

The Golden Deeds of Islam



Muhammad Yakub Khan

*Lift I say the flag of Islam
Place it on the hills again
Every beautiful fold revealing
To the world-wide sons of man.*

The Golden Deeds of Islam

BY

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Printed for Mr. AZIZ AHAMAD

By

THE COLLEGE PRESS

P. O. BOX 175

PORT-OF-SPAIN, TRINIDAD

www.aaiil.org

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of

AHMADIYYA ANJUMAN

Ishaat Islam, Lahore, Pakistan

by

AZIZ AHAMAD

London Street,

St. Joseph Village, San Fernando,

Trinidad, West Indies.

1964.

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FOREWORD

The war years have had a blighting effect upon printing industry as upon every other sphere of peace time activities. Scarcity of paper and paucity of other printing facilities made it well-nigh impossible for new publications to see the light of the day or old ones to bring out a reprint. Now that the situation has ceased, though only a little bit, I take this earliest opportunity to present this third edition of this little book.

The stress and strain that the world war No. 2 brought to almost every home throughout the world as well as the trail of wreckage, moral as well as material which it left behind baffling all attempts at rehabilitation, lend added point to a publication like the **Golden Deeds of Islam**.

The writing on the wall is now too clear to be missed by the most material-minded sceptic that if humanity is to re-discover the path of peace and human fellow-ship, it must reorient its entire outlook on life and instead of the materialistic pre-occupations which have monopolized its hand and heart, it must set up and regulate life according to moral and spiritual values of life. The **Golden**

Deeds of Islam, is an attempt to emphasize and hence no moment could be more opportune than the present one to set this third edition of this book in circulation.

So far as the substance of the contents of this edition goes, it remains unchanged. But the language has undergone considerable retouching and brushing up in many places which should make the book more readable.

My thanks are due to Messrs Dar-ul-Kutub Islamia Limited, Ahmadiyya Buildings, Lahore for coming forward, in these hard times, when the pinch of printing disabilities still continues, to enable me to place this third edition of the **Golden Deeds of Islam** in the hands of the public.

Pahalgam (Kashmir)

M.Y.K.

August 5, 1946.

When a Muslim's Word Was His Bond

By the side of the sandy track that ran from Mecca to Medina, there rose a lovely grove of palm trees. Underneath these flowed springs of cool crystal water. Caravans that wended their weary way across the bleak desert thanked Allah as they came upon this boon. Unloading their camels, they halted there, enjoyed the cool refreshing water and spent the noon-tide in the thick shades of the trees. Their animals, in the meantime, roamed about and helped themselves to whatever came their way. Scattered among these trees were humble huts where dwelt the tenants of the Sheikh, the master of the oasis. In the centre of this hamlet and surrounded by rich orchards there stood a nice little villa, the residence of the Sheikh himself.

Peace and content reigned in this lonely habitation. Life ran smoothly on till one fateful noon it so happened that a young man on camel back chanced to pass that way. As usual he dropped at the oasis to have a little rest. Letting his camel loose to graze about, he stretched his weary limbs under one of the trees by the side of the stream. The breeze was cool. He was tired. Before long he was fast asleep. Meanwhile his animal moved freely

about, mouthing at every bush or bramble it came across. As ill luck would have it, it broke at length into the Sheikh's garden and spoiled the rich vineyard. The keeper of the garden, a pious old man, was busy making a matting for the mosque. As he looked up, he saw the beast damage his master's property. Taking hold of his club, he rushed at the animal and drove it out. A short while afterwards the beast found another way in. The old man again turned it out. But the animal repeated the raid a third time, and a third time the keeper brandished his club at it. This time, however, the blow fell on a tender spot and down came the camel with a thud. It was dead.

The young man, the owner of the camel, was lying asleep while all this went on. Little did he dream what fate his dear old camel had met. When he woke up, the shadows had already lengthened. The rays of the sun had lost much of their heat. It was time to start. Like a good Mussalman, however, his first concern was to say his afternoon prayers. Taking a dip in the cool brook and making due ablutions, he spread his prayer carpet and in solemn bows and prostrations thanked Allah for the cool shade, sweet water, rest and comfort He had vouchsafed him in that desert place. This done, he promptly made ready to resume his journey. He looked about for his camel

but the animal was nowhere to be seen. "Where on earth has it gone?" he said to himself. As, however, he proceeded further and entered the Sheikh's garden he saw the camel lying stiff and cold. A bolt from the blue could not have caused him greater shock. The death of the beautiful beast which was to him as dear as a friend caused him much grief.

The gardener who had done it came up to explain the whole thing. "Pray pardon, O son," said the old man. "It was just a mishap. I meant no harm. The camel was spoiling the garden. I just wanted to drive it out. Twice I turned it out but it came in a third time. This time the blow proved fatal. It is accident pure and simple and I am so very sorry."

The young man was too upset to listen to any explanations. His rage knew no bounds. "You old fool," he shouted, as with his big brawny hands he caught the poor old man by the throat. "You old fool! How dare you touch my beast?" And in the fit of excitement he gave the poor old man such a violent shake that his weak age-worn limbs could hardly stand it. His heart failed and in the twinkling of eyes the keeper of the Sheikh's garden was no more. He fell down a dead man.

Now when the excitement of the moment was over, the young man stood aghast at what he had

done. He was filled with remorse. He had taken the life of a fellow man and violated the sacred law of Islam. Had not the Prophet enjoined : "The life, honour and property of one Muslim is sacred and inviolable unto another." Was not this the very parting message of the Prophet to the world of Islam on the eve of his departure from this world? The words rang and rang and rang in his ears. He was overwhelmed with shame. He was an unworthy son of Islam, he said to himself, a traitor. In taking the life of a brother man, he had betrayed the very last trust the Prophet had reposed in every Muslim.

It was, however, too late. What was done was done. The question of questions now was : What was he to do? There was nobody about. Must he slip off to save his neck? To stay there was to court the hangman's rope. What was he to do? Thus did he muse within himself and was almost on the point of giving way to the instinct of self-preservation and taking to his heels, when there came a sharp and firm voice from within. "No ! never !" said this voice. It was un-Muslim-like to have given way to his wrath. It was sheer madness. But even a mad Muslim must not be a mean Muslim. To escape the law of the land would mean deception and it was not for a Muslim to deceive. Straightway he made for the Sheikh's

villa and gave himself up as the murderer of the old gardener.

These were the good old days when Umar, the Great, reigned in Medina as the Caliph of Islam. The fame of his even-handed justice had spread far and wide. It spared neither high or low, friend nor foe. He had ordered his own son, when found guilty, to be flogged to death. To such a court was the young man sent up by the Sheikh to stand his trial. The old man's two sons accompanied him.

After a weary march, the party arrived at the Capital of Islam, the prosecutors as well as the accused. The suit was duly lodged before the Caliph. Umar's court was nothing like our modern courts with so much of pomp and ceremony but with so little of justice. Simplicity was the badge of Islam in that golden age. The court was no other than the thatch-roofed mosque; nor was the judge bedecked with any wig, hood or gown. In his patched yet clean garments sat the mighty Caliph on a bench no better than a palm matting. Nevertheless the wrong-doer trembled at his sight. His stern justice was the protector of the weak and the terror of the oppressor. The jury was equally simple. It consisted of the pious congregation of Musalmans who had come to say their prayers. God-fearing folks, they were all lovers of

justice and fairplay. Before such a judge and such a jury was the young man brought, charged with the murder of the old man, the keeper of the Sheikh's garden.

“Amir-ul-Muminin,” said the elder brother. “This man stopped at our oasis for rest. As he was having a nap, his camel strayed into our Sheikh's garden and did much damage to the vineyard. Our father twice drove the beast out, but it came in again. The third time the blow fell on some vital organ and the animal died. It was just a mis-chance. He meant no harm. He was only doing his duty. That was his job and that was what the Sheikh paid him for. This young fellow was lying asleep all this while and knew nothing about it. My father could have denied any knowledge of the incident if he had so chosen. There was no eye-witness about. But he was a true Musalman and a true follower of the Prophet. He would not sully the name of Islam and the Prophet by telling a lie. He often told us that a Muslim must be truthful, no matter what the consequences. Truthfulness, he would tell us, was the brightest gem in the Prophet's character. Even before he was made a prophet, he was nick-named Al Amin, the Upright. A man of such pure Islamic sentiments could not stoop so low as to tell a lie merely to save his skin. He came up to this young

man and frankly told him all that had happened and expressed his sorrow. But this fellow, rather than appreciate his candid Islamic confession and regret, rushed at his aged throat and killed him outright."

Pin-drop silence reigned in the court room as the old man's son related the sad story.

"What have you to say to this, young man?" — came the firm clear voice of the judge, breaking the silence.

"Sire," said the young man, his head hanging low in shame and remorse, "I have nothing to say, no defence to offer. I am filled with shame and sorrow at what my hands have wrought. I care not if I pay for it with my life which I am here to do. What pains me most is that I have been a traitor to Islam. I turned my back on the noble teachings of Islam. The Prophet has enjoined that a Muslim must respect old age. The Prophet in his very last will to the world of Islam made the life, property and honour of one man sacred unto another. I turned my back on all this and rather than show respect due to a gray-bearded man, I lost my head and took his life. I have nothing to say but submit to the law. I plead guilty."

The audience in the mosque were visibly moved by this candid confession of the young

man. They all admired his Islamic courage to tell the truth even in the face of death. "Well done," said the Caliph. "Well done, my boy. This is how a Muslim lad must behave. It is never too late to repent and feel ashamed of one's evil conduct. Though a murderer, I must congratulate you on your high sense of truthfulness. That is what Islam expects from every one of its sons. What, if death should stare him in the face? A Muslim must never be so mean as to tell a lie. It is a coward who tells lies. He is afraid of consequences. Whatever else a Muslim may be, he is never a coward. Fear is not the word in the dictionary of Islam. I am glad in this critical juncture, you have behaved as a worthy son of Islam. Nevertheless, I am so sorry. It cannot be helped. The law must have its course. You shall die."

"Amir-ul-Muminin," rejoined the young man. "You need not be sorry. A Muslim is one who submits to the will of Allah. It is His will that I should die and I cheerfully submit to His will. I have just one last request to make. Back at home I have some debts to clear off. This is what rankles in my mind. How shall I face God with my obligations to fellow-men unfulfilled? I may be a murderer, but let it not be said that I was dishonest. I vividly recollect how the Prophet when

on the point of death had just this one anxiety, in his mind. He expressly asked if he owed anything to anybody so that it might be paid. He asked if he had done any offence to anybody, so that he might make amends for it while he was yet in the flesh. He did not wish to leave this world but with a clean sheet. Better ashamed before man than ashamed before God, he said. I would be unworthy of his illustrious name and a slur on his noble memory, should I leave behind my debts unpaid. Pray, therefore O, Amir-ul-muminin allow me just respite enough to go home and clear off these debts. This is my last, my only wish."

The congregation no less than the Caliph was once more filled with admiration for the young man. "What high sense of honesty!", they all said. "Just at the threshold of death, only one anxiety troubles his heart — his unfulfilled obligations to man! What a pity that such a worthy son of Islam should have to die!

There was, however, no way out of it. The law was no respecter of persons. Die he must. But everybody wished that his last request might be granted.

'Be it so," declared the Caliph. "Your wish is granted. But you must produce some one to stand surety for you and be responsible that you duly turn up at the appointed hour for execution."

“Amir-ul-Muminin!” submitted the young man. “My word of honour is the only surety I can give and a Muslim’s word of honour is his bond.”

“You are right,” rejoined the Caliph. “That is what is expected of every son of Islam. He must be true to his word even if it should cost him his life. But the procedure of the law must be observed and the law does not recognise a mere word of honour as surety. You must produce some one to stand surety for you.”

This cast a gloom over the young man. He was a stranger to the place. Who could stand surety for him and endanger his own life for a mere stranger? He was at a loss what to do. It was a critical affair. In case he failed to turn up at the appointed time, the surety ran the risk of his own life. This was too much for a stranger to expect. He cast a helpless look of despair all around, but he could not take heart to ask any one. He knew it would be asking too much.

Thus stood the young man there, the very picture of gloom and disappointment, when, lo! to the joyful surprise of all, from a corner of the mosque, an elderly man sprang to his feet. “Amir-ul-Muminin,” he announced, “I offer myself as a surety for this young man.” This was

Abuzar Ghaffari, the well-known Companion of the Prophet.

The young man was forthwith released. Promising to return in time for his execution, he hastened home to set his affairs straight. Before he faced God, he must square up his dealings with man. His home was a long way off. He travelled day and night. The time at his disposal was short and he had to be back in time to meet his doom. So he hurried up and went as fast as he could. At last he reached home. The whole family was filled with joy. His little children ran up to him. Each vied with the others to reach him first, throw its tiny arms around his knees and win the first kiss from him. His wife and old parents were transported with joy as they saw this cheer and sunshine brought back to the family after many days of absence. The aged mother advanced and imprinted a warm kiss on her son's forehead. This scene of love and joy was, however, too good to last long. A cloud soon passed over it. The young man looked unusually agitated and sad emotions seemed to swell up within him. The older members of the family could not fail to sense that all was not well.

“What on earth is the matter with you?” exclaimed the mother anxiously, “You look so agitated, so upset. What is wrong?” For a while

dead silence prevailed. The young man buried his head in his hands. He did not know how to break the news to the family. To his dear old mother and father, these brief moments of suspense seemed ages. This was the first time that a ripple of anxiety had ever crossed the forehead of their son. It foreboded something serious. The young man at last raised his head and summoning courage thus broke the silence :

“Mother dear ! while I was yet a boy, you told me stories of the bravery of Muslims of the day of the Prophet. They bore great hardships, but a murmur never came to their lips. It was the will of Allah and their best joy lay in doing His will. They had to encounter great dangers but they were never daunted. It was the will of Allah. At the field of battle they wrought deeds of valour and if duty called, they plunged into the very jaws of death. Fearless, dauntless, death itself was to them a door-way to Heaven. Didn't you tell me all this, mother dear ?”

As, however, the young man went on in this strain, talking of dangers, daring, death and all that, the parents listened with bated breath. Their anxiety knew no bounds. With their eyes riveted on their son's lips, they trembled as all sorts of conjectures crossed their minds. What was he about to divulge ? they wondered.

“Well, mother dear,” continued the young man, “you have always been telling me how brave Muslim mothers and fathers were. At the call of duty they would rouse the spirits of their dearly loved sons to brave all dangers. Duty or death—that was to be their motto in life, they told them. Now listen! The moment has come when our Islamic mettle shall be put to the test. Be brave and I will tell you”

The parents, now prepared for the worst, assured their son that he might break the news by all means. He would find them worthy of the traditions of Islam. The young man then recounted the whole story—how while he was taking a nap at the oasis, his camel was killed by the gardener, how he got enraged, lost his temper and caused the death of the old man, how he was taken to the court of the Caliph, tried and condemned to death, how he implored the Caliph to let him pay off his debts, how he had been released on bail, how a stranger trusting his mere word of honour had stood surety for him. “I am now here,” he continued, “not as the dear old son of the house to live under this dear old roof and share your joys and sorrows. I am here to pay my last respects to you and bid you farewell for good. Let the Jews whom I owe money be sent for. I must be quick. I have just enough time

to settle the account and be back in time for execution.”

As the young man thus delivered himself, the parents were dumb-founded. Streams of tears trickled down their cheeks on which age had drawn deep furrows. It took them some time to recover from the shock.

“Allah’s will be done,” said the mother. “What is written is written and you must keep your word. Let it not be said that the son of a Muslim mother was untrue to his word to save his life.”

The Jewish money-lenders came. As a class these money-lenders are devoid of all humane feelings. They are notorious for their pound of flesh. But now when they came to know that the young man had but a few hours to settle the account, they saw their opportunity. They must extort more than a pound from him, they thought. He had no cash. He could only pay in kind and live-stock and it was for these Shylocks to fix the price. They did it at a very low rate, less than half the market value. But there was no helping it. The debt had to be paid, there and then. Much of the young man’s property was thus made over to the creditors.

The most crucial hour was yet to come, the hour of departure. The camel was brought duly

saddled. The young man must bid eternal farewell to sweet home and bolt off. The wrench was by no means easy. Between sobs and tears and kisses the parents embraced their darling one after the other. The young wife fainted as the parting of ways came and her beloved husband, the sweet companion of her life, advanced towards her. There on the ground she lay unconscious, her rich beautiful locks dishevelled and rolling in dust. The young man bent over her and gave her a parting kiss. So far he kept up his courage. But when he turned to the dear little ones standing by, lost in amazement at all this, his iron resolve seemed to give way. He sat in their midst and warmly hugged and kissed each one.

“Daddy!” said the eldest of the three. “Is Mummy dead? Who will take us to the fair? Please Daddy, don’t go.”

The younger two clung to his knees as he got up. “We would also go with you, Daddy,” they began to cry.

For once the young man’s courage seemed to fail him. The sight of these sweet little things who thought their mother was dead and father was leaving them too, unnerved him. There was no policeman about. A word of honour was all that bound him. Besides, living in the heart of the desert, it would be no easy thing for the arm of

the law to reach him. Why, for a mere word of honour, kill the joy and happiness of a whole family for life? Why break those innocent tiny hearts? He was the offender, not they. Why doom them to the miserable lot of orphans? As he thus mused within himself, for a moment, it seemed, the flesh in him was about to get the better of the spirit. But the last moment had come. To be in time for the execution, he must put his foot in the turrup at once and be off.

There at the most crucial cross-roads of his life, the young man stood, lost in thought which course to choose. Honour called him back to execution. Love of parents, wife and children nailed him to the ground there. There was a severe conflict within him—conflict between the flesh and the spirit. But this lasted for just one brief moment. His Muslim sense of honour re-asserted itself. "Let not your wealth or your children divert you from the path of God!"—came the clarion call of the Quran back to his ears. And his choice was made. To a Musalman, his word of honour must be more than his father, his mother, his wife, his children. In the midst of tears and cries he jumped to his camel-back and was off to Medina and his doom. The dear ones left behind followed him with wistful looks till he was lost in the distance.

At full speed the young man hurried to Medina and his own execution. Yes, his own

execution ! A very strange thing indeed, but such happens to be a Muslim's code of honour. When once he has pledged his word he never goes back upon it, not even if it should cost him his life. The history of Islam is rich in promises kept under the most trying circumstances. A worthy son of Islam, the young man acted up to these noble traditions of Islam. Death stared him in the face, but it was not for a follower of the great Phophet to play false and go back upon his word. On and on he sped towards the capital. In spite of himself, however, he was unavoidably detained on the way. His stirrups gave way and he had to drop at a way-side hamlet to get them mended. This took some time. The appointed hour of execution came and he was yet on the way.

In the meantime, there was much sensation in Medina. People had come together at the Mosque. Abuzar Ghaffari, the surety was also there. Every moment the young man was expected back. The time fixed for execution came and passed. But the young man did not turn up. This caused much anxiety on account of Abuzar whose life was now in the balance. There were all sorts of surmises. Perhaps the young man had played false.

“Poor Abuzar !” everybody said. “Must he die for nothing.”

Abuzar, on his part, was cool and calm, "What is written is written," he said. "A Muslim must cheerfully submit to the decree of Allah. It is His will that I should die. I am ready for it."

All that Abuzar asked for was that before leaving this world he might be allowed to say his last prayers. He made due ablutions and said his prayers. Then he made ready for the execution. When, however, all was ready, there on the distant horizon was seen a moving speck in a cloud of dust.

"Wait! Wait!" ordered the Caliph, as the executioner was on the point of doing his job. "Wait! it may yet be the young man."

The executioner stayed his hand. All eyes were now turned towards the advancing speck. At first it was dim and undiscernable. As, however, it drew nearer and nearer, it brought added hope to the anxious crowd. It was some one on camel back riding along at full speed. The figure gradually became more and more distinct. To the immense relief of every one present, it turned out to be the condemned young man. Abuzar was the recipient of congratulations from all sides and excitement ran all the more high. The young man at last arrived.

"I am sorry," he said, as soon as he stepped into the Mosque. "I could not turn up at the

right moment and kept you waiting so long. I must specially ask pardon of my unknown benefactor who stood surety for me at the risk of his own life. It must have been a great worry to him. But I could not help it." And he explained at length what had detained him on the way.

Everybody admired the young man's sense of honour no less than Abuzar's spirit of self-sacrifice. The Caliph was deeply touched, too, and allowed the man to take rest before he should prepare for execution. As they all sat down in the Mosque, the young man, Abuzar, the murdered old man's sons, the Great Caliph Umar, with the eager crowd around them, the Caliph thus queried Abuzar :

"Abuzar ! What made you risk your own life for the sake of this young man ?"

"Amir-ul-Muminin !" replied this great Companion of the Prophet, "when the young man cast a helpless glance at the Muslim congregation, wondering whether some one would come to his assistance and stand surety for him, I was filled with shame that in a crowd of Muslims, a fellow Muslim should feel so helpless and find himself a stranger. Let not people say, I said to myself, that the Islamic teaching that all Muslims are brothers is a mere platitude and that in time of distress one Muslim does not come to the help of another. Come

what may, I said, the good name of Islam must not be sullied and I stood surety for him."

Everyone was greatly touched at these words. The Caliph then turned to the young man : " What was it, O young man, that made you come back to your own execution ?"

" Amir-ul-Muminin " replied the young man, " it was no easy thing for me to do so. Great was the temptation in my way. My home is in the trackless heart of the desert which the hand of justice can hardly penetrate. There was nobody about to force me back here. Then there were before me the age-worn faces of my dear old mother and father streaming with tears, as I was coming away. My lovely young wife fell down unconscious at the thought of life-long separation. My three sweet little children clung to my feet, clamouring, ' Dad ! Dad ! where are you going ?' It was nothing easy to wrench myself away from these dear souls. But every time the flesh within me was about to get the upper hand of the spirit, I said to myself—What would people say of it ? A Muslim breaking his solemn word of honour ! Let not the name of Islam be sullied through me, I resolved, and in the midst of tears and shrieks of those dear things I jumped to my camel's back."

The audience were once more moved to a high pitch of excitement. They greatly admired

the young man's sense of honour. A perfect Islamic atmosphere prevailed which could not but move the gardener's sons.

“Amir-ul-Muminin!” they spoke out.

“This young fellow has killed our father and we have come all the way to see that he is brought to book. But now it seems to us that in avenging our father's death we would be ignoring the higher Islamic teaching of forgiveness. A tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye was the ancient law. But Islam has given us the higher gospel of forgiveness. To forgive an offender, teaches the Quran, is more meritorious in the eye of God than to punish him. Let it not be said that two unworthy sons of Islam were too petty-minded to forgive and forget. Islam's name shall not be sullied through us. We forgive the young man.”

“Allah-o-Akbar!”—went up the enthusiastic shout from the crowd. There was great joy that all ended so well.

The Sheikh of Andlusia

I

Long long ago when the peninsula of Spain was under the sway of Islam, there lived in one of the busiest business centres of that country a merchant of great name and enormous riches. His name was Sheikh Idris Ahmad, commonly called the Sheikh of Andlusia, for this was the name given to that land by its Muslim conquerors and rulers.

Idris was by no means a man born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He was entirely a self-made man. Born in an obscure family in Arabia, his parents had bequeathed to him only one legacy—a true Islamic character. Equipped with this weapon, he strenuously fought his way up till he became the wealthiest man of Andlusia.

In his native land, fortune refused to smile on Idris. He was in need even of his daily bread. He went from place to place in quest of work but he got none. His early Islamic training, however, stood him in good stead. Every time he was going to give way to despair, there came to cheer him up that great message of hope, given in the Quran : “Slacken not and be not grieved ; for you are bound to win, provided you have faith.” Every

fresh defeat was thus converted into a spur to his drooping spirits, and with redoubled energy he would resume his fight against adversity.

Having met with failure in every quarter in his homeland, Idris went over to Syria to try his luck there. The turning point at last came, and one day as he was seated in one of the Mosques of that country, he chanced to come across a merchant who showed great interest in him. This is how the terms were settled and the bargain was struck :

MERCHANT : "What job are you good at? Do you at all know how to read and write?"

IDRIS : "I am sorry I don't. But I am fairly skilled in horsemanship and lancing."

MERCHANT : "Fancy, a man of your skill knocking about for a job!"

IDRIS : "What is written is written. When it should please God, all would be well. A Muslim must only do his best and leave the rest to His fatherly will."

MERCHANT : "Listen! I am a native of Andalusia. In a day or two I am leaving for home. I shall be pleased to take you along with me, should you care to take up service under me."

IDRIS : "I am at your service. What shall be my work?"

MERCHANT : "Why, didn't you tell me just now that you were good at horsemanship and

lancing? That shall be your job. You will act as my bodyguard.”

IDRIS : “You will ever find me dutiful and faithful.”

A few days more and Idris was on his way to Andlusia by the side of his master. The small caravan travelled by day and rested by night at some way-side habitation. Immediately at nightfall, Idris would mount his lance on his shoulder and keep guard at the merchant's camp. After a long and weary journey they at last arrived at the sea-coast. During all this time Idris had given not the slightest cause for complaint to his master. He had been brought up in a truly Islamic home and had at that early age cultivated the high sense of duty characteristic of that early Muslim society.

Idris' devotion to duty and faithfulness to his master were, however, yet to be put to the most crucial test. The merchant along with his party were encamped at the sea-side. He was going home after many years' absence. Besides valuable merchandise, he had with him a great deal of gold and diamonds. The homeward bound ship was to take another few days to sail. He had hardly been there a week when the hour of trial came. Far off in the distance, there appeared on the horizon a dark speck which grew larger and larger as it approached the coast. This was a pirate boat.

The coast officer drew up a body of his picked men to guard the coast. They patrolled the harbour till sunset but the pirate ship was yet far off and it was feared that the pirates might effect a landing in the dark night. The officer, therefore, divided his men into batches of ten each and ordered them to keep guard by turn the whole night. The travellers who were there, waiting for the boat for Andlusia also planned their own defence. The merchant ordered all his servants to keep watch along with Idris turn by turn.

It was a moonless night. The whole encampment was enveloped in thick darkness. Stars twinkled in the sky. The stillness of the night was broken by a sudden uproar on the coast. The pirates had at last landed and swooped down. The merchant's encampment was about half a mile from the coast. Idris was as usual keeping guard along with a few others of the merchant's servants. Hearing the noise he raised an alarm and in a moment everybody was up, armed with a spear, patrolling the area. The pirate gang was upon the encampment. The merchant rushed to his tent-door, sword in hand, and shouted to his men to be ready.

The sea pirates had anchored at an unexpected place and, having dodged the coastguard they had fallen upon the travellers who were awaiting the

arrival of the boat to take them to Spain. Most of these travellers had a number of attendants of their own. The master of Idris also had half a dozen men. The pirate chief tried to seduce these men. Whoever should join hands with him, he shouted, would get a goodly share of the plunder. This evoked an enthusiastic response from several tents. These mean fellows came rushing out, yelling and shouting, made common cause with the pirates and fell upon their masters whose salt they had eaten.

The master of Idris was also the victim of this treachery. Two of his Negro servants grappled with him, pinned him to the ground and firmly pinioned him. One servant, sword in hand kept guard over him, whereas the rest helped themselves to his goods and chattels.

Idris was in the meanwhile keeping guard over the tent where the merchandise was kept. He knew nothing of the fate of his master. Some seven pirates pointed their spears at him but Idris was a match for them all. He was a skilled spearsman and made short work of three of his assailants. The others, seeing the fate of their comrades, let Idris alone and turned away in search of easier prey.

Idris was wondering all this time why his master's voice was no longer heard. While thus

lost in thought, one of his fellow-servants who was posted there along with him, came up to him and thus accosted him :

“ Idris why waste time here standing still ? It is only once in a life-time that an opportunity like this comes one’s way.”

IDRIS : “ What nonsense do you talk ? What on earth do you mean ?”

SERVANT : “ Let us plunder the merchandise. We will share fifty fifty—half goes to you alone and half to the rest of us. The merchant cannot stir. We have firmly secured him. Come along, what do you say ?”

Idris knew but one reply to such a wicked suggestion. Hardly had this villain finished the last word when the point of Idris’ spear was in his chest. Giving out a shrill cry, he fell to the ground.

The pirates had in the meantime picked up their loot and were hurrying towards the sea-shore. Idris rushed to his master’s tent. Here too, he found treachery at work. The servants had taken possession of the chests containing cash and jewellery and were ready to decamp. When they saw Idris approach, they thought he had accepted their offer communicated to him through the fellow now lying lifeless in the dust.

“ Hallo Idris !” they said. “ Are you ready ? The camels will be here in a minute.”

The merchant was lying close by on the ground with his face turned downwards. One of these mutineers, pointing to him with a kick in his hind part asked Idris, "How shall we dispose of this wretch?" Idris was touched to the quick at this pitiable condition of his master. One of the servants was holding a naked sword over his head whereas the others were packing up his goods.

Idris was a Muslim and a Muslim would much rather die than turn a traitor. His master was now lying in dust before him, tightly pinioned. The assassin's sword was hanging over his head. It was no easy task to attempt his rescue. Idris knew full well that in doing so, he would be running the risk of his own life. A slight move on his part and the half dozen fellows now busy packing their loot would be forthwith on him. If, on the other hand, he would just let things have their course, the next dawn would find him a millionaire. He was to have full half of those chests of treasures and so many camel-loads of valuable goods. From a penniless watchman to a millionaire was not a small stroke of fortune and any other mortal would have yielded to the temptation. Idris, however, had a much higher code of honour. He was a Muslim. He could not be mean. He had once pledged his word to

his master and a Muslim's word is his bond. The path of duty was clear. He must spurn at millions and keep his word, come what might.

And Idris was a man of determination. He was no coward and knew how to live up to his conviction. His blood boiled within him at the barbarity. With tiger-like agility he sprang at the man keeping watch over his prostrate master, and with a single stroke chopped the fellow's head off his shoulders. Then he hastened to cut asunder the ropes around the body of his master and released him. Spear in hand, he shouted a shrill challenge to the rest of the gang who, as soon as they heard Idris' challenge rushed out to meet him. Idris was now joined by his master who was also a brave man. Three of the ruffians were despatched there and then. The rest took to their heels and joining the sea-pirates, made haste towards the coast.

The next morning a ship was spotted in the distance sailing full speed. This was the pirate ship, laden with the booty of the preceding night. The pirates left behind them some ten dead and many wounded. Almost every traveller had been attacked and robbed. The merchant of Andlusia was the only man who escaped unscratched and unharmed. This was due to the bravery and fidelity of Idris. Everybody praised Idris for his

courage and character. To all these compliments he would modestly reply that as a Muslim he had only done his duty. The Quran had taught him to keep his word under all circumstances. He was a follower of the Prophet, the Al-Amin, and he could not sully the name of his illustrious sire by bad faith or cowardice.

From that day the merchant relieved Idris of his watchman's work and made him his personal confidant and adviser. They sailed for Andlusia and after a pleasant voyage safely landed there. In his native town the merchant owned palatial buildings and lovely gardens. He was the richest man of the town. Idris also settled here along with his master. Every year the merchant would celebrate the day of his rescue by holding a feast to which he invited the elite of the place and would relate the whole story of Idris' fidelity over again. Life thus went on with Idris, enjoying universal esteem for his Islamic character, when fortune, as we shall see as we go on, added to his life-drama, a scene at once romantic and tragic.

II

Away from the crowded town and its dust and din, there spread a vast plain laid out with lovely green turf. It belonged to no particular man. The Muslim State of Spain had set apart such parks in every town and village to serve as

recreation grounds for the public. To the north of this field stood a magnificent building, while all around, it was encircled by terraces and pavilions where crowds of spectators might sit on tournament days.

Tournaments were common in those days in Spain and they were open to people of every creed and colour. The Muslims were the ruling class but the Jews and Christians as well as Negroes, the rulers and the ruled—all were welcome to participate in these tournaments without distinction. Whenever a tournament was held, the national flag of Islam was flown at the top of the building.

Year after year one such tournament was held on the day of Id-ul-Fitr. The tournament opened with a military parade, followed by martial feats of arms and sports. Muslim knights invited Christian princes and renowned military veterans to friendly contests in horsemanship, lancing, archery and so forth. People from far and wide flocked to see the tournament. They enjoyed the best of hospitality. The Muslim gentry of the place would fling their doors open to these strangers and treat them to sumptuous banquets. Such of them as could not find room under some private roof were accommodated in State hotels and entertained at State expense.

The month of Ramzan was drawing to a close, and the inhabitants of the town were eagerly looking forward to the annual tournament. They were busy making preparations for the reception of their guests. The common practice was that whoever from outside wanted to take part in a tournament informed his friends in the town before-hand to arrange for his stay. The programme consisted of a display of all manly games. But horse-racing, archery, and lancing were the most favourite games and aroused the greatest enthusiasm. The **Id-ul-Fitr** was yet three days to come but the names of the Christian princes and chiefs coming to take part in the tournament had already spread in the town.

Among these competitors, Christians as well as Muslims, there was one name which was on everybody's lips. This was Ishaq, the son of our hero, Idris. Idris, it will be recollected, had come with his merchant master and settled in Spain. He had saved the life of his master and the latter had taken him for his most trusted counsellor. After some time, the merchant died, bequeathing a goodly portion of his vast riches to Idris. This made Idris the wealthiest man of the town. He spent much of his wealth on the poor and the needy, and every year when the pilgrim party would embark for Mecca, he sent the

choicest presents for the House of God. He married but remained without an issue for a long time. He was already forty-five when a son was born to him. This was Ishaq. Idris had taken good care to give him the best of Muslim breeding. Besides education which the Prophet made compulsory for every Muslim, he was trained in all the manly games—horsemanship, archery and lancing. He grew up to be a stalwart youth and won a great name at the annual national tournaments. Idris was already an old man and Ishaq, the sole prop of his declining years. For two consecutive years, Ishaq had won the gold trophy for archery and this year much enthusiasm was caused by the news that Christian veterans from far and wide were coming to contest the laurels with him.

It was the last day of 'Id-ul-Fitr, and on this day was to be held the most exciting contest in archery. Early in the morning, the people flocked to the field. Royal band played the sweetest of tunes. Everybody, wearing gala dress, was on his way to the field. The ladies were particularly enthusiastic. Gay, bright and blithe and attired in their best costumes, they seemed to vie with the men in their love of sport. It was customary on such occasions to reserve one whole wing of pavilions for ladies. The King, the officers

of State and royal guests had a special wing reserved for them.

By 10 o'clock, the whole field was full of men, women, boys and girls. The competitors were all ready. Dressed in their respective national costumes and mounted on thorough-breds pulling at their reins, impatient for action, they stood by the royal canopy awaiting the arrival of His Majesty, the Khalifa-tul-Muslimin. Christians and Muslims all were there rubbing shoulders as members of a common fraternity. Presently the usual beat of drums announced the arrival of the King. The royal cavalry led the van of the procession. It consisted purely of Arab youths with drawn swords and mounted on the best of Arab steeds. The cavalry was followed by a platoon of infantry. These veterans of many wars were dressed in the military uniform of their units and bore in their hands the flags and ensigns which they had won as trophies of war on many a battle-field. High State dignitaries came next. Then appeared the King's own body-guard, clad in the most gorgeous uniforms. Each one of them was carrying a small spear in his hand with a scimitar suspended from his waist. And at last when His Majesty himself, surrounded by princes of the royal blood, appeared on his snow-white charger, wearing full court robes, with a jewel-studded

sword clanging by his side and a big diamond shining across his forehead, up went the usual lusty shouts of Allah-o-Akbar, from the vast concourse of people crowded on the terraces and the pavilions. The ladies waved their thousands of fancy multicoloured handkerchiefs to welcome the royal visitor.

When the King occupied the chair especially prepared for him, one of the chiefs presented the competitors one by one to His Majesty. Among them, there were some who had taken part in the previous tournaments and were known to the King. As to the new-comers, their heredity and antecedents were proclaimed by another chief. Ishaq was among the first. He had been the champion for the last two years. When he in his turn bowed to the King, His Majesty greeted him with a smile, saying: "Hallo, Ishaq! You did well last year. This year, it is rather tough work. You will have to contest with archers of great name and fame." Ishaq made another respectful bow. "With the help of Allah, Your Majesty," he said, "I will do my best."

The drum-beat shortly afterwards announced to the eager crowds that the first round was to start. It was a hard contest and in the first two rounds, only ten came out successful, out of some sixty competitors. Now began the hardest con-

test. In the centre of the field was fixed a long pole. At the top of the pole was planted a beautiful bird of silk. A strong current of wind made it flutter its wings and spin swiftly round and round in its place. Each one of the competitors was to try three arrow-shots to bring it down to the ground. Five archers tried their hand one after another but failed to bring the bird down. The other four who followed, likewise failed. Now it was the turn of Ishaq. He was the champion of the last year and according to the rules of the game he was to come last. As he stepped forward, he was greeted with a deafening shout of **Allah-o-Akbar**. As he set himself into position and stretched his bow-string, a dead hush prevailed over the vast concourse.

With bated breath and wide open eyes the crowds watched from the terraces and the pavilions when Ishaq stretched his bow-string and took aim at the silk sparrow at the top of the pole, flapping its wings and spinning round and round. Ishaq had a sharp eye and a steady hand. "Twang!" and the arrow whizzed through the air and pierced both the wings of the spinning silk bird. "Bravo! Bravo!" came the shouts from all sides. The condition of the contest, however, was still unfulfilled. The sparrow had not been brought down to the ground. Ishaq took up another arrow.

Another "twang", and the arrow pierced through the chest of the bird. Once more came the shouts, "Well done!" The bird still stuck to its place. A third "twang" and the arrow this time cut through the thin iron bar on which the silk bird was perched and in the midst of universal acclamation and shouts of Allah-o-Akbar, the bird toppled down to the ground. Ishaq got up, made a graceful bow to His Majesty the Khalifa-tul-Muslimin, who congratulated him and awarded him the gold cup, the trophy of the tournament. Taking hold of this much-coveted prize, Ishaq made another bow to the King and turned homeward, surrounded by a crowd of friends and admirers.

Idris lived in a lovely villa at some distance from the town. The news of the victory of his son reached him. Several of his acquaintances hastened there and congratulated him, even before Ishaq could get there. Idris was too old now to move about. His heart, however, was full of joy and he managed to walk up to the front-door of his villa to welcome his victorious son. Presently the party arrived roaring with joy. Ishaq dismounted and embraced his dear father who imprinted an affectionate kiss on his blooming cheek. Before the party dispersed, they were treated to coffee and light refreshments after the Arab fashion.

About mid-day when Idris had said his prayers, he sent for his son and thus accosted him : "Ishaq dear, I am already in the twilight of my life and there is no knowing when the call may come. I wish to see you married under my own eyes. Let it be within this very month." Ishaq kept quiet. A gentle smile was all that came to his lips. His aged mother placed her hand on his head and tenderly said, "Your uncle, Sheik Abdul Karim has invited you to tea this afternoon. He has also invited several of his friends to meet you. You must now change and go to your uncle's house in the town. But mind that you come back before sunset."

"Now this is something I can't really promise, dear mother," replied Ishaq smiling. "It rests with uncle when he might let me come back."

"But he too is expected here by sunset," rejoined the mother, "Your father is giving a dinner to-night in honour of your victory."

Ishaq took a bath and changed and mounting on his Arab steed, went to the town. His uncle Abdul Karim was a very wealthy man. He had only one issue, a daughter, who was engaged to Ishaq. To celebrate the victory of his son-in-law, he had arranged this garden party and invited the prominent people of the town. On his arrival at

the party Ishaq received a hearty ovation from all those present.

After enjoying a delightful evening the guests left one by one Ishaq also took leave of his uncle and mounting on his horse took his way homeward. The last lingering rays of the setting sun were imparting their parting kiss to the tops of the western hills. Flocks of birds were on their wings to their roosting places in the woods. Just then Ishaq was passing by the royal cemetery when all of a sudden his horse took fright at something and began to prance about. A way-farer who was passing by, with a load on his back, accidentally received a kick and was rolled over along with his load. Ishaq held in his reins and apologized. "I am awfully sorry" he said, "I hope it is nothing serious."

WAY-FARER : "It seems you are both blind and arrogant."

ISHAQ : "You look a stranger. Where do you come from?"

WAY-FARER : "What the devil have you got to do with that? I know you Muslims look upon yourselves as the ruling nation. But this much I may tell you that this intoxication of yours will soon be gone."

ISHAQ: "Friend, don't be so cross. You look a way-farer. Please pardon me. Here is some money as compensation."

WAY-FARER: "You fool! Do you take me for a native of Andlusia? I come from a land where people wouldn't even spit on money from a Muslim's hand."

ISHAQ: Please hold your tongue! You may call me whatever names you will but you have no business to insult the great Muslim nation.

WAY-FARER: "Hold my tongue! By Jove! I have not seen a coward like you in my life."

ISHAQ: Be gone! My religion forbids to raise hand against a way-farer or I would have torn your tongue out."

WAY-FARER: "Dare you threaten me like that, you coward! Just be a man and get down from your horse and we will settle the account."

ISHAQ: No more, I say."

And as he said so, Ishaq began to dismount.

The way-farer was, however, too quick for him. Ishaq's left foot was yet in the stirrup when his opponent rushed at him and plunged his dagger into his heart. Instantaneously Ishaq fell to the ground and in the twinkling of eyes he was no more.

Ishaq was dead. There by the side of his steed, in dust and in his own blood, lay the only

son of Idris, the Sheikh of Andlusia. His assassin seized with consternation and in utter bewilderment, looked about for a way of escape. There was nobody about. The servant of Ishaq who trailed behind his master had just appeared in the distance and was following with hasty steps. Not a minute was to be lost, thought the terror-stricken murderer. Leaving his load on the spot, he took to his heels to put a safe distance between himself and Ishaq's servant.

Idris, in the meanwhile, was awaiting the return of his son with his usual eagerness. Little did he dream that the only prop of his old age lay weltering in his own blood, a victim to an assassin's dagger. The sun had already set and it was growing dark. All sorts of misgivings crossed the old man's mind. Restlessly he paced up and down in front of his villa to watch along the road whether his son was coming. Meeting, however, with disappointment he at last bade his servant to fetch a jug of water for ablutions. The latter enquired whether he would say his evening prayers in his own room or he would go out to the Mosque. "To the Mosque, of course," replied the old Sheikh. "Has not the Prophet said that he would like to set the house on fire whose inmates, instead of joining the congregational prayers in the Mosque said their prayers at home?" "But just wait!"

he ejaculated "who is this man coming along running?"

"Looks a stranger," rejoined the servant. "But he is running rather desperately! Let us hope there is nothing wrong."

And presently the assassin of Ishaq was at the front-door of his villa, his hands and clothes red with blood, his face full of terror and consternation. A tremor had seized him from head to foot, but on account of extreme fear, he could not find tongue to utter a word. Seeing the old Sheikh, he kneeled on the ground and with folded hands at last managed to utter a few broken words.

ASSASSIN: "O Sheikh! I am a stranger to this land. I am away from my homeland and . . . and . . ."

SHEIKH: "And what? Go on! Don't be afraid! Say what is wrong with you? Just step in and compose yourself!"

ASSASSIN: "I want an asylum. Pray save me. I am innocent. . . An asylum in the name of Allah, in the name of Mahomet . . . Pity! Have pity on me!"

SHEIKH: "An asylum you shall have. A Musalman is never so mean as to shut his door against a man in distress. You need have no fear on that account. But do tell us what the matter is with you." "Just go (turning to

his servant) and fetch him a glass of cool drink."

The servant soon came with cool refreshing syrup which moistened the dry throat and tongue of the assassin. But even then he only mumbled.

ASSASSIN: "O Sheikh! You are the chief of your clan and I am a stranger. I was fresh into the town...on the way a few Mussalmans met me. I was alone. They jeered at me and abused me."

SHEIKH: "God forbid! Who could these wretched fellows be? No Mussalman can injure the feelings of a fellow man."

ASSASSIN: "O Sheikh! I resented their foul words, I told them not to do so. This enraged them and they began to belabour me. Some of them took out their knives to stab me. I took out my dagger and in self-defence to ward off their attacks and in the scuffle, one of them accidentally got wounded and died instantaneously. I came running away for my life...By God I am innocent...It was not a wilful murder...pray give me an asylum... I am a stranger."

The Sheikh was impressed with the story as true and was much moved at the plight of the stranger. Little did he know that the blood that

stained the stranger's hands was that of his own dear son. In a most tender tone, he thus consoled the man :

SHEIKH : " Step in, brother ! What, though a Christian ? The Prophet has taught us that a Mussalman must regard all men as his brothers, children of the same God. Come in and be of good cheer. You are under my protection and no harm shall come to you."

Seeing, however, the assassin hesitate, as if not prepared to believe such chivalrous welcome, the Sheikh continued :

" Why hesitate ? Just step in and you are safe. Even if the relations of the man you have slain come up to demand you I will never give you up. Have no worry. You have my word for it and a Muslim's word is his bond. You will find me true of faith by the help of Allah."

The assassin once more made an obeisance, kissed the skirt of the Sheikh's flowing robe and followed the servant into the interior of the unexpected asylum.

Idris, it will be recollected, had invited the elite of the town to a dinner party in honour of Ishaq's victory. The guests were already in their seats awaiting the return of Ishaq who was unusually late. As a rule he returned home before

sun-set. This was the first time that he had over-stayed. The evening prayers were over and yet no Ishaq! This caused his aged father much anxiety. Presently the suspense was broken by some noise at the front-door and forthwith one of the domestics burst into the dining-hall, horribly agitated.

“What is the matter!” exclaimed the Sheikh. “Hope nothing is wrong?”

“Ishaq is no more,” mumbled the servant, in the midst of tears and lamentations.

A bolt from the blue could have caused no greater consternation. The party could hardly believe their ears. The Sheikh was bodily crushed and it was only with a supreme effort that he could manage to get up to his legs and drag his old limbs along to the courtyard, followed by the guests. Drenched in blood, Ishaq's body lay on a stretcher, surrounded by quite a little crowd. With a trembling hand, Idris took off the corner of the sheet that was covering the body. The face of his own dear Ishaq indeed! His once blooming cheeks were now pale in death and the pair of lovely eyes, that once sparkled with life and joy, now closed in death, no longer lifted towards Idris with their affectionate gleam. “From the Lord we are and unto the Lord we go,” exclaimed the old man in true Islamic resignation. The world grew dark before his eyes. For a while his grey dark head

sank and lay buried in his hands. Then, raising his head, he asked :

“What does all this mean? Where did you find this body and who killed Ishaq?”

The attendant who had accompanied Ishaq stepped forward and said :

“O Sheikh! I saw from a distance the young Sheikh talk to someone. I could not hear what the talk was about. Then I saw my master dismount but before he could set his foot on the ground the fellow had stabbed him. Before I could get to the place, Ishaq had expired and the assassin had made good his escape.”

As if struck by some sudden flash of thought, Idris paused and pondered. “God’s will be done,” he said after a moment. “What is written is written and there is no running away from it.”

The kith and kin of Ishaq had in the meanwhile all come. Several of his friends had set out in search of the assassin. Deep sorrow brooded over the villa. In the adjoining room, the Christian refugee was bewildered to hear the lamentations. All sorts of thoughts and fears crowded upon his mind. Was it the house of the man he had killed? he said to himself. It could not be, he reassured himself. If that were so, the relations of the deceased would already have been upon him and he would have been a dead man long ago. He was thus

plunged in thought when the door turned on its hinges and the old man entered, lamp in hand.

“Was the man you killed all alone?” he enquired of the stranger, “or did he have some one else along with him?”

ASSASSIN : “No, he was not alone. There were four of them. I used my dagger only in self-defence . . . But, but . . . for Allah’s sake don’t hand me over. I am innocent.

SHEIKH : “Be not afraid! Just come up and follow me!”

With trembling steps the assassin followed the Sheikh. At the door of the room where the body of Ishaq lay, the latter beckoned to him to stop. Entering the room the Sheikh asked the four men appointed to chant the Quran over Ishaq’s body, to retire by another door. When left alone, he bade the assassin enter and, raising the sheet off the face of Ishaq, asked, “Do you recognize this man?”

The assassin turned ghastly pale at the sight of his victim.

“Is this the man you have killed?” demanded the Sheikh. “Have no fear and speak the truth.”

ASSASSIN : “Y . . . y . . . yes, but for Heaven’s sake, have mercy on me. I am innocent. This young man abused me and . . .”

SHEIKH : Let us be back to your own room now.

There is yet a good bit of night left. Rest yourself and early in the morning I will arrange your escape."

While the assassin was musing what fate might await him in the morning, the Sheikh kept a vigil by the side of his son. Early at dawn he bade one of his attendants keep the fastest of his dromedaries in readiness at the front-door, together with a water-skin full of water. While the attendant was busy at the stable, the Sheikh, taking a purse full of money and a bag containing dry fruits, awaited his arrival at the appointed place. Presently the dromedary came, led by the attendant. The Sheikh then told the latter to go to the stranger's room and quietly bring him there. The assassin had not had a wink of sleep all night. At the sight of the attendant, he thought his last moment had come. Having said his last prayers according to the rites of his faith, he prepared himself for death and staggered along after the attendant, trembling with fear. The Sheikh, holding the animal by the nose-string, was reclining against the compound wall. When the two arrived, he beckoned to the attendant to retire and thus addressed the assassin.

"You wretch! The man you have slain is my own darling son, Ishaq. You can't imagine what

havoc you have played. You have snatched away from me the only prop of my old age. You can't imagine all that I am, at the moment, passing through. There is Ishaq standing before my eyes crying for revenge. There is my deep love for Ishaq crying to hand you over to the executioner. Ishaq was in the full bloom of youth. We were shortly looking forward to his happy wedding. I am in the twilight of life. Ishaq was my only son, my only hope. You have ruined the whole of our family. All this makes my blood boil within me. But there is a call yet higher to which I must bow. In the name of God and his Holy Apostle I have solemnly pledged you my word of honour to protect you. Let it not be said that a follower of the Prophet of Islam was so mean as to go back upon his word. Be gone! You are free. Here is the swiftest dromedary of my stable to run off with you before the hand of law can lay hold on you. Here is also some money and some fruit to serve you on your journey. Ishaq was dearer to me than life itself. But I forgive you his blood. Let it not be said that a son of Islam was untrue to his word of honour. That would sully the name of Islam and the good name of Islam is dearer to me than the blood of Ishaq."

The Princess of Tripoly

The soldiers of Islam had filled the whole world with the fame of their feats of arms. Mighty monarchs and great generals trembled at the very name of these camel drivers of Arabia. The kingdoms across the sea felt equally alarmed. Powers in the close neighbourhood were ever conspiring to undermine the kingdom of Islam.

It was during the reign of Umar the Great that Egypt was captured and ever since the king of the neighbouring country of Tripoly, Gregory by name, made inroads into the territory of Islam in order to drive the Muslims out of the soil of Africa. When this sort of guerilla warfare failed to harass the Muslims, the several petty chieftains, under the lead of Gregory entered into an alliance against Islam. This was not a state of things that the Muslims could afford to let go unchallenged. When the news of the impending danger to the power of Islam in Egypt reached Medina, the capital of the Empire of Islam, Usman, the then Caliph ordered a general mobilization. No sooner did this national call reach the ears of the people, then from far and wide all over the peninsula of Arabia they rallied to the standard of Islam. Some came mounted on camels, some on horses, some

on foot. In no time a whole colony of tents sprang up outside the capital. Friday prayers were said on the vast camping ground after which the Caliph rose and thus addressed the expeditionary force :

“Soldiers of Islam ! You are going out on an expedition in a just and righteous cause. Beware of all greed and avarice. Greed and avarice degrade a man. Before you unsheathe the sword, invite the foe to peaceful settlement. In case they refuse to stop their machinations against Islam, only then you may take up the sword and victory shall by God’s grace be yours.

“When victorious, you enter a town, bear in mind that you neither burn houses, nor destroy crops, nor cut down fruit-bearing trees. These are acts which God dislikes. Don’t in any way injure or insult a woman, an old man, or the weak and the sick. This is cruelty and God never grants success to the cruel.

“Soldiers of Islam ! Remember God and beware of a split in your own camp. Stand as one man. Guard against jealousy and haughtiness. Don’t strut on God’s earth. God does not like the overbearing.

“Soldiers of Islam ! I put Abdullah in command over you. Respect him and obey him. In case of a difference of opinion, hold a council and act as the majority may decide.”

Then turning to Abdullah, the Caliph proceeded :

“Abdullah ! I put you in command. This is a sacred trust. See that you do not betray it. When you reach the enemy’s country invite them to peace. If they respond and come to terms, they are your brothers. If not, then alone you may resort to the sword. Always hold counsel with your associates and remember God.”

After a long and weary march, the soldiers of Islam reached Tripoly. Gregory’s Kingdom extended right up to Tangier. He had fortified his capital, Sophetule, with a strong fort. His court was unique for its splendour and magnificence. He had subjugated all the unruly people of the neighbourhood at the point of the sword.

The soldiers of Islam encamped in front of the walls of Tripoly. They were yet thinking of starting negotiations before actually unsheathing the sword when the foe fell upon them from all sides. The die was cast. The Muslims also took up the sword and hostilities broke out.

The town of Tripoly was situated on the sea-coast. Most of the trade with foreign lands was done through this sea-port. The news of the Muslim invasion spread like wild fire and hosts of the Allies flocked by the sea-route to the help of Tripoly. Their plan was to take the Muslims

by surprise. But the Muslim commander, Abdullah, was a wide-awake veteran. He had posted reconnaissance parties all around and intelligence of the enemy's movements was brought to him in time. The very night that the army landed and encamped on the soil of Tripoly, a detachment of Muslim soldiers fell upon it and scattered it. A large number were drowned in the sea and many fell in action. The following day, the Muslim army stormed the fort but could not capture it. At the same time they got the news that the King was in person coming with a large army to deliver Tripoly from the hands of the "Infidels," as the Muslims were called.

This is how the King's help was obtained. One day when Gregory was seated in his court, a courtier presented himself before him. After paying the ceremonial respects due to royalty, the man raised his right hand, after the wont of the times and thus addressed the King :

"O King! The barbarians from the desert of Arabia have fallen on the country like a bolt from the blue. The town has been besieged and if timely help is not forthcoming, not a soul will survive."

GREGORY : "Where do you come from and who has sent you?"

COURIER : "Your Majesty! I am a resident of Tripoly and I have been deputed by the inhabitants of that town."

GREGORY : "But didn't you say just now that the town is besieged? How could you make good your escape?"

COURIER : "Your Majesty! In doing so I carried my life on the palms of my hands. There is an under-ground sewer leading out of the town. In the dark of the night, I escaped through this dirty outlet. It was awfully stinky. My clothes all got full of dirt. But I managed before dawn to come out to a spot where I had no fear of the enemy."

GREGORY : "How daring of these babarians! From far-off Arabia to fall on Africa! Just fancy!"

A COURTIER : "In the fervour of their faith these people brook no danger."

ANOTHER : "Don't you believe that! It is not religious zeal that has brought them here. It is the lust of loot."

GREGORY : "By the Holy Virgin! It is their doom that has dragged them to these shores. Not one of them shall see his native land again."

A BISHOP : "I have lived in Egypt and Arabia for some time. Don't you take them as petty robbers. They are a formidable people and

you should be prepared for some very tough fighting.”

GREGORY: “Don’t talk in this despondent strain! This very day I am going to march in person at the head of an army to teach these wild fellows a lesson. By the Virgin, this palace shall not see me back until I have driven out the last of these blood-thirsty hounds.”

The grim determination of Gregory, the Christian King of Tripoly that he would drive the Muslim invaders out of the country or perish in the attempt, put heart into his courtiers and roused them to enthusiasm. The courier who had come from the besieged town with his tale of woe also felt much relieved. And thus proceeded the dialouge between the King and the courier:

KING: “You must at least have some idea of the Muslim army.”

COURIER: “Of course, Your Majesty. Disguising myself as a pedlar, a number of times I have been round their camp.”

KING: “What is your estimate, then?”

COURIER: “Not more than thirty to forty thousand.”

KING: “Thirty to forty thousand! Did you say that? They must be mad to invade Tripoly with that army and an irregular one at that.”

COURIER : " I am positive, Your Majesty, it is no more than that. Nothing like a regular army. They are more like a herd of babarians. No uniform. They are clad in all forms of dress and equipped with all sorts of weapons."

KING : " By Jove ! It is some cheek to think of invading a distant land like Tripoly with that contemptible little band !"

BISHOP : " Your Majesty, I know much of these Muslims. Ill-disciplined and ill-equipped as they are, it is not wise to take them so lightly. They are a people of determination. Once they make up their mind, they know no wavering, no going back. Death which sends a shiver through the hearts of the most daring is a thing they actually court. According to their belief, death for a Muslim is but a door-way to paradise. It must be sheer folly not to be well on our guard against such a foe."

A COURTIER : " Well ! Just wait and see ! They will soon come to their senses when they are once face to face with the regular army of Tripoly."

KING : " Let war drums be beaten and the brave soldiers of Tripoly get ready !"

In a few days, a huge army was in thorough military array. Troops rallied to the headquarters

from the various cantonments, and even from the States of Berbery, contingents of warriors flocked to join hands with Gregory.

King Gregory had a daughter whose charms of appearance were only rivalled by her reckless daring. Tales of her beauty and bravery had spread far and wide and many were the Christian knights and princes of high birth and repute who coveted her hand. It was her wont to keep by her father's side in the very thick of the battle, to cheer up the soldiers with her unusual courage and tactics. But this time it was not the Berbers of Africa that Gregory had to fight. He knew he had a far more formidable foe to deal with and so he hesitated to risk the life of his lovely daughter. The Princess, however, would not listen to any such counsels and insisted on taking her stand, as usual, in the midst of the army. Thus at the head of the army which historians put at about 115,000 strong, and accompanied by his fascinating daughter, the King with unprecedented pomp and splendour, marched out of the capital.

The inhabitants of the town of Tripoly got the news of Gregory's march. So far they had taken shelter within the fort walls and adopted defensive measures against Muslim attacks. But the news that the King was in person coming to their succour roused their spirits and one day,

sallying forth through the fort gates, they stormed the soldiers of Islam in the open. A most furious fight ensued. All day long swords were ruthlessly plied. Abdullah, the commander of the Muslim army was not prepared for such a desperate onslaught. He was adopting tactics to capture the fort that very day when intelligence was brought to him of the advancing army of King Gregory. He at once changed his tactics. He formed the soldiers of Islam into detachments and posted each one at a strategic point to intercept the progress of the King's army. At the same time, brandishing his glittering sword, he shouted to the rest of the valiant soldiers of Islam to storm the enemy ranks. It was a most desperate dash. In utter confusion the enemy hosts were on the point of retreating within the walls, when, to their unbounded joy, there came from the neighbouring hills, the welcome sounds of war-drums. This notified the approach of the King of Tripoly. A few moments more and on the peaks of the hills could be seen banners fluttering in the air. Abdullah at once ordered a retreat and the Tripolitons, as soon as they got this breathing space, rushed back into the fort, awaiting the arrival of reinforcements.

At the foot of the mountain range of Tripoly, as far as the eye could see, a whole colony of tents sprang up. This was the army of King Gre-

gory which formed a semi-circle around the camp of Islam. At the rear of the Muslim army stood the fort, so that the Muslims were practically taken in a snare. The regal canopy of Gregory was perched high up on the peak of the hill from which the cross proudly fluttered. Full two days passed and the two armies were thus encamped, but inspite of his large numbers Gregory hesitated to advance. When Abdullah, the Muslim General, saw that the Allies were not prepared for action, he deputed three of his picked men, versed in the teachings of Islam, to convey the message of Islam to the Christian King.

When Gregory came to know of the visit of the Muslim envoys, he tried to impress them with the pomp and splendour of a regal reception. The pathway from the mountain foot right up to the top where the royal tent stood was rowed on either side with officers clad in steel. The regular army was ordered to fall in, in full uniform. On their arrival at Gregory's camp, the envoys of Abdullah were received by an officer. They told him that they had come with peace terms. So he conducted them to the royal tent, taking them through the ranks of the army. The King's tent was guarded by soldiers of stout build from the various parts of Africa, attired in their respective uniforms.

After a little while of waiting, the Muslim envoys were ushered in. Gregory had donned a

most gorgeous costume and occupied a golden chair in the midst of his courtiers and officers. According to the custom, the usher proclaimed the envoys and made them stand at a respectful distance. The envoys offered due salutations after the fashion of Islam and a slight nod of the head was all the acknowledgement they got from the Christian King. The Bishop who knew Arabic stood by their side to act as an interpreter. Gregory, for a while, transfixed them with a furious stare and then thundered :

“What people are you and how dare you come into my territory ?”

Among the envoy there was one who had the Quran by heart. He was also the head of the deputation. He thus replied to the King’s query :

“O King ! We are the inhabitants of Arabia. We came to know of your designs against Islam and this is what brings us here. Now, before hostilities break out we offer you the Truth of Islam.”

KING : “Who on earth sent you ?”

MUSLIM ENVOY : “We have come under the orders of the mighty Caliph of Islam.”

KING : “What do you mean by such an offer ?”

MUSLIM ENVOY : “O King ! God has blessed you with power and wealth. He has entrusted his creatures to your care. Accept Him as one

without a son or a partner. Accept also His chosen Phophet Muhammad. Follow the teachings of the Quran and embrace Islam !”

GREGORY : “ What if we refuse to accept your God and Apostle ?”

MUSLIM ENVOY : “ That is your own look-out. It is for us only to show you the path of Truth. It is for you to accept or reject it. Should you accept it, we are brethren in faith and our hostilities come to an end. This is one way of securing friendly relations. In case this fails to appeal to you, there is yet another way to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. You must pay *jizya*, i.e., a protection-tax.”

GREGORY : “ And should we refuse both, what then ?”

MUSLIM ENVOY (unsheathing his sword): This then, will be the arbiter between you and us.”

GREGORY : “ You impudent upstart ! Shut up or I will have you flayed alive.”

MUSLIM ENVOY : “ What is written is written, and not a blade of grass can move against Divine writ.”

GREGORY : “ Well, your God has no business here. I am the lord of the place and your lives are at my mercy.”

MUSLIM ENVOY : "God is Omnipresent and Omnipotent and our lives are in His keeping."

GREGORY : "Your God is far off but my hand is very strong. You are just trifling with life. You would be more sensible when you feel the executioner's sword on your neck."

MUSLIM ENVOY : "Your Majesty is mistaken. To a Muslim, death is only a door-way to Paradise, especially when met in the path of God."

GREGORY (after a pause): "Get thee off! I must not stain my hands with the blood of envoys or by now your skin would not be on your body. Get thee off and tell your Chief to quit along with his herd immediately or, by the Holy Virgin, the soil of Tripoly will become red with your blood."

MUSLIM ENVOY : "Your Majesty! I will convey your message to our Chief, but bear in mind that God Almighty does not like such haughtiness. Hundreds of proud potentates like you have met an ignominious fall."

GREGORY : "Hold your tongue! (turning to one of his officers)—Let these fellows have a safe conduct to their camp and let the war-drums beat!"

The morning broke clear and bright. The rays of the sun threw lurid light over the hills and dales. There was a stir in the Allies' camp, some girding their loins, some saddling their horses, others putting on their armours. In full array the two armies were slowly advancing towards each other, accompanied here and there by war drums and military wind-pipes.

At a stone's throw from the fortress, the soldiers of Islam, drawn up in regular lines were awaiting the approach of the foe. Every now and then the shout of Allah-o-Akbar went up to the skies, reverberating far and wide in the long-drawn chain of hills and filling the whole valley with awe. The banner of Islam with its glittering Crescent rose over forty thousand heads, all impatient to strike a blow in defence of the honour of Islam. In front, the whole field looked one vast sea of humanity. This was the locust army of the Allies.

Abdullah, the Commander of the army of Islam, riding on his best steed, galloped from rank to rank, drawing up his men in fighting array. The infantry was to take the centre, to be flanked on the right and left by the cavalry. A battalion of horsemen was also put in the rear, with instructions to intercept any attack from inside the fort. This was the stirring message from the lips of the Muslim commander that went from rank to rank :

“Soldiers of Islam! In your hands lies to-day the honour of Islam. It is up to you to maintain that honour and fill the hearts of the unbelievers with the awe of Islam. By Allah! You are a most lucky lot. Those of you who survive to-day shall win the laurels of victory. Those that fall in action shall win martyrdom. Has not the Prophet said that anyone who meets death in a just cause goes to Heaven straightaway? Soldiers of Islam? It is seldom that an opportunity like this comes one’s way. Here lies the short cut to Heaven at your door-step.”

While Abdullah was rushing from rank to rank, the Allies’ war-drums began to sound. There was a commotion in the army. To this the Muslims responded with three lusty shouts of Allah-o-Akbar. This was followed by a volley of arrows from both sides. From Gregory’s camp, a whole cloud of arrows came pouring down the ranks of Islam. Simultaneously with this shower of arrows from the air, the iron-clad warriors of Gregory stormed the centre of the army of Islam. The King with his charming princess by his side, in person led this blitz at the heart of Islam. It was a critical juncture. The soldiers of Islam were attacked on three sides, but they knew no wavering. With marvellous firmness they stuck to their posts and repulsed every onslaught. A fierce fight ensued

taking a heavy toll of human life. More than half of Gregory's iron-clads were weltering in their blood. The sun was already lowering on the western horizon but the battle stood undecided. The scale of fortune now turned one way now the other. In order to clinch the issue Abdullah was contemplating a general attack when cries of **Allah-o-Akbar** from the side of the fort arrested his attention. At the same moment, a Muslim soldier came rushing along with news that the fort had fallen and the Muslims were already in possession of it. The Allies' army was fast beating a retreat towards its camp. The soldiers of Islam were impatient to give them a chase but their commander skilled as he was in the art of warfare, bade them halt. He was aware of the enemy's numerical superiority. It would have been a blunder to risk a chase. The sun was already concealed behind the lofty towers of the fort over which now the Crescent proudly fluttered. The soldiers of Islam, exhausted after a hard day's fight, let themselves down on the ground wherever they were and before nightfall the dead were laid to eternal rest in their graves whereas the wounded were removed to the camp which had by now shifted to the fort.

The following morning, immediately after the prayers, the soldiers of Islam were duly at their

posts on the field. They in vain waited for the enemy to advance. The sun was already high up above the horizon but there was not a stir in the enemy camp. This was causing much surprise when a couple of Gregory's soldiers who had been taken prisoners that very morning by a Muslim reconnaissance party were brought before Abdullah. According to the teachings of Islam and the example of the Holy Prophet, these prisoners were so well treated that in addition to their bodies they surrendered even their hearts to Islam and embraced this great faith of human fellowship. From these new converts to Islam it transpired that Gregory would not come out that day. He wanted to give his army rest.

COMMANDER: "But does he not apprehend an attack from our side either?"

CONVERT: "He is too proud of the numerical strength of his army. Besides, it is not advisable for you to advance on such a large army."

COMMANDER: "Surely you must be in the know. Couldn't you tell us what approximately the strength of Gregory's army must be?"

CONVERT: "At this moment, Gregory has 120,000 under his banner."

COMMANDER: "Allah be praised! Notwithstanding such a large army he quitted the field yesterday."

CONVERT : " They have sustained heavy losses in yesterday's action. **Good many chiefs of great fame fell on the field.** This morning Gregory held a council of war at which he announced that whoever should bring the head of the Muslim Commander would be rewarded with the hand of his fascinating princess together with a large territory."

A MUSLIM : " The hand of the Princess ! By Allah, a goodly prize ! Ah ! Now I recollect. There was yesterday among the iron-clad warriors and right in the thick of the battle a youthful girl of bewitching beauty, plying her sword with reckless dash and daring. It must have been the Princess."

CONVERT : " There you are ! It was she, the sole heiress to the throne of her father. As a rule, there is no action but you can see her by the side of her father, bravely facing the brunt of the battle. Christian princes of fame and fortune have in vain been seeking her hand. She is too proud to choose anyone for her spouse."

COMMANDER : " What can these promises and prizes avail ? All depends on Allah's will and what is written is written."

A SHEIKH : " At any rate, a prize so coveted will serve as a spur to the daring of soldiers and

every one will be prepared to lay down his life to win it."

CONVERT : "There is not the least doubt about that. Immediately this order of the day was announced to the rank and file, there was frantic enthusiasm. The soldiers were impatient to jump into the fray and begged to be permitted to rush into the field and try their luck. But Gregory would not listen. He has ordered the attack for tomorrow before day-break. We must be on our guard. The iron-clad warriors will rush upon the section of our army where our Commander may happen to be."

COMMANDER : "It comes to this then that victory and defeat hang on my life and death." At this the Muslim chiefs who were present counselled the Commander not to participate in person in the coming fight.

COMMANDER : "Do you mean to deprive me of the honour of falling for a righteous cause?"

A CHIEF : "That is the dictate of prudence. You must not join to-morrow's action. Yours is the responsibility to see that Muslims come to no harm. You have heard that you will be the enemy's chief target tomorrow. Should you fall, the loss of Muslims would be irreparable." A lengthy discussion ensued and it was at

length decided that Abdullah should take no part in the battle. At this the Commander retired to his tent.

The soldiers of Islam offered their mid-day and afternoon prayers on the field of battle. A little while before sunset they all retired to their respective tents. In order to guard against a night attack, Abdullah posted small detachments to mount guard turn by turn.

Early next morning the enemy army advanced and occupied the whole front. Abdullah drew up his army in battle array, putting each division under a veteran. Fighting commenced at every point and before the sun had reached the meridian, the whole field was drenched with human blood. Gregory with his eagle eye watched the whole thing and wherever he saw the battle was at its hottest, there he darted along with his iron-clads. His pretty daughter out-did her father in her reckless daring. The field was strewn with the dead and the wounded. The Allies were proud of their superior numbers and therefore put up a most steady fight. As to the Muslims, they were actually sandwiched between the enemy hordes, yet with the roaring shouts of Allah-o-Akbar, they made dash after dash on them. The fortune of the day was thus hanging in the balance with a slight inclination in favour of the Allies when, all

of a sudden, a tremendous shout of Allah-o-Akbar, which filled the whole field with awe, proclaimed an unexpected turn of the tide.

The shout was evoked by the sudden appearance of the famous Muslim General, Zubair, at the head of his detachment. Zubair was a veteran of uncommon skill, having fought shoulder to shoulder with the Prophet on many a field. He had stayed behind to arrange provisions for the army. His appearance was hailed as God-send by the Muslim army which was pressed hard at several points. Zubair dashed straightway to the standard of Islam where he expected to meet the Commander. And as soon as the shout of greeting was over, he enquired where the Commander was.

A SOLDIER : "The Commander is in his tent."

ZUBAIR : "What makes him stay in his tent ?"

I hope there is nothing wrong with him."

THE SOLDIER : "As counselled by his officers, he has not joined the battle to-day, but is directing it from his own tent."

ZUBAIR : "But what on earth could it be that keeps him to his tent ?"

THE SOLDIER : "Gregory has set a very high price on his head. He has a daughter of matchless beauty and fascinating charms. He has had it proclaimed to his army that who-soever should take the head of our Commander

would be awarded the hand of that paragon of beauty. This naturally would have made our Commander the main target of the enemy attack. It was therefore considered prudent that he should not take part in to-day's engagement."

At this Zubair hastened towards the tent of Abdullah and on entering it accosted the Commander with the Islamic salutation of Assalam-o-alikum.

ABDULLAH : "Walaikum us-salam ! You have come in good time. You must have heard that in the last engagement we captured the fort."

ZUBAIR : "I must warmly congratulate you on that but I can't understand you lounging here in your tent on a day like this when the soldiers of Islam are shedding their blood for the honour and glory of Islam."

ABDULLAH : "But do you know the reason why I am here ? By Allah, nothing is so boring to me as this compulsory idleness, while right in front of me there is so much of opportunity for gaining glory and advancement."

ZUBAIR : "Yes, I know. But that need not keep you to your tent. Come, it is time for mid-day prayer. Conduct the prayer and announce to the soldiers of Islam that whosoever should

fetch the head of King Gregory would win the charming Princess of Tripoly for a prize."

Upon this Abdullah ordered his steed to be saddled and rushed to the battle field along with Zubair. The sight of their Chief filled the soldiers of Islam with renewed enthusiasm. It was prayer time and Muslims would not miss prayers, even though engaged in a deadly combat. The call to prayer was sounded and, as was the wont of the soldiers of Islam, half of the total strength of the Muslim army formed themselves into prayer rows, the other half keeping the enemy engaged in fray. Abdullah led the prayers, for in those good old days, the Imam's function was considered too exalted to be entrusted to a paid mulla. The highest among the Muslims acted as Imam. After the other half of the army had, in like manner, said the mid-day prayer, Abdullah issued his order of the day that whoever should fetch the head of Gregory would be awarded his warrior princess as a prize. Criers rushed forth from rank to rank proclaiming the prize to the soldiers of Islam. This raised enthusiasm to a still higher pitch and fierce was the fight that ensued. Brave deeds were performed on both sides. Abdullah and Zubair fell on the section of the Allies' army under the direct command of King Gregory. The Muslim war-cry of Allah-o-Akbar reverberated all over the battle

field. It was a most sanguinary fight. Abdullah and Zubair were soon cut off from each other. Zubair made repeated onslaughts at the heart of the Allies' army where King Gregory and his lovely Princess, surrounded by the picked of their warriors, roused the spirits of their iron-clads. The Muslim soldiers under the daring lead of Zubair made a desperate dash to cut their way through enemy ranks. Renowned warriors advanced to stem their progress but it was no easy task to withstand the cuts and thrusts of these seasoned warriors of Islam. They made short work of those who stood in their way. Gregory and his daughter watched Zubair's feats of arms with their mouths wide agape. The King was mounted on a snow-white steed, clad in full steel armour, with a glittering helmet on his head. A big diamond was suspended from his neck. Zubair's eagle eye saw at a glance that it must be the King and piercing his way through his body-guard, was in a minute face to face with this imposing figure.

ZUBAIR: "Is it His Majesty that I have the honour of meeting?"

A BISHOP (who was standing by): "Yes, it is His Majesty. What do you want—life or death?"

ZUBAIR: "Neither is within your power. Life and death rest in the hand of God. To a Muslim death in the path of Allah is more

welcome than life itself. So you need not threaten me with death."

"You infidel wretch ;" shouted Gregory. "How dare you stand up to the King of Tripoly?" And with the full fury of wounded dignity he fell upon Zubair. Zubair remained on the defensive, parrying the King's cuts and thrusts but not assuming the offensive. So hot was this clashing of swords that in a short while Gregory found his weapon rendered quite useless. This he flung away and clutching at the heavy club fastened to his waist he raised it to deal a smashing blow to his adversary. With the agility of lightning, however, Zubair rushed forward and snatched the weapon from his hand, and with a single knock-out blow sent Gregory staggering to the ground. The proud King of Tripoly was no more.

A tremendous shout of Allah-o-Akbar by the comrades of Zubair went up to the skies. As to the knot of soldiers who formed a ring around Gregory, as soon as they saw their King fall, they ran away helter skelter. And when the news of Gregory's death spread, the whole army was seized with consternation and took to flight. The Muslims gave them a long chase, and for miles the ground was drenched with the enemy's blood. Heaps were the spoils of war that fell into the hands of the victors. Large was the number of prisoners taken,

but what was by far the greatest trophy of the war, viz, the fascinating Princess, also fell into the hands of the Muslims.

The war was over. King Gregory was slain and his fair Princess taken prisoner. Abdullah the Commander of Islam retired to his tent. Soldiers of Islam, besmeared with the blood of the enemy, came in batches and offered congratulations to their chief. In front were lined up the prisoners of war, including the Princess. Directions were issued to distribute the spoils of war among the Muslim soldiers. Under the express orders of the Commander, the Princess was treated with special respect and honour in keeping with the dignity of her position. As had been announced, she was to go to the man who had slain her father, the King. In order that the promise might be fulfilled and the fair prize duly awarded, Abdullah enquired who that brave man was. There was a deep silence. Curious eyes turned from one man to another, but none of the sons of Islam came forward with such a claim. Over and over again the Commander repeated the question but still there was no reply.

As regards Zubair, no sooner was the Allies' army routed than he addressed himself to the burial of the dead and the care of the dying and the wounded. This took him some time and he was therefore rather late in offering his congratu-

lations to the Commander. The moment he appeared on the scene, the Princess got up and began to shriek and rave in her own language. Everybody was amazed to behold this and turned his eyes towards the Princess. One of the captives who knew Arabic informed the Commander of Islam that she was cursing the slayer of her father. Abdullah bade the interpreter ask the Princess to point out the man who had slain her father. On the interpreter's question, she pointed to Zubair to be the man who had done it.

ABDULLAH (turning to Zubair): "Is it really you who did it?"

ZUBAIR: "It was God's wrath that sent Gregory to his doom. I was just an instrument to carry out that Divine decree. Gregory wanted to crush Islam and this is the price he has paid for his arrogance."

ABDULLAH: "Why then did you at all tarry so long? According to the proclamation the Princess is yours. Pray accept her. She comes of a noble stock. Take her in your marriage. Of course, she is to enjoy perfect freedom of conscience. You may give her the message of Islam. If she accepts it, so much the better."

ZUBAIR: "Pardon, Sir! I did not kill her father out of any selfish motive to win her hand. God knows that when we were busy raining deadly

blows at each other, myself and her father, not once did the thought of your proclamation enter my mind. My sole idea was that he was an enemy of Islam, out to destroy Islam and it was my duty to kill him. I only did my duty."

ABDULLAH : "To you goes the whole glory of this triumph of Islam, for the enemy's defeat is the direct outcome of the death of Gregory. The soldiers of Islam cannot be too proud of you. No one is either more worthy or more entitled to the hand of Gregory's daughter. God knows how long we have yet to sojourn in this country. You had better immediately take her in your marriage. Besides this, it may have a political value. Matrimonial union with the daughter of the King of Tripoly may be of help in maintaining order in the conquered territory. The Caliph may moreover appoint you as Governor of this Province of the Empire of Islam."

ZUBAIR : "It is so kind of you indeed ! But I covet neither power nor riches nor the hand of the most charming Princess under the sun. Duty alone is enough of reward for a true son of Islam and I thank God I have done mine. I have just one wish and if it so please you, pray grant me that."

ABDULLAH : “By all means, provided it is in my power to grant it.”

ZUBAIR : “Pray confer on me the privilege of being the first to carry the happy news of victory to Medina and allow me to leave immediately.”

ABDULLAH : “With the greatest pleasure ! The heart of every soldier of Islam will go out with you. It is to men of your stamp that Islam owes its glory—men who know their duty and knowing it respond to its call with a devotion unadulterated by any sordid motives. It is such a high sense of duty that has made Islam what it is. In sacrificing such a well-earned prize at the altar of duty you have added to the history of Islam a chapter that will shine for all time to come. Your name will go down to history and the posterity of Islam, generation after generation, will derive inspiration from your sublime example of single-minded devotion to duty. Adieu !”

Refusing to have anything to do with the prize of victory, the Princess of bewitching beauty whose hand was coveted by illustrious princes and warriors, Zubair obtained the Commander's permission to forthwith start for Medina. Duty for its own sake ! That, he said, must be the motto of a true follower of that greatest of men who, while

the temporal and spiritual overlord of a whole nation, slept on a bare matting, swept his own house, stitched his own shoes and patched his own clothes. Sons of Islam knew but two laws, he went on, the law of duty and the law of honour, and even the fairest princess under the sun was nothing compared to the joy of duty done and the call of honour manfully met. Thus asserting his high sense of manhood which he had imbibed at the feet of the Prophet, this illustrious son of Islam quietly quitted the scene of his heroic exploits, and spurning both fame and fortune, he took his way to Medina. As regards the Princess, she fell to the lot of a Bedouin chief, her rightful winner having preferred the nook of obscurity to the charms of the loveliest beauty of Tripoly.

Stage by stage, Zubair did his journey till he arrived at Medina, the metropolis of the Empire of Islam. The news of his arrival spread like wild fire and batch after batch of inquisitive folk came flocking to the mosque known as the Prophet's Mosque where he had betaken himself immediately on his arrival. On hearing the joyous tidings of victory, the people raised shouts of Allah-o-Akbar; for, according to the teachings of Islam, a Muslim must attribute every achievement to the grace of God Almighty. So rather than indulge in any spirit of vain-gloriousness, these crowds of Muslims,

assembled in and around the Prophet's Mosque glorified the Lord for the victory which He had vouchsafed to the arms of Islam. There was great excitement. Anxious mothers came to enquire after their sons who had accompanied the flag of Islam to those distant lands. Wives were anxious to know about their beloved husbands. Zubair gave them a graphic description of the many deeds of daring and devotion done by the soldiers of Islam, how every one of them gloried in striking a blow to uphold the honour of Islam, even if that should cost him the last drop of his blood. "Allah-o-Akbar"—the shout went up each time as he narrated some soul-stirring feat of valour or self-sacrifice. The one thing however, that Zubair did not utter a word about was the part played by himself in the achievement of this glorious victory.

Days passed by and for about three months the soldiers of Islam went on consolidating their position in Tripoly. As ill luck would have it, however, that country was infected with a terrible epidemic and it became necessary to recall this army of occupation from Tripoly. On their return to their homeland, the soldiers of Islam would, with great relish, recount the wondrous tales of Zubair's daring, devotion to duty and self-renunciation. Those who had beheld him measuring swords with Gregory related the prodigious feats

of his swordsmanship and courage. The news at last reached the ears of the Caliph, Usman. So touched was he with the unassuming greatness of Zubair's character that after the Friday prayers, in the presence of all the Muslim community of the Capital, he warmly embraced him and thus accosted him :

THE CALIPH : "The laurels of the victory of Tripoly go entirely to you. How is it that while you were the first to bring us the news of this great achievement, you kept back from us this most important news of the whole expedition ? Victory or defeat, each ultimately rests with Allah. But He chooses men as His instruments to fulfil His purpose. In this fierce struggle, the slaughter of King Gregory was the determining factor and for this brave deed Allah's choice fell on you. How strange to keep the Muslims in the dark about an achievement of which any man may well feel proud !"

ZUBAIR : " O Amir-ul-Muminin ! Gregory was indeed slain at my hand but it is not for a Muslim to gloat over his achievements. I killed the King neither for his daughter nor for his crown. He was an enemy of Islam and I considered it my duty to unsheathe the sword against him. Though it was not my

lot to win the honour of martyrdom, thank God I did my duty."

Seeing such self-abnegation in a man so sublime, many were the eyes that moistened with tears. The Amir-ul-Muminin was also much moved and after a pause thus addressed the assembly :

"O Believers ; God does not like those who gloat over their achievements. He likes those who are humble in spirit. If you do anything good or great, don't trumpet it about. God likes those who are lowly in spirit and don't strut about on His earth. A true son of Islam must be above popular applause. He must do his duty even if that should cost him his life. And when he has done his duty, that should be enough of pride for him. He must not seek any other reward for it. Fight in the cause of Truth ! Spend of your money in the cause of Truth ! Look after the orphans and the indigent ! Give shelter to the way-farer ! Be hospitable ! Succour the aggrieved ! Be upright in your dealings ! Shun jealousy, falsehood, back-biting and cowardice ! A true Muslim, the Prophet has said, is one from whose hand and tongue his fellowmen are safe. Bear this always in mind that you hurt no fellowman. Then will you be men in the true sense of the word. Then will you be of those to whom God has promised a life of honour and felicity here as well as in the hereafter.

Ruler of People: Servant of People

It was a summer night. A cool refreshing breeze was gently playing about while pretty little stars were twinkling above. And when, after a restless day of scorching heat, man and bird and beast, all were taking sweet rest, one solitary figure could be seen hovering about in the streets of the town of Medina. This was the man the Muslims had elected to be their King.

In Islam the leader of the people is supposed to be the servant of the people. As was his wont, this King of Islam was out that night on one of his rounds to ascertain for himself the weal and woe of his people. At the outskirts of the town, as he gazed up at the star-bespangled firmament above him, his mind was switched off in a higher direction. The spectacle was simply overwhelming. The whole of his being was filled with the majesty and grandeur of this handiwork of God. And from this his thoughts went up to the good and great God Who had made these great wonderful things. Thus musing upon the sublimity and beauty of God he walked on till he was quite a long way from the town. All of a sudden, in the dark of night, his eyes fell on a flame of fire at a distance. Spurred on by curiosity he turned to-

wards this bright speck and approaching where the light came from, he found a small tent loom in the darkness. As he went nearer, he saw a Beduin seated in front of the shabby tent, his face buried in his hands and a camel standing by. The Beduin was lost in thought and took no notice of this strange visitor.

“Assalam-o-Alaikum !” said the visitor at last, to wake him up from his reverie, but to no effect. The visitor repeated the salutation, yet no reply. A third time, and the Beduin, taking him for a way-farer or a beggar, sternly told him to be off and not to worry him.

“Why, brother? What is the trouble with you?” asked the visitor, not minding the rebuff in the least.

“Don’t you bore me,” shouted the Beduin. “Haven’t I once told you to clear off?”

The visitor insisted to know what the matter was with him. At this the Beduin jumped to his feet to fetch his sword from inside the tent. “If you don’t want to lose your head,” said he, “be off with you. It seems you must be a highwayman out on your game.”

“No brother,” replied the visitor gently. “I am no highwayman. Nor am I a way-farer or a beggar. I live in the town and have come out just for a stroll. Seeing this fire in the wilderness, I

was attracted here. I am afraid you are in trouble. What can I do for you ?”

“Are you a resident of Medina ?” asked the Beduin, a little softened. “What is your profession ?”

“Yes, I belong to Medina. I earn my living by working for others,” replied the visitor.

“Whose servant are you, then ?” asked the Beduin.

“I am the servant of the Muslims. My profession is to work for them,” the visitor replied.

“What has brought you here ?” enquired the Beduin.

“All I want to know is the trouble that keeps you here in the desert in such perplexity,” replied the visitor, taking his seat by the Beduin. As he did so, he heard a cry of pain coming from inside the tent—the cry of a woman.

“Why brother ? Who is it that is crying for pain ?” asked the visitor.

“It is my wife,” replied the Beduin. “She is in the family way. As we were coming along from a long distance her time came. I am a poor man and could not afford to take her to the town to engage a midwife. So I stopped here in the desert. She is in great distress now. Please pray that God may help her in this desert place.”

“Don’t you worry about it in the least,” replied the visitor. “I know a midwife. I am just

going to fetch her. I shall be back with you before long."

"Just wait, please!" said the Beduin. "Don't fetch a midwife. I have got no money to pay her."

"Don't worry on that account either," replied the visitor. "She will want no remuneration. Besides, she will be a great help to your wife."

It was past midnight when the visitor came back to his house. His wife was still up, awaiting her husband's return. Finding him a bit agitated she asked what the matter was. The husband told her the Beduin's story and asked her if she would help a fellow woman in time of need. The wife was as good a Muslim as the husband. She said she was prepared to start that very moment.

"But they look very poor," said the husband. "Is there anything in the house to eat, so that we might take it along with us for the stranded Beduin."

WIFE: "Your own dinner is all that is left."

HUSBAND: "Anything more?"

WIFE: "A jug of goat milk."

HUSBAND: "Anything else?"

WIFE: "A small quantity of flower and a little olive oil."

HUSBAND: "An what more?"

WIFE: "That is all we have in the house."

HUSBAND : " Well, then, have all these things ready. I am going to saddle the camel. We must be quick."

WIFE : " But wouldn't you take your dinner ?"

HUSBAND : " God knows whether these strangers have had any food since morning at all."

WIFE : " Then, do take a little milk."

HUSBAND : " That poor woman would need it. Hurry up ! They must be very anxious. Take a lamp also with you."

In a moment the camel was ready and the husband and the wife started with all the provisions they had in their house, and in a short while they were at the Beduin's tent. Addressing the Beduin, the visitor said :

" Please permit my wife to go in to render whatever help she can."

" It is awfully kind of you. But I don't know how to repay you. I haven't got even so much as a meal," replied the Beduin.

" No question of payment. You just permit my wife in," said the visitor.

While the wife went in, the visitor opened the bag of provisions he had brought with him. Taking out his own dinner he served it before the Beduin and asked him to help himself. The Beduin asked his unknown benefactor that he must also partake of the meal but the food was barely

enough for one man. So the visitor excused himself and the Beduin had a hearty meal. When he had finished it, the two entered into a friendly chat.

BEDUIN : "Are you a native of Medina?"

VISITOR : "No, my birth-place is Mecca."

BEDUIN : "Why did you leave Mecca?"

VISITOR : "I came here along with my master."

BEDUIN : "Has your master set you free?"

VISITOR : "He has put me to the service of Muslims."

BEDUIN : "Have you seen the Prophet's days?"

VISITOR : "Yes, I have had that privilege too."

BEDUIN : "Have you been in the Prophet's company?"

VISITOR : "Of course! Hundreds of times."

BEDUIN : "What a fortunate fellow! Then, surely you must tell me how the Prophet lived and what he taught."

VISITOR : "The Prophet lived a simple life. He wore plain clothes and took simple food. He was very keen on cleanliness. He rose very early and first thing in the morning, he would thoroughly clean his mouth and teeth. He worked very hard and did everything with his own hand. He patched his own clothes, mended his own shoes, milked his own goats, even swept his own floor. God, he would say, loves the man who earns his own living by

honest labour. He helped the poor and took care of the orphans and the widows. He stood by the weak and never did a man in distress go to him who went back disappointed. He respected women. He never gave way to despair. In the face of the greatest obstacles, he always looked for the best. He taught that all men are equal. Though the Prophet of God and the King of Arabia, he never looked upon himself as superior to other men. When on his death bed, he had it announced that if he had offended anyone, he was there ready to suffer the penalty ; if he owed anything to anybody, he was there to repay it. Such was the Prophet's life of love and labour, such his teaching."

BEDUIN : "But you have told me nothing about prayers, fasting, pilgrimage and so many other things which he enjoined."

VISITOR : "Yes, he was very particular about prayers. He said when we say our prayers we are taking a spiritual bath and come out cleaner and refreshed. He also said prayers were like a ladder which took us up to a higher and nobler life. But all worship, he said, was meant to enable us to play our part in life worthily. A man, he said, who says his prayers but does not feel for the orphan and the needy

is saying no Prayers. Prayers must make us truthful, honest, hard-working, fearless, humble, regular—above all, loving and serviceable to fellow-man. Religion, he taught, meant love of God and service to fellowman.”

Renewed restlessness within the tent disturbed their conversation. For a while there was a hush. The Beduin walked up and down and then resuming his seat by the visitor went on with his questions.

BEDUIN : “So you must know Umar too. They say he is a very harsh man.”

VISITOR : “Rather! This is indeed a great defect in him.”

BEDUIN : “I wonder why people elected such a harsh man as their Caliph.”

VISITOR : “Perhaps they could not find a better servant.”

BEDUIN : “Servant! What do you mean? The Caliph must be having the time of his life. He must have plenty of money.”

At this stage a voice from within the tent announced a new comer.

“Amir-ul-Muminin!” said the visitor’s wife from within the tent. “Congratulate your friend. God has blessed him with a son.”

The Beduin was taken aback at the word Amir-ul-Muminin. His visitor was none other than the

Caliph himself. The thought almost overwhelmed him.

“I beg your pardon, Amir-ul-Muminin,” said he, with fear writ large on his face. “I have been rude to you.”

“Don’t you worry about that, friend,” Umar the Great reassured him. “You are as much of a man as I. In the sight of God there is neither high nor low. We are all equal. God loves those who love His creatures. I have only done my duty. In Islam, the leader of the people is the servant of the people.”

The Manliest of Kings

The Isha prayer was over. Every one came out of the great mosque of Medina. Among them there was one whose clothes were simple, but whose face proclaimed him to be a man far above the common run. This man was the King of the Muslims.

A little later, as his wont, this King left his bed and at the dead of night visited a village, a good few miles away from the town. Here he came across a family that was still up, at this late hour of night. The mother had kindled fire by her tent and around the fire were squatted on the ground her three dear little ones. The children were crying their tiny hearts out. And the kettle on the fire showed that the mother was doing some cooking for them.

“What makes these children cry?” asked the stranger tenderly, as he approached the fire.

“Pray, mind your own business. Worry not an unfortunate woman with questions!” replied the gloomy mother.

“Take me for your brother, madam!” reassured the stranger, “and do tell me what the matter is with these children. I feel you are in trouble and I must help you.”

“For the last two days,” said the mother with a sob, “I have not had a morsel to put into these hungry mouths. They cling to me crying for food.

I have nothing to give. So far I have been putting them off. Now it has become unbearable. Yet I have no food to give them. This kettle on the fire contains nothing but water. This is just to console them. They think Mammy is cooking something for them. But alas, it is only a short-lived consolation. In a little while they will find it out. And disappointment this time may break their little hearts."

"Poor little things!" exclaimed the stranger with tears in his eyes, as he rose to his feet. "Worry no more! Be of good cheer! I shall be just back with food." And with a parting kiss to each one of the children he left the family.

It was past midnight and as the King was coming home to fetch provisions for the family in distress, his heart trembled with the fear of God. "God has appointed me to look to the welfare of my people," he said to himself. "Woe unto me if in the kingdom of Islam there should be a single soul suffering from starvation. In the eye of God, the responsibility is mine. In Islam the King is there not to wear a crown and roll in plenty. He is there to bear the burden of his people. He must feel for his people and work for his people. In fact Islam is another name for service of fellow-man and no Muslim is a Muslim who does not live up to that ideal. But a Muslim King is doubly accountable for any omission of this Islamic duty."

Thus musing within himself, the King arrived home speedily and collected a quantity of flour, butter, sugar and dates. This made quite a heavy load and the place it had to go to was a pretty long way off. One of his men offered to carry the load for him. "Will you carry my load for me on the Judgment Day?" came the sharp reply. "As a King it is my duty to look to the well-being of my subjects and it is, therefore, for me to carry this load." And cheerfully he shoved that load on his own Kingly back and carried it all those miles to the starving mother and children.

As the King sat down by the fire-side and the children helped themselves to the dates and the bread which mother soon cooked for them, his face beamed with the delight of seeing misery relieved. "My bread is sweet," shouted the boy. "But my dates are sweeter," retorted sister, and as they merrily frolicked about, the King's heart was filled with joy that no kingly crown could give. He had done his duty and would face God with a clean conscience. As to the mother, she was overwhelmed with emotion. "You ought to be the King instead of Umar," said she, her eyes bubbling with tears of gratitude, little knowing that this unknown visitor was none other than the great Caliph Umar himself. And the next day a stipend was duly allotted to the widow and the orphans out of public treasury.

The Desert Thief

Once upon a time there lived in a lovely oasis in Arabia a man, Ahmad by name. He was the head of his clan and was therefore known as the Sheikh. The Sheikh was a very good man. His fame had spread far and wide. Way-farers found his hospitable door ever open, by day as well as by night. He would do sundry little things for the blind and the cripple. For old women, he would draw water from the well and was ever at the service of those who needed his help. Never did an untruth pollute his lips.

Now the Sheikh had a steed of the purest Arab breed. Throughout the length and breadth of the land wherever there was talk about horses of the finest breed, the name of the Sheikh's animal was invariably on every body's lips. People from far and wide came to see it. The Arabs were very fond of horses and every now and then held horse-show fairs. On these occasions huge crowds would come to witness the feats of the Sheikh's steed. Many were the well-to-do chiefs who offered huge sums for it. But the Sheikh refused to sell it.

It so happened that like the Sheikh's steed, there was one more object which had spread fame.

This was a pretty girl, Layla by name, who came of a nomad tribe and whose matchless beauty was the gossip of the tribes. Many a young lover was attracted to seek her hand. When the fame of the Sheikh's steed reached her ears, she simply could not resist the temptation to obtain possession of it. She yearned for it and was bent upon having it at any cost. But the Sheikh, she was told, was not going to part with the animal for any price. So she hit upon a clever stratagem. She had it announced that she would give her hand to the man who might get her the Sheikh's steed.

Qasim, one of the numerous lovers and an enterprising young lad set out to try his luck. After a long and wearisome journey across the desert, he arrived at the Sheikh's villa. The Sheikh, as was usual with him, treated him with all hospitality. But he would listen to no talk about the steed and refused big offers that Qasim made him. Disappointed to get the horse by fair means, Qasim thought of trying a trick. All, he said to himself, was fair in love and war.

It was the Sheikh's wont to have a ride in the evening and come back home after sunset. One evening as he was returning from one such ride he came across a man by the way-side, wrapped up in a blanket and crying for pain. The Sheikh pulled up

the reins of the horse and stopped by the side of this man.

“What is the matter with you?” he asked the fellow on the ground.

“I am ill,” the man replied. “Pray, have pity on me and take me along to that hamlet!”

The Sheikh dismounted and helped the man to the animal's back, himself holding the reins and walking along in front.

“Wait a bit, please,” said the man on horseback, as they had gone a dozen paces. “You have left my blanket on the ground. Please pick it up.”

And as the Sheikh left the reins to go back for the blanket, the man spurred the horse and bolted off. Looking back, the Sheikh saw that he had been tricked. It was Qasim who turned back and shouted: “Good-bye, Sheikh! I am off. You see how I got the steed you wouldn't give for money.”

“Just one word before you bolt off!” replied the Sheikh.

“Yes, come along. What is it?” shouted Qasim, stopping at a safe distance.

“Just one word,” rejoined the Sheikh, “and if you promise me that, I wouldn't regret the loss of my pet. Should some one ask you how you got the steed, for God's sake, don't tell him you tricked me

It would mean a blot on the good name of Islam and Muslims. A Muslim is above underhand dealings and you must not spoil that reputation.”

Though blind in love, this appeal to his higher self went home to Qasim. There and then he dismounted.

“Here you are!” said he, handing the reins over to the Sheikh. “A son of Islam, I will do nothing to sully the name of Islam.”

END