

Abdullah Tinkel and the Scribe.

A PERSIAN ROMANCE WITH A COLONIAL FLAVOUR.

(From the original of *Feramorz*.)

It was many, many years ago, in the beautiful City of Teheran, the capital of poetic Persia, then the centre of Eastern learning and Oriental magnificence, that the events chronicled below took place. Timour, the magnificent, was the reigning Shah, and was beloved by his subjects as much for his wisdom as for his strict and at times even stern-sense of justice. At the court held by this gracious monarch, which was visited by princes from far and near to drink in the learning of the Shah's Ministers and to partake of the boundless hospitality of the ruler, were two men upon whom he allowed the light of his countenance to fall—his Grand Vizier Abdullah and his chief scribe, Haman. The Grand Vizier was a man of great intelligence and powerful oratory, but of overweening self-conceit and arrogant manner, and from the fact that he was prone to boast of his power and to treat the common people with contempt, had earned for himself throughout the dominions of his Lord, the title of Abdullah Tinkel. He was of great wealth, too, and possessed much gold and many precious stones, but few of the people benefited by his bounty, for he loved to squander his wealth in his own aggrandisement. Many gifts and emoluments were in his power to bestow, and those who could speak loudly in his favour were many, for had he not both the power and the will to reward or punish those who followed or spoke against him. He was the favourite of the King, and basked in the sunshine of his smile, and the people, both high and low, made of him a small god, whom they slavishly worshipped either for fear of his power or for the crumbs which he might throw from his table. Haman, the scribe, was the King's chronicler, and set down such events of his reign and the doings of his subjects as the world should know; he neither wrote in malice nor with favour, but simply that which when the King had gone would tell the generations to follow how he had ruled, and what good or evil his Ministers had done. His task was not always a pleasant one, but the love and admiration he bore his King, and the desire to always do that which was true and right buoyed him up through many a troublous time. The masses, who were fickle then as now, were oft inclined to judge him wrongly, when in their interest and his master's criticised the action of some powerful emir or perhaps of the Grand Vizier himself; and actuated by fear or malice would cry down the scribe, who ventured to in all honesty record in his history the mistakes either wilful or otherwise of a reigning favourite.

Abdullah Tinkel united to his other attributes one of insatiable ambition, and not satisfied with the position he held, yearned for further power. He wished not only to be the right hand of the King, but to represent the King's people as a power in perpetuity, which the King could not in a moment of pique deprive him of, as could be done in the case of his position as Grand Vizier; he wished to be one of those great counsellors whose tongue is the mouthpiece of the people, and who is yet the favourite of the King, and when the time came for the election of a chief satrap, he used his great wealth and power to achieve this coveted position. His manner to the lowly softened, his speech to his equals was as honey in the mouth of the true believer, and his charity, which he caused to be cried abroad, appeared like that of a father to his children. His voice was as the music of the Angel Israfil and his wisdom answers that of the mighty Solimon. The people, though

warned by Haman, were dazzled by his combined power and assumed graciousness, and forsook their true friends to raise him to the eminence his ambition desired. The day came and throughout the land it was made known that Abdullah Tinkel had been successful. Then came a change in his demeanour. The Grand Vizier's haughtiness returned and, inflated with victory, he spoke scornfully of his rivals, and derided them in their defeat and sorrow.

Now, inasmuch as such action showed a want of tact and discernment in one who never allowed his policy to be governed by an emotion that might endanger his own future power, the people marvelled and the chief scribe wrote in the annals of the Kingdom that the Satrap elect must have spoken when under an influence other than the natural exhilaration of his victory. This the people heard from the mouths of the wise men, and they spoke amongst themselves and said it must be so. Surely the Grand Vizier had drunk too much of the wine which it is not permitted the faithful to partake of, and it was not he but an evil spirit within him that spoke, but they mistook the meaning of the scribe and were sore wrong in their conclusions. Yet they went to Abdullah and spoke with him, and urged that he should put forth his power and crush the scribe for what he had said, lest it should be repeated that sinning he had allowed himself to be found out and his power be weakened. This they did for fear of Abdullah's power, and in treachery to him who had fought their battles with the King, and they swore to abide by his word whether he were right or wrong and plead with the King for his vengeance; and Abdullah listened and called together those who were dependent upon him and said, "We will stamp out this man and destroy him with the King, and the weight of our wealth and power shall do him grievous harm. Ye shall do in all things as I shall say, and ye shall not think of that which is right or wrong, but shall obey my word; and I will have audience with the King, and he shall appoint such a man to judge between us, as shall turn a deaf ear to Haman, and the end will be that mine enemy shall be cast into disgrace, and lose the position he holds, and I shall triumph over his downfall; and if ye do not do this thing as I have said then will I take from you that which feeds your wives and families, and if ye speak a word in his defence ye shall lose the prestige ye hold as counsellors to the people, and shall become as Haman, the scribe, will be when I have finished my sport with him;" and they made answer and said, "We will obey, and he shall have none to speak for him before the Judge." Then Abdullah said "It is well, but I will do yet a more cunning thing, as I did in days gone by, when Ilderim Ben Jelcho arose against me and questioned my power, I will make it known to the people through those other scribes, who have eaten my salt and must obey my word, that it is not for the goods or the possessions of Haman, the scribe, that I care, for I will give them to the poor if I win. Thus will I be doing a good action at his expense, and will win the favour of the common people, whom Timour allows to have a voice in such matters."

Now, when all these things were brought to Haman, the scribe, he pondered, and knowing in his heart that the words which he had written were not intended to mean that which Abdullah Tinkel and his under satraps and followers wished the people to believe, was sore perplexed; but he thought, surely the King is just, and when I am brought before the judge, he will listen to the truth which I may tell, and he and the people will acquit me of an intention to transgress the law which Timour has laid down; and will see that that which I have written was but a fair comment on the action of one who from his position should expect the bright light of criticism to beat upon his actions.