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ITALIAN HAUNTS OF LORD BYRON.

I.

THERE are no more interesting files of letters in the whole range of literature than those that were addressed to the little back-parlor in Albemarle Street, London, and contained so large a part of the life and adventures of Lord Byron. This little back-parlor was the seraglio of the mighty London publisher Murray, the Garden of Delight to the literary London of fifty years ago, where many a reputation was born or blasted, trumpeted or trampled. All the men of wit and literature about town assembled there to discuss literary novelties, compare notes, usher timid conjectures into the world about the possibility of this or that literary venture being a success, or to sip of that voluminous correspondence which Murray cultivated with his authors, abroad or in the provinces. This correspondence thrived especially with those whose works had been ushered with *éclat* before the world by this Ismail Pacha of publishers, who decided a reputation with a twinkle of his authoritative eye. As the publisher of the poems of Lord Byron, additional glory was acquired by his printers and additional guineas rolled into his coffers. But more interesting perhaps even than the poems of Lord Byron are the letters in which he details their conception, elaboration, interruptions, and final triumph over the world, the pen, and the printer's devil. For one of his chief difficulties was the illegibility of his handwriting, and his chief torment was the bosh diabolical which the printers made of it. These letters sparkled like fireflies and showered like hail upon the enamored Murray as he sat in his back-parlor, warmed his feet before a sea-coal

WHAT I SAW OF THE SHAH.

Persicos odi apparatus.

—HORACE.

IT is admitted on all hands that the visit of the Persian autocrat to the seats of power in Europe is one of the notable events in the century. What was the motive of those eccentric journeyings is still, and is likely to remain, a mystery. Speculation has been busy with this problem, but so far has failed to penetrate the secret. For my own mind this question from the first had a strange interest. Numberless were the fantastic suppositions that occurred to me, only to be at once dismissed as chimerical. Was it for a moment to be credited that the most selfish and self-willed of Asiatic despots was thus making the round of European courts simply in quest of the best means of promoting the welfare of his subjects under a liberal administration? The notion seemed preposterous. Was he actuated merely by the desire to "see life" and to show his jewels? This appeared more plausible, but on the whole was not believed to furnish an adequate explanation. Was his purpose fulfilled when he had seen kings, or did he wish to be brought in contact with the people? One thing was evident, that he not only tolerated but encouraged the presence of crowds at his festivals. On the occasion of these grand assemblages did he confine his notice to the mass of people in general, or did he sometimes fix an earnest scrutiny upon individuals? The answer to this inquiry I adjourned to the future, as I did also the reply to another question which at this time recurred very often and held its place with obstinate persistence: Was there any particular person then in Europe whom Nasr-ed-din expected and wished to see, and was it within the bounds of reasonable conjecture that that person might be *myself*? Absurd as it may, and doubtless will, strike the reader, this last idea haunted me like a nightmare. Having on account of certain peculiar mental symptoms which had excited the attention and awakened the anxiety of my physicians, been put upon a spare diet, I never transgressed the stringent rules of my medical adviser without paying the forfeit for the indulgence by a night of troubled dreams. The prescriptions by following which I alone found the "kind nepenthe" of sleep, only had the effect of aggravating this nocturnal torture. As no relief could be discovered for my ailment, I was directed to try the effect of an entire change of air and scene; and partly because of the beneficial results which it was hoped would be produced by the sudden shock upon the nerves in the great metropolis, and the more gradual relaxation of the mind which is usually consequent on foreign travel, was strongly exhorted to take lodgings for a fortnight or three weeks in the heart of London, and then to spend several months in leisurely rambles over the Continent.

The time fixed for my arrival in the English capital was the 18th of May, 1873; and my purpose had hardly been formed and communicated to a few intimate friends, when I was startled one morning at the breakfast-table by a telegram in the *Times*, announcing officially that the same date precisely had been determined upon for the arrival there of his Majesty the Shah of Persia. This remarkable coincidence in our plans, a coincidence indeed which might perhaps be set down to the merest accident, once more set me to thinking, and in spite of every protest of my better reason, woke into new activity the slumbering suspicion that had tormented me in the earlier stages of my affliction. The Persian Shah now tyrannised over my dreams with as incessant and remorseless a dominion as that nightly exercised over the visions of De Quincey by the wandering Malay to whom he had given a large piece of opium, which the famished infidel had swallowed at a single mouthful. Sometimes the mysterious visitant from Iran would appear to me seated before a gigantic blackboard, involved in clouds of tobacco smoke, expounding to a class composed of all the nations of Europe a law (more potent than the formula of Grimm) which comprehended and unified not only the Indo-Germanic and Semitic, but also the so-called Turanian and monosyllabic languages of the earth. Oftener in these midnight fancies I gazed upon the pomp of infinite processions, in which Nasr-ed-din was the central figure; or of armies so vast as to throw the fabled hordes of Xerxes into insignificance, at the head of which Nasr-ed-din with blazing turban and flaming cimetar was leading on the dark hosts of the eastern hemisphere to avenge the disasters of the Indus and of Marathon. But the vision that most frequently plagued my serenity, and which sometimes caused me to spring from my bed in a clammy tremor, was one which with much variety in the details of the scenery always presented the Shah as the chief of the Magi — now bending over an astrolabe, now staring with blood-shot eyes upon the stars; now inscribing in Arabic characters upon a writing tablet the mystic legend, "It is written in the laws of the Medes and Persians that Nasr-ed-din shall take summary vengeance on the Barbarian ———." I was never able to fill the blank, but sometimes imagined that I could make out a few letters of my own name.

When the day appointed for my journey had come round I set off for London, and at the time that had been pre-arranged got out of my Hansom and quietly occupied my two adjoining rooms, in Cork Street, near Burlington Arcade, a little to the rear of Regent Street Crescent. That very day, if my information is correct, the Asiatic monarch entered the doors of Buckingham Palace. The London season was now at its height; but no persuasion or entreaty could induce me to visit the Sydenham Crystal Palace, the Alhambra, the Tower, the Bank, the Docks, the Royal Albert Hall, or any of the places where the populace thronged daily to witness the spectacle of Eastern apathy under the tuition of Western reserve. One Sunday I ventured into Westminster Abbey, where I stood in the crowded aisle near the Collingwood monument, and heard Dean Stanley discourse with honeyed scholarship of Ahasuerus (whom he very properly iden-

tified with Xerxes) and the Persian dynasty, and refer eloquently to the advent of "the king of kings" to the shores of England. Secluding myself more and more from impertinent observation, I began to lead a comparatively tranquil life, albeit I could not wholly shut out from my dreams the dusky features of "the son of heaven."

At the expiration of the period that had been assigned to my stay in London I resolved to cross the Channel to Calais. No sooner had I settled on my programme and the day of my departure than there appeared an official bulletin, setting forth the intention of his Majesty of Persia to avail himself of the same opportunity. In sheer desperation I embarked at Dover for Ostend, instead of Calais, and lingered among the *musees* of Belgium and Holland until I was certainly assured that Nasr-ed-din had completed his observations in France and Germany and had retired to the south of Europe, to Italy if my unfaithful recollection does not in this as in so many other instances play me false. After a sojourn of some weeks in the chief cities of Prussia and Saxony I turned my steps towards the *Weltausstellung* at Vienna. My week in the Austrian capital was nearly over, when one day as I was waiting for the Imperial band to play in the square in front of the *Hofburg*, I was shocked to overhear an allusion to the expected visit of the Shah of Persia. It turned out that the wily old heathen was looked for the very next day. This was at noon of Wednesday or Thursday. Friday passed and still no stir of preparation. My fears were a little aroused by the *on dit* that his Majesty the Shah would visit the Exposition on Monday. To set my mind perfectly at ease I resolved to make my last pilgrimage to the giant show on Saturday. Accordingly I whiled away Saturday forenoon in the Liechtenstein Gallery, and then took my seat on the tramway to the *Prater*.

There was an unusual crowd about one of the side-doors of the Rotunda as I passed under the bannered arch connecting the open circular space with the long narrow aisle or highway running down the middle of the building. I found myself standing beneath the great dome and in the splendid airy region of the bronze fountain. Hurried onward by the current, though in a line deflected off from the long axis of the building, my curiosity was attracted to a lane of human beings which had been formed between this door and a point somewhere in the interior. As I approached the outer boundary of one of the crowds which constituted the two sides of this lane, I noticed that every eye was intently directed towards the side-door. After considerable delay the Imperial band of Austria, in their white uniforms, brass helmets and with long masses of white horse-hair hanging down their shoulders, proceeded one by one along the circular gallery of the rotunda, and took their station at a point immediately opposite the side-entrance, so as to face that part of the building towards which everybody was now steadily looking. In the distance they appeared about the size of the toy soldiers that are put up in boxes for Christmas.

Again and again the curiosity of the expectant multitude was piqued, only to be disappointed; but at length a marshal with a bâton, preceded by an officer of the constabulary who forcibly cleared the

way by pushing the crowd back to the right and left, advanced down the lane of which I have spoken about as far as the place where I was standing, at which point he turned round and waved his arm. Then at some signal from the Grand Marshal every bell in the Exposition Palace was struck, every organ, harmonium, and piano began to play, and the band in the remote gallery took up the strains of the now too familiar Persian march. Now, at last, the unreasonable patience of the gazers was rewarded and their hopes were fully gratified. Walking slowly down the lane at some distance to the rear of the marshal I saw a modest looking gentleman, whom I afterwards supposed to be Sir Henry Rawlinson. Just behind him came the Emperor of Austria, his somewhat small but elegant figure starred all over with imperial decorations, and at his side a personage who deserves a more particular mention. Shuddering as I beheld him under a sudden access of my malady, shaken with superstitious "terrors never felt before," I yet managed to get a whiff of air from the park and to preserve my balance well enough to observe the royal stranger with acute attention. This I was enabled to do better from the fact that the foreign potentate was on the side nearest me, being on the Emperor's right hand. He was rather below the middle stature, and of slight proportions, and wore a little black hat without a brim, and which was higher on one side than the other. Upon the front and at the upper corner of this hat was an aigrette, displaying a little, stiff, upright white plume, and a diamond of surpassing brilliancy that flashed and sparkled in the sunlight as the small head was turned in one direction or another. A simple black tunic or blouse, gathered together at the waist, invested so much as was visible of the trunk and limbs. This remarkable garment, though ornamented but in one way, is the envy and despair of all jewellers. In the centre was a rosette composed wholly of precious stones, apparently diamonds, some of which were of great size; and the breast of the coat was spangled on both sides with gems of the finest water, diamonds in parallel rows everywhere taking the place of the braid on an officer's uniform, and glittering and scintillating like icicles on a winter's morning. The face was the very same which had transmuted my dreams into agony, and was hardly more distinct and vivid in the impression that it now made upon me. It was indeed Nasr-ed-din himself, the Shah of Persia. Frail and even insignificant as he appeared in his person, there was something in his port and mien that struck me as really majestic. As he moved deliberately forward he carried his head from side to side like a captive eagle, with a sort of easy swing that gave him an air of lofty and at the same time unaffected condescension, not unmingled with habitual disdain. His features were nearly regular, nose straight and finely shaped, moustache originally jet-black, face and chin shaved clean. The color of his face was a shade browner than dingy tallow. His eyes were as black as hate and treachery, and the whites were tinged with jaundice yellow and streaked with ferocious blood and animalism, yet it would be an error to imagine that they did not express a high degree of alert intelligence. Not one sign of the apathy that has been attributed to him, though perhaps there was Oriental languor — the face

of a miscreant who chanced to be also a despot. From time to time he nodded his serene approval as he glanced through his eye-glass over the sea of heads, up at the lamp-shade roof of the rotunda or down at the show-cases, the central fountain, and other objects that attracted his notice out of the many that together made up the enchanted circuit of gaiety and magnificence then shining in the sun-beams or flickering among the restless shadows.

Unable to stand it any longer, I rushed away to meet a friend with whom I had an appointment to lunch at the English Dining Rooms ; but the frantic rabble had invaded all the passages, and rendered either ingress or egress by the main avenues almost impossible. Many of the people were stumbling over one another in headlong confusion like men in a panic ; others, like old and sagacious fox-hunters, were quietly taking the short cuts. Following the example of the latter I soon found myself once more in one of the principal thoroughfares, where I was again constrained to wait and be passed by the Shah of Persia. Just before he reached me he was laughing and talking with the complaisant Emperor ; but as he was on the point of passing the spot where I stood wedged in, he flung towards the group of persons near me a glance of wrath and scorn as deadly as the blight of the sirocco. At first I thought it was meant for *me* ; but it turned out that somebody had disturbed his royal equanimity, either by pressing too close to him or by making too loud a noise in his hearing. After my refectation was ended I attempted to make my way to the Turkish Bazaar, which is situated outside of the main building, and very near the Persian Pavilion, the Viceroy's Palace, the Italian Restaurant, and Strauss's Band-Arbor. It so happened that I had to pass (on the outside) the side-entrance to the rotunda of which I have already spoken, and noticed a row of open carriages, with drivers and footmen in livery, standing at the portal. Crowds of idlers beset the door both on the outside and on the inside. When I first looked, the throng on the inside was divided by a lane of faces similar to the one I have elsewhere described ; but after watching it awhile I saw this lane of heads break up, and the individuals composing the interior crowd mingle together in one homogeneous mass. Seeing the Austrian band had taken a position near the Persian Pavilion, and not far from the palace of the Khedive of Egypt, I went in that direction, and found myself at the door of the pavilion, and on the edge or outskirts of still another throng of sight-seers. Just as I arrived there, the door of the pavilion opened, and the Shah came out as if by accident, and passed me once more ; this time so near that I almost touched him, and thought I could detect the dark gleam of an uncut and dusty opal on his coat just under the sleeve of his right arm. This time there was no one between me and the wind of his celestial majesty, and actuated by the blind instinct of Western courtesy, even while I quailed before those searching eye-balls, I uncovered my head in presence of the guest of Austria. To my astonishment the jewelled head of Persia was uncovered to me in return. The action would have graced a European diplomat or an American politician. What could it all mean? To me it meant "miching mallecho," as Hamlet puts it. Before, however, I had time

to collect my thoughts, the Shah had been admitted through a private entrance into the sanctuary of his brother of Egypt. The palace erected by the Khedive on the Prater is modelled after the pattern of the half-dozen others which he has in the East, and is one of the most interesting buildings in Europe. It answers perfectly to the descriptions of similar structures in the Arabian Nights. I had been all through it before, and what had attracted me most was the interior courts—paved with parti-colored stones, planted with exotic trees and shrubs, and refreshed with the incessant drip of cooling fountains. One of these courts, which was surrounded on the inside by the usual verandah and upper gallery or extended balcony, was also provided on one side with an iron railing, through which it was partially visible to any one standing on the bare ground beyond the Viceroy's limits. Noticing some appearances of excitement in the court, I placed myself where I could look between the tall iron bars and see what was going on within. What I saw was well adapted to raise surprise to the point of admiration. The camels and asses of the Viceroy, urged to a brisk trot by their Egyptian drivers, were going round and round the quadrangular enclosure; while, as I gazed, the Austrian military band again struck up the detested Persian march, and the bejewelled Shah came out of one of the upper chambers upon the balcony, and paced slowly backward and forward once or twice in full view. The Khedive, although himself absent in Turkey, had it seemed prepared this congenial entertainment for the most sated yet unwearied of professional sight-seers. As the swarthy Egyptians leaned forward on the camel's humps (looking in their turbans and flowing vesture not unlike our European ladies on their side-saddles), and quickened the movements of the huge brutes into the rapid time required by the music, the Imperial Band ceased playing, and the renowned orchestra of Herr Johann Strauss took up the discontinued theme, from their amphitheatrical band-arbor. Not a word did I hear around me but German, French and Italian. It was as if the ends of the earth had met together—the Copts, the Fire-worshippers, the Goths, the Gauls, the Romans. Presently the satiated Shah retired to the recesses of his Sahidic solitude, and I in turn fled to seek my usual afternoon solace from Strauss's violins and the never-failing solo on the cornet-à-pistons by the vainglorious Herr Hoch. As I was following the musicians in their laudable effort to disentangle a well-known air from a mesh of seemingly inextricable variations, I observed a number of carriages move off from the rotunda door of the Exposition Palace, and after a pause at the Khedive's gateway, saw one of the landaus bearing off a mass of glittering diamonds and a little stiff white plume that set my heart all in a flutter. That evening at *Schönbrunn* I dreaded another rencontre with the Shah; but the silent fountains and the desolation of the *Gloriette*, and of those matchless lawns and vast forest-walls cropped into hedgerows, proclaimed that the multitude had gone elsewhere to see the soft raiment of Persia.

Monday I executed my purpose of leaving Vienna. I went first to Munich, and whiled away another week or fortnight in the Bavarian capital. From the banks of Isar my wandering fancy took me to the

valley of the Inn and to the ruddy precipices of the Tyrolese Alps. Here I recovered something of my ancient peace of mind, strolling by the river-side among the slim forms of the pale Lombardy poplars, and over wide level reaches of Indian corn, and under abrupt gaunt cliffs which lift their extensive wall of uncouth rock nine and ten thousand feet above the sea. The rose and lilac or violet tints of the evening mountains were delicious, and touched my feelings like a sonata of Beethoven. One day I looked out of my window at Innspruck and saw a detachment of Tyrolese mounted riflemen drawn up in the shabby but somewhat quaint old street in front of the hotel. The uniform was gray, with facings of green; though most of them had on overcoats of a darker color, to protect them against the rain which was falling in torrents. Every man of them wore a black felt hat with the broad brim turned up at one side and fastened to the crown, and each hat was surmounted by a dark green feather and a bunch of fresh green oak-leaves. They appeared to be expecting some distinguished arrival; and dispersed, with a flourish of trumpets, as soon as the carriages, looking as wet as water-rats, had come rolling in from the railway station. Of course the vehicles all had the glass down. The next morning just after breakfast, as I was standing at the door of my hotel and gazing out upon the almost empty street, a barouche or open carriage of some kind slowly passed along, preceded and followed by one or two others, which contained a man whose face once seen could never be forgotten. It was a face not wholly unknown to me, and riveted my gaze like the head of Medusa. It was a man of low stature and frail physique, and a dull atrabilious complexion. On his head was a small black cap or brimless hat, from the side of which uprose a small stiff plume of triangular shape, with the apex of the inverted triangle fastened by an invaluable gem. His black frock was studded all over with diamonds, which glittered like constellations in an Alpine night. It was, of course, my mortal enemy the Shah. This time he wore spectacles, and was bending forward as if to listen intently to some remark from an Austrian General of many ribbons and medals whose monstrous gray whiskers confronted him from the opposite seat, and whose cocked hat (which the General held in his hand) filled the bottom of the carriage with a profusion of white feathers. Every moment I expected the princely visitor to fix his solemn regards on me; but the pageant was soon over, and passed without any such alarming incident.

This sudden apparition of the unlooked-for Persian on the classic ground of Andrew Höfer not only troubled, but appalled me; for, be it known, the Shah had been to Innspruck once before that very summer. It was the knowledge of this fact which had induced me to go there rather than to Switzerland, and had allayed my morbid apprehensions of any further intrusion of his hateful presence. The fear thus strangely reawakened was altogether abject (I admit it), and was not in the least quieted by the story trumped up to explain the otherwise inexplicable reappearance of Persian diamonds among the fastnesses of the Tyrol. On the occasion of his first visit to this picturesque region his Majesty (so it was given out) had been asleep in his railway-carriage, and his attendants had not dared to disturb

his elysian meditations. This was so evidently a manufactured tale to throw dust into the eyes, of the unthinking multitude, and thus hide his real purpose, that I leave the sensible reader to draw his own conclusions from the facts as I have recorded them.

Staggered and all but stupefied by this mysterious occurrence, and with a fixed presentiment of coming evil, the sun was hardly down before I retired to my bed-room, to take my usual composing draught, and to speculate on the possible tremendous issues of the future. The moon had not yet risen on the jagged pinnacles at the back of the town, which were yet faintly glowing with the hazy sunset, and the outlines of the different articles of furniture in my room were by this time scarcely distinguishable in the dubious twilight. I fell into a reverie, and became quite unconscious of the lapse of time and the advance of darkness. Presently my eyelids began to droop, and I was transported in fancy to the gardens of Astrabad. The bulbul was hidden amongst the swaying branches of neighboring fruit-trees and under the thick covert formed by luxuriant masses of flowers and Oriental shrubbery; but I heard its song. Above the motionless tree-tops I could just descry a flotilla of moon-shaped domes and minarets. A maid of the East, with eyelids darkened with kohl, sat on a bank of verdure near the edge of a tessellated pavement of white and red marble, in the centre of which was a circular basin of pure water from which a fountain sprang in a white column and then fell back in rainbow spray, and was touching the strings of a lute and murmuring a ditty of Hafiz about the rose. Gradually and voluptuously (as in those pretty dioramic shows called dissolving views) the scene changed, and I beheld a long train of pilgrim-warriors of the Orient, who as they marched before the chariot of some great hero were chanting some heroic measures from Firdusi. Again the scene shifted, and I dreamed this time of Turks and Saracens, of famines and frightful conflagrations, of Mediterranean shipwrecks, of Dutch fish-wives and their marvellous headgear, of Venetian cafés and Vienna Expositions, of Strauss and the "Beautiful Blue Danube," of turbans and tomtoms, bulbs and bulbuls, roses, Raphaels; lutes, Loreleis and the Niebelungen frescoes. Once more the kaleidoscope was shaken, and this time the effect was novel and startling. By the light of the pale stars I saw voluminous masses of pitch-black clouds hurrying with solemn haste across the sky, which as I gazed upon them (and without producing any surprise in my mind) seemed to change into the outspread wings of the Arabian *roc*, bearing from the shores of Europe a gigantic spectre enveloped in an enormous afghan, whose exaggerated features impressed me as being painfully like those of my hated familiar. The great bird, however, I thought, veered from the direct course, descended towards the valley of the Inn, and making a sudden stoop, alighted on the roof of the house where I was lodging. The clap with which the ungainly fowl brought his huge wings together roused me. A gust of air from the bleak Alps had slammed-to the shutter. I rose chilled through and through, lighted my lamp, intending to look over my account-book, and jumped into bed. My head had no sooner pressed the pillow than I fell into a light sleep, and was instantly snatched away again into the

realm of fantasy. The silken fetters of the slumber which now bound me fast were so exquisitely delicate and ethereal that, as is usual in such cases, my dream was distinct, vivid, consistent, almost like reality itself.

The dream too was one to be remembered in terror while life lasts. I thought I was in utter darkness, with manacles on my wrist, a gag in my mouth and a handkerchief pressed tight against my forehead, but evidently in the midst of a scene of bewildering novelty. On the sudden removal of the bandage from my eyes I was wrapt in a blaze of splendor so unutterable that for the instant it had almost blinded me, and intoxicated to the verge of delirium by a rush of sweet odors. By degrees I became sensible that I was standing before a heavily-draped structure of a pyramidal outline, somewhat like that of a pagoda, and which occupied at its base an area of many acres, not as is usually the case at the entrance of a temple, but in the central portion of a hall of unimaginable vastness and magnificence. The architecture of this cavernous and yet mosque-like building, considered as a whole, was apparently a combination of the Hindu and old Persian with the later Mohammedan styles; in the main, though there were traces here and there of India, and even of Egypt, the style was the Saracenic and Moresque, although there were many features for which I can find no counterpart elsewhere. There were reminiscences of temples like those of Bahar, Tanjore, Ajmeer, and the famous Taj Mahal near Agra; but the points of resemblance were far more numerous to such royal residences as the Alhambra in Granada, the Alcazar at Seville, and the Az-zahrá at Córdoba, and to such sacred Eastern edifices as the Mosque of Omar and Santa Sophia. Subsequent study has led me to notice a striking similarity too between the hall of my dream and the mosque at Chunar Gur on the Ganges, which structure has been thought to illustrate the well-known fact that much of the architecture of India was brought in the first instance from Persia by the descendants of Timour, and carried with certain modifications into Europe by the Moriscos of Spain. The occasional short antique pillars of rude solidity and Egyptian figure, though not of Egyptian regularity, which sustained the main walls and their supporting arches hinted, however, of a style that has never been imported from the Orient, and was coeval with some of the earlier periods of the Indic and Persic civilisation. Overhead sprang a profusion of mighty domes of the Saracenic or bulbous variety, the tallest of which seemed distant as the zenith from the horizon. The floor was a pavement of porphyry, malachite, and variegated and white marbles arranged in a pattern of tessellated octagons, stars and other figures formed by the rectangular intersections of zigzag lines. Upon this floor, disposed in concentric circles all around the pagoda and the clear interspace in which I was standing, lay an innumerable population of Indians and Persians, among whom were mixed many strange swart-ruddy beings whom I at once recognised as original Aryans. The contrasts of color presented by their raiment and their dusky skins were among the most striking I had ever witnessed. Their lean slender hands were all clasped as if in prayer, and the polished floor was everywhere stained as if with their tears.

There were other contrasts, however, of color and brilliancy which were infinitely more splendid than those afforded by the robes and complexions of this motley multitude. The interior of the palace roof consisted of a series of concave ceilings and cupolas, covered with a mosaic of blue, red, and other gay tints, and at intervals with projections of gold, and laid off in square panels or coffers containing lozenges filled with roses, and enriched with foliage, flowers, geometrical devices, painting, sculpture, arabesques, scrolls, and sentences from the Korân in an elaborate style of calligraphy—the whole making up an enchanting aerial labyrinth. The innermost of these ceilings was a mosaic of dark gold and precious stones, with a boundary of honeycomb fretwork, and was rough with opals, emeralds, and other gems of every known name, size and hue. From this roof, like stalactites in a cave, there hung solid dependencies, to which were attached gold chains, and twisted cords of the same metal, terminating in a multitude of silver lamps of massive and curious workmanship and often of the highest artistic beauty; and to meet them there rose, like stalagmites, around the outer margin of the hall, upright stone pillars in the shape of candelabra, and bearing cressets also of silver, and also of rare Oriental beauty. The joint light of these innumerable lamps and cressets was caught up by a succession of multiplying steel mirrors gleaming with pearl and *nacre* and set in frames of lattice and open trellis-work, and was reflected again by the jewels that clustered like grapes in the curve of every horse-shoe arch and pointed crescent, and round the decorated chapter of every slender column. Thousands upon thousands of these light shining columns stood like a forest of jasper and white marble under the seeming weight of their crescent arches and perforated battlements in the remoter glooms of the hall beyond the most distant circle of worshippers. Far away, and foreshortened in perspective, a noble portal of red granite revealed a fairy-land of paradisiacal gardens. In the grand airy region under the principal domes the light gradually increased to an intensity of almost celestial brightness that shed a glory over the whole scene, producing in me a rapture of admiration that almost became pain. As if to mitigate in part this excess of illumination, censers swung by fire-worshippers in flame-colored scarfs and turbans, filled the air beneath with violet fumes of incense.

Presently a sonorous voice, which seemed to be instantly repeated from the invisible exterior minarets, proclaimed that the head of the nefarious barbarian would now be taken from his shoulders. Through a flash of cimetars leaping from their scabbards I saw before me, and in the very heart of the pagoda which was now thrown open, under an immense pavilion of scarlet and on an elevated dais, a turbaned throng of coal-black eunuchs, swarthy Brahmans, fakirs and dervishes, white-bearded mollahs, ominous-browed cadis, rosy captives from Gurgistan, veiled Circassian houris, and Persian satraps and emirs. The high officials of Persia, and all the dignitaries of blood, rank, and opulence, and the beauties under clouds of white gauze, were invested in habiliments of the most costly fabric and brightest variety of color. Notwithstanding my apprehensions, I gazed on the splendid pageant with irresistible admiration.

As I was wistfully regarding them a trumpet sounded. The note was repeated. At the third summons one of the viziers turned and waved his arm quickly backwards and forwards in the air. At this signal the royal retinue parted, falling back like a pair of folding doors, and languidly reclining on a divan of purple velvet disclosed the form of that being of whom more than any other on earth I stood in horror—the imperial wanderer from Shushan and Persepolis, the inscrutable successor of Darius Codomannus. He was arrayed in a superb turban glittering with diamonds, and flowing outer robe and mantle. Near him lay several headless trunks, and the pavement before him was splashed with blood. Transfixing me with his black and yellow eyeballs that glared upon me with more than carnivorous ferocity and lustre, just as the slave in the white turban, who had been standing near by mute and motionless, was about to obey a signal from the Grand Vizier, and was actually drawing from its sheath the awful symbol of justice, Nasr-ed-din himself springing to his feet, with rapid motions drew from his own girdle a jewel-hilted dagger, and raising it with an imperious sweep of his arm above my head as I vainly struggled to cry for help, bounded forward like a royal Bengal tiger, seized me by the trembling beard, and in a voice which “grated harsh thunder,” uttered a sound for all the world like the creaking of my chamber-door.

I was now awake and took in the situation at a glance. My eye was riveted by a sight it encountered about midway between the door and the bed-post. There in the dull glow of the lamp, which was burning low, stood a heavily-muffled figure, evidently that of a man. As I looked, with hair erect and heart beating violently, the figure threw off a great cloak lined with some red material, unmuffled itself of an inner scarf, and disclosed (as I am an honest man and in my sound senses) the Shah of Persia himself in veritable flesh and blood, in a plain black caftan and large bell-crowned hat. I sat bolt upright in bed. Opening his lips at length, the Shah addressed me in a few unintelligible sentences. He spoke volubly, and, as I have no doubt, in Persian. One word only I was able to remember certainly, the word *jâhil*, which I have since learned means “fool.” Finding that the vernacular would not do, he burst impetuously into French, rolling his *r*'s like a German. Now and then he had recourse, I thought, to Arabic, a language with which I had picked up a scant acquaintance some years previously in Palestine and Constantinople. I fancied at least I was able to make out a few vehement imprecations. Seeing these efforts to be hopeless, he presently muttered between his clenched teeth, and with a look of fury, the following sentences in his best English:—“Miszcreant! didszt zinks do escabe ME? Didszt ze not know zat I Gould hev made oll Europa doo haut to hold you? *Morbieu!* I vould has zacked a-very zeettee. of ze beauteéfle East but I vould hev unearthed you!” As he gave expression to this terrible threat he stamped with his slipped foot and glared upon me in a way that put me in mind of Browning's lynx—

“Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls.”

When I reflected upon his diminutive size, and thought of the loaded

revolver under my pillow and of the party of stalwart Englishmen on the next *étage*, I became outwardly calm. Nevertheless I must own that I was miserably perturbed. The disordered state of my nerves, the mental disease under which I had been for so long laboring, my previous inexplicable fears of this very personage, the presentiments which had pointed so accurately to this very meeting, my recent dream—all contributed to unhinge me completely. "Sire," I exclaimed faintly, "there certainly must be some painful mistake. Upon honor, I am entirely at fault as to your meaning. It must surely be some other man." Disregarding, with an impatient frown, this attempt at an expostulation, the old heathen went on remorselessly: "Ze grand zegrét vot you hugg is deadly—neetro-gleezereén—jeeant-poodè-re! Kinks zey do hev long ar-r-r-rms!" Then, after a pause: "I *veel* hev it of you! It eez ein leetil vord!" Here his tone softened visibly: "Entrust it to safe ears! I shall dell it to no mans!" Even in the midst of my fright I was somewhat tickled at the grotesque appearance of his Majesty during the interview. The figure he cut was certainly in itself a rather comical one. The odd idea struck me that he was a cross between the dodo and the vulture. On the whole, however, my abject timidity and a certain weird feeling of the eerie and the supernatural conquered all sense of what was ludicrous in the situation. "I can zay leetil vord, and *presto!* his head is off. But no, I *veel* virst dry to obtains vat I zeek by inducements ze more agreable." Then with a leer of hypocritical affection, "*Eh bien! Vare eez it!*" I protested with still greater earnestness than before that I knew no secret—that I could not conjecture what he would be at—that surely it must be a case of mistaken identity, like that of the Tichborne claimant, of which his Majesty had doubtless heard something when in England. The suzerain resumed as follows: "My vizier grand he shall hev been undère ze arrest. Vot for it pe? Von leetil vord from you shall make him quite correct. *Allons! vite! Vare it do pe?*" By this time I was all but distracted. What with suppressed emotion and the protracted nervous strain I had undergone, I could stand it no longer. Unbuttoning the collar of my night-wrapper, and inwardly breathing the wish that "this too, too solid flesh would melt" and "dissolve into a dew," I heaved an involuntary sigh. Observing my strong feeling and thinking he had at last made an impression on me, the Sultan again took up the thread of his discourse, and in this instance made a very clever appeal to my humanity. "My bepils," quoth he, "zey pe oll dying like zo many zeeb viz a murrain: zare carcasse zey do offends ze g-great zon, ze g-gry of ze survivor he go up to heaven as ze gry of Niobe or Hagar-r-r. Varefores zey die?" Satisfied that he had now effected a practicable breach, his Majesty advanced like a forlorn hope and recklessly expended upon me his last shot. Putting on the wheedling manner he had used once before, and eagerly perusing my countenance, he whispered under his breath, "Do you *veesh* for monish?—*Voilà!*" and opening his caftan Nasr-ed-din displayed to my astonished view a diamond necklace which would have driven the jewellers of the Palais Royal to suicide for very envy. When he saw that he had not even yet succeeded he at first seemed stunned, and

then in a broken voice said, "In ze name of ze prophet, *vare it vas?*" This was his Parthian arrow. Finding that he could do no more he sat down on a chair, and carefully removing his bell-crowned hat from his head, placed it deliberately between his knees. As he did so I noticed that he wore a scratch. He then took a pair of pewter spectacles out of a pocket in the caftan, and drew from the deep recesses of the bell-crowned hat a large yellow bandanna handkerchief, slowly unfolded it, spread it out in his lap, and proceeded to wipe his glasses with the corner of it. The hat and handkerchief were both of antique pattern and originally of rich materials, but had both seen their best days. He then adjusted his spectacles on the tip of his nose, and looked over them at me steadily and reproachfully. I did not fail even then to take notice that they were of the old-fashioned sliding sort, and a very big pair, something like goggles. It is strange what queer fancies may pass through a man's brain even when it is most perplexed with care or apprehension. It occurred to me, just at this moment, that he looked something like an old dyspeptic owl, and something like a colored barber who had once dressed my hair in America. One may have an intellectual judgment that a given thing is mirthful without the slightest corresponding feeling. On the present occasion my risibles did not respond in the least to the impertinent suggestions of my reason. I was as solemn as a judge. So was the Shah.

His Majesty at this stage in the proceedings inserted his hand into another pocket of the caftan and brought out a damaged gold snuff-box, rapped it with his elbow and knuckles, and thrust some of the fragrant powder into his nostrils. Apparently he was not accustomed to this mode of using the seductive narcotic, for he sneezed. He sneezed a second time. He then surveyed me again with a most dolorous aspect through his spectacles, after which he took them off, wiped them softly with the bandanna, quietly put the bandanna once more in the bottom of his hat, and restored the glasses to their receptacle in the caftan. Here he rose up from his seat with the brisk movement and solemn absurdity of a Jack-in-the-Box. He then got into a terrific passion, during which he stamped violently on the carpet, ground his teeth, tore his wig off, shook his little fist in my face, and finally broke down utterly; and resuming his seat in the chair, fumbled in the bell-crowned hat for the handkerchief, and at length, and with the manner of one who is utterly overcome with grief, bowed his sovereign head, buried his face in the depths of the bandanna and sobbed like a child, catching his breath at the end of each paroxysm like a little boy who has the whooping-cough, or who is in a towering rage. Finding all his schemes frustrated, foiled for the first time in his life in one of his darling projects, unhabituated to contradiction, and (in the absence of his vizier and suite, and of the usual appliances of torture) wholly destitute of the means to enforce his authority and punish the offender, the discrowned monarch presented a most pitiable illustration of the imperfection of Eastern governments, as well as of the vanity of human wishes. My fear and disgust had never left me any room for derision, and they were now mixed with compassion. I could not but pity even while I

loathed and dreaded him. The preposterous and abhorred Merry Andrew had become a sort of helpless and desolate King Lear. When the fit was over, he hurriedly arranged his disordered toilet and put himself in readiness for a speedy departure. This event was hastened by the noise made by somebody scratching at the door. Starting up, the Shah glided, or rather shuffled, stealthily over the floor and out of the apartment. As he retreated he scowled upon me with a look (which I can never forget) of baffled malice, and uttered something in English which had to my ear a ghastly likeness to the Arabian proverb about death being "the terminator of delights and the separator of companions."

Peering through the crack of the door, which his Majesty had failed to close, I saw the Shah and some one else enter the opposite room and heard the key turn in the lock. Springing from the low bed, I dashed on my clothes, seized the muffler which his Majesty had dropped in his haste, and—incontinently fled. *Proh pudor!* you will say, and so do I. As soon as I was out of hearing I uttered a scream of relief and joy. It was fortunate for me that I was in time to catch a night-train for Venice, where I spent a few days at Danieli's, and then proceeded, in a state of extreme physical prostration, *via* Verona and Milan as far as Belaggio on Lake Como. Here I sat down wearily and drank in a tide of peace among the myrtles and olives and rare wild-flowers of those grand blue hills and translucent waters. As soon as I could command the strength to do so, I wrote to Innspruck, enclosing the amount of my unpaid bill there, and demanding my portmanteau and alpenstock. My friends and I often talk over my mysterious adventure with Nasr-ed-din. Some of them indeed have provoked my resentment by foolishly endeavoring to explain the whole thing away, either as an opium-dream, an optical delusion, a crazy hallucination partly founded on fact, or as a prank of my foreign-travelling companion in collusion with my doctor. Nothing could be more untenable than every one of these suppositions. I have thought very much about the matter, and have never ceased to speculate what information it could have been that the Sultan was so anxious to get from me. All is not gold that glitters, and they may be right who surmise that the snuff-box was of some baser material. The muffler I still keep as a souvenir, and as an indemnity for many evils. I have indeed once or twice overheard sagacious suspicions on the part of certain underbred wiseacres who had been gossiping, I dare say, with the village tailor, that the scarf to all appearance had known more of Leeds or Paisley than it ever had of Ispahan. In the teeth of these vexations I am in the habit of maintaining against all comers that the muffler is a shawl of the finest black Cashmeer, and that it is not all a hallucination about my tête-à-tête interview with the Shah of Persia.

JOHN GRANTLEIGH.