

The Cræsus of Yemen

By Henry Iliowizi

Sanaa, the capital of Yemen, is one of the noblest cities of Arabia Felix, and is said to rival beautiful Damascus in many of her exquisite features. The Imam of Yemen who ruled in the beginning of this century could claim rank among the most whimsical princes who ever sat on a throne. He was a man of weak intellect, strong passion, boundless vanity, and a religious enthusiasm entirely foreign to his subjects, who are indifferent followers of Mohammed. That eccentric Commander of the Faithful conceived the singular fancy that he was animated by the soul of the last Prophet, and he suited his conduct to his conceit, there being no one to dispute his ludicrous presumption. He dressed in green, sermonized his people in the style of the Koran, read *surahs* of his own creation, raved of his nocturnal visits to heaven, descanted on visions and revelations vouchsafed to him, and scrupulously arranged his household in imitation of Mohammed's, not forgetting the seventeen wives of the founder of Islam, including an Ayesha, who was the power behind the Imam's throne, being the flower of his harem.

The most important person who stood next to the Imam in power, and above him in wisdom, was the great Kadi, or judge, Omar, who presided over the supreme court of Sanaa, and was in fact the walking code and cyclopædia of Yemen. What he did not know only Allah and His Prophet could reveal. The wise Kadi had no doubt at all that the Imam was a spiritual duplicate or the true Prophet, and he received in recognition the proud title of the "Lion of God," reminiscent of Mohammed's most devoted champion who fought his baffles, and died sword in hand.

Omar plied his legal profession so well, had so many questions of justice and equity referred to him from every quarter of the land, that he rose to be the wealthiest Moslem of Sanaa, exceeded in his opulence by one man only, and that was the renowned Ben Abir, surnamed "The Cræsus of Yemen." Ben Abir was no Moslem, but a Hebrew, and one who feared nothing so much as the remote likelihood of slighting his faith.

The Imam's ruling passion for prophetic honors was equalled by his unprophetic mania for building monumental structures with an extravagance which drained his treasure. Lacking the vast resources of the Caliph of Estamboul, the prince of Yemen nevertheless aspired to rival the head of the faithful in the monumental magnificence of his great capital; and immense sums were lavished on the embellishments of a city which was meant to dazzle even the strangers who had wondered at the imperial palaces of the mighty Sultan himself. The drawback was the limited revenues of the Imam's domains, and the shrewd Kadi, forestalling the danger of a royal recourse to his riches, was instrumental in causing his master to draw on Ben Abir for large sums, in return for titles and privileges which enabled the misused Israelite to indemnify himself in a measure for advances he never expected to see returned. Unlimited in the extent of his commercial enterprises, and furnished with as many military escorts as he chose to ask for, Ben Abir's caravans carried loads of silk, cotton, hardware, weapons and trinkets as far as Hadramaut, Hejaz and Nejd, fearless of the dangers of the Tehamah and the deathful simoons of the arid desert; and they returned to the seashore with tons of coffee, packs of gum, ostrich feathers, dyes and pearls, which foreign vessels carried to distant lands. To all this Ben Abir added the breeding of the finest Arabian horses, such as are only found in Nejd, and it became a current saying that whatever the Cræsus of Yemen touched turned into gold.

Now, it happened that, previous to the closing celebration of the Ramadhan Fast, Ben Abir presented his sovereign with one of his choicest Nejdi stallions, of spotless white and a most fiery temper, caparisoned in the most approved fashion. Delighted with the gift, the Imam showed his appreciation by mounting the spirited animal on the solemn occasion brought about by the sacrificial ceremony which marks the close of the Fast. As ill-luck would have it, a distracted saint, who had just issued from his cave looking more like a chimpanzee than a human being, threw himself in the way of the stallion with a yell that frightened both horse and rider. Snorting and balking in recoil from the object of terror, the high-spirited creature reared and fell backward injuring the Kadi, who was behind, and landing the second edition of the Prophet on a rock, with a broken leg and a dislocated jaw as mementos of the inauspicious incident. Somebody had to be burdened with the blame, and the Kadi realized his opportunity. As soon as sufficiently recovered from his own hurts to sit in judgment, Omar declared Ben Abir guilty of high treason for having tempted the Imam to mount a mad horse, and condemned him to perish by decapitation, unless he should ransom his life for a fabulous sum, which was named, with the additional condition that it be paid in solid gold. Within twenty-four hours the gold was in the hands of the Imam's treasurer, and Ben Abir was a poor man.

When Ayesha, the flower of the royal harem, who was of Hebraic origin, heard of the Kadi's sentence, she appealed to her prophetic lord's conscience against the flagrant injustice. The Imam was moved to the extent of offering to return a small portion of the robbery, provided the Hebrew would enter the mosque. Ben Abir would not listen to the thought of such treason to the God of his fathers, and had a brave wife to sustain him in his trial, with two children, one an ineffably charming maiden, to comfort him. Nor was he entirely destitute, his commercial credit remaining good.

In one of the mountain ranges of Yemen one Friday afternoon, as the sun began to approach the rim of the horizon, a small caravan made a halt. The dromedaries were freed from their burdens and allowed to browse, and a dark tent was stretched for the use of the master of the caravan. On a matting on the ground a rug was spread and a few pillows were put thereon for the ease of a middle-aged person who, dismounting from his horse, took possession of the transient resting-place. As soon as he found himself within the tent he washed himself with water drawn from the nearest spring, changed his garments, brought forth a silver lamp, which he filled with oil, a silver flask full of wine, and a goblet of the same metal. With nightfall the lamp illumined the tent, and the inmate stood lost in prayer, with his face turned to the east. A blessing uttered over the wine was followed by a frugal meal, and the rest of the evening was spent in study of sacred lore. At the entrance to the tent, near a spear struck into the soil, stood a black sentry, while at a distance the camel drivers made themselves comfortable for the night. The lord of the caravan was Ben Abir, his sentinel was Ibraeem, a freed slave, who, having been treated kindly by his master in his happier days, would not desert him now that fortune declined to smile on him.

The night was very dark, and would have been voiceless but for the sighs and moans of the dromedaries, who seemed audibly to commiserate one with another upon the hardships of life. About midnight the silence was unbroken, the discontented animals having buried their sense of trouble in dreamless sleep. At this hour Ben Abir was roused by his faithful attendant, who informed him of a great marvel that was to be seen before the tent. A heap of gold cropped up from the ground, each coin scintillating like a star. "Rise, O, master! Allah sends thee a treasure," cried the devoted slave.

"What is it thou art raving of, O, Ibraeem!—art thou dreaming?" said Ben Abir.

“Indeed I am wide awake, O, master!— step forth and trust to thine own senses if thou doubtest mine; here is the hoard Allah would have thee take,” insisted Ibraeem.

As Ben Abir peered out of his tent to convince himself of Ibraeem’s illusion, he saw with amazement a golden pile of coin, the pieces glowing like lupine eyes in the dark. This is a temptation of the evil one, thought the scrupulous Israelite, who would not have touched pelf on his Sabbath for the wealth of the Indies.

“Touch not a piece of this hoard, Oh, Ibraeem!—if thou fearest Allah, and wouldst not disobey Ben Abir. If the treasure is to be mine, it will remain where it is till after my Sabbath; if it be not mine, the breaking of my holy day will not save it for me. What is to be, will be. Go to sleep,” closed the pious Yemenite, and retired to his couch, Ibraeem, after a little natural hesitation, doing likewise. What right, after all, had he to question the deep wisdom and deeper faith of his generous master?

But sleep would not return to Ben Abir. Through the coarse goat hair texture that made up the covering of his tent the glittering mass stared at him like so many living eyes, and he felt a chill run through the marrow of his bones. While he was at a loss to explain how the glare of the hoard penetrated the opaque material of his tent, a new wonder diverted his attention. An inclined plane, broad as a valley and smooth as glass, stretched down from the deep heavens with both ends lost, one among the starry configurations, the other in the unfathomed abysses of the nether world. The only irregularity in the sweep of the prodigious highway was a terrace which made a connecting link between the upper and the lower part of the plane. In the heart of the terrace shone the hoard which a while before had been seen before the tent.

Ben Abir doubted not that there was an evil design back of this marvelous display, but he felt safe in the consciousness of his firm loyalty. His feeling of safety, however, was somewhat shaken by a terrific detonation, like the eruption of a volcano. It was the signal for a numberless host to ascend towards the terrace, who, dividing and subdividing, started to march up in frowning armies to the sound of wailing notes,—clarions and clashing cymbals mixing with a chaos of noise produced by all the instruments of music known. The vanguard was made up of a seried division of vicious gholes whose march resembled more the dance of droll harlequins than the pace of warriors. At their heels came a vast herd of monstrous bipeds, with head, tail and hoofs of the boar, making the air shudder with their hideous grunts, and piercing the sable of night with their grim eyes. Next followed a division of bipedal beasts, rolling fiery eyeballs, striking their sides with tails like those of lions, and rending the atmosphere with roars of fury. Back of these came bounding an enormous pack of bellowing hell-hounds, each one a Cerberus, armed with the deadly teeth and claws of the tiger. Close behind tramped an appalling herd of deformities, hunch-backed elephants, with raised trunks that were hissing serpents, and tusks which reached down to the ground tearing up fragments of rock and hurling them against the terrace with diabolic fury. The rear was taken up by a grisly multitude of animated skeletons, who yelled, grinned, laughed, danced,—drawing up and thrusting out their bony limbs with wriggling motion, and varying the infernal performance by a series of somersaults. Back of all burst a deluge of red fire which shot with raging impetuosity among the hellish monsters, who instead of being deterred appeared to derive strength from the consuming element. But fierce as was the rush against the terrace, beyond its outer limits the demons could not pass.

Meanwhile, on the upper extension of the celestial highway there was a quick mustering of radiant squadrons, and an array of embattled lines which extended beyond the remotest galaxies. The summons had gone forth to be ready for the infernal invader, and the denizens of the stars responded in unnumbered myriads. Signals flashed from height to height, and save the warning

note of a trumpet faintly heard now and then, the pregnant silence of the ethereal combatants contrasted strangely with the fiendish defiance of the howling goblins.

The moments of suspense were intensified by the swelling of the hoard to amazing dimensions; not that the coins multiplied, but they grew in size and in lustre, until each one resembled the solar disk. It was no more a pile, but a pyramid, of gold set in a frame of thickening darkness.

A peal of thunder from on high was the sign for the encounter. Like a sea of lightning, the radiant vanguard swept adown the terrace with a mien so dreadful and weapons so deterring that the black divisions fled in horror before the blasting might that shook the deeps to the foundation.

With all his attention concentrated on the engagement, Ben Abir had not seen that a cherub stood before him one of those precious disks in his hand, until the apparition spoke. "So much is thine, O, righteous Ben Abir! the rest will come," were the mystic words of the benign power.

Ben Abir could not accept the gift without stretching his arms to their full length, and found it impossible to hold it the moment his hands closed round the edge of the fiery wheel. Finding the priceless treasure was slipping from his grasp he called for Ibraeem to help.

"What is it thou wouldst have me do for thee, master?" asked the attendant when roused from his sound sleep.

"Have I called thee, Ibraeem? Yes, I did call thee; but it was all a dream, a dream as awful as the vision of Jacob in the wilderness.—How far advanced is the night? Is there anything left of the golden hoard?" inquired Ben Abir.

"The camels are astir, and the east is gray, but the gold is all gone, master,—all gone. Had we taken it, thou wouldst again be the Cræsus of Yemen," said the simpleminded Ibraeem, regretfully. "We ought to have taken it, ought we not?"

"It is well that we kept our hands from it; it was a temptation held out by the evil one, Ibraeem, who lures man into error. What is to be will be.—Let me be alone for a little space; I am somewhat perturbed," concluded Ben Abir, who wished to think over his unearthly vision.

With eyes closed, the Hebrew endeavored to recall the dark and bright phantoms of the night, pondering what it all might mean. And that hoard, which his humble servant had witnessed and referred to, had been too tangible a reality to be transferred to the domain of the spectral.

The radiant flood-gates of heaven's light-oceans opened wide. The Orient was ablaze with the glories of an early sunrise, which had been initiated by waves of gilded crimson; and Arabia Felix rose from a transcendental dream to bathe in dew as brilliant as the pearls of Halool and Katar. The air vibrated with the joyous notes of the feathered freebooters; there were the finch, the lark and the thrush to lead in the matin concert, and the beautifully-crested hoopoe, on whom Solomon bestowed a golden crown for services rendered him in the desert and for messages carried between His Majesty and Belkeys, the Queen of Sheba. Sweet was the scent of the air, and the sparkling dew was as yet unabsorbed by the glowing heat of the rising day.

Ben Abir issued from his tent to feel that nature donned her festal robes in honor of the Sabbath blessed of the Lord. Was it not his over-soul that made him realize the holiness of God's creation? How different the world looked to him on week-days. But think of whatever he might, before his mental gaze still soared his vision undispelled by the cheer of sunshine and life. His heart throbbed with prophetic apprehension. Who was wise enough to enlighten him?

However, the day was passed in worship and study; and at the sight of the first three stars in the firmament, the scrupulous Ben Abir bade his farewell to the Sabbath by the blessing uttered over a cup of wine; and, lantern in hand, proceeded to search the spot whereon the golden hoard had been seen on the previous night. One gold piece only he found on turning up the sand with

the tip of his sandal, but it was enough to make his heart flutter, conscious that the coin in his hand was not of human make. Returning to his tent, the precious piece was deposited on a pillow with a trembling hand, when lo! the thing began to dilate and grow in brilliance, until it reached the size and shape of the golden disk he had in his vision received from an angel's hand. Ben Abir bit his thumb to assure himself that he was awake. Was it not another illusion? To the touch it was an ordinary coin; to the eye it had the form of a mighty targe of burnished gold. "It is mine, and I shall keep it as the secret and talisman of my life, a gift of the Most High, blessed be He!" whispered the loyal Israelite, and the mysterious coin was carefully wrapped up and put away.

The early dawn of the first day of the week found Ben Abir's caravan winding its way amidst a wilderness of tropic vegetation and scattered rocks; but the tide of fortune still turned against him. Torrents of rain impeded the march of his camels and damaged the goods he depended on for the success of his journey. While the dromedaries were in the act of crossing a bridge the span gave way and three of the poor brutes went down never to rise again; and to complete his ruin, fire broke out at the caravansary where he had hoped to find refuge from the weather's inclemencies, and he had good cause to be grateful even for escape from death in the flames that consumed the remnant of his merchandise, largely secured on credit. The Cræsus of Yemen found himself on the brink of poverty, a ruined man with a crowd of creditors to lodge him in one of Sanaa's abominable prisons. He knew the Kadi who would speak the sentence, and he prepared to face the inevitable, trusting that something would happen to render his painful situation bearable.

There lived at this time another person in Sanaa who actually rejoiced at the disgrace and impoverishment of Ben Abir; and this contrary both to his own temper, and to the popular sympathies with a man who in his better days alleviated human misery to the best of his ability. That exception was Hayem Cordosa. The cause of the ill feeling in Cordosa's breast was an unhappy, one-sided romance, which had driven his son, Menahem, to desperation. Until a certain morning that youth had but one dream, and that was knowledge. It was the fateful moment when he chanced to meet in the street an exquisitely lovely boy mounted on a pony in charge of a black man. The child's silken locks were darker than the jet black face of his attendant, his complexion was like milk and blood, his lips reminded one of the red coral, his teeth of the purest pearl, while his eyes suggested the dreams of angels in realms of ineffable felicity. A few questions put to the slave brought the information that infinitely fairer than the child was his elder sister Estrelia. In the glow of his loyal admiration Ibraeem, who had the child in charge, portrayed to the interested youth a maiden who was more beautiful than the Pen of Yemen. So great was her beauty that her pellucid witchery shone through her veil, while her perfect form would have been envied by the graces of antiquity. Ibraeem did not think that he exaggerated matters by assuring Menahem that Estrelia's loveliness illumined the apartments of her privacy, and that her eyes would enchant the deadly *rukta*. If the youth had any doubt about it, the cherub-like sweetness of her little brother dispelled the doubt.

Menahem was not a youth to be despised. His fidelity to principle was as great as his learning in sacred literature was deep. He felt justified in offering his heart to Ben Abir's daughter, but met with a rebuff, and became desperate. The erstwhile cheerful youth grew gloomy, courted seclusion, brooded on vengeance; and finally resorted to the extremity of deserting his faith, to the great sorrow of his scrupulously religious parents. It was a mad step, but there was method in the madness. The apostate put himself under the protection of Omar, and the learned Kadi presented him to his royal master as a convert to Islam; the Imam received him with favor,

assured him of a seat in Paradise, and made him his cup-bearer. Menahem was where he wished to be, but Cordosa hated the house of Ben Abir.

It was during the last trip of the fallen Croesus of Yemen that the convert took an opportunity to speak to the Imam of the maiden who had driven him mad, and he spoke of her as the “luminous Pen of Yemen, whose radiant beauty enlightens Ben Abir’s home.”

Under ordinary circumstances there was not a thing within the boundaries of his dominion the Imam would hesitate to lay hand on if he deemed its possession desirable. In this especial case the remembrance of a broken leg and dislocated jaw seemed to justify any step calculated to afford some recompense for those injuries which gave the aspirant to prophetic veneration a hideous aspect. When consulted in the matter, the Kadi failed to see it in any other light—“Thou art the blessed re-birth of the last prophet, the prince of this great land, and there is no power in the heavens to interfere with thy right, O, commander of the faithful! when thou seest fit to save a soul from perdition. As to the increase in thy harem beyond the number consecrated by the will of Mohammed, thy servant will be grateful for any of thy Houris, if thou deignest to transfer her to the humbler home of thy devoted Kadi,” was Omar’s suggestion.

Had the secret remained among its originators and been carried out promptly, the fate of Estrelia would have been sealed; but the removal of one from the Imam’s harem put Ayesha on her mettle. She suspected a new arrival, and, having fathomed the mind of Yemen’s lord, she was alarmed at the prospect of being eclipsed by superior charms, thus forfeiting her hitherto undisputed rule; and she lost no time in apprising the right persons of Estrelia’s imminent danger. Thus did it come to pass that when, led by the apostate, the minions of the prince descended on Ben Abir’s unprotected home, they had to report that their nocturnal invasion had been a failure. The “luminous pen of Yemen” had been warned in time.

For a man already under the pressure of great trials to return from a ruinous trip, and be greeted by the news of his child’s disappearance, is an experience more readily imagined than described. The last visitation was too overwhelming even for the Job-like resignation of Ben Abir. His only comfort was his wife’s assurance that Estrelia was not in the seraglio of the Imam. She had been carried away by two men in disguise through a back door, barely escaping the grasp of the vandals who knocked for admission in the front. The mother was so panic-stricken that she failed to remember the names of the persons who had come to the rescue of her child, and she had not heard from them since; but she felt sure that everything would turn out right.

In his brighter days Ben Abir would have invoked the power of his sovereign to effect the restitution of his daughter, but matters had changed, and circumstances dictated prudence on his part. Imam and Kadi were alike interested in his ruin. To search quietly, wait patiently, hope and pray, were the only ways and means compatible with his safety. Besides, there were impatient creditors to be appeased and starvation at the door. The princely home had to be disposed of, but this afforded small relief. Whatever he touched, success was his adversary. “If I made it my business to bury the dead, not a death would for years occur in the city of Sanaa,” remarked the disappointed man to his wife. The last trinket had been sold to keep the wolf away from the door, and now hunger stared his wife and child in the face. The devoted Ibraeem did his utmost to relieve the want of his master’s family, but his fidelity was more of a comfort than a support. With the pride of a man who would rather die than appeal for help, Ben Abir yet had finally to yield to the entreaties of a starving wife. There remained but one thing for him to do, a bitter pill for him to swallow, and he acted like a man. Twice a year it was Cordosa’s business to lead a caravan to one of Yemen’s ports to exchange Arabian products for merchandise imported for the markets of the peninsula. What he did not do on his own account he did on commission for

others. The leading merchants of Sanaa charged him with the purchase of their wares, and their commissions were all entered in a book to be referred to in due time.

The resources of Ben Abir having been exhausted, he bethought himself of the precious coin he had sewed up in the hem of his coarse mantle, and he resolved to ask Cordosa to invest it for him in whatever way he should deem profitable. Curbing his pride he sought an interview with his enemy, made a frank statement of his pinching indigence, and requested Cordosa to buy for the only piece of gold he had in the world anything that could be sold in Sanaa. Ben Abir's sad plight and frankness moved Cordosa's heart, who not alone promised to do his best in the matter of business, but insisted on relieving the distress of the fallen man's family. The reconciliation was complete, and the generous commissioner set out on his journey, accompanied by the best wishes of Ben Abir, and those who expected his return with more than usual interest.

The six long lines of dromedaries of Cordosa's caravan, each file held together by a hair rope, were preceded by a snow-white donkey of the best breed in Hasa, good luck being insured by that philosophic animal who gave Balaam a lesson. To the left of the sagacious quadruped rode the regular guide, a Bedouin who felt at home in the trackless waste; to the right, astride of a fine steed, was the *Karawan-Bashi*,—the caravan commander,—a gorgeous display of gaudy trimmings, trappings, jingling bells and tassels, in which, however, he was greatly eclipsed by the leading ass. At the *Bashi's* left side dangled a sword of Damascus, sheathed in a scabbard; and his warlike temper was formidably impressed on all whom it concerned by a spear of unusual length. Behind these three leaders, varying in their capacity, on his horse came Cordosa, the master of the caravan. Between the guide and the *Karawan-Bashi* there was a tacit understanding to while away the monotony of the trip by tales of adventure in the desert, which they told with startling vividness, each one managing to pose as the hero of some thrilling episode.

After the usual number of days, and the accidents incidental to a journey through inhospitable regions, Cordosa reached the point of his destination. Here the unexpected happened to the experienced commissioner. Following his memoranda, he left no detail of business unattended to, except the order of Ben Abir, which he had omitted to enter on his book. As the caravan was on the point of proceeding homeward, Cordosa remembered Ben Abir's request, and felt guilty of neglect. Full of self-reproach, he turned to the *Karawan-Bashi* and required him to hurry to the bazaar and buy for the gold piece he gave him anything he thought profitable or useful. The order was carried out to the letter, to the great mortification of Cordosa. The *Karawan-Bashi* happened to meet a sailor, who had a cage full of Angola cats for sale, and proposing to strike a bargain, offered the gold piece in exchange for the feline colony, was taken at his word, and thus possessed himself of the freaky live-stock. The sailor's tale was brief. The animals had kept a large vessel free of mice, the ship had foundered, the seaman saved the cats. He had nothing to live on. It was a straight story. The vendor had the gold and Cordosa the cats. The only thing to be done was to take the feline company along.

Again the unexpected happened to Cordosa. For many days everything went on without a hitch, when the *Karawan-Bashi* and the guide informed him that the high-land they were traversing was entirely unknown to them, and that they did not know how they had come into it. "What I see around me I have never before seen, and I have led a hundred caravans athwart the width and breadth of Yemen," asserted the most experienced guide, and the *Bashi* shook his head significantly.

“And have you perceived the singular fact, that though the country hereabout resembles the garden of Eden, we have this long day not seen a single sign of life,” said Cordosa, not undisturbed in his mind.

“Allah achbar! what sea is it there we are drawing nearer to?” asked the *Bashi* in alarm.—“A big water in the mountain!”,

“By the beard of the Prophet, how can a big water climb up a mountain?” ejaculated the astonished guide.

“What you see is no water, but a heavy fog, which looks like water,” corrected Cordosa, much surprised however at the phenomenal denseness of the cloud.

“True, it is a fog; but I have never seen one that looked so much like a rolling tide threatening to engulf us. Everything that is alive seems to have fled before we entered this region,” observed the guide, apprehensively.

And a strange fog it was, which rolled forward like a tidal wave, and ere long buried the caravan in a cloud so dense that one could not see his own feet, and the men became alarmed lest they go down unwarned over the brink of some precipice. The camels were allowed to grope their way, the guide having given up the idea of guiding; and the long string of animals progressed slowly amidst a flood of vapor with nothing to vary the nerve-trying suspense for fully an hour. Everything and everybody was soaked by the moisture; the air did not stir, and the stillness was oppressive. At last there was a rift in the hitherto impenetrable mass; and when a breeze lifted the fog, Cordosa rubbed his eyes to assure himself of being awake.

“Dost thou see what I see?” asked he of the *Karawan-Bashi*.

“And what dost thou see, O, man, who hast traversed the Red Desert?” asked in turn the *Bashi* of the guide.

“I see, high up, a city of marble palaces with roofs of silver and balconies of gold, as glorious as Balbec and Chilminar,” cried the guide, enthusiastically.

“That is what I see; we have been lured into the domain of the genii, and harm will betide us if we fail to evade their crafty wiles,” answered the *Bashi*, nervously.

“If we do not flee the malicious *Div* will hurl us into one of those bottomless chasms which swarm with venomous serpents,” warned the guide.

“Try we to retrace our course, or the bird of prey and the hyena will pick the flesh from our bones,” said the *Bashi*, in a mood of dark prophecy.

“Is it not God who rules this world and the stars? How can you be sure that evil will befall us if we enter that place? We are men of faith and stout hearts, and I propose that we proceed toward that dazzling city, no matter who they be who inhabit it,” was Cordosa’s fearless proposition.

“Thou shalt not find me craven if there be danger to face. The point of this spear has been buried in the body of the lion, and this heel has bruised the head of the *rukta*; if there be the evil one, I will face him,” exclaimed the *Karawan-Bashi*.

“Neither is thy guide of the stuff that shrinks before spectres, however monstrous. Let us know them who have built that marvelous city,” cried the guide heroically, and toward the city the caravan advanced.

It was that hour of the day when the lengthened shadows indicate the descent of the glowing orb, but the striking absence of bird or insect in a quarter where every inducement for their presence was to be seen in abundance gave the surroundings an air of desolation, and produced the sensation experienced by him who suddenly lights on a corpse. A broad avenue shaded by treble lines of orange trees in blossom, diffusing delicious odors, led up to a high portal giving admission to a vast enclosure walled by gray stones perfectly fitted by masterful hands, a fortress

looking as new as though the masons had just given it the finishing touch. The wall was not high enough to hide the gorgeous edifices within; but the wayfarers pricked their ears in vain to catch a sound of life, the quiet being that of the graveyard. "This is a dead city," observed the guide, in the hope of shaking the courage of Cordosa; "peradventure the desolate city built by the son of Ad."

"They are not dead at night who are dead during the day," added the *Karawan-Bashi*, with a similar object in view.

"God is strong enough to afford us protection against all evil powers. Here may be a mystery we are destined to solve. Knock at the gate for admission," ordered Cordosa peremptorily.

"*Allah illaha ii Allah!*" cried the *Bashi*, seized with a fit of unflinching heroism; "I will knock at the gate with my scabbard, be the place under the rule of grim Monkir; the faithful need not be afraid of the creatures of Eblis."

The rap on the gate gave forth a hollow sound in response, yet the gateway opened with a jar, revealing a scene at which the intruders gazed with amazement. Sheddad's garden of Irem could hardly equal the vernal luxuriance which hid the foundations of the wonderful buildings. Scattered here and there, among delightful flower-beds and thick clusters of the luscious vine, stood groups of fairies motionless, so handsome that their cheeks rivaled the rose in sweetness. They were all barefooted, their little feet resembling those of children. For headgear they wore crowns of golden hair; their garb was a transparent gauze, shining like moonlight, and bespangled with gold, and they were all armed with spears of that precious metal. Awful was their silence, their expression yet showing an intense anxiety to utter speech. The gate slammed to with its jarring note as soon as the last camel was within the precincts, and the Yemenites shuddered at the realization of their being locked in a dead city. Overcome by the awe of the surroundings, Cordosa exclaimed: "Great Lord, protect us!" Hereupon the whole mountain experienced a tremor, shared by the life-like fairies, who appeared to shiver at the mention of the Supreme.

It being sunset, Cordosa directed the *Bashi* and the guide to take the caravan to the nearest khan, and the next moment the travellers entered a caravansary, compared to which the Asaad Pasha of Damascus is but an insignificant hostelry. They found the gate ajar, and within there was plenty of provender, and a playing fountain to quench the thirst of man and brute. A sumptuous divan furnished with the most costly rugs of silk, and such seats as are only reserved for caliphs, tempted the Arabs to rest their weary limbs, while the odors of savory viands betrayed the neighborhood of a culinary institution of the highest order. Following the scent they entered a prodigious banquet hall of imperial splendor. On low tables a royal feast was set in glittering crystal under covers of gold. On the right side of each service lay a golden rod not unlike the sceptre of a king. Scores of fairies stood around in the attitude of attendants eager to serve, but stiff and lifeless as mummies, dead beauty radiating from their faces of immaculate purity.

Hunger yielded to temptation, and the *Bashi's* example was followed by the others, except Cordosa who, lost in wonder, would not avail himself of the magnificent hospitality impliedly offered by beings who to all appearances were dead; if not dead then strangely enchanted for some unaccountable purpose.

Neither had the others time to appease the cravings of their appetites; for no sooner was the first dish uncovered than a multitudinous rustling, tripping and squeaking caused the astonished guests to turn their eyes toward the door, when lo, and behold!—thick swarms of silvery mice came rushing and tumbling one over the other, and, flying up the limbs of the horrified men, as

squirrels are often seen to run up trees, they devoured in the twinkling of an eye whatever had been laid bare to their voracity. The sumptuous banquet was turned into a scene of horror and disgust, the more so since the pests seemed heedless of those who were present, and callous to the blows which were dealt them with the golden rods that were apparently there for that purpose. "Bring the cats hither," commanded Cordosa. And as the cage was brought forth and opened the cats leapt forth like tigers wild for prey. But nimble as pussy is, the agility of her game left her without a chance to do mischief. Quick as the vermin had appeared, they much more quickly disappeared, as though the swarms had been nothing but flitting shadows.

Before it was possible to restore the animals to their cage, Cordosa and his subordinates were not only startled by the sudden animation of the fairies in the banquet hall, but a muffled roar, as of a victorious army without, made them feel instinctively that a great change had come over the dwellers of the magic city. It was a tumult that stirred the air far and wide, was echoed and re-echoed, until the hills were vocal with the ringing vibrations of countless voices, and before a question could be asked, in marched a legion of those admirable creatures, who but a little before had been seen in a state of inanimation. Arraying themselves in military form, they presented arms and made a profound salaam in evident honor of Cordosa, thus acknowledging his title to their respect. With that unflinching politeness, which is the exquisite quality of the refined Oriental, the Hebrew begged to be informed why he was made the object of this distinguished attention. "Because thou hast broken the spell which for many hundred years held the denizens of this city enthralled by enchantment," was the answer.

There was a genial affability in the demeanor of the child-like representatives of the city's population, so that the fear of their being malicious genii vanished, and a confiding intercourse took the place of shrinking suspicion. The story they told of their origin and subsequent enchantment is one of romance, necromancy, and dire vengeance, it is briefly as follows:

Lilithiana, the Peri-Queen of the mountains of Yemen, had, in ages gone by, been wooed by the then two mighty magicians of Africa, known as El Akbor and Metemhagi. El Akbor was dreaded as the master of all the rodent species, which he had often sent on expeditions of destruction to avenge wrongs or to satisfy malice. There was no escape from the instruments of his ire. Persons and property were bitten, torn, and destroyed according to his order. The only power he feared was Metemhagi, who ruled all the feline tribes, and could be appealed to against the plague his rival was in a position to inflict. Long and assiduous was the courtship of the twain necromancers, and the love-contest closed with Lilithiana's declared preference for Metemhagi.

The Peri-Queen controlled the untold wealth hidden in the mountains of her domain, was mistress of all the genii within the bounds of her empire, and concluded to build an enchanted city accessible to none but her progeny. A host of her aerial subjects received orders to carry out their Queen's behest, and the city of marble, silver and gold was the result of one hour's workmanship. Hither the queenly Pen retired with her mortal adorer, and an impenetrable zone of cloud was thrown around the region that had the weird city as its centre.

Lilithiana was not long to enjoy her marital felicity. Her intimacy with a mortal deprived her of the power over Yemen's genii; and the angel, who centuries before had expelled her from Paradise for a slight trespass, descended to inform her that her sin would be visited on her guiltless offspring, her own punishment being exile and separation from her dear ones. Aware of the Pen's fall and disgrace, El Akbor assumed the deterring form of a monstrous rat and, embracing his opportunity, threw himself among the genii of Lilithiana's realm during a dance in the moonlight. The shock transformed them into a swarm of silvery mice, and the magician

having thus gained power over them, uttered another incantation, causing the whilom airy beings to raven with an insatiate hunger. This gluttony made them the terror of Lilithiana's descendants, who were doomed hereafter to live only from sunset to sunrise, held by witch-craft the rest of the time in a death-like trance.

Metemhagi's devotion to his fairest of consorts made it impossible for him to part with her whose tender passion for him had caused her fall and banishment, and his absence enabled the diabolical Akbor to accomplish his purpose. Informed of the outrage, Metemhagi hurried to the spot as fast as the fleetest tiger could carry him, but found that the spell was to last until, prompted by a higher power, the intrusion of man with that feline species of whom the rodents are in terror should break the magic thrall, and restore matters to their original condition. This having happened, the disenchantment of the enthralled inhabitants of the superb city was followed by that of the genii who had been changed to mice. Lilithiana's return to majesty came next. Widowed and humiliated, she had hovered for centuries on the borders of her beloved empire till Cordosa's arrival in her city changed the aspect of things, and she was the Peri-Queen once more.

Hitherto the nocturnal revelers could not indulge their feast without beating off the pestilent vermin with one hand while eating with the other; it was the first time that the banquet was being enjoyed in daylight, and without the use of the erstwhile indispensable weapon. The viands served appeared as inexhaustible as the multitudes who entered the dining hail to pay their respects to Cordosa, regale themselves, and file off again. Nor was music wanting to enliven conviviality. The charming attendants ravished the souls of the throng with song so sweet that the strangers had difficulty to prevent their eyelids from closing, lulled into obliviousness by the dulcet melody. At last Cordosa alone remained awake; the rest had succumbed to the irresistible charm of the bewitching voices. The honors showered on Cordosa were worthy of a great deliverer. In a palanquin of the most precious metal, studded with brilliant jewels, seated on cushions softer than air, he was carried through the festively decked boulevards and paradisaical gardens, among dazzling palaces and amid the joyous ovations of jubilant crowds.

And as soon as the sun had withdrawn his last mellow beam from the crests of the mountains, unearthly splendors burst over the magic city. The spectacle was one of ghostly awe and august magnificence. A splendid illumination shed a flood of light on towering edifices and their resplendent decorations. In a second, grand triumphal arches spanned every highway, woven of the Orient's most exuberant foliage, flowers and blossoms, each one strewed thickly with the delicate petals of all the roses in creation, and the delighted denizens were transfigured in the reflex of the weird effulgence. Expectation sat visible on every face, and the reason became manifest when the faint vibration of a dreamy music came floating on the balmy breeze from the lower end of the main boulevard. The disenchanted genii celebrated their deliverance, and prepared to welcome their Peri-Queen, whose time had come to return from her banishment to rule, surrounded by those whose image kept her lover's memory green. The event was to be commemorated by a transcendent jubilee.

The Queen's cavalry opened the triumphal entry with a division of diminutive and luminous horsemen, armed with golden spears, mounted on tiny zebras not larger than kittens, and blowing trumpets not unlike the calyx of the white lily. In an instant their files flew up the first triumphal arch, with no more effort than a bird makes when he hops from one twig to another. From their lofty position they watched the advance of the Queen's artillery, a glittering train of golden cannon, mortars and howitzers, on silver carriages, pulled by little white elephants whose drivers in lustrous uniform swelled the chorus by bugles which varied the harmony with great effect. An

inclined span thrown by the vanguard to the top of an arch served as a road to an elevated platform, where the ordnance was put in position, loaded and pointed in every direction of the compass. Beneath came the body of the great army, battalion on battalion, ascending and occupying in succession arch after arch, until the vernal displays bristled and blazed with the gorgeousness of the shining host. A translucent haze like a veil of atomized jewels floated in the atmosphere, reflecting the hues of the rainbow; and a thousand bands accompanied a chorus as numerous as the voices of the entire army and population.

Cordosa's tears flowed freely; the symphony proved too much for his heart. The pageant around him looked like a dream of blessed childhood. He had neither time to feel nor to think. The chorus sang the prelude to the entrance of the Peri-Queen. Wrapped in a cloud as intensely bright, as though the moon's light had been concentrated within a radius of a few leagues, Lilithiana entered the gate of her own city. Jubilant hurrahs greeted her and reverberated a thousandfold throughout the hills. As the queenly train drew nearer, Cordosa discerned in the heart of the mass of light a gliding chariot drawn by twelve fiery steeds as white as the blaze around them. In reclining ease Lilithiana rested on pillows of gossamer apparently filled out with light. Her golden hair hung like a beam of mild sunshine, leaving a countenance free, which with its star-like eyes left no hope for mortal beauty to equal it. Of lesser witchery yet unmatched by flesh however fair were her nine attending nymphs, who in another equipage rode behind their mistress, each one holding a bag full of precious coin. The glorious pageant closed with a division of brilliantly mounted guards on stags with golden hoofs and antlers.

What was the sensation of Cordosa on perceiving that the Peri-Queen had her eyes riveted upon him. Before the spot he occupied her chariot stopped. Without alighting from her royal seat, Lilithiana spoke thus to the astonished man:

"Not so much to thee, O, Cordosa, do we owe our restoration, and our children their disenchantment, as to the righteous Ben Abir whose faith and reverence frustrated the designs of the evil one. Temptation lured him in vain, and trials failed to weaken his trust in Eternal Justice. Yet hast thou done thy share to deepen his misery. Why knows he not where his daughter hides? Art thou not afraid of retribution? Lead his child to his heart And behold!—these nine bags of gold are destined for him. Take them hence and deliver them untouched as his meed for virtues rare among men. His cause is in higher hands; they who injured him will suffer."

The air was rent with cries of applause, and the triumphal chariot proceeded onward. Filing down from the arches, the army stood in marching order, and followed in grand parade. The discharge of artillery shook the air; the musicians played, and the pageant moved on and out of sight, except the column of moonlight, which faded slowly in the hazy distance. The palatial buildings burst out with radiance from within, and the happy crowds abandoned themselves to feasting and dancing.

Cordosa's first business now was to load the dromedaries with the treasure intended for Ben Abir. At the khan he found it almost impossible to awaken his men. When the *Karawan-Bashi* finally opened his eyes, he looked stupid as an ox and talked as if he had lost his senses. The guide was similarly affected. The Arabs seemed deaf and dumb, and Cordosa felt alarmed at their state of torpidude. When all his efforts to raise them failed, he bethought himself of the fountain and grasped a vessel with the intention of throwing cold water on the dull company. But the fountain was gone. Cordosa turned toward the door of the superb Divan, where they had spent hours on the previous day; there was neither a hall nor a door to be seen, and a sudden dimness had made all things uncertain. Still more disturbed by the startling situation, Cordosa tried to grope his way into the room of whose nearness he was sure, but, instead of striking one

of the cushioned seats, he struck his head against the bark of a tree. Awaiting once more some unexpected change he strained his eyes to discern some object; and failing in the effort, knelt down to ascertain the nature of the ground he was on. Cold sand, gravel, and wet grass apprised him of surroundings other than those he had supposed to be about him. While fear was gaining on him, a passing wind raised the fog, and his astonished eye was sweeping in vain in search for the enchanted—or disenchanting—city.

The sun was just throwing out his multicolored couriers to inform continents of his coming. A further effort to awaken his men proved successful, and Cordosa's next care was to discover whether the cats were in their cage, and whether the gold bags made a part of what he doubted not was a dream's phantom. His consternation was great when he found the cage empty, and counted nine bags full to overflowing of the precious metal. Calling on the *Karawan-Bashi* and the guide, he thought it was time to proceed homeward. "We have dreamed long enough," said he for a purpose.

"Yes, master, there must be some tricky *Div* hereabout; I have a jumble in my head. I could swear by Allah that we have been in a grand city and have witnessed queer things," said the *Bashi*, with a yawn.

"By the beard of the Prophet, *Bashi*, the demon has blown something of that sort into my own brain," asserted the guide. The others said nothing. The caravan pursued its way, and Cordosa had his eyes on the camels that bore the enormous treasure. Sanaa was reached in safety. None of the men noticed the disappearance of the cats.

Immediately after his arrival Cordosa dispatched two trusty persons to his country retreat, and they returned with a third in a disguise which rendered identification impossible. He then sent for Ben Abir and insisted on being informed as to how he had come into possession of the mysterious coin that he had given him to invest. Filled with unutterable wonder at what he heard, Cordosa emptied one bag of gold after the other, asking each time whether the pile he had refrained from touching on the specified Friday eve had been as large as the one before him. Not before the contents of the ninth bag had been added to the heap, did Ben Abir exclaim, "So large, and not larger."

"Then take all this, and be once more the Croesus of Yemen, O, righteous Ben Abir!" cried Cordosa, and supplemented his words by the tale of the phantom city. It was Ben Abir's turn to be overwhelmed by astonishment. "And now has thy time come to be perfectly happy," added Cordosa, knowing the contrary to be the case.

"Alas, Ben Abir's happiness will never, never return!—My daughter,—my daughter!" lamented the disconsolate father.

"Even thy daughter returns with thy fortune," said Cordosa, and disappeared through the door, which led to his private apartments. Another minute and the lost Estrelia lay sobbing in her father's arms. Ben Abir was a happy man, but the other felt that he owed his friend an explanation, which was substantially as follows.

When the jealous Ayesha had learned of the Imam's intention to glorify his harem by the incomparable loveliness of Ben Abir's daughter, she lost no time in warning Cordosa of the maiden's danger. Knowing that his recreant son was at the bottom of the infamous scheme, he felt himself called upon to frustrate it. But once in possession of the girl, whose charms had lost him his son, Cordosa hoped against hope to effect a change in her feelings toward the desperate Menahem. The plan did not work. Estrelia detested the youth who had worshipped her, but was told that her safety required her removal to a hiding place. Cordosa was maturing a new plan

when the supernatural incidents of his last journey left him no choice. The Peri-Queen must be obeyed, lest misfortune betide his house.

Cordosa asked Abir's forgiveness, pointing to the great anguish of heart the love affair had caused him. The Cræsus of Yemen, recognizing the higher hand that fashioned his destiny, would not have his friend refer to it hereafter. "I would to God I could heal thy wound, O, kind-hearted Cordosa. My gratitude and sympathy are thine, and if a part of this hoard will give thee ease, be it thine also," replied Ben Abir.

But Cordosa would not entertain the thought of being rewarded for services he had rendered accidentally, while Lilithiana's warning not to touch the gold was fresh in his memory.

As the two much tried men were considering the best way of conveying the treasure quietly to the house - of its owner, Ibraeem knocked at the door. When admitted, the man could scarcely speak for excitement. "The Imam is dead!" cried the liberated slave out of breath.

"The Imam dead!—Who killed him?" asked Cordosa, sure that death had not come peacefully,—else why that commotion

"He killed both the Imam and the Kadi," supplemented Ibraeem, "He ran amuck."

"Who is he?" asked Ben Abir with pardonable impatience.

"Menahem Cordosa," breathed the slave, betraying a delicacy of feeling slaves are not credited with. Cordosa grew faint, and was caught in the arms of Ben Abir.

"Menahem Cordosa an assassin!" mourned the stricken parent. "It is well that it ended as it did," added Cordosa, having recovered his composure. "Take your hoard, friend, and may thy house prosper."

"Dost thou remember to have ever seen this heap of coin?" asked Ben Abir, seeing Ibraeem's eyes fascinated by the shining pile.

"That is the gold we saw that Friday eve before thy tent," replied Ibraeem.

"Yes, Ibraeem, and then I told thee that what is to be will be. This all goes to our house, thine not less than mine, faithful Ibraeem, who shall live to the end of thy days with the Cræsus of Yemen," said the grateful Ben Abir.