuckling and grinning in their disgust, and behind him his own little company of soldiers, guides, muleteers, and tentmen, who, like himself, had neither slept nor eaten, were dragging along in dudgeon. The Kaid had turned them out of the town.

Later in the day, while Israel and his people lay sheltering within their tents on the plain of Sais by the river Nagar, near the tent-village called a Douar, and the palm-tree by the bridge, there passed them in the fierce sunshine two men in the peaked shasheeah of the soldier, riding at a furious gallop from the direction of Fez, and shouting to all they came upon to fly from the path they had to pass over. They were messengers of the Sultan, carrying letters to the Kaid of Mequinez, commanding him to present himself at the palace without delay, that he might give good account of his stewardship, or else deliver up his substance and be cast into prison for the defalcations with which rumour had charged him.

Such was the errand of the soldiers, according to the country-people, who toiled along after them on their way home from the markets at Fez; and great was the glee of Israel's men on hearing it, for they remembered with bitterness how basely the Kaid had treated them at last in his false loyalty and hypocrisy. But Israel himself was too nearly touched by a sense of Fate's coquetry to rejoice at this new freak of its whim, though the victim of it had so lately turned him from his door. Miserable was the man who laid up his treasure in money-bags and built his happiness on the favour of princes! When the one was taken from him and the other failed him, where then was the hope of that man's salvation, whether in this world or the next? The dungeon, the chain, the lash, the wooden jellab—what else was left to him? Only the wail of the poor whom he has made poorer, the curse of the orphan whom he has made fatherless, and the execration of the down-trodden whom he has oppressed. These followed him into his prison, and mingled their cries with the clank of his irons, for they were voices which had never yet deserted the man that made them, but clamoured loud at the last when his end had come, above the death-rattle in his

throat. One dim hour waited for all men always, whether in the prison or in the palace—one lonely hour wherein none could bear him company—and what was wealth and treasure to man's soul beyond it? Was it power on earth? Was it glory? Was it riches? Oh! glory of the earth—what could it be but a will-o'-the-wisp pursued in the darkness of the night! Oh! riches of gold and silver—what had they ever been but marsh-fire gathered in the dusk! The empire of the world was evil, and evil was the service of the prince of it!

Then Israel thought of Naomi, his sweet treasure—so far away. Though all else fell from him like dry sand from graspless fingers, yet if by God's good mercy the lot of the sin-offering could be lifted away from his child, he would be content and happy! Naomi! His love! His darling! His sweet flower afflicted for his transgression. Oh! let him lose anything, everything, all that the world and all that the devil had given him; but let the curse be lifted from his helpless child! For what was gold without gladness, and what was plenty without peace?

Israel lit upon the Mahdi at last in the country of the verbena and the musk that lies outside the walls of Fez. The prophet was a young man of unusual stature, but no great strength of body, with a head that drooped like a flower and with the wild eyes of an enthusiast. His people were a vast concourse that covered the plain a furlong square, and included multitudes of women and children. Israel had come upon them at an evil moment. The people were murmuring against their leader. Six months ago they had abandoned their houses and followed him They had passed from Mequinez to Rabat, from Rabat to Mazagan, from Mazagan to Mogador, from Mogador to Marrakesh, and finally from Marrakesh through the treacherous Beni Magild to Fez. At every step their numbers had increased but their substance had diminished, for only the destitute had joined them. Nevertheless, while they had their flocks and herds they had borne their privations patiently—the weary journeys, the exposure, the long rains of the spring and the scorching heat of summer. But the soldiers of the Kaids whose provinces they had passed through had stripped them of both in the

name of tribute. The last raid on their poverty had been made that very day by the Kaid of Fez, and now they were without goats or sheep or oxen, or even the guns with which they had killed the wild bear, and their children were crying to them for bread.

So the people's faces grew black, and they looked into each other's eyes in their impotent rage. Why had they been brought out of the cities to starve? Better to stay there and suffer than come out and perish! What of the vain promises that had been made to them that God would feed them as He fed the birds! God was witness to all their calamities; He was seeing them robbed day by day, He was seeing them famish hour by hour, He was seeing them die. They had been fooled! A vain man had thought to plough his way to power. Through their bodies he was now ploughing it. “The hunger is on us!” “Our children are perishing!” “Find us food!” “Food!” “Food!”

With such shouts, mingled with deep oaths, the hungry multitude in their madness had encompassed Mohammed of Mequinez as Israel and his company came up with them. And Israel heard their cries, and also the voice of their leader when he answered them.

First the young prophet rose up among his people, with flashing eyes and quivering nostrils. “Do you think I am Moses,” he cried, “that I should smite the rock and work you a miracle? If you are starving, am I full? If you are naked, am I clothed?”

But in another instant the fire of anger was gone from his face, and he was saying in a very moving voice, “My good people, who have followed me through all these miseries, I know that your burdens are heavier than you can bear, and that your lives are scarce to be endured, and that death itself would be a relief. Nevertheless, who shall say but that Allah sees a way to avert these trials of His poor servants, and that, unknown to us all, He is even at this moment bringing His mercy to pass! Patience, I beg of you; patience, my poor people—patience and trust!”

At that the murmurs of discontent were hushed. Then Israel remembered the presents with which the Kaid of El Kasar and the Shereef of Wazzan had burdened him. They were jewels and ornaments such as are sometimes worn unlawfully by vain men in that country—silver signet rings and earrings, chains for the neck, and Solomon's seal to hang on the breast as safeguard against the evil eye—as well as much gold filagree of the kind that men give to their women. Israel had packed them in a box and laid them in the leaf pannier of a mule, and then given no further thought to them; but, calling now to the muleteer who had charge of them, he said, “Take them quickly to the good man yonder, and say, 'A present to the man of God and to his people in their trouble.'”

And when the muleteer had done this, and laid the box of gold and silver open at the feet of the young Mahdi, saying what Israel had bidden him, it was the same to the young man and his followers as if the sky had opened and rained manna on their heads.

“It is an answer to your prayer,” he cried; “an angel from heaven has sent it.”

Then his people, as soon as they realised what good thing had happened to them, took up his shout of joy, and shouted out of their own parched throats—

“Prophet of Allah, we will follow you to the world's end!”

And then down on their knees they fell around him, the vast concourse of men and women, all grinning like apes in their hunger and glee together, and sobbing and laughing in a breath, like children, and sent up a great broken cry of thanks to God that He had sent them succour, that they might not die. At last, when they had risen to their feet again, every man looked into the eyes of his fellow and said, as if ashamed, “I could have borne it myself, but when the children called to me for bread. I was a fool.”

CHAPTER X

THE WATCHWORD OF THE MAHDI

Early the next day Israel set his face homeward, with this old word of the new prophet for his guide and motto: “Exact no more than is just; do violence to no man; accuse none falsely; part with your riches and give to the poor.” That was all the answer he got out of his journey, and if any man had come to him in Tetuan with no newer story, it must have been an idle and a foolish errand; but after El Kasar, after Wazzan, after Mequinez, and now after Fez, it seemed to be the sum of all wisdom. “I'll do it,” he said; “at all risks and all costs, I'll do it.”

And, as a prelude to that change in his way of life which he meant to bring to pass he sent his men and mules ahead of him, emptied his pockets of all that he should not need on his journey, and prepared to return to his own country on foot and alone. The men had first gaped in amazement, and then laughed in derision; and finally they had gone their ways by themselves, telling all who encountered them that the Sultan at Fez had stripped their master of everything, and that he was coming behind them penniless.

But, knowing nothing of this graceless service. Israel began his homeward journey with a happy heart. He had less than thirty dollars in his waistband of the more than three hundred with which he had set out from Tetuan; he was a hundred and fifty miles from that town, or five long days' travel; the sun was still hot, and he must walk in the daytime. Surely the Lord would see it that never before had any man done so much to wipe out God's displeasure as he was now doing and yet would do. He had said nothing of Naomi to the Mahdi even when he told him of his vision; but all his hopes had centred in the child. The lot of the sin-offering must be gone from her now, and in the resurrection he would meet her without shame. If he had brought fruits meet to repentance, then must her debt also be wiped away. Surely never before had any child been so smitten of God, and never had any father of an afflicted child bought God's mercy at so dear a price!

Such were the thoughts that Israel cherished secretly, though he dared not to utter them, lest he should seem to be bribing God out of his love of the child. And thus if his heart was glad as he turned towards home, it was proud also, and if it was grateful it was also vain; but vanity and pride were both smitten out of it in an hour, before he went through the gates of Fez (wherein he had slept the night preceding), by three sights which, though stern and pitiful, were of no uncommon occurrence in that town and province.

First, it chanced that as he was passing from the south-east of the new town of Fez to the gate that is at the north-west corner, going by the high walls of the Sultan's hareem, where there is room for a thousand women, and near to the Karueein mosque that is the greatest in Morocco and rests on eight hundred pillars, he came upon two slaveholders selling twelve or fourteen slaves. The slaves were all girls, and all black, and of varying ages, ranging from ten years to about thirty. They had lately arrived in caravans from the Soudan, by way of Tafilet and the Wargha, and some of them looked worn from the desert passage. Others were fresh and cheerful, and such as had claims to negro beauty were adorned, after their doubtful fashion, or the fancy of their masters, with love-charms of silver worn about their necks, with their fingers pricked out with hennah, and their eyelids darkened with kohl. Thus they were drawn up in a line for public auction; but before the sale of them could begin among the buyers that had gathered about them in the street, the overseers of the Sultan's hareem had to come and make a selection for their master. This the eunuchs presently did, and when two of them nicknamed Areefahs—gaunt and hairless men, with the faces of evil old women and the hoarse voices of ravens—had picked out three fat black maidens, the business of the auction began by the sale of a negro girl of seventeen who was brought out from the rest and passed around.

“Now, brothers,” said the slave-master, “look see; sound of wind and limb—how much?”

“Eighty dollars,” said a voice from the crowd.

“Eighty? Well, eighty to start with. Look at her—rosy lips, fit for the kisses of a king, eh? How much?”

“A hundred dollars.”

“A hundred dollars offered; only a hundred. It's giving the girl away. Look at her teeth, brothers, white and sound.”

The slave-master thrust his thumb into the girl's mouth and walked her round the crowd again.

“Breath like new-mown hay, brothers. Now's the chance for true believers. How much?”

“A hundred and ten.”

“A hundred and ten—thanks, Sidi! A hundred and ten for this jewel of a girl. Dirt cheap yet, brothers. Try her muscles. Look at her flesh. Not a flaw anywhere. Pass her round, test her, try her, talk to her—she speaks good Arabic. Isn't she fit for a Sultan? She's the best thing I'll offer to-day, and by the Prophet, if you are not quick I'll keep her for myself. Now, for the third and last time—seventeen years of age, sound, strong, plump, sweet, and intact—how much?”

Israel's blood tingled to see how the bidders handled the girl, and to hear what shameless questions they asked of her, and with a long sigh he was turning away from the crowd, when another man came up to it. The man was black and old and hard-featured, and visibly poor in his torn white selham. But when he had looked over the heads of those in front of him, he made a great shout of anguish, and, parting the people, pushed his way to the girl's side, and opened his arms to her, and she fell into them with a cry of joy and pain together.

It turned out that he was a liberated slave, who, ten years before, had been brought from the Soos through the country of Sidi Hosain ben Hashem, having been torn

away from his wife, who was since dead, and from his only child, who thus strangely rejoined him. This story he told, in broken Arabic; to those that stood around, and, hard as were the faces of the bidders, and brutal as was their trade; there was not an eye among them all but was melted at his story.

Seeing this, Israel cried from the back of the crowd, “I will give twenty dollars to buy him the girl's liberty,” and straightway another and another offered like sums for the same purpose until the amount of the last bid had been reached, and the slave-master took it, and the girl was free.

Then the poor negro, still holding his daughter by the hand, came to Israel, with the tears dripping down his black cheeks, and said in his broken way: “The blessing of Allah upon you, white brother, and if you have a child of your own may you never lose her, but may Allah favour her and let you keep her with you always!”

That blessing of the old black man was more than Israel could bear, and, facing about before hearing the last of it, he turned down the dark arcade that descends into the old town as into a vault, and having crossed the markets, he came upon the second of the three sights that were to smite out of his heart his pride towards God. A man in a blue tunic girded with a red sash, and with a red cotton handkerchief tied about his head, was driving a donkey laden with trunks of light trees cut into short lengths to lie over its panniers. He was clearly a Spanish woodseller and he had the weary, averted, and downcast look of a race that is despised and kept under. His donkey was a bony creature, with raw places on its flank and shoulders where its hide had been worn by the friction of its burdens. He drove it slowly; crying “Arrah!” to it in the tongue of its own country, and not beating it cruelly. At the bottom of the arcade there was an open place where a foul ditch was crossed by a rickety bridge. Coming to this the man hesitated a moment, as if doubtful whether to drive his donkey over it or to make the beast trudge through the water. Concluding to cross the bridge, he cried “Arrah!” again, and drove the donkey forward with one

blow of his stick. But when the donkey was in the middle of it, the rotten thing gave way, and the beast and its burden fell into the ditch. The donkey's legs were broken, and when a throng of Arabs, who gathered at the Spaniard's cry, had cut away its panniers and dragged it out of the water on to the paving-stones of the street, the film covered its eyes, and in a moment it was dead.

At that the man knelt down beside it, and patted it on its neck, and called on it by its name, as if unwilling to believe that it was gone. And while the Arabs laughed at him for doing so—for none seemed to pity him—a slatternly girl of sixteen or seventeen came scudding down the arcade, and pushed her way through the crowd until she stood where the dead ass lay with the man kneeling beside it. Then she fell on the man with bitter reproaches. “Allah blot out your name, you thief!” she cried. “You've killed the creature, and may you starve and die yourself, you dog of a Nazarene!”

This was more than Israel could listen to, and he commanded the girl to hold her peace. “Silence, you young wanton!” he cried, in a voice of indignation. “Who are you, that you dare trample on the man in his trouble?”

It turned out that the girl was the man's daughter, and he was a renegade from Ceuta. And when she had gone off, cursing Israel and his father and his grandfather, the poor fellow lifted his eyes to Israel's face, and said, “You are very kind, my father. God bless you! I may not be a good man, sir, and I've not lived a right life, but it's hard when your own children are taught to despise you. Better to lose them in their cradles, before they can speak to you to curse you.”

Israel's hair seemed to rise from his scalp at that word, and he turned about and hurried away. Oh no, no, no! He was not, of all men, the most sorely tried. Worse to be a slave, torn from the arms he loves! Worse to be a father whose children join with his enemies to curse him!

He had been wrong. What was wealth, that it was so noble a sacrifice to part with it?

Money was to give and to take, to buy and to sell, and that was all. But love was for no market, and he who lost it lost everything. And love was his, and would be his always, for he loved Naomi, and she clung to him as the hyssop clings to the wall. Let him walk humbly before God, for God was great.

Now these sights, though they reduced Israel's pride, increased his cheerfulness, and he was going out at the gate with a humbler yet lighter spirit, when he came upon a saint's house under the shadow of the town walls. It was a small whitewashed enclosure, surmounted by a white flag; and, as Israel passed it, the figure of a man came out to the entrance. He was a poor, miserable creature—ragged, dirty, and with dishevelled hair—and, seeing Israel's eyes upon him, he began to talk in some wild way and in some unknown tongue that was only a fierce jabber of sounds that had no words in them, and of words that had no meaning. The poor soul was mad, and because he was distraught he was counted a holy man among his people, and put to live in this place, which was the tomb of a dead saint—though not more dead to the ways of life was he who lay under the floor than he who lived above it. The man continued his wild jabber as long as Israel's eyes were on him, and Israel dropped two coins into his hand and passed on.

Oh no, no, no; Naomi was not the most afflicted of all God's creatures. And yet, and yet, and yet, her bodily infirmities were but the type and sign of how her soul was smitten.

On the hill outside the town the young Mahdi, with a great company of his people, was waiting for him to bid him godspeed on his journey. And then, while they walked some paces together before parting, and the prophet talked of the poor followers of Absalam lying in the prison at Shawan (for he had heard of them from Israel), Israel himself mentioned Naomi.

“My father,” he said, “there is something that I have not told you.”

“Tell it now, my son,” said the Mahdi.

“I have a little daughter at home, and she is very sweet and beautiful. You would never think how like sunshine she is to me in my lonely house, for her mother is gone, and but for her I should be alone, and so she is very near and dear to me. But she is in the land of silence and in the land of night. Nothing can she see, and nothing hear, and never has her voice opened the curtains of the air, for she is blind and dumb and deaf.”

“Merciful Allah!” cried the Mahdi.

“Ah! is her state so terrible? I thought you would think it so. Yes, for all she is so beautiful, she is only as a creature of the fields that knows not God.”

“Allah preserve her!” cried the Mahdi.

“And she is smitten for my sin, for the Lord revealed it to me in the vision, and my soul trembles for her soul. But if God has washed me with water should not she also be clean?”

“God knows,” said the Mahdi. “He gives no rewards for repentance.”

“But listen!” said Israel. “In a vision of death her mother saw her, and she was afflicted no more. No, for she could see, and hear, and speak. Man of God, will it come to pass?”

“God is good,” said the Mahdi. “He needs that no man should teach Him pity.”

“But I love her,” cried Israel, “and I vowed to her mother to guard her. She is joy of my joy and life of my life. Without her the morning has no freshness and the night no rest. Surely the Lord sees this, and will have mercy?”

The Mahdi held back his tears, and answered, “The Lord sees all. Go your way in trust. Farewell!”

“Farewell!”

CHAPTER XI

ISRAEL'S HOME-COMING

ISRAEL'S return home was an experience at all points the reverse of his going abroad. He had seven dollars in the pocket of his waistband on setting away from Fez, out of the three hundred and more with which he had started from Tetuan. His men had gone on before him and told their story. So the people whom he came upon by the way either ignored him or jeered at him, and not one that on his coming had run to do him honour now stepped aside that he might pass.

Two days after leaving Fez he came again to Wazzan. Women were going home from market by the side of their camels, and charcoal-burners were riding back to the country on the empty burdas of their mules. It was nigh upon sunset when Israel entered the town, and so exactly was everything the same that he could almost have tricked himself and believed that scarce two minutes had passed since he had left it. There at the fountains were the water-carriers waiting with their water-skins, and there in the market-place sat the women and children with their dishes of soup; there were the men by the booths with their pipes ready charged with keef, and there was the mooddin in the minaret, looking out over the plain. Everything was the same save one thing, and that concerned Israel himself. No Grand Shereef stood waiting to exchange horses with him, and no black guard led him through the town. Footsore and dirty, covered with dust, and tired, he walked through the streets alone. And when presently the voice rang out overhead, and the breathless town broke instantly into bubbles of sounds—the tinkling of the bells of the water-carriers, the shouts of the children, and the calls of the men—only one man seemed to see him and know him. This was an Arab, wearing scarcely enough rags to cover his nakedness, who was bathing his hot cheeks in water which a water-carrier was pouring into his hands, and he lifted his glistening face as Israel passed, and called him “Dog!” and “Jew!” and commanded him to uncover his feet.

Israel slept that night in one of the three squalid fondaks of Wazzan inhabited by the

Jews. His room was a sort of narrow box, in a square court of many such boxes, with a handful of straw shaken over the earth floor for a bed. On the doorpost the figure of a hand was painted in red, and over the lintel there was a rude drawing of a scorpion, with an imprecation written under it that purported to be from the mouth of the Prophet Joshua, son of Nun. If the charm kept evil spirits from the place of Israel's rest, it did not banish good ones. Israel slept in that poor bed as he had never slept under the purple canopy of his own chamber, and all night long one angel form seemed to hover over him. It was Naomi. He could see her clearly. They were together in a little cottage somewhere. The house was a mean one, but jasmine and marjoram and pinks and roses grew outside of it, and love grew inside. And Naomi! How bright were her eyes, for they could see! Yes, and her ears could hear, and her tongue could speak!

Two days after Israel left Wazzan he was back in the bashalic of Tetuan. Each night he had dreamt the same dream, and though he knew each morning when he awoke with a sigh that his dream was only a reflection of his dead wife's vision, yet he could not help but think of it the long day through. He tried to remember if he had ever seen the cottage with his waking eyes, and where he had seen it, and to recall the voice of Naomi as he had heard it in his dream, that he might know if it was the same as he used to think he heard when he sat by her in his stolen watches of the night while she lay asleep. Sometimes when he reflected he thought he must be growing childish, so foolish was his joy in looking forward to the night—for he had almost grown in love with it—that he might dream his dream again.

But it was a dear, delicious folly, for it helped him to bear the troubles of his journey, and they were neither light nor few. After passing through El Kasar he had been robbed and stripped both of his small remaining moneys and the better part of his clothes by a gang of ruffians who had followed him out of the town. Then a good woman—the old wife, turned into the servant of a Moor who had married a young one—had taken pity on his condition and given him a disused Moorish jellab. His

misfortune had not been without its advantage. Being forced to travel the rest of his way home in the disguise of a Moor, he had heard himself discussed by his own people when they knew nothing of his presence. Every evil that had befallen them had been attributed to him. Ben Aboo, their Basha, was a good, humane man, who was often driven to do that which his soul abhorred. It was Israel ben Oliel who was their cruel taxmaster.

When Israel was within a day's journey of Tetuan a terrible scourge fell upon the country. A plague of locusts came up like a dense cloud from the direction of the desert, and ate up every leaf and blade of grass that the scorching sun had left green, so that the plain over which it had passed was as black and barren as a lava stream. The farmers were impoverished, and the poorer people made beggars. Even this last disaster they charged in their despair to Israel, for Allah was now cursing them for Israel's sake. They were the same people that had thrust their presents upon him when he was setting out.

At the lonesome hut of the old woman who had offered him a bowl of buttermilk Israel rested and asked for a drink of water. She gave him a dish of zummetta—barley roasted like coffee—and inquired if he was going on to Tetuan. He told her yes, and she asked if his home was there. And when he answered that it was, she looked at him again, and said in a moving way, “Then Allah help you, brother.”

“Why me more than another, sister?” said Israel.

“Because it is plain to see that you are a poor man,” said the old woman. “And that is the sort he is hardest upon.”

Israel faltered and said, “He? Who, mother? Ah, you mean—”

“Who else but Israel the Jew?” said she, and then added, as by a sudden afterthought, “But they say he is gone at last, and the Sultan has stripped him. Well, Allah send us some one else soon to set right this poor Gharb of ours! And what a

man for poor men he might have been—so wise and powerful!"

Israel listened with his head bent down, and, like a moth at the flame, he could not help but play with the fire that scorched him. "They tell me," he said, "that Allah has cursed him with a daughter that has devils."

"Blind and dumb, poor soul," said the old woman; "but Allah has pity for the afflicted—he is taking her away."

Israel rose. "Away?"

"She is ill since her father went to Fez."

"Ill?"

"Yes, I heard so yesterday—dying."

Israel made one loud cry like the cry of a beast that is slaughtered, and fled out of the hut. Oh, fool of fools, why had he been dallying with dreams—billing and cooing with his own fancies—fondling and nuzzling and coddling them? Let all dreams henceforth be dead and damned for ever; for only devils out of hell had made them that poor men's souls might be staked and lost! Oh, why had he not remembered the pale face of Naomi when he left her, and the silence of her tongue that had used to laugh? Fool, fool! Why had he ever left her at all?

With such thoughts Israel hurried along, sometimes running at his utmost velocity, and then stopping dead short; sometimes shouting his imprecations at the pitch of his voice and beating his fist against the sharp aloes until it bled, and then whispering to himself in awe.

Would God not hear his prayer? God knew the child was very near and dear to him, and also that he was a lonely man. "Have pity on a lonely man, O God!" he whispered. "Let me keep my child; take all else that I have, everything, no matter what! Only let me keep her—yes, just as she is, let me have her still! Time was when I asked more of Thee, but now I am humble, and ask that alone."

On his knees in a lonesome place, with the fierce sun beating down on his uncovered head, amid the blackened leaves left by the locust, he prayed this prayer, and then rose to his feet and ran.

When he got to Tetuan the white city was glistening under the setting sun. Then he thought of his Moorish jellab, and looked at himself, and saw that he was returning home like a beggar; and he remembered with what splendour he had started out. Should he wait for the darkness, and creep into his house under the cover of it? If the thought had occurred an hour before he must have scouted it. Better to brave the looks of every face in Tetuan than be kept back one minute from Naomi. But now that he was so near he was afraid to go in; and now that he was so soon to learn the truth he dreaded to hear it. So he walked to and fro on the heath outside the town, paltering with himself, struggling with himself, eating out his heart with eagerness, trying to believe that he was waiting for the night.

The night came at length, and, under a deep-blue sky fast whitening with thick stars, Israel passed unknown through the Moorish gate, which was still open, and down the narrow lane to the market square. At the gate of the Mellah, which was closed, he knocked, and demanded entrance in the name of the Kaid. The Moorish guards who kept it fell back at sight of him with looks of consternation.

“Israel!” cried one, and dropped his lantern.

Israel whispered, “Keep your tongue between your teeth!” and hurried on.

At the door of his own house, which was also closed, he knocked again, but more fearfully. The black woman Habeebah opened it cautiously, and, seeing his jellab, she clashed it back in his face.

“Habeebah!” he cried, and he knocked once more.

Then Ali came to the door. “What Moorish man are you?” cried Ali, pushing him back as he pressed forward.

“Ali! Hush! It is I—Israel.”

Then Ali knew him and cried, “God save us! What has happened?”

“What has happened here?” said Israel. “Naomi,” he faltered, “what of her?”

“Then you have heard?” said Ali. “Thank God, she is now well.”

Israel laughed—his laugh was like a scream.

“More than that—a strange thing has befallen her since you went away,” said Ali.

“What?”

“She can hear!”

“It's a lie!” cried Israel, and he raised his hand and struck Ali to the floor. But at the next minute he was lifting him up and sobbing and saying, “Forgive me, my brave boy. I was mad, my son; I did not know what I was doing. But do not torture me. If what you tell me is true, there is no man so happy under heaven; but if it is false, there is no fiend in hell need envy me.”

And Ali answered through his tears, “It is true, my father—come and see.”

CHAPTER XII

THE BAPTISM OF SOUND

WHAT had happened at Israel's house during Israel's absence is a story that may be quickly told. On the day of his departure Naomi wandered from room to room, seeming to seek for what she could not find, and in the evening the black women came upon her in the upper chamber where her father had read to her at sunset, and she was kneeling by his chair and the book was in her hands.

“Look at her, poor child,” said Fatimah. “See, she thinks he will come as usual. God bless her sweet innocent face!”

On the day following she stole out of the house into the town and made her way to the Kasbah, and Ali found her in the apartments of the wife of the Basha, who had

lit upon her as she seemed to ramble aimlessly through the courtyard from the Treasury to the Hall of Justice, and from there to the gate of the prison.

The next day after that she did not attempt to go abroad, and neither did she wander through the house, but sat in the same seat constantly, and seemed to be waiting patiently. She was pale and quiet and silent; she did not laugh according to her wont, and she had a look of submission that was very touching to see.

“Now the holy saints have pity on the sweet jewel,” said Fatimah. “How long will she wait, poor darling?”

On the morning of the day following that her quiet had given place to restlessness, and her pallor to a burning flush of the face. Her hands were hot, her head was feverish, and her blind eyes were bloodshot.

It was now plain that the girl was ill, and that Israel's fears on setting out from home had been right after all. And making his own reckoning with Naomi's condition, Ali went off for the only doctor living in Tetuan—a Spanish druggist living in the walled lane leading to the western gate. This good man came to look at Naomi, felt her pulse, touched her throbbing forehead, with difficulty examined her tongue, and pronounced her illness to be fever. He gave some homely directions as to her treatment—for he despaired of administering drugs to such a one as she was—and promised to return the next day.

About the middle of that night Naomi became delirious. Fatimah stood constantly by her bed, bathing her hot forehead with vinegar and water; Habeebah slept in a chair at her feet; and Ali crouched in a corner outside the door of her room.

The druggist came in the morning, according to his promise; but there was nothing to be done, so he looked wise, wagged his head very solemnly, and said, “I will come again after two days more, when the fever must be near to its height, and bring a famous leech out of Tangier along with me!”

Meantime, Naomi's delirium continued. It was gentle as her own spirit tent there was

this that was strange and eerie about her unconsciousness—that whereas she had been dumb while her mind in its dark cell must have been mistress of itself and of her soul, she spoke without ceasing throughout the time of her reason's vanquishment. Not that her poor tongue in its trouble uttered speech such as those that heard could follow and understand, but only a restless babble of empty sounds, yet with tones of varying feeling, sometimes of gladness, sometimes of sorrow, sometimes of remonstrance, and sometimes of entreaty.

All that night, and the next night also, the two black women sat together by her bedside, holding each other's hands like little children in great fear. Also Ali crouched again like a dog in the darkness outside the door, listening in terror to the silvery young voice that had never echoed in that house before. This was the night when Israel, sleeping at the squalid inn of the Jews of Wazzan, was hearing Naomi's voice in his dreams.

At the first glint of daylight in the morning the lad was up and gone, and away through the town-gate to the heath beyond, as far as to the fondak, which stands on the hill above it, that he might strain his wet eyes in the pitiless sunlight for Israel's caravan that should soon come. On the first morning he saw nothing, but on the second morning he came upon Israel's men returning without him, and telling their lying story that he had been stripped of everything by the Sultan at Fez, and was coming behind them penniless.

Now, Israel was to Ali the greatest, noblest, mightiest man among men. That he should fall was incredible, and that any man should say he had fallen was an affront and an outrage. So, stripling as he was, the lad faced the rascals with the courage of a lion. “Liars and thieves!” he cried; “tell that story to another soul in Tetuan, and I will go straight to the Kaid at the Kasbah, and have every black dog of you all whipped through the streets for plundering my master.”

The men shouted in derision and passed on, firing their matchlocks as a mock salute.

But Ali had his will of them; they told their tale no more, and when they entered Tetuan, and their fellows questioned them concerning their journey, they took refuge in the reticence that sits by right of nature on the tongues of Moors—they said and knew nothing.

While Ali was on the heath looking out for Israel, the doctor out of Tangier came to Naomi. The girl was still unconscious, and the wise leech shook his head over her. Her case was hopeless; she was sinking—in plain words, she was dying—and if her father did not come before the morrow he would come too late to find her alive.

Then the black women fell to weeping and wailing, and after that to spiritual conflict. Both were born in Islam, but Fatimah had secretly become a Jewess by persuasion of her mistress who was dead. She was, therefore, for sending for the Chacham. But Habeebah had remained a Muslim, and she was for calling the Imam. "The Imam is good, the Imam is holy; who so good and holy as the Imam?" "Nay, but our Sidi holds not with the Imam, for our lord is a Jew, and our lord is our master, our lord is our sultan, our lord is our king." "Shoof! What is Sidi against paradise? And paradise is for her who makes a follower of Moosa into a follower of Mohammed. Let but the child die with the Kelmah on her lips, and we are all three blest for ever—otherwise we will burn everlastingly in the fires of Jehinnum." "But, alack! how can the poor girl say the Kelmah, being as dumb as the grave?" "Then how can she say the Shemang either?"

Having heard the verdict of the doctor, Ali returned in hot haste and silenced both the bondwomen: "The Imam is a villain, and the Chacham is a thief." There was only one good man left in Tetuan, and that was his own Taleb, his schoolmaster, the same that had taught him the harp in the days of the Governor's marriage. This person was an old negro, bewrinkled by years, becrippled by ague, once stone deaf, and still partially so, half blind, and reputed to be only half wise, a liberated slave from the Sahara, just able to read the Koran and the Torah, and willing to teach

either impartially, according to his knowledge, for he was neither a Jew nor a Muslim, but a little of both, as he used to say, and not too much of either. For such a hybrid in a land of intolerance there must have been no place save the dungeons of the Kasbah, but that this good nondescript was a privileged pet of everybody. In his dark cellar, down an alley by the side of the Grand Mosque in the Metamar, he had sat from early morning until sunset, year in year out, through thirty years on his rush-covered floor, among successive generations of his boys; and as often as night fell he had gone hither and thither among the sick and dying, carrying comfort of kind words, and often meat and drink of his meagre substance.

Such was Ali's hero after Israel, and now, in Israel's absence and his own great trouble, he tried away for him.

“Father,” cried the lad, “does it not say in the good book that the prayer of a righteous man availeth much?”

“It does, my son,” said the Taleb “You have truth. What then?”

“Then if you will pray for Naomi she will recover,” said Ali.

It was a sweet instance of simple faith. The old black Taleb dismissed his scholars, closed down his shutter, locked it with a padlock, hobbled to Naomi's bedside in his tattered white selham, looked down at her through the big spectacles that sprawled over his broad black nose, and then, while a dim mist floated between the spectacles and his eyes, and a great lump rose at his throat to choke him, he fell to the floor and prayed, and Ali and the black women knelt beside him.

The negro's prayer was simple to childishness. It told God everything; it recited the facts to the heavenly Father as to one who was far away and might not know. The maiden was sick unto death. She had been three days and nights knowing no one, and eating and drinking nothing. She was blind and dumb and deaf. Her father loved her and was wrapped up in her. She was his only child, and his wife was dead, and he was a lonely man. He was away from his home now, and if, when he returned,

the girl were gone and lost—if she were dead and buried—his strong heart would be broken and his very soul in peril.

Such was the Taleb's prayer, and such was the scene of it—the dumb angel of white and crimson turning and tossing on the bed in an aureole of her streaming yellow hair, and the four black faces about her, eager and hot and aflame, with closed eyelids and open lips, calling down mercy out of heaven from the God that might be seen by the soul alone.

And so it was, but whether by chance or Providence let no man dare to tell, that even while the four black people were yet on their knees by the bed, the turning and tossing of the white face stopped suddenly and Naomi lay still on her pillow. The hot flush faded from her cheeks; her features, which had twitched, were quiet; and her hands, which had been restless, lay at peace on the counterpane.

The good old Taleb took this for an answer to his prayer, and he shouted “El hamdu l'Illah!” (Praise be to God), while the big drops coursed down the deep furrows of his streaming face. And then, as if to complete the miracle, and to establish the old man's faith in it, a strange and wondrous thing befell. First, a thin watery humour flowed from one of Naomi's ears, and after that she raised herself on her elbow. Her eyes were open as if they saw; her lips were parted as though they were breaking into a smile; she made a long sigh like one who has slept softly through the night and has just awakened in the morning.

Then, while the black people held their breath in their first moment of surprise and gladness, her parted lips gave forth a sound. It was a laugh—a faint, broken, bankrupt echo of her old happy laughter. And then instantly, almost before the others had heard the sound, and while the notes of it were yet coming from her tongue, she lifted her idle hand and covered her ear, and over her face there passed a look of dread.

So swift had this change been that the bondwomen had not seen it, and they were

shouting “Hallelujah!” with one voice, thinking only that she who had been dead to them was alive again. But the old Taleb cried eagerly, “Hush! my children, hush! What is coming is a marvellous thing! I know what it is—who knows so well as I? Once I was deaf, my children, but now I hear. Listen! The maiden has had fever—fever of the brain. Listen! A watery humour had gathered in her head. It has gone, it has flowed away. Now she will hear. Listen, for it is I that know it—who knows it so well as I? Yes; she will be no longer deaf. Her ears will be opened. She will hear. Once she was living in a land of silence; now she is coming into the land of sound. Blessed be God, for He has wrought this wondrous work. God is great! God is mighty! Praise the merciful God for ever! El hamdu l'Illah!”

And marvellous and passing belief as the old Taleb's story seemed to be, it appeared to be coming to pass, for even while he spoke, beginning in a slow whisper and going on with quicker and louder breath, Naomi turned her face full upon him; and when the black women in their ready faith, joined in his shouts of praise, she turned her face towards them also; and wherever a voice sounded in the room she inclined her head towards it as one who knew the direction of the sounds, and also as one who was in fear of them.

But, seeing nothing of her look of pain, and knowing nothing but one thing only, and that was the wondrous and mighty change that she who had been deaf could now hear, that she who had never before heard speech now heard their voices as they spoke around her, Ali, in his frantic delight laughing and crying together, his white teeth aglitter, and his round black face shining with tears, began to shout and to sing, and to dance around the bed in wild joy at the miracle which God had wrought in answer to his old Taleb's prayer. No heed did he pay to the Taleb's cries of warning, but danced on and on, and neither did the bondwomen see the old man's uplifted arms or his big lips pursed out in hushes, so overpowered were they with their delight, so startled and so joy drunken. But over their tumult there came a wild outburst of piercing shrieks. They were the cries of Naomi in her blind and sudden

terror at the first sounds that had reached her of human voices. Her face was blanched, her eyelids were trembling, her lips were restless, her nostrils quivered, her whole being seemed to be overcome by a vertigo of dread, and, in the horrible disarray of all her sensations her brain, on its wakening from its dolorous sleep of three delirious days, was tottering and reeling at its welcome in this world of noise.

Then Ali ended suddenly his frantic dance, the bondwomen held their peace in an instant, and blank silence in the chamber followed the clamour of tongues.

It was at this great moment that Israel, returning from his journey in the jellab of a Moor, knocked like a stranger at his outer door. When he entered the chamber, still clad as a torn and ragged man, too eager to remove the sorry garments which had been given to him on the way, Naomi was resting against the pillar of the bed. He saw that her countenance was changed, and that every feature of her face seemed to listen. No longer was it as the face of a lamb that is simple and content, neither was it as the face of a child that is peaceful and happy; but it was hot and perplexed. Fear sat on her face, and wonder and questioning; and as Fatimah stood by her side, speaking tender words to comfort her, no cheer did she seem to get from them, but only dread, for she drew away from her when she spoke, as though the sound of the voice smote her ears with terror of trouble. All this Israel saw on the instant, and then his sight grew dim, his heart beat as if it would kill him, a thick mist seemed to cover everything, and through the dense waves of semi-consciousness he heard the dull hum of Fatimah's muffled voice coming to him as from far away.

“My pretty Naomi! My little heart! My sweet jewel of gold and silver! It is nothing! Nothing! Look! See! Her father has come back! Her dear father has come back to her!”

Presently the room ceased to go round and round, and Israel knew that Naomi's arms surrounded him, that his own arms enlaced her, and that her head was pressed hard against his bosom. Yes, it was she! It was Naomi! Ali had told him truth. She lived!

She was well! She could hear! The old hope that had chirped in his soul was justified, and the dear delicious dream was come true. Oh! God was great, God was good, God had given him more than he had asked or deserved!

Thus for some minutes he stood motionless, blessing the God of Jacob, yet uttering no words, for his heart was too full for speech, only holding Naomi closely to him, while his tears fell on her blind face. And the black people in the chamber wept to see it, that not more dumb in that great hour of gladness was she who was born so than he to whose house had come the wonderful work that God had wrought.

No heed had Israel given yet to the bodeful signs in Naomi's face, in joy over such as were joyful. When he had taken her in his arms she had known him, and she had clung to him in her glad surprise. But when she continued to lie on his bosom it was not only because he was her father and she loved him, and because he had been lost to her and was found, it was also because he alone was silent of all that were about her.

When he saw this his heart was humbled; but he understood her fears, that, coming out of a land of great silence, where the voice of man was never heard, where the air was songless as the air of dreams and darkling as the air of a tomb, her soul misgave her, and her spirit trembled in a new world of strange sounds. For what was the ear but a little dark chamber, a vault, a dungeon in a castle, wherein the soul was ever passing to and fro, asking for news of the world without? Through seventeen dark and silent years the soul of Naomi had been passing and repassing within its beautiful tabernacle of flesh, crying daily and hourly, “Watchman, what of the world?” At length it had found an answer, and it was terrified. The world had spoken to her soul and its voice was like the reverberations of a subterranean cavern, strange and deep and awful.

In that first moment of Israel's consciousness after he entered the room, all four black folks seemed to be speaking together.

Ali was saying, “Father, those dogs and thieves of tentmen and muleteers returned yesterday, and said—”

And the bondwomen were crying, “Sidi, you were right when you went away!” “Yes, the dear child was ill!” “Oh, how she missed you when you were gone.” “She has been delirious, and the doctor, the son of Tetuan—”

And the old Taleb was muttering, “Master, it is all by God's mercy. We prayed for the life of the maiden, and lo! He has given us this gateway to her spirit as well.”

Then Israel saw that as their voices entered the dark vault of Naomi's ears they startled and distressed her. So, to pacify her, he motioned them out of the chamber. They went away without a word. The reason of Naomi's fears began to dawn upon them. An awe seemed to be cast over her by the solemnity of that great moment. It was like to the birth-moment of a soul.

And when the black people were gone from the room, Israel closed the door of it that he might shut out the noises of the streets, for women were calling to their children without, and the children were still shouting in their play. This being done, he returned to Naomi and rested her head against his bosom and soothed her with his hand, and she put her arms about his neck and clung to him. And while he did so his heart yearned to speak to her, and to see by her face that she could hear. Let it be but one word, only one, that she might know her father's voice—for she had never once heard it—and answer it with a smile.

“Daughter! My dearest! My darling.”

Only this, nothing more! Only one sweet word of all the unspoken tenderness which, like a river without any outlet, had been seventeen years dammed up in his breast. But no, it could not be. He must not speak lest her face should frown and her arms be drawn away. To see that would break his heart. Nevertheless, he wrestled with the temptation. It was terrible. He dared not risk it. So he sat on the bed in silence, hardly moving, scarcely breathing—a dust-laden man in a ragged jellab, holding

Naomi in his arms.

It was still the month of Ramadhan, and the sun was but three hours set. In the fondak called El Oosaa, a group of the town Moors, who had fasted through the day, were feasting and carousing. Over the walls of the Mellah, from the direction of the Spanish inn at the entrance to the little tortuous quarter of the shoemakers, there came at intervals a hubbub of voices, and occasionally wild shouts and cries. The day was Wednesday, the market-day of Tetuan, and on the open space called the Feddan many fires were lighted at the mouths of tents, and men and women and children—country Arabs and Barbers—were squatting around the charcoal embers eating and drinking and talking and laughing, while the ruddy glow lit up their swarthy faces in the darkness. But presently the wing of night fell over both Moorish town and Mellah; the traffic of the streets came to an end; the “Balak” of the ass-driver was no more heard, the slipper of the Jew sounded but rarely on the pavement, the fires on the Feddan died out, the hubbub of the fondak and the wild shouts of the shoemakers' quarter were hushed, and quieter and more quiet grew the air until all was still.

At the coming of peace Naomi's fears seemed to abate. Her clinging arms released their hold of her father's neck, and with a trembling sigh she dropped back on to the pillow. And in this hour of stillness she would have slept; but even while Israel was lifting up his heart in thankfulness to God, that He was making the way of her great journey easy out of the land of silence into the land of speech, a storm broke over the town. Through many hot days preceding it had been gathering in the air, which had the echoing hollowness of a vault. It was loud and long and terrible. First from the direction of Marteel, over the four miles which divide Tetuan from the coast, came the warning which the sea sends before trouble comes to the land—a deep moan as of waters falling from the sky. Next came the moan of the wind down the valley that opens on the gate called the Bab el Marsa, and along the river that flows to the port. Then came the roll of thunder, like a million cannons, down the gorges

of the Reef mountains and across the plain that stretches far away to Kitan. Last of all, the black clouds of the sky emptied themselves over the town, and the rain fell in floods on the roof of the house and on the pavement of the patio, and leapt up again in great loud drops, making a noise to the ear like to the tramp, tramp, tramp of a hidden multitude. Thus sound after sound broke over the darkness of the night in a thousand awful voices, now near, now far, now loud, now low, now long, now short, now rising, now falling, now rushing, now running—a mighty tumult and a fearsome anarchy.

At last Naomi's terror was redoubled. Every sound seemed to smite her body as a blow. Hitherto she had known one sense only, the sense of touch, and though now she knew the sense of hearing also, she continued to refer all sensations to feeling. At the sound of the sea she put out her arms before her; at the sound of the wind she buried her face in her palms; and at the sound of the thunder she lifted her hands as if to protect her head.

Meanwhile, Israel sat beside her and cherished her close at his bosom. He yearned to speak words of comfort to her, soft words of cheer, tender words of love, gentle words of hope.

“Be not afraid, my daughter! It is only the wind, it is only the rain; it is only the thunder. Once you loved to run and race in them. They shall not harm you, for God is good, and He will keep you safe. There, there, my little heart! See, your father is with you. He will guard you. Fear not, my child, fear not!”

Such were the words which Israel yearned to speak in Naomi's ears, but, alas! what words could she understand any more than the wind which moaned about the house and the thunder which rolled overhead? And again and again, alas! as surely as he spoke to her she must shrink from the solace of his voice even as she shrank from the tumult of the voices of the storm.

Israel fell back helpless and heartbroken. He began to see in its fulness the change

which had befallen Naomi, yet not at once to realise it, so sudden and so numbing was the stroke. He began to know that with the mighty blessing for which he had hoped and prayed—the blessing of a pathway to his daughter's soul—a misfortune had come as well. What was it to him now that Naomi had ears to hear if she could not understand? And what was this tempest to the maiden new-born out of the land of silence into the world of sound, yet still both blind and dumb, but a circle of darkness alive with creatures that groaned and cried and shrieked and moved around her?

Thus nothing could Israel do but watch the creeping of Naomi's terror, and smooth her forehead and chafe her hands. And this he did, until at length, in a fresh outbreak of the storm, when the vault of the heavens seemed rent asunder, a strong delirium took hold of her, and she fell into a long unconsciousness. Then Israel held back his heart no longer, but wept above her, and called to her, and cried aloud upon her name—

“Naomi! Naomi! My poor child! My dearest! Hear me! It is nothing! nothing! Listen! It is gone! Gone!”

With such passionate cries of love and sorrow; Israel gave vent to his soul in its trouble. And while Naomi lay in her unconsciousness, he knew not what feelings possessed him, for his heart was in a great turmoil. Desolate! desolate! All was desolate! His high-built hopes were in ashes!

Sometimes he remembered the days when the child knew no sorrow, and when grief came not near her, when she was brighter than the sun which she could not see and sweeter than the songs which she could not hear, when she was joyous as a bird in its narrow cage and fretted not at the bars which bound her, when she laughed as she braided her hair and came dancing out of her chamber at dawn. And remembering this, he looked down at her knitted face, and his heart grew bitter, and he lifted up his voice through the tumult of the storm, and cried again on the God of Jacob, and

rebuked Him for the marvellous work which He had wrought.

If God were an almighty God, surely He looked before and after, and foresaw what must come to pass. And, foreseeing and knowing all, why had God answered his prayer? He himself had been a fool. Why had he craved God's pity? Once his poor child was blither than the panther of the wilderness and happier than the young lamb that sports in springtime. If she was blind, she knew not what it was to see; and if she was deaf, she knew not what it was to hear; and if she was dumb, she knew not what it was to speak. Nothing did she miss of sight or sound or speech any more than of the wings of the eagle or the dove. Yet he would not be content; he would not be appeased. Oh! subtlety of the devil which had brought this evil upon him!

But the God whom Israel in his agony and his madness rebuked in this manner sent His angel to make a great silence, and the storm lapsed to a breathless quiet.

And when the tempest was gone Naomi's delirium passed away. She seemed to look, and nothing could she see; and then to listen, and nothing could she hear; and then she clasped the hand of her father that lay over her hand, and sighed and sank down again.

“Ah!”

It was even as if peace had come to her with the thought that she was back in the land of great silence once again, and that the voices which had startled her, and the storm which had terrified her, had been nothing but an evil dream.

In that sweet respite she fell asleep, and Israel forgot the reproaches with which he had reproached his God, and looked tenderly down at her, and said within himself, “It was her baptism. Now she will walk the world with confidence, and never again will she be afraid. Truly the Lord our God is king over all kingdoms and wise beyond all wisdom!”

Then, with one look backward at Naomi where she slept, he crept out of the room on tiptoe.

CHAPTER XIII

NAOMI'S GREAT GIFT

With the coming of the gift of hearing, the other gifts with which Naomi had been gifted in her deafness, and the strange graces with which she had been graced, seemed suddenly to fall from her as a garment when she disrobed.

It seemed as though her old sense of touch had become confused by her new sense of hearing, She lost her way in her father's house, and though she could now hear footsteps, she did not appear to know who approached. They led her into the street, into the Feddan, into the walled lane to the great gate, into the steep arcades leading to the Kasbah; and no more as of old did she thread her way through the people, seeming to see them through the flesh of her face and to salute them with the laugh on her lips, but only followed on and on with helpless footsteps. They took her to the hill above the battery, and her breath came quick as she trod the familiar ways; but when she was come to the summit, no longer did she exult in her lofty place and drink new life from the rush of mighty winds about her, but only quaked like a child in terror as she faced the world unseen beneath and hearkened to the voices rising out of it, and heard the breeze that had once laved her cheeks now screaming in her ears. They gave Ali's harp into her hands, the same that she had played so strangely at the Kasbah on the marriage of Ben Aboo; but never again as on that day did she sweep the strings to wild rhapsodies of sound such as none had heard before and none could follow, but only touched and fumbled them with deftless fingers that knew no music.

She lost her old power to guide her footsteps and to minister to her pleasures and to cherish her affections. No longer did she seem to communicate with Nature by other organs than did the rest of the human kind. She was a radiant and joyous spirit maid no more, but only a beautiful blind girl, a sweet human sister that was weak and

faint.

Nevertheless, Israel recked nothing of her weakness, for joy at the loss of those powers over which his enemies throughout seventeen evil years had bleated and barked “Beelzebub!” And if God in His mercy had taken the angel out of his house, so strangely gifted, so strangely joyful, He had given him instead, for the hunger of his heart as a man, a sweet human daughter, however helpless and frail.

Thus in the first days of Naomi's great change Israel was content. But day by day this contentment left him, and he was haunted by strange sinkings of the heart. Naomi's frailty appeared to be not only of the body but also of the spirit. It seemed as if her soul had suddenly fallen asleep. She betrayed neither joy nor sorrow. No sound escaped her lips; no thought for herself or for others seemed to animate her. She neither laughed nor wept. When Israel kissed her pale brow, she did not stretch out her arms as she had done before to draw down his head to her lips. Calmly, silently, sadly, gracefully, she passed from day to day, without feeling and without thought—a beautiful statue of flesh and blood.

What God was doing with her slumbering spirit then, only He Himself knows; but the time of her awakening came, and with it came her first delight in the new gift with which God had gifted her.

To revive her spirits and to quicken her memory, Israel had taken her to walk in the fields outside the town where she had loved to play in her childhood—the wild places covered with the peppermint and the pink, the thyme, the marjoram, and the white broom, where she had gathered flowers in the old times, when God had taught her. The day was sweet, for it was the cool of the morning, the air was soft, and the wind was gentle, and under the shady trees the covert of the reeds lay quiet. And whither Naomi would, thither they had wandered, without object and without direction.

On and on, hand in hand, they had walked through the winding paths of the

oleander, between the creeping fences of the broom, and the sprawling limbs of the prickly pear, until they came to a stream, a tributary of the Marteel, trickling down from the wild heights of the Akhmas, over the light pebbles of its narrow bed. And there—but by what impulse or what chance Israel never knew—Naomi had withdrawn her hand from his hand; and at the next moment, in scarcely more time than it took him to stoop to the ground and rise again, suddenly as if she had sunk into the earth, or been lifted into the sky, Naomi disappeared from his sight.

Israel pushed the low boughs apart, expecting to find her by his side, but she was nowhere near. He called her by her name, thinking she would answer with the only language of her lips, the old language of her laugh.

“Naomi! Naomi! Come, come, my child, where are you?”

But no sound came back to him.

Again he called, not as before in a tone of remonstrance, but with a voice of fear.

“Naomi, Naomi! Where are you? where? where?”

Then he listened and waited, yet heard nothing, neither her laugh nor the rustle of her robe, nor the light beat of her footstep.

Nevertheless, she had passed over the grass from the spot where she had left him, without waywardness or thought of evil, only missing his hand and trying to recover it, then becoming afraid and walking rapidly, until the dense foliage between them had hidden her from sight and deadened the sound of his voice.

Opening a way between the long leaves of an aloe, Israel found her at length in the place whereto she had wandered. It was a short bend of the brook, where dark old trees overshadowed the water with forest gloom. She was seated on the trunk of a fallen oak, and it seemed as if she had sat herself down to weep in her dumb trouble, for her blind eyes were still wet with tears. The river was murmuring at her feet; an old olive-tree over her head was pattering with its multitudinous tongues; the little family of a squirrel was chirping by her side, and one tiny creature of the brood was

squirling up her dress; a thrush was swinging itself on the low bough of the olive and singing as it swung, and a sheep of solemn face—gaunt and grim and ancient—was standing and palpitating before her. Bees were humming, grasshoppers were buzzing, the light wind was whispering, and cattle were lowing in the distance. The air of that sweet spot in that sweet hour was musical with every sweet sound of the earth and sky, and fragrant with all the wild odours of the wood.

“My darling,” cried Israel in the first outburst of his relief, and then he paused and looked at her again.

The wet eyes were open, and they appeared to see, so radiant was the light that shone in them. A tender smile played about her mouth; her head was held forward; her nostrils quivered; and her cheeks were flushed. She had pushed her hat back from her head, and her yellow hair had fallen over her neck and breast. One of her hands covered one ear, and the other strayed among the plants that grew on the bank beside her. She seemed to be listening intently, eagerly, rapturously. A rare and radiant joy, a pure and tender delight, appeared to gush out of her beautiful face. It was almost as though she believed that everything she heard with the great new gift which God had given her was speaking to her, and bidding her welcome and offering her love; as if the garrulous old olive over her head were stretching down his arms to sport with her hair, and pattering; “Kiss me, little one! kiss me, sweet one! kiss me! kiss me!”—as if the rippling river at her feet were laughing and crying, “Catch me, naked feet! catch me, catch me!” as if the thrush on the bough were singing, “Where from, sunny locks? where from? where from?”—as if the young squirrel were chirping, “I'm not afraid, not afraid, not afraid!” and as if the grey old sheep were breathing slowly, “Pat me, little maiden! you may, you may!”

“God bless her beautiful face!” cried Israel. “She listens with every feature and every line of it.”

It was the awakening of her soul to the soul of music, and from that day forward she

took pleasure in all sweet and gentle sounds whatsoever—in the voices of children at play—in the bleat of the goat—in the footsteps of them she loved—in the hiss and whirr of her mother's old spinning-wheel, which now she learned to work—and in Ali's harp, when he played it in the patio in the cool of the evening.

But even as no eye can see how the seed which has been sown in the ground first dies and then springs into life, so no tongue can tell what change was wrought in the pure soul of Naomi when, after her baptism of sound, the sweet voices of earth first entered it. Neither she herself nor any one else ever fully realised what that change was, for it was a beautiful and holy mystery. It was also a great joy, and she seemed to give herself up to it. No music ever escaped her, and of all human music she took most pleasure in the singing of love songs. These she listened to with a simple and rapt delight; their joy seemed to answer to her joy, and the joyousness of a song of love seemed to gather in the air wheresoever she went.

There were few of the kind she ever heard, and few of that few were beautiful, and none were beautifully sung. Fatimah's homely ditties were all she knew, the same that had been crooned to her a thousand times when she had not heard. Most of these were songs of the desert and the caravan, telling of musk and ambergris, and odorous locks and dancing cypress, and liquid ruby, and lips like wine; and some were warm tales which the good soul herself hardly understood, of enchanting beauties whose silence was the door of consent, and of wanton nymphs whose love tore the veil of their chastity.

But one of them was a song of pure and true passion that seemed to be the yearning cry of a hungering, unfilled, unsatisfied heart to call down love out of the skies, or else be carried up to it. This had been a favourite song of Naomi's mother, and it was from Ruth that Fatimah had learned it in those anxious watches of the early uncertain days when she sang it over the cradle to her babe that was deaf after all and did not hear. Naomi knew nothing of this, but she heard her mother's song at

last, though silent were the lips that first sang it, and it was her chief and dear delight.

O, where is Love? Where, where is Love? Is it of heavenly birth? Is it a thing of earth? Where, where is Love?

In her crazy, creechy voice the black woman would sing the song, when Israel was out of hearing; and the joy Naomi found in it, and the simple silent arts she used, being mute and blind, to show her pleasure while it lasted, and to ask for it again when it was done, were very sweet and touching.

And so it came about at last, that even as the human mother loves that child most among many children that most is helpless, so the earth-mother of Naomi made her ears more keen because her eyes were blind. Thus she seemed to hear many things that are unheard by the rest of the human family. It is only a dim echo of the outer world that the ears of men are allowed to hear, just as it is only a dim shadow of the outer world that the eyes of men are allowed to see; but the ears of Naomi seemed to hear all.

There is one hearing of men, and another hearing of the beasts, and a third of the birds, and one hearing differs from another in keenness even as one sight differs from another in strength. And all the earth is full of voices, and everything that moves upon the face of it has its sound; but the bird hears that which is unheard of the beast, and the beast hears that which is unheard of men. But Naomi appeared to hear all that is heard of each.

Listening hour after hour, listening always, listening only, with nothing that she could do but listen, nothing moved on the ground but she dropped her face, and nothing flew in the sky but she lifted her eyes. And whereas before the coming of her great gift her face had been all feeling, and she seemed to feel the sunset, and to feel the sky, and to feel the thunder and the light, now her face was all hearing, and her whole body seemed to hear, for she was like a living soul floating always in a

sea of sound.

Thus, day after day, she was busy in her silence and in her darkness, building up notions of man and of the world by the new gift with which God had gifted her; but what strange thing the earth was to her then, what the sun was with its warmth, and what the sea was with its roar, and what the face of man was, and the eyes of woman, none could know, and neither could she tell, for her soul was not linked to other souls—soul to soul, in the chains of speech.

And for all that she could not answer; yet Israel did not forget that, beside the sounds of earth and sky, Naomi was hearing words, and that words had wings, and were alive, and, for good or ill, made their mark on the soul that listened to them. So he continued to read to her out of the Book of the Law, day after day at sunset, according to his wont and custom. And when an evil spirit seemed to make a mock at him, and to say, “Fool! she hears, but does she understand?” he remembered how he had read to her in the days of her deafness, and he said to himself, “Shall I have less faith now that she can hear?”

But, though he turned his back on the temptation to let go of Naomi's soul at last, yet sometimes his heart misgave him; for when he spoke to her it seemed to him that he was like a man that shouts into a cavern and gets back no answer but the sound of his own voice. If he told her of the sky, that it was broad as the ocean, what could she see of the great deeps to measure them? And if he told her of the sea, that it was green as the fields, what could she see of the grass to know its colour? And sometimes as he spoke to her it smote him suddenly that the words themselves which he used to speak with were no more to Naomi than the notes which Ali struck from his dead harp, or the bleat of the goat at her feet.

Nevertheless, his faith was great, and he said in his heart, “Let the Lord find His own way to her spirit.” So he continued to speak with her as often as he was near her, telling her of the little things that concerned their household, as well as of the

greater things it was good for her soul to know.

It was a touching sight—the lonely man, the outcast among his people, talking with his daughter though she was blind and dumb, telling her of God, of heaven, of death and resurrection, strong in his faith that his words would not fail, but that the casket of her soul would be opened to receive them, and that they would lie within until the great day of judgment, when the Lord Himself would call for them.

Did Naomi hear his words to understand them, or did they fall dead on her ear like birds on a dead sea? In her darkness and her silence was she putting them together, comparing them, interpreting them, pondering them, imitating them, gathering food for her mind from them, and solace for her spirit? Israel did not know; and, watch her face as he would, he could never learn. Hope! Faith! Trust! What else was left to him? He clung to all three, he grappled them to him; they were his sheet-anchor and his pole-star. But one day they seemed to be his calenture also—the false picture of green fields and sweet female faces that rises before the eye of the sailor becalmed at sea.

It was some three weeks after his return from his journey, and the fierce blaze of the sun continued. The storm that had broken over the town had left no results of coolness or moisture, for the ground had been baked hard, and the rain had been too short and swift to penetrate it. And what the withering heat had spared of green leaf and shrub a deadlier blight had swept away. The locusts had lately come up from the south and the east, in numbers exceeding imagination, millions on millions, making the air dark as they passed and obscuring the blue sky. They had swept the country of its verdure, and left a trail of desolation behind them. The grass was gone, the bark of the olives and almonds was stripped away, and the bare trees had the look of winter.

The first to feel the plague had been the cattle and beasts of burden. Without food to eat or water to drink they had died in hundreds. A Mukabar, a cemetery, was made

for the animals outside the walls of the town. It was a charnel yard on the hill-side, near to one of the town's six gates. The dead creatures were not buried there, but merely cast on the bare ground to rot and to bleach in the sun and the heated wind. It was a horrible place.

The skinny dogs of the town soon found it. And after these scavengers of the East had torn the putrefying flesh and gnawed the multitude of bones, they prowled around the country, with tongues lolling out, in search of water. By this time there was none that they could come at nearer than the sea, and that was salt. Nevertheless, they lapped it, so burning was their thirst, and went mad, and came back to the town. Then the people hunted them and killed them.

Now, it chanced that a mad dog from the Mukabar was being hunted to death on a day when Naomi, who had become accustomed to the tumult of the streets, had first ventured out in them alone, save for her goat, that went before her. The goat was grown old, but it was still her constant companion and also it was now her guide and guardian, for the little dumb creature seemed to know that she was frail and helpless. And so it was that she was crossing the Sok el Foki, a market of the town, and hearkening only to the patter of the feet of the goat going in front, when suddenly she heard a hundred footsteps hurrying towards her, with shouts and curses that were loud and deep. She stood in fear on the spot where she was, and no eyes had she to see what happened next, and she had none save the goat to tell her.

But out of one of the dark arcades on the left, leading downward from the hill, the mad dog came running, before a multitude of men and boys. And flying in its despair, it bit out wildly at whatever lay in its way, and Naomi, in her blindness, stood straight in front of it. Then she must have fallen before it, but instantly the goat flung itself across the dog's open jaws, and butted at its foaming teeth, and sent up shrill cries of terror.

The dog stopped a moment, for such love was human, and it seemed as if the

madness of the monster shrank before it. But the people came down with their wild shouts and curses, and the dog sprang upon the goat and felled it, and fled away. The people followed it, and then Naomi was alone in the market-place, and the goat lay at her feet.

Ali found her there, and brought her home to her father's house in the Mellah, and her dying champion with her. And out of this hard chance, and not out of Israel's teaching, Naomi was first to learn what life is and what is death. She felt the goat with her hands, and as she did so her fingers shook. Then she lifted it to its feet, and when they slipped from under it she raised her white face in wonder. Again she lifted it, and made strange noises at its ear; but when it did not answer with its bleat her lips began to tremble. Then she listened for its breathing, and felt for its breath; but when neither the one came to her ear, nor the other to her cheek, her own breath beat hot and fast. At length she fondled it in her arms, and kissed it with her lips; and when it gave back no sign of motion nor any sound of voice, a wild labouring rose at her heart. At last, when the power of life was low in it, the goat opened its heavy eyes upon her and put forth its tongue and licked her hand. With that last farewell the brave heart of the little creature broke, and it stretched itself and died.

Israel saw it all. His heart bled to see the parting in silence between those two, for not more dumb was the goat that now was dead than the human soul that was left alive. He tried to put the goat from Naomi's arms, saying, “It was only a goat, my child; think of it no more,” though it smote him with pain to say it, for had not the creature given its life for her life? And where, O God, was the difference between them? But Naomi clung to the goat, and her throat swelled and her bosom fluttered, and her whole body panted, and it was almost as if her soul were struggling to burst through the bonds that bound it, that she might speak and ask and know.

“Oh, what does it mean? Why is it? Why? Why?”

Such were the questions that seemed ready to break from her tongue. And, thinking

to answer her, Israel drew her to him and said, “It is dead, my child—the goat is dead.”

But as he spoke that word he saw by her face, as by a flash of light in a dark place, that, often as he had told her of death, never until that hour had she known what it was. Then, if the words that he had spoken of death had carried no meaning, what could he hope of the words that he had spoken of life, and of the little things which concerned their household? And if Naomi had not heard the words he had said of these—if she had not pondered and interpreted them—if they had fallen on her ear only as voices in a dark cavern—only as dead birds on a dead sea—what of the other words, the greater words, the words of the Book of the Law and the Prophets, the words of heaven and of the resurrection and of God?

Had the hope of his heart been vanity? Did Naomi know nothing? Was her great gift a mockery?

Israel's feet were set in a slippery place. Why had he boasted himself of God's mercy? What were ears to hear to her that could not understand? Only a torment, a terror, a plague, a perpetual desolation! When Naomi had heard nothing she had known nothing, and never had her spirit asked and cried in vain. Now she was dumb for the first time, being no longer deaf. Miserable man that he was, why had the Lord heard his supplication and why had He received his prayer?

But, repenting of such reproaches, in memory of the joy that Naomi's new gift had given her, he called on God to give her speech as well.

“Give her speech, O Lord!” he cried, “speech that shall lift her above the creatures of the field, speech whereby alone she may ask and know! Give her speech, O God my God, and Thy servant will be satisfied!”

CHAPTER XIV

ISRAEL AT SHAWAN

AFTER Israel's return from his journey he had followed the precepts of the young Mahdi of Mequinez. Taking a view of his situation, that by his hardness of heart in the early days, and by base submission to the will of Katrina, the Kaid's Christian wife, in the later ones, he had filled the land with miseries, he now spared no cost to restore what he had unjustly extorted. So to him that had paid double in the taxings he had returned double—once for the tax and once for the excess; and if any man, having been unjustly taxed for the Kaid's tribute, had given bond on his lands for his debt and been cast into the Kasbah and died, without ransoming them, then to his children he had returned fourfold—double for the lands and double for the death. Israel had done this continually, and said nothing to Ben Aboo, but paid all charges out of his own purse, so that from being a rich man he had fallen within a month to the condition of a poor one, for what was one man's wealth among so many? Yet no goodwill had he won thereby, but only pity and contempt, for the people that had taken his money had thanked the Kaid for it, who, according to their supposals, had called on him to correct what he had done amiss. And with Ben Aboo himself he had fared no better, for the Basha was provoked to anger with him when he heard from Katrina of the good money that he had been casting away in pity for the poor.

“What have I told you a score of times?” said the woman. “That man has mints of money.”

“My money, burn his grandfather,” said Ben Aboo.

Thus, on every side Israel had fallen in the world's reckoning. When he lifted his hand from off that plough wherewith he had done the devil's work, he had made many enemies, and such as he had before he had made more powerful. People who had showed him lip-service when he was thought to be rich did not conceal the joy they had that he was brought down so near to be a beggar. Upstarts, who owed their promotion to his intercession, found in his charities an easy handle given them to be

insolent, for, by carrying to Katrina their secret messages of his mercy to the people, they brought things at length to such a pass between him and the Kaid that Ben Aboo openly upbraided Israel for his weakness, not once or twice but many times.

“And pray what is this I hear of your fine charities, master Israel?” said Ben Aboo. “Ah, do not look surprised. There are little birds enough to twitter of such follies. So you are throwing away silver like bones to the dogs! Pity you've got too much of it, Israel ben Oliel; pity you've got too much of it, I say.”

“The people are poor, Lord Basha,” said Israel; “they are famishing, and they have no refuge save with God and with us.”

“Tut!” cried Ben Aboo. “A famine in my bashalic! Let no man dare to say so. The whining dogs are preying upon your simpleness, mistress Israel. You poor old grandmother! I always suspected,” he added, facing about upon his attendants, “I always suspected that I was served by a woman. Now I am sure of it.”

Israel felt the indignity. He had given good proof of his manhood in the past by standing five-and-twenty years scapegoat for Ben Aboo between him and his people, making him rich by his extortions, keeping him safe in his seat, and thereby saving him from the wooden jellab which Abd er-Rahman, the Sultan, kept for Kaids that could not pay. But Israel mastered his anger and held his peace.

Word went through the town that Israel had fallen from the favour of the Basha, and then some of the more bold and free laughed at him in the streets when they saw him relieve the miseries of the poor, thinking himself accountable to God for their sufferings. He could have crushed the better part of his insulters to death in his brawny arms, but he was slow to anger and long-suffering. All the heed he paid to their insults was to do his good work with more secrecy.

Remembering his Moorish jellab, and how effectually it had disguised him on the night of his return home, he had recourse to it in this difficulty. When darkness fell he donned it again, drawing the hood well down over his black Jewish skull-cap and

as far as might be over his face. In this innocent disguise he went out night after night for many nights among the poorer Moors that lived in the dismal quarters of the grain markets near the Bab Ramooz. How he bore himself being there, with what harmless deceptions he unburdened his soul by stealth, what guileless pretences he made that he might restore to the poor the money that had been stolen from them, would be a long story to tell.

“Who are you?” he was asked a hundred times.

“A friend,” he answered

“Who told you of our trouble?”

“Allah has angels,” he would reply.

Often, on his nightly rambles, he heard himself reviled, and saw the very children of the streets spit over their fingers at the mention of his name. And sometimes as he passed he heard blind people whisper together and say, “He is a saint. He comes from the Kabar at nightfall. Allah sends him to help poor men who have been in the clutches of Israel the Jew.”

Nevertheless, Israel kept his secret. What did the word of man avail for good or evil? It would count for nothing at the last. Do justice and ask nought; neither praise, for it was a wayward wind, nor gratitude, for it was the breath of angels.

One day, about a month after his return from his journey, when he was near to the end of his substance, a message came to him that the followers of Absalam were perishing of hunger in their prison at Shawan. Their relatives in Tetuan had found them in food until now, but the plague of the locust had fallen on the bread-winners, and they had no more bread to send. Israel concluded that it was his duty to succour them. From a just view of his responsibilities he had gone on to a morbid one. If in the Judgment the blood of the people of Absalam cried to God against him, he himself, and not Ben Aboo, would be cast out into hell.

Israel juggled with his heart no further, but straightway began to take a view of his

condition. Then he saw, to his dismay, that little as he had thought he possessed, even less remained to him out of the wreck of his riches. Only one thing he had still, but that was a thing so dear to his heart that he had never looked to part with it. It was the casket of his dead wife's jewels. Nevertheless, in his extremity he resolved to sell it now, and, taking the key, he went up to the room where he kept it—a closet that was sacred to the relics of her who lay in his heart for ever, but in his house no more.

Naomi went up with him, and when he had broken the seal from the doorpost, and the little door creaked back on its hinge, the ashy odour came out to them of a chamber long shut up. It was just as if the buried air itself had fallen in death to dust, for the dust of the years lay on everything. But under its dark mantle were soft silks and delicate shawls and gauzy haiks, and veils and embroidered sashes and light red slippers, and many dainty things such as women love. And to him that came again after ten heavy years they were as a dream of her that had worn them when she was young that now was dead when she was beautiful that now was in the grave.

“Ah me, ah me! Ruth! My Ruth!” he murmured. “This was her shawl. I brought it from Wazzan. . . . And these slippers—they came from Rabat. Poor girl, poor girl! . . . . This sash, too, it used to be yellow and white. How well I remember the first time she wore it! She had put it over her head for a hood, pretending to be a Moorish woman. But her brown curls fell out over her face, or she could not imprison them. And then she laughed. My poor dear girl. How happy we were once in spite of everything! It is all like yesterday. When I think Ah no, I must think no more, I must think no more.”

Israel had little heart for such visions, so he turned to the casket of the jewels where it stood by the wall. With trembling hands he took it and opened it, and here within were necklaces and bracelets, and rings and earrings, glistening of gold and rubies under their covering of dust. He lifted them one by one over his wrinkled fingers,

and looked at them while his eyes grew wet.

“Not for myself,” he murmured, “not for myself would I have sold them, not for bread to eat or water to drink; no, not for a wilderness of worlds!”

All this time he had given little thought to Naomi, where she stood by his side, but in her darkness and silence she touched the silks and looked serious, and the slippers and looked perplexed, and now at the jingling of the jewels she stretched out her hand and took one of them from her father's fingers, and feeling it, and finding it to be a necklace, she clasped it about her neck and laughed.

At the sound of her laughter Israel shook like a reed. It brought back the memory of the day when she danced to her mother's death, decked in that same necklace and those same ornaments. More on this head Israel could not think and hold to his purpose, so he took the jewels from Naomi's neck and returned them to the casket, and hastened away with it to a man to whom he designed to sell it.

This was no other than Reuben Maliki, keeper of the poor box of the Jews; for as well as a usurer he was a silversmith, and kept his shop in the Sok el Foki. Israel was moved to go to this person by the remembrance of two things, of which either seemed enough for his preference—first, that he had bought the jewels of Reuben in the beginning, and next, the Reuben had never since ceased to speak of them in Tetuan as priceless beyond the gems of Ethiopia and the gold of Ophir.

But when Israel came to him now with the casket that he might buy, he eyed both with looks of indifference, though it was more dear to his covetous and revengeful heart that Israel should humble himself in his need, and bring these jewels, than almost any other satisfaction that could come to it.

“And what is this that you bring me?” said Reuben languidly.

“A case of jewels,” said Israel, with a downward look.

“Jewels? umph! what jewels?”

“My poor wife's. You know them, Reuben See!”

Israel opened the casket.

“Ah, your wife's. Umph! yes, I suppose I must have seen them somewhere.”

“You have seen them here, Reuben.”

“Here?—do you say here?”

“Reuben, you sold them to me eighteen years ago.”

“Sold them to you? Never. I don't remember it. Surely you must be mistaken. I can never have dealt in things like these.”

Reuben had taken the casket in his hands, and was pursing up his lips in expressions of contempt.

Israel watched him closely. “Give them back to me,” he said; “I can go elsewhere. I have no time for wrangling.”

Reuben's lip straightened instantly. “Wrangling? Who is wrangling, brother? You are too impatient, Sidi.”

“I am in haste,” said Israel.

“Ah!”

There was an ominous silence, and then in a cold voice Reuben said, “The things are well enough in their way. What do you wish me to do with them?”

“To buy them,” said Israel.

“Buy them?”

“Yes.”

“But I don't want them.”

“Are they worth your money?—you don't want that either.”

“Umph!”

A gleam of mockery passed over Reuben's face, and he proceeded to examine the

casket. One by one he trifled with the gems—the rich onyx, the sapphire, the crystal, the coral, the pearl, the ruby, and the topaz, and first he pushed them from him, and then he drew them back again. And seeing them thus cheapened in Reuben's hairy fingers, the precious jewels which had clasped his Ruth's soft wrist and her white neck, Israel could scarcely hold back his hand from snatching them away. But how can he that is poor answer him that is rich? So Israel put his twitching hands behind him, remembering Naomi and the poor people of Absalam, and when at length Reuben tendered him for the casket one half what he had paid for it, he took the money in silence and went his way.

“Five hundred dollars—I can give no more,” Reuben had said.

“Do you say five hundred—five?”

“Five—take it or leave it.”

It was market morning, and the market-square as Israel passed through was a busy and noisy place. The grocers squatted within their narrow wooden boxes turned on their sides, one half of the lid propped up as a shelter from the sun, the other half hung down as a counter, whereon lay raisins and figs, and melons and dates. On the unpaved ground the bakers crouched in irregular lines. They were women enveloped in monstrous straw hats, with big round cakes of bread exposed for sale on rush mats at their feet. Under arcades of dried leaves—made, like desert graves, of upright poles and dry branches thrown across—the butchers lay at their ease, flicking the flies from their discoloured meat. “Buy! buy! buy!” they all shouted together. A dense throng of the poor passed between them in torn jellabs and soiled turbans, and haggled and bought. Asses and mules crushed through amid shouts of “Arrah!” “Arrah!” and “Balak!” “Ba-lak!” It was a lively scene, with more than enough of bustle and swearing and vociferation.

There was more than enough of lying and cheating also, both practised with subtle and half-conscious humour. Inside a booth for the sale of sugar in loaf and sack a

man sat fingering a rosary and mumbling prayers for penance. “God forgive me,” he muttered, “God forgive me, God forgive me,” and at every repetition he passed a bead. A customer approached, touched a sugar loaf and asked, “How much?” The merchant continued his prayers and did his business at a breath. “(God forgive me) How much? (God forgive me) Four pesetas (God forgive me),” and round went the restless rosary. “Too much,” said the buyer; “I'll give three.” The merchant went on with his prayers, and answered, “(God forgive me) Couldn't take it for as much as you might put in your tooth (God forgive me); gave four myself (God forgive me).” “Then I'll leave it, old sweet-tooth,” said the buyer, as he moved away. “Here! take it for nothing (God forgive me),” cried the merchant after the retreating figure. “(God forgive me) I'm giving it away (God forgive me); I'll starve, but no matter (God forgive me), you are my brother (God forgive me, God forgive me, God forgive me).”

Israel bought the bread and the meat, the raisins and the figs which the prisoners needed—enough for the present and for many days to come. Then he hired six mules with burdas to bear the food to Shawan, and a man two days to lead them. Also he hired mules for himself and Ali, for he knew full well that, unless with his own eyes he saw the followers of Absalam receive what he had bought, no chance was there, in these days of famine, that it would ever reach them. And, all being ready for his short journey, he set out in the middle of the day, when the sun was highest, hoping that the town would then be at rest, and thinking to escape observation.

His expectation was so far justified that the market-place, when he came to it again, with his little caravan going before him, was silent and deserted. But, coming into the walled lane to the Bab Toot, the gate at which the Shawan road enters, he encountered a great throng and a strange procession. It was a procession of penance and petition, asking God to wipe out the plague of locusts that was destroying the land and eating up the bread of its children. A venerable Jew, with long white beard,

walked side by side with a Moor of great stature, enshrouded in the folds of his snow-white haik. These were the chief Rabbi of the Jews and the Imam of the Muslims, and behind them other Jews and Moors walked abreast in the burning sun. All were barefooted, and such as were Berbers were bareheaded also.

“In the name of Allah, the Compassionate and Merciful!” the Imam cried, and the Muslims echoed him.

“By the God of Jacob!” the Rabbi prayed, and the Jews repeated the words after him.

“Spare us! Spare the land!” they all cried together. “Send rain to destroy the eggs of the locust!” cried the Rabbi. “Else will they rise on the ground in the sunshine like rice on the granary floor; and neither fire nor river nor the army of the Sultan will stop them; and we ourselves will die, and our children with us!”

And the Jews cried, “God of Jacob, be our refuge.”

And the Muslims shouted, “Allah, save us!”

It was a strange sight to look upon in that land of intolerance—the haughty Moor and the despised Jew, with all petty hatreds sunk out of sight and forgotten in the grip of the death that threatened both alike, walking and praying in the public streets together.

Israel drew close to the wall and passed by unobserved. And being come into the open road outside the town, he began to take a view of the motives that had brought him away from his home again. Then he saw that, if he was not a hypocrite like Reuben, no credit could he give himself for what he was doing, and if he was poor who had before been rich, no merit could he make of his poverty.

“Naomi, Naomi, all for her, all for her,” he thought. Naomi was his hope and his salvation. His faith in God was his love of the child. He was only bribing God to give her grace. And well he knew it, while he journeyed towards the prison behind his six mules laden with bread for them that lay there, that, much as he owed them,

being a cause of their miseries, the mercy he was about to show them was but as mercy shown to himself. So the nearer he came to it the lower his head sank into his breast, as if the sun itself that beat down so fiercely upon his head had eyes to peer into his deceiving soul.

The town of Shawan lies sixty miles south of Tetuan in the northern half of the territory of the tribe of Akhmas, and the sun was two hours set when Israel entered its beautiful valley between the two arms of the mountain called Jebel Sheshawan. Going through the orchards and vineyards that were round it, he was recognised by certain Jews; tanners and pannier-makers, who in the days of his harder rule had fled from Tetuan and his heavy taxings.

“It's Israel ben Oliel,” whispered one.

“God of Jacob, save us!” whispered another.

“He has followed us for the arrears of taxes.”

“We must fly.”

“Let us go home first.”

“No time for that.”

“There is Rachel—”

“She's a woman.”

“But I must warn my son—he has children.”

“Then you are lost. Come on.”

Before he reached the rude old masonry that had once been the fortress and was now the prison, the poor followers of Absalam, who lay within, had heard that he was coming, and, in their despair and the wild disorder of all their senses, they looked for nothing but death from his visit, as if they were to be cut to pieces instantly. Men and women and young children, gaunt with hunger and begrimed with dirt, some with faces that were hard and stony, some with faces that were weak and simple,

some with eyes that were red as blood, all weary with waiting and wasted with long pain, ran hither and thither in the gloom of the foul place where they were immured together. Shedding tears, beating their flesh, and crying out with woeful clamour, these unhappy creatures of God, who had been great of soul when they sang their death-song with the precipice behind them and the soldiers in front, now quaked for the miserable lives which they preserved in hunger and cherished in bitterness.

By help of the seal of his master, which he always carried, Israel found his way into the courtyard of the prison. The prisoners, who had been gathered there for his inspection, heard his footsteps, and by one impulse, as if an angel from heaven had summoned them, they fell to their knees about the door whereby he must enter, men behind and women in front, and mothers holding out their babes before their breasts so that he might see them first, and have mercy upon them if he had a heart made for pity.

Then the door of the place was thrown open, and Israel entered. His head was bowed down, and his feet were bare. The people drew their breath in wonder.

“Arise,” he said; “I mean you no harm! See! Here is bread! Take it, and God bless you!”

So saying, he motioned with his trembling hand to where Ali and the muleteer brought in the burden of food behind him.

And when the poor souls could believe it at last, that he whom they had looked for as their judge had come as their saviour, their hearts surged within them. Their hunger left them, and only the children could eat. For a moment they stood in silence about Israel, and their tears stained their wasted faces. And Israel, in their midst, tasted a new joy in his new poverty such as his riches had never brought him—no, not once in all the days of his old prosperity.

At length an old man—he was a Muslim—looked steadily into Israel's face and said, “May the God of Jacob bless thee also, brother!”

After that they all recovered their voices and began to thank him out of their blind gratitude, falling to their knees at his feet as before, yet with hearts so different.

“May the Father of the fatherless requite thee!”

“May the child of thy wife be blessed!”

“Stop,” he cried; “stop! you don't know what you are saying.”

He turned away from them with a look of pain, as if their words had stung him. They followed him and touched his kaftan with their lips; they pushed their children under his hands for his blessing.

“No, no,” he cried; “no, no, no!”

Then he passed out of the place with rapid steps and fled from the town like one who was ashamed.

CHAPTER XV

THE MEETING ON THE SOK

Although Israel did not know it, and in the hunger of his heart he would have given all the world to learn it, yet if any man could have peered into the dark chamber where the spirit of Naomi had dwelt seventeen years in silence, he would have seen that, dear as the child was to the father, still dearer and more needful was the father to the child. Since her mother left her he had been eyes of her eyes and ears of her ears, touching her hand for assent, patting her head for approval, and guiding her fingers to teach them signs.

Thus Israel was more to Naomi than any father before to any daughter, more to her than mother or sister or brother or kindred; for he was her sole gateway to the world she lived in, the one alley whereby her spirit gazed upon it, the key that opened the closed doors of her soul; and without him neither could the world come in to her, nor could she go out to the world. Soft and beautiful was the commerce between

them, mute on one side of all language save tears and kisses, like the commerce of a mother with her first-born child, as holy in love, as sweet in mystery as pure from taint, and as deep in tenderness. While her father was with her, then only did Naomi seem to live, and her happy heart to be full of wonder at the strange new things that flowed in upon it. And when he was gone from her, she was merely a spirit barred and shut within her body's close abode, waiting to be born anew.

When Israel made ready to go to Shawan, Naomi clung to him to hinder him, as if remembering his long absence when he went to Fez, and connecting it with the illness that came to her in his absence; or as seeming to see, with those eyes that were blind to the ways of the world, what was to befall him before he returned. He put her from him with many tender words, and smoothed her hair and kissed her forehead, as though to chide her while he blessed her for so much love. But her dread increased, and she held to him like a child to its mother's robe. And at last, when he unloosed her hands and pushed them away as if in anger, and after that laughed lightly as if to tell her that he knew her meaning yet had no fear, her trouble rose to a storm and she fell to a fit of weeping.

“Tut! tut! what is this?” he said. “I will be back to-morrow. Do you hear, my child?—tomorrow! At sunset to-morrow.”

When he was gone, the terror that had so suddenly possessed her seemed to increase. Her face was red, her mouth was dry, her eyelids quivered, and her hands were restless. If she sat she rose quickly; if she stood she walked again more fast. Sometimes she listened with head aside, sometimes moaned, sometimes wept outright, and sometimes she muttered to herself in noises such as none had heard from her lips before.

The bondwomen could find no-way to comfort her. Indeed, the trouble of her heart took hold of them. When she plucked Fatimah by the gown, and with her blind eyes, that were also wet, seemed to look sadly into the black woman's face, as if asking for

her father, like a dog for its master that is dead, Fatimah shed tears as well, partly in pity of her fears, and partly in terror of the unknown troubles still to come which God Himself might have revealed to her.

“Alas! little dumb soul, what is to happen now?” cried Fatimah.

“Alack! girl,” said Habeebah, “the maid is sickening again.”

And this was all that the good souls could make of her restless agitation. She slept that night from sheer exhaustion, a deep lethargic slumber, apparently broken once or twice by troubled dreams. When she awoke in the morning at the first sound of the voice of the mooddin, the evil dreams seemed to be with her still. She appeared to be moving along in them like one spell-bound by a great dread that she could not utter, as if she were living through a nightmare of the day. Then long hour followed long hour, but the inquietude of her mood did not abate. Her bosom heaved, her throat throbbed, her excitement became hysterical. Sometimes she broke into wild, inarticulate shouts, and sometimes the black women could have believed, in spite of knowledge and reason, that she was muttering and speaking words, though with a wild disorder of utterance.

At last the day waned and the sun went down. Naomi seemed to know when this occurred, for she could scent the cool air. Then, with a fresh intentness, she listened to the footsteps outside, and, having listened, her trouble increased. What did Naomi hear? The black women could hear nothing save the common sounds of the streets—the shouts of children at play, the calls of women, the cries of the mule-drivers, and now and again the piercing shrieks of a black story-teller from the town of the Moors—only this varied flow of voices, and under it the indistinct murmur of multitudinous life coming and going on every side.

Did other sounds come to Naomi's ears? Was her spiritual power, which was unclogged by any grosser sense than that of hearing, conscious of some terrible undertone of impending trouble? Or was her disquietude no more than recollection

of her father's promise to be back at sunset, and mere anxiety for his return? Fatimah and Habeebah knew nothing and saw nothing. All that they could do was to wring their hands.

Meantime, Naomi's agitation became yet more restless, and nothing would serve her at last but that she should go out into the streets. And the black women, seeing her so steadfastly minded, and being affected by her fears, made her ready, and themselves as well, and then all three went out together.

“Where are we going?” said Habeebah.

“Nay, how should I know?” said Fatimah.

“We are fools,” said Habeebah.

It was now an hour after sunset, the light was fading, and the traffic was sinking down. Only at the gate of the Mellah, which, contrary to custom, had not yet been closed, was the throng still dense. A group of Jews stood under it in earnest and passionate talk. There was a strange and bodeful silence on every side. The coffee-house of the Moors beyond the gate was already lit up, and the door was open, but the floor was empty. No snake-charmers, no jugglers, no story-tellers, with their circles of squatting spectators, were to be seen or heard. These professors of science and magic and jocularity had never before been absent. Even the blind beggars, crouching under the town walls, were silent. But out of the mosques there came a deep low chant as of many voices, from great numbers gathered within.

“The girl was right,” said Fatimah; “something has happened.”

“What is it?” said Habeebah.

“Nay, how should I know that either?” said Fatimah.

“I tell you we are a pair of fools,” said Habeebah.

Meantime Naomi held their hands, and they must needs follow where she led. Her body was between them; they were borne along by her feeble frame as by an

irresistible force. And pitiful it would have seemed, and perhaps foolish also, if any human eye had seen them then, these helpless children of God, going whither they knew not and wherefore they knew not, save that a fear that was like to madness drew them on.

“Listen! I hear something,” said Fatimah.

“Where?” said Habeebah.

“The way we are going,” said Fatimah.

On and on Naomi passed from street to street. They were the same streets whereby she had returned to her father's house on the day that her goat was slain. Never since then had she trodden them, but she neither altered not turned aside to the right or the left, but made straight forward, until she came to the Sok el Foki, and to the place where the goat had fallen before the foaming jaws of the dog from the Mukabar. Then she could go no farther.

“Holy saints, what is this?” cried Habeebah.

“Didn't I tell you—the girl heard something?” said Fatimah.

“God's face shine on us,” said Habeebah. “What is all this crowd?”

An immense throng covered the upper half of the market-square, and overflowed into the streets and arched alleys leading to the Kasbah. It was not a close and dense crowd of white-hooded forms such as gathered on that spot on market morning—a seething, steaming, moving mass of haiks and jellabs and Maghribi blankets, with here and there a bare shaven head and plaited crown-lock—but a great crowd of dark figures in black gowns and skull-caps. The assemblage was of Jews only—Jews of every age and class and condition, from the comely young Jewish butcher in his blood-stained rags to the toothless old Jewish banker with gold braid on his new kaftan.

They were gathered together to consider the posture of affairs in regard to the plague

of locusts. Hence the Moorish officials had suffered them to remain outside the walls of their Mellah after sunset. Some of the Moors themselves stood aside and watched, but at a distance, leaving a vacant space to denote the distinction between them. The scribes sat in their open booths, pretending to read their Koran or to write with their reed pens; the gunsmiths stood at their shop-doors; and the country Berbers, crowded out of their usual camping ground on the Sok, squatted on the vacant spots adjacent. All looked on eagerly, but apparently impassively, at the vast company of Jews.

And so great was the concourse of these people, and so wild their commotion, that they were like nothing else but a sea-broken by tempestuous winds. The market-place rang as a vault with the sounds of their voices, their harsh cries, their protests, their pleadings, their entreaties, and all the fury of their brazen throats. And out of their loud uproar one name above all other names rose in the air on every side. It was the name of Israel ben Oliel. Against him they were breathing out threats, foretelling imminent dangers from the hand of man, and predicting fresh judgments from God. There was no evil which had befallen him early or late but they were remembering it, and reckoning it up and rejoicing in it. And there was no evil which had befallen themselves but they were laying it to his charge.

Yesterday, when they passed through the town in their procession of penance, following their Grand Rabbi as he walked abreast of the Imam, that they might call on God to destroy the eggs of the locust, they had expected the heavens to open over their heads, and to feel the rain fall instantly. The heavens had not opened, the rain had not fallen, the thick hot cake as of baked air had continued to hang and to palpitate in the sky, and the fierce sun had beaten down as before on the parched and scorching earth. Seeing this, as their petitions ended, while the Muslims went back to their houses, disappointed but resigned, and muttering to themselves, “It is written,” they had returned to their synagogues, convinced that the plague was a judgment, and resolved, like the sailors of the ship going down to Tarshish, to cast

lots and to know for whose cause the evil was upon them.

They were more than a hundred and twenty families, and had thought they were therefore entitled to elect a Synhedrin. This was in defiance of ceremonial law, for they knew full well that the formation of a Synhedrin and the right to try a capital charge had long been forbidden. But they were face to face with death, and hence the anachronism had been adopted, and they had fallen back on the custom of their fathers. So three-and-twenty judges they had appointed, without usurers, or slave-dealers, or gamblers, or aged men or childless ones.

The judges had sat in session the same night, and their judgment had been unanimous. The lot of Jonah had fallen on Israel. He had sold himself to their masters and enemies, the Moors, against the hope and interest of his own people; he had driven some of the sons of his race and nation into exile in distant cities; he had brought others to the Kasbah, and yet others to death: he was a man at open enmity with God, and God had given him, as a mark of His displeasure, a child who was cursed with devils, a daughter who had been born blind and dumb and deaf, and was still without sight and speech.

Could the hand of God's anger be more plain if it were printed in fire upon the sky? Israel was the evil one for whose sin they suffered this devastating plague. The Lord was rebuking them for sparing him, even as He had rebuked Saul for sparing the king and cattle of the Amalekites. Seventeen years and more he had been among them without being of them, never entering a synagogue, never observing a fast, never joining in a feast. Not until their judgment went out against him would God's anger be appeased. Let them cut him off from the children of his race, and the blessed rain would fall from heaven, and the thirsty earth would drink it, and the eggs of the locust would be destroyed. But let them put off any longer their rightful task and duty before God and before the people, and their evil time would soon come. Within eight-and-twenty days the eggs would be hatched, and within

eight-and-forty other days the young locust would have wings. Before the end of those seventy-and-six days the harvest of wheat and barley would be yellow to the scythe and ripe for the granary, but the locust would cover the face of the earth, and there would be no grain to gather. The scythe would be idle, the granaries would be empty, the tillers of the ground would come hungry into the markets, and they themselves that were town-dwellers and tradesmen would be perishing for bread, both they and their children with them.

Thus in Israel's absence, while he was away at Shawan, the three-and-twenty judges of the new Synhedrin of Tetuan had—contrary to Jewish custom—tried and convicted him. God would not let them perish for this man's life, and neither would He charge them with his blood.

Nevertheless, judges though they were, they could not kill him. They could only appeal against him to the Kaid. And what could they say? That the Lord had sent this plague of locusts in punishment of Israel's sin? Ben Aboo would laugh in their faces and answer them, “It is written.” That to appease God's wrath it was expedient that this Jew should die? Convince the Muslim that a Jew had brought this desolation upon the land of the Shereefs, and he would arise, and his soldiers with him, and the whole community of the Jewish people would be destroyed.

The judges had laid their heads together. It was idle to appeal to Ben Aboo against Israel on any ground of belief. Nay, it was more than idle, for it was dangerous. There was nothing in common between his faith and their own. His God was not their God, save in name only. The one was Allah, great, stern, relentless, inexorable, not to be moved striding on to an inevitable end, heedless of man and trampling upon him—though sometimes mocked with the names of the Compassionate and the Merciful. But the other was Jehovah, the father of His people Israel, caring for them, upholding them, guiding the world for them, conquering for them; but visiting His anger upon them when they fell away from Him.

The three-and-twenty judges in session in the synagogue up the narrow lane of the Sok el Foki had sat far into the night, with the light of the oil-lamps gleaming on their perplexed and ashen faces. Some other ground of appeal against Israel had to be found, and they could not find it. At length they had remembered that, by ancient law and custom the trial of an Israelite, for life or death, must end an hour after sunset. Also they had been reminded that the day that heard the evidence in a capital case must not be the same whereon the verdict was pronounced. So they had broken up and returned home. And, going out at the gate, they had told the crowds that waited there that judgment had fallen upon Israel ben Oliel, but that his doom could not be made known until sunset on the following day.

That time was now come. In eagerness and impatience, in hot blood and anger, the people had gathered in the Sok three hours after midday. The Judges had reassembled in the synagogue in the early morning. They had not broken bread since yesterday, for the day that condemned a son of Israel to death must be a fast-day to his judges.

As the afternoon wore on, the doors of the synagogue were thrown open. The sentence was not ready yet, but the judges in council were near to their decision. At the open door the reader of the synagogue had stationed himself, holding a flag in his hand. Under the gate of the Mellah a second messenger was standing, so placed that he could see the movement of the flag. If the flag fell, the sentence would be “death,” and the man under the gate would carry the tidings to the people gathered in the market-place. Then the three-and-twenty judges would come in procession and tell what steps had been taken that the doom pronounced might be carried into effect.

Amid all their loud uproar, and notwithstanding the wild anger which seemed to consume them, the people turned at intervals of a few minutes to glance back towards the Mellah gate.

If the angels were looking down, surely it was a pitiful sight—these children of Zion in a strange land, where they were held as dogs and vermin and human scavengers to the Muslim; thinking and speaking and acting as their fathers had done any time for five thousand years before; again judging it expedient that one man should die rather than the whole people be brought to destruction; again probing their crafty heads, if not their hearts, for an artifice whereby their scapegoat might be killed by the hand of their enemy; children indeed, for all that some of their heads were bald, and some of their beards were grizzled, and some of their faces were wrinkled and hard and fierce; little children of God writhing in the grip of their great trouble.

Such was the scene to which Naomi had come, and such had been the doings of the town since the hour when her father left her. What hand had led her? What power had taught her? Was it merely that her far-reaching ears had heard the tumult? Had some unknown sense, groping in darkness, filled her with a vague terror, too indefinite to be called a thought, of great and impending evil? Or was it some other influence, some higher leading? Was it that the Lord was in His heaven that night as always, and that when the two black bondwomen in their helpless fear were following the blind maiden through the darkening streets she in her turn was following God?

When Fatimah and Habeebah saw what it was to which Naomi had led them, though they were sorely concerned at it, yet they were relieved as well, and put by the worst of the fears with which her strange behaviour had infected them. And remembering that she was the daughter of Israel, and they were his servants, and neither thinking themselves safe from danger if they stayed any longer where his name was bandied about as a reproach, nor fully knowing how many of the curses that were heaped upon him found a way to Naomi's mind, they were for turning again and going back to the house.

“Come,” said Habeebah; “let us go—we are not safe.”

“Yes,” said Fatimah; “let us take the poor child back.”

“Come along, then,” said Habeebah, and she laid hold of Naomi's hand.

“Naomi, Naomi,” whispered Fatimah in the girl's ear, “we are going home. Come, dearest, come.”

But Naomi was not to be moved. No gentle voice availed to stir her. She stood where she had placed herself on the outskirts of the crowd, motionless save for her heaving bosom and trembling limbs, and silent save for her loud breathing and the low muttering of her pale lips, yet listening eagerly with her neck outstretched.

And if, as she listened, any human eye could have looked in on her dumb and imprisoned soul, the tumult it would have seen must have been terrible. For, though no one knew it as a certainty, yet in her darkness and muteness since the coming of her gift of hearing she had been learning speech and the different voices of men. All that was spoken in that crowd she understood, and never a word escaped her, and what others saw she felt, only nearer and more terrible, because wrapped in the darkness outside her eyes that were blind.

First there came a lull in the general clamour, and then a coarse, jarring, stridulous voice rose in the air. Naomi knew whose voice it was—it was the voice of old Abraham Pigman, the usurer.

“Brothers of Tetuan,” the old man cried, “what are we waiting for? For the verdict of the judges? Who wants their verdict? There is only one thing to do. Let us ask the Kaid to remove this man. The Kaid is a humane master. If he has sometimes worked wrong by us, he has been driven to do that which in his soul he abhors. Let us go to him and say: 'Lord Basha, through five-and-twenty years this man of our people has stood over us to oppress us, and your servants have suffered and been silent. In that time we have seen the seed of Israel hunted from the houses of their fathers where they have lived since their birth. We have seen them buffeted and smitten, without a resting-place for the soles of their feet, and perishing in hunger and thirst and

nakedness and the want of all things. Is this to your honour, or your glory, or your profit?'"

The people broke into loud cries of approval, and when they were once more silent, the thick voice went on: "And not the seed of Israel only, but the sons of Islam also, has this man plunged in the depths of misery. Under a Sultan who desires liberty and a Kaid who loves justice, in a land that breathes freedom and a city that is favoured of God, our brethren the Muslimeen sink with us in deep mire where there is no standing. Every day brings to both its burden of fresh sorrow. At this moment a plague is upon us. The country is bare; the town is overflowing; every man stumbles over his fellow our lives hang in doubt; in the morning we say 'Would it were evening'; in the evening we say, 'Would it were morning'; stretch out your hand and help us!"

Again the crowd burst into shouts of assent, and the stridulous voice continued: "Let us say to him 'Lord Basha, there is no way of help but one. Pluck down this man that is set over us. He belongs to our own race and nation; but give us a master of any other race and nation; any Moor, any Arab, any Berber, any negro; only take back this man of our own people, and your servants will bless you.'"

The old man's voice was drowned in great shouts of "Ben Aboo!" "To Ben Aboo!" "Why wait for the judges?" "To the Kasbah!" "The Kasbah!"

But a second voice came piercing through the boom and clash of those waves of sound, and it was thin and shrill as the cry of a pea-hen. Naomi knew this voice also—it was the voice of Judah ben Lolo, the elder of the synagogue, who would have been sitting among the three-and-twenty-judges but that he was a usurer also.

"Why go to the Kaid?" said the voice like a peahen. "Does the Basha love this Israel ben Oliel? Has he of late given many signs of such affection? Bethink you, brothers, and act wisely! Would not Ben Aboo be glad to have done with this servant who has been so long his master? Then why trouble him with your grievance? Act for

yourselves, and the Kaid will thank you! And well may this Israel ben Oliel praise the Lord and worship Him, that He has not put it into the hearts of His people to play the game of breaker of tyrants by the spilling of blood, as the races around them, the Arabs and the Berbers, who are of a temper more warm by nature, must long ago have done, and that not unjustly either, or altogether to the displeasure of a Kaid who is good and humane and merciful, and has never loved that his poor people should be oppressed."

At this word, though it made pretence to commend the temperance of the crowd, the fury broke out more loudly than before. "Away with the man!" "Away with him!" rang out on every side in countless voices, husky and clear, gruff and sharp, piping and deep. Not a voice of them all called for mercy or for patience.

While the anger of the people surged and broke in the air, a third voice came through the tumult, and Naomi knew it, for it was the harsh voice of Reuben Maliki, the silversmith and keeper of the poor-box.

"And does God," said Reuben, "any more than Ben Aboo—blessings on his life!—love that His people should be oppressed? How has He dealt with this Israel ben Oliel? Does He stand steadfastly beside him, or has His hand gone out against him? Since the day he came here, five-and-twenty years ago, has God saved him or smitten him? Remember Ruth, his wife, how she died young! Remember her father, our old Grand Rabbi, David ben Ohana, how the hand of the Lord fell upon him on the night of the day whereon his daughter was married! Remember this girl Naomi, this offspring of sin, this accursed and afflicted one, still blind and speechless!"

Then the voices of the crowd came to Naomi's ears like the neigh of a breathless horse. Fatimah had laid hold of her gown and was whispering. "Come! Let us away!" But Naomi only clutched her hand and trembled.

The harsh voice of Reuben Maliki rose in the air again. "Do you say that the Lord gave him riches? Behold him!—he swallowed them down, but has he not vomited

them up? Examine him!—that which he took by extortions has he not been made to restore? Does God's anger smoke against him? Answer me, yes or no!”

Like a bolt out of the sky there came a great shout of “Yes!” And instantly afterwards, from another direction, there came a fourth voice, a peevish, tremulous voice, the voice of an old woman. Naomi knew it—it was the voice of Rebecca Bensabott, ninety-and-odd years of age, and still deaf as a stone.

“Tut! What is all this talking about?” she snapped and grunted. “Reuben Maliki, save your wind for your widows—you don't give them too much of it. And, Abraham Pigman, go home to your money-bags. I am an old fool, am I? Well, I've the more right to speak plain. What are we waiting here for? The judges? Pooh! The sentence? Fiddle-faddle! It is Israel ben Oliel, isn't it? Then stone him! What are you afraid of? The Kaid? He'll laugh in your faces. A blood-feud? Who is to wage it? A ransom? Who is to ask for it? Only this mute, this Naomi, and you'll have to work her a miracle and find her a tongue first. Out on you! Men? Pshaw! You are children!”

The people laughed—it was the hard, grating, hollow laugh that sets the teeth on edge behind the lips that utter it. Instantly the voices of the crowd broke up into a discordant clangour, like to the counter-currents of an angry sea. “She's right,” said a shrill voice. “He deserves it,” snuffled a nasal one. “At least let us drive him out of the town,” said a third gruff voice. “To his house!” cried a fourth voice, that pealed over all. “To his house!” came then from countless hungry throats.

“Come, let us go,” whispered Fatimah to Naomi, and again she laid hold of her arm to force her away. But Naomi shook off her hand, and muttered strange sounds to herself.

“To his house! Sack it! Drive the tyrant out!” the people howled in a hundred rasping voices; but, before any one had stirred, a man riding a mule had forced his way into the middle of the crowd.

It was the messenger from under the Mellah gate. In their new frenzy the people had forgotten him. He had come to make known the decision of the Synhedrin. The flag had fallen; the sentence was death.

Hearing this doom, the people heard no more, and neither did they wait for the procession of the judges, that they might learn of the means whereby they, who were not masters in their own house, might carry the sentence into effect. The procession was even then forming. It was coming out of the synagogue; it was passing under the gate of the Mellah; it was approaching the Sok el Foki. The Rabbis walked in front of it. At its tail came four Moors with shamefaced looks. They were the soldiers and muleteers whom Israel had hired when he set out on his pilgrimage to that enemy of all Kaids and Bashas, Mohammed of Mequinez. By-and-by they were to betray him to Ben Aboo.

But no one saw either Rabbis or Moors. The people were twisting and turning like worms on an upturned turf. “Why sack his house?” cried some. “Why drive him out?” cried others. “A poor revenge!” “Kill him!” “Kill him!”

At the sound of that word, never before spoken, though every ear had waited for it, the shouts of the crowd rose to madness. But suddenly in the midst of the wild vociferations there was a shrill cry of “He is there!” and then there was a great silence.

It was Israel himself. He was coming afoot down the lane under the town walls from the gate called the Bab Toot, where the road comes in from Shawan. At fifty paces behind him Ali, the black boy, was riding one mule and leading another.

He was returning from the prison, and thinking how the poor followers of Absalam, after he had fed them of his poverty, had blest him out of their dry throats, saying, “May the God of Jacob bless you also, brother!” and “May the child of your wife be blessed!” Ah! those blessings, he could hear them still! They followed him as he walked. He did not fly from them any longer, for they sang in his ears and were like

music in his melted soul. Once before he had heard such music. It was in England. The organ swelled and the voices rose, and he was a lonely boy, for his mother lay in her grave at his feet. His mother! How strangely his heart was softened towards himself and-all the world And Ruth! He could think of nothing without tenderness. And Naomi! Ah! the sun was nigh two hours down, and Naomi would be waiting for him at home, for she was as one that had no life without his presence. What would befall if he were taken from her? That thought was like the sweeping of a dead hand across his face. So his body stooped as he walked with his staff, and his head was held down, and his step was heavy.

Thus the old lion came on to the market-place, where the people were gathered together as wolves to devour him. On he came, seeing nothing and hearing nothing and fearing nothing, and in the silence of the first surprise at sight of him his footsteps were heard on the stones.

Naomi heard them.

Then it seemed to Naomi's ears that a voice fell, as it were, out of the air, crying, “God has given him into our hands!” After that all sounds seemed to Naomi to fade far-away, and to come to her muffled and stifled by the distance.

But with a loud shout, as if it had been a shout out of one great throat, the crowd encompassed Israel crying, “Kill him!” Israel stopped, and lifted his heavy face upon the people; but neither did he cry out nor make any struggle for his life. He stood erect and silent in their midst, and massive and square. His brave bearing did not break their fury. They fell upon him, a hundred hands together. One struck at his face, another tore at his long grey hair, and a third thrust him down on to his knees.

No one had yet observed on the outer rim of the crowd the pale slight girl that stood there—blind, dumb, powerless, frail, and so softly beautiful—a waif on the margin of a tempestuous sea. Through the thick barriers of Naomi's senses everything was coming to her ugly and terrible. Her father was there! They were tearing him to

pieces!

Suddenly she was gone from the side of the two black women. Like a flash of light she had passed through the bellowing throng. She had thrust herself between the people and her father, who was on the ground: she was standing over him with both arms upraised, and at that instant God loosed her tongue, for she was crying, “Mercy! Mercy!”

Then the crowd fell back in great fear. The dumb had spoken. No man dared to touch Israel any more. The hands that had been lifted against him dropped back useless, and a wide circle formed around him. In the midst of it stood Naomi. Her blind face quivered; she seemed to glow like a spirit. And like a spirit she had driven back the people from their deed of blood as with the voice of God—she, the blind, the frail, the helpless.

Israel rose to his feet, for no man touched him again, and the procession of judges, which had now come up, was silent. And, seeing how it was that in the hour of his great need the gift of speech had come upon Naomi, his heart rose big within him, and he tried to triumph over his enemies and say, “You thought God's arm was against me, but behold how God has saved me out of your hands.”

But he could not speak. The dumbness that had fallen from his daughter seemed to have dropped upon him.

At that moment Naomi turned to him and said, “Father!”

Then the cup of Israel's heart was full. His throat choked him. So he took her by the hand in silence and down a long alley of the people they passed through the Mellah gate and went home to their house. Her eyes were to the earth, and she wept as she walked; but his face was lifted up, and his tears and his blood ran down his cheeks together.

CHAPTER XVI

NAOMI'S BLINDNESS

Although Naomi, in her darkness and muteness since the coming of her gift of hearing, had learned to know and understand the different tongues of men, yet now that she tried to call forth words for herself, and to put out her own voice in the use of them, she was no more than a child untaught in the ways of speech. She tripped and stammered and broke down, and had to learn to speak as any helpless little one must do, only quicker, because her need was greater, and better, because she was a girl and not a babe. And, perceiving her own awkwardness, and thinking shame of it, and being abashed by the patient waiting of her father when she halted in her talk with him, and still more humbled by Ali's impetuous help when she miscalled her syllables, she fell back again on silence.

Hardly could she be got to speak at all. For some days after the night when her emancipated tongue had rescued Israel from his enemies on the Sok, she seemed to say nothing beyond “Yes” and “No,” notwithstanding Ali's eager questions, and Fatimah's tearful blessings, and Habeebah's breathless invocations, and also notwithstanding the hunger and thirst of the heart of her father, who, remembering with many throbs of joy the voice that he heard with his dreaming ears when he slept on the straw bed of the poor fondak at Wazzan, would have given worlds of gold, if he had possessed them still, to hear it constantly with his waking ears.

“Come, come, little one; come, come, speak to us, only speak,” Israel would say.

His appeals were useless. Naomi would smile and hang her sunny head, and lift her father's hairy hand to her cheek, and say nothing.

But just about a week later a beautiful thing occurred. Israel was returning to the Mellah after one of his secret excursions in the poor quarter of the Bab Ramooz, where he had spent the remainder of the money which old Reuben had paid him for the casket of his wife's jewels. The night was warm, the moon shone with steady lustre, and the stars were almost obliterated as separate lights by a luminous silvery

haze. It was late, very late, and far and near the town was still.

With his innocent disguise, his Moorish jellab, hung over his arm, Israel had passed the Mellah gate, being the only Jew who was allowed to cross it after sunset. He was feeling happy as he walked home through the sleeping streets, with his black shadow going in front. The magic of the summer night possessed him, and his soul was full of joy.

All his misgivings had fallen away. The coming to Naomi of the gift of speech had seemed to banish from his mind the dark spirit of the past. He had no heart for reprisals upon the enemies who had sought to kill him. Without that blind effort on their part, perhaps his great blessing had not come to pass. Man's extremity had indeed been God's opportunity and Ruth's vision was all but realised.

Ah, Ruth! Ruth! It had escaped Israel's notice until then that he had been thinking of his dead wife the whole night through. When he put it to himself so, he saw the reason of it at once. It was because there was a sort of secret charm in the certainty that where she was she must surely know that her dream was come true. There was also a kind of bitter pathos in the regret that she was only an angel now and not a woman; therefore she could not be with him to share his human joy.

As he walked through the Mellah, Israel thought of her again: how she had sung by the cradle to her babe that could not hear. Sung? Yes, he could almost fancy that he heard her singing yet. That voice so soft, so clear even in its whispers—there had been nothing like it in all the world. And her songs! Israel could also fancy that he heard her favourite one. It was a song of love, a pure but passionate melody wherein his own delicious happiness in the earlier days, before the death of the old Grand Rabbi, had seemed to speak and sing.

Israel began to laugh at himself as he walked. To think that the warmth and softness of the night, the sweet caressing night, the light and beauty of the moon and the stillness and slumber of the town, could betray an old fellow into forgotten dreams

like these!

He had taken out of his pocket the big key of the clamped door to his house, and was crossing the shadowed lane in front of it, when suddenly he thought he heard music coating in the air above him. He stopped and listened. Then he had no longer any doubt. It was music, it was singing; he knew the song, and he knew the voice. The song was the song he had been thinking of, and the voice was the voice of Ruth.

O where is Love? Where, where is Love? Is it of heavenly birth? Is it a thing of earth? Where, where is Love?

Israel felt himself rooted to the spot, and he stood some time without stirring. He looked around. All else was still. The night was as silent as death. He listened attentively. The singing seemed to come from his own house. Then he thought he must be dreaming still, and he took a step forward. But he stopped again and covered both his ears. That was of no avail, for when he removed his hands the voice was there as before.

A shiver ran over his limbs, yet he could not believe what his soul was saying. The key dropped out of his hand and rang on the stone. When the clangour was done the voice continued. Israel bethought him then that his household must be asleep, and it flashed on his mind that if this were a human voice the singing ought to awaken them. Just at that moment the night guard went by and saluted him. “God bless your morning!” the guard cried; and Israel answered, “Your morning be blessed!” That was all. The guard seemed to have heard nothing. His footsteps were dying away, but the voice went on.

Then a strange emotion filled Israel's heart, and he reflected that even if it were Ruth she could have come on no evil errand. That thought gave him courage, and he pushed forward to the door. As he fumbled the key into the lock he saw that a beggar was crouching by the doorway in the shadow cast by the moonlight. The man was asleep. Israel could hear his breathing, and smell his rags. Also he could hear

the thud of his own temples like the beating of a drum in his brain.

At length, as he was groping feebly through the crooked passage, a new thought came to him. “Naomi,” he told himself in a whisper of awe. It was she. By the full flood of the moonlight in the patio he saw her. She was on the balcony. Her beautiful white-robed figure was half sitting on the rail, half leaning against the pillar. The whole lustre of the moon was upon her. A look of joy beamed on her face. She was singing her mother's song with her mother's voice, and all the air, and the sky, and the quiet white town seemed to listen:—

Within my heart a voice Bids earth and heaven rejoice Sings—“Love, great Love O come and claim shine own, O come and take thy throne Reign ever and alone, Reign, glorious golden Love.”

Then Israel's fear was turned to rapture. Why had he not thought of this before? Yet how could he have thought of it? He had never once heard Naomi's voice save in the utterance of single words. But again, why had he not remembered that before the tongues of children can speak words of their own they sing the words of others?

The singing ended, and then Israel, struggling with his dry throat, stepped a pace forward—his foot grated on the pavement—and he called to the singer—

“Naomi!”

The girl bent forward, as if peering down into the darkness below, but Israel could see that her fixed eyes were blind.

“My father!” she whispered.

“Where did you learn it?” said Israel.

“Fatimah, she taught me,” Naomi answered; and then she added quickly, as if with great but childlike pride, saying what she did not mean, “Oh yes, it was I! Was I not beautiful?”

After that night Naomi's shyness of speech dropped away from her, and what was

left was only a sweet maidenly unconsciousness of all faults and failings, with a soft and playful lisp that ran in and out among the simple words that fell from her red lips like a young squirrel among the fallen leaves of autumn. It would be a long task to tell how her lisping tongue turned everything then to favour and to prettiness. On the coming of the gift of hearing, the world had first spoken to her; and now, on the coming of the gift of speech, she herself was first speaking to the world. What did she tell it at that first sweet greeting? She told it what she had been thinking of it in those mute days that were gone, when she had neither hearing nor speech, but was in the land of silence as well as in the land of night.

The fancies of the blind maid so long shut up within the beautiful casket of her body were strange and touching ones. Israel took delight in them at the beginning. He loved to probe the dark places of the mind they came from, thinking God Himself must surely have illumined it at some time with a light that no man knew, so startling were some of Naomi's replies, so tender and so beautiful.

One evening, not long after she had first spoken, he was sitting with her on the roof of their house as the sun was going down over the palpitating plains towards Arzila and Laraiche and the great sea beyond. Twilight was gathering in the Feddan under the Mosque, and the last light of day, which had parleyed longest with the snowy heights of the Reef Mountains, was glowing only on the sky above them.

“Sweetheart,” said Israel, “what is the sun?”

“The sun is a fire in the sky,” Naomi answered; “my Father lights it every morning.”

“Truly, little one, thy Father lights it,” said Israel; “thy Father which is in heaven.”

“Sweetheart,” he said again, “what is darkness?”

“Oh, darkness is cold,” said Naomi promptly, and she seemed to shiver.

“Then the light must be warmth, little one?” said Israel.

“Yes, and noise,” she answered; and then she added quickly, “Light is alive.”

Saying this, she crept closer to his side, and knelt there, and by her old trick of love she took his hand in both of hers, and pressed it against her cheek, and then, lifting her sweet face with its motionless eyes she began to tell him in her broken words and pretty lisp what she thought of night. In the night the world, and everything in it, was cold and quiet. That was death. The angels of God came to the world in the day. But God Himself came in the night, because He loved silence, and because all the world was dead. Then He kissed things, and in the morning all that God had kissed came to life again. If you were to get up early you would feel God's kiss on the flowers and on the grass. And that was why the birds were singing then. God had kissed them in the night, and they were glad.

One day Israel took Naomi to the mearrah of the Jews, the little cemetery outside the town walls where he had buried Ruth. And there he told her of her mother once more; that she was in the grave, but also with God; that she was dead, but still alive; that Naomi must not expect to find her in that place, but, nevertheless, that she would see her yet again.

“Do you remember her, Naomi?” he said. “Do you remember her in the old days, the old dark and silent days? Not Fatimah, and not Habeebah, but some one who was nearer to you than either, and loved you better than both; some one who had soft hands, and smooth cheeks, and long, silken, wavy hair—do you remember, little one?”

“Y-es, I think—I think I remember,” said Naomi.

“That was your mother, my darling.”

“My mother?”

“Ah, you don't know what a mother is, sweetheart. How should you? And how shall I tell you? Listen. She is the one who loves you first and last and always. When you are a babe she suckles you and nourishes you and fondles you, and watches for the first light of your smile, and listens for the first accent of your tongue. When you are

a young child she plays with you, and sings to you, and tells you little stories, and teaches you to speak. Your smile is more bright to her than sunshine, and your childish lisp more sweet than music. If you are sick she is beside you constantly, and when you are well she is behind you still. Though you sin and fall and all men spurn you, yet she clings to you; and if you do well and God prospers you, there is no joy like her joy. Her love never changes, for it is a fount which the cold winds of the world cannot freeze. . . . And if you are a little helpless girl—blind and deaf and dumb maybe—then she loves you best of all. She cannot tell you stories, and she cannot sing to you, because you cannot hear; she cannot smile into your eyes, because you cannot see; she cannot talk to you, because you cannot speak; but she can watch your quiet face, and feel the touch of your little fingers and hear the sound of your merry laughter."

"My mother! my mother!" whispered Naomi to herself, as if in awe.

"Yes," said Israel, "your mother was like that, Naomi, long ago, in the days before your great gifts came to you. But she is gone, she has left us, she could not stay; she is dead, and only from the blue mountains of memory can she smile back upon us now."

Naomi could not understand, but her fixed blue eyes filled with tears, and she said abruptly, "People who die are deceitful. They want to go out in the night to be with God. That is where they are when they go away. They are wandering about the world when it is dead."

The same night Naomi was missed out of the house, and for many hours no search availed to find her. She was not in the Mellah, and therefore she must have passed into the Moorish town before the gates closed at sunset. Neither was she to be seen in the Feddan or at the Kasbah, or among the Arabs who sat in the red glow of the fires that burnt before their tents. At last Israel bethought him of the mearrah, and there he found her. It was dark, and the lonesome place was silent. The reflection of

the lights of the town rose into the sky above it, and the distant hum of voices came over the black town walls. And there, within the straggling hedge of prickly pear, among the long white stones that lay like sheep asleep among the grass, Naomi in her double darkness, the darkness of the night and of her blindness was running to and fro, and crying, “Mother! Mother!”

Fatimah took her the four miles to Marteel, that the breath of the sea might bring colour to her cheeks, which had been whitened by the heat and fumes of the town. The day was soft and beautiful, the water was quiet, and only a gentle wind came creeping over it. But Naomi listened to every sound with eager intentness—the light plash of the blue wavelets that washed to her feet, the ripple of their crests when the Levanter chased them and caught them, the dip of the oars of the boatman, the rattle of the anchor-chains of ships in the bay, and the fierce vociferations of the negroes who waded up to their waists to unload the cargoes.

And when she came home, and took her old place at her father's knees, with his hand between hers pressed close against her cheek, she told him another sweet and startling story. There was only one thing in the world that did not die at night, and it was water. That was because water was the way from heaven to earth. It went up into the mountains and over them into the air until it was lost in the clouds. And God and His angels came and went on the water between heaven and earth. That was why it was always moving and never sleeping, and had no night and no day. And the angels were always singing. That was why the waters were always making a noise, and were never silent like the grass. Sometimes their song was joyful, and sometimes it was sad, and sometimes the evil spirits were struggling with the angels, and that was when the waters were terrible. Every time the sea made a little noise on the shore, an angel had stepped on to the earth. The angel was glad.

Israel had begun to listen to Naomi's fancies with a doubting heart. Where had they come from? Was it his duty to wipe out these beautiful dream-stories of the maid

born blind and newly come upon the joy of hearing with his own sadder tales of what the world was and what life was, and death and heaven? The question was soon decided for him.

Two days after Naomi had been taken to Marteel she was missed again. Israel hurried away to the sea, and there he came upon her. Alone, without help, she had found a boat on the beach and had pushed off on to the water. It was a double-pronged boat, light as a nutshell, made of ribs of rush, covered with camel-skin, and lined with bark. In this frail craft she was afloat, and already far out in the bay not rowing, but sitting quietly, and drifting away with the ebbing tide. The wind was rising, and the line of the foreshore beyond the boat was white with breakers. Israel put off after her and rescued her. The motionless eyes began to fill when she heard his voice.

“My darling, my darling!” cried Israel; “where did you think you were going?”

“To heaven,” she answered.

And truly she had all but gone there.

Israel had no choice left to him now. He must sadden the heart of this creature of joy that he might keep her body safe from peril. Naomi was no more than a little child, swayed by her impulses alone, but in more danger from herself than any child before her, because deprived of two of her senses until she had grown to be a maid, and no control could be imposed upon her.

At length Israel nerved himself to his bitter task; and one evening while Naomi sat with him on the roof while the sun was setting, and there were noises in the streets below of the Jewish people shuffling back into the Mellah, he told her that she was blind. The word made no impression upon her mind at first. She had heard it before, and it had passed her by like a sound that she did not know. She had been born blind, and therefore could not realise what it was to see. To open a way for the awful truth was difficult, and Israel's heart smote him while he persisted. Naomi laughed

as he put his fingers over her eyes that he might show her. She laughed again when he asked if she could see the people whom she could only hear. And once more she laughed when the sun had gone down, and the mooddin had come out on the Grand Mosque in the Metamar, and he asked if she could see the old blind man in the minaret, where he was crying, “God is great! God is great!”

“Can you see him, little one?” said Israel.

“See him?” said Naomi; “why yes, you dear old father, of course I can see him. Listen,” she cried, ceasing her laughter, lifting one finger, and holding her head aslant, “listen: God is great! God is great! There—I saw him then.”

“That is only hearing him, Naomi—hearing him with your ears—with this ear and with this. But can you see him, sweetheart?”

Did her father mean to ask her if she could feel the mooddin in his minaret far above them? Once more she laid her head aslant. There was a pause, and then she cried impulsively—

“Oh, I know. But, you foolish old father, how can I? He is too far away.”

Then she flung her arms about Israel's neck and kissed him.

“There,” she cried, in a tone of one who settles differences, “I have seen my father anyway.”

It was hard to check her merriment, but Israel had to do it. He told her, with many throbs in his throat, that she was not like other maidens—not like her father, or Ali, or Fatimah, or Habeebah; that she was a being afflicted of God; that there was something she had not got, something she could not do, a world she did not know, and had never yet so much as dreamt of. Darkness was more than cold and quiet, and light was more than warmth and noise. The one was day—day ruled by the fiery sun in the sky—and the other was night, lit by the pale moon and the bright stars in heaven. And the face of man and the eyes of woman were more than features to feel—they were spirit and soul, to watch and to follow and to love without any hand

being near them.

“There is a great world about you, little one,” he said, “which you have never seen, though you can hear it and feel it and speak to it. Yes, it is true, Naomi, it is true. You have never seen the mountains and the dangerous gullies on their rocky sides. You have never seen the mighty deep, and the storms that heave and swell in it. You have never seen man or woman or child. Is that very strange, little one? Listen: your mother died nine years ago, and you had never seen her. Your father is holding your head in his hands at this moment, but you have never seen his face. And if the dark curtains were to fall from your eyes, and you were to see him now, you would not know him from another man, or from woman, or from a tree. You are blind, Naomi, you are blind.”

Naomi listened intently. Her cheeks twitched, her fingers rested nervously on her dress at her bosom, and her eyes grew large and solemn, and then filled with tears. Israel's throat swelled. To tell her of all this, though he must needs do it for her safety, was like reproaching her with her infirmity. But it was only the trouble in her father's voice that had found its way to the sealed chamber of Naomi's mind. The awful and crushing truth of her blindness came later to her consciousness, probed in and thrust home by a frailer and lighter hand.

She had always loved little children, and since the coming of her hearing she had loved them more than ever. Their lisping tongues, their pretty broken speech, their simple words, their childish thoughts, all fitted with her own needs, for she was nothing but a child herself, though grown to be a lovely maid. And of all children those she loved best were not the children of the Jews, nor yet the children of the Moorish townsfolk, but the ragged, barefoot, black and olive-skinned mites who came into Tetuan with the country Arabs and Berbers on market mornings. They were simplest, their little tongues were liveliest, and they were most full of joy and wonder. So she would gather them up in twos and threes and fours, on Wednesdays

and Sundays, from the mouths of their tents on the Feddan, and carry them home by the hand.

And there, in the patio, Ali had hung a swing of hempen rope, suspended from a bar thrown from parapet to parapet, and on this Naomi would sport with her little ones. She would be swinging in the midst of them, with one tiny black maiden on the seat beside her, and one little black man with high stomach and shaven poll holding on to the rope behind her, and another mighty Moor in a diminutive white jellab pushing at their feet in front, and all laughing together, or the children singing as the swing rose, and she herself listening with head aslant and all her fair hair rip-rip-rippling down her back and over her neck, and her smiling white face resting on her shoulder.

It was a beautiful scene of sunny happiness, but out of it came the first great shadow of the blind girl's life. For it chanced one day that one of the children—a tiny creature with a slice of the woman in her—brought a present for Naomi out of her mother's market-basket. It was a flower, but of a strange kind, that grew only in the distant mountains where lay the little black one's home. Naomi passed her fingers over it, and she did not know it.

“What is it?” she asked.

“It's blue,” said the child.

“What is blue?” said Naomi

“Blue—don't you know?—blue!” said the child.

“But what is blue?” Naomi asked again, holding the flower in her restless fingers.

“Why, dear me! can't you see?—blue—the flower, you know,” said the child, in her artless way.

Ali was standing by at the time, and he thought to come to Naomi's relief. “Blue is a colour,” he said.

“A colour?” said Naomi.

“Yes, like—like the sea,” he added.

“The sea? Blue? How?” Naomi asked.

Ali tried again. “Like the sky,” he said simply.

Naomi's face looked perplexed. “And what is the sky like?” she asked.

At that moment her beautiful face was turned towards Ali's face, and her great motionless blue orbs seemed to gaze into his eyes. The lad was pressed hard, and he could not keep back the answer that leapt up to his tongue. “Like,” he said—“like—”

“Well?”

“Like your own eyes, Naomi.”

By the old habit of her nervous fingers, she covered her eyes with her hands, as if the sense of touch would teach her what her other senses could not tell. But the solemn mystery had dawned on her mind at last: that she was unlike others; that she was lacking something that every one else possessed; that the little children who played with her knew what she could never know; that she was infirm, afflicted, cut off; that there was a strange and lovely and lightsome world lying round about her, where every one else might sport and find delight, but that her spirit could not enter it, because she was shut off from it by the great hand of God.

From that time forward everything seemed to remind her of her affliction, and she heard its baneful voice at all times. Even her dreams, though they had no visions, were full of voices that told of them. If a bird sang in the air above her, she lifted her sightless eyes. If she walked in the town on market morning and heard the din of traffic—the cries of the dealers, the “Balak!” of the camel-men, the “Arrah!” of the muleteers, and the twanging ginbri of the story-tellers—she sighed and dropped her head into her breast. Listening to the wind, she asked if it had eyes or was sightless;

and hearing of the mountains that their snowy heads rose into the clouds, she inquired if they were blind, and if they ever talked together in the sky.

But at the awful revelation of her blindness she ceased to be a child, and became a woman. In the week thereafter she had learned more of the world than in all the years of her life before. She was no longer a restless gleam of sunlight, a reckless spirit of joy, but a weak, patient, blind maiden, conscious of her great infirmity, humbled by it, and thinking shame of it.

One afternoon, deserting the swing in the patio, she went out with the children into the fields. The day was hot, and they wandered far down the banks and dry bed of the Marteel. And as they ran and raced, the little black people plucked the wild flowers, and called to the cattle and the sheep and the dogs, and whistled to the linnets that whistled to their young.

Thus the hours went on unheeded. The afternoon passed into evening, the evening into twilight, the twilight into early night. Then the air grew empty like a vault, and a solemn quiet fell upon the children, and they crept to Naomi's side in fear, and took her hands and clung to her gown. She turned back towards the town, and as they walked in the double silence of their own hushed tongues and the songless and voiceless world, the fingers of the little ones closed tightly upon her own.

Then the children cried in terror, “See!”

“What is it?” said Naomi.

The little ones could not tell her. It was only the noiseless summer lightning, but the children had never seen it before. With broad white flashes it lit up the land as far as from the bed of the river in the valley to the white peaks of the mountains. At every flash the little people shrieked in their fear, and there was no one there to comfort them save Naomi only, and she was blind and could not see what they saw. With helpless hands she held to their hands and hurried home, over the darkening fields, through the palpitating sheets of dazzling light, leading on, yet seeing nothing.

But Israel saw Naomi's shame. The blindness which was a sense of humiliation to her became a sense of burning wrong to him. He had asked God to give her speech, and had promised to be satisfied. “Give her speech, O Lord,” he had cried, “speech that shall lift her above the creatures of the field, speech whereby alone she may ask and know.” But what was speech without sight to her who had always been blind? What was all the world to one who had never seen it? Only as Paradise is to Man, who can but idly dream of its glories.

Israel took back his prayer. There were things to know that words could never tell. Now was Naomi blind for the first time, being no longer dumb. “Give her sight, O Lord,” he cried; “open her eyes that she may see; let her look on Thy beautiful world and know it! Then shall her life be safe, and her heart be happy, and her soul be Thine, and Thy servant at last be satisfied!”

CHAPTER XVII

ISRAEL'S GREAT RESOLVE

It was six-and-twenty days since the night of the meeting on the Sok, and no rain had yet fallen. The eggs of the locust might be hatched at any time. Then the wingless creatures would rise on the face of the earth like snow, and the poor lean stalks of wheat and barley that were coming green out of the ground would wither before them. The country people were in despair. They were all but stripped of their cattle; they had no milk; and they came afoot to the market. Death seemed to look them in the face. Neither in the mosques nor in the synagogues did they offer petitions to God for rain. They had long ceased their prayers. Only in the Feddan at the mouths of their tents did they lift up their heavy eyes to the hot haze of the pitiless sky and mutter, “It is written!”

Israel was busy with other matters. During these six-and-twenty days he had been

asking himself what it was right and needful that he should do. He had concluded at length that it was his duty to give up the office he held under the Kaid. No longer could he serve two masters. Too long had he held to the one, thinking that by recompense and restitution, by fair dealing and even-handed justice, he might atone to the other. Recompense was a mockery of the sufferings which had led to death; restitution was no longer possible—his own purse being empty—without robbery of the treasury of his master; fair dealing and even justice were a vain hope in Barbary, where every man who held office, from the heartless Sultan in his hareem to the pert Mut'hasseb in the market, must be only as a human torture-jellab, made and designed to squeeze the life-blood out of the man beneath him.

To endure any longer the taunts and laughter of Ben Aboo was impossible, and to resist the covetous importunities of his Spanish woman, Katrina, was a waste of shame and spirit. Besides, and above all, Israel remembered that God had given him grace in the sacrifices which he had made already. Twice had God rewarded him, in the mercy He had shown to Naomi, for putting by the pomp and circumstance of the world. Would His great hand be idle now—now when he most needed its mighty and miraculous power when Naomi, being conscious of her blindness, was mourning and crying for sweet sight of the world and he himself was about to put under his feet the last of his possessions that separated him from other men—his office that he wrought for in the early days with sweat of brow and blood, and held on to in the later days through evil report and hatred, that he might conquer the fate that had first beaten him down!

Israel was in the way of bribing God again, forgetting, in the heat of his desire, the shame of his journey to Shawan. He made his preparations, and they were few. His money was gone already, and so were his dead wife's jewels. He had determined that he would keep his house, if only as a shelter to Naomi (for he owed something to her material comfort as well as her spiritual welfare), but that its furniture and belongings were more luxurious than their necessity would require or altered state

allow.

So he sold to a Jewish merchant in the Mellah the couches and great chairs which he had bought out of England, as well as the carpets from Rabat, the silken hangings from Fez, and the purple canopies from Morocco city. When these were gone, and nothing remained but the simple rugs and mattresses which are all that the house of a poor man needs in that land where the skies are kind, he called his servants to him as he sat in the patio—Ali as well as the two bondwomen—for he had decided that he must part with them also, and they must go their ways.

“My good people,” he said, “you have been true and faithful servants to me this many a year—you, Fatimah, and you also, Habeebah, since before the days when my wife came to me—and you too, Ali, my lad, since you grew to be big and helpful. Little I thought to part with you until my good time should come; but my life in our poor Barbary is over already, and to-morrow I shall be less than the least of all men in Tetuan. So this is what I have concluded to do. You, Fatimah, and you, Habeebah, being given to me as bondwomen by the Kaid in the old days when my power, which now is little and of no moment, was great and necessary—you belong to me. Well, I give you your liberty. Your papers are in the name of Ben Aboo, and I have sealed them with his seal—that is the last use but one that I shall put it to. Here they are, both of them. Take them to the Kadi after prayers in the morning, and he will ratify your title. Then you will be free women for ever after.”

The black women had more than once broken in upon Israel's words with exclamations of surprise and consternation. “Allah!” “Bismillah!” “Holy Saints!” “By the beard of the Prophet!” And when at length he put the deeds of emancipation into their hands they fell into loud fits of hysterical weeping.

“As for you, Ali, my son,” Israel continued, “I cannot give you your freedom, for you are a freeman born. You have been a son to me these fourteen years. I have another task for you—a perilous task, a solemn duty—and when it is done I shall see

you no more. My brave boy, you will go far, but I do not fear for you. When you are gone I shall think of you; and if you should sometimes think of your old master who could not keep you, we may not always be apart."

The lad had listened to these words in blank bewilderment. That strange disasters had of late befallen their household was an idea that had forced itself upon his unwilling mind. But that Israel, the greatest, noblest, mightiest man in the world—let the dogs of rasping Jews and the scurvy hounds of Moors yelp and bark as they would—should fall to be less than the least in Tetuan, and, having fallen that he should send him away—him, Ali, his boy whom he had brought up, Naomi's old playfellow—Allah! Allah! in the name of the merciful God, what did his master mean?

Ali's big eyes began to fill, and great beads rolled down his black cheeks. Then, recovering his speech he blurted out that he would not go. He would follow his father and serve him until the end of his life. What did he want with wages? Who asked for any? No going his ways for him! A pretty thing, wasn't it, that he should go off, and never see his father again, no, nor Naomi—Naomi—that-that—but God would show! God would show!

And, following Ali's lead, Fatimah stepped up to Israel and offered her paper back. "Take it," she said; "I don't want any liberty. I've got liberty enough as I am. And here—here," fumbling in her waistband and bringing out a knitted purse; "I would have offered it before, only I thought shame. My wages? Yes. You've paid us wages these nine years, haven't you; and what right had we to any, being slaves? You will not take it, my lord? Well, then, my dear master, if I must go, if I must leave you, take my papers and sell me to some one. I shall not care, and you have a right to do it. Perhaps I'll get another good master—who knows?"

Her brows had been knitted, and she had tried to look stern and angry, but suddenly her cheeks were a flood of tears.

“I'm a fool!” she cried. “I'll never get a good master again; but if I get a bad one, and he beats me, I'll not mind, for I'll think of you, and my precious jewel of gold and silver, my pretty gazelle, Naomi—Allah preserve her!—that you took my money, and I'm bearing it for both of you, as we might say—working for you—night and day—night and day—”

Israel could endure no more. He rose up and fled out of the patio into his own room, to bury his swimming face. But his soul was big and triumphant. Let the world call him by what names it would—tyrant, traitor, outcast pariah—there were simple hearts that loved and honoured him—ay, honoured him—and they were the hearts that knew him best.

The perilous task reserved for Ali was to go to Shawan and to liberate the followers of Absalam, who, less happy than their leader, whose strong soul was at rest, were still in prison without abatement of the miseries they lay under. He was to do this by power of a warrant addressed to the Kaid of Shawan and drawn under the seal of the Kaid of Tetuan. Israel had drawn it, and sealed it also, without the knowledge or sanction of Ben Aboo; for, knowing what manner of man Ben Aboo was, and knowing Katrina also, and the sway she held over him, and thinking it useless to attempt to move either to mercy, he had determined to make this last use of his office, at all risks and hazards.

Ben Aboo might never hear that the people were at large, for Ali was to forbid them to return to Tetuan, and Shawan was sixty weary miles away. And if he ever did hear, Israel himself would be there to bear the brunt of his displeasure, but Ali the instrument of his design, must be far away. For when the gates of the prison had been opened, and the prisoners had gone free, Ali was neither to come back to Tetuan nor to remain in Morocco, but with the money that Israel gave him out of the last wreck of his fortune he was to make haste to Gibraltar by way of Ceuta, and not to consider his life safe until he had set foot in England.

“England!” cried Ali. “But they are all white men there.”

“White-hearted men, my lad,” said Israel; “and a Jewish man may find rest for the sole of his foot among them.”

That same day the black boy bade farewell to Israel and to Naomi. He was leaving them for ever, and he was broken-hearted. Israel was his father, Naomi was his sister, and never again should he set his eyes on either. But in the pride of his perilous mission he bore himself bravely.

“Well, good-night,” he said, taking Naomi's hand, but not looking into her blind face.

“Good-night,” she answered, and then, after a moment, she flung her arms about his neck and kissed him. He laughed lightly, and turned to Israel.

“Good-night, father,” he said in a shrill voice.

“A safe journey to you, my son,” said Israel; “and may you do all my errands.”

“God burn my great-grandfather if I do not!” said Ali stoutly.

But with that word of his country his brave bearing at length broke down, and drawing Israel aside, that Naomi might not hear, he whispered, sobbing and stammering, “When—when I am gone, don't, don't tell her that I was black.”

Then in an instant he fled away.

“In peace!” cried Israel after him. “In peace! my brave boy, simple, noble, loyal heart!”

Next morning Israel, leaving Naomi at home, set off for the Kasbah, that he might carry out his great resolve to give up the office he held under the Kaid. And as he passed through the streets his head was held up, and he walked proudly. A great burden had fallen from him, and his spirit was light. The people bent their heads before him as he passed, and scowled at him when he was gone by. The beggars lying at the gate of the Mosque spat over their fingers behind his back, and muttered

“Bismillah! In the name of God!” A negro farmer in the Feddan, who was bent double over a hoof as he was shoeing a bony and scabby mule, lifted his ugly face, bathed in sweat, and grinned at Israel as he went along. A group of Reefians, dirty and lean and hollow-eyed, feeding their gaunt donkeys, and glancing anxiously at the sky over the heads of the mountains, snarled like dogs as he strode through their midst. The sky was overcast, and the heads of the mountains were capped with mist. “Balak!” sounded in Israel's ears from every side. “Arrah!” came constantly at his heels. A sweet-seller with his wooden tray swung in front of him, crying, “Sweets, all sweets, O my lord Edrees, sweets, all sweets,” changed the name of the patron saint of candies, and cried, “Sweets, all sweets, O my lord Israel, sweets, all sweets!” The girl selling clay peered up impudently into Israel's eyes, and the oven-boy, answering the loud knocking of the bodiless female arms thrust out at doors standing ajar, made his wordless call articulate with a mocking echo of Israel's name.

What matter? Israel could not be wroth with the poor people. Six-and-twenty years he had gone in and out among them as a slave. This morning he was a free man, and to-morrow he would be one of themselves.

When he reached the Kasbah, there was something in the air about it that brought back recollections of the day—now nearly four years past—of the children's gathering at Katrina's festival. The lusty-lunged Arabs squatting at the gates among soldiers in white selhams and peaked shasheeahs the women in blankets standing in the outer court, the dark passages smelling of damp, the gusts of heavy odour coming from the inner chambers, and the great patio with the fountain and fig-trees—the same voluptuous air was over everything. And as on that day so on this, in the alcove under the horseshoe arch sat Ben Aboo and his Spanish wife.

Time had dealt with them after their kind, and the swarthy face of the Kaid was grosser, the short curls under his turban were more grey and his hazel eyes were now

streaked and bleared, but otherwise he was the same man as before, and Katrina also, save for the loss of some teeth of the upper row, was the same woman. And if the children had risen up before Israel's eyes as he stood on the threshold of the patio, he could not have drawn his breath with more surprise than at the sight of the man who stood that morning in their place.

It was Mohammed of Mequinez. He had come to ask for the release of the followers of Absalam from their prison at Shawan. In defiance of courtesy his slippers were on his feet. He was clad in a piece of untanned camel-skin, which reached to his knees and was belted about his waist. His head, which was bare to the sun and drooped by nature like a flower, was held proudly up, and his wild eyes were flashing. He was not supplicating for the deliverance of the people, but demanding it, and taxing Ben Aboo as a tyrant to his throat.

“Give me them up, Ben Aboo,” he was saying as Israel came to the threshold, “or, if they die in their prison, one thing I promise you.”

“And pray what is that?” said Ben Aboo.

“That there will be a bloody inquiry after their murderer.”

Ben Aboo's brows were knitted, but he only glanced at Katrina, and made pretence to laugh, and then said, “And pray, my lord, who shall the murderer be?”

Then Mohammed of Mequinez stretched out his hand and answered, “Yourself.”

At that word there-was silence for a moment, while Ben Aboo shifted in his seat, and Katrina quivered beside him.

Ben Aboo glanced up at Mohammed. He was Kaid, he was Basha, he was master of all men within a circuit of thirty miles, but he was afraid of this man whom the people called a prophet. And partly out of this fear, and partly because he had more regard to Mohammed's courageous behaviour in thus bearding him in his Kasbah and by the walls of his dungeons than to the anger his hot word had caused him, Ben Aboo would have promised him at that moment that the prisoners at Shawan should

be released.

But suddenly Katrina remembered that she also had cause of indignation against this man, for it had been rumoured of late that Mohammed had openly denounced her marriage.

“Wait, Sidi,” she said. “Is not this the fellow that has gone up and down your bashalic, crying out on our marriage that it was against the law of Mohammed?”

At that Ben Aboo saw clearly that there was no escape for him, so he made pretence to laugh again, and said, “Allah! so it is! Mohammed the Third, eh? Son of Mequinez, God will repay you! Thanks! Thanks! You could never think how long I've waited that I might look face to face upon the prophet that has denounced a Kaid.”

He uttered these big words between bursts of derisive laughter, but Mohammed struck the laughter from his lips in an instant. “Wait no longer, O Ben Aboo,” he cried, “but look upon him now, and know that what you have done is an unclean thing, and you shall be childless and die!”

Then Ben Aboo's passion mastered him. He rose to his feet in his anger, and cried, “Prophet, you have destroyed yourself. Listen to me! The turbulent dogs you plead for shall lie in their prison until they perish of hunger and rot of their sores. By the beard of my father, I swear it!”

Mohammed did not flinch. Throwing back his head, he answered, “If I am a prophet, O Ben Aboo hear me prophesy. Before that which you say shall come to pass, both you and your father's house will be destroyed. Never yet did a tyrant go happily out of the world, and you shall go out of it like a dog.”

Then Katrina also rose to her feet, and, calling to a group of barefooted Arab soldiers that stood near, she cried, “Take him! He will escape!”

But the soldiers did not move, and Ben Aboo fell back on his seat, and Mohammed, fearing nothing, spoke again.

"In a vision of last night I saw you, O Ben Aboo and for the contempt you had cast upon our holy laws, and for the destruction you had wrought on our poor people, the sword of vengeance had fallen upon you. And within this very court, and on that very spot where your feet now rest, your whole body did lie; and that woman beside you lay over you wailing and your blood was on her face and on her hands, and only she was with you, for all else had forsaken you—all save one, and that was your enemy, and he had come to see you with his eyes, and to rejoice over you with his heart, because you were fallen and dead."

Then, in the creeping of his terror, Ben Aboo rose up again and reeled backward and his eyes were fixed steadfastly downward at his feet where the eyes of Mohammed had rested. It was almost as if he saw the awful thing of which Mohammed had spoken, so strong was the power of the vision upon him.

But recovering himself quickly, he cried, "Away! In the name of God, away!"

"I will go," said Mohammed; "and beware what you do while I am gone."

"Do you threaten me?" cried Ben Aboo. "Will you go to the Sultan? Will you appeal to Abd er-Rahman?"

"No, Ben Aboo; but to God."

So saying, Mohammed of Mequinez strode out of the place, for no man hindered him. Then Ben Aboo sank back on to his seat as one that was speechless, and nothing had the crimson on his body availed him, or the silver on his breast, against that simple man in camel-skin, who owned nothing and asked nothing, and feared neither Kaid nor King.

When Ben Aboo had regained himself, he saw Israel standing at the doorway, and he beckoned to him with the downward motion, which is the Moorish manner. And rising on his quaking limbs he took him aside and said, "I know this fellow. Ya Allah! Allah! For all his vaunts and visions he has gone to Abd er-Rahman. God will show! God will show! I dare not take him! Abd er-Rahman uses him to spy and pry

on his Bashas! Camel-skin coat? Allah! a fine disguise! Bismillah! Bismillah!"

Then, looking back at the place where Mohammed in the vision saw his body lie outstretched, he dropped his voice to a whisper, and said, "Listen! You have my seal?"

Israel without a word, put his hand into the pocket of his waistband, and drew out the seal of Ben Aboo.

"Right! Now hear me, in the name of the merciful God. Do not liberate these infidel dogs at Shawan and do not give them so much as bread to eat or water to drink, but let such as own them feed them. And if ever the thing of which that fellow has spoken should come to pass—do you hear?—in the hour wherein it befalls—Allah preserve me!—in that hour draw a warrant on the Kaid of Shawan and seal it with my seal—are you listening?—a warrant to put every man, woman, and child to the sword. Ya Allah! Allah! We will deal with these spies of Abd er-Rahman! So shall there be mourning at my burial—Holy Saints! Holy Saints!—mourning, I say, among them that look for joy at my death."

Thus in a quaking voice, sometimes whispering, and again breaking into loud exclamations, Ben Aboo in his terror poured his broken words into Israel's ear.

Israel made no answer. His eyes had become dim—he scarcely saw the walls of the place wherein they stood. His ears had become dense—he scarcely heard the voice of Ben Aboo, though the Kaid's hot breath was beating upon his cheek. But through the haze he saw the shadow of one figure tramping furiously to and fro, and through the thick air the voice of another figure came muffled and harsh. For Katrina, having chased away with smiles the evil looks of Ben Aboo, had turned to Israel and was saying—

"What is this I hear of your beautiful daughter—this Naomi of yours—that she has recovered her speech and hearing! When did that happen, pray? No answer? Ah, I see, you are tired of the deception. You kept it up well between you. But is she still

blind? So? Dear me! Blind, poor child. Think of it!”

Israel neither answered nor looked up, but stood motionless on the same place, holding the seal in his hand. And Ben Aboo, in his restless tramping up and down, came to him again, and said, “Why are you a Jew, Israel ben Oliel? The dogs of your people hate you. Witness to the Prophet! Resign yourself! Turn Muslim, man—what's to hinder you?”

Still Israel made no reply. But Ben Aboo continued: “Listen! The people about me are in the pay of the Sultan, and after all you are the best servant I have ever had. Say the Kelmah, and I'll make you my Khaleefa. Do you hear?—my Khaleefa, with power equal to my own. Man, why don't you speak? Are you grown stupid of late as well as weak and womanish?”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LIGHT-BORN MESSENGER

“Basha,” said Israel—he spoke slowly and quietly; but with forced calmness—“Basha, you must seek another hand for work like that—this hand of mine shall never seal that warrant.”

“Tut, man!” whispered Ben Aboo. “Do your new measles break out everywhere? Am I not Kaid? Can I not make you my Khaleefa?”

Israel's face was worn and pale, but his eye burned with the fire of his great resolve.

“Basha,” he said again calmly and quietly, “if you were Sultan and could make me your Vizier, I would not do it.”

“Why?” cried Ben Aboo; “why? why?”

“Because,” said Israel, “I am here to deliver up your seal to you.”

“You? Grace of God!” cried Ben Aboo.

“I am here,” continued Israel, as calmly as before, “to resign my office.”

“Resign your office? Deliver up your seal?” cried Ben Aboo. “Man, man, are you mad?”

“No, Basha, not to-day,” said Israel quietly. “I must have been that when I came here first, five-and-twenty years ago.”

Ben Aboo gnawed his lip and scowled darkly, and in the flush of his anger, his consternation being over, he would have fallen upon Israel with torrents of abuse, but that he was smitten suddenly by a new and terrible thought. Quivering and trembling, and muttering short prayers under his breath, he recoiled from the place where Israel stood, and said, “There is something under all this? What is it? Let me think! Let me think!”

Meantime the face of Katrina beneath its covering of paint had grown white, and in scarcely smothered tones of wrath, by the swift instinct of a suspicious nature, she was asking herself the same question, “What does it mean? What does it mean?”

In another moment Ben Aboo had read the riddle his own way. “Wait!” he cried, looking vainly for help and answer into the faces of his people about him. “Who said that when he was away from Tetuan he went to Fez? The Sultan was there then. He had just come up from Soos. That's it! I knew it! The man is like all the rest of them. Abd er-Rahman has bought him. Allah! Allah! What have I done that every soul that eats my bread should spy and pry on me?”

Satisfied with this explanation of Israel's conduct, Ben Aboo waited for no further assurance, but fell to a wild outburst of mingled prayers and protests. “O Giver of Good to all! O Creator! It is Abd er-Rahman again. Ya Allah! Ya Allah! Or else his rapacious satellites—his thieves, his robbers, his cut-throats! That bloated Vizier! That leprous Naib es-Sultan! Oh, I know them. Bismillah! They want to fleece me. They want to squeeze me of my little wealth—my just savings—my hard earnings after my long service. Curse them! Curse their relations! O Merciful! O

Compassionate! They'll call it arrears of taxes. But no, by the beard of my father, no! Not one feels shall they have if I die for it. I'm an old soldier—they shall torture me. Yes, the bastinado, the jellab—but I'll stand firm! Allah! Allah! Bismillah! Why does Abd er-Rahman hate me? It's because I'm his brother—that's it, that's it! But I've never risen against him. Never, never! I've paid him all! All! I tell you I've paid everything. I've got nothing left. You know it yourself, Israel, you know it."

Thus, in the crawling of his fear he cried with maudlin tears, pleaded and entreated and threatened fumbling meantime the beads of his rosary and tramping nervously to and fro about the patio until he drew up at length, with a supplicating look, face to face with Israel. And if anything had been needed to fix Israel to his purpose of withdrawing for ever from the service of Ben Aboo, he must have found it in this pitiful spectacle of the Kaid's abject terror, his quick suspicion, his base disloyalty, and rancorous hatred of his own master, the Sultan.

But, struggling to suppress his contempt, Israel said, speaking as slowly and calmly as at first, "Basha, have no fear; I have not sold myself to Abd er-Rahman. It is true that I was at Fez—but not to see the Sultan. I have never seen him. I am not his spy. He knows nothing of me. I know nothing of him, and what I am doing now is being done for myself alone."

Hearing this, and believing it, for, liars and prevaricators as were the other men about him, Israel had never yet deceived him, Ben Aboo made what poor shift he could to cover his shame at the sorry weakness he had just betrayed. And first he gazed in a sort of stupor into Israel's steadfast face; and then he dropped his evil eyes, and laughed in scorn of his own words, as if trying to carry them off by a silly show of braggadocio, and to make believe that they had been no more than a humorous pretence, and that no man would be so simple as to think he had truly meant them. But, after this mockery, he turned to Israel again, and, being relieved of his fears, he fell back to his savage mood once more, without disguise and without

shame.

“And pray, sir,” said he, with a ghastly smile, “what riches have you gathered that you are at last content to hoard no more?”

“None,” said Israel shortly.

Ben Aboo laughed lustily, and exchanged looks of obvious meaning with Katrina.

“And pray, again,” he said, with a curl of the lip, “without office and without riches how may you hope to live?”

“As a poor man among poor men,” said Israel, “serving God and trusting to His mercy.”

Again Ben Aboo laughed hoarsely, and Katrina joined him, but Israel stood quiet and silent, and gave no sign.

“Serving God is hard bread,” said Ben Aboo.

“Serving the devil is crust!” said Israel.

At that answer, though neither by look nor gesture had Israel pointed it, the face of Ben Aboo became suddenly discoloured and stern.

“Allah! What do you mean?” he cried. “Who are you that you dare wag your insolent tongue at me?”

“I am your scapegoat, Basha,” said Israel, with an awful calm—“your scapegoat, who bears your iniquities before the eyes of your people. Your scapegoat, who sins against them and oppresses them and brings them by bitter tortures to the dust and death. That's what I am, Basha, and have long been, shame upon me! And while I am down yonder in the streets among your people—hated, reviled, despised, spat upon, cut off—you are up here in the Kasbah above them, in honour and comfort and wealth, and the mistaken love of all men.”

While Israel said this, Ben Aboo in his fury came down upon him from the opposite side of the patio with a look of a beast of prey. His swarthy cheeks were drawn hard,

his little bleared eyes flashed, his heavy nose and thick lips and massive jaw quivered visibly, and from under his turban two locks of iron-grey fell like a shaggy mane over his ears.

But Israel did not flinch. With a look of quiet majesty, standing face to face with the tyrant, not a foot's length between them, he spoke again and said, “Basha, I do not envy you, but neither will I share your business nor your rewards. I mean to be your scapegoat no more. Here is your seal. It is red with the blood of your unhappy people through these five-and-twenty bad years past. I can carry it no longer. Take it.”

In a tempest of wrath Ben Aboo struck the seal out of Israel's hand as he offered it, and the silver rolled and rang on the tiled pavement of the patio.

“Fool!” he cried. “So this is what it is! Allah! In the name of the most merciful God, who would have believed it? Israel ben Oliel a prophet! A prophet of the poor! O Merciful! O Compassionate!”

Thus, in his frenzy, pretending to imitate with airs of manifest mockery his outbreak of fear a few minutes before, Ben Aboo raved and raged and lifted his clenched fist to the sky in sham imprecation of God.

“Who said it was the Sultan?” he cried again. “He was a fool. Abd er-Rahman? No; but Mohammed of Mequinez! Mohammed the Third! That's it! That's it!”

So saying, and forgetting in his fury what he had said before of Mohammed himself, he laughed wildly, and beat about the patio from side to side like a caged and angry beast.

“And if I am a tyrant,” he said in a thick voice, “who made me so? If I oppress the poor, who taught me the way to do it? Whose clever brain devised new means of revenue? Ransoms, promissory notes, bonds, false judgments—what did I know of such things? Who changed the silver dollars at nine ducats apiece? And who bought up the debts of the people that murmured against such robbery? Allah! Allah!

Whose crafty head did all this? Why, yours—yours—Israel ben Oliel! By the beard of the Prophet, I swear it!"

Israel stood unmoved, and when these reproaches were hurled at him, he answered calmly and sadly, "God's ways are not our ways, neither are His thoughts our thoughts. He works His own will, and we are but His ministers. I thought God's justice had failed, but it has overtaken myself. For what I did long ago of my own free will and intention to oppress the poor, I have suffered and still am suffering."

All this time the Spanish wife of Ben Aboo had sat in the alcove with lips whitening under their crimson patches of paint, beating her fan restlessly on the empty air, and breathing rapid and audible breath. And now, at this last word of Israel, though so sadly spoken, and so solemn in its note of suffering, she broke into a trill of laughter, and said lightly, "Ah! I thought your love of the poor was young. Not yet cut its teeth, poor thing! A babe in swaddling clothes, eh? When was it born?"

"About the time that you were, madam," said Israel, lifting his heavy eyes upon her.

At that her lighter mood gave place to quick anger. "Husband," she cried, turning upon Ben Aboo with the bitterness of reproach, "I hope you now see that I was right about this insolent old man. I told you from the first what would come of him. But no, you would have your own foolish way. It was easy to see that the devil's dues were in him. Yet you would not believe me! You would believe him. Simpleton as you are, you are believing him now! The poor? Fiddle-faddle and fiddlesticks! I tell you again this man is trying to put his foot on your neck. How? Oh, trust him, he's got his own schemes! Look to it, El Arby, look to it! He'll be master in Tetuan yet!"

Saying this, she had wrought herself up to a pitch of wrath, sometimes laughing wildly, and then speaking in a voice that was like an angry cry. And now, rising to her feet and facing towards the Arab soldiers, who stood aside in silence and wonder, she cried, "Arabs, Berbers, Moors, Christians, fight as you will, follow the Basha as you may, you'll lie in the same bed yet! But where? Under the heels of the

Jew!”

A hoarse murmur ran from lip to lip among the men, and the ghostly smile came back into the face of Ben Aboo.

“You must be right,” he said, “you must be right! Ya Allah! Ya Allah! This is the dog that I picked out of the mire. I found him a beggar, and I gave him wealth. An impostor, a personator, a cheat, and I gave him place and rank. When he had no home, I housed him, and when he could find no one to serve him, I gave him slaves. I have banished his enemies, and imprisoned those he hated. After his wife had died, and none came near him, and he was left to howk out her grave with his own hands, I gave him prisoners to bury her, and when he was done with them I set them free. All these years I have heaped fortune upon him. Ya Allah! His master! No, but his servant, doing his will at the lifting of his finger. And all for what? For this! For this! For this! Ingrate!” he cried in his thick voice, turning hotly upon Israel again, “if you must give up your seal, why should you do it like a fool? Could you not come to me and say, 'Kaid, I am old and weary; I am rich, and have enough; I have served you long and faithfully; let me rest'—why not? I say, why not?”

Israel answered calmly, “Because it would have been a lie, Basha.”

“So it would,” cried Ben Aboo sharply, “so it would: you are right—it would have been a lie, an accursed lie! But why must you come to me and say, 'Basha, you are a tyrant, and have made me a tyrant also; you have sucked the blood of your people, and made me to drink it.”

“Because it is true, Basha,” said Israel.

At that Ben-Aboo stopped suddenly, and his swarthy face grew hideous and awful. Then, pointing with one shaking hand at the farther end of the patio, he said, “There is another thing that is true. It is true that on the other side of that wall there is a prison,” and, lifting his voice to a shriek, he added, “you are on the edge of a gulf, Israel ben Oliel. One step more—”

But just at that moment Israel turned full upon him, face to face, and the threat that he was about to utter seemed to die in his stifling throat. If only he could have provoked Israel to anger he might have had his will of him. But that slow, impassive manner, and that worn countenance so noble in sadness and suffering, was like a rebuke of his passion, and a retort upon his words.

And truly it seemed to Israel that against the Basha's story of his ingratitude he could tell a different tale. This pitiful slave of rage and fear, this thing of rags and patches, this whining, maudlin, shrieking, bleating, barking-creature that hurled reproaches at him, was the master in whose service he had spent his best brain and best blood. But for the strong hand that he had lent him, but for the cool head wherewith he had guarded him, where would the man be now? In the dungeons of Abd er-Rahman, having gone thither by way of the Sultan's wooden jellabs and his houses of fierce torture. By the mind's eye Israel could see him there at that instant—sightless, eyeless, hungry, gaunt. But no, he was still here—fat, sleek, voluptuous, imperious. And good men lay perishing in his prisons, and children, starved to death, lay in their graves, and he himself, his servant and scapegoat, whose brains he had drained, whose blood he had sweated, stood before him there like an old lion, who had been wandering far and was beaten back by his cubs.

But what matter? He could silence the Basha with a word; yet why should he speak it? Twenty times he had saved this man, who could neither read nor write nor reckon figures, from the threatened penalties of the Shereefean Court, and he could count them all up to him; yet why should he do so? Through five-and-twenty evil years he had built up this man's house; yet why should he boast of what was done, being done so foully? He had said his say, and it was enough. This hour of insult and outrage had been written on his forehead, and he must have come to it. Then courage! courage!

“Husband,” cried the woman, showing her toothless jaw in a bitter smile to Ben

Aboo as he crossed the patio, “you must scour this vermin out of Tetuan!”

“You are right,” he answered. “By Allah, you are right! And henceforth I will be served by soldiers, not by scribblers.”

Then, wheeling about once more to where Israel stood, he said in a voice of mockery, “Master, my lord, my Sultan, you came to resign your office? But you shall do more than that. You shall resign your house as well, and all that's in it, and leave this town as a beggar.”

Israel stood unmoved. “As you will,” he said quietly.

“Where are the two women—the slaves?” asked Ben Aboo.

“At home,” said Israel.

“They are mine, and I take them back,” said Ben Aboo.

Israel's face quivered, and he seemed to be about to protest, but he only drew a longer breath, and said again, “As you will, Basha.”

Ben Aboo's voice gathered vehemence at every fresh question. “Where is your money?” he cried; “the money that you have made out of my service—out of me—my money—where is it?”

“Nowhere,” said Israel.

“It's a lie—another lie!” cried Ben Aboo. “Oh yes, I've heard of your charities, master. They were meant to buy over my people, were they? Were they? Were they, I ask?”

“So you say, Basha,” said Israel.

“So I know!” cried Ben Aboo; “but all you had is not gone that way. You're a fool, but not fool enough for that! Give up your keys—the keys of your house!”

Israel hesitated, and then said, “Let me return for a minute—it is all I ask.”

At that the woman laughed hysterically. “Ah! he has something left after all!” she cried.

Israel turned his slow eyes upon her, and said, “Yes, madam, I have something left—after all.”

Paying no heed to the reply, Katrina cried to Ben Aboo again, saying, “El Arby, make him give up the key of that house. He has treasure there!”

“It is true, madam,” said Israel; “it is true that I have a treasure there. My daughter—my little blind Naomi.”

“Is that all?” cried Katrina and Ben Aboo together.

“It is all,” said Israel, “but it is enough. Let me fetch her.”

“Don't allow it!” cried Katrina.

Israel's face betrayed feeling. He was struggling to suppress it. “Make me homeless if you will,” he said, “turn me like a beggar out of your town, but let me fetch my daughter.”

“She'll not thank you,” cried Katrina.

“She loves me,” said Israel, “I am growing old, I am numbering the steps of death. I need her joyous young life beside me in my declining age. Then, she is helpless, she is blind, she is my scapegoat, Basha, as I am yours, and no one save her father—”

“Ah! Ah! Ah!”

Israel had spoken warmly, and at the tender fibres of feeling that had been forced out of him at last the woman was laughing derisively. “Trust me,” she cried, “I know what daughters are. Girls like better things. No, I'll give her what will be more to her taste. She shall stay here with me.”

Israel drew himself up to his full height and answered, “Madam, I would rather see her dead at my feet.”

Then Ben Aboo broke in and said, “Don't wag your tongue at your mistress, sir.”

“Your mistress, Basha,” said Israel; “not mine.”

At that word Katrina, with all her evil face aflame came sweeping down upon Israel,

and struck him with her fan on the forehead. He did not flinch or speak. The blow had burst the skin, and a drop of blood trickled over the temple on to the cheek. There was a short deep pause.

Then the hard tension of silence was broken by a faint cry. It came from behind, from the doorway; it was the voice of a girl.

In the blank stupor of the moment, every eye being on the two that stood in the midst, no one had observed until then that another had entered the patio. It was Naomi. How long she had been there no one knew, and how she had come unnoticed through the corridors out of the streets scarce any one—even when time sufficed to arrange the scattered thoughts of the Makhazni, the guard at the gate—could clearly tell. She stood under the arch, with one hand at her breast, which heaved visibly with emotion, and the other hand stretched out to touch the open iron-clamped door, as if for help and guidance. Her head was held up, her lips were apart, and her motionless blind eyes seemed to stare wildly. She had heard the hot words. She had heard the sound of the blow that followed them. Her father was smitten! Her father! Her father! It was then that she uttered the cry. All eyes turned to her. Quaking, reeling, almost falling, she came tottering down the patio. Soul and sense seemed to be struggling together in her blind face. What did it all mean? What was happening? Her fixed eyes stared as if they must burst the bonds that bound them, and look and see, and know!

At that moment God wrought a mighty work, a wondrous change, such as He has brought to pass but twice or thrice since men were born blind into His world of light. In an instant, at a thought, by one spontaneous flash, as if the spirit of the girl tore down the dark curtains which had hung for seventeen years over the windows of her eyes, Naomi saw!

They all knew it at once. It seemed to them as if every feature of the girl's face had leapt into her eyes; as if the expression of her lips, her brow, her nostrils, had sprung

to them: as if her face, so fair before, so full of quivering feeling, must have been nothing until then but a blank. Nay, but they seemed to see her now for the first time. This, only this, was she!

And to Naomi also, at that moment, it was almost as if she had been newly born into life. She was meeting the world at last face to face, eye to eye. Into her darkened chamber, that had never known the light, everything had entered at a blow—the white glare of the sun, the blue sky, the tiled patio, the faces of the Kaid and his wife and his soldiers, and of the old man also, with the unshed tears hanging on the fringe of his eyelid. She could not realise the marvel. She did not know what vision was. She had not learned to see. Her trembling soul had gone out from its dark chamber and met the mighty light in his mansion. “Oh! oh!” she cried, and stood bewildered and helpless in the midst. The picture of the world seemed to be falling upon her, and she covered her eyes with her hands, that she might abolish it altogether.

Israel saw everything. “Naomi!” he cried in a choking voice, and stretched out his hands to her. Then she uncovered her eyes, and looked, and paused and hesitated.

“Naomi!” he cried again, and made a step towards her. She covered her eyes once more that she might shut out the stranger they showed her, and only listen to the voice that she knew so well. Then she staggered into her father's arms. And Israel's heart was big, and he gathered her to his breast, and, turning towards the woman, he said, “Madam, we are in the hands of God. Look! See! He has sent His angel to protect His servant.”

Meantime, Ben Aboo was quaking with fear. He too, saw the finger of God in the wondrous thing which had come to pass. And, falling back on his maudlin mood, he muttered prayers beneath his breath, as he had done before when the human majesty, the Sultan Abd er-Rahman, was the object of his terror. “O Giver of good to all! What is this? Allah save us! Bismillah! Is it Allah or the Jinoon? Merciful! Compassionate! Curses on them both! Allah! Allah!”

The soldiers were affected by the fears of the Basha, and they huddled together in a group. But Katrina fell to laughing.

“Brava!” she cried. “Brava! Oh! a brave imposture! What did I say long ago? Blind? No more blind than you were! But a pretty pretence! Well acted! Very well acted! Brava! Brava!”

Thus she laughed and mocked, and the Basha, hearing her, took shame of his crawling fears, and made a poor show of joining her.

Israel heard them, and for a moment, seeing how they made sport of Naomi, a fire was kindled in his anger that seemed to come up from the lowest hell. But he fought back the passion that was mastering him, and at the next instant the laughter had ceased, and Ben Aboo was saying—

“Guards, take both of them. Set the man on an ass, and let the girl walk barefoot before him; and let a crier cry beside them, 'So shall it be done to every man who is an enemy of the Kaid, and to every woman who is a play-actor and a cheat!' Thus let them pass through the streets and through the people until they are come to a gate of the town, and then cast them forth from it like lepers and like dogs!”

CHAPTER XIX

THE RAINBOW SIGN

While this bad work had been going forward in the Kasbah a great blessing had fallen on the town. The long-looked for, hoped for, prayed for—the good and blessed rain—had come at last. In gentle drops like dew it had at first been falling from the rack of dark cloud which had gathered over the heads of the mountains, and now, after half an hour of such moisture, the sky over the town was grey, and the rain was pouring down like a flood.

Oh! the joy of it, the sweetness, the freshness, the beauty, the odour! The air

overhead, which had been dense with dust, was clearing and whitening as if the water washed it. And the ground underfoot, which had reeked of creeping and crawling things, was running like a wholesome river, and bearing back to the lips a taste as of the sea.

And the people of the town, in their surprise and gladness at the falling of the rain, had come out of their houses to meet it. The streets and the marketplace were full of them. In childish joy they wandered up and down in the drenching flood, without fear or thought of harm, with laughing eyes and gleaming white teeth, holding out their palms to the rain and drinking it. Hailing each other in the voices of boys, jesting and shouting and singing, to and fro they went and came without aim or direction. The Jews trooped out of the Mellah, chattering like jays, and the Moors at the gate salaamed to them. Mule-drivers cried “Balak” in tones that seemed to sing; gunsmiths and saddle-makers sat idle at their doors, greeting every one that passed; solemn Talebs stood in knots, with faces that shone under the closed hoods of their dark jellabs; and the bareheaded Berbers encamped in the market-square capered about like flighty children, grinned like apes, fired their long guns into the air for love of hearing the powder speak, often wept, and sometimes embraced each other, thinking of their homes that were far away.

Now, it was just when the town was alive with this strange scene that the procession which had been ordered by Ben Aboo came out from the Kasbah. At the head of it walked a soldier, staff in hand and gorgeous—notwithstanding the rain—in peaked shasheeah and crimson selham. Behind him were four black police, and on either side of the company were two criers of the street, each carrying a short staff festooned with strings of copper coin, which he rattled in the air for a bell. Between these came the victims of the Basha's order—Naomi first, barefooted, bareheaded, stripped of all but the last garment that hid her nakedness, her head held down, her face hidden, and her eyes closed—and Israel afterwards, mounted on a lean and ragged ass. A further guard of black police walked at the back of all. Thus they came

down the steep arcades into the market-square, where the greater body of the townspeople had gathered together.

When the people saw them, they made for them, hastening in crowds from every side of the Feddan, from every adjacent alley, every shop, tent, and booth. And when they saw who the prisoners were they burst into loud exclamations of surprise.

“Ya Allah! Israel the Jew!” cried the Moors.

“God of Jacob, save us! Israel ben Oliel!” cried the people of the Mellah.

“What is it? What has happened? What has befallen them?” they all asked together.

“Balak!” cried the soldier in front, swinging his staff before him to force a passage through the thronging multitude. “Attention! By your leave! Away! Out of the way!”

And as they walked the criers chanted, “So shall it be done to every man who is an enemy of the Kaid, and to every woman who is a play-actor and a cheat.”

When the people had recovered from their consternation they began to look black into each other's face, to mutter oaths between their teeth, and to say in voices of no pity or rush, “He deserved it!” “Ya Allah, but he's well served!” “Holy Saints, we knew what it would come to!” “Look at him now!” “There he is at last!” “Brave end to all his great doings!” “Curse him! Curse him!”

And over the muttered oaths and pitiless curses, the yelping and barking of the cruel voices of the crowd, as the procession moved along, came still the cry of the crier, “So shall it be done to every man who is an enemy of the Kaid, and to every woman who is a play-actor and a cheat.”

Then the mood of the multitude changed. The people began to titter, and after that to laugh openly. They wagged their heads at Israel; they derided him; they made merry over his sorry plight. Where he was now he seemed to be not so much a fallen tyrant as a silly sham and an imposture. Look at him! Look at his bony and ragged ass! Ya

Allah! To think that they had ever been afraid of him!

As the procession crossed the market-place, a woman who was enveloped in a blanket spat at Israel as he passed. Then it was come to the door of the Mosque, an old man, a beggar, hobbled through the crowd and struck Israel with the back of his hand across the face. The woman had lost her husband and the man his son by death sentences of Ben Aboo. Israel had succoured both when he went about on his secret excursions after nightfall in the disguise of a Moor.

“Balak! Balak!” cried the soldier in front, and still the chant of the crier rang out over all other noises.

At every step the throng increased. The strong and lusty bore down the weak in the struggle to get near to the procession. Blind beggars and feeble cripples who could not see or stir shouted hideous oaths at Israel from the back of the crowd.

As the procession went past the gates of the Mellah, two companies came out into the town. The one was a company of soldiers returning to the Kasbah after sacking and wrecking Israel's house; the other was a company of old Jews, among whom were Reuben Maliki, Abraham Pigman, and Judah ben Lolo. At the advent of the three usurers a new impulse seized the people. They pretended to take the procession for a triumphal progress—the departure of a Kaid, a Shereef, a Sultan. The soldier and police fell into the humour of the multitude. Salaams were made to Israel; selhams were flung on the ground before the feet of Naomi. Reuben Maliki pushed through the crowd, and walked backward, and cried, in his harsh, nasal croak—

“Brothers of Tetuan, behold your benefactor! Make way for him! Make way! make way!”

Then there were loud guffaws, and oaths, and cries like the cry of the hyena. Last of all, old Abraham Pigman handed over the people's heads a huge green Spanish umbrella to a negro farrier that walked within; and the black fellow, showing his white teeth in a wide grim, held it over Israel's head.

Then from fifty rasping throats came mocking cries.

“God bless our Lord!”

“Saviour of his people!”

“Benefactor! King of men!”

And over and between these cries came shrieks and yells of laughter.

All this time Israel had sat motionless on his ass, neither showing humiliation nor fear. His face was worn and ashy, but his eyes burned with a piteous fire. He looked up and saw everything; saw himself mocked by the soldier and the crier, insulted by the Muslimeen, derided by the Jews, spat upon and smitten by the people whose hungry mouths he had fed with bread. Above all, he saw Naomi going before him in her shame, and at that sight his heart bled and his spirit burred. And, thinking that it was he who had brought her to this ignominy, he sometimes yearned to reach her side and whisper in her ear, and say, “Forgive me, my child, forgive me.” But again he conquered the desire, for he remembered what God had that day done for her; and taking it for a sign of God's pleasure, and a warranty that he had done well, he raised his eyes on her with tears of bitter joy, and thought, in the wild fever of his soul, “She is sharing the triumph of my humiliation. She is walking through the mocking and jeering crowd, but see! God Himself is walking beside her!”

The procession had now come to the walled lane to the Bab Toot, the gate going out to Tangier and to Shawan. There the way was so narrow and the concourse so great that for a moment the procession was brought to a stand. Seizing this opportunity, Reuben Maliki stepped up to Israel and said, so that all might hear, “Look at the crowds that have come out to speed you, O saviour of your people! Look! look! We shall all remember this day!”

“So you shall!” cried Israel. “Until your days of death you shall all remember it!”

He had not spoken before, and some of the Moors tried to laugh at his answer; but his voice, which was like a frenzied cry, went to the hearts of the Jews, and many of

them fell away from the crowd straightway, and followed it no farther. It was the cry of the voice of a brother. They had been insulting calamity itself.

“Balak!” shouted the soldier, and the crier cried once more, and the procession moved again.

It was the hour of Israel's last temptation. Not a glance in his face disclosed passion, but his heart was afire. The devil seemed to be jarring at his ear, “Look! Listen! Is it for people like these that you have come to this? Were they worth the sacrifice? You might have been rich and great, and riding on their heads. They would have honoured you then, but now they despise you. Fool! You have sold all and given to the poor, and this is the end of it.” But in the throes and last gasp of his agony, hearing his voice in his ear, and seeing Naomi going barefooted on the stones before him, an angel seemed to come to him and whisper, “Be strong. Only a little longer. Finish as you have begun. Well done, servant of God, well done!”

He did not flinch, but rode on without a word or a cry. Once he lifted his head and looked down at the steaming, gaping, grinning cauldron of faces black and white. “O pity of men!” he thought. “What devil is tempting them?”

By this time the procession had come to the town walls at a point near to the Bab Toot. No one had observed until then that the rain was no longer falling, but now everybody was made aware of this at once by sight of a rainbow which spanned the sky to the north-west immediately over the arch of the gate.

Israel saw the rainbow, and took it for a sign. It was God's hand in the heavens. To this gate then, and through it, out of Tetuan, into the land beyond—the plains, the hills, the desert where no man was wronged—God Himself, and not these people, had that day been leading them!

What happened next Israel never rightly knew. His proper sense of life seemed lost. Through thick waves of hot air he heard many voices.

First the voice of the crier, “So shall it be done to every man who is an enemy of the

Kaid, and to every woman who is a play-actor and a cheat.”

Then the voice of the soldier, “Balak! Balak!”

After that a multitudinous din that seemed to break off sharply and then to come muffled and dense as from the other side of the closed gate.

When Israel came to himself again he was walking on a barren heath that was dotted over with clumps of the long aloe, and he was holding Naomi by the hand.

CHAPTER XX

LIFE'S NEW LANGUAGE

Two days after they had been cast out of Tetuan, Israel and Naomi were settled in a little house that stood a day's walk to the north of the town, about midway between the village of Semsa and the fondak which lies on the road to Tangier. From the hour wherein the gates had closed behind them, everything had gone well with both. The country people who lay encamped on the heath outside had gathered around and shown them kindness. One old Arab woman, seeing Naomi's shame, had come behind without a word and cast a blanket over her head and shoulders. Then a girl of the Berber folk had brought slippers and drawn them on to Naomi's feet. The woman wore no blanket herself, and the feet of the girl were bare. Their own people were haggard and hollow-eyed and hungry, but the hearts of all were melted towards the great man in his dark hour. “Allah had written it,” they muttered, but they were more merciful than they thought their God.

Thus, amid silent pity and audible peace-blessings, with cheer of kind words and comfort of food and drink, Israel and Naomi had wandered on through the country from village to village, until in the evening, an hour after sundown, they came upon the hut wherein they made their home. It was a poor, mean place—neither a round tent, such as the mountain Berbers build, nor a square cube of white stone, with its garden in a court within, such as a Moorish farmer rears for his homestead, but an

oblong shed, roofed with rushes and palmetto leaves in the manner of an Irish cabin. And, indeed, the cabin of an Irish renegade it had been, who, escaping at Gibraltar from the ship that was taking him to Sidney, had sailed in a Genoese trader to Ceuta, and made his way across the land until he came to this lonesome spot near to Semsa. Unlike the better part of his countrymen, he had been a man of solitary habit and gloomy temper, and while he lived he had been shunned by his neighbours, and when he died his house had been left alone. That was the chance whereby Israel and Naomi had come to possess it, being both poor and unclaimed.

Nevertheless, though bare enough of most things that man makes and values, yet the little place was rich in some of the wealth that comes only from the hand of God. Thus marjoram and jasmine and pinks and roses grew at the foot of its walls, and it was these sweet flowers which had first caught the eyes of Israel. For suddenly through the mazes of his mind, where every perception was indistinct at that time, there seemed to come back to him a vague and confused recollection of the abandoned house, as if the thing that his eyes then saw they had surely seen before. How this should be Israel could not tell, seeing that never before to his knowledge had he passed on his way to Tangier so near to Semsa. But when he questioned himself again, it came to him, like light beaming into a dark room, that not in any waking hour at all had he seen the little place before, but in a dream of the night when he slept on the ground in the poor fondak of the Jews at Wazzan.

This, then, was the cottage where he had dreamed that he lived with Naomi; this was where she had seemed to have eyes to see and ears to hear and a tongue to speak; this was the vision of his dead wife, which when he awoke on his journey had appeared to be vainly reflected in his dream; and now it was realised, it was true, it had come to pass. Israel's heart was full, and being at that time ready to see the leading of Heaven in everything, he saw it in this fact also; and thus, without more ado than such inquiries as were necessary, he settled himself with Naomi in the place they had chanced upon.

And there, through some months following, from the height of the summer until the falling of winter, they lived together in peace and content, lacking much, yet wanting nothing; short of many things that are thought to make men's condition happy, but grateful and thanking God.

Israel was poor, but not penniless. Out of the wreck of his fortune, after he sold the best contents of his house, he had still some three hundred dollars remaining in the pocket of his waistband when he was cast out of the town. These he laid out in sheep and goats and oxen. He hired land also of a tenant of the Basha, and sent wool and milk by the hand of a neighbour to the market at Tetuan. The rains continued, the eggs of the locust were destroyed, the grass came green out of the ground, and Israel found bread for both of them. With such simple husbandry, and in such a home, giving no thought to the morrow, he passed with cheer and comfort from day to day.

And truly, if at any weaker moment he had been minded to repine for the loss of his former poor greatness, or to fail of heart in pursuit of his new calling, for which heavier hands were better fit, he had always present with him two bulwarks of his purpose and sheet-anchors of his hope. He was reminded of the one as often as in the daytime he climbed the hillside above his little dwelling and saw the white town lying far away under its gauzy canopy of mist, and whenever in the night the town lamps sent their pale sheet of light into the dark sky.

“They are yonder,” he would think, “wrangling, contending, fighting, praying, cursing, blessing, and cheating; and I am here, cut off from them by ten deep miles of darkness, in the quiet, the silence, and sweet odour of God's proper air.”

But stronger to sustain him than any memory of the ways of his former life was the recollection of Naomi. God had given back all her gifts, and what were poverty and hard toil against so great a blessing? They were as dust, they were as ashes, they were what power of the world and riches of gold and silver had been without it. And higher than the joy of Israel's constant remembrance that Naomi had been blind and

could now see, and deaf and could now hear, and dumb and could now speak, was the solemn thought that all this was but the sign and symbol of God's pleasure and assurance to his soul that the lot of the scapegoat had been lifted away.

More satisfying still to the hunger of his heart as a man was his delicious pleasure in Naomi's new-found life. She was like a creature born afresh, a radiant and joyful being newly awakened into a world of strange sights.

But it was not at once that she fell upon this pleasure. What had happened to her was, after all, a simple thing. Born with cataract on the pupils of her eyes, the emotion of the moment at the Kasbah, when her father's life seemed to be once more in danger, had—like a fall or a blow—luxated the lens and left the pupils clear. That was all. Throughout the day whereon the last of her great gifts came to her, when they were cast out of Tetuan, and while they walked hand in hand through the country until they lit upon their home, she had kept her eyes steadfastly closed. The light terrified her. It penetrated her delicate lids, and gave her pain. When for a moment she lifted her lashes and saw the trees, she put out her hand as if to push them away; and when she saw the sky, she raised her arms as if to hold it off. Everything seemed to touch her eyes. The bars of sunlight seemed to smite them. Not until the falling of darkness did her fears subside and her spirits revive. Throughout the day that followed she sat constantly in the gloom of the blackest corner of their hut.

But this was only her baptism of light on coming out of a world of darkness, just as her fear of the voices of the earth and air had been her baptism of sound on coming out of a land of silence. Within three days afterwards her terror began to give place to joy; and from that time forward the world was full of wonder to her opened eyes. Then sweet and beautiful, beyond all dreams of fancy, were her amazement and delight in every little thing that lay about her—the grass, the weeds, the poorest flower that blew, even the rude implements of the house and the common stones that

worked up through the mould—all old and familiar to her fingers, but new and strange to her eyes, and marvellous as if an angel out of heaven had dropped them down to her.

For many days after the coming of her sight she continued to recognise everything by touch and sound. Thus one morning early in their life in the cottage, and early also in the day, after Israel had kissed her on the eyelids to awaken her, and she had opened them and gazed up at him as he stooped above her, she looked puzzled for an instant, being still in the mists of sleep, and only when she had closed her eyes again, and put out her hand to touch him, did her face brighten with recognition and her lips utter his name. “My father,” she murmured, “my father.”

Thus again, the same day, not an hour afterwards, she came running back to the house from the grass bank in front of it, holding a flower in her hand, and asking a world of hot questions concerning it in her broken, lisping, pretty speech. Why had no one told her that there were flowers that could see? Here was one which while she looked upon it had opened its beautiful eye and laughed at her. “What is it?” she asked; “what is it?”

“A daisy, my child,” Israel answered.

“A daisy!” she cried in bewilderment; and during the short hush and quick inspiration that followed she closed her eyes and passed her nervous fingers rapidly over the little ring of sprinkled spears, and then said very softly, with head aslant as if ashamed, “Oh, yes, so it is; it is only a daisy.”

But to tell of how those first days of sight sped along for Naomi, with what delight of ever-fresh surprise, and joy of new wonder, would be a long task if a beautiful one. They were some miles inside the coast, but from the little hill-top near at hand they could see it clearly; and one day when Naomi had gone so far with her father, she drew up suddenly at his side, and cried in a breathless voice of awe, “The sky! the sky! Look! It has fallen on to the land.”

“That is the sea, my child,” said Israel.

“The sea!” she cried, and then she closed her eyes and listened, and then opened them and blushed and said, while her knitted brows smoothed out and her beautiful face looked aside, “So it is—yes, it is the sea.”

Throughout that day and the night which followed it the eyes of her mind were entranced by the marvel of that vision, and next morning she mounted the hill alone, to look upon it again; and, being so far, she walked farther and yet farther, wandering on and on, through fields where lavender grew and chamomile blossomed, on and on, as though drawn by the enchantment of the mighty deep that lay sparkling in the sun, until at last she came to the head of a deep gully in the coast. Still the wonder of the waters held her, but another marvel now seized upon her sight. The gully was a lonesome place inhabited by countless sea-birds. From high up in the rocks above, and from far down in the chasm below, from every cleft on every side, they flew out, with white wings and black ones and grey and blue, and sent their voices into the air, until the echoing place seemed to shriek and yell with a deafening clangour.

It was midday when Naomi reached this spot, and she sat there a long hour in fear and consternation. And when she returned to her father, she told him awesome stories of demons that lived in thousands by the sea, and fought in the air and killed each other. “And see!” she cried; “look at this, and this, and this!”

Then Israel glanced at the wrecks she had brought with her of the devilish warfare that she had witnessed and “This,” said he, lifting one of them, “is a sea-bird's feather; and this,” lifting another, “is a sea-bird's egg; and this,” lifting the third, “is a dead sea-bird itself.”

Once more Naomi knit her brows in thought, and again she closed her eyes and touched the familiar things wherein her sight had deceived her. “Ah yes,” she said meekly, looking into her father's eye, with a smile, “they are only that after all.” And

then she said very quietly, as if speaking to herself, “What a long time it is before you learn to see!”

It was partly due to the isolation of her upbringing in the company of Israel that nearly every fresh wonder that encountered her eyes took shapes of supernatural horror or splendour. One early evening, when she had remained out of the house until the day was well-nigh done, she came back in a wild ecstasy to tell of angels that she had just seen in the sky. They were in robes of crimson and scarlet, their wings blazed like fire, they swept across the clouds in multitudes, and went down behind the world together, passing out of the earth through the gates of heaven.

Israel listened to her and said, “That was the sunset my child. Every morning the sun rises and every night it sets.”

Then she looked full into his face and blushed. Her shame at her sweet errors sometimes conquered her joy in the new heritage of sight, and Israel heard her whisper to herself and say, “After all, the eyes are deceitful.” Vision was life's new language, and she had yet to learn it.

But not for long was her delight in the beautiful things of the world to be damped by any thought of herself. Nay, the best and rarest part of it, the dearest and most delicious throb it brought her, came of herself alone. On another early day Israel took her to the coast, and pushed off with her on the waters in a boat. The air was still, the sea was smooth, the sun was shining, and save for one white scarf of cloud the sky was blue. They were sailing in a tiny bay that was broken by a little island, which lay in the midst like a ruby in a ring, covered with heather and long stalks of seeding grass. Through whispering beds of rushes they glided on, and floated over banks of coral where gleaming fishes were at play. Sea-fowl screamed over their heads, as if in anger at their invasion, and under their oars the moss lay in the shallows on the pebbles and great stones. It was a morning of God's own making, and, for joy of its loveliness no less than of her own bounding life, Naomi rose in the

boat and opened her lips and arms to the breeze while it played with the rippling currents of her hair, as if she would drink and embrace it.

At that moment a new and dearer wonder came to her, such as every maiden knows whom God has made beautiful, yet none remembers the hour when she knew it first. For, tracing with her eyes the shadow of the cliff and of the continent of cloud that sailed double in two seas of blue to where they were broken by the dazzling half-round of the sun's reflected disc on the shadowed quarter of the boat, she leaned over the side of it, and then saw the reflection of another and lovelier vision.

“Father,” she cried with alarm, “a face in the water! Look! look!”

“It is your own, my child,” said Israel. “Mine!” she cried.

“The reflection of your face,” said Israel; “the light and the water make it.”

The marvel was hard to understand. There was something ghostly in this thing that was herself and yet not herself, this face that looked up at her and laughed and yet made no voice. She leaned back in the boat and asked Israel if it was still in the water. But when at length she had grasped the mystery, the artlessness of her joy was charming. She was like a child in her delight, and like a woman that was still a child in her unconscious love of her own loveliness. Whenever the boat was at rest she leaned over its bulwark and gazed down into the blue depths.

“How beautiful!” she cried, “how beautiful!”

She clapped her hands and looked again, and there in the still water was the wonder of her dancing eyes. “Oh! how very beautiful!” she cried without lifting her face, and when she saw her lips move as she spoke and her sunny hair fall about her restless head she laughed and laughed again with a heart of glee.

Israel looked on for some moments at this sweet picture, and, for all his sense of the dangers of Naomi's artless joy in her own beauty, he could not find it in his heart to check her. He had borne too long the pain and shame of one who was father of an afflicted child to deny himself this choking rapture of her recovery. “Live on like a

child always, little one," he thought; "be a child as long as you can, be a child for ever, my dove, my darling! Never did the world suffer it that I myself should be a child at all."

The artlessness of Naomi increased day by day, and found constantly some new fashion of charming strangeness. All lovely things on the earth seemed to speak to her, and she could talk with the birds and the flowers. Also she would lie down in the grass and rest like a lamb, with as little shame and with a grace as sweet. Not yet had the great mystery dawned that drops on a girl like an unseen mantle out of the sky, and when it has covered her she is a child no more. Naomi was a child still. Nay, she was a child a second time, for while she had been blind she had seemed for a little while to become a woman in the awful revelation of her infirmity and isolation. Now she was a weak, patient, blind maiden no longer, but a reckless spirit of joy once again, a restless gleam of human sunlight gathering sunshine into her father's house.

It was fit and beautiful that she who had lived so long without the better part of the gifts of God should enjoy some of them at length in rare perfection. Her sight was strong and her hearing was keen, but voice was the gift which she had in abundance. So sweet, so full, so deep, so soft a voice as Naomi's came to be, Israel thought he had never heard before. Ruth's voice? Yes, but fraught with inspiration, replete with sparkling life, and passionate with the notes of a joyous heart. All day long Naomi used it. She sang as she rose in the morning, and was still singing when she lay down at night. Wherever people came upon her, they came first upon the sound of her voice. The farmers heard it across the fields, and sometimes Israel heard it from over the hill by their hut. Often she seemed to them like a bird that is hidden in a tree, and only known to be there by the outbursts of its song.

Fatimah's ditties were still her delight. Some of them fell strangely from her pure lips, so nearly did they border on the dangerous. But her favourite song was still her

mother's:—

Oh, come and claim thine own, Oh, come and take thy throne, Reign ever and alone Reign glorious, golden Love.

Into these words, as her voice ripened, she seemed to pour a deeper fervour. She was as innocent as a child of their meaning, but it was almost as if she were fulfilling in some way a law of her nature as a maid and drifting blindly towards the dawn of Love. Never did she think of Love, but it was just as if Love were always thinking of her; it was even as if the spirit of Love were hovering over her constantly, and she were walking in the way of its outstretched wings.

Israel saw this, and it set him to chasing day-dreams that were like the drawing up of a curtain. A beautiful phantom of Naomi's future would rise up before him. Love had come to her. The great mystery! the rapture, the blissful wonder, the dear, secret, delicious palpitating joy. He knew it must come some day—perhaps to day, perhaps to-morrow. And when it came it would be like a sixth sense.

In quieter moments—generally at night, when he would take a candle and look at her where she lay asleep—Israel would carry his dreams into Naomi's future one stage farther, and see her in the first dawn of young motherhood. Her delicate face of pink an cream; her glance of pride and joy and yearning, an then the thrill of the little spreading red fingers fastening on her white bosom—oh, what a glimpse was there revealed to him!

But struggle as he would to find pleasure in these phantoms, he could not help but feel pain from them also. They had a perilous fascination for him, but he grudged them to Naomi. He thought he could have given his immortal soul to her, but these shadows he could not give. That was his poor tribute to human selfishness; his last tender, jealous frailty as a father. He dreaded the coming of that time when another—some other yet unseen—should come before him, and he should lose the daughter that was now his own.

Sometimes the memory of their old troubles in Tetuan seemed to cross like a thundercloud the azure of Naomi's sky, but at the next hour it was gone. The world was too full of marvels for any enduring sense but wonder. Once she awoke from sleep in terror, and told Israel of something which she believed to have happened to her in the night. She had been carried away from him—she could not say when—and she knew no more until she found herself in a great patio, paved and wailed with tiles. Men were standing together there in red peaked caps and flowing white kaftans. And before them all was one old man in garments that were of the colour of the afternoon sun, with sleeves like the mouths of bells, a curling silver knife at his waistband, and little leather bags hung by yellow cords about his neck. Beside this man there was a woman of a laughing cruel face; and she herself, Naomi—alone her father being nowhere near—stood in the midst with all eyes upon her. What happened next she did not know, for blank darkness fell upon everything, and in that interval they who had taken her away must have brought her back. For when she opened her eyes she was in her own bed, and the things of their little home were about her, and her father's eyes were looking down at her, and his lips were kissing her, and the sun was shining outside, and the birds were singing, and the long grass was whispering in the breeze, and it was the same as if she had been asleep during the night and was just awakening in the morning.

“It was a dream, my child,” said Israel, thinking only with how vivid a sense her eyes had gathered up in that instant of first sight the picture of that day at the Kasbah.

“A dream!” she cried; “no, no! I saw it!”

Hitherto her dreams had been blind ones, and if she dreamt of her own people it had not been of their faces, but of the touch of their hands or the sound of their voices. By one of these she had always known them, and sometimes it had been her mother's arms that had been about her, and sometimes her father's lips that had

pressed her forehead, and sometimes Ali's voice that had rung in her ears.

Israel smoothed her hair and calmed her fears, but thinking both of her dream and of her artless sayings, he said in his heart, “She is a child, a child born into life as a maid, and without the strength of a child's weakness. Oh! great is the wisdom which orders it so that we come into the world as babes.”

Thus realising Naomi's childishness, Israel kept close guard and watch upon her afterwards. But if she was a gleam of sunlight in his lonely dwelling, like sunlight she came and went in it, and one day he found her near to the track leading up to the fondak in talk with a passing traveller by the way, whom he recognised for the grossest profligate out of Tetuan. Unveiled, unabashed, with sweet looks of confidence she was gazing full into the man's gross face, answering his evil questions with the artless simplicity of innocence. At one bound Israel was between them; and in a moment he had torn Naomi away. And that night, while she wept out her very heart at the first anger that her father had shown her, Israel himself, in a new terror of his soul, was pouring out a new petition to God. “O Lord, my God,” he cried, “when she was blind and dumb and deaf she was a thing apart, she was a child in no peril from herself for Thy hand did guide her, and in none from the world, for no man dared outrage her infirmity. But now she is a maid, and her dangers are many, for she is beautiful, and the heart of man is evil. Keep me with her always, O Lord, to guard and guide her! Let me not leave her, for she is without knowledge of good and evil. Spare me a little while longer, though I am stricken in years. For her sake spare me, Oh Lord—it is the last of my prayers—the last, O Lord, the last—for her sake spare me!”

God did not hear the prayer of Israel. Next morning a guard of soldiers came out from Tetuan and took him prisoner in the name of the Kaid. The release of the poor followers of Absalam out of the prison at Shawan had become known by the blind gratitude of one of them, who, hastening to Israel's house in the Mellah, had flung

himself down on his face before it.

CHAPTER XXI

ISRAEL IN PRISON

Short as the time was—some three months and odd days—since the prison at Shawan had been emptied by order of the warrant which Israel had sealed without authority in the name of Ben Aboo, it was now occupied by other prisoners. The remoteness of the town in the territory of the Akhmas, and the wild fanaticism of the Shawanis, had made the old fortress a favourite place of banishment to such Kaids of other provinces as looked for heavier ransoms from the relatives of victims, because the locality of their imprisonment was unknown or the danger of approaching it was terrible. And thus it happened that some fifty or more men and boys from near and far were already living in the dungeon from which Israel and Ali together had set the other prisoners free.

This was the prison to which Israel was taken when he was torn from Naomi and the simple home that he had made for himself near Semsa. “Ya Allah! Let the dog eat the crust which he thought too hard for his pups!” said Ben Aboo, as he sealed the warrant which consigned Israel to the Kaid of Shawan.

Israel was taken to the prison afoot, and reached it on the morning of the second day after his arrest. The sun was shining as he approached the rude old block of masonry and entered the passage that led down to the dungeon. In a little court at the door of the place the Kaid el habs, the jailer, was sitting on a mattress, which served him for chair by day and bed by night. He was amusing himself with a ginbri, playing loud and low according as the tumult was great or little which came from the other side of a barred and knotted doorway behind him, some four feet high, and having a round peephole in the upper part of it. On the wall above hung leather thongs, and a long

Reefian flintlock stood in the corner.

At Israel's approach there were some facetious comments between the jailer and the guard. Why the ginbri? Was he practising for the fires of Jehinnum? Was he to fiddle for the Jinoon? Well, what was a man to do while the dogs inside were snarling? Were the thongs for the correction of persons lacking understanding? Why, yes; everybody knew their old saying, “A hint to the wise, a blow to the fool.”

A bunch of great keys rattled, the low doorway was thrown open, Israel stooped and went in, the door closed behind him, the footsteps of the guard died away, and the twang of the ginbri began again.

The prison was dark and noisome, some sixty feet long by half as many broad, supported by arches resting on rotten pillars, lighted only by narrow clefts at either hand, exuding damp from its walls, dropping moisture from its roof, its air full of vermin, and its floor reeking of filth. And only less horrible than the prison itself was the condition of the prisoners. Nearly all wore iron fetters on their legs, and some were shackled to the pillars. At one side a little group of them—they were Shereefs from Wazzan—were conversing eagerly and gesticulating wildly; and at the other side a larger company—they were Jews from Fez—were languidly twisting palmetto leaves into the shape of baskets. Four Berbers at the farther end were playing cards, and two Arabs that were chained to a column near the door squatted on the ground with a battered old draughtboard between them. From both groups of players came loud shouts and laughter and a running fire of expostulation and of indignant and sarcastic comment. Down went the cards with triumphant bangs, and the moves of the “dogs” were like lightning. First a mocking voice: “You call yourself a player! There!—there!—there!” Then a meek, piping tone: “So—so—verily, you are my master. Well, let us praise Allah for your wisdom.” But soon a wild burst of irony: “You are like him who killed the dog and fell into the river. See! thus I teach you to boast over your betters! I shave your beard!

There!—there!—and there!”

In the middle of the reeking floor, so placed that the thin shaft of light from the clefts at the ends might fall on them—a barber-doctor was bleeding a youth from a vein in the arm. “We're all having it done,” he was saying. “It's good for the internals. I did it to a shipload of pilgrims once.” A wild-looking creature sat in a corner—he was a saint, a madman, of the sect of the Darkaoa—rocking himself to and fro, and crying “Allah! All-lah! All-l-lah! All-l-l-lah!” Near to this person a haggard old man of the Grega sect was shaking and dancing at his prayers. And not far from either a Mukaddam, a high-priest of the Aissa, brotherhood—a juggler who had travelled through the country with a lion by a halter—was singing a frantic mockery of a Christian hymn to a tune that he had heard on the coast.

Such was the scene of Israel's imprisonment, and such were the companions that were to share it. There had been a moment's pause in the clamour of their babel as the door opened and Israel entered. The prisoners knew him, and they were aghast. Every eye looked up and every mouth was agape. Israel stood for a time with the closed door behind him. He looked around, made a step forward, hesitated, seemed to peer vainly through the darkness for bed or mattress, and then sat down helplessly by a pillar on the ground.

A young negro in a coarse jellab went up to him and offered a bit of bread. “Hungry, brother? No?” said the youth. “Cheer up, Sidi! No good letting the donkey ride on your head!”

This person was the Irishman of the company—a happy, reckless, facetious dog, who had lost little save his liberty and cared nothing for his life, but laughed and cheated and joked and made doggerel songs on every disaster that befell them. He made one song on himself—

El Arby was a black man They called him “'Larby Kosk:” He loved the wives of the Kasbah, And stole slippers in the Mosque.

Israel was stunned. Since his arrest he had scarcely spoken. “Stay here,” he had said to Naomi when the first outburst of her grief was quelled; “never leave this place. Whatever they say, stay here. I will come back.” After that he had been like a man who was dumb. Neither insult nor tyranny had availed to force a word or a cry out of him. He had walked on in silence doggedly, hardly once glancing up into the faces of his guard, and never breaking his fast save with a draught of water by the way.

At Shawan, as elsewhere in Barbary, the prisoners were supported by their own relatives and friends, and on the day after Israel's arrival a number of women and children came to the prison with provisions. It was a wild and gruesome scene that followed. First, the frantic search of the prisoners for their wives and sons and daughters, and their wild shouts as each one found his own. “Blessed be God! She's here! here!” Then the maddening cries of the prisoners whose relatives had not come. “My Ayesha! Where is she? Curses on her mother! Why isn't she here?” After that the shrieks of despair from such as learned that their breadwinners were dying off one by one. “Dead, you say?” “Dead!” “No, no!” “Yes, yes!” “No, no, I say!” “I say yes! God forgive me! died last week. But don't you die too. Here take this bag of zummetta.” Then inquiries after absent children. “Little Selam, where is he?” “Begging in Tetuan.” “Poor boy! poor boy! And pretty M'barka, what of her?” “Alas! M'barka's a public woman now in Hoolia's house at Marrakesh. No, don't curse her, Jellali; the poor child was driven to it. What were we to do with the children crying for bread? And then there was nothing to fetch you this journey, Jellali.” “I'll not eat it now it's brought. My boy a beggar and my girl a harlot? By Allah! May the Kaid that keeps me here roast alive in the fires of hell!” Then, apart in one quiet corner, a young Moor of Tangier eating rice out of the lap of his beautiful young wife. “You'll not be long coming again, dearest?” he whispers. She wipes her eyes and stammers, “No—that is—well—” “What's amiss?” “Ali, I must tell you—” “Well?” “Old Aaron Zaggoory says I must marry him, or he'll see that both of us starve.” “Allah! And you—you?” “Don't look at me like that, Ali; the

hunger is on me, and whatever happens I—I can love nobody else." "Curses on Aaron Zaggoory! Curses on you! Curses on everybody!"

No one had come with food for Israel, and seeing this 'Larby the negro swaggered up to him, singing a snatch and offering a round cake of bread—

Rusks are good and kiks are sweet And kesksoo is both meat and drink; It's this for now, and that for then, But khalia still for married men.

"You're like me, Sidi," he said, "you want nothing," and he made an upward movement of his forefinger to indicate his trust in Providence. That was the gay rascal's way of saying that he stole from the bags of his comrades while they slept.

"No? Fasting yet?" he said, and went off singing as he came—

It will make your ladies love you; It will make them coo and kiss—

"What?" he shouted to some one across the prison "eating khalia in the bird-cage? Bad, bad, bad!"

All this came to Israel's mind through thick waves of half-consciousness, but with his heart he heard nothing, or the very air of the place must have poisoned him. He sat by the pillar at which he had first placed himself, and hardly ever rose from it. With great slow eyes he gazed at everything, but nothing did he see. Sometimes he had the look of one who listens, but never did he hear. Thus in silence and languor he passed from day to day, and from night to night, scarcely sleeping, rarely eating, and seeming always to be waiting, waiting, waiting.

Fresh prisoners came at short intervals, and then only was Israel's interest awakened. One question he asked of all. "Where from?" If they answered from Fez, from Wazzan, from Mequinez, or from Marrakesh, Israel turned aside and left them without more words. Then to his fellows they might pour out their woes in loud wails and curses, but Israel would hear no more.

Strangers from Europe travelling through the country were allowed to look into the

prison through the round peephole of the door kept by the Kaid el habs, who played the ginbri. The Jews who made baskets took this opportunity to offer their work for sale; and so that he might see the visitors and speak with them Israel would snatch up something and hang it out. Always his question was the same. “Where from last?” he would say in English, or Spanish, or French, or Moorish. Sometimes it chanced that the strangers knew him. But he showed no shame. Never did their answers satisfy him. He would turn back to his pillar with a sigh.

Thus weeks went on, and Israel's face grew worn and tired. His fellow prisoners began to show him deference in their own rude way. When he came among them at the first they had grinned and laughed a little. To do that was always the impulse of the poor souls, so miserably imprisoned, when a new comrade joined him. But the majesty and the suffering in Israel's face told on their hearts at last. He was a great man fallen, he had nothing left to him; not even bread to eat or water to drink. So they gathered about him and hit on a way to make him share their food. Bringing their sacks to his pillar, they stacked them about it, and asked him to serve out provisions to all, day by day, share and share alike. He was honest, he was a master, no one would steal from him, it was best, the stuff would last longest. It was a touching sight.

Still the old eagerness betrayed itself in Israel's weary manner as often as the door opened and fresh prisoners arrived. Once it happened that before he uttered his usual question he saw that the newcomers were from Tetuan, and then his restlessness was feverish. “When—were you—have you been of late—” he stammered, and seemed unable to go farther.

But the Tetawanis knew and understood him. “No,” said one in answer to the unspoken question; “Nor I,” said another; “Nor I,” said a third, “Nor I neither,” said a fourth, as Israel's rapid eyes passed down the line of them.

He turned away without a word more, sat down by the pillar and looked vacantly

before him while the new prisoners told their story. Ben Aboo was a villain. The people of Tetuan had found him out. His wife was a harlot whose heart was a deep pit. Between them they were demoralising the entire bashalic. The town was worse than Sodom. Hardly a child in the streets was safe, and no woman, whether wife or daughter, whom God had made comely, dare show herself on the roofs. Their own women had been carried off to the palace at the Kasbah. That was why they themselves were there in prison.

This was about a month after the coming of Israel to Shawan. Then his reason began to unsettle. It was pitiful to see that he was conscious of the change that was befalling him. He wrestled with madness with all the strength of a strong man. If it should fall upon him, where then would be his hope and outlook? His day would be done, his night would be closed in, he would be no more than a helpless log, rolling in an ice-bound sea, and when the thaw came—if it ever came—he would be only a broken, rudderless, sailless wreck. Sometimes he would swear at nothing and fling out his arms wildly, and then with a look of shame hang down his head and mutter, “No, no, Israel; no, no, no!”

Other prisoners arrived from Tetuan, and all told the same story. Israel listened to them with a stupid look, seeming hardly to hear the tale they told him. But one morning, as life began again for the day in that slimy eddy of life's ocean, every one became aware that an awful change had come to pass. Israel's face had been worn and tired before, but now it looked very old and faded. His black hair had been sprinkled with grey, and now it was white; and white also was his dark beard, which had grown long and ragged. But his eye glistened, and his teeth were aglitter in his open mouth. He was laughing at everything, yet not wildly, not recklessly, not without meaning or intention, but with the cheer of a happy and contented man.

Israel was mad, and his madness was a moving thing to look upon. He thought he was back at home and a rich man still, as he had been in earlier days, but a generous

man also, as he was in later ones. With liberal hand he was dispensing his charities.

“Take what you need; eat, drink, do not stint; there is more where this has come from; it is not mine; God has lent it me for the good of all.”

With such words, graciously spoken, he served out the provisions according to his habit, and only departed from his daily custom in piling the measures higher, and in saluting the people by titles—Sid, Sidi, Mulai, and the like—in degree as their clothes were poor and ragged. It was a mad heart that spoke so, but also it was a big one.

From that time forward he looked upon the prisoners as his guests, and when fresh prisoners came to the prison he always welcomed them as if he were host there and they were friends who visited him. “Welcome!” he would say; “you are very welcome. The place is your own. Take all. What you don't see, believe we have not got it. A thousand thousand welcomes home!” It was grim and painful irony.

Israel's comrades began to lose sense of their own suffering in observing the depth of his, and they laid their heads together to discover the cause of his madness. The most part of them concluded that he was repining for the loss of his former state. And when one day another prisoner came from Tetuan with further tales of the Basha's tyranny, and of the people's shame at thought of how they had dealt by Israel, the prisoners led the man back to where Israel was standing in the accustomed act of dispensing bounty, that he might tell his story into the rightful ears.

“They're always crying for you,” said the Tetawani; “'Israel ben Oliel! Israel ben Oliel!' that's what you hear in the mosques and the streets everywhere.' Shame on us for casting him out, shame on us! He was our father!' Jews and Muslimeen, they're all saying so.”

It was useless. The glad tidings could not find their way. That black page of Israel's life which told of the people's ingratitude was sealed in the book of memory. Israel

laughed. What could his good friend mean? Behold! was he not rich? Had he not troops of comrades and guests about him?

The prisoners turned aside, baffled and done. At length one man—it was no other than 'Larby the wastrel—drew some of them apart and said, “You are all wrong. It's not his former state that he's thinking of. I know what it is—who knows so well as I? Listen! you hear his laughter! Well, he must weep, or he will be mad for ever. He must be made to weep. Yes, by Allah! and I must do it.”

That same night, when darkness fell over the dark place, and the prisoners tied up their cotton headkerchiefs and lay down to sleep, 'Larby sat beside Israel's place with sighs and moans and other symptoms of a dejected air.

“Sidi, master,” he faltered, “I had a little brother once, and he was blind. Born blind, Sidi, my own mother's son. But you wouldn't think how happy he was for all that? You see, Sidi he never missed anything, and so his little face was like laughing water! By Allah! I loved that boy better than all the world! Women? Why—well, never mind! He was six and I was eighteen, and he used to ride on my back! Black curls all over, Sidi, and big white eyes that looked at you for all they couldn't see. Well a bleeder came from Soos—curse his great-grandfather! Looked at little Hosain—'Scales!' said he—burn his father! Bleed him and he'll see! So they bled him, and he did see. By Allah! yes, for a minute—half a minute! 'Oh, 'Larby,' he cried—I was holding him; then he—he—' 'Larby,' he cried faint, like a lamb that's lost in the mountains—and then—and then—'Oh, oh, 'Larby,' he moaned Sidi, Sidi, I paid that bleeder—there and then—this way! That's why I'm here!”

It was a lie, but 'Larby acted it so well that his voice broke in his throat, and great drops fell from his eyes on to Israel's hand.

The effect on Israel himself was strange and even startling. While 'Larby was speaking, he was beating his forehead and mumbling: “Where? When? Naomi!” as if grappling for lost treasures in an ebbing sea. And when 'Larby finished, he fell on

him with reproaches. “And you are weeping for that?” he cried. “You think it much that the sweet child is dead—God rest him! So it is to the like of you, but look at me!”

His voice betrayed a grim pride in his miseries. “Look at me! Am I weeping? No; I would scorn to weep. But I have more cause a thousandfold. Listen! Once I was rich; but what were riches without children? Hard bread with no water for sop. I asked God for a child. He gave me a daughter; but she was born blind and dumb and deaf. I asked God to take my riches and give her hearing. He gave her hearing; but what was hearing without speech? I asked God to take all I had and give her speech. He gave her speech, but what was speech without sight? I asked God to take my place from me and give her sight. He gave her sight, and I was cast out of the town like a beggar. What matter? She had all, and I was forgiven. But when I was happy, when I was content, when she filled my heart with sunshine, God snatched me away from her. And where is she now? Yonder, alone, friendless, a child new-born into the world at the mercy of liars and libertines. And where am I? Here, like a beast in a trap, uttering abortive groans, toothless, stupid, powerless, mad. No, no, not mad, either! Tell me, boy, I am not mad!”

In the breaking waters of his madness he was struggling like a drowning man. “Yet I do not weep,” he cried in a thick voice. “God has a right to do as He will. He gave her to me for seventeen years. If she dies she'll be mine again soon. Only if she lives—only if she falls into evil hands—Tell me, have I been mad?”

He gave no time for an answer. “Naomi!” he cried, and the name broke in his throat. “Where are you now? What has—who have—your father is thinking of you—he is—No, I will not weep. You see I have a good cause, but I tell you I will never weep. God has a right—Naomi!—Na—”

The name thickened to a sob as he repeated it, and then suddenly he rose and cried in an awful voice, “Oh, I'm a fool! God has done nothing for me. Why should I do

anything for God? He has taken all I had. He has taken my child. I have nothing more to give Him but my life. Let Him take that too. Take it, I beseech Thee!" he cried—the vault of the prison rang—"Take it, and set me free!"

But at the next moment he had fallen back to his place, and was sobbing like a little child. The other prisoners had risen in their amazement, and 'Larby, who was shedding hot tears over his cold ones, was capering down the floor, and singing, "El Arby was a black man."

Then there was a rattling of keys, and suddenly a flood of light shot into the dark place. The Kaid el habs was bringing a courier, who carried an order for Israel's release. Abd er-Rahman, the Sultan, was to keep the feast of the Moolood at Tetuan, and Ben Aboo, to celebrate the visit, had pardoned Israel.

It was coals of fire on Israel's head. "God is good," he muttered. "I shall see her again. Yes, God has a right to do as He will. I shall see her soon. God is wise beyond all wisdom. I must lose no time. Jailer can I leave the town to-night? I wish to start on my journey. To-night?—yes, to-night! Are the gates open? No? You will open them? You are very good. Everybody is very good. God is good. God is mighty."

Then half in shame, and partly as apology for his late intemperate outburst, with a simpleness that was almost childish, he said, "A man's a fool when he loses his only child. I don't mean by death. Time heals that. But the living child—oh, it's an unending pain! You would never think how happy we were. Her pretty ways were all my joy. Yes, for her voice was music, and her breath was like the dawn. Do you know, I was very fond of the little one—I was quite miserable if I lost sight of her for an hour. And then to be wrenched away! . . . . But I must hasten back. The little one will be waiting. Yes, I know quite well she'll be looking out from the door in the sunshine when she awakes in the morning. It's always the way of these tender creatures, is it not? So we must humour them. Yes, yes, that's so that's so."

His fellow-prisoners stood around him each in his night-headkerchief knotted under his chin—gaunt, hooded figures, in the shifting light of the jailer's lantern.

“Farewell, brothers!” he cried; and one by one they touched his hand and brought it to their breasts.

“Farewell, master!” “Peace, Sidi!” “Farewell!” “Peace!” “Farewell!”

The light shot out; the door clasped back; there were footsteps dying away outside; two loud bangs as of a closing gate, and then silence—empty and ghostly.

In the darkness the hooded figures stood a moment listening, and then a croaking, breaking, husky, merry voice began to sing—

El Arby was a black man, They called him “'Larby Kosk;” He loved the wives of the Kasbah, And stole slippers in the Mosque.

CHAPTER XXII

HOW NAOMI TURNED MUSLIMA

What had happened to Naomi during the two months and a half while Israel lay at Shawan is this: After the first agony of their parting, in which she was driven back by the soldiers when she attempted to follow them, she sat down in a maze of pain, without any true perception of the evil which had befallen her, but with her father's warning voice and his last words in her ear: “Stay here. Never leave this place. Whatever they say, stay here. I will come back.”

When she awoke in the morning, after a short night of broken sleep and fitful dreams, the voice and the words were with her still, and then she knew for the first time what the meaning was, and what the penalty, of this strange and dread asundering. She was alone, and, being alone, she was helpless; she was no better than a child, without kindred to look to her and without power to look to herself, with food and drink beside her, but no skill to make and take them.

Thus her awakening sense was like that of a lamb whose mother has been swallowed up in the night by the sand-drifts of the simoom. It was not so much love as loss. What to do, where to look, which way to turn first, she knew no longer, and could not think, for lack of the hand that had been wont to guide her.

The neighbouring Moors heard of what had happened to Naomi, and some of the women among them came to see her. They were poor farming people, oppressed by cruel taxmasters; and the first things they saw were the cattle and sheep, and the next thing was the simple girl with the child-face, who knew nothing yet of the ways wherein a lonely woman must fend for herself.

“You cannot live here alone, my daughter,” they said; “you would perish. Then think of the danger—a child like you, with a face like a flower! No, no, you must come to us. We will look to you like one of our own, and protect you from evil men. And as for the creatures—”

“But he said I was never to leave this place,” said Naomi. “'Stay here,' he said; 'whatever they say, stay here. I will come back.'”

The women protested that she would starve, be stolen, ruined, and murdered. It was in vain. Naomi's answer was always the same: “He told me to stay here, and surely I must do so.”

Then one after another the poor folks went away in anger. “Tut!” they thought, “what should we want with the Jew child? Allah! Was there ever such a simpleton? The good creatures going to waste, too! And as for her father, he'll never come back—never. Trust the Basha for that!”

But when the humanity of the true souls had conquered their selfishness, they came again one by one and vied with each other in many simple offices—milking and churning, and baking and delving—in pity of the sweet girl with the great eyes who had been left to live alone. And Naomi, seeing her helplessness at last, put out all her powers to remedy it, so that in a little while she was able to do for herself nearly

everything that her neighbours at first did for her. Then they would say among themselves, “Allah! she's not such a baby after all; and if she wasn't quite so beautiful, poor child, or if the world wasn't so wicked—but then, God is great! God is great!”

Not at first had Naomi understood them when they told her that her father had been cast into prison, and every night when she left her lamp alight by the little skin-covered window that was half-hidden under the dropping eaves, and every morning when she opened her door to the radiance of the sun she had whispered to herself and said, “He will come back, Naomi; only wait, only wait; maybe it will be tonight, maybe it will be to-day; you will see, you will see.”

But after the awful thought of what prison was had fully dawned upon her as last, by help of what she saw and heard of other men who had been there, her old content in her father's command that she should never leave that place was shaken and broken by a desire to go to him.

“Who's to feed him, poor soul? He will be famishing. If the Kaid finds him in bread, it will only be so much more added to his ransom. That will come to the same thing in the end, or he'll die in prison.”

Thus she had heard the gossips talk among themselves when they thought she did not listen. And though it was little she understood of Kaids and ransoms, she was quick to see the nature of her father's peril, and at length she concluded that, in spite of his injunction, go to him she should and must. With that resolve, her mind, which had been the mind of a child seemed to spring up instantly and become the mind of a woman, and her heart, that had been timid, suddenly grew brave, for pity and love were born in it. “He must be starving in prison,” she thought, “and I will take him food.”

When her neighbours heard of her intention they lifted their hands in consternation and horror. “God be gracious to my father!” they cried. “Shawan? You? Alone?

Child, you'll be lost, lost—worse, a thousand times worse! Shoof! you're only a baby still."

But their protests availed as little to keep Naomi at her home now as their importunities had done before to induce her to leave it. "He must be starving in prison," she said, "and I will take him food."

Her neighbours left her to her stubborn purpose.

"Allah!" they said, "who would have believed it, that the little pink-and-white face had such a will of her own!"

Without more ado Naomi set herself to prepare for her journey. She saved up thirty eggs, and baked as many of the round flat cakes of the country; also she churned some butter in the simple way which the women had taught her, and put the milk that was left in a goat's-skin. In three days she was ready, and then she packed her provisions in the leaf panniers of a mule which one of the neighbours had lent to her, and got up before them on the front of the burda, after the manner of the wives whom she had seen going past to market.

When she was about to start her gossips came again, in pity of her wild errand, to bid her farewell and to see the last of her. "Keep to the track as far as Tetuan," they said to her, "and then ask for the road to Shawan." One old creature threw a blanket over her head in such a way that it might cover her face. "Faces like yours are not for the daylight," the old body whispered, and then Naomi set forward on her journey. The women watched her while she mounted the hill that goes up to the fondak, and then sinks out of sight beyond it. "Poor mad little fool," they whimpered; "that's the end of her! She'll never come back. Too many men about for that. And now," they said, facing each other with looks of suspicion and envy, "what of the creatures?"

While the good souls were dividing her possessions among them, Naomi was awakening to some vague sense of her difficulties and dangers. She had thought it

would be easy to ask her way, but now that she had need to do so she was afraid to speak. The sight of a strange face alarmed her, and she was terrified when she met a company of wandering Arabs changing pasture, with the young women and children on camels, the old women trudging on foot under loads of cans and kettles, the boys driving the herds, and the men, armed with long flintlocks, riding their prancing barbs. Her poor little mule came to a stand in the midst of this cavalcade, and she was too bewildered to urge it on. Also her fear which had first caused her to cover her face with the blanket that her neighbour had given her, now made her forget to do so, and the men as they passed her peered close into her eyes. Such glances made her blood to tingle. They seared her very soul, and she began to know the meaning of shame.

Nevertheless, she tried to keep up a brave heart and to push forward. “He is starving in prison,” she told herself; “I must lose no time.” It was a weary journey. Everything was new to her, and nearly everything was terrible. She was even perplexed to see that however far she travelled she came upon men and women and children. It was so strange that all the world was peopled. Yet sometimes she wished there were more people everywhere. That was when she was crossing a barren waste with no house in sight and never a sign of human life on any side. But oftener she wished that the people were not so many; and that was when the children mocked at her mule, or the women jeered at her as if she must needs be a base person because she was alone, or the men laughed and leered into her uncovered face.

Before she had gone many miles her heart began to fail. Everything was unlike what she expected. She had thought the world so good that she had but to say to any that asked her of her errand, “My father is in prison, they say that he is starving; I am taking him food,” and every one would help her forward. Though she had never put it to herself so, yet she had reckoned in this way in spite of the warnings of her neighbours. But no one was helping her forward; few were looking on her with goodwill, and fewer still with pity and cheer.

The jogging of the mule, a most bony and stiff-limbed beast, had flattened the panniers that hung by its side, and made the round cakes of bread to protrude from the open mouth of one of them. Seeing this, a line of market-women going by, with bags of charcoal on their backs, snatched a cake each as they passed and munched them and laughed. Naomi tried to protest. “The bread is for my father,” she faltered; “he is in prison; they say he—” But the expostulation that began thus timidly broke down of itself, for the women laughed again out of their mouths choked with the bread, and in another moment they were gone.

Naomi's spirit was crushed, but she tried to keep up a brave front still. To speak of her father again would be to shame him. The poor little illusions of the sweetness and goodness of the world which, in spite of vague recollections of Tetuan, she had struggled, since the coming of her sight, to build up in her fresh young soul, were now tumbling to pieces. After all, the world was very cruel. It was the same as if an angel out of the clouds had fallen on to the earth and found her feet mired with clay.

Six hours after she had set out from her home Naomi came to a fondak which stood in those days outside the walls of Tetuan on the south-western side. The darkness had closed in by this time, and she must needs rest there for the night, but never until then had she reflected that for such accommodation she would need money. Only a few coppers were necessary, only twenty moozoonahs, that she might lie in the shelter and safety of one of the pens that were built for the sleep of human creatures, and that her mule might be tethered and fed on the manure heap that constituted the square space within. At last she bethought her of her eggs, and, though it went to her heart to use for herself what was meant for her father, she parted with twelve of them, and some cakes of the bread besides, that she might be allowed to pass the gate, telling herself repeatedly, with big throbs of remorse between her protestations, that unless she did so her father might never get anything at all.

The fondak was a miserable place, full of farming people who were to go on to

market at Tetuan in the morning, of many animals of burden, and of countless dogs. It was the eve of the month of Rabya el-ooal, and between the twilight and the coming of night certain of the men watched for the new moon, and when its thin bow appeared in the sky they signalled its advent after their usual manner by firing their flintlocks into the air, while their women, who were squatting around, kept up a cooing chorus. Then came eating and drinking, and laughing and singing, and playing the ginbri, and feats of juggling, as well as snarling and quarrelling and fighting, and also peacemaking by means of a cudgel wielded by the keeper of the fondak. With such exercises the night passed into morning.

Naomi was sick. Her head ached. The smell of rotten fish, the stench of the manure heap, the braying of the donkeys, the barking of the dogs, the grunt of the camels, and the tumult of human voices made her light-headed. She could neither eat nor sleep. Almost as soon as it was light she was up and out and on her way. “I must lose no time,” she thought, trying not to realise that the blue sky was spinning round her, that noises were ringing in her head, and that her poor little heart, which had been so stout only yesterday, was sinking very low.

“He must be starving,” she told herself again, and that helped her to forget her own troubles and to struggle on. But oh, if the world were only not so cruel, oh, if there were anyone to give her a word of cheer, nay, a glance of pity! But nobody had looked at her except the women who stole her bread and the men who shamed her with their wicked eyes.

That one day's experience did more than all her life before it to fill her with the bitter fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Her illusions fell away from her, and her sweet childish faith was broken down. She saw herself as she was: a simple girl, a child ignorant of the ways of the world, going alone on a long journey unknown to her, thinking to succour her father in prison, and carrying a handful of eggs and a few poor cakes of bread. When at length the scales fell from the eyes of

her mind, and as she trudged along on her bony mule, afraid to ask her way, she saw herself, with all her fine purposes shrivelled up, do what she would to be brave, she could not help but cry. It was all so vain, so foolish; she was such a weak little thing. Her father knew this, and that was why he told her to stay where he left her. What if he came home while she was absent! Should she go back?

She had almost resolved to return, struggle as she might to push forward, when going close under the town walls, near to the very gate, the Bab Toot whereat she had been cast out with her father remembering this scene of their abasement with a new sense of its cruelty and shame born of her own simple troubles, she lit upon a woman who was coming out.

It was Habeebah. She was now the slave of Ben Aboo, and was just then stealing away from the Kasbah in the early morning that she might go in search of Naomi, whose whereabouts and condition she had lately learned.

The two might have passed unknown, for Habeebah was veiled, but that Naomi had forgotten her blanket and was uncovered. In another moment the poor frightened girl, with all her brave bearing gone, was weeping on the black woman's breast.

“Whither are you going?” said Habeebah.

“To my father,” Naomi began. “He is in prison; they say he is starving; I was taking food to him, but I am lost, I don't know my way; and besides—”

“The very thing!” cried Habeebah.

Habeebah had her own little scheme. It was meant to win emancipation at the hands of her master, and paradise for her soul when she died. Naomi, who was a Jewess, was to turn Muslima. That was all. Then her troubles would end, and wondrous fortune would descend upon her, and her father who was in prison would be set free.

Now, religion was nothing to Naomi; she hardly understood what it meant. The differences of faith were less than nothing, but her father was everything, and so she clutched at Habeebah's bold promises like a drowning soul at the froth of a breaker.

“My father will be let out of prison? You are sure—quite sure?” she asked.

“Quite sure,” answered Habeebah stoutly.

Naomi's hopes of ever reaching her father were now faint, and her poor little stock of eggs and bread looked like folly to her new-born worldliness.

“Very well,” she said. “I will turn Muslima.”

A few minutes afterwards she was riding by Habeebah's side into the town, through the Bab Toot across the Feddan, and up to the courtyard of the Kasbah, which had witnessed the beginning of her own and her father's degradation. Then, tethering the beast in the open stables there, Habeebah took Naomi into her own little room and left her alone for some minutes, while she hastened to Ben Aboo in secret with her wondrous news.

“Lord Basha,” she said, “the beautiful Jewess Naomi, the daughter of Israel ben Oliel, will turn Muslima.”

“Where is she?” said Ben Aboo.

“Sidi,” said Habeebah, “I have promised that you will liberate her father.”

“Fetch her,” said Ben Aboo, “and it shall be done.”

But meanwhile Fatimah had gone to Habeebah's room and found Naomi there, and heard of the vain hope which had brought her.

“My sweet jewel of gold and silver,” the black woman cried, “you don't know what you are doing. Turn Muslima, and you will be parted from your father for ever. He is a Jew, and will have no right to you any more. You will never, never see him again. He will be lost to you—lost—I say—lost!”

Habeebah, with two of the guard, came back to take Naomi to Ben Aboo. The poor girl was bewildered. She had seen nothing but her father in Fatimah's protest, just as she had seen nothing but her father in Habeebah's promises. She did not know what to do, she was such a poor weak little thing, and there was no strong hand to guide

her.

They led her through dark passages to an open place which she thought she had seen before. It was a great patio, paved and walled with tiles. Men were standing together there in red peaked caps and flowing white kaftans. And before them all was one old man in garments that were of the colour of the afternoon sun, with sleeves like the mouths of bells, a silver knife at his waistband, and little leather bags, hung by yellow cords, about his neck. Beside this man there was a woman of a laughing cruel face, and she herself, Naomi, stood in the midst, with every eye upon her. Where had she seen all this before?

Ben Aboo had often bethought him of the beautiful girl since he committed her father to prison. He cherished schemes concerning her which he did not share with his wife Katrina. But he had hitherto been withheld by two considerations: the first being that he was beset with difficulties arising out of the demands of the Sultan for more money than he could find, and the next that he foresaw the necessity that might perchance arise of recalling Israel to his post. Out of these grave bedevilments he had extricated himself at length by imposing dues on certain tribes of Reefians, who had never yet acknowledged the Sultan's authority, and by calling on the Sultan's army to enforce them. The Sultan had come in answer to his summons, the Reefians had been routed, their villages burnt, and that morning at daybreak he had received a message saying that Abd er-Rahman intended to keep the feast of the Moolood at Tetuan. So this capture of Naomi was the luckiest chance that could have befallen him at such a moment. She should witness to the Prophet; her father, the Jew, would thereby lose his rights in her; and he himself, as her sole guardian, would present her as a peace-offering to the Sultan on crossing the boundary of his bashalic.

Such was the new plan which Ben Aboo straightway conceived at hearing the news of Habeebah, and in another moment he had propounded it to Katrina. But when Naomi came into the patio, looking so soft, so timid, so tired, yet so beautiful, so

unlike his own painted beauties, with the light of the dawn on her open face, with her clear eyes and the sweet mouth of a child, his evil passions had all they could do not to go back to his former scheme.

“So you wish to turn Muslima?” he said.

Naomi gave one dazed look around, and then cried in a voice of fear “No, no, no!”

Ben Aboo glanced at Habeebah, and Habeebah fell upon Naomi with protests and remonstrances. “She said so,” Habeebah cried. “'I will turn Muslima,' she said. Yes, Sidi, she said so, I swear it!”

“Did you say so?” asked Ben Aboo.

“Yes,” said Naomi faintly.

“Then, by Allah, there can be no going back now,” said Ben Aboo; and he told her what was the penalty of apostasy. It was death. She must choose between them.

Naomi began to cry, and Ben Aboo to laugh at her and Habeebah to plead with her. Still she saw one thing only. “But what of my father?” she said.

“He shall be liberated,” said Ben Aboo.

“But shall I see him again? Shall I go back to him?” said Naomi.

“The girl is a simpleton!” said Katrina.

“She is only a child,” said Ben Aboo, and with one glance more at her flower-like face, he committed her for three days to the apartments of his women.

These apartments consisted of a garden overgrown by straggling weeds, with a fountain of muddy water in the middle, an oblong room that was stifling from many perfumes, and certain smaller chambers. The garden was inhabited by a gazelle, whose great startled eyes looked out through the long grass; and the oblong room by a number of women of varying ages, among whom were a matronly Mooress, called Tarha, in a scarlet head-dress, and with a string of great keys swung from shoulder to waist; a Circassian, called Hoolia, in a gorgeous rida of red silk and gold brocade;

a Frenchwoman, called Josephine, with embroidered red slippers and black stockings; and a Jewess, called Sol, with a band of silk handkerchiefs tied round her forehead above her coal-black curls, with her fingers pricked out with henna and her eyes darkened with kohl.

Such were Ben Aboo's wives and concubines and captives, whom he had not divorced according to his promise; and when Naomi came among them they did their duty by their master faithfully. Being trapped themselves, they tried to entrap Naomi also. They overwhelmed her with caresses, they went into ecstasies over her beauty, and caused the future which awaited her to shine before her eyes. She would have a noble husband, magnificent dresses, a brilliant palace, and the world would be at her feet. “And what's the difference between Moosa and Mohammed?” said Sol; “look at me!” “Tut!” said Josephine, “there's nothing to choose between them.” “For my part,” said Tarha, “I don't see what it matters to us; they say Paradise is for the men!” “And think of the jewels, and the earrings as big as a bracelet,” said Hoolia, “instead of this,” and she drew away between her thumb and first finger the blanket which Naomi's neighbour had given her.

It was all to no purpose. “But what of my father?” Naomi asked again and again.

The women lost patience at her simplicity, gave up their solicitations, ignored her, and busied themselves with their own affairs. “Tut!” they said, “why should we want her to be made a wife of the Sultan? She would only walk over us like dirt whenever she came to Tetuan.”

Then, sitting alone in their midst, listening to their talk, their tales, their jests, and their laughter, the unseen mantle fell upon Naomi at last, which made her a woman who had hitherto been a child. In this hothouse of sickly odours these women lived together, having no occupation but that of eating and drinking and sleeping, no education but devising new means of pleasing the lust of their husband's eye, no delight than that of supplanting one another in his love, no passion but jealousy, no

diversion but sporting on the roofs, no end but death and the Kabar.

Seeing the uselessness of the siege, Ben Aboo transferred Naomi to the prison, and set Habeebah to guard her. The black woman was in terror at the turn that events had taken. There was nothing to do now but to go on, so she importuned Naomi with prayers. How could she be so hard-hearted? Could she keep her father famishing in prison when one word out of her lips would liberate him? Naomi had no answer but her tears. She remembered the hareem, and cried.

Then Ben Aboo thought of a daring plan. He called the Grand Rabbi, and commanded him to go to Naomi and convert her to Islam. The Rabbi obeyed with trembling. After all, it was the same God that both peoples worshipped, only the Moors called Him Allah and the Jews Jehovah. Naomi knew little of either. It was not of God that she was thinking: it was only of her father. She was too innocent to see the trick, but the Rabbi failed. He kissed her, and went away wiping his eyes.

Rumour of Naomi's plight had passed through the town, and one night a number of Moors came secretly to a lane at the back of the Kasbah, where a narrow window opened into her cell. They told her in whispers that what she held as tragical was a very simple matter. “Turn Muslima,” they pleaded, “and save yourself. You are too young to die. Resign yourself, for God's sake.” But no answer came back to them where they were gathered in the darkness, save low sobs from inside the wall.

At last Ben Aboo made two announcements. The first, a public one, was that Abd er-Rahman would reach Tetuan within two days, on the opening of the feast of the Moolood, and the other, a private one, that if Naomi had not said the Kelmah by first prayers the following morning she should die and her father be cut off as the penalty of her apostasy.

That night the place under the narrow window in the dark lane was occupied by a group of Jews. “Sister,” they whispered, “sister of our people, listen. The Basha is a hard man. This day he has robbed us of all we had that he may pay for the Sultan's

visit. Listen! We have heard something. We want Israel ben Oliel back among us. He was our father, he was our brother. Save his life for the sake of our children, for the Basha has taken their bread. Save him, sister, we beg, we entreat, we pray."

Naomi broke down at last. Next morning at dawn, kneeling among men in the Grand Mosque in the Metamar, she repeated the Word after the Iman: "I testify that there is no God but God, and that our Lord Mohammed is the messenger of God; I am truly resigned."

Then she was taken back to the women's apartments, and clad gorgeously. Her child face was wet with tears. She was only a poor weak little thing, she knew nothing of religion, she loved her father better than God, and all the world was against her.

CHAPTER XXIII

ISRAEL'S RETURN FROM PRISON

Such was the method of Israel's release. But, knowing nothing of the price which had been paid for it, he was filled with an immense joy. Nay, his happiness was quite childish, so suddenly had the darkness which hung over his life been lifted away. Any one who had seen him in prison would have been puzzled by the change as he came away from it. He laughed with the courier who walked with him to the town gate, and jested with the gate porter as with an old acquaintance. His voice was merry, his eye gleamed in the rays of the lantern, his face was flushed, and his step was light. "Afraid to travel in the night? No, no, I'll meet nothing worse than myself. Others may who meet me? Ha, ha! Perhaps so, perhaps so!" "No evil with you, brother?" "No evil, praise be God." "Well, peace be to you!" "On you be peace!" "May your morning be blessed! Good-night!" "Good-night!" Then with a wave of the hand he was gone into the darkness.

It was a wonderful night. The moon, which was in its first quarter, was still low in

the east, but the stars were thick overhead, making a silvery dome that almost obliterated the blue. Rivers were rumbling on the hillside, an owl was hooting in the distance, kine that could not be seen were chewing audibly near at hand, and sheep like patches of white in the gloom were scuttling through the grass before Israel's footsteps. Israel walked quickly, tracing his course between the two arms of the Jebel Sheshawan, whose summits were visible against the sky. The air was cool and moist, and a gentle breeze was blowing from the sea. Oh! the joy of it to him who had lain long months in prison! Israel drank in the night air as a young colt drinks in the wind.

And if it was night in the world without, it was day in Israel's heart. “I am going to be happy,” he told himself, “yes, very happy, very happy.” He raised his eyes to heaven, and a star, bigger and brighter than the rest, hung over the path before him. “It is leading me to Naomi,” he thought. He knew that was folly, but he could not restrain his mind from foolishness. And at least she had the same moon and stars above her sleep, for she would be sleeping now. “I am coming,” he cried. He fixed his eye on the bright star in front and pushed forward, never resting, never pausing.

The morning dawned. Long rippling waves of morning air came down the mountains, cool, chill, and moist. The grey light became tinged with red. Then the sun rose somewhere. It had not yet appeared, but the peak of the western hill was flushed and a raven flew out and perched on the point of light. Israel's breast expanded, and he strode on with a firmer step. “She will be waking soon,” he told himself.

The world awoke. From unseen places birds began to sing—the wheatear in the crevices of the rocks, the sedge-warbler among the rushes of the rivers. The sun strode up over the hill summit, and then all the earth below was bright. Dewdrops sparkled on the late flowers, and lay like vast spiders' webs over the grass; sheep began to bleat, dogs to bark, kine to low, horses to cross each other's necks, and over

the freshness of the air came the smell of peat and of green boughs burning. Israel did not stop, but pushed on with new eagerness. “She will have risen now,” he told himself. He could almost fancy he saw her opening the door and looking out for him in the sunlight.

“Poor little thing,” he thought, “how she misses me! But I am coming, I am coming!”

The country looked very beautiful, and strangely changed since he saw it last. Then it had been like a dead man's face; now it was like a face that was always smiling. And though the year was so old it seemed to be quite young. No tired look of autumn, no warning of winter; only the freshness and vigour of spring. “I am going to see my child, and I shall be happy yet,” thought Israel. The dust of life seemed to hang on him no longer.

He came to a little village called Dar el Fakeer—“the house of the poor one.” The place did not even justify its name, for it was a cinereous wreck. Not a living creature was to be seen anywhere. The village had been sacked by the Sultan's army, and its inhabitants had fled to the mountains. Israel paused a moment, and looked into one of the ruined houses. He knew it must have been the house of a Jew, for he could recognise it by its smell. The floor was strewn over with rubbish—cans, kettles, water-bottles, a woman's handkerchief, and a dainty red slipper. On the ragged grass in the court within there were some little stones built up into tiny squares, and bits of stick stuck into the ground in lines. A young girl had lived in that house; children had played there; the gaunt and silent place breathed of their spirits still. “Poor souls!” thought Israel, but the troubles of others could not really touch him. At that very moment his heart was joyful.

The day was warm, but not too hot for walking. Israel did not feel weary, and so he went on without resting. He reckoned how far it was from Shawan to his home near Semsa. It was nearly seventy miles. That distance would take two days and two

nights to cover on foot. He had left the prison on Wednesday night, and it would be Friday at sunset before he reached Naomi. It was now Thursday morning. He must lose no time. “You see, the poor little thing will be waiting, waiting, waiting,” he told himself. “These sweet creatures are all so impatient; yes, yes, so foolishly impatient. God bless them!”

He met people on the road, and hailed them with good cheer. They answered his greetings sadly, and a few of them told him of their trouble. Something they said of Ben Aboo, that he demanded a hundred dollars which they could not pay, and something of the Sultan, that he had ransacked their houses and then gone on with his great army, his twenty wives, and fifteen tents to keep the feast at Tetuan. But Israel hardly knew what they told him, though he tried to lend an ear to their story. He was thinking out a wonderful scheme for the future. With Naomi he was to leave Morocco. They were to sail for England. Free, mighty, noble, beautiful England! Ah, how it shone in his memory, the little white island of the sea! His mother's home! England! Yes, he would go back to it. True, he had no friends there now; but what matter of that? Ah, yes, he was old, and the roll-call of his kindred showed him pitiful gaps. His mother! Ruth! But he had Naomi still. Naomi! He spoke her name aloud, softly, tenderly, caressingly, as if his wrinkled hand were on her hair. Then recovering himself, he laughed to think that he could be so childish.

Near to sunset he came upon a dooar, a tent village, in a waste place. It was pitched in a wide circle, and opened inwards. The animals were picketed in the centre, where children and dogs were playing, and the voices of men and women came from inside the tents. Fires were burning under kettles swung from triangles, and sight of this reminded Israel that he had not eaten since the previous day. “I must have food,” he thought, “though I do not feel hungry.” So he stopped, and the wandering Arabs hailed him. “Markababikum!” they cried from where they sat within.

“You are very welcome! Welcome to our lofty land!” Their land was the world.

Israel went into one of the tents, and sat down to a dish of boiled beans and black bread. It was very sweet. A man was eating beside him; a woman, half dressed, and with face uncovered, was suckling a child while she worked a loom which was fastened to the tent's two upright poles. Some fowls were nestling for the night under the tent wing, and a young girl was by turns churning milk by tossing it in a goat's-skin and baking cakes on a fire of dried thistles crackling in a hole over three stones. All were laughing together, and Israel laughed along with them.

“On a long journey, brother?” said the man.

“No, oh no, no,” said Israel. “Only to Semsa, no farther.”

“Well, you must sleep here to-night,” said the Arab.

“Ah, I cannot do that,” said Israel.

“No?”

“You see, I am going back to my little daughter. She is alone, poor child, and has not seen her old father for months. Really it is wrong of a man to stay away such a time. These tender creatures are so impatient, you know. And then they imagine such things, do they not? Well, I suppose we must humour them—that's what I always say.”

“But look, the night is coming, and a dark one, too!” said the woman.

“Oh, nothing, that's nothing, sister,” said Israel. “Well, peace! Farewell all, farewell!”

Waving his hand he went away laughing, but before he had gone far the darkness overtook him. It came down from the mountains like a dense black cloud. Not a star in the sky, not a gleam on the land, darkness ahead of him, darkness behind, one thick pall hanging in the air on every side. Still for a while he toiled along. Every step was an effort. The ground seemed to sink under him. It was like walking on mattresses. He began to feel tired and nervous and spiritless. A cold sweat broke out

on his brow, and at length, when the sound of a river came from somewhere near, though on which side of him he could not tell, he had no choice but to stop. “After all, it is better,” he thought. “Strange, how things happen for the best! I must sleep to-night, for to-morrow night I will get no sleep at all. No, for I shall have so many things to say and to ask and to hear.”

Consoling him thus, he tried to sleep where he was, and as slumber crept upon him in the darkness, with five-and-twenty heavy miles of dense night between him and his home, he crooned and talked to himself in a childish way that he might comfort his aching heart. “Yes, I must sleep—sleep—to-morrow she must sleep and I must watch by her—watch by her as I used to do—used to do—how soft and beautiful—how beautiful—sleeping—sleep—Ah!”

When he awoke the sun had risen. The sea lay before him in the distance, the blue Mediterranean stretching out to the blue sky. He was on the borders of the country of the Beni-Hassan, and, after wading the river, which he had heard in the night, he began again on his journey. It was now Friday morning, and by sunset of that day he would be back at his home near Semsa. Already he could see Tetuan far away, girt by its white walls, and perched on the hillside. Yonder it lay in the sunlight, with the snow-tipped heights above it, a white blaze surrounded by orange orchards.

But how dizzy he was! How the world went round! How the earth trembled! Was the glare of the sun too fierce that morning, or had his eyes grown dim? Going blind? Well, even so, he would not repine, for Naomi could see now. She would see for him also. How sweet to see through Naomi's eyes! Naomi was young and joyous, and bright and blithe. All the world was new to her, and strange and beautiful. It would be a second and far sweeter youth.

Naomi—Naomi—always Naomi! He had thought of her hitherto as she had appeared to him during the few days of their happy lives at Semsa. But now he began to wonder if time had not changed her since then. Two months and a half—it

seemed so long! He had visions of Naomi grown from a sweet girl to a lovely woman. A great soul beamed out of her big, slow eyes. He himself approached her meekly, humbly, reverently. Nevertheless, he was her father still—her old, tired, dim-eyed father; and she led him here and there, and described things to him. He could see and hear it all. First Naomi's voice: “A bow in the sky—red, blue, crimson—oh!” Then his own deeper one, out of its lightsome darkness: “A rainbow, child!” Ah! the dreams were beautiful!

He tried to recall the very tones of Naomi's voice—the voice of his poor dead Ruth—and to remember the song that she used to sing—the song she sang in the patio on that great night of the moonlight, when he was returning home from the Bab Ramooz, and heard her singing from the street—

Within my heart a voice Bids earth and heaven rejoice.

He sang the song to himself as he toiled along. With a little lisp he sang it, so that he might cheat himself and think that the voice he was making was Naomi's voice and not his own.

Towards midday Israel came under the walls of Tetuan, between the Sultan's gardens and the flour-mills that are turned by the escaping sewers, and there he lit upon a company of Jews. They were a deputation that had come out from the town to meet him, and at first sight of his face they were shocked. He had left Tetuan a stricken man, it was true, but strong and firm, fifty years of age and resolute. Six months had passed, and he was coming back as a weak, broken, shattered, doddering, infirm old man of eighty. Their hearts fell low before they spoke, but after a pause one of them—Israel knew him: a grey-bearded man, his name was Solomon Laredo—stepped up and said, “Israel ben Oliel, our poor Tetuan is in trouble. It needs you. Alas! we dealt ill with you, but God has punished us, and we are brothers now. Come back to us, we pray of you; for we have heard of a great thing that is coming to pass. Listen!”

Something they told him then of Mohammed of Mequinez, follower of Seedna Aissa (Jesus of Nazareth), but a good man nevertheless, and also something they said of the Spaniards and of one Marshal O'Donnel, who was to bombard Marteel. But Israel heard very little. “I think my hearing must be failing me,” he said; and then he laughed lightly, as if that did not greatly matter. “And to tell you the truth, though I pity my poor brethren, I can no longer help them. God will raise up a better minister.”

“Never!” cried the Jews in many voices.

“Anyhow,” said Israel, “my life among you is ended. I set no store by place and power. What does the English poet say, 'In the great hand of God I stand.' Shakespeare—oh, a mighty creature—one who knew where the soul of a man lay. But I forget, you've not lived in England. Do you know I am to go there again, and to take my little daughter? You remember her—Naomi—a charming girl. She can see now, and hear, and speak also! Yes for God has lifted His hand away from her, and I am going to be very happy. Well, I must leave you, brothers. The little one will be waiting. I must not keep her too long, must I? Peace, peace!”

Seeing his profound faith, no one dared to tell him the truth that was on every tongue. A wave of compassion swept over all. The deputation stood and watched him until he had sunk under the hill.

And now, being come thus near to home, Israel's impatience robbed him of some of his happy confidence and filled him with fears. He began to think of all the evil chances that might have befallen Naomi. His absence had been so long, and so many things might have happened since he went away. In this mood he tried to run. It was a poor uncertain shamble. At nearly every step the body lurched for poise and balance.

At last he came to a point of the path from which, as he knew, the little rush-covered house ought to be seen. “It's yonder,” he cried, and pointed it out to himself with

uplifted finger. The sun was sinking, and its strong rays were in his face. “She's there, I see her!” he shouted. A few minutes later he was near the door. “No, my eyes deceived me,” he said in a damp voice. “Or perhaps she has gone in—perhaps she's hiding—the sweet rogue!”

The door was half open; he pushed it and entered the house. “Naomi!” he called in a voice like a caress. “Naomi!” His voice trembled now. “Come to me, come, dearest; come quickly, quickly, I cannot see!” He listened. There was not a sound, not a movement. “Naomi!” The name was like a gurgle in his throat. There was a pause, and then he said very feebly and simply, “She's not here.”

He looked around, and picked up something from the floor. It was a slipper covered with mould. As he gazed upon it a change came over his face. Dead? Was Naomi dead? He had thought of death before—for himself, for others, never for Naomi. At a stride the awful thing was on him. Death! Oh, oh!

With a helpless, broken, blind look he was standing in the middle of the floor with the slipper in his hand, when a footstep came to the door. He flung the slipper away and threw open his arms. Naomi—it must be she!

It was Fatimah. She had come in secret, that the evil news of what had been done at the Kasbah and the Mosque might not be broken to Israel too suddenly. He met her with a terrible question. “Where is she laid?” he said in a voice of awe.

Fatimah saw his error instantly. “Naomi is alive,” she said, and, seeing how the clouds lifted off his face, she added quickly, “and well, very well.”

That is not telling a falsehood, she thought; but when Israel, with a cry of joy which was partly pain, flung his arms about her, she saw what she had done.

“Where is she?” he cried. “Bring her, you dear, good soul. Why is she not here? Lead me to her, lead me!”

Then Fatimah began to wring her hands. “Alas!” she said, weeping, “that cannot be.”

Israel steadied himself and waited. “She cannot come to you, and neither can you go to her.” said Fatimah. “But she is well, oh! very well. Poor child, she is at the Kasbah—no, no, not the prison—oh no, she is happy—I mean she is well, yes, and cared for—indeed, she is at the palace—the women's palace—but set your mind easy—she—”

With such broken, blundering words the good woman blurted out the truth, and tried to deaden the blow of it. But the soul lives fast, and Israel lived a lifetime in that moment.

“The palace!” he said in a bewildered way. “The women's palace—the women's—” and then broke off shortly. “Fatimah, I want to go to Naomi,” he said.

And Fatimah stammered, “Alas! alas! you cannot, you never can—”

“Fatimah,” said Israel, with an awful calm. “Can't you see, woman, I have come home? I and Naomi have been long parted. Do you not understand?—I want to go to my daughter.”

“Yes, yes,” said Fatimah; “but you can never go to her any more. She is in the women's apartments—”

Then a great hoarse groan came from Israel's throat.

“Poor child, it was not her fault. Listen,” said Fatimah; “only listen.”

But Israel would hear no more. The torrent of his fury bore down everything before it. Fatimah's feeble protests were drowned. “Silence!” he cried. “What need is there for words? She is in the palace!—that's enough. The women's palace—the hareem—what more is there to say?”

Putting the fact so to his own consciousness, and seeing it grossly in all its horror, his passion fell like a breaking in of waters. “O God!” he cried, “my enemy casts me into prison. I lie there, rotting, starving. I think of my little daughter left behind alone. I hasten home to her. But where is she? She is gone. She is in the house of my

enemy. Curse her! . . . . Ah! no, no; not that, either! Pardon me, O God; not that, whatever happens! But the palace—the women's palace. Naomi! My little daughter! Her face was so sweet, so simple. I could have sworn that she was innocent. My love! my dove! I had only to look at her to see that she loved me! And now the hareem—that hell, and Ben Aboo—that libertine! I have lost her for ever! Yet her soul was mine—I wrestled with God for it—"

He stopped suddenly, his face became awfully discoloured, he dropped to his knees on the floor, lifted his eyes and his hands towards heaven, and cried in a voice at once stern and heartrending, "Kill her, O God! Kill her body, O my God, that her soul may be mine again!"

At this awful cry Fatimah fled out of the hut. It was the last voice of tottering reason. After that he became quiet, and when Fatimah returned the following morning he was talking to himself in a childish way while sitting at the door, and gazing before him with a lifeless look. Sometimes he quoted Scriptures which were startlingly true to his own condition: "I am alone, I am a companion to owls. . . . I have cleansed my heart in vain. . . . My feet are almost gone, my steps have well-nigh slipped. . . . I am as one whom his mother comforteth."

Between these Scriptures there were low incoherent cries and simple foolish play-words. Again and again he called on Naomi, always softly and tenderly, as if her name were a sacred thing. At times he appeared to think that he was back in prison, and made a little prayer—always the same—that some one should be kept from harm and evil. Once he seemed to hear a voice that cried, "Israel ben Oliel! Israel ben Oliel!" "Here! Israel is here!" he answered. He thought the Kaid was calling him. The Kaid was the King. "Yes, I will go back to the King," he said. Then he looked down at his tattered kaftan, which was mired with dirt, and tried to brush it clean, to button it, and to tie up the ragged threads of it. At last he cried, as if servants were about him and he were a master still, "Bring me robes—clean

robes—white robes; I am going back to the King!”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ENTRY OF THE SULTAN

Meantime Tetuan was looking for the visit of His Shereefian Majesty, the Sultan Abd er-Rahman. He had been heard of about four hours away, encamped with his Ministers, a portion of his hareem, and a detachment of his army, somewhere by the foot of Beni Hosmar. His entry was fixed for eight o'clock next morning, and preparations for his coming were everywhere afoot. All other occupations were at a standstill, and nothing was to be heard but the noise and clamour of the cleansing of the streets, and the hanging of flags and of carpets.

Early on the following morning a street-crier came, beating a drum, and crying in a hoarse voice, “Awake! Awake! Come and greet your Lord! Awake! Awake!”

In a little while the streets were alive with motley and noisy crowds. The sun was up, if still red and hazy, and sunlight came like a tunnel of gold down the swampy valley and from over the sea; the orange orchards lying to the south, called the gardens of the Sultan, were red rather than yellow, and the snowy crests of the mountain heights above them were crimson rather than white. In the town itself the small red flag that is the Moorish ensign hung out from every house, and carpets of various colours swung on many walls.

The sun was not yet high before the Sultan's army began to arrive. It was a mixed and noisy throng that came first, a sort of ragged regiment of Arabs, with long guns, and with their gun-cases wrapped about their heads—a big gang of wild country-folk lately enlisted as soldiers. They poured into the town at the western gate, and shuffled and jostled and squeezed their way through the narrow streets firing recklessly into the air, and shouting as they went, “Abd er-Rahman is coming!

The Sultan is coming! Dogs! Men! Believers! Infidels! Come out! come out!”

Thus they went puffing along, covered with dust and sweltering in perspiration, and at every fresh shot and shout the streets they passed through grew denser. But it was a grim satire on their lawless loyalty that almost at their heels there came into the town, not the Sultan himself, but a troop of his prisoners from the mountains. Ten of them there were in all, guarded by ten soldiers, and they made a sorry spectacle. They were chained together, man to man in single file, not hand to hand or leg to leg but neck to neck. So had they walked a hundred miles, never separated night or day, either sleeping or waking, or faint or strong. The feet of some were bare and torn, and dripping blood; the faces of all were black with grime, and streaked with lines of sweat. And thus they toiled into the streets in that sunlight of God's own morning, under the red ensigns of Morocco, by the many-coloured carpets of Rabat, to the Kasbah beyond the market-place. They were Reefians whose homes the Sultan had just stripped, whose villages he had just burnt, whose wives and children he had just driven into the mountains. And they were going to die in his dungeons.

It was seven o'clock by this time, and rumour had it that the Sultan's train was moving down the valley. From the roofs of the houses a vast human ant-hill could be seen swarming across the plain in the distance. Then came some rapid transformations of the scene below. First the streets were deserted by every decent blue jellab and clean white turban within range of sight. These presently reappeared on the roofs of the principal thoroughfare, where groups of women, closely covered in their haiks, had already begun to congregate with their dark attendants. Next, a body of the townsmen who possessed firearms mounted guard on the walls to protect the town from the lawlessness of the big army that was coming. Then into the Feddan, the square marketplace, came pouring from their own little quarter within its separate walls a throng of Jewish people, in their black gabardines and skull-caps, men and women and children, carrying banners that bore loyal inscriptions, twanging at tambourines and crying in wild discords, “God bless our

Lord!" "God give victory to our Lord the Sultan!"

The poor Jews got small thanks for such loyalty to the last of the Caliphs of the Prophet. Every ragged Moor in the streets greeted them with exclamations of menace and abhorrence. Even the blind beggar crouching at the gate lifted up his voice and cursed them.

"Get out, you Jew! God burn your father! Dogs, take off your slippers—Abd er-Rahman is coming!"

Thus they were scolded and abused on every side, kicked, cuffed, jostled, and wedged together well-nigh to suffocation. Their banners were torn out of their hands, their tambourines were broken, their voices were drowned, and finally they were driven back into their Mellah and shut up there, and forbidden to look upon the entry of the Sultan even from their roofs.

And the vagabonds and ragamuffins among the faithful in the streets, having got rid of the unbelievers had enough ado to keep peace among themselves. They pushed and struggled and stormed and cried and laughed and clamoured down this main artery of the town through which the Sultan's train must pass. Men and boys, women also and young girls, donkeys with packs, bony mules too, and at least one dirty and terrified old camel. It was a confused and uproarious babel. Angry black faces thrust into white ones, flashing eyes and gleaming white teeth, and clenched fists uplifted. Human voices barking like dogs, yelping like hyenas, shrill and guttural, piercing and grating. Prayings, beggings, quarrellings, cursings.

"Arrah! Arrah! Arrah!"

"O Merciful! O Giver of good to all!"

"Curses on your grandfather!"

"Allah! Allah! Allah!"

"Balak! Balak! Balak!"

But presently the wild throng fell into order and silence. The gate of the Kasbah was thrown open, and a line of soldiers came out, headed by the Kaid of Tetuan, and moved on towards the city wall. The rabble were thrust back, the soldiers were drawn up in lines on either side of the street, and the Kaid, Ben Aboo himself, took a position by the western gate.

By this time there was commotion on the town walls among the townsmen who had gathered there. The Sultan's army was drawing near, a confused and disorderly mass of human beings moving on from the plain. As they came up to the walls, the people who were standing on the house-roofs could see them, and as they were ordered away to encamp by the river, none could help but hear their shouts and oaths.

When the motley and noisy concourse had been driven off to their camping-ground, the gates of the town were thrown wide, for the Sultan himself was at hand.

First came two soldiers afoot, and then followed five artillerymen, with their small pieces packed on mules. Next came mounted standard-bearers four deep, some in red, some in blue, and some in green. Then came the outrunners and the spearmen, and then the Sultan's six led horses. And then at length with the great red umbrella of royalty held over him, came the Sultan himself, the elderly sensualist, with his dusky cheeks, his rheumy eyes, his thick lips, and his heavy nostrils. The fat Father of Islam was mounted that day on a snow-white stallion, bedecked in gorgeous trappings. Its bridle was of green silk, embroidered in gold. Solomon's seal was stamped on its headgear, and the tooth of a boar—a safeguard against the evil eye—was suspended from its neck. Its saddle was of orange damask, with girths of stout silk, and its stirrups were of chased silver. The Sultan's own trappings were of the colour of his horse. His kaftan was of white cloth, with an embroidered leathern girdle; his turban was of white cotton, and his kisa was also white and transparent.

As he passed under the archway of the town's gate the cannon of the Kasbah boomed forth a salute, Ben Aboo dismounted and kissed his stirrup, and the crowds

in the streets burst upon him with blessings.

“God bless our Lord!”

“Sultan Abd er-Rahman!”

“God prolong the life of our Lord!”

He seemed hardly to hear them. Once his hand touched his breast when the Kaid approached him. After that he looked neither to the right nor to the left, nor gave any sign of pleasure or recognition. Nevertheless the people in the streets ceased not to greet him with deafening acclamations.

“All's well, all's well,” they told each other, and pointed to the white horse—the sign of peace—which the Sultan rode, and to the riderless black horse—the sign of strife—that pranced behind him.

The women on the housetops also, in their hooded cloaks, welcomed the Sultan with a shrill ululation: “Yoo-yoo, yoo-yoo, yoo-yoo!”

Not content with this, the usual greeting of their sex and nation, some of them who had hitherto been closely veiled threw back their muslin coverings, exposed their faces to his face, and welcomed him with more articulate cries.

He gave them neither a smile nor a glance, but rode straight onward. Beside him walked the fly-flappers, flapping the air before his podgy cheeks with long scarfs of silk, and behind him rode his Ministers of State, five sleek dogs who daily fed his appetites on carrion that his head might be like his stomach, and their power over him thereby the greater. After the Ministers of State came a part of the royal hareem. The ladies rode on mules, and were attended by eunuchs.

Such was the entry into Tetuan of the Sultan Abd er-Rahman. In their heart of hearts did the people rejoice at his visit? No. Too well they knew that the tyrant had done nothing for his subjects but take their taxes. Not a man had he protected from injustice; not a woman had he saved from dishonour. Never a rich usurer among

them but trembled at his messages, nor a poor wretch but dreaded his dungeons. His law existed only for himself; his government had no object but to collect his dues. And yet his people had received him amid wild vociferations of welcome.

Fear, fear! Fear it was in the heart of the rich man on the housetops, whose moneys were hidden, as well as in the darkened soul of the blind beggar at the gate, whose eyes had been gouged out long ago because he dared not divulge the secret place of his wealth.

But early in the evening of that same day, at the corners of quiet streets, in the covered ways, by the doors of bazaars, among the horses tethered in the fondaks, wheresoever two men could stand and talk unheard and unobserved by a third, one secret message of twofold significance passed with the voice of smothered joy from lip to lip. And this was the way and the word of it:

“She is back in the Kasbah!”

“The daughter of Ben Oliel? Thank God! But why? Has she recanted?”

“She has fallen sick.”

“And Ben Aboo has sent her to prison?”

“He thinks that the physician who will cure her quickest.”

“Allah save us! The dog of dogs! But God be praised! At least she is saved from the Sultan.”

“For the present, only for the-present.”

“For ever, brother, for ever! Listen! your ear. A word of news for your news: the Mahdi is coming! The boy has been for him.”

“Bismillah! Ben Oliel's boy?”

“Ali. He is back in Tetuan. And listen again! Behind the Mahdi comes the—”

“Ya Allah! well?”

“Hark! A footstep on the street—some one is near—”

“But quick. Behind the Mahdi—what?”

“God will show! In peace, brother, in peace!”

“In peace!”

CHAPTER XXV

THE COMING OF THE MAHDI

The Mahdi came back in the evening. He had no standard-bearers going before him, no outrunners, no spearmen, no fly-flappers, no ministers of state; he rode no white stallion in gorgeous trappings, and was himself bedecked in no snowy garments. His ragged following he had left behind him; he was alone; he was afoot; a selham of rough grey cloth was all his bodily adornment; yet he was mightier than the monarch who had entered Tetuan that day.

He passed through the town not like a sultan, but like a saint; not like a conquering prince, but like an avenging angel. Outside the town he had come upon the great body of the Sultan's army lying encamped under the walls. The townspeople who had shut the soldiers out, with all the rabble of their following, had nevertheless sent them fifty camels' load of kesksoo, and it had been served in equal parts, half a pound to each man. Where this meal had already been eaten, the usual charlatans of the market-place had been busily plying their accustomed trades. Black jugglers from Zoos, sham snake-charmers from the desert, and story-tellers both grave and facetious, all twanging their hideous ginbri, had been seated on the ground in half-circles of soldiers and their women. But the Mahdi had broken up and scattered every group of them.

“Away!” he had cried. “Away with your uncleanness and deception.”

And the foulest babbler of them all, hot with the exercise of the indecent gestures wherewith he illustrated his filthy tale, had slunk off like a pariah dog.

As the Mahdi entered the town a number of mountaineers in the Feddan were going through their feats of wonder-play before a multitude of excited spectators. Two tribes, mounted on wild barbs, were charging in line from opposite sides of the square, some seated, some kneeling, some standing. Midway across the market-place they were charging, horses at full gallop, firing their muskets, then reining in at a horse's length, throwing their barbs on their haunches, wheeling round and galloping back, amid deafening shouts of “Allah! Allah! Allah!”

“Allah indeed!” cried the Mahdi, striding into their midst without fear. “That is all the part that God plays in this land of iniquity and bloodshed. Away, away!”

The people separated, and the Mahdi turned towards the Kasbah. As he approached it, the lanes leading to the Feddan were being cleared for the mad antics of the Aissawa. Before they saw him the fanatics came out in all the force of their acting brotherhood, a score of half-naked men, and one other entirely naked, attended by their high-priests, the Mukaddameen, three old patriarchs with long white beards, wearing dark flowing robes and carrying torches. Then goats and dogs were riven alive and eaten raw; while women and children; crouching in the gathering darkness overhead looked down from the roofs and shuddered. And as the frenzy increased among the madmen, and their victims became fewer, each fanatic turned upon himself, and tore his own skin and battered his head against the stones until blood ran like water.

“Fools and blind guides!” cried the Mahdi sweeping them before him like sheep. “Is this how you turn the streets into a sickening sewer? Oh, the abomination of desolation! You tear yourselves in the name of God, but forget His justice and mercy. Away! You will have your reward. Away! Away!”

At the gate of the Kasbah he demanded to see the Kaid, and, after various parleyings with the guards and negroes who haunted the winding ways of the gloomy place, he was introduced to the Basha's presence. The Basha received him in a room so dark

that he could but dimly see his face. Ben Aboo was stretched on a carpet, in much the position of a dog with his muzzle on his forepaws.

“Welcome,” he said gruffly, and without changing his own unceremonious posture, he gave the Mahdi a signal to sit.

The Mahdi did not sit. “Ben Aboo,” he said in a voice that was half choked with anger, “I have come again on an errand of mercy, and woe to you if you send me away unsatisfied.”

Ben Aboo lay silent and gloomy for a moment, and then said with a growl, “What is it now?”

“Where is the daughter of Ben Oliel?” said the Mahdi.

With a gesture of protestation the Basha waved one of the hands on which his dusky muzzle had rested.

“Ah, do not lie to me,” cried the Mahdi. “I know where she is—she is in prison. And for what? For no fault but love of her father, and no crime but fidelity to her faith. She has sacrificed the one and abandoned the other. Is that not enough for you, Ben Aboo? Set her free.”

The Basha listened at first with a look of bewilderment, and some half-dozen armed attendants at the farther end of the room shuffled about in their consternation. At length Ben Aboo raised his head, and said with an air of mock inquiry, “Ya Allah! who is this infidel?”

Then, changing his tone suddenly, he cried, “Sir, I know who you are! You come to me on this sham errand about the girl, but that is not your purpose, Mohammed of Mequinez! Mohammed the Third! What fool said you were a spy of the Sultan? Abd er-Rahman is here—my guest and protector. You are a spy of his enemies, and a revolutionary, come hither to ruin our religion and our State. The penalty for such as you is death, and by Allah you shall die!”

Saying this, he so wrought upon his indignation, that in spite of his superstitious fears, and the awe in which he stood of the Mahdi, he half deceived himself, and deceived his attendants entirely. But the Mahdi took a step nearer and looked straight into his face, and said—

“Ben Aboo, ask pardon of God; you are a fool. You talk of putting me to death. You dare not and you cannot do it.”

“Why not?” cried Ben Aboo, with a thrill of voice that was like a swagger. “What's to hinder me? I could do it at this moment, and no man need know.”

“Basha,” said the Mahdi, “do you think you are talking to a child? Do you think that when I came here my visit was not known to others than ourselves outside? Do you think there are not some who are waiting for my return? And do you think, too,” he cried, lifting one hand and his voice together, “that my Master in heaven would not see and know it on an errand of mercy His servant perished? Ben Aboo, ask pardon of God, I say; you are a fool.”

The Basha's face became black and swelled with rage. But he was cowed. He hesitated a moment in silence, and then said with an air of braggadocio—

“And what if I do not liberate the girl?”

“Then,” said the Mahdi, “if any evil befalls her the consequences shall be on your head.”

“What consequences?” said the Basha.

“Worse consequences than you expect or dream,” said the Mahdi.

“What consequences?” said the Basha again.

“No matter,” said the Mahdi. “You are walking in darkness, and do not know where you are going.”

“What consequences?” the Basha cried once more.

“That is God's secret,” said the Mahdi.

Ben Aboo began to laugh. “Light the infidel out of the Kasbah,” he shouted to his people.

“Enough!” cried the Mahdi. “I have delivered my message. Now woe to you, Ben Aboo! A second time I have come to you as a witness, but I will come no more. Fill up the measure of your iniquity. Keep the girl in prison. Give her to the Sultan. But know that for all these things your reward awaits you. Your time is near. You will die with a pale face. The sword will reach to your soul.”

Then taking yet another step nearer, until he stood over the Basha where he lay on the ground, he cried with sudden passion, “This is the last word that will pass between you and me. So part we now for ever, Ben Aboo—I to the work that waits for me, and you to shame and contempt, and death and hell.”

Saying this, he made a downward sweep of his open hand over the place where the Basha lay, and Ben Aboo shrank under it as a worm shrinks under a blow. Then with head erect he went out unhindered.

But he was not yet done. In the garden of the palace, as he passed through it to the street, he stood a moment in the darkness under the stars before the chamber where he knew the Sultan lay, and cried, “Abd er-Rahman! Abd er-Rahman! slave of the Merciful! Listen: I hear the sound of the trumpet and the alarum of war. My heart makes a noise in me for my country, but the day of her tribulation is near. Woe to you, Abd er-Rahman! You have filled up the measure of your fathers. Woe to you, slave of the Compassionate!”

The Sultan heard him, and so did the Ministers of State; the women of the hareem heard him, and so did the civil guards and the soldiers. But his voice and his message came over them with the terror of a ghostly thing, and no man raised a hand to stop him.

“The Mahdi,” they whispered with awe, and fell back when he approached.

The streets were quiet as he left the Kasbah. The rabble of mountaineers of Aissawa

were gone. Hooded Talebs, with prayer-mats under their arms, were picking their way in the gloom from the various mosques; and from these there came out into the streets the plash of water in the porticos and the low drone of singing voices behind the screens.

The Mahdi lodged that night in the quarter of the enclosure called the M'Salla, and there a slave woman of Ben Aboo's came to him in secret. It was Fatimah, and she told him much of her late master, whom she had visited by stealth, and just left in great trouble and in madness; also of her dead mistress, Ruth who was like rose-perfume in her memory, as well as of Naomi, their daughter, and all her sufferings. In spasms, in gasps, without sequence and without order, she told her story; but he listened to her with emotion while the agitated black face was before him, and when it was gone he tramped the dark house in the dead of night, a silent man, with tender thoughts of the sweet girl who was imprisoned in the dungeons of the Kasbah, and of her stricken father, who supposed that she was living in luxury in the palace of his enemy while he himself lay sick in the poor hut which had been their home. These false notions, which were at once the seed and the fruit of Israel's madness, should at least be dispelled. Let come what would, the man should neither live nor die in such bitterness of cruel error.

The Mahdi resolved to set out for Semsa with the first grey of morning, and meantime he went up to the house-top to sleep. The town was quiet, the traffic of the street was done, the raggabash of the Sultan's following had slunk away ashamed or lain down to rest. It was a wonderful night. The air was cool, for the year was deep towards winter, but not a breath of wind was stirring, and the orange-gardens behind the town wall did not send over the river so much as the whisper of a leaf. Stars were out and the big moon of the East shone white on the white walls and minarets. Nowhere is night so full of the spirit of sleep as in an Eastern city. Below, under the moonlight, lay the square white roofs, and between them were the dark streets going in and out, trailing through and along, like to narrow streams of black water in a bed

of quarried chalk. Here or there, where a belated townsman lit himself homeward with a lamp, a red light gleamed out of one of the thin darknesses, crept along a few paces, and then was gone. Sometimes a clamour of voices came up with their own echo from some unseen place, and again everything was still. Sleep, sleep, all was sleep.

"O Tetuan," thought the Mahdi, "how soon will your streets be uprooted and your sanctuaries destroyed!"

The Mooddin was chanting the call to prayers, and the old porter at the gate was muttering over his rosary as the Mahdi left the town in the dawn. He had to pick his way among the soldiers who were lying on the bare soil outside, uncovered to the sky. Not one of them seemed to be awake. Even their camels were still sleeping, nose to nose, in the circles where they had last fed. Only their mules and asses, all hobbled and still saddled, were up and feeding.

The Mahdi found Israel ben Oliel in the hut at Semsa. So poor a place he had not seen in all his wanderings through that abject land. Its walls were of clay that was bulged and cracked, and its roof was of rushes, which lay over it like sea-wreck on a broken barrel. Israel was in his right mind. He was sitting by the door of his house, with a dejected air, a hopeless look, but the slow sad eyes of reason. His clothing was one worn and torn kaftan; his feet were shoeless, and his head was bare. But so grand a head the Mahdi thought he had never beheld before. Not until then had he truly seen him, for the poverty and misery that sat on him only made his face stand out the clearer. It was the face of a man who for good or ill, for struggle or submission, had walked and wrestled with God.

With salutations, barely returned to him, the Mahdi sat down beside Israel at a little distance. He began to speak to him in a tender way, telling him who he was, and where they had met before, and why he came, and whither he was going. And Israel listened to him at first with a brave show of composure as if the very heart of the

man were a frozen clod, whereby his eyes and the muscles of his face and even the nerves of his fingers were also frozen.

Then the Mahdi spoke of Naomi, and Israel made a slow shake of the head. He told him what had happened to her when her father was taken to prison, and Israel listened with a great outward calmness. After that he described the girl's journey in the hope of taking food to him, and how she fell into the hands of Habeebah; and then he saw by Israel's face that the affection of the father was tearing his old heart woefully. At last he recited the incidents of her cruel trial, and how she had yielded at length, knowing nothing of religion, being only a child, seeing her father in everything and thinking to save his life, though she herself must see him no more (for all this he had gathered from Fatimah), and then the great thaw came to Israel, and his fingers trembled, and his face twitched, and the hot tears rained down his cheeks.

“My poor darling!” he muttered in a trembling undertone, and then he asked in a faltering voice where she was at that time.

The Mahdi told him that she was back in prison, for rebelling against the fortune intended for her—that of becoming a concubine of the Sultan.

“My brave girl!” he muttered, and then his face shone with a new light that was both pride and pain.

He lifted his eyes as if he could see her, and his voice as if she could hear: “Forgive me, Naomi! Forgive me, my poor child! Your weak old father; forgive him, my brave, brave daughter!”

This was as much as the Mahdi could bear; and when Israel turned to him, and said in almost a childish tone, “I suppose there is no help for it now, sir. I meant to take her to England—to my poor mother's home, but—”

“And so you shall, as sure as the Lord lives,” said the Mahdi, rising to his feet, with the resolve that a plan for Naomi's rescue which he had thought of again and again,

and more than once rejected, which had clamoured at the door of his heart, and been turned away as a barbarous impulse, should at length be carried into effect.

CHAPTER XXVI

ALI'S RETURN TO TETUAN

The plan which the Mahdi thought of had first been Ali's, for the black lad was back in Tetuan. After he had fulfilled his errand of mercy at Shawan; he had gone on to Ceuta; and there, with a spirit afire for the wrongs of his master, from whom he was so cruelly parted, he had set himself with shrewdness and daring to incite the Spanish powers to vengeance upon his master's enemies. This had been a task very easy of execution, for just at that time intelligence had come from the Reef, of barbarous raids made by Ben Aboo upon mountain tribes that had hitherto offered allegiance to the Spanish crown. A mission had gone up to Fez, and returned unsatisfied. War was to be declared, Marteel was to be bombarded, the army of Marshal O'Donnel was to come up the valley of the river, and Tetuan was to be taken.

Such were the operations which by the whim of fate had been so strangely revealed to Ali, but Ali's own plan was a different matter. This was the feast of the Moolood, and on one of the nights of it, probably the eighth night, the last night, Friday night, Ben Aboo the Basha was to give a “gathering of delight,” to the Sultan, his Ministers, his Kaids, his Kadis, his Khaleefas, his Umana, and great rascals generally. Ali's stout heart stuck at nothing. He was for having the Spaniards brought up to the gates of the town, on the very night when the whole majesty and iniquity of Barbary would be gathered in one room; then, locking the entire kennel of dogs in the banqueting hall, firing the Kasbah and burning it to the ground, with all the Moorish tyrants inside of it like rats in a trap.

One danger attended his bold adventure, for Naomi's person was within the Kasbah walls. To meet this peril Ali was himself to find his way into the dungeon, deliver Naomi, lock the Kasbah gate, and deliver up to another the key that should serve as a signal for the beginning of the great night's work.

Also one difficulty attended it, for while Ali would be at the Kasbah there would be no one to bring up the Spaniards at the proper moment for the siege—no one in Tetuan on whom the strangers could rely not to lead them blindfold into a trap. To meet this difficulty Ali had gone in search of the Mahdi, revealed to him his plan, and asked him to help in the downfall of his master's enemies by leading the Spaniards at the right moment to the gates that should be thrown open to receive them.

Hearing Ali's story, the Mahdi had been aflame with tender thoughts of Naomi's trials, with hatred of Ben Aboo's tyrannies, and pity of Israel's miseries. But at first his humanity had withheld him from sympathy with Ali's dark purpose, so full, as it seemed, of barbarity and treachery.

“Ali,” he had said, “is it not all you wish for to get Naomi out of prison and take her back to her father?”

“Yes, Sidi,” Ali had answered promptly.

“And you don't want to torture these tyrants if you can do what you desire without it?”

“No-o, Sidi,” Ali had said doubtfully.

“Then,” the Mahdi had said, “let us try.”

But when the Mahdi was gone to Tetuan on his errand of warning that proved so vain, Ali had crept back behind him, so that secretly and independently he might carry out his fell design. The towns-people were ready to receive him, for the air was full of rebellion, and many had waited long for the opportunity of revenge. To certain of the Jews, his master's people, who were also in effect his own, he went

first with his mission, and they listened with eagerness to what he had come to say. When their own time came to speak they spoke cautiously, after the manner of their race, and nervously, like men who knew too well what it was to be crushed and kept under; but they gave their help notwithstanding, and Ali's scheme progressed.

In less than three days the entire town, Moorish and Jewish, was honeycombed with subterranean revolt. Even the civil guard, the soldiers of the Kasbah, the black police that kept the gates, and the slaves that stood before the Basha's table were waiting for the downfall to come.

The Mahdi had gone again by this time, and the people had resumed their mock rejoicings over the Sultan's visit. These were the last kindlings of their burnt-out loyalty, a poor smouldering pretence of fire. Every morning the town was awakened by the deafening crackle of flintlocks, which the mountaineers discharged in the Feddan by way of signal that the Sultan was going to say his prayers at the door of some saint's house. Beside the firing of long guns and the twanging of the ginbri the chief business of the day seemed to be begging. One bow-legged rascal in a ragged jellab went about constantly with a little loaf of bread, crying, “An ounce of butter for God's sake!” and when some one gave him the alms he asked he stuck the white sprawling mess on the top of the loaf and changed his cry to “An ounce of cheese for God's sake!” A pert little vagabond—street Arab in a double sense—promenaded the town barefoot, carrying an odd slipper in his hand, and calling on all men by the love of God and the face of God and the sake of God to give him a moozoonah towards the cost of its fellow. Every morning the Sultan went to mosque under his red umbrella, and every evening he sat in the hall of the court of justice, pretending to hear the petitions of the poor, but actually dispensing charms in return for presents. First an old wrinkled reprobate with no life left in him but the life of lust: “A charm to make my young wife love me!” Then an ill-favoured hag behind a blanket: “A charm to wither the face of the woman that my husband has taken instead of me!” Again, a young wife with a tearful voice: “A charm to make me bear

children!" A greasy smile from the fat Sultan, a scrap of writing to every supplicant, chinking coins dropped into the bag of the attendant from the treasury, and then up and away. It was a nauseous draught from the bitterest waters of Islam.

But, for all the religious tumult, no man was deceived by the outward marks of devotion. At the corners of the streets, on the Feddan, by the fountains, wherever men could meet and talk unheard, there they stood in little groups, crossing their forefingers, the sign of strife, or rubbing them side by side, the sign of amity. It was clear that, notwithstanding the hubbub of their loyalty to the sultan, they knew that the Spaniard was coming and were glad of it.

Meantime Ali waited with impatience for the day that was to see the end of his enterprise. To beguile himself of his nervousness in the night, during the dark hours that trailed on to morning, he would venture out of the lodging where he lay in hiding throughout the day, and pick his steps in the silence up the winding streets, until he came under a narrow opening in an alley which was the only window to Naomi's prison. And there he would stay the long dark hours through, as if he thought that besides the comfort it brought to him to be near to Naomi, the tramp, tramp, tramp of his footsteps, which once or twice provoked the challenge of the night-guard on his lonely round, would be company to her in her solitude. And sometimes, watching his opportunity that he might be unseen and unheard, he would creep in the darkness under the window and cry up the wall in an underbreath, "Naomi! Naomi! It is I, Ali! I have come back! All will be well yet!"

Then if he heard nothing from within he would torture himself with a hundred fears lest Naomi should be no longer there, but in a worse place; and if he heard a sob he would slink away like a dog with his muzzle to the dust, and if he heard his own name echoed in the softer voice he knew so well he would go off with head erect, feeling like a man who walked on the stars rather than the stones of the street. But, whatever befell, before the day dawned he went back to his lodging less sore at heart

for his lonely vigil, but not less wrathful or resolute.

The day of the feast came at length, and then Ali's impatience rose to fever. All day he longed for the night, that the thing he had to do could be done. At last the sunset came and the darkness fell, and from his place of concealment Ali saw the soldiers of the assaseen going through the streets with lanterns to lead honoured guests to the banquet. Then he set out on his errand. His foresight and wit had arranged everything. The negro at the gate of the Kasbah pretended to recognise him as a messenger of the Vizier's, and passed him through. He pushed his way as one with authority along the winding passages to the garden where the Mahdi had called on Abd er-Rahman and foretold his fate. The garden opened upon the great hall, and a number of guests were standing there, cooling themselves in the night air while they waited for the arrival of the Sultan. His Shereefian Majesty came at length, and then, amid salaams and peace-blessings, the company passed in to the banquet. “Peace on you!” “And on you the peace!” “God make your evening!” “May your evening be blessed!”

Did Ali shrink from the task at that moment? No, a thousand times no! While he looked on at these men in their muslin and gauze and linen and scarlet, sweeping in with bows and hand-touchings to sup and to laugh and to tell their pretty stories, he remembered Israel broken and alone in the poor hut which had been described to him, and Naomi lying in her damp cell beyond the wall.

Some minutes he stood in the darkness of the garden, while the guests entered, and until the barefooted servants of the kitchen began to troop in after them with great dishes under huge covers. Then he held a short parley with the negro gatekeeper, two keys were handed to him, and in another minute he was standing at the door of Naomi's prison.

Now, carefully as Ali had arranged every detail of his enterprise, down to the removal of the black woman Habeebah from this door, one fact he had never

counted with, and that seemed to him then the chief fact of all—the fact that since he had last looked upon Naomi she had come by the gift of sight, and would now first look upon him. That he would be the same as a stranger to her, and would have to tell her who he was; that she would have to recognise him by whatsoever means remained to belie the evidence of the newborn sense—this was the least of Ali's trouble. By a swift rebound his heart went back to the fear that had haunted him in the days before he left her with her father on his errand to Shawan. He was black, and she would see him.

With the gliding of the key into the lock all this, and more than this, flashed upon his mind. His shame was abject. It cut him to the quick. On the other side of that door was she who had been as a sister to him since times that were lost in the blue clouds of childhood. She had played with him and slept by his side, yet she had never seen his face. And she was fair as the morning, and he was black as the night! He had come to deliver her. Would she recoil from him?

Ali had to struggle with himself not to fly away and leave everything. But his stout heart remembered itself and held to its purpose. “What matter?” he thought. “What matter about me?” he asked himself aloud in a shrill voice and with a brave roll of his round head. Then he found himself inside the cell.

The place was dark, and Ali drew a long breath of relief. Naomi must have been lying at the farther end of it. She spoke when the door was opened. As though by habit, she framed the name of her jailer Habeebah, and then stopped with a little nervous cry and seemed to rise to her feet. In his confusion Ali said simply, “It is I,” as though that meant everything. Recovering himself in a moment he spoke again, and then she knew his voice: “Naomi!”

“It's Ali,” she whispered to herself. After that she cried in a trembling undertone “Ali! Ali! Ali!” and came straight in the accustomed darkness to the spot where he stood.

Then, gathering courage and voice together, Ali told her hurriedly why he was there. When he said that her father was no longer in prison, but at their home near Semsa and waiting to receive her, she seemed almost overcome by her joy. Half laughing, half weeping, clutching at her breast as if to ease the wild heaving of her bosom she was transformed by his story.

“Hush!” said Ali; “not a sound until we are outside the town,” and Naomi knitted her fingers in his palm, and they passed out of the place.

The banquet was now at its height, and hastening down dark corridors where they were apt to fall, for they had no light to see by, and coming into the garden, they heard the ripple and crackle of laughter from the great hall where Ben Aboo and his servile rascals feasted together. They reached the quiet alley outside the Kasbah (for the negro was gone from his post), and drew a lone breath, and thanked Heaven that this much was over. There had been no group of beggars at the gate, and the streets around it were deserted; but in the distance, far across the town in the direction of the Bab el Marsa, the gate that goes out to Marteel, they heard a low hum as of vast droves of sheep. The Spaniard was coming, and the townsmen were going out to meet him. Casual passers-by challenged them, and though Ali knew that even if recognised they had nothing to fear from the people, yet more than once his voice trembled when he answered, and sometimes with a feeling of dread he turned to see that no one was following.

As he did so he became aware of something which brought back the shame of that awful moment when he stood with the key in hand at the door of Naomi's prison. By the light of the lamps in the hands of the passers-by Naomi was looking at him. Again and again, as the glare fell for an instant, he felt the eyes of the girl upon his face. At such moments he thought she must be drawing away from him, for the space between them seemed wider. But he firmly held to the outstretched arm, kept his head aside, and hastened on.

“What matter about me?” he whispered again. But the brave word brought him no comfort. “Now she's looking at my hand,” he told himself, but he could not draw it away. “She is doubting if I am Ali after all,” he thought. “Naomi!” he tried to say with averted head, so that once again the sound of his voice might reassure her; but his throat was thick, and he could not speak. Still he pushed on.

The dark town just then was like a mountain chasm when a storm that has been gathering is about to break. In the air a deep rumble, and then a loud detonation. Blackness overhead, and things around that seemed to move and pass.

Drawing near to the Bab Toot, the gate that witnessed the last scene of Israel's humiliation and Naomi's shame, Ali, with the girl beside him, came suddenly into a sheet of light and a concourse of people. It was the Mahdi and his vast following with lamps in their hands, entering the town on the west, while the Spaniards whom they had brought up to the gates were coming in on the east. The Mahdi himself was locking the synagogues and the sanctuaries.

“Lock them up,” he was saying. “It is enough that the foreigner must burn down the Sodom of our tyrant; let him not outrage the Zion of our God.”

Ali led Naomi up to the Mahdi, who saw her then for the first time.

“I have brought her,” he said breathlessly; “Naomi, Israel's daughter, this is she.” And then there was a moment of surprise and joy, and pain and shame and despair, all gathered up together into one look of the eyes of the three.

The Mahdi looked at Naomi, and his face lightened. Naomi looked at Ali, and her pale face grew paler, and she passed a tress of her fair hair across her lips to smother a little nervous cry that began to break from her mouth. Then she looked at the Mahdi, and her lips parted and her eyes shone. Ali looked at both, and his face twitched and fell.

This was only the work of an instant, but it was enough. Enough for the Mahdi, for it told him a secret that the wisdom of life had not yet revealed; enough for Naomi, for

a new sense, a sixth sense, had surely come to her; enough for Ali also, for his big little heart was broken.

“What matter about me?” thought Ali again. “Take her, Mahdi,” he said aloud in a shrill voice. “Her father is waiting for her—take her to him.”

“Lady,” said the Mahdi, “can you trust me?”

And then without a word she went to him; like the needle to the magnet she went to the Mahdi—a stranger to her, when all strangers were as enemies—and laid her hand in his.

Ali began to laugh, “I'm a fool,” he cried. “Who could have believed it? Why, I've forgotten to lock the Kasbah! The villains will escape. No matter, I'll go back.”

“Stop!” cried the Mahdi.

But Ali laughed so loudly that he did not hear. “I'll see to it yet,” he cried, turning on his heel. “Good night, Sidi! God bless you! My love to my father! Farewell!”

And in another moment he was gone.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE FALL OF BEN ABOO

The roysterers in the Kasbah sat a long half-hour in ignorance of the doom that was impending. Squatting on the floor in little circles, around little tables covered with steaming dishes, wherein each plunged his fingers, they began the feast with ceremonious wishes, pious exclamations, cant phrases, and downcast eyes. First, “God lengthen your age,” “God cover you,” and “God give you strength.” Then a dish of dates, served with abject apologies from Ben Aboo: “You would treat us better in Fez, but Tetuan is poor; the means, Seedna, the means, not the will!” Then fish in garlic, eaten with loud “Bismillah's.” Then kesksoo covered with powdered sugar and cinnamon, and meat on skewers, and browned fowls, and fowls and

olives, and flake pastry and sponge fritters, each eaten in its turn amid a chorus of “La Ilah illa Allah's.” Finally three cups of green tea, as thick and sweet as syrup, drunk with many “Do me the favour's,” and countless “Good luck's.” Last of all, the washing of hands, and the fumigating of garments and beard and hair by the live embers of scented wood burning in a brass censer, with incessant exchanges of “The Prophet—God rest him—loved sweet odours almost as much as sweet women.”

But after supper all this ceremony fell away, and the feasters thawed down to a warm and flowing brotherhood. Lolling at ease on their rugs, trifling with their egg-like snuff-boxes, fumbling their rosaries for idleness more than piety, stretching their straps, and jingling on the pavement the carved ends of their silver knife-shields, they laughed and jested, and told dubious stories, and held doubtful discourse generally. The talk turned on the distinction between great sins and little ones. In the circle of the Sultan it was agreed that the great sins were two: unbelief in the Prophet, whereby a man became Jew and dog; and smoking keef and tobacco, which no man could do and be of correct life and unquestionable Islam. The atonement for these great sins were five prayers a day, thirty-four prostrations, seventeen chapters of the Koran, and as many inclinations. All the rest were little sins; and as for murder and adultery, and bearing false witness—well, God was Merciful, God was Compassionate, God forgave His poor weak children.

This led to stories of the penalises paid by transgressors of the great sins. These were terrible. Putting on a profound air, the Vizier, a fat man of fifty, told of how one who smoked tobacco and denied the Prophet had rotted piecemeal; and of how another had turned in his grave with his face from Mecca. Then the Kaid of Fez, head of the Mosque and general Grand Mufti, led away with stories of the little sins. These were delightful. They pictured the shifts of pretty wives, married to worn out old men, to get at their youthful lovers in the dark by clambering in their dainty slippers from roof to roof. Also of the discomfiture of pious old husbands and the wicked triumph of rompish little ladies, under pretences of outraged innocence.

Such, and worse, and of a kind that bears not to be told, was the conversation after supper of the roysterers in the Kasbah. At every fresh story the laughter became louder, and soon the reserve and dignity of the Moor were left behind him and forgotten. At length Ben Aboo, encouraged by the Sultan's good fellowship, broke into loud praises of Naomi, and yet louder wails over the doom that must be the penalty of her apostasy; and thereupon Abd er-Rahman, protesting that for his part he wanted nothing with such a vixen, called on him to uncover her boasted charms to them. “Bring her here, Basha,” he said; “let us see her,” and this command was received with tumultuous acclamations.

It was the beginning of the end. In less than a minute more, while the rascals lolled over the floor in half a hundred different postures, with the hazy lights from the brass lamps and the glass candelabras on their dusky faces, their gleaming teeth, and dancing eyes, the messenger who had been sent for Naomi came back with the news that she was gone. Then Ben Aboo rose in silent consternation, but his guests only laughed the louder, until a second messenger, a soldier of the guard, came running with more startling news. Marteel had been bombarded by the Spaniards; the army of Marshall O'Donnel was under the walls of Tetuan, and their own people were opening the gates to him.

The tumult and confusion which followed upon this announcement does not need to be detailed. Shoutings for the mkhaznia, infuriated commands to the guards, racings to the stables and the Kasbah yard, unhobbling of horses, stamping and clattering of hoofs, and scurryings through dark corridors of men carrying torches and flares. There was no attempt at resistance. That was seen to be useless. Both the civil guard and the soldiery had deserted. The Kasbah was betrayed. Terror spread like fire. In very little time the Sultan and his company with their women and eunuchs, were gone from the town through the straggling multitude of their disorderly and dissolute and worthless soldiery lying asleep on the southern side of it.

Ben Aboo did not fly with Abd er-Rahman. He remembered that he had treasure, and as soon as he was alone he went in search of it. There were fifty thousand dollars, sweat of the life-blood of innocent people. No one knew the strong-room except himself, for with his own hand he had killed the mason who built it. In the dark he found the place, and taking bags in both his hands and hiding them under the folds of his selham, he tried to escape from the Kasbah unseen.

It was too late; the Spanish soldiers were coming up the arcades, and Ben Aboo, with his money-bags, took refuge in a granary underground, near the wall of the Kasbah gate. From that dark cell, crouching on the grain, which was alive with vermin, he listened in terror to the sounds of the night. First the galloping of horses on the courtyard overhead; then the furious shouts of the soldiers, and, finally, the mad cries of the crowd. “Damn it—they've given us the slip.” “Yes; they've crawled off like rats from a sinking ship.” “Curse it all, it's only a bungle.” This in the Spanish tongue, and then in the tongue of his own country Ben Aboo heard the guttural shouts of his own people: “Sidi, try the palace.” “Try the apartments of his women, Sidi.” “Abd er-Rahman's gone, but Ben Aboo's hiding.” “Death to the tyrant!” “Down with the Basha!” “Ben Aboo! Ben Aboo!” Last of all a terrific voice demanding silence. “Silence, you shrieking hell-babies, silence!”

Ben Aboo was in safety; but to lie in that dark hole underground and to hear the tumult above him was more than he could bear without going mad. So he waited until the din abated, and the soldiers, who had ransacked the Kasbah, seemed to have deserted it; and then he crept out, made for the women's apartments, and rattled at their door. It was folly, it was lunacy; but he could not resist it, for he dared not be alone. He could hear the sounds of voices within—wailing and weeping of the women—but no one answered his knocking. Again and again he knocked with his elbows (still gripping his money-bags with both hands), until the flesh was raw through selham and kaftan by beating against the wood. Still the door remained unopened, and Ben Aboo, thinking better of his quest for company, fled to the patio,

hoping to escape by a little passage that led to the alley behind the Kasbah.

Here he encountered Katrina and a guard of five black soldiers who were helping her flight. “We are safe,” she whispered—“they've gone back into the Feddan—come;” and by the light of a lamp which she carried she made for the winding corridor that led past the bath and the sanctuary to the Kasbah gate. But Ben Aboo only cursed her, and fumbled at the low door of the passage that went out from the alcove to the alley. He was lumbering through with his armless roll, intending to clash the door back in Katrina's face, when there was a fierce shout behind him, and for some minutes Ben Aboo knew no more.

The shout was Ali's. After leaving the Mahdi on the heath outside the Bab Toot, the black lad had hunted for the Basha. When the Spanish soldiers abandoned the Kasbah he continued his search. Up and down he had traversed the place in the darkness; and finding Ben Aboo at last, on the spot where he had first seen him, he rushed in upon him and brought him to the ground. Seeing Ben Aboo down, the black soldiers fell upon Ali. The brave lad died with a shout of triumph. “Israel ben Oliel,” he cried, as if he thought that name enough to save his soul and damn the soul of Ben Aboo.

But Ben Aboo was not yet done with his own. The blow that had been aimed at his heart had no more than grazed his shoulder. “Get up,” whispered Katrina, half in wrath; and while she stooped to look for his wounds, her face and hands as seen in the dim light of the lantern were bedaubed with his blood. At that moment the guards were crying that the Kasbah was afire, and at the next they were gone, leaving Katrina alone with the unconscious man. “Get up,” she cried again, and tugging at Ben Aboo's unconscious body she struck it in her terror and frenzy. It was every one for himself in that bad hour. Katrina followed the guards, and was never afterwards heard of.

When Ben Aboo came to himself the patio was aglow with flames. He staggered to

his feet, still grappling to his breast the money-bags hidden under his selham. Then, bleeding from his shoulder and with blood upon his beard, he made afresh for the passage leading to the back alley. The passage was narrow and dark. There were three winding steps at the end of it. Ben Aboo was dizzy and he stumbled.

But the passage was silent, it was safe, and out in the alley a sea of voices burst upon him. He could hear the tramp of countless footsteps, the cries of multitudes of voices, and the rattle of flintlocks. Lanterns, torches, flares and flashes of gunpowder came and went at both ends of the long dark tunnel. In the light of these he saw a struggling current of angry faces. The living sea encircled him. He knew what had happened. At the first certainty that his power was gone and that there was nothing to fear from his vengeance, his own people had gathered together to destroy him.

There were two small mean houses on the opposite side of the alley, and Ben Aboo tried to take refuge in the first of them. But the woman who came with uncovered face to the door was the widow of the mason who had built his strong-room. “Murderer and dog!” she cried, and shut the door against him. He tried the other house. It was the house of the mason's son. “Forgive me,” he cried. “I am corrected by Allah! Yes, yes, it is true I did wrong by your father, but forgive me and save me.” Thus he pleaded, throwing himself on the ground and crawling there. “Dog and coward,” the young man shouted, and beat him back into the street.

Ben Aboo's terror was now appalling to look upon. His face was that of a snared beast. With bloodshot eyes, hollow cheeks, and short thick breath, he ran from dark alley to dark alley, trying every house where he thought he might find a friend. “Alee, don't you know me?” “Mohammed, it is I, Ben Aboo.” “See, El Arby, here's money, money; it's yours, only save me, save me!” With such frantic cries he raced about in the darkness like a hunted wolf. But not a house would shelter him. Everywhere he met relatives of men who had died through his means, and he was

driven away with curses.

Meantime, a rumour that Ben Aboo was in the streets had been bruited abroad among the people, and their lust of blood was thereby raised to madness. Screaming and spitting and raving, and firing their flintlocks, they poured from street into street, watching for their victim and seeing him in every shadow. “He's here!” “He's there!” “No, he's yonder!” “He's scaling the high wall like a cat!”

Ben Aboo heard them. Their inarticulate cries came to him laden with one message only—death. He could see their faces, their snarling teeth. Sometimes he would rave and blaspheme. Then he would make another effort for his life. But the whirlpool was closing in upon him; and at last, like one who flings himself over a precipice from dizziness, fears, and irresistible fascination, he flung himself into the middle of the infuriated throng as they scurried across the open Feddan.

From that moment Ben Aboo's doom was sealed. The people received him with a long furious roar, a cry of triumphant execration, as if their own astuteness at length had entrapped him. He stood with his back to the high wall; the bellowing crowd was before him on either side. By the torches that many carried all could see him. Turban and shasheeah had fallen off, and the bald crown of his head was bare. His face retained no human expression but fear. He was seen to draw his arms from beneath his selham, to hold both his money-bags against his breast, to plunge a hand into the necks of them, and fling handfuls of coins to the people. “Silver,” he cried; “silver, silver for everybody.”

The despairing appeal was useless. Nobody touched the money. It flashed white through the air, and fell unheard. “Death to the Kaid!” was shouted on every side. Nevertheless, though half the men carried guns, no man fired. By unspoken consent it seemed to be understood that the death of Ben Aboo was not to be the act of one, but of all. “Stones,” cried somebody out of the crowd, and in another moment everybody was picking stones, and piling them at his feet or gathering them in the

skirt of his jellab.

Ben Aboo knew his awful fate. Gesticulating wildly, having flung the money-bags from him, slobbering and screaming, the blighted soul was seen to raise his eyes towards the black sky, his thick lubber lips working visibly, as if in wild invocation of heaven. At the next instant the stones began to fall on him. Slowly they fell at first, and he reeled under them like a drunken man; the back of his neck arched itself like the neck of a bull, and like the roar of a bull was the groan that came from his throat. Then they fell faster, and he swayed to and fro, and grunted, with his beard bobbing at his breast, and his tongue lolling out. Faster and faster, and thicker and thicker they showered upon him, darting out of the darkness like swallows of the night. His clothes were rent, his blood spirted over them, he staggered as a beast staggers in the slaughter, and at length his thick knees doubled up, and he fell in a round heap like a ball.

The ferocity of the crowd was not yet quelled. They hailed the fall of Ben Aboo with a triumphant howl, but their stones continued to shower upon his body. In a little while they had piled a cairn above it. Then they left it with curses of content and went their ways. When the Spanish soldiers, who had stood aside while the work was done, came up with their lanterns to look at this monument of Eastern justice, the heap of stones was still moving with the terrific convulsions of death.

Such was the fall of El Arby, nicknamed Ben Aboo.

CHAPTER XXVIII

“ALLAH-U-KABAR”

Travelling through the night,—Naomi laughing and singing snatches in her new-found joy, and the Mahdi looking back at intervals at the huge outline of Tetuan against the blackness of the sky,—they came to the hut by Semsa before

dawn of the following day. But they had come too late. Israel ben Oliel was not, after all, to set out for England. He was going on a longer journey. His lonely hour had come to him, his dark hour wherein none could bear him company. On a mattress by the wall he lay outstretched, unconscious, and near to his end. Two neighbours from the village were with him, and but for these he must have been alone—the mighty man in his downfall deserted by all save the great Judge and God.

What Naomi did when the first shock of this hard blow fell upon her, what she said, and how she bore herself, it would be a painful task to tell. Oh, the irony of fate! Ay, the irony of God! That scene, and what followed it, looked like a cruel and colossal jest—none the less cruel because long drawn out and as old as the days of Job.

It was useless to go out in search of a doctor. The country was as innocent of leechcraft as the land of Canaan in the days of Abraham. All they could do was to submit, absolutely and unconditionally. They were in God's hands.

The light was coming yellow and pink through the window under the eaves as Israel awoke to consciousness. He opened his eyes as if from sleep, and saw Naomi beside him. No surprise did he show at this, and neither did he at first betray pleasure. Dimly and softly he looked upon her, and then something that might have been a smile but for lack of strength passed like sunshine out of a cloud across his wasted face. Naomi pressed a pillow-under his loins, and another under his head, thinking to ease the one and raise the other. But the iron hand of unconsciousness fell upon him again, and through many hours thereafter Naomi and the Mahdi sat together in silence with the multitudinous company of invisible things.

During that interval Fatimah came in hot haste, and they had news of Tetuan. The Spaniards had taken the town, but Abd er-Rahman and most of his Ministers had escaped. Ben Aboo had tried to follow them, but he had been killed in the alcove of the patio. Ali had killed him. He had rushed in upon him through a line of his

guards. One of the guards had killed Ali. The brave black lad had fallen with the name of Israel on his lips and with a dauntless shout of triumph. The Kasbah was afire; it had been burning since the banquet of the night before.

Towards sunset peace fell upon Israel ben Oliel, and then they knew that the end was very near. Naomi was still kneeling at his right hand, and the Mahdi was standing at his left. Israel looked at the girl with a world of tenderness, though the hard grip of death was fast stiffening his noble face. More than once he glanced at the Mahdi also as if he wished to say something, and yet could not do so, because the power of life was low; but at last his voice found strength.

“I have left it too late,” he said. “I cannot go to England.”

Naomi wept more than ever at the sound of these faltering words, and it was not without effort that the Mahdi answered him.

“Think no more of that,” he said, and then he stopped, as if the word that he had been about to speak had halted on his tongue.

“It is hard to leave her,” said Israel, “for she is alone; and who will protect her when I am gone?”

“God lives,” said the Mahdi, “and He is Father to the fatherless.”

“But what Jew,” said Israel, “would not repeat for her her father's troubles, and what Muslim could save her from her own?”

“Who that trusts in God,” said the Mahdi, “need fear the Kaid?”

“But what man can save her?” cried Israel again.

And then the Mahdi, touched by Naomi's tears as well as her father's importunities, answered out of a hot heart and said—

“Peace, peace! If there is no one else to take her, from this day forward she shall go with me.”

Naomi looked up at him then with such a light in her beautiful eyes as he has often

since, but had never before seen there, and Israel ben Oliel who had been holding at his hand, clutched suddenly at his wrist.

“God bless you!” he said, as well as he could for the two angels, the angel of love and the angel of death, were struggling at his throat.

Israel looked steadily at the Mahdi for a moment more, and then said very softly—

“Death may come to me now; I am ready. Farewell, my father! I tried to do your bidding. Do you remember your watchword? But God has given me rewards for repentance—see,” and he turned his eyes towards the eyes of Naomi with a wasting yet sunny smile.

“God is good,” said the Mahdi; “lie still, lie still,” and he laid his cool hand on Israel's forehead.

“I am leaving her to you,” said Israel; “and you alone can protect her of all men living in this land accursed of God, for God's right arm is round you. Yes, God is good. As long as you live you will cherish her. Never was she so dear to me as now, so sweet, so lovable, so gentle. But you will be good to her. God is very good to me. Guard her as the apple of your eye. It will reward you. And let her think of me sometimes—only sometimes. Ah! how nearly I shipwrecked all this! Remember! Remember!”

“Hush, hush! Do not increase your pains,” said the Mahdi. “Are you feeling better now?”

“I am feeling well,” said Israel, “and happy—so happy.”

The sun had set, and the swift twilight was passing into night, when another messenger arrived from Tetuan. It was Ali's old Taleb, shedding tears for his boy, but boasting loudly of his brave death. He had heard of it from the black guards themselves. After Ali fell he lived a moment, though only in unconsciousness. The boy must have thought himself back at Israel's side, “I've done it, father,” he said; “he'll never hurt you again. You won't drive me away from you any more; will you,

father?”

They could see that Israel had heard the story. The eyes of the dying are dry, but well they knew that the heart of the man was weeping.

The Taleb came with the idea that Israel also was gone, for a rumour to that effect had passed through the town. “El hamdu l'Illah!” he cried, when he saw that Israel was still alive. But then he remembered something, and whispered in the Mahdi's farther ear that a vast concourse of Moors and Jews including his own vast fellowship was even then coming out to bury Israel, thinking he was dead.

Israel overheard him and smiled. It seemed as if he laughed a little also. “It will soon be true,” he muttered under his breath, that came so quick. And hardly had he spoken when a low deep sound came from the distance. It was the funeral wail of Israel ben Oliel.

Nearer and nearer it came, and clearer and more clear. First a mighty bass voice: “Allah Akbar!” Again another and another voice: “Allah Akbar!” and then the long roar of a vast multitude: “Al—l—lah-u-kabar!” Finally a slow melancholy wail, rising and falling on the darkening air: “There is no God but God, and Mohammed is the Prophet of God.”

It was a solemn sound—nay, an awful one, with the man himself alive to hear it.

O gratitude that is only a death-song! O fame that is only a funeral!

Israel listened and smiled again. “Ah, God is great!” he whispered; “God is great!”

To ease his labouring chest a moment the Mahdi rose and stepped to the door, and then in the distance he could descry the procession approaching—a moving black shadow against the sky. Also over their billowy heads he could see a red glow far away in the clouds. It was the last smouldering of the fire of the modern Sodom.

While he stood there he was startled by the sound of a thick voice behind him. It was Israel's voice. He was speaking to Naomi. “Yes,” he was saying, “it is hard to part.

We were going to be very happy. . . . But you must not cry. Listen! When I am there—eh? you know, there—I will want to say, 'Father, you did well to hear my prayer. My little daughter—she is happy, she is merry, and her soul is all sunshine.' So you must not weep. Never, never, never! Remember! . . . . Ah! that's right, that's right. My simple-hearted darling! My sunny, merry, happy girl!"

Naomi was trying to laugh in obedience to her father's will. She was combing his white beard with her fingers—it was knotted and tangled—and he was labouring hard to speak again.

"Naomi, do you remember?" he said; and then he tried to sing, and even to lisp the words as he sang them, just as a child might have done. "Do you remember—

Within my heart a voice Bids earth and heaven rejoice, Sings 'Love'—"

But his strength was spent, and he had to stop.

"Sing it," he whispered, with a poor broken smile at his own failure. And then the brave girl—all courage and strength, a quivering bow of steel—took up the song where he had left it, though her voice trembled and the tears started to her eyes.

As Naomi sang Israel made some poor shift to beat the time to her, though once and again his feeble hand fell back into his breast. When she had done singing Israel looked at the Mahdi and then at her, and smiled, as if he and she and the song were one to him.

But indeed Naomi had hardly finished when the wail came again, now nearer than before, and louder. Israel heard it. "Hark! They are coming. Keep close," he muttered.

He fumbled and tugged with one hand at the breast of his kaftan. The Mahdi thought his throat wanted air, but Naomi, with the instinct of help that a woman has in scenes like these, understood him better. In the disarray of his senses this was his way of trying to raise himself that he might listen the easier to the song outside. The girl slid her arm under his neck, and then his shrunken hand was at rest. "Ah! closer.

'God is great'!" he murmured again. "'God—is—great'!" With that word on his lips he smiled and sighed, and sank back. It was now quite dark.

When the Mahdi returned to his place at Israel's feet the dying man seemed to have been feeling for his hand. Taking it now, he brought it to his breast, where Naomi's hand lay under his own trembling one. With that last effort, and a look into the girl's face that must have pursued him home, his grand eyes closed for ever.

In the silence that followed after the departing spirit the deep swell of the funeral wail came rolling heavily on the night air: "Allah Akbar! Al-lah-u-kabar!"

In a few minutes more the procession of the people of Tetuan who had come out to bury Israel ben Oliel had arrived at the house.

"He has gone," said the Mahdi, pointing down; and then lifting his eyes towards heaven, he added, "TO THE KING!"

Notes: 1. Where spelling inconsistencies in the printed text appear to be unintentional, they have been made consistent in this Etext version, either by adopting the dictionary spelling or the spelling most frequently used in the printed text. 2. In the printed text, many representations of Arabic words use accented characters; in this Etext version, the accents have been removed to allow transmission by email using the 7-bit character set.

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