

# THE WEEKLY MESSENGER.

THE PAST—THE PRESENT—FOR THE FUTURE.

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From the Philadelphia Saturday Courier.

## THE SACRIFICE.

The events recorded in the following tale may be found in the annals of a reign, memorable for its splendor and oppression—the reign of Amurath, one of the most powerful Sultans of the East. The usurper and not the inheritor of another's throne, he ruled with iron despotism over the subjects to whose obedience he felt he had no legitimate claim. Yet while others crouched beneath the tyrant's frown, his own heart was a prey to secret disquietude and distrust.

There are no pangs more keen than those occasioned by a consciousness of crime, and a dread of its consequences. Amurath knew that he had been no common usurper, that the path which led to his present grandeur had been deluged with royal blood, and in the midst of all his magnificence a voice was ever sounding in his ear, that royal blood would one day dry aloof for vengeance, and be heard.

Superstition, which usually holds dark companionship with guilt, and which in that age and clime maintained a powerful sway over the purest minds, added to the depth and intensity of these emotions. One of those wild dwellers of the mountain, who believe themselves gifted with inspiration from heaven, or impose that belief on the credulity of others, had first kindled the fire of ambition in the cold breast of Amurath by clouded prophecies of his future greatness. The shade which dimmed the brilliant unveiling of his destiny was the asseveration of the prophet, that while the remotest branch of the royal family existed, his power was without base, and his life without security. He had exterminated, with remorseless cruelty, that ill-fated race, but the jewels with which he encircled his brow were as so many points of living fire to his brain. The fear that some scion from the ancient stock still flourished, protected from his power, flitted like a phantom in his path, and shadowed the possession of his glory.

He sat one evening in his magnificent divan, his countenance darkened with more than its wonted expression of care and apprehension. Selim, his favorite and prime minister, stood before him, holding in his hand an unfolded letter, whose contents he had just perused and upon which he still bent a stern and steadfast gaze. "Knowest thou, whose hand has traced these characters?" exclaimed the Sultan, breaking the ominous silence, in a voice which in vain endeavored to master its inquietude. Selim lifted his head, from the bending position which it had assumed, and met the keen searching glance of the Sultan, with one, irresolute and troubled. At length his eye steadied, while it kindled into an expression of moral sublimity, and though his lip quivered with undefinable emotion, he answered in unflinching accents, "I do." For a moment Amurath was silent, for there is a power in intellect, proudly resting on its own strength for support, unaided and alone, to whose sovereignty the haughtiest despot is compelled to bow. But the momentary awe was succeeded by a gust of stormy passion. "Ha! darest thou thus avow a league with treachery—thou whom I have taken into my bosom, whom I have drawn near my throne and exalted even to my right hand? Tell me the name of him, who has penned this seditious scrawl, or by the sword of the prophet, every drop of thy false heart's blood shall be spilled to expiate thy crime." "I have formed no league with treason," exclaimed the undaunted Selim—"still true is my allegiance to my royal master; I boldly assert my right to that confidence which has never been

violated. Drain the last drop, if it be thy sovereign will, from this faithful heart, and in my dying agonies, I will only remember that thou once was just to thyself and me." "I demand the proof of thy fidelity," repeated the Sultan in a calmer tone, his wrath beginning to yield to the overmastering influence of his favorite; "tell me the author of those fatal lines." Selim answered not, but bending one knee to the ground, bowed his head in the attitude of oriental submission. "Commander of the faithful! bid me not expose an unfortunate to the fate he merits. I once knew the misguided being who has thus clandestinely intruded himself on thy notice, but years have passed since we have met and every bond which once united us has long been broken. Believe me, Sire, it is not the discovery of an obscure individual, that can insure safety to thyself, or security to thy throne. There is a powerful existing party in favor of the fallen dynasty, and were it once known that an offspring of that race was still left behind it would be the signal of anarchy and blood. Destroy this letter,—its contents are safe in my bosom—my life shall be the pledge of my fidelity—it is in thy hands; but I will not redeem it, by the sacrifice of another, even to obey the mandate of my sovereign." "Take back thy pledge," replied the Sultan, "and hug thy secret to thy breast. But never shall thy nuptials be consummated with the beautiful daughter of Ibrahim, till thou hast unravelled this dark conspiracy and discovered the pretended offspring of that race, which was created only to serve at the foot-stool of my glory. The morrow was to have been gilded by the pomp of thy union, but never shall that sun rise, which is to illuminate the hymenial rite, till thou hast rolled away this shadow from thy name and fulfilled the commands of thy insulted sovereign."

Selim found himself alone—but ere we penetrate into the recesses of his soul, agitated as it now is with contending passions, we will give an explanation of the preceding scene. Amurath had intercepted an anonymous letter to Selim, whose contents were calculated to awaken the strongest suspicions and darkest forebodings. The language of this epistle was bold and eloquent. It called upon Selim to unite himself to a band, which was leagued to redeem the ancient honors of the throne. He spoke of the existence of a Princess, a daughter of the murdered Sultan, who had been sheltered since infancy from the power of the usurper, and whom they had sworn to protect with their blood. Selim recognised in this daring appeal, the character of his elder brother, who, scorning the restraints of the paternal roof, and obeying the impulses of his own wild spirit, had for many years, been an alien from his home. He had cherished for this brother an affection more than fraternal; it was romantic, enthusiastic and intense; and in proportion to the ardor of his attachment was the bitterness of sorrow which he felt for his desertion. No longer interested in the scenes of his youth, he sought the precincts of the court, and the favorite of nature soon became the idol of fortune. He obtained the unbounded confidence of the Sultan, the highest honors royal favor could bestow, and, more than all, the love of Zerah, the beautiful daughter of Ibrahim. He had that evening entered the presence of his sovereign rich in the possession of all that grandeur can impart, and the reversion of all that hope can offer. He now stood desolate and alone,—conscious of the abyss, which yawned before him; for he knew but too well that the wrath of sovereignty succeeded its smile, was terrible as the tempest, blackening in the subbeam's ray. He might have denied all knowledge of the bold conspirator who had thus exposed him to peril and disgrace, but his truth-telling lips refused to sanction even an implied deceit. He had pledged his fidelity to Amurath—he was bound to him by every tie of gratitude and honor—ties indissolubly strong. He was united to his brother by the holy bonds of fraternity—to Zerah, the fair, the fond; the confiding, by all those hallowed and imperishable sympathies, which the God of nature has created and entwined with the life-chords of our existence. Could he throw off his allegiance to the ruthless usurper, yet liberal benefactor, and brand himself with the name of traitor and ingrate? Better to die with an unblemished name than live to bear a stigma so degrading. Could he sacrifice his brother to the excited vengeance of Amurath, who would search his kingdom to discover the place of his retreat were he once assured of his identity with the conspirator who had awakened his fears; Never—nature would disown the monster who could violate her sacred laws. Could he persist in his present resolution, and wound by

his desertion that tender and innocent heart, which beat but to adore him? To this there was but one reply, involving life or death.—These reflections pursued him at the midnight hour, while wandering in a garden contiguous to the palace, which the liberality of nature and the splendour of art had embellished with every charm. Groves of orange trees, covered with their sweet, virginial blossoms, filled the air with that mild, delicious fragrance, which reminds one of all that is lovely in the moral and spiritual world. Fountains of the purest water tost their silvery foam to the moon's glancing rays, or flowed on through marble channels, in low, murmuring melody, till their sound died on the ear. The moon shone with that pearl-like lustre, which is only known in oriental climes, while remote from the halo of light which surrounded her throne, the stars were scattered like so many living diamonds over the deep, dark blue of a midnight firmament, each shining distinctly in its own individual glory.

Selim felt for a moment calmed and solemnized before the majesty of creation. Who has not felt the influence of night? Grand, silent, religious night! It is invested with a veiled splendor, an approached magnificence, a thousand times more sublime than the insufferable blaze of day. We feel as if we had entered the inner temple of nature and shared in the mysteries of her repose. The soul, disturbed by earth-born cares, agonized by earthly conflicts, discards its cares and its conflicts before the altar of omnipotence, and conscious of its own immortality, identifies itself with the divinity around. Such thoughts as these awed the tempestuous passions which raged in the breast of Selim to repose. He threw himself upon a flight of marble steps and reclining his burning temples, against the cold smooth surface, remained motionless as the statue carved from the same everlasting stone. He lay with his eyes, intensely fixed upon the illimitable vault above, unconscious of aught else in the eternal world, when he perceived the light darkening around him, though no cloud swept over the ethereal blue. Half-rising from his recumbent attitude, he beheld a majestic figure standing before him, in bold relief against the heavens on which its lineaments were defined. Selim stood erect and gazing his acclimated with one hand repelled with the other the approach of the mysterious visitant.

"Selim," exclaimed the stranger, in the deep tones of suppressed emotion; and in an instant the hand which grasped the scimitar relaxed its hold. Time may dim the recollection of familiar features, or change the form whose traits are hoarded in the memory, but the voice—there is a magic in the voice; it steals over the soul, as the wind floats over the chords of some neglected harp; and the music of remembrance awakens its breathes. The stranger opened his arms and Selim fell upon his brother's neck and wept. Forgotten were desertion and wrongs, danger and fear. Every other feeling absorbed in that of fraternal love. He saw only the long estranged companion of his childhood, he felt only the tears of a brother, bedewing his cheek.—But the tears of man are few; they are wrong from him only by extremity of feeling, and pride soon argues the weakness of nature.—Solyman, such was the name of the wanderer unfolded to his brother, the purpose of his secret visit, adjured him to break the gilded chains which linked him to a tyrant's destiny, and assert the claims of the orphan Princess to loyalty and protection.

Selim was immovable—he felt the galling weight of those gilded chains, but he vowed never to betray the master, whom he had served and who had till this moment leaned upon his faith, with undoubting trust. "But where," he cried, "is this unfortunate Princess, who survives the ruin of her race?" "The secret is locked in my bosom," replied Solyman, close as the gems in the casket, which contains the testimonials of her birth. That casket was committed to my care, by the dying loyalist, who snatched her, when an infant, from destruction and sheltered her from the wrath of the destroyer. Even he who now fosters her in his arms, and shields her with parental care, knows not the treasure, he wears in his bosom. Selim, I have that in my power which thou wilt value more than all that Amurath, in the prodigality of favor can bestow. Join but our faithful and devoted band, aid us in protecting this last remnant of the kingly line, and thou shalt be rewarded by the possession of the royal beauty. "Talk not of love and beauty," exclaimed Selim sternly, "thou knowest not what thou utterest." "I know not!" repeated the wanderer—"thinkest thou that my heart, because it scorned the cold restraints of the

world, is dead to human feelings. I roam from scene of heartless splendour but another was the companion of my wanderings.—An angel spirit in woman's form, has ever followed my devious path, smoothed its roughness and gilded its gloom. Go with me to yon mountain cave, see the fair flower that hides its sweetness there, and then tell me, if thou canst, that I know nought of love and beauty." "Thou dost not read my meaning," replied Selim, with bitterness—my dreams of bliss are vanished—The paradise of love will never cheer this isolated heart. He related to Solyman, the history of his betrothed, his anticipated marriage, and the fatal denunciation which had blasted his hopes. He trusted to the magnanimity of his brother and appealed to him, by all that was holy and awful, to relinquish a design which was not only endangering his own life, but destroying the happiness of a brother.

Solyman listened in breathless silence, but Selim marked with indignant surprise, that his eye kindled in the moonlight with a fierce delight, which seemed to mock the calm radiance it reflected. He gazed on the majestic features, which shone with a corresponding illumination, and almost imagined that some malignant demon had animated them. That Solyman should exult over the misery he had caused—the thought was inexplicable. "Fear not," exclaimed Solyman, "she shall yet be thine. No fraternal blood, shall stain the hymenial altar—meet me to-morrow when the day first dawns, at the foot of yon mountain which stretches its dard outline on the right, and I will show the credentials, which shall prove the truth of my words." They parted, to meet again at the appointed hour. They met in stealth, at the foot of the mountain, whose summit was just gilded by the breaking light.

Selim earnestly perused his brother's face that he might penetrate into the depths of his soul, and learn its latent emotions, but he could not fathom them. He saw only the bold, unquiet eye, the proud, curling lip, and naughty mien which distinguished him in early years, and gained him the appellation of Solyman the proud. The spot which had been selected was one which nature had guarded from intrusion with the most jealous care. On one side, a cluster of trees, clothed in the densest foliage presented a wall of living verdure, impenetrable to the eye; on the other a broad stream, darkened by the boughs which overshadowed its banks, poured its tributary waters into the ocean wave. Selim impatiently demanded of his brother the credentials he had promised to deliver. Solyman drew the casket from his breast, and touching a secret spring, displayed its brilliant contents. It was filled with the richest gems, but there were papers concealed in the magnificent bed, which Selim gathered regardless of the splendour which surrounded them. From these he discovered that Zerah, his betrothed bride, the supposed daughter of Ibrahim, was that orphan Princess, who had been rescued from the power of Amurath.—The loyalist, whose attachment to his murdered sovereign had led him to protect this lone blossom, from the storm which blasted the royal tree, placed her in the arms of Ibrahim's gentle wife, then watching the cradle of her own slumbering babe. Ibrahim was absent, but she vowed to cherish with a mother's tenderness, the innocent being committed to her care. In the mean time her own child sickened and died, and when Ibrahim, who proud and ambitious, had attached himself to the new dynasty, returned, he received to his bosom the offspring of another unconscious of the deception which was imposed. The wife of Ibrahim justly deemed that her husband would be secured from danger and solicitude if he remained ignorant of the hazardous charge she had received; and the inexplicable resemblance of the two infants favoured her design. She feared too the lofty ambition of Ibrahim, and in silence cherished the child of her adoption. The protectress of Zerah was no more—and they who stood, side by side in the solitude we have described, were the soul possessors of this interesting secret.

Selim grasped the casket as if it contained his salvation. "More be thine bosom to guard these sacred relics—I dare hazard them even in thy hands.—Should Amurath but dream of her identity with the subject of his vengeance, her life would be the instantaneous sacrifice. Even now, his emissaries are on the watch, sent to every part of his kingdom to discover the victim on whom he now so sensuously smiles." "Not let them be a pledge to what thou utterest," cried Solyman. "Thou hast sworn not to betray me—but thou art human. My life and that of my brave band are in thy keeping. I have applied to thee for most