AT LOVE'S COMMAND.

By John A. Steuart.

The caravan on which we were anxious to bestow our attentions was the one that, starting from Yumen, proceeds by the mountain course to Taif. As we knew almost to a day the date at which it would appear, we could post ourselves satisfactorily and await its coming with composure. The place of reception was in the heart of the mountains, in a deep and ugly defile where two camels could scarcely walk abreast, and a caravan could be harried with impunity. We rode hard, gained our position in good time, hid like foxes among the rocks, and prayed that the hadjis would not tarry. While waiting their arrival I had an experience that would be worth a fortune to a story-teller.

The sun had set, and the night had closed in rather dark. I had been attending to my mare, and was returning to my companions, when Baruk, sidling up with an air of profound mystery, whispered that the Indian princess wished to have speech with me.

"But beware how thou goest," he said. "A score of lances would be sheathed in thy body if thou wert caught talking to her in sercet."

"What does she want with me, Baruk?" I enquired, softly.

"She will tell thee. Follow me," he answered, gliding into the darkness.

The danger and the mystery were of course an irresistible incentive, and I turned after him instantly. We found the Indian crouching behind a big stone, having by some pretence managed to get away from the other women. Saluting her quietly, I told her I was at her service, but instead of answering me she turned to Baruk.

"Good, good Baruk," she said, in the sweetest of voices and in broken Arabic. "Gracious Baruk, go back to the litters. Say I am praying to the night. It is a custom with my people. It is a rite, say a rite, my Baruk. Fear not, I will return to thee. He," indicating me, "will keep me safe."

Baruk looked a little dubious, but he went.

"Thou art a stranger in this land," she said to me quickly when we were alone. "In India we see thy people, but this is not India. Thy face made my heart leap in the palace. Art one of the robbers? What do people call them? Bedouins—yea, that is it. Art one of them?"

A man must not trust himself unreservedly to the first minx he meets, so I answered, warily. But her eager intelligence found all she wanted in my reply.

"See, I take thy hand and kiss it—so," seizing my hand and putting it to her lips. "It is sin in our religion. But I have been taught. Ah, ha! I have been taught. I am a daughter of the holy prophet, but there is more than one road to Heaven. Is that not good truth?"

I had to admit it was fairly good truth and excellent Christian doctrine.

"Yes, yes, I know," she went on, quickly, and her voice was thrilling with suppressed emotion. "I have been taught—more than one road to Heaven—that is what thy people say. Now listen. Dost know we are guilty of a great big sin? Ah, the big knife would cut off thy head if eyes discovered us. But thy people are brave. Art afraid?" she asked, coming so close I could hear the quick beating of her heart.

There was a rustle behind and she turned, holding her breath.

"It is only Baruk," she said, much relieved. "Good Baruk, just a little space longer. Tell them if they ask thee that I am safe. Thou comest from far across the sea—people call it England," she continued, turning back to me.

More and more puzzled, I admitted she was right.

"I knew," she said, with an eagerness in which pleasure and pain were mingled. "Thy face proclaimeth thy country. I know thy people. Yea, one is—but never mind, that is too fast. Listen! Art thou going to remain with the robbers, the Bedouins?"

Baruk came creeping back again, declaring she would be missed and be slain.

"Thou shalt go straight to paradise, Baruk," she replied, soothingly. "Just one little space more," and he went away again.

"Now art thou going to stay?"

"Not if I can help it," I blurted, almost without knowing what I said.

"That is good," she said, with a little rocking motion of delight. "There is not time to tell everything now. If thou goest take me with thee. Let them not keep me to do their will. Pollution—that is it. Thou wilt save me, and I will love thee forever. Listen. I was performing the pilgrimage, they captured the caravan and slew my father. There was one—but there is no time to tell it. It was Amood Sinn that was wicked, and now I know he has been punished because his palace is in ashes. A battle, perchance. Wert thou in it?"

I answered in the affirmative, getting ever deeper involved in the mysteries surrounding this strange woman.

"And didst thou see one there like thyself? Hush, hush!"

Baruk came again, saying he would risk his life for us no longer.

"Good Baruk, thou wilt not die," said my companion. "One turn more—one little turn. That is it. The night is cool. Thy mind will be at ease."

"Thou wilt have me speared like a goat," he demurred. Nevertheless he left us once more.

"There is another caravan coming," pursued my companion, breathlessly. "I heard it from Baruk. Let us join it. Trust Baruk for his love of gold. I will trust thee in honour of thy people." And she was lost in the darkness like a shadow.

I returned to my place and presently got a word with Baruk.

"What is this strange thing that the Indian princess sayeth?" I asked, putting my mouth close to his ear, for there was need of dead secrecy.

"Nay, I am not a magician," he answered, with the oily evasiveness of the Oriental, who is chary about committing himself.

"Let us have no pretence of ignorance," I said, feigning anger. "What do they mean?"

"My lord frighteneth me."

The voice of Suleiman was heard calling for someone, and in the same instant the fires leaped up, shedding a fitful, lurid light on the scene. If we were caught consulting, our lives would not be worth ten minutes' purchase.

"Look here, Baruk," I said, "I am thy friend. What is the state of affairs? Tell it clearly."

"May I never be in such a position again," groaned Baruk. "Hark you, we deal with treachery and cruel lances. What is our blood? Nothing. What is the spoil and the price of these women? Everything. Yet we talk of that which, were it known, would make us dead on the spot."

My thoughts were exactly like his, but a woman had asked my aid, and I could not refuse it.

"Freedom is more than life," I said, with an audacity that was not entirely genuine. "We must not be timorous. Now, look you, I am a stranger. Thinkest thou I came here to rob? We help ourselves, good Baruk, in helping the Indian princess."

"She hath untold riches; she can recompense," murmured Baruk. "Yet perchance when she was safe she would forget us."

"And if thou remainest here, art not thou a bondsman forever? Nay, who is to hinder these fellows from taking thee out into the desert and stripping thee naked and leaving thee, so that when the wolves were done with thy bones they would be the sport of the winds?"

"There is much in what thou sayest."

Suleiman was calling again and more impatiently than before.

"I will speak with thee again," whispered Baruk, hurriedly. "It is not safe now." And he disappeared.

Sauntering carelessly back to the fires, which burned red and low now, I threw myself on the ground to ruminate on all I had just heard.

We were riotously merry. There was an abundance, indeed a superabundance, of food; wine flowed like water in the rainy season, and the coffee and tobacco were the best on earth.

Suleiman, rising presently, went to see that the ladies were being properly attended, and came back praising the wondrous docility of the Indian princess. I smoked, looking up at the brightness of Orion, and said nothing. But in my heart was the quivering exultation of the schemer who has important business on hand and knows that failure is death.

My next move was to enlighten Tabal. It was done in a few words, for now that the heavens were bright, the chance of private talk was small. But Tabal quickly understood all, and fervently swore a vow of fealty. To Tabal's mind there was but one serious difficulty in our project of escape.

"We go with the caravan to Mecca," he said.

"Assuredly; it will do us all good."

"But thou art not of our religion. Think what that meaneth."

"I am a better Mohammedan than thyself, good Tabal. There will not be in the great mosque a more devout hadji than him whom thou callest Christian. Are we not brothers? Did not thy father put the light of the Koran into my soul? Dost thou think I am careless about getting to Heaven? Tabal, I will do the pilgrimage as a follower of the prophet."

Tabal was convinced, and we parted, to ignore each other very studiously for the rest of the night.

Near the dawn, when the world was black and men were heavy, Baruk returned to me. He had got over his wavering and was ready for the most desperate exploit.

"We will put on the green turban (the badge or sign of such as have performed the pilgrimage to Mecca) together, Baruk," I said, joyfully, after listening to his promise to help. "Now, tell me the name of our princess."

"They call her Ranee."

"A pretty name," I remarked. "Let us make her happy." Therefore as briefly and minutely as was possible with words I gave himself instructions both for Ranee and for himself. Fortunately the simplicity of the plan of attack enabled us to make our arrangements with confidence and tolerable accuracy.

With the first blink of light we were on the lookout for the caravan, but the day had worn well into the afternoon before our scouts brought word it was at the mouth of the defile. At the intelligence that it was coming we settled down in our hiding-place as still as dead men, the horses being kept some distance behind lest they should neigh and betray us. Tabal and I had many unsuspected thoughts, but as it would be unwise to express them and it was impossible to communicate with either Ranee or Baruk we could only wait in silent eagerness and faith.

The pilgrims sent forward a party of half a dozen horsemen, and we were ordered further back. Suleiman himself, with one companion to act as messenger, remained to observe, their place of vantage being the hollow top of a great rock which projected, causing a curve in the path below. Lying there flat they had an almost uninterrupted view of the pass, and by deft clambering the messenger could reach our ambush without fear of detection.

To keep us keen and in touch with what was going on Suleiman sent frequently to tell us of the movements of the horsemen. We learned that, passing right beneath his hiding-place, they rode to the head of the gorge, looked dutifully about among the rocks, and discovering nothing returned light-heartedly to report the way clear. Then the caravan, wishing no doubt to get to open ground again as speedily as might be, swung its huge length into the defile and came trailing on like an endless serpent. Suleiman, watching it closely, sent back word to look to our horses and arms, as the prospect was glorious beyond his expectation.

A little later the order for action made the blood tingle in our veins. Half of us were to go to the foot of the gorge and half to the head, so that the pilgrimage might be harassed simultaneously in front and rear, and so the readier induced to relinquish a part of their abounding riches. The response was as prompt as might be expected of men whose notion of Heaven is eternal plundering. Almost before the words of command were out of the messenger's mouth we were clattering off at a breakneck pace into sunless chasms and by beetling archways and up and down dizzy steps that only robbers with no souls to save would have faced. Tabal and I were of those who went to the foot, and fervently we prayed the pilgrims might have a good courage and firearms for distressed strangers.

In the course of a racking ride we came often into violent contact, and in one of the collisions, while pretending vehement anger at the rough usage, I managed to get a word in Tabal's ear.

"Whatever happens, let us stick to each other," I said, in a quick aside. "Our signal for the dash is when we see Baruk and Ranee descending among the rocks."

"Never leech clung as I will cling to thee," answered Tabal. And then he began to abuse his horse for the son of a mule that couldn't keep his feet in a plain road. And the Bedouins, being closely occupied, saw or suspected nothing.

Reaching the bottom too soon, we had to wait behind a bluff. The tail of the caravan still wriggled outside the mouth of the pass, and it would be folly to attack till it had disappeared after the body. While waiting, Ibrahim, our captain, gave his instructions briefly and pointedly. We were to rush the camelmen, throw them into utter confusion, seize as many laden animals as we could lay hands on, and make off with them to the rear as fast as steel could urge them. Such as were free would protect the others, but as many as could were to pounce on some piece of property. In short, our business was more to pillage than to fight, and, if the pilgrims were not unreasonable, not a man of them need lose his life.

With beating hearts and a burning impatience, we kept still till the tail should have wriggled itself into the mountain cleft. As if to try our self-control, our watchers were constantly reporting that the crucial moment had come, and then immediately contradicted themselves, to reaffirm their first intelligence the next minute. This went on until we were in a fever and ready to rush from our concealment at all hazards. As for Tabal and me, if you have ever laid in wait with the merest chance between life and death and a frantic desire to try it, you will understand our feelings. Being apart, we could not so much as exchange a whisper, and all we had to restrain and encourage us were the muttered curses and comments of our comrades. Once a horse of keen scent neighed, and Ibrahim nearly felled the brute, thinking we were betrayed, but the tail continued to wriggle slowly on, and we breathed again. Then word came that the last man was within the pass. The next moment we were in the open and galloping furiously to the attack.

CHAPTER XXV.

MECCA AND MORE SURPRISE.

The rush was made strictly according to orders, with preconceived results. Shouting "Techbir, techbir!" at the pitch of our voices, we dashed through the mouth of the defile hard upon the tail of the caravan, discharging our pieces and whirling our weapons with the sudden fury in which the Bedouin in a foray has no equal. The point of the tail crumpled up like a feather at a fierce fire, and as we smote and seized, yelling the while to keep up the panic, there were responsive noises in front that told the caravan had come to an involuntary halt to be robbed.

What followed the onset I could not tell in detail if I were to be examined on oath, for I had many things to think of, and thieving was the last and least of them. I saw the hadjis hurled together in the centre like an ice jam in a river; I saw two clumps of spears, one in front and one behind, flashing viciously in the sun, and I saw many camels going swiftly out of the mouth of the pass in charge of new owners. These salient facts the eye took in unconsciously, without the ability to catch minute particulars.

I got the impression that the hadjis offered but a feeble resistance, and that, as I subsequently learned, was true. There is a season for everything, and the pilgrims had a valid one for preferring their lives to their property. Caravans start expecting to be plundered, nor fail to make provision accordingly. Immemorial custom and experience have taught the hadji that it is the will of Heaven he should suffer loss at the hands of wicked men in the performance of the prime religious duty of life. Moreover, the pious Mohammedan on his way to the holy city has such an aversion to broils and bloodshed that he would rather sacrifice a portion of his worldly goods than present himself at the prophet's shrine with red hands. These things the astute Bedouin knows and profits by; the time of the pilgrimage is his harvest, and he reaps with a wide sickle.

That knowledge was acquired afterward. Just then my sole concern was how Tabal and I were to escape. The situation was of the sort that gives one a sudden cold in the back, though the sun may be hot, only we could not afford time to stand and shiver. So soon as we should make an effort to desert the Bedouin lances would be after us, and in case we were caught would have no mercy. That was certain. Had it been equally certain how the hadjis would receive us, the matter would be simple, or, at any rate, simplified. But our reception was exceedingly doubtful, for the Arab, be he Bedouin or pilgrim, is ever sniffing for treachery and suspecting he smells it.

Another difficulty was that we could not make the dash at the most opportune moment for ourselves. We must wait for Ranee and Baruk, and very anxiously we began to look for them among the cliffs. If they did not come quickly, our chance would be gone; we might go back with the children of the desert to shame and cruelty and violence, and, it might be, to lasting bondage.

The band had already distrained more than the legitimate tax—that is to say, had taken all the loose camels—and were pressing on for more than their dues, for, having the right of the strong, they were hard to satisfy. Tabal and I, for unsuspected reasons, were well to the front, and could be minutely observed by the plundered, a circumstance that might tell awkwardly against us later on.

What was keeping the idiotic Baruk? Had the coward rued his promise? If so, by all we held dearly would he pay for it. We were hot with fighting and seizing and shouting, and two of us were beginning to have tremours of despair, when at last, as we were retiring with our booty, Tabal's sharp eye espied two skulking figures slipping craftily down among the rocks. By this time the hadjis, animated by the spirit of the wronged, were behaving in a way that was exceedingly discomforting to those who meant presently to appeal to their humanity. Baruk and Ranee made their appearance at the very worst moment. But there was no time to grumble or make comment. We must take fortune as we found it and make haste to redeem our pledges.

So I gave Tabal the word, and reversing our spears to indicate we were not hostile we bounded from among the Bedouins, calling out we were hadjis and praying for protection. At the same time we drew attention by pointing and shouting to the two clambering down the rocks.

Thinking, as well indeed they might, that this was but a ruse to get their ranks broken, the pilgrims hurriedly formed up, presenting a front of leveled spears and gun-barrels, and faces that said plainer than any language we advanced at the peril of our lives. And as they stood close together to receive us there went up a diabolic shout behind. We glanced back in terror to see a dozen of our late comrades at our heels with lance-shafts hugged, after the manner of men who have resolved to slay without pity.

The moment that followed was such as a man recalls in his sleep with a horrid, cold sweat and a creeping of the flesh and groanings and writhings. In front was a gleaming hedge of steel, forbidding, impenetrable; behind was more steel already poised to strike by men to whom revenge was as blood to the lion. Half an instant more, and we should be fuller of holes than a fishermen's net.

"Save us. Save us," we screamed. "We are not enemies, but friends. For the love of the prophet, take us in."

There was not the tenth part of a second to decide. The pilgrims looked swiftly from us to our pursuers. The steel hedge opened, we shot through, and it closed quickly again as the Bedouins wheeled within a yard of it, brandishing their lances and screeching vengeance. They stood awhile vociferating, then, growling they would yet give us to the vultures, slowly returned to look after their booty.

Meantime Ranee and Baruk were scrambling down with the breathless haste of fear straight upon the centre of the caravan, as being the point remotest from the Bedouins. We spoke earnestly for them, but indeed they required no pleader, their own distracted manner being ample evidence of their need. As the descent was extremely hazardous, I hurried forward to assist Ranee, and as I ran some shots were fired from above. Poor Ranee gave a little scream, and losing her hold came toppling into my arms. I put her gently on the ground, thinking she must have been hit, but a cursory examination showed she suffered from nothing worse than fright.

Baruk, however, did not escape so easily. Some of the flying slugs found a billet in his left arm, and the good man, being unaccustomed to pain, cried out till the gorge rang with his wailings. But there was little opportunity to console him, for the children of the desert, having levied their tax and been balked in their revenge, had disappeared like water in sand, and the caravan was ordered to proceed. So the great snake stretched out its cumbrous length once more, making what haste it could to quit such ugly quarters. Ranee clung to me like a scared child, murmuring how good I was, and wondering, with many ejaculations that were strange to me, if we were yet safe. I did what I could to encourage her, till a venerable man with a long white beard and a compassionate manner led her off to the company of her own sex.

No questions were asked of us strangers till the caravan halted safe on the open plain. Then, while fires were being lighted, we were taken before some of the chief men and requested to give an account of ourselves. Tabal, who was a plausible fellow, with a ready invention, got through the ordeal quickly and well, but I had more trouble in proving myself a pious Mohammedan. Perhaps it was owing to my face, or it may have been from some defect in my accent. But one scurvy priest, who was the most active of the inquisitors, made a point at the beginning of doubting all I said.

"Art not thou a heretic unbeliever?" he asked, bending a pair of uncommonly sharp, black eyes on me. "Art not thou an enemy of our holy religion, a scoffer, an infidel? Here, what sayest thou?" he demanded of Tabal. "Is not this fellow an unbeliever?"

"As lahek Allah (may Heaven set you right)," replied Tabal, with a rapt and pious expression. "Surely man never knew his Koran better."

"We will see," said the priest.

Whereupon, whipping out his greasy copy of the sacred volume, he began to catechise me with the air of one who would say, "Now you shall see me do up this heretic."

But in my enforced leisure I had not studied the Koran in vain. To every question came a pat answer in the very words of the prophet himself, till the priest, first amazed and then convinced, thrust the book back into his bosom and embraced me as a true believer.

"Marhaba, marhaba" (welcome, welcome)" he said, with a fervour more embarrassing than his doubt. "I crave thy pardon for my distrust. Thou art indeed a worthy follower of our holy prophet. Would that all his sons knew his words so well. And now sit thee down. El hamdu l'illah. Praise be to Heaven it hath fallen to our lot to rescue a believer from the fangs of these wolves. Semmo (eat)." And forthwith we all set to work with an appetite that the exercise with the Koran had in no wise dulled.

It required constant watchfulness, however, to preserve me from lapsing into Christian barbarities and heathenisms. Even Tabal had to be kept out of my inner secrets, and as to Ranee, though I doubted not her desire to be secret, I had a careful remembrance of the natural weakness of a woman's tongue.

Once satisfied with our credentials the pilgrims made us as one of themselves. When we spoke of their kindness to strangers, they made ever the one answer:

"Think ye it is the will of God that any true believer should be left to perish on the way to the holy city? At the gathering of the nations, when the angels shall render their account of men's deeds, both good and bad, what would be our recompense if we were guilty of such a thing?" And somehow it seemed to me the spirit was one that Christians, who boast of their charity, might occasionally imitate with advantage.

We travelled fast, and made our destination without loss by sickness or violence. No Bedouin molested us, because we were 2,000 strong and our way lay through the open, where the children of the desert seldom attack. We went by arid strips and fertile pasture lands, among flocks and herds and herdsmen that are to-day as they were in the days of the patriarchs, and appear not to miss the blessings of civilization. We paid extortionate tolls to legalized robbers for allowing us to pass where all the world was free, and we halted for refection and prayers beside pleasant wells that were in no fanciful sense the eye of the landscape. (The Bedouin, living mostly among torrid sands, very appropriately calls water the eye of the landscape.) And ever as we drew nearer the holy city the pace increased and the enthusiasm grew. We smote ourselves on the breast, ejaculating fervid passages of the Koran, and many would have dismounted and run, so ardent and inspiring was their joy.

At last one evening, as we were winding among short, stony ravines that edged a verdurous plain, the leaders raised an ecstatic shout, and the rest of the caravan, crushing forward, with beating hearts, beheld in a sort of valley below them the minarets of Mecca gleaming in the sun like a thousand points of fire, the great mosque being conspicuous in the midst.

We descended, like an avalanche, in a storm of dust, every Moslem of us beside himself with joy and awe and excitement, and, reaching the foot of the declivity, we burst into such a scene of commotion as human eye could witness nowhere else under the wide cope of heaven.

We talk of Babel, but the credit of the real confusion of tongues belongs to Mecca. There were a hundred thousand strangers in the city, and, judging by the ear, ten times as many tongues and dialects. There were faces of every imaginable hue and shape, from every known clime, and costumes that only a mad tailor could realize in delirious visions of the night. The elect of the believers were there from Turkey and Greece, from Syria and Barbary and Timbuctoo, from Egypt, Palestine, and the dark heart of Africa, from Persia, and the regions of the Indus, from Hindoostan, Malacca and the Asiatic isles, and from many far separated places besides, gathered at incalculable cost and indescribable trouble and discomfort to worship according to the doctrines of Islam.

Yet the tumult was certainly not such as one associates with acts of religion. Men using the language of troopers in a rage were hauling wildly at apathetic camels that appeared to have an insuperable bias in favour of standing still, and frantically endeavouring to stuff them in holes and corners that could not possibly accommodate anything larger than a cat; horses were rearing and backing and dancing; ladies were screaming in fear of having their litters upset and their sacred beauty exposed to the public gaze; householders and visitors wrangled and gesticulated about the value of lodgings, and over all were a million ear-splitting cries that seemed to rise out of the very earth.

We did not a little ourselves to add to the din and confusion, for we had a goodly number of beasts to dispose of and voluble tongues in our heads to argue against the obstinacy of man and brute. It took several hours of arduous pulling and pushing and vociferating to get ourselves and our belongings housed, but the enterprise was at length accomplished just as the sun, the only street lamp at Mecca, was dropping out of sight. Then having dined sumptuously on roast fowl, eggs, bread, and coffee—rare delicacies after the hard fare of the desert—we lay down to dream of the great things that were before us.

Anxious to show ourselves patterns of piety and strictness, Tabal and I assumed the ihram, which is the special mark of devoutness. It consists of two pieces of linen cloth, one of which is wrapped about the loins like a Highland kilt and the other thrown over the upper part of the body in such a way as to leave the right arm uncovered. As no other garment, not even so much as a covering for the head, is permitted while it is worn, it makes an airy dress, especially in the evening and at early morning, when the Mecca air is often as shrewd as that of Edinburgh.

Thus we visited with our companions the beitullah, or temple, an imposing building with more gates and minarets and courts and domes and marble, granite, and porphyry pillars than I had time to count. Ranee we were obliged to leave in the porch with a great crowd of her own sex, for the Moslem will allow no woman, however beautiful of pious or exalted, to set foot in his temple. Thus the Mohammedan ladies, less fortunate than their Christian sisters, are denied the privilege of displaying the latest fashions in church.

Inside the pavements were full of men in every posture of rapt devotion, some kneeling, some sitting with bent heads, others prostrate on the floor. At sight of these we stopped for one minute, bowing low; then with a solemn, measured step, we advanced five abreast upon the kaaba, keeping our eyes fast upon it. On reaching it we stopped again, but only for an instant. Proceeding at the same pace as before we went round it seven times, reciting in a low voice certain prescribed verses from the Koran, only we interrupted ourselves at each round to kiss the black stone which, as all believed, was brought direct from Heaven by the angel Gabriel.

Having done our duty by the kaaba and the black stone we turned to the zemzem—that is to say, the holy well which God miraculously created for the outcast Hagar and her son, the father of the children of the desert. We drank of its waters and washed in them (for the benefit of succeeding hadjis), but there was one pilgrim at least who would have taken a draft of Epsom salts with more relish. The zemzem may be good to wash in, but it is not good to drink from, a fact which the Arabs themselves tacitly acknowledge by refraining from partaking of its waters oftener than once a year.

Purified of our sins, we returned to the pavement already mentioned, and there went down in groups and said our prayers. Then slowly retracing our steps we passed through a great door, and lo! we were in the midst of the fair again. Ranee, who was waiting for us, ran to me clasping her hands in ecstasy.

"Now, verily thou art one of us in spite of thy English face," she said, freezing the blood in my veins.

"For God's sake, hush!" I whispered, hastily. "Not a syllable, as thou lovest me."

She looked hurt, but said no more, and I glanced fearfully round, half expecting to see a dagger coming at me. But luckily the hubbub had drowned her speech.

The remaining rites were performed with demonstrative zeal and unction, the most trifling detail being done strictly according to the letter of the law. We went to Mount Arafat to hear the sermons with a throng that laughed and jested, baiting each other with the roughest of wit and sarcasm, and read the Koran, and prayed aloud, and sang snatches of love songs all in the same breath. All night, in a blaze of ineffable brilliancy, we made merry at the foot of the mountain—pashas and sheiks and chiefs and governors and priests and camel drivers and beggars and stray Bedouins, great men and small, learned and ignorant, mingling like brothers, for all men are equal during the hajj.

At noon the next day we ascended the mountain to listen to a sermon, which lasted without a break or halt till sunset. Then we hurried elsewhere to hear one that lasted till sunrise. Having reverently and patiently heard the preachers, we went to the valley of Meina, where we sacrificed multitudes of sheep and fowls, and cast twenty-one stones apiece at the devil, and pared our nails, and had our heads shaved by barbers, who took most of the skin as well as the hair. All these things done devoutly and thoroughly, we returned to Mecca, and after paying another visit to the mosque threw off the ihram with great rejoicing. Our fasting and praying were at an end, and we were free to eat, drink and be merry after the manner of our own hearts.

After the religious ceremonies comes a great fair which lasts three days, and is attended by pilgrims and traders from the ends of the earth, and by many who neither trade nor worship in the mosque. The scene is picturesque and animated, for the grandees spread gorgeous tents and Moslem traders drive bargains with unequaled energy of voice and gesture. To many the fair is much more than the ceremonies at the kaaba or Mount Arafat.

On the second day of the fair, well toward evening, Tabal and I were strolling at our leisure, having nothing particular to do but enjoy the sights and the cool air. We were chatting carelessly over our past hardships and wondering what Suleiman and Amood Snnn and the man on the black horse were about, when, in passing a tent of unusual size and magnificence, we heard a sound that brought us to a halt, listening with all our senses.

"Hark!" I said. "What notes are those?"

"I know them not," answered Tabal. "They are not of my tongue."

To be Continued.

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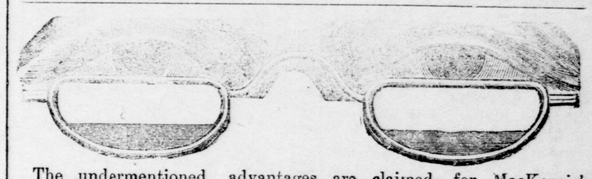

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