"I think he is a brave, modest young man, and better worth rewarding than my own foolish girl—"

"Oh, Papa!"

"Shall I offer him money—how much? You shall decide."

"No, no, Papa," said Julia, flushing, "not money—"

"No, I agree with you, we cannot offer him money. What a contrast is a superior, refined, quiet, sober man like that to the silly popinjay of a young officer, who came here courting you. Ah, it's work alone, the work of brains and hands, that makes a true man—a worthy man."

"Then, Papa, you stand convicted on your showing. That chauffeur you appreciate is the very same young officer who has done all this for my sake. He loved me, he worked for me, he saved my life, and now let him have his reward. Let us both be happy—let me marry him."

The girl pleaded eloquently, and her eloquence was not lost on her father, a shrewd man of the world.

Thus it came about that when Alfred appeared, obedient to his summons, and prepared to receive instant dismissal, he found his beloved one smiling and tearful, while her hand was gently placed in his, with a few kindly, broken words of gratitude from her father.

A flutter of excited gossip filled the country at the news of the engagement of the handsome young officer to the merchant's daughter. Unfortunately, it also became incumbent on Julia's father to find another chauffeur.

The City of Kabul.

(By Mrs Kate Daly.)

As regards mere geographical distance, the Afghan capital is not appreciably far from our own possessions in India; in literal fact it is as far away from anything that is not Afghan and supremely Eastern as if it were on another planet. It is a closed city in the strictest sense; it is shut off from anything outside it by the inexorable rule of an absolute despot, whose word is the only law its people know.

No stranger may enter Kabul save by the Ameer's permission: no man who values his life would dare to cross the frontier without that permission and the necessary guarding of his safety which it includes. Nor may any subject leave the country without his sovereign's sanction, nor any inhabitant of Kabul itself pass beyond a three-mile radius without the outposts. Here there is no coming and going at individual will—there is only one will over all.

On the first day of my arrival in Kabul it seemed to me that I had suddenly become completely shut off from all that I had ever known of the world. Even India seemed to have become so far away as to be inaccessible. The long journey from England, full of incident, was over, the tedious last stage of it over the Khyber Pass accomplished, and there I was in the Afghan capital at last - immured.

OLD KABUL.

At moments like those one is apt to think of all the stories that one has heard of the place to which destiny has brought one, and old stories of Kabul are not pleasant to think of. The strangeness of my new surroundings that night (the closely shut in house, the difference of the domestic arrangements, the guard of soldiers at my door—all these were things that made me feel as if I were in some new world, from which there is never going to be any escape. But there were two other things that impressed me still more that night—the rushing of the Kabul River, swollen by the winter rains, and the dismal howling of the pariah dogs, who go about the city at night literally seeking anything they can devour.

One's first inspection of the houses and residences of Kabul heightens the impression of jealously-guarded security which a first general glimpse of the city has given. There are no cheerful rows of houses seeming to invite free entrance; here the private house is as secure as a prison and as rigidly inviolate. Every door is barred to the outsider.

As the outer walls are usually those of the compound within which the house itself stands, they present a somewhat blank appearance to the street. There are no smiling faces at windows, no surreptitious peeps into lighted rooms at family parties. The closely-shut, heavily-secured door implies much. And every man must open it to a sudden summons with a quaking heart, for none ever know—so much intrigue and treachery and false accusation is there—when they may not be haled off to prison, perhaps to death, on some charge which is not known to them.

LIFE AND MOVEMENT.

Yet, jealously guarded as the whole city is, and as the houses are, there is abundance of life and movement and colour in the streets of Kabul. If the dress of the people is poor it is picturesque, and to Western eyes there is a vast amount that is deeply interesting. A procession of blind men holding on to each other's garments and led by a lame man; the story-teller, with a circle of spell-bound listeners around him—these are only some of the things that strike the Western mind as matters connected with the East from time immemorial.

Of these crowds in the streets, however, one soon notices that they are almost entirely composed of men and children. Women are rarely seen abroad. Some women are carried as brides to their husband's harem and never leave it again till their death. Children—of whom the Afghans are universally very fond—go about freely in the streets and bazaars. Nightfall puts a strict stoppage to these perambulations. From ten in summer and nine in winter none may leave his house before sunrise next morning, unless he provides himself with the proper permission. At night the city is given up to the soldiers and the pariah dogs.

HORDES OF MONGRELS.

The latter, a vast horde of mongrels of all sorts, and often of considerable size, act as scavengers, but they will attack anything, and hence every soldier on guard at night carries a stout stick as well as his gun. So common is it for people to be bitten by these dogs that one often hears of cases of pilgrimage to a certain holy shrine in the neighbourhood, prayers offered at which are held to be particularly efficacious.

The dominating feeling of all life in Kabul is, of course, essentially fatalistic. Everything that happens is Kismet (fate). If a man falls under the displeasure of the Ameer and is cast into prison, or is beaten to death with sticks, or suffers tortures such as Europeans have not heard of since the Middle Ages, it is because it was ordained to be.

It is difficult for anyone who has always lived under a constitutional government and has enjoyed the rights and privileges of a free man to understand what it means to the population of a closed city like Kabul to live under a sovereign power which holds and exercises the absolute power of life and death.

That power is sometimes announced to the entire population in an impressive and dramatic fashion. On one of the hill-sides outside the city there is a gun which is fired every day at noon as a signal. All who hear it know that noontide has come. But there are times when this gun is discharged at some hour which is not that of noon. Its sudden note is heard everywhere—then people whisper to each other, "Someone has been blown from the gun!"

The absolute ownership of life is the keystone of this edifice of Eastern despotism. And life is of small account. After all, everything is the will of Allah. If it be that he has given the power of life and death to one man to exercise over others, it is Fate. That is the dominating influence, the true atmosphere of the Closed City, which, in spite of the modern features now found there, is in essentials as far off and as barbaric as in the days when no European had ever set foot in it.

"Ever see an Indian policeman?" asked the passenger with the bristling mustache.

"Yes," said the passenger with the skull cap. "I used to know one in Omaha."

"How did he look in uniform?"

"Much like the ordinary copper, only a little more copper-coloured, of course."