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"His heart was as the dust under his feet," pursued Koor Ali, "and he railed upon the evil spirit on the black horse who had come to destroy him. I asked him if he intended to let Yumen Yusel harry his kingdom and carry away his horses, his camels, his wives and his little ones, and he answered, 'If it is the will of God.' 'Nay,' I replied, 'that is but the voice of a craven fear. We are come hither to help thee with a great host, and we are to go back because thou liest among the rocks afraid to come forth and give the enemy battle?' Whereupon there were shame and confusion on his countenance, and he arose and said that of a surety they would fight.

'But how shall I prevail on my men,' he asked, 'for they think these are evil spirits leagued against them?' 'Gather them unto one place,' said I unto him, and he sent out messengers and gathered them into one place—a great hollow in the midst of the mountains. 'Speak unto them,' I said. 'Nay, it will be better if thou speak unto them,' he answered, 'for they no longer heed my words.'

"Whereupon I stood on a rock and spoke to them, and told them how my lord had come to help them, and hearing this they took heart and shouted with a mighty voice that they yearned for vengeance, and were ready to do battle with Yumen Yusel and the man on the black horse. And I, thinking it well to take them while the spirit was strong upon them, bade them come down to join my lord, whereat Amood Sinn, trembling greatly, said, 'Nay, it is better for us to remain here until all things are ready.' 'Thou art more afraid than thy men,' I said. 'They are but common soldiers,' he answered. 'The enemy seeketh not their life, but mine. Peradventure if we go down with thee he will fall upon us by the way and slay me.' Whereupon I, answering, said that forasmuch as no battle could be fought among rocks and gorges, they must come down to the plain. If they did not, then would my lord return to Marabel, and Amood Sinn's possessions would go from him and his posterity forever. And being again sore ashamed he consented to come down, and now lieth yonder close by the foot of the mountain awaiting my lord's behest."

"Thou hast done the part of a brave man, Koor Ali," said Abou Kuram, when the recital was at an end. "I was wroth at the delay, and now my anger is kindled against Amood Sinn. Thou hast done right well in taking the cowardly dog by the ear and dragging him to the foot of the mountain. We have been surprised here, and a battle is at hand. Get thou things ready, Koor Ali. We will move to meet Amood Sinn. And now I must go to Mohammed ben Eldad Hassam. He lieth ill at ease in my tent, full of excuses for his brave master and peradventure for himself."

"Yes, it is likely," returned Koor Ali. "My opinion is that he cometh to spy my lord's strength. He will return if thou let him to report to Amood Sinn, and if my lord's army be not enough in their eyes they will betake themselves to the rocks again."

"Two can play at every game," said Abou Kuram, significantly, pointing toward his tent.

The warning which Koor Ali had given was well timed, for sure enough, when Mohammed ben Eldad Hassam had washed and eaten, and rested and paid Abou Kuram the regulation number of compliments, he proposed that he should get an escort and precede the troops in order that Amood Sinn might be prepared to receive their illustrious general in a fashion becoming his rank. But Abou Kuram had not studied diplomacy for nothing.

"My lord troubleth himself too much," he replied, with an insinuating grace that was wonderful to behold. "We are soldiers, and will be satisfied with a soldier's welcome. We are not come hither for feasting and ceremonies, but to destroy Yumen Yusel and his evil ally on the black horse, of whom we have heard so much."

Mohammed ben Eldad turned his eyes to heaven at this, mentally invoking its protection. "Thinkest thou steel or lead will avail upon him?" he asked. "'Tis hard to kill Satan."

"If he come in our way, we can but try our weapons upon him," answered Abou Kuram.

"Thou speakest like the valiant man thou art," said the Envoy, sweetly. "Wherefore I would again crave my lord's permission to return in advance of the troops. My royal master will be sore displeased if he be denied the opportunity of preparing for my lord's reception."

"The good Amood Sinn knoweth we are coming," said Abou Kuram, suavely, "and thou needst not fear for his princely beneficence. We do not look for ceremonies with the foe in sight. Besides, see the troops are even now ready to march. It were folly for thee, therefore, to hurry away."

After that Mohammed ben Eldad could not further persist, but his disappointment and chagrin were evident to all. He and his master were committed to the chances of another battle.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AMOOD SINN'S BRAVERY.

When early in the afternoon the two armies effected a juncture, the aspect of the allies was such as might well have made Abou Kuram pause ere joining them in battle against so formidable an opponent as Yumen Yusel. The rest had given our men back their spirits. The toils of the desert were forgotten, and every heart beat eagerly for the chance of spoil and glory that was at hand. Amood Sinn's troops, on the contrary, though they made a great show of valour and enthusiasm at our approach, were as miserably draggled and downcast as if they had just crept out of the mire after a trampling by the enemy, and all their shouting and brandishing of arms could not hide the deathly fear that was upon them. To put trust in the intrepidity of such deplorable losels was like relying on the valour of a company of scarecrows.

Amood Sinn himself rode out to meet us, gallantly mounted on a richly-caparisoned charger, and attended by a suite in magnificent draperies and a blaze of variegated colours. Nature had given him a soldierly figure, and being very gorgeously and imposingly dressed, he would, in looks at least, have been the beau ideal of a military leader but for the irresolution of the restless eye and a general air of despondency that pomp appeared powerless to lift.

The meeting of the two princes, however, was extremely cordial, both dismounting and embracing in the presence of the assembled host. But when the preliminary civilities were over, and Abou Kuram showed a disposition to come to business, Amood hesitated, made excuses, and then all at once became excited and hysterical. Launching into a distracted tale of the supernatural, which any old wife in Scotland would have been ashamed of, he declared he had had the clearest ocular proof that the man on the black horse was none other than Satan himself.

(To be Continued.)

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