THE STORY-TELLER OF STAMBOUL.

(*Concluded-*)

Being thus deprived of the means of subsistence Selim led a vagrant lifa, depending for a time upon the casual relief he obtained from those who had known him in better days. This resource speedily failed him; and he was soon brought to the very verge of starvation, when the idea struck him of turning to his pecuniary advantage the talent for reciting and invention which had made him so popular among his youthful companions. Accordingly, he frequented cafes and places of public resort where he practised these gifts for the amusement of the company. At first, his gains in this branch of public life were very small; but his fame as a story-teller speedily spread, and his receipts increased accordingly. He possessed all the elements necessary for proficiency in his profession—a clear head and musical voice, a ready invention, a retentive memory, an animated delivery, and unbounded assurance. Wherever Selim exercised his vocation, a large crowd was sure to collect about him, and as he brought much additional custom to the coffee-house keepers, they found it worth their while to supply him with food and money. Thus he went on, laughing and making others laugh, but still neither forgetting nor forgiving the faithless and avaricious mollah who had usurped his birthright. He often interweaved this part of his own history into the wild legends he was accustomed to recite, and declaimed against the injustice with a warmth which betrayed his interest in the matter; while those of his audience who undersood the illusion, winked gravely at each other, and puffed away at their narghiles with sympathising ardour Almost everybody in Stamboul knew of the wrong which had been practised, and yet so influential was Mollah Hassan's gold, that all who had any power to interfere were blind to his villiany.

Notwithstanding his light-hearted disposition, Selim could not prevent occasional attacks of despondency, induced by a keen sense of the injustice he had suffered. Under the influence of these, he would often take long and solitary journeys, and even retire for days together from the society of his companions. He would be missed from his accustomed haunts, and his absence would be lamented by his admirers and in a few days he would reappear, and delight them with some new narration of marvellous and absorbing interest. On one occasion, after some days spent in these wild purposeless rambles, Selim was returning to the capital: it was nearly evening, and he was yet some distance from his destination, when he heard the rumble of an araba behind him. The vehicle drew near, drawn by two richly caparisoned oxen; and the bells with which the harness was studded made a merry jingling as they moved along. The curtains of the araba, needed no longer to keep off the sun, were thrown back to admit the cool breeze of the evening. Selim saw that there were two occupants in the vehicle, both females; and, from the difference in their costume, he judged that they were mistress and servant. They were apparently returning from an excursion into the country, and were under the charge of an aga who drove the vehicle. As the araba passed beside him, Selim observed beneath the *yashmac* of the superior the twinkle of a merry pair of dark eyes. Now Selim was a connoisseur in the matter of eyes. All the powers of observation he possessed had been concentrated on the subject, and from long practice, he had become very expert in deducing, from the hue and aspect of that organ, an argument as to the remaining features; and so, on this occasion, though the envious veil concealed all else, yet the tell-tale eyes inspired him with visions of surpassing beauty. The araba passed him by, the tinkling of its tiny bells died away in the distance, and still the light of those dark eyes lingered in his soul, and he busied his fancy in weaving many pretty images respecting their owner. With an eye to business, he soon succeded in founding a capital tale upon the incident, for the behoof of his friend in his next 'entertainment,' and was just finishing off the plot in his mind, with the readiness of an experienced hand, when a sudden turn in the road revealed a sight which quickly changed the current of his thoughts. Either through the aga's want of skill in driving, or from some sudded restiveness on the part of the oxen, the araba had swerved from the road, the wheels had sunk into a hollow at the side, and the vehicle was overturned. Selim hastened with all his might to render assistance, the screams which he heard adding wings to his feet, and very quickly arrived at the scene of accident. He found the younger female stunned and senseless with the shock, having been thrown out with great force; the aga bewildered and helpless; and the elder female, who appeared to be a kind of duenna, or nurse, endeavouring to restore her charge to consciousness, ejaculating meanwhile with great fervency mingled lamentation over her mistress and curses on the stupidity of the driver.

'Ah me! ah me! Fatime, my jewel! Thou luckless offspring of a dog—fifty strokes of the bastinado for thy supper. Look upon me, my flower; art thou dead! Alas!'

Meanwhile Selim stood by in silence, rapt in astonishment at the realisation of his late fancies. Here were the very charms revealed in all their fulness which he had pictured to himself; and he stood divided beween admiration of so much beauty and pleasure at his own skill in guessing it so correctly. His heart was rapidly escaping through his ardent gaze, when Fatime opened her eyes and blushed to find herself unveiled in the presence of a stranger. Her blush was immediately succeeded by an expression of pain; and on her attempting to rise, it was found that her ankle was seriously injured, and that she was unable to move. Selim examined the overturned araba; and finding that no great damage had been done to it in the fall, summoned the luckless driver to his assistance, and soon succeeded in preparing it for further progress. It then became necessary to lift the injured lady into the vehicle; and while the others were leisurely preparing for the task, Selim stepped between them, raised the fair sufferer in his arms, and placed her gently on the cushions. The attendants appeared shocked at his presumption, and the yashmac was immediately arranged over the face of the lovely maiden; but Selim had his reward in a grateful glance, which dwelt in his heart long after. He would have accompanied the araba to the city, but the nurse forbade it in no gentle terms, and he felt that such an intrusion would be deemed unwarrantable. He therefore remained where he was until the vehicle had passed out of sight; and when at last he turned to depart, he observed that the lady had letf her fan, which he seized upon with eagerness, as a souvenir of the fair Fatime.

Selim's heart burned with curiosity to know who the maiden was' whom he had met under these strange circumstances; but he wisely determined, for the present, to keep the whole matter a secret. He returmed to Stamboul with his head full of romantic visions, and his peace of mind sadly disturbed by his remembrance of the charms of this unknown lady. He betook himself at once to his accustomed occupation, and delighted an audience more numerous than select, upon that very evening, by the glowing and impassioned terms in which he depicted, with incidents in the story never heard of till then, the mutual loves and sorrows of Schemselnihar and the Prince of Persia. In fact, under this new inspiration, Selim seemed to have become more brilliant than ever; and, like many another poor poet and player in the world's history, he poured forth the tale of his own passion and misfortunes through the lips of his heroes. A few evenings after the event just narrated, Selim was reposing in one of the chief cafes, after having entertained the company with a portion of a tale which he proposed to conclude at the same hour on the following evening. Occupying the best seat in the divan, and inhaling the grateful incense of the perfumed tobacco, he enjoyed the luxury of listening to the speculations of his audience as to the *denouement* of the narrative he had begun: some were of opinion that the hero would in the end succeed in uniting his destinies with those of his adored mistress; while others held that the malignant power of the Evil Genius would thwart this desirable consumation. At last, after many vain appeals to Selim, they decided to await the issue on the following evening, and the conversation took another channel. A shaggy *sipahi* who sat near to Selim entered into discourse with his neighbour. 'Thou hast heard of our pacha's proclamation, brother?'

'I have not. What is it?'

'Three nights since, his daughter, the light of his harem, was returning from a visit to the medicinal waters, accompanied by the aga and her woman, when the araba was overturned, and the lady broke her ankle. A young man in passing by had the presumption to remove her veil, and even took her into his arms, and lifted her into the araba. The pacha was so enraged, when he heard of this stranger's audacity, that he immediately offered a reward of twenty purses to whomsoever will secure the offender, and bring him to punishment.'

'And by the Prophet's beard,' returned the other, 'our pacha is the man to keep his word.'

To the truth of this remark, Selim gave a silent assent; for no one was more noted for severity in discipline and firmness of purpose than Osman Pacha, the commander of the sultan's sipahis. Thus, then, the unfortunate youth obtained more light than was agreeable as to the parentage and abode of the young lady whom he had thus mysteriously met. He learned her rank, and what part of the city she blessed by her presence, only to learn at the same time, that all hope of wooing and winning her was out of the question. For him, the penniless adventurer; the laugh-maker for street-crowds and idlers at the cafe, whose scanty income depended on the maufacture of jokes and stories—for him to raise his eyes to the exalted rank to which the lovely Fatime belonged, would be, as he said, remonstrating with his rebellious heart in gloomy soliloquy, 'like a beetle courting the rose.' Still, with all the aid of his philosophy, he could not scatter the delightful vision. His habits of moody and restless wandering grew more confirmed, and he was less frequently met with at his wonted places of resort. Indeed his acquaintances began to fear, that the sense of his injuries would either kill him or drive him mad; and either catastrophe would have proved a serious loss to the mirth-loving portion of Stamboul.

Wandering one day through a remote part of the suburbs, he was startled at being suddenly confronted by a stranger, who evidently sought to conceal his features from observation. He drew from beneath his robe a bonquet of rich and beautiful flowers, which he presnted to the young man, whispering as he did so a stanzas well known at that time among the people of the city:

'The waters go to the seas from whence they came;
A loving heart repays in kindness the kindness once bestowed;'

and making a sign as an injunction to secrecy, he passed on his way. Selim did not doubt for a moment that the flowers had been sent from the beautiful Fatime, and hastened, with his heart heaving with eager joy, to seek some retired spot where he could examine this precious missive without fear of interruption. This method of communication was made to supply the place of writing, and as every flower had its recognised meaning, it was not difficult to gather the drift and purport of the whole. Here was a flower to express the bashfulness of maiden's love; another denoting hinderance and difficulty; another stimulating him to hope and faithfulness; and altogether, the young man, an apt student in such matters, contrived to make out a state of affairs tolerably encouraging to himself. Overwhelmed with joy at the good-fortune which had befallen him, Selim became an altered man in health and spirits, though he kept his secret most religiously, both from motives of honour and also from a prudent regard for his own safety. Messages of the same character were repeated, and he found opportunities, through the same medium to return suitable acknowledgments and replies; and though the impediments to a successful termination of this love-passage still appered insuperrable, yet Selim almost forgot that it was hopeless in his joy that it was mutual, love.

Meanwhile, his professional reputation continued to extend, till at last it reached the court itself, and the attendants and officers discoursed among themselves concerning the man whose talents were thus dazzling and delighting the people. These reports came to the ears of the sultan, who forthwith resolved that he would hear Selim's performamce, and judge for himself of his ability. Murad was very fond off assuming a disguise, exchanging his robes of state for the plain garb of citizen or travelling-merchant, and thus prowling about to observe the manners and proceedings of his people. On more than one occasion this propensity had involved him in difficulties in which the commander of the faithful appeared in a somewhat undignified position at this time, however, he resolved to repeat the experiment, and went forth incognito, attended only by a confidential servant, to visit the cafe at which Selim was to perform. On this evenineg, the spacious divan was more than usually crowded, and the disguised sultan, with his companion, joining the throng, was able to observe everything without risk of being discovered. The story-teller commenced his harangue, and it happened on this night that Selim recounted, with more pathos and minutenss ofdetail than he had ever done before, the tale of his own wrongs and sorrows. The concidence was so remarkable, that it was commonly reported afterwards that the fact, of the sultan's intended presence had been communicated to him by some one who was in the secret.

Bulbul was a wild and thoughtless youth, full of idle pranks and folly, and with a love of fun which led him into many scrapes; and as the speaker described some ludicrous incidents in which he figured, his hearers were kept for some time in roars of laughter. But Bulbul loved an aged parent, and at his request, began to reform his life, and not too soon, for shortly after the aged father died. The desolate home, the grief of the orphan, and his friendless condition, were dwelt on so pathetically, that the lately smiling audience were melted into tears. Bulbul was the subject of treachery—a perfidious friend grasped the heritage of the orphan; and forthwith indignation, was expressed in every face. Then the mystery of a secret love was interweaved into the narrative—there was a maiden 'fair as the rosy-fingerered morning,' the rays of whose beauty absorbed his soul; oh, the stars of heaven grew pale in her presence, and the flowers drooped before her superior beauty. The eyes of the breathless listeners flashed as he painted her loveliness, and described the ardour of their mutual love. Then with solemn and piteous utterance, he set forth that all was hopeless, this ardent passion wasted and in vain: Bulbul was poor and oppresed, and Gul was rich and exalted, and the beauty he admired was treasured up unwillingly for another. Then, throwing up his arms, and personating the unhappy Bulbul, he pronounced an impassioned invective upon the enemy who had thus blasted his prospects, and barred the union of two loving hearts; calling down the vengeance of Heaven upon his guilty head. With this burst of indignant eloquence, he concluded, having with these scanty materials wrought his audienece to an almost incredible pitch of excitement.

The sultan, forgetting his disguise in his enthusiasm, exclaimed, in those stentorian tones which so often made hif servants tremble:

'Stand forth! thou teller of stories, and let me speak with thee!'

It would be difficult to describe the confusion which took place on the utterance of these words. Murad's habits of wandering about in disguise were well known, and many of those present were acquainted with his person. The moment he was recognised, while many were occupied in making their reverences, others sought only how they might make their escape without observation for the sultan was not very popular among his subjects, and few were ambitious of the honour of appearing in his presence

'Stand forth!' shouted Murad again, 'and tell me if there is truth in thy story; for by the beard of my father, if there lives in my dominions such an evildoer as thou hast spoken of, the holy law shall have its course upon him.'

'O my padishah,' cried Selim, prostrating himself before the sultan, and kissing the carpet before him, 'the pent-up fountain must overflow, and thy slave hath set forth his own sorrows under another likeness.'

At the request of the sultan, Selim related again the details of his injuries, and revealed the name of the mollah who had chiefly brought them about. Murad then concluded the interview by presenting him with a ring, which he took from his own finger, and commanding him to come before him on the following day, when he would himself be the judge of his cause. Selim failed not to obey the injunction; and on his arrival in the imperial presence, he was confronted with the Mollah Hassan. The young man was provided with witnesses to prove that he had conformed to the conditions imposed by his father; and many of those who had refused him help in his greatest need, came forward now with great alacrity to offer their testimony on his behalf. The arguments which the mollah used in his defence were deemed of no weight. He was condemned to make full restitution, with interest, of the wealth which he had detained from its lawful possessor, to pay a large fine to the government, and to be imprisoned during the sultan's pleasure. It appeared, from documents found in the mollah's possession, that the property thus bequeathed was considerable larger than had been expected, so that Selim found himself suddenly raised from a position of comparative poverty to one of competence and wealth. The young man, penetrated with gratitude for this act of justice, wished to testify his devotion to the sultan, and he offered himself, to act in whatever capacity he might be pleased to employ him. Murad retained him about his own person, as possessing agreeable talents which would serve to amuse him in those gloomy fits of dispondency and sullenness to which he was prone. After a time, finding him shrewd and sensible, and not unacquainted with the principles of Turkish law, he entrusted to his hands a post in the administration; and thus the youth commenced a career which bade fair to be prosperous and honorable.

Shortly after the restoration of his fortune, Selim, rejoicing in the thought that his love was not now altogether hopeless, determined to make application for the hand of his long-loved Fatime. After sending notice of his intention, he sought an interview with Osman Pacha, and revealed himself as the fortunate youth to whom a happy chanc had granted a sight of the surpassing charms of his fair daughter. When he produced the long-cherished fan, and gave the true account of the occurrence, the grim pacha could not but see that the breach of decorum was warranted by the circumstances, and his frown gradually relaxed into a smile. Selim's proposal, as a man of wealth, and a favourite of the sultan, was deemed 'eligible;' and so the beauteous Fatime became in due season the light of another harem. Thus was furnished an instance—of rare occurrence in eastern life—of a marriage founded upon mutual affection; and thus was provided an unfailing source of inspiration for every succeeding story-teller that may chant his ditty in Stamboul.—*Chamber's Journal*.

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