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THE PAST—THE PRESENT—FOR THE FUTURE.

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From the Philadelphia Saturday Courier.

THE SACRIFICE.

(CONCLUDED.)

Selim gazed after this wild and singular being, with feelings it would be difficult to define. The conviction that Solymn scorned that species of honor which bound him to Amurath, stung him to the soul. "He knows me not," he bitterly cried—but the recollection of Zerah, and the dangers which surrounded her, soon banished every other recollection. The sun was just beginning to curl the mist that hung upon the mountain's brow—that sun which was to have gilded their nuptial vows. The fear, that Amurath might discover the secret of her birth, deepened to maddening certainty, as he thought of the almost illimitable power, which Amurath exercised over the sordid minions who surrounded his throne. He could not admit the belief that a knowledge of so important a fact was confined to the bosom of an individual. He resolved to seek the dwelling of Ibrahim, warn him of some impending calamity, urge him immediately to leave the kingdom and flee with his daughter to some distant asylum, till the apprehended danger was past.

Ibrahim beheld with astonishment the clouded brow and troubled mien of Selim. The pride of the father rose high in his heart, for his beautiful Zerah was the fairest flower of oriental climes, and he deemed her a gift richer than all the gems of the East. To Selim's impassioned representations of imminent peril which awaited them, and earnest entreaties for their immediate departure, he lent a doubting ear. He was one of the most powerful grandees of the kingdom, and he felt that he possessed sufficient power in himself to guard against external ills, and with the proud consciousness of integrity, he declared himself superior to all fear. Selim was prepared for this resistance, and he marked with anguish the suspicions which had entered the breast of Ibrahim. He dared not avow the secret which oppressed him. He could not prove by the necessary credentials the almost incredible tale, and he feared that ambition which held lordly sway over Ibrahim's minor passions, would lead him to sacrifice the innocence and beauty he had fostered, while unconscious of her imperial origin. Ibrahim summoned his daughter and commanding her to fathom the mystery of her lover's conduct, or withdraw the pledge she had given, left the apartment.

Selim had not till this moment experienced the overwhelming embarrassment of his situation. He stood pale and disordered in the presence of her, whom he was to have claimed that day as a triumphant bridegroom. The pride which sustained him before his fellow man, was now annihilated by a stronger emotion. He did not speak, but knelt in the prostration of agony at her feet, and buried his face in the foldings of her robe. And surely if aught in woman's form could justify the adoration of the heart, this daughter of a kingly line might vindicate the worship she inspired. With eyes of celestial glory, a brow on which the regularity of nature was enthroned, a cheek on which the rich hue of the pomegranate was mellowed into the softness of virgin bloom, and tresses that wreathed in dark redundancy, as they fell, a native veil around her, she moved amidst the maidens of that eastern land, fair and transcendent as the moon, when attended by her starry handmaids, she treads the halls of ether. The temple was worthy the divinity it enshrined. Thus clothed with the light of material, and spiritual loveliness, she seemed born to feel and create a passion, refined from the grossness of mortality. Unlike the

proud Ibrahim, she doubted not the faith of her lover—when, in broken accents, he told her of the interdiction to their nuptials, of the cloud which darkened their destiny, she wept over her blighted hopes, and instead of withdrawing, renewed her vows of fidelity and love. Oh! the deep, the trusting tenderness of woman's uncorrupted heart! A ray emanating from the fountain of all purity and light, shining on with unwavering brightness, undimmed by the gloom of sorrow, unextinguished by the darkness of despair. The heavier and closer the clouds gather around, the clearer and stronger its divine radiance—the sunshine resting on the brow of the tempest—the rainbow gilding its retiring shades.

Selim felt, in this moment, more than indemnified for all he had endured. The conviction of her unalterable love restored to him that energy and eloquence which had ever rendered him an irresistible pleader. Zerah yielded to the entreaties which the unbending Ibrahim had withstood, and ere they parted, had consented to fly with him to some far and lone retreat, where, like the desert flower, which blooms unseen, save by the omniscient eye, she would be content to live and die alone for him.

Selim sought the palace of the Sultan; he had one of the hardest offices for a noble mind to perform; he was compelled to mask his purpose and to appear with deep submission before that sovereign whose resentment he had incurred. The day must be devoted to the revolting task of dissimulation till the shades of night should favor their design. He was retracing with slow steps the path which led to the mountain stream, that he might avoid the guards of the Sultan; when he suddenly encountered Solymn, who was hurrying along with breathless speed, his countenance expressive of the most violent emotion. "Fly," exclaimed Solymn, in a voice which sounded in Selim's startled ear, loud as the battle shout. "Fly, the minions of tyranny are abroad; they rushed upon me, cowards as they are; they wrestled the casket from my unguarded hand; their scimitars were flashing around me; I fled, but not in fear; I fled in search of vengeance. See," and he lifted his still bleeding hand, "for every drop a thousand streams shall flow; fly through yon secret path; intercept the wretch who robbed me of my treasure; he left his comrades far behind; fear not the power of Amurath; I swear to redeem thee or perish by thy side."

Like the lightning's flash he vanished, and swift as the same red messenger of heaven, Selim pursued the path which Solymn indicated. The fatal casket! Had he ten thousand lives, he would have perilled them all for the possession of those priceless gems. Zerah, expiring under the hands of the assassin, seemed embodied before his eyes; so powerful was the illusion that when he caught a glimpse of a mantle fluttering through the trees, he called out with the energy of despair; "Save her, All-gracious Allah! save her!" It was the guard, who was hastening to the Sultan, with the treasure he had won. He turned at the sudden adjuration; the bold arm of Selim impeded his flight. He was a man of towering stature and athletic limbs, noted for physical strength, and one of the chosen guards of the Sultan. He met the stern embrace of Selim with one which might have crushed a feebler frame. They grappled close and fiercely, and it was with the life-blood of his adversary, that Selim redeemed the prize, for which he would have freely poured out his own. He buried the casket in his bosom, and mantled over it the foldings of his robe; but the conviction of Zerah's safety was immediately followed by the consciousness of his own danger. He was surrounded by the guards, who had overtaken the flying steps of their comrade, and who had been sent as spies to watch the secret movements of Selim. He saw that it was vain to contend with an armed band, but lifting his blade aloft, still dripping with the blood of his antagonist, with that majesty of look and gesture, which always has such over-awing influence on inferior minds, he commanded them to forbear. "Stand back," he cried; "what would ye dare to do? On to the royal palace, say to the Sultan ye saw me wing yon felon's soul to paradise. Aye, tell him, too, ye saw me cast into the oblivious waves, what I could not barter for all the riches of his kingdom." Then opening his blood-stained vest, he drew forth the casket of Zerah, and raising it high over their unsheathed scimitars, dashed it into the mountain stream, which there rushed impetuously towards the ocean, as if anxious to throw its wealth into the waves.

Selim drew a deep inspiration as if his

breast were relieved from some oppressive burden. The secret was now safe in the sanctuary of his heart, and no tyrant's power could penetrate its guarded recesses. Turning to the astonished guards, he signed them to advance. Accustomed to obey the princely Selim, they involuntarily followed his command, and though they marched on either side, with naked blades precluding the possibility of escape, he had more the air of a sovereign with his attendant vassals, than a victim to be arraigned before the throne. With a dauntless mien and unflinching steps he entered the presence of Amurath. He knew the doom that awaited him; but as the bark, which is about to be swallowed by the ocean wave, is borne up over the stormy billows, rising with the rising tempest, his spirit elevated itself above the perils which threatened to overwhelm him. He stood in immovable silence, while the guards related the scene we have described, and met with an unquailing eye the withering glance of the Sultan.

The wrath of Amurath was at first too deep for words. In spite of his denunciations he had felt till this moment, a confidence in the fidelity of Selim, which he deemed it impossible to abandon. The conviction of his perfidy brought with it the most exquisite pangs. Selim was the only being whom he had really loved and trusted, and a tear actually gathered in his cold and haughty eye, as one by one he gathered up the proofs of his favorite's treachery. Selim marked that unwonted sign of human tenderness, and his pride melted at the sight. He saw once more the trusting friend, the lavish benefactor, and casting down his sword at the foot of the throne, he exclaimed, "Commander of the faithful! take back thy gifts; take even the life which Allah has given; but leave me yet the consciousness of my integrity. I am no traitor, though stained with the blood of thy subject. I am guiltless of treason, and with my expiring breath, I will proclaim my innocence." "Prove then thy innocence," cried Amurath; "I swear by the sword and buckler of the Prophet, if thou wilt reveal the name of the supposed offspring of sovereignty and place her in our power, I freely pardon thy past offences, restore thee to thy former honors, and give thee even this day thy plighted bride."

Selim folded his hands resolutely over his breast. "Her name is buried here and shall perish with me. No commands shall force, no tortures compel me to reveal it; I offer thee my life; thou mayest devote it to bondage or death; but thou hast not, canst not, have control over my free spirit's will." "Away then to the darkest dungeon; away till the traitor's death is prepared for thee. My slighted mercy shall turn to vengeance now. The hour of relenting is past. Thy fate shall tell to after ages, the ingratitude of favorites, and the justice of kings."

Selim bent his head in token of submission. Amurath ordered him to be shackled in his presence, that the scene of his former grandeur might be also that of his present degradation. Then after a fresh ebullition of his ungoverned rage, he commanded the guards to bear him to his cell. A damp and noisome dungeon, feebly lighted by the rays which struggled through the grated walls, was now the abode of the late magnificent Selim; and proof of the evanescent nature of earthly glory. But there is a moral brightness, transcending the noonday's beams, which can throw the radiance of heaven over the darkest hour of human suffering. He, who is willing to sacrifice his existence for another, is supported by the spirit of martyrdom, and that spirit will bear him up, as with an angel's wings, over the gloomy valley of death. That exaltation of feeling, however, which attends the performance of a magnanimous deed, and which sustains the sufferer in the moment of physical agony, gradually subsided, as he recalled the appalling circumstances which accompanied the sacrifice of life. To lay down his life for Zerah, and leave behind him an unblemished name, a memory which the brave might honor, and the true-hearted mourn, would have seemed a trifling effort for a love like his. But to go down to the grave in ignominy and shame; to be branded with the name of traitor, that withering deathless curse, while even she for whom he died might learn to scorn his memory, and place another idol on the shrine, where once his image dwelt; the thought was maddening. He lifted up his shackled hands and prayed that Allah would send down the waters of oblivion, and obliterate the remembrance of the wretch whom he had created. He poured out the bitterness of his soul into the all-hearing ear of God, till in the stillness of awe, the troubled billows of human passion sunk to rest. At last the

feeble light of his cell darkened and disappeared. Conscious of the return of night, he wondered that Amurath had delayed the execution of his wrath. He felt that he must soon meet his summons, but he had wrestled with the indwelling enemy and came off victorious, and throwing himself on the cold floor of his dungeon, he slept more calm than Amurath on his bed of luxury. He wandered in an interminable desert, trackless and fountless; parched with thirst, bewildered in the blackening waste; when suddenly, the gates of Paradise unfolded above and sent down a flood of light, annihilating the gloom. The dazzling contrast broke his slumbers; the dream was fled, but the illumination remained. A celestial figure, robed in white, bearing a lamp in one fair hand, while she veiled with the other her dazzled eyes, stood by the side of the slumbering victim. She stood, with pallid brow and dark resplendent locks, beautiful as the angel commissioned to bear the liberated soul to the bowers of immortality. But it was no spirit of heaven who thus severed the dungeon's gloom. It was a daughter of earth, young, loving, and beloved, full of earth's warmest affections, sharing in earth's bitterest woes. It was Zerah, who bent over her doomed lover and met his wailing glance. Almost doubting in what world he existed, Selim started from his inglorious couch, while the clanking of his chains sent a thrill or horror through that faithful bosom, which soon throbbled wildly against his own. She, who in the hour of prosperity and joy, repelled with bashful pride the carresses of her lover, as the flower shrinks from the sun's too ardent rays, now threw her pure arms around him and moistened his fetters with her tears.

"Hast thou come," he cried, "to travel with me to the entrance of the tomb? To receive once more from my dying lips the vows of imperishable love? 'I came,' said Zerah, in low faltering accents, 'as a messenger of mercy and pardon; I came, in Amurath's name, to bid thee live.' 'Live!' exclaimed Selim, and every drop of blood thrilled in his veins: 'and live for thee?' Zerah paused, as if irresolute in what words to utter the commission with which she was entrusted. Bending her head, till her brow was veiled by her heavy locks, she continued: 'He demands the name of that unfortunate Princess who lives unknown to all but thee. It is his last offer of mercy. He has sent me hither, thy plighted bride, that love may move the heart which was steered to the pleadings of loyalty.' 'Would Zerah counsel dishonor?' cried Selim almost sternly, his warm hopes chilled to ice as she spoke; 'would she purchase my life with the blood of innocence?' 'I would purchase thy life, were it with the blood of thousands,' she wildly exclaimed; and sinking on her knees before him, she locked her hands in the agony of supplication. 'I pray thee but to live. What is the world to me? It's but a name he asks, and yet that simple word thou wilt refuse, even at the sacrifice of Zerah's life.' 'Zerah,' he cried, 'in Allah's name forbear. Thou knowest not what thou askest.'

Zerah gazed earnestly for a moment on her lover's countenance, then rising from her kneeling attitude, every feature of her face changed in its expression. That look of doubtful anguish was resolved into that of cold, settled despair. 'The truth has entered my heart,' she said, and her late faltering voice was firm and distinct. 'Thou lovest this orphan daughter of a kingly race. Thou hast pledged thy false vows to Zerah, while thy heart is given to her, who dwells in thy secret bower. And I, insulted and betrayed; I have knelt at thy feet, for the name of her whom thou adorest, and for whom thou art offering up thy life.' 'Oh! cruel and unjust,' exclaimed Selim, in a burst of uncontrollable emotion. 'Dear, unhappy Zerah! Thou hast added the bitterest drop to my cup of misery! For thee to doubt my faith! Oh! mayest thou never know how fearfully this ill-requited faith is proved.' The sound of footsteps was heard in the passage. 'They come,' cried Zerah, 'to bear me from thy cell. The allotted moments are past. For the last time, inexorable Selim, wilt thou destroy thyself and me?' The grating of the heavy bolts were heard. The paleness of death overspread her face, and the cold dew of mortal agony gathered on her brow.

Selim felt that the tortures which his supposed perfidy inflicted, were keener than those which the cruelty of Amurath could invent. Must then the sacrifice be vain? While he deemed himself the instrument of her salvation, must she believe that his perfidious hand was stabbing with deliberate cruelty her too confiding heart? The guard had entered the cell. "All-gracious Allah! I