

The Student of Timbuctu

By Henry Iliowizi

At the close of the year 1578 the slave-markets of Mauritania were glutted to their uttermost, and for once the price of a male slave was less than that of a donkey. This overstock of human ware was due to the thousands of prisoners who had survived the fateful battle fought in the neighborhood of Al-Kesar Kebir, on the banks of the Elmahassen, between the invading army of Dam Sebastian, the youthful, overbearing monarch of Lusitania, and the host of Muley Abd-al-Melek, the formidable Emir-al-Mumemm, the Commander of the true believers, the *Seedna* or lord of the Moorish Empire.¹

The Moslem's cruelty to his Christian slaves rose in proportion to the latter's decline as marketable articles, and fanaticism revelled in the daily spectacle of crusaders doomed to immurement, because of their refusing to embrace Islam by uttering the *Fatha*. The irony of the historic whirligig showed itself in the fact that the Catholic Auto-da-fê had its counterpart in the frightful doom of a king and an army led by the flower of his nobility, who, barely a hundred miles from the coast of their kingdom, had to choose between apostasy or being immured alive for the edification of the vengeful Moor. The wretches were compelled to prepare their own graves, usually cells in the city's wall, one Christian bricking up his fellow only to be in turn entombed alive himself.

A melancholy distinction was reserved for the royal zealot, Dam Sebastian, who had encountered crushing defeat and humiliation. With less than half of his smitten chivalry and valiant soldiers he saw himself in the power of an inexorable foe, himself wounded and in chains pining in the vile dungeon of Mequinez, one of the Sultan's capitals, the others being Fez and Morocco. After the obsequies of the unmourned *Seedna*, who had died on the field of battle, his son and successor, having been proclaimed Sultan, and crowned in the holy shrine of Mulai Edris at Fez, proposed to celebrate his coronation by the entombment alive of the Christian king who had invaded his father's empire, notwithstanding the warning of the late *Shereef* that the unjust inroad would surely land the aggressors in ruin. His Majesty furthermore remembered the treacherous proceeding of Sebastian, who, at the end of the decisive battle, had caused a white flag to be displayed, but had broken the truce by throwing himself with fifty of his knights into the thick of the Moorish ranks, causing slaughter and consternation, and resulting in the death of the late Sultan.

But the strongest motive of the young *Shereef's* dire vengeance was the unaccountable loss of his sire's priceless crown, which Muley Abd-al-Melek was in the habit of carrying with him whithersoever he went, wearing it on solemn occasions. Muley had worn the crown upon his head while the great battle was being fought, after which that invaluable symbol of imperial grandeur was not to be found. The crown was an heirloom traced back to the great Caliph of Omar, whose victorious general Saad had acquired it with the enormous treasures of the Chosroes. It was worn by Chosroes Nushirvan in the throne-hall of his grand palace in Madayn, the capital of ancient Persia, and its incalculable value had been further enhanced by a rare jewel which the Emperor Heraclius had sent Omar as a present.

¹ This battle and the fate of Dom Sebastian as narrated in this tradition agrees with historical fact.

Such were the cumulative incentives to one of the most cruel executions devised by human atrocity. And the tortures also inflicted by order of the new *Seedna* on his most loyal attendants, such as the *Mul-el-Ma*, who satisfies His Majesty's thirst when in camp from a gazelle-skin; the *Mul Attai*, who prepares the royal tea and serves it; and the most important *Mul M'dul*, the keeper and holder of the *Shereef's* red umbrella, left the mystery unsolved.

The inhabitants of Mequinez, who since times immemorial furnished the bulk of the Emperor's most devoted servitors, tingled with excitement, and the entire population turned out to witness the burial of a live Christian monarch. From the portal of the imperial mosque issued a train of chosen notables, long-bearded *Kadis* robed in white flowing raiments, wearing white turbans, red sandals, the *delill* or prayer book suspended from the belt by a cord of silk; *talebs*, the doctors of law; *emins*, the ministers of the mosque; *adools*, the public notaries; and a train of *fukies*, the all-moving luminaries at whose feet the rising generation of the faithful drink in truth and wisdom. They were joined at the city's gate by another cortege, grotesque and dismal enough to match the gruesome processions of the Inquisition. This was made up of happy juveniles, who struck tom-toms, rent the air with the blare of infernal horns, and accompanied the music with ludicrous grimaces and comical dances, to the great delight of a sympathetic crowd, who swelled the chorus to the pitch of mad vociferation. A hideous negro, broad-shouldered, tall and massive, his frame clothed tightly in black, his eyes blinking dismally from circles of red, with a pointed hat to add several feet to his unusual height, impersonated Azrael the angel of death. Behind this caricature came a donkey whereon was seated the woeful representative of outraged Christian royalty, bare-headed, dressed in a black *jellab*, holding in his right hand a human skull,—a picture of terror and anguish. This was Dom Sebastian, riding to his sepulchre, on his right Monkir, to his left Nakir,—the demons of livid hue, who wake the dead to question him about his faith, and beat him with clubs if unable to stand the examination. The rear of this group was occupied by Eblis, grotesquely attired in red and armed with the implements of hellish torture. A throng of naked, filthy saints ran along howling and spitting at the whilom majesty of Portugal, relegating his soul to the deepest pit, and praying Allah to show no mercy to the Christian dog. Having passed out of the city's gate, the procession advanced along a tortuous road, winding among well-fostered gardens, protected by an outer and much lower wall, toward the spot where a cell about six feet high, but barely wide enough to enclose a human body, stood open in the main wall for the death by suffocation and for the dreamless rest of the fallen king. Too weak to dismount unassisted, Sebastian was rudely handled by Monkir and Nakir, who raised him from his seat, lifted him to the level of the cell, and pushed him inside, turning him with a twist so that the fanatic spectators had a full view of his face. Three wooden bars held the victim against the dead wall.

All eyes were now turned in the direction of the mosque, whence the signal for the closing up of the king's grave was to be given by the firing of a gun and the hoisting of a flag. The ghastly ceremony was so timed that the bricking up of the living tomb coincided with the hour of prayer, so that the boom of cannon and the appearance of the flag streaming to the breeze, was answered by a score of muezzins from the tops of their minarets, who called; "*Allah akbar, Allah akbar,—* God is great, and Mohammed is his Prophet!" The multitude fell prostrate in the dust, sending the *fatha* eastward to Mecca: "Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures, the most merciful, the King of the Day of Judgment! Thee do we worship, and of Thee do we beg assistance. Direct us in the right way, in the way of those to whom Thou hast been gracious, not of those against whom thou art incensed, nor of those who go astray."

The echoes of the *Sulhama* having expired in the air, the faithful rose from their posture of adoration, and the supreme Kadi of the land read this decree: "Hear me, ye worshippers of the true God! The Christian there had planned the downfall of our nation and the uprooting of Islam; but Allah willed it otherwise, decreeing that we deal with him as he meant to deal with us. Our late Seedna.—may Allah grant him the joys of paradise—died in his coat of mail, combating that infidel dog, who came as a foe and acted as a traitor, dishonoring his flag. Therefore did our Emir-al-Mume-min decree that he perish ignominiously, like the other slaves who would not recite the *fatha*. May Allah wither the right hand of our Seedna's enemies.—There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his Prophet!"—Slowly bricks and mortar closed up the open side of the upright tomb. One hour later there was no cell to be seen, but a plain wall hiding a monarch quickly choking to death, while the barbarians returned jubilant to the city.

Under the rule of Muley Zidan, a firman, bearing the Grand Vizier's signature, was placarded in every mosque of his domain, promising him who should be instrumental in restoring the lost crown to the ruling dynasty not alone high honors, but the option of leading home as wife any maiden of the empire, from the daughter of the first Sultana down to any damsel within the confines of Mauritania, and the assurance was given that there would be no inquiry as to how the lucky finder had come into possession of the imperial diadem.

As time lent distance to the disastrous crusade and its tragic sequels, a spontaneous crop of tales and legends transferred the former memorable event into the realm of romance. Down to this day the rustic folk of Lusitania look forward to the return of Dom Sebastian, whom they believe to dwell among the Moors in the somnolent state of Barbarossa, while among the tribes of Western Barbary it is popularly current that, owing to unknown causes, the great battle is periodically fought over, always at new moon, the phantom armies engaging each other on the banks of the Elmahassen, and the combat winding up with the historic rout of the crusaders.

Indeed the foolhardy invasion would read like the myth of the Argonauts, had the outcome turned out less crushing to the adventurers. For a youthful king, in the twenties, and of limited resources, to embark on a career of conquest remote from his base of supply, the coveted prize being a warlike empire much larger than the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal combined, an empire which Christendom learned to fear, is so daring an adventure that, but for its unquestioned reality, it could pass as a bit of chivalrous fiction. And the circumstances under which the last encounter took place, the death of the Sultan, the loss of the crown, and the terrible fate of the prisoners, tend much to invest the event with a halo of the mystic and the ghostly.

However, the legendary evolution of that desperate struggle near Al-Kesar Kebir may be traced back to the adventures of a student from Timbuctu, who arrived at Fez at the beginning of the sixteenth century. That was the time when the Fazzi had good cause to boast of cherishing one of the greatest centres of learning in the world. From the valley of the Nile, from the banks of the Congo and the Niger, from populous Europe, darkest Africa, and farthest Asia, the youth of the opulent without distinction of creed and race flocked to the halls of the Kairouin to cull the honey dropping from the lips of inspiration, especially the dimly revealed arcana that teach how to read the signs of the stars.

The Kairouin was then, and is in diminished lustre now, four institutions in one,—the highest school, the largest mosque, the greatest library, and the most hospitable caravansary in the vast regions traversed by the Atlas Mountains. Within the precincts of the Kairouin hundreds of poor students found then not only free shelter and tuition but also food and garments, the cost being defrayed from the ample bequest of the philanthropic Fatma, the original benefactress of that

curious university. It embraced a miniature world of the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the faithful and the infidel, the good and the bad; was the home of every Moslem who had none other; and, among its many good things, was distinguished for an atmosphere of tolerance, peace and cordiality. Even to-day the president of the Kairouin, the *Mokaddun*, whose office is hereditary, treats all as equals, the prince and the beggar having the same right, and that is to take life easy,—very easy. Instances of nervousness from overwork have never been heard of in the Kairouin. Once matriculated, the student is not expected to pass examinations, and is a privileged character, his presence in the city being a source of revenue to its inhabitants. For it should be remembered that among those who come to the Kairouin in quest of wisdom are the sons of the wealthiest *sheykhs*, nobles, and merchants from all the habitable lands which skirt the sands of the Sahara, young lords wrapped in soft silks, bestriding Arabian steeds magnificently caparisoned, followed by retinues of slaves to cater to their physical wants, and harems to beguile their ennui. Nor is, in the chase of romantic diversion, the beautiful Fazzi neglected; the people being inclined to connive at the trivial transgressions of the future pillars of Moslem scholarship. Thrifty parents know how and when to be absent when the young lords from Insala, Nubia, Tunis, Tripoli, Egypt, Taradunt, or Timbuctu are sure to mark their transit through apartments of supposed inviolable privacy by a trail of gold-sand. Such are the traditions of the Kairouin, realized down to this day.

But the student of Timbuctu with whom this tale is concerned was in every way an exception. He disdained luxury, spurned the delights of the harem, consorted with nobody, had but one aged slave to wait on him, dwelt in a tent on a rock in the outskirts of the city, and spent his days among the piles of old books and manuscripts treasured on the shelves of the Kairouin's subterranean library. In the bazaars he was known for years as the student who paid for his purchases in silver or in gold, without ever waiting for the change. He was not handsome. His most remarkable feature was a face strikingly reminding one of the owl's, with orange eyeballs which glowed like living topaz stones. He wore an expression which, once caught, haunted one like an apparition. His white-haired attendant was dumb and moved like an automaton of bronze, leaving one in doubt as to whether he was really a creature of flesh and blood. All that was known about that strange student was that he had come with the great caravan from Timbuctu, that his name was Omeyya, and that he devoted his whole time to researches in works of the occult sciences, such, for instance, as alchemy and astrology, supplementing his inquiries with practical experiments, assisted by his automatic attendant. His was a personality whom the Fazzi liked much less than they feared. Omeyya was left severely alone, but this was just the condition which seemed to suit him. His unique appearance and singular individuality had their origin in his exceptionally romantic birth, and in a career even stranger than his beginning. He grew up as the adopted child of the renowned sibyl Kadijah, whose abode was a cavern near Timbuctu, and who was more shunned than sought by the people of her quarter. To the simple folk Kadijah was known as the "owl-witch,"—rarely met, and then usually during the dusky hour before and after sunset, still more rarely at night; ever in a hurry, with her hair-covered arms flapping like the wings of a scared ostrich. She was in very truth like a hairy owl; weazen-faced, the extremities of her body resembling claws while her face bore every resemblance to that of the owl, orange eyeballs and a nose so pointed, hooked, and beak-like that it partly covered the thin curl of her upper lip. Only in extreme cases of distress did the people of Timbuctu resort to her for help, and her manner of meeting emergencies inspired them with awe. Her most potent specific was the likeness of a long-necked, heron-like bird, crudely drawn with charcoal on a bit of leather, and hung on the breast of the afflicted patient. The cure was assured.

In Kadijah's sombre abode Omeyya came to his consciousness of life, nursed with motherly solicitude, and was later initiated into the secrets of her dark arts. One day, the boy having risen to mature youth, the owl-witch startled him by offering to inform him as to the mystery of his life.

"Thou knowest not who thou art, my son, and my approaching end requires me to let nothing stand between thee and the truth concerning thy legitimate parents. In this place Naïma, the daughter of Moadh, then recognized the strongest arm of Timbuctu, gave thee birth. Thy father's name was Abu Sofian, the heir of Abu Thaleb, whom Moadh had slain in a family feud. When of age, and strong enough to avenge his father's death, Sofian burned to run a steel through Moadh's heart, vengeance being his only thought and prayer. From the flat roof of his mother's home Sofian had a clear view of his foe's terraced habitation, and thither he daily sent his imprecations, determined to break into it at the first opportunity, and make an end of the fierce homicide. The outbreak of a fire in the immediate neighborhood of Moadh's house gave the daring youth his chance. Armed with a deadly weapon, he succeeded in slipping unnoticed into the *Saalemlik* (reception room) of the hated man. Missing his object here, the son of Abu Thaleb made a dash for the *Haremlik*, resolved to strike down the head of the house in the inviolable seclusion of his wives. His rush was checked by the appearance of a tiny, jewelled, alabaster hand, that swept a silken curtain aside,—and there stood revealed above the frame of a screen a Houri of charms so enchanting that the lad was not sure that he was awake. 'Comest thou to save me from the flames? They are out to watch the fire, and my sire commanded me to await his return; he is a fearful man to be disobeyed,' spoke the girl in excitement; but her voice melted Sofian's heart, and made his eyes to swim.

" 'Fairy of the sun, disguise thy beauty in a man's *jellab* and turban that I may save thee, even if I die in the attempt,' replied Sofian with great presence of mind; and the girlish figure disappeared, to return as that of a stately youth.

" 'My name is Naïma, and if thou wilt be the light of mine eyes and the breath of my life, I will be the dust for thy feet to tread upon,' said the metamorphosed maiden, and, favored by the general confusion, they gained the street unobserved. Under Sofian's roof the same day Naïma became his wife; but Timbuctu was too small for Moadh's rage, grief and shame, and the young lovers guarded their secret so well that many weeks passed by before the city was in a furor at the news of the elopement.

"Moadh summoned his kindred to assist him in avenging the outrage; but Sofian was not to be found napping. An armed force of his kith and kin guarded his house day and night against an attack by surprise, while his girl-wife was delivered to my keeping in case of defeat. There was a siege and an assault, and, in the hand to hand struggle that ensued, Moadh met his death at the hand of Sofian, who was in turn mortally stabbed by one of the avengers. The youthful widow remained in my charge, and here thou wast born, thy mother having had nobody to return to or appeal to for protection. Sorrow, shame and remorse caused her to shun the sight of man, so that she would never venture out in daytime, lest someone recognize her and do her harm; for she was hated of all her relatives.

"She did not remain long in my keeping. In an evil hour she left her safe refuge to bask in the morning sun, only to fall an easy prey to the rapacity of marauding Bedouins who, having attacked and plundered the city, lighted on her as they passed this way. My arts could not rescue her, Omeyya, and the daughter of Moadh has changed hands many times since,—a slave or a mistress, just as it suits her master's fancy. This happened nineteen years ago, when thou hadst become my charge, yea, and my comfort.

“In my youth I was loved by a man of the black arts, and of him I inherited the secret of Egypt’s great mystery, the land of his birth. He knew much, but not enough to escape death, the inexorable reaper, whose approach I also now feel. To-morrow I shall be no more, and this hollow shall be my sepulchre. Bury me as a son would his mother.—Under that stone thou wilt find gold to sustain thee for the length of thy days. Yet shalt thou depart hence to seek a brighter life, greater wealth, higher station, and the happiness of love,—yea, and thy mother,—in the famous city on the River of Pearls, provided thou wilt act as thou art bidden. This unlighted hole, Omeyya, hides Egypt’s great mystery, which is hereafter to be in thy trust.—Take this rod from my hand and describe in mid-air the sign of the crescent from right to left toward the eastern wall,” commanded the witch.

Omeyya did as he was bidden. In answer the silvery crescent loomed up on the bleak rock, with its horns gradually lengthening downward until it completed the shape of an oval door opening to an arched space, brilliant with dazzling light. In the heart of the vault thus revealed there stood, perched on a block of onyx, a large heron, white as snow from its crop down, the rest of the plumage sky-blue traversed by lines of hieroglyphics in relief set in jewels of every hue with a predominance of the ruby and the amethyst. The scintillant hieroglyphics were irregularly scattered over the body of the mystic bird, thicker along the wings and thickest around the breast and the gracefully elongated neck; the eyes in the beautiful head were of topaz, and the long bill of burnished gold, pointed with black diamonds. Of a deep lapis-lazuli color was the heron’s tail, spreading to the dimensions of the peacock’s and furnishing a field for star-like configurations set in sparkling pearls, emeralds, sapphires, beryls, chrysolites, carbuncles, sards, and a variety of the jasper and the licure, while the black of his legs was likewise relieved by kabbalistic lines in rare gems.

“By the genii of Amenti, the masters who fashioned thee in the beginning to be the symbol and oracle of Osiris, O, Phoenix! I adjure thee to accept this youth in my stead as thy favorite, and to answer his call as soon as he shall decipher the emblems that move the spirits of thy mystery,” screamed the sibyl, vociferously.

Omeyya’s eyes dilated in amazement. The bird’s inanimate form gave signs of life. Ruffling his great plumes, he displayed a blaze of variegated gems, flashing like so many brilliant stars. From his feather train issued a haze of golden orange, changed into a flame of carmine, which consumed the bird and left the place to its previous dinginess.

“Mark me well, for death is upon me!—The rod in thy hand holds the key to the mystery thou art to unriddle in Fatma’s great school, during a period of strict abstinence from carnal pleasures. For thirty-seven months thou shalt drink the dew of the morning, shalt bathe at new moon in the River of Pearls, sleep within canvas-walls, so that thy nature be untainted and thou worthy of the power the revealed arcana insure for thee,” exclaimed the sibyl, never to speak again. With the last word her shrivelled frame fell lifeless to the ground.

Omeyya suspected that the rod contained something to be studied. On examining it in full light he found the upper end, looking like a carved handle, to be a closing stopple removable by a turn. From the hollow of the rod he pulled forth a rolled up papyrus. The unrolling of the document proved it to be much larger than it at first appeared, and Omeyya looked with concentrated attention at the lifelike picture of the phoenix it represented, the shining hieroglyphics being startlingly reproduced. Having reverently buried his foster-mother and possessed himself of the hoard, Omeyya abandoned the gloomy abode of his boyhood, earnestly resolved to comply most scrupulously with the directions of the sibyl.

When we meet Omeyya at the Kairouin of Fez he is at the close of his probationary period, and we need not be surprised to see him one new moon's eve on the bank of Elmahassen, rod in hand, ready to test the occult science acquired during years of assiduous application.

It is a cloudy night, and Omeyya strains his eyes to catch a glimpse of the tiny crescent. "Spirit of Kadijah, assist me," prayed Omeyya, and his rod described an imaginary crescent in face of the real one, now gleaming through a fleecy cloud. Like the flash of a search-light, there broke forth a radiance in the crown of a cedar-tree, focussing upon a nest upon which sat the shining phoenix.

"Bird of Osiris,—worship of Heliopolis! if I am as worthy of thy masters' favor as I have been successful in fathoming the mystic lore which commands thy presence, then let me see the encounter of those armies which years and years ago fought their last battle in this valley, so that I may learn what has become of Abd-al-Melek's crown," spoke, the student of Timbuctu, circumscribing the area by a sweep of his rod.

A prolonged scream was the bird's response, and its thousandfold echo a rumbling and stamping, a tramping and clattering, like that of heavy cavalry and artillery, followed by muffled hurrahs, and the neighing of horses. In the hazy twilight of the new-born moon Omeyya surveyed from a convenient elevation the inrushing of column after column, on horse, on foot, accompanied by trains of ammunition. It was a foreign army in the act of occupying strategic points. Wild cheers rent the air at the sight of a royal train that emerged from the distance, a youthful king at the head of a compact force of mounted cavaliers armed to the teeth. No sooner had the kingly commander surveyed the ground than he ordered a bridge of boats to be thrown across the river. The bulk of the army formed into two divisions, one fortifying the position occupied while the other hurried across the water to do likewise on the other side. It was a scene of feverish activity.

During the precipitous preparations in this part of the valley, a Moslem host burst forth from the shades of the groves, gardens and thickets up and down the stream, bore up with the speed of the wind, deployed into frowning lines of battle—having caused a force of horsemen to ford the stream—and faced the foe on both sides of the water. Surrounded by a formidable body-guard, appeared the Commander of the true faithful, whose pavilion was pitched at the foot of the hill on which Omeyya stood, in the midst of the minor pavilions of His Majesty's ministers. The soul of Moslem inspiration was the Shereef Abd-al-Melek, mounted on a white horse, his crown showing him to be the imperial centre of force. At a motion of his hand the Court's Emin gave the signal for battle by the cry: "*La illaha il Allah!*" But before the echoes answered the call, a dashing body of Portuguese cavalry broke into the advance lines of the Moors, and the fierce onslaught was backed up by a discharge of artillery, which mowed down great numbers of the true believers.

"Hamdillah!—Destroy the enemy of the faithful!" thundered the Sultan, and the rush of his host was like the roar of the forest swept by the storm. Outnumbered three to one, Dom Sebastian's lines were broken into upon every side. Yet the brave Christians not only held their ground, but threw their entire phalanx of foot soldiery against the enemy's left wing with such an impetus as drove it back toward the royal pavilion, spreading consternation and confusion. Abd-al-Melek, who had watched the action with intense concern, on seeing his forces hurled backward raved like a madman, smote with his scimitar whoever came within its reach, cursed his men, and wound up by tearing the crown from his head and flinging it into the tide of the river. For a moment the issue was doubtful, but the Christians fell as grass struck by the scythe. Presently a white flag was raised in Sebastian's quarter, which induced the Moors to slacken

their fury, when the desperate king dashed against their ranks with as many of his knights as were yet alive. The enraged Moslems made short work of the king's devoted band, slaughtered as traitors, and the victory was proclaimed by the Emin from a pile built of Christian heads. From this unique minaret the *Sulhama* stirred the echoes of the valley: "*Allah ahbar! Allah akbar!*" Prostrate on their faces the host offered up prayer; all except the *Shereef*, whose head sank until the chin touched his breast, and when assistance came it was too late. Abd-al-Melek was dead; and dead night ruled, the phantom hosts dissolving as they had come. Omeyya's heart throbbed in hope and suspense. What will day reveal to him in the river's tide?

Early dawn found the student on the spot he had held during the eventful night. "*Bismillah! Arrahmani! Arrahimi!*" exclaimed Omeyya, blessing the "all-merciful God" for his wonderful success. For in the slime of the bed, about four feet under the surface of the eddying current, his eye distinctly discerned the precious object. In a moment Omeyya plunged into the water and emerged therefrom with the tiara of Abd-al-Melek. The achievement was dazzling enough to turn a young head, but Omeyya had passed through a probation which left him in full control of his passions.

Although successful beyond his most sanguine expectations, Omeyya returned to Fez in a mood of profound sadness, having nobody on earth to share with him the golden anticipations inseparable from the treasure in his trust, and the incalculable possibilities latent in the potency of his magic rod. Though sobered by the earnest researches of years, Omeyya's thoughts involuntarily reverted to the prize to which his find entitled him. He had a claim on the *Seedna's* own daughter, but it behooved him to ascertain whether the first maiden of the empire was a covetable acquisition; secondly, whether, considering the *Shereef's* chronic inclination to silence annoying pretenders by putting them out of the way, it were prudent to proceed without adequate safeguards.

Full of golden reveries, the youthful wizard drifted the following day into the enclosed bazaar where the Fazzi, after the yearly arrival of the *Akabah*, or the great caravan from Timbuctu, gathered to take a look at the exhibited wares of fair human flesh. It was the slave-dealer's paradise. The square marketplace had but one gate and embraced many concerns within its confines, but the chief business was the disposition of slaves by auction or by private bargain. Under a roof of rough boards supported by rude posts, men, women and children were being stripped of their clothing and examined like cattle,—teeth, eyes, mouth, nostrils, chest, arms and legs. The agility of the slaves was tested by a free application of the whip, making them jump high, and their strength by the lifting of heavy weights. Handsome females were treated with more consideration. Bids were made, accepted, or declined. The most of the human chattels were black, and dressed to set off their forms to advantage.

Among the few whites there was a woman for whom the owner asked a fabulous price, and scornfully rejected a bid of twenty-five doubloons, although that was the highest amount that had ever been offered for a slave above thirty years of age. She was not on open exhibition like the others who shared her fate, but screened by a canvas stretched before her in a corner, behind which the prospective purchaser was allowed to make his examination. The one who had last availed himself of this privilege and had just come out from behind the partition, was a negroid Moslem, whose green caftan of silk bespoke his descent from the Prophet, while the soft rich folds of his satin shawl gracefully wound around his upper frame, like his capacious girth, suggested the enjoyment of an ample revenue, with little work and less worry. He was likewise a student at the Kairouin, but his researches were entirely confined to the mystery centred in

woman, and the bags of gold-sand he had brought along from Tafilet enabled him to pursue his ardent work with much assiduity.

“What is the age of thy gazelle?” inquired the lineal descendant of Mohammed.

“It is a gazelle from Jannet al Ferdaws, who are ever young and sweet, like the blossoms of the Tuba-tree,” replied the slave-dealer volubly.

“If she were a virgin thy comparison would pass, but she has seen somebody’s love, and must have seen at least thirty Ramazans,” observed the holy connoisseur of the fair sex.

“She will see thirty more years and yet be more beautiful than one of twenty. She is worth her weight in gold,” asserted the slave-dealer.

“Will a pound of gold-sand buy her?” asked the scion of the Prophet.

“One hundred doubloons will take Naïma,” cried the master of the slave.

“Naïma!” echoed a voice nearby. “Naïma—is that thy slave’s name?” asked Omeyya eagerly, who had been a witness of the progressing transaction.

“That is her name, Cid, as sweet as herself,” returned the cunning dealer.

“I will pay the price if thou canst satisfy me as to her place of birth, her pedigree, and her antecedents,” promised Omeyya without hesitation.

“What thou askest of me I cannot do. We buy and exchange slaves as we trade in other things, never bothering our heads as to whence they come, or who they are. What matters it? I traded for Naïma in Tenduf; she might have come thither from Timbuctu by Tandeng, an oasis in the desert, rich in salt, and fertilized by wholesome springs,” said the merchant hypothetically.

“She is mine; let the *taleb* write out the legal transfer,” said Omeyya, without so much as a look at the object of his purchase. A murmur of surprise passed around among the onlookers. The saint of the green caftan departed in disgust. In a few minutes the document was produced and signed, the price paid, and Omeyya, trembling all over, led off the slave, whom he felt must be his mother. Brought to his tent, he caused her to remove her *kaik* or face cover, made her sit on a pillow, threw himself on his knees before her, looked into her beautiful countenance, then kissed her hands and spoke: “Let thy first answer to my first question be plain and brief.—If thy father’s name was Moadh of Timbuctu; if thy husband was Sofian the son of Abu Thaleb of the same city; if thy friend was the owl-witch Kadijah; if a child was born to thee in her cave and his name was Omeyya,—then speak the word that I may praise Allah’s great mercy.”

“What spirit imparted to thee the tale of my woe, master?” cried the woman, in a thrilling tone; “thou must be a descendant of the all-knowing Prophet!”

“No! Is it not enough that I am thy child?” answered Omeyya, with an outburst of tears; and there was a pathetic moment beyond the reach of words.

It is again new-moon. Naïma is mistress of an elegant home, is waited on by slaves, moves among hangings of silk, on the softest of Moorish rugs; her eyelids are painted with kohl, her finger nails with henna; her harem opens on a courtyard pervaded by the odoriferous scent of the mandragora and the blossom of the orange, cooled by the splash and play of fountains, and animated by storks, who are sacred birds in Morocco as elsewhere. Mother and son have by this time unbosomed themselves to each other, and both are confident that the culmination of things will be equal to their expectations.

Once more Omeyya is alone in the dead of voiceless night, under cloud-obscured stars. He has been waiting since before the sun had withdrawn his last beam from the picturesque panorama afforded by the sight of the Western Mecca and its wreath of groves and gardens, spreading on the slopes of the valley through which flows the Wad-el-Jubar. Omeyya stood on the height crowned by Mulai Ismael’s bastion, whence the view of Fez is as perfect as that of the palace

grounds. As night closed over the city and the green tops of Mulai Edris—the famous mosque, striking because of its all-overtopping golden globe,— faded in deepening twilight, Omeyya heard the nightingale at her best, and his soul was well attuned for the amorous cadence. Now the crescent soared in relief on heaven's mystic tapestry, but a later hour was to evolve the vision of Egypt's mystery. At the right moment the potency of Omeyya's rod raised up the bird. Over court and palace broke a white radiance, and in its core hung the heron on wing in mid-heaven.

“Bird of Osiris, worship of Heliopolis! by the invisible masters who fashioned thee I demand to let me behold her whom destiny has decreed to be my consort.”

Omeyya was frightened on seeing the phoenix fade, as if offended by his command; but in its stead there sprung, like Iris from the clouds, a smiling Hebe; back of her rose in imperial majesty Muley Zidan and his foremost Sultana.—“*Hamdillah!*” cried Omeyya, falling on his face to praise Allah “the most merciful, the King of the Day of Judgment!” When he rose there were the stars above him and the silvery crescent, while the valley of the River of Pearls rang with the trill of a thousand nightingales.

The next morning the streets of Fez were filled with the cries of the Sultan's heralds, calling on him, who was entitled to the great prize, to come forth and obtain it.—“Bring the crown and obtain thy reward!” was the cry heard in street and bazaar, no one knowing what it meant.

But Omeyya suspected that something had happened in the palace, and he felt that his triumph was assured. What he learned later was this. That same night the *Shereef*, the *Shereefa*, and their daughter Rehamina, had a vision which they imparted to each other the following morning. They had all seen the same thing, and the coincidence could only be explained in one way. Abd-al-Melek's crown had been found. The Sultans's criers were sent out to assure the happy finder of his prize. Thus doubly reassured, Omeyya presented himself before the Emil-al-Mumemin who, it need hardly be told, was greatly impressed by the student's tale.

“What thou hast seen, son, is not the phoenix of Osiris, but the image of Allah's dazzling cock, who each morning chants to delight the ear of the true God, when all the fowls of his kind join in his melodious praise. By no less a miracle than the help of the bird, whom our Prophet saw in the skies, could the crown of Abd-al-Melek be restored,” concluded the Seedna, piously.

In the presence of the great *Divan*, Omeyya produced the crown; and here in the throne-hall his betrothal to Rehamina was solemnly confirmed. In due time there was a royal wedding, after which Muley Zidan found Omeyya not only to be worthy of his lovely daughter, but of his highest esteem and fullest confidence as the wisest counselor in his *Divan*.