

# The Doom of Al Zameri

By Henry Iliowizi

Nothing is known in nature which, in awful impressiveness, compares with the overpowering scenery forever associated with God's revelation to man. That arm of the Indian Ocean called the Red Sea bifurcates into the westerly gulf of Suez and the easterly one of Akabah, and the triangular peninsula thus formed embraces the region that bears the name of the sky-consecrated Mount Sinai. He who, from an overtopping height, once surveys those prodigies of this globe's eternal framework, pile on pile, varied by solitary peaks raising their heads above the clouds, amidst a confusion of innumerable gorges, *wadys* and ravines, the red of the stupendous mass interspersed with porphyry and greenstone, will, apart from their spiritual reminiscences, bear the impression to the end of his days that he has been in the very heart of creative omnipotence. About the entire system there is such a ghostly air, such a terrific frown, as is recalled by no other chain of crests and cliffs, however bold or life-deserted. If the bleaker rocks that encompass the basin of the Dead Sea are more deterring, those of Horeb are of a thrilling sublimity; and if this is true in broad daylight, night invests them with an inexpressible mystic awe, intensified by an inexplicable rumbling and roaring not unlike distant thunder. But all other feelings are merged in the one of terror when, as it sometimes happens, a heavy thunderstorm breaks over the wilderness of Sinai. Rendered impervious by a rarely disturbed aridity, the barren rocks retain little more water than would the glazed incline of a pyramid, so that the mountain torrents rush down with cyclonic impetuosity, uprooting trees and sweeping off settlements, with no trace left of what man and nature combine to produce.

It was in one of those spasmodic storms that, in the year 1185 after Mohammed's flight from Mecca, a muffled figure moved cautiously in the heart of a cloudburst which was accompanied by blinding flashes of lightning and such thunderbolts as shook the very bedrock of the mountainous desolation. The Bedouin's watch-fires, nightly seen all along the gentler acclivities, vanished before the elemental fury; and though the plain of al-Rahe opened before him, the lonely wanderer turned his face toward Jebel Musa, or Mount of Moses, betraying his anxiety to remain unrecognized. Wind and rain forced the man to seek shelter somewhere, but he seemed to prefer a dark hollow to the sure hospitality of the Arab's tent. From the heights the torrents came roaring like waterfalls, carrying along piled up masses of uprooted tamarisks, palm-trees, struggling sheep and goats; even bowlders were swept down like pebbles.

While stopping for a moment, irresolute as to the direction he should take, the muffled figure discerned a human form stranger than his own, whelmed by the flood and on the point of being either engulfed or crushed to death by the wreck-encumbered torrent. With a rush which endangered his life, the mysterious wanderer caught hold of the forlorn victim, tearing him out of the destructive tide, and as it happened landing him near a cave which he had not before seen. "Touch me not!" cried the rescued creature in a voice that startled his preserver. Yet compared with the rest of his individuality, the voice was the least appalling of his features. There stood a bare-headed being, bent with age, pale as a ghost, lean as starvation, wrinkled as a shriveled hag, shaggy as a bear, his beard descending to his knees, and his hair to his waist. Death stared from his eyes, misery from his face; in all an image of hopelessness, tottering toward the grave. Barely strong enough to drag his limbs, the wretch waddled into the rayless hole, whining and groaning.

The weather's inclemency would have hardly induced the other to divide the cave with one whose aspect suggested the tenant of the graveyard, but the tramp of approaching horses left no time for reflection. Like a shadow the muffled figure disappeared just in time to escape the notice of two Mamlooks on horses, who, perceiving the hole, drew in the reins with an oath: "Allah tear the devil!— If it were not for my poor horse I would crawl into that black pit to get out of this infernal tempest.—See this cataract! Why, this beats the Nile!—And the hawk we are looking for may as well be leagues out of this wilderness as within it. If we do not hurry to Wady-Feiran, the fever will settle in my belly. I feel cold about the heart," said one of the horsemen.

"Give up the thousand purses set on Ali Bey's head?" asked his fellow.

"Give up the chase of the devil!—The slave-Sultan is not within these black reaches, I say, and we are fools to follow our noses until the breath is out of our stomachs," answered the other impatiently.

A red zigzag flash tore the clouds; the crash threw the horses on their haunches. Had not the astounded Mamlooks scampered off like the wind, the lightning would have revealed to them the object of their hunt, Egypt's celebrated Sheykh el-Beled, a title tantamount to the power and dignity of Caliph. Such was Ali Bey who, at the close of a career of adventure and romance, was a fugitive in the wilds, with a price set by his enemies upon his head.

"The bloodhounds have lost the spoor of the game, and if my messengers reach Acre safely, my friend Daher will be out in force; but where hide till then?" thought Ali Bey, and proceeded to close up the entrance to his retreat by a pile of rubbish near at hand, darkness favoring the operation.

"Unless there are snakes in this hole, I shall have an hour's rest," said Ali to himself, having completed the hiding wall. A moaning ululation in the dark reminded him of the other presence he had enclosed with himself, and his alarm was not lessened by the sudden glimmer of a something which broke the gloom of the den. Coming as it did from the deep of the hollow, it could not be mistaken for a flare of lightning from without. Another glimmer left no doubt as to its source.

Ali Bey was not a man to quail before anything another man could face; but here was a phenomenon to stop the pulsation of the stoutest heart. A burning jewel, not in the palsied hand of a decrepit dotard, but in the hold of one in the prime of manhood, who resembled the other as closely as a heifer does its dam. Who was he? A son of the former? Or had there occurred the miracle of instantaneous rejuvenescence? Or was it Satan bent on some diabolical performance?—"Man or demon, good or evil power, whoever thou art, I demand of thee in Allah's name to unfold thy mystery to me. Art thou he whom I saved from the fury of the elements? He was nearer a hundred than thirty years; nearer death than life. Thou lookest like him, but couldst be his grandchild as to age and vigor. Art thou and he the same? Or art thou an illusion,—peradventure the spirit of this mountain? If thou art a spirit, thou knowest who I am; if thou art human I charge thee to speak to Ali Bey, the Sheykh el-Beled of Egypt, who is waiting for assistance to defeat the conspiracies of his enemies," spoke Ali with the firmness of despair.

"Sheykh el-Beled," answered the one spoken to in a tone as changed as his form, "there is less of spirit in me than in thee, yet am I less human than man ever was, deathless yet mortal, tossed about on the ocean of time from age to age, century to century, cycle to cycle, millennium to millennium; denied the peace of soul, the comfort of hope, the blessing of prayer, the nepenthe of oblivion, yea, the rest of the grave. Tremble not at the sound of my name. I am *Al Zameri*, the accursed roamer of the times, doomed since the making of the golden calf to begin, rejuvenated

after a lapse of every hundred years, anew my unblest career,—homeless, godless, hopeless, shunned, feared and hated!”

“Al Zameri!” ejaculated Au, who had moved some steps backward horrified.

“That is my name; credulity couples it with sin, greed, famine, war, inundations, hurricanes and pestilence. While thou art within the reach of my breath, warned by instinct, no man will do thee harm,” promised the wretched wanderer.

“Allah confound the devil!—Thou wouldst have perished in the flood if I had not rescued thee; there must be a hidden purpose in the accident of our meeting. Born a slave, destiny has given me the power to defy and defeat the Caliph of Islam. My sword has made me sole ruler over the empire on the banks of the Nile. In open battle I fear no foe; it is conspiracy and the assassin’s dagger that I am fleeing, and thy thwarting my pathway, or my thwarting thine, means something to me, Al Zameri. I am in the hand of Allah, the most merciful.—But speak, thou man of immortal woe, how didst thou provoke the anger of thy people’s God? Why was the golden idol fashioned? Why by thee? What has been thy experience since?—For few are the Prophet’s words in his reference to thy transgression in the Koran,” resumed Ali, making the best of his unique acquaintance.

“Sheykh el-Beled, thy kindness, not thy service, requires my acknowledgment. Thy succor was wasted on a man whom perdition would not have. For three thousand years death shuns me as ruthlessly as I long to hug it. My tale is a nightmare of three millenniums, taking me back to ancient Egypt, where I, a Hebrew, was born into abject slavery. My hot blood resented the taskmaster’s rod. In a moment of rage I struck back one of my tormentors, blow for blow, and was with other rebels doomed to dig in one of Pharaoh’s copper mines on the coast of Akabah in the valley of Semud. Here many of the Egyptian idols were fashioned, and here I learned the secret of the priests, who caused metallic forms to utter sound, to articulate oracular speech. Certain instruments were skilfully inserted into the interior of the idol, and the priest manipulated them to the great wonderment of the populace, who lay prostrate before their all-knowing, warning or blessing gods. The fraud was guarded by the loss of the tongue that betrayed it.

“I was young and strong when the joyous tidings penetrated our penal colony, that a man of God had afflicted Egypt with plague after plague, insisting that the Israelites be freed from bondage, and we soon read Egypt’s doom in the face of our taskmaster. We conspired, made a desperate break for liberty, and marked our track with the blood of those who offered resistance. Love for parents long missed impelled me to disdain danger. Disguised as an Egyptian, I was determined to steal into the land of the Pharaohs, when one night my progress was stopped by a manifestation in the desert, which filled me with consternation. A pillar of lurid flame, having its base on earth, advanced eastward with a rotatory motion, its upper end obeying a force among the stars. It was a glowing meteor, enormous in volume, endless in height, and terrible to behold, setting earth and heaven on fire, and bathing the desert in fearful glory. As I hurried to get out of the pillar’s reach, lest I be consumed, I fell in with the vanguard of my liberated brethren in the rear of their fiery guide. What I saw and heard thrilled me with awe. A power greater than Osiris lowered Egypt to the dust, and that was the God of my people. My father was no more; I embraced my aged mother and one surviving sister, and we wept for joy.

“Before I had been an hour in the great camp, which extended over many miles, the cry ran from lip to lip, ‘We are pursued! The Egyptians are at our heels!’ Terror and confusion seized the enormous multitude, men, women and children acting like maniacs, while a throng of lusty fellows, myself among them, pressed on to see what the Man of God was going to do. We found him in company of Aaron and Hur, his countenance beaming, as though it had concentrated the

blaze of the flaming pillar to reflect it in a milder beam. He was Moses, the son of Amram. In his hand a staff, his gray beard and curly locks setting off a face of manly firmness, tempered by feminine grace and a visionary dreaminess, his eyes turned fixedly where the top of the fire-pillar lost itself in azure. As if in compliance with his tacit prayer, the prodigious beam swerved from its forward course, wheeled backward to the right, and thus transferred its base from the front of the moving camp to its rear, interposing its volume between the pursuer and the pursued. It was the second watch of the night; we were within a short hour of the Yam-Mitzrayim, the Egyptian Sea,<sup>1</sup> and a dense fog left us in doubt as to the distance of the enemy behind us. The suspense was unbearable, and Moses was besieged by the rebellious and the craven, who rent the air with reproaches and appeals. He spoke a few words of encouragement, asking the people to faithfully await the salvation of the Lord, but his voice was drowned in the vociferation of the threatening crowd.

“At a hint from Aaron five thousand armed men of the tribe of Levi threw themselves between the great leader and the damoring mob. It was a critical moment. The undaunted chief spread out his hands in prayer.

“The third watch of the night came with a freezing gale; it raised the fog and revealed a sea lashed by the fury of the growing tempest. It was dawn when the leader, inspired from On High, struck the flood with his staff. The waters rose high, broke, scattered in dust, rose again, tumbled, divided up, and froze, leaving a broad highway dry as the shore. With his brother the leader entered the depth followed by the people, till the whole multitude found themselves between the icy walls, emerging on the opposite shore happy and jubilant.

“Just now the blush of morning in the east was eclipsed by a wave of effulgence west of the Sea of Egypt, and as we turned our eyes thither we were amazed to behold the burning pillar replaced by a sun-crowned power that illumined the heavens with his dazzling panoply and his sword of many flames. That presence sealed the doom of the Egyptians. In their impetuous onward rush they plunged into the jaws of death. The miraculous road was not meant to give them passage; and no sooner were they in the heart of the dry abyss than, by a touch of the leader’s staff, the frozen walls, melted by the sun-crowned power, gave way to the devouring sea, burying Egypt’s mighty army. The air shivered with the multitudinous shout of joy sent up by our myriads of grateful fugitives. Song, dance and praise commemorated the great event, to be shortly followed by one greater than anything I know of in the annals of man.

“Ah, let me come to the cause of my doom! What happened between the crossing of the Red Sea and the Day of Revelation is on record, but eternity will not efface the picture burned into my memory of what I have, thousands of years ago, witnessed in this wilderness of Zin.

“After a short encampment hereabout, the leader, he the chief of chiefs, made it known that in three days the Majesty Divine would reveal Himself and His truth on the top of Sinai, the interval to be spent in purifying preparations.

“As though all the earthquakes and thunders of the ages were to spend their furious energy within the space of one daybreak, a convulsed earth and a bursting firmament roused a terrified people from their sleep, summoning them to gather at the foot of the fire-belching, quaking, night-shrouded mountain, there to receive the first commandments of the Torah, the Law of the world. They obeyed the summons, but succumbed to the supernatural manifestations. Himself unseen, the voice of the leader was heard from the thick of the clouds, communing with Omnipotence, the blasts of mighty trumpets intermingling with the bellowing, rumbling and growling of the roused elements. Suddenly a profound silence superseded the universal agitation.

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<sup>1</sup> The Red Sea, among the Hebrews, was “the Sea of Egypt.”

Clearly stood out the apex of the mountain, clear spread the horizon; and ear, heart and soul were entranced by the ineffable melody of utterance which came floating from the empyrean. Like the symphony of an angelic chorus, the Ten Commandments vibrated throughout the ethereal spaces, reclaiming the people from their torpor, to be overawed by a wonder exceeding anything they had yet seen. With a background of azure, and the three summits of the Sinaitic range as base, there spread in the clear infinite blue the likeness of inexpressible Majesty in the transcendental shape of a sovereign, crowned with supernal glory,—compassion and benign grace radiating from His dimly discernible features; in His hand an open scroll, covering half the firmament, and showing the Decalogue in sunny splendor, each letter proving but the reflex of a yet grander copy visibly set in stars far back in the deepest heavens.

“A season of tumultuous rejoicing followed the closing of that soul-thrilling scene, and the emancipated slaves abandoned themselves to indulgences bordering on license. In the whirl of excitement nobody noticed the absence of the venerated prophet, who had not been seen nor heard from since the Day of Revelation, and his family and closest associates were as ignorant of his whereabouts as the rest of the people. But when a whole month had passed by without a token of the prophet’s being or doing, the craven-hearted mass took umbrage, fearing they had been deserted both by Moses and his God. Aaron was called upon to allay their apprehensions, but he proved unequal to the exigency. Pressed to supply them with a power to worship, and somebody to lead them, instead of bidding them to have patience and wait, in a moment of weakness he yielded, suggesting that all the golden ornaments of the women be delivered to him, that he might fashion for them a god. If the High-priest hoped that the women would not sacrifice their jewelry, he was soon undeceived. And I was at hand to lure him into the most heinous of human transgressions.

“Herein centres the enormity of my guilt. Aaron could have never fulfilled his promise had not an evil spirit prompted me to offer him my service in moulding for him a golden calf after the pattern of Egypt’s idolatry. Doubting my ability to materialize what I proposed, he gave his assent, and my experience in metal work enabled me to produce a golden calf with the trick of articulating words.

“When the people saw the image and heard it declare itself their god, they went wild with delight, Aaron himself catching the infection. An altar was built, a feast proclaimed, sacrifices offered, and the masses delivered themselves up to orgies.

“The riot of debauch was broken up by the unexpected arrival of the prophet. With his countenance shining like the sun, he rushed down from the mountain, dropped and shattered the tablets, which bore the Commandments he had received from the hand of God, and reduced the idol to powder which he scattered to the winds. Aaron exonerated himself by pointing to the madness of the people, and to me as the real culprit.—“This Azazel has brought the great sin on the head of the people,” cried he, his eye fixed in fierce hatred on my detested self. What could I advance in extenuation of my devilish authorship?

“Severe punishment was meted out. Four thousand prominent offenders fell under the sword, but I was singled out for a special fate as a warning to coming ages. ‘Al Zameri shall not die; Al Zameri shall henceforth wander like Cain, shunned, feared, cursed and hated; Al Zameri shall, at the lapse of a hundred years, revisit the scene of his crime, shall be restored to his present condition, and thus go on and on, until time shall wipe out the memory of his evil deed,’ was the verdict I heard. The prophet spoke it under the spell of inspiration, and I was set free.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This legend of the Wandering Jew, which so far as I am aware has never before been printed, except for some few references in the Koran, is probably the precursor of the one currently familiar among Christians, and it will be seen

“And free I was, and free I am to roam forever like a mad beast, driven hither by the fury to be transformed at the appointed hour into the young man that I was when malicious folly stamped me as the outcast of the human race.

“That same hour! conceived an irrepressible impulse to seek the vast, the void, the desert, the jungle, the swamp,—the unlighted cavern, the place of graves, the ruin,—evading the blessed haunts of man, abhorring sunshine and courting darkness. Daylight blinds me as it does the owl; the sight of gold confounds, its touch burns me. The ferocious beast flees at my approach; the serpent hisses and writhes away. However teeming the region with animal life, however vocal with the song of bird, my passing turns it into a soundless, lifeless wild. I speed with the wind, sweep with the storm, welcome the lightning’s flare, the thunder’s growl, rage with the elements, curse with the fiends of black Abaddon. The tiger’s den is my shelter, my pillow a coil of venomous reptiles. I throw myself into the jaws of the lion, swallow the essence of poison,—it does not avail me. Death is in league with all creation against me. If I try to end my misery by falling into a chasm, I am lighter than air. Water will not drown me, fire will not burn me, steel will cut my flesh but spares my life, and my dread is life—time—time, endless, hopeless, hateful years,—decades, cycles, millenniums! Such is the sky-ruled destiny of Al Zameri!”

“Horrible is thy fate! Thine is hell on earth, O, son of guilt, who didst ingraft on the race an evil growth,—the worship of gold! Ah, the glittering fetich! What crimes are not trace. able to his glossy fascinations!—But the potency of prayer, the tear of remorse dear to Allah the most merciful, the King of the Day of Judgment, are they denied thee?” inquired Ali Bey.

“Prayer, prayer, mans s inward heaven, the unction of life, the solace of the soul,— prayer, the heart-feeding stream, with God as its fountainhead and influx, swelled by springs unrevealed and currents vainly searched,” exclaimed Al Zameri, striking the palms of his hands together with a clap of pain;<sup>3</sup> “prayer would just as readily commingle with my being as Eden’s blessed rivers with the flames of hell. What heaven and earth reveal of the wonderful and holy is deterring to me, whom neither the sublime nor the beautiful inspires, filled as I am with doubt as to whether there be mercy ample enough to cover my guilt.

“Yea, once,—but once,—long before the Orient felt the Roman’s iron grip, my lips, prompted by the whisper of a cherub, stammered prayer; and with that inspiration died my feeble hope, leaving a seething caldron in a heart of flint. Ah, from my gloom of hell I had a glimpse of paradise. Thou hast heard of Balbec’s ancient glories, of which her magnificent ruins tell; I saw her in her palmy days, a city of palaces for merchant princes to dwell in, the rival of Tyre,

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places the date of the crime that entailed perpetual punishment at some 1500 years earlier. To my mind it possesses much the greater psychological interest. The Koran says:

“And in like manner al Zameri also cast in what he had collected, and he produced unto them a corporeal calf which lowed. And al Zameri and his companions said, This is your god and the god of Moses . . . Moses said unto al Zameri, What was thy design, O Zameri? He answered, I knew that which they knew not, wherefore I took a handful of dust from the footsteps of the messenger of God, and I cast it into the molten calf; for so did my mind direct me” (Surah 20).

The presence, and especially the touch, of the outcast is supposed to entail disaster, of which he is bound to warn those with whom he is brought into contact; and it is therefore that Al Zameri cries out to his rescuer (page 24) “Touch me not.” The reference in the Koran is, “Moses said, Get thee gone; for thy punishment in this life shall be, that thou shalt say unto those who shall meet thee, Touch me not” (Surah 20).

The roaming Al Zameri has in Oriental folklore a counterpart in the wandering Cain, who also is supposed to live forever.

<sup>3</sup> The familiar Oriental gesture expressing painful emotions is to throw the arms wide apart, and bring the palms of the hands together with a distinct, and often resounding, clap; then clasping the hands, tremulous with the stress of feeling.

Tadmor and Damascus. Perched on the side of the Anti-Libanus, high above the fertile plain of Sahlat-Ba'albec, and encircled by groves and gardens watered by the valley's never-failing spring of Ra'as-el Ayr, Balbec gloried in rearing great monuments, while the temples dedicated to her gods stood among the marvels of the world. Whatever was precious, useful, or ornamental, was to be had in the bazaars of Balbec. Caravans carried invaluable treasures through her gates, and the royalties she levied enabled her to display a princely munificence in her domestic affairs. With Syria's fluctuating fortunes, Balbec realized every change, but her deadliest enemy was the earthquake's fearful visitation. Often did I wish to see creation sink in chaos, and myself engulfed in the universal wreckage; but my attempt to find death in one of Balbec's catastrophes, instead of bringing deliverance, brought heaven within my touch, with redoubled anguish as the sequel. Satan has his sport with Al Zameri.

"My memory is aglow as I recall the day of lurid skies, an atmosphere saturated with oppressive vapors, an ominous fluttering of birds, and a spasmodic rumbling, as of explosions underground. Too familiar with the symptoms to misunderstand the nature of the impending disturbance, I was thankful to be near Balbec, in whose ruins I hoped to be buried. Quick as my limbs could carry me, I hurried to the doomed city, and entered it through one of her gates, which gave me a full view of her famous Great Temple. Terror distracted the multitude, who rushed about, tumbling one against the other, and bellowing like frightened cattle. Repeated shocks opened gaping crevices in the ground, swallowing houses and closing over man and brute. Down came monumental shafts of skilful workman ship; buildings of massive masonry were either lying in heaps, the graves of their inmates, or stood cracked, ready to tumble at the next upheaval. Death was lurking everywhere. Little affected by the wrecks around me, my only thought was to corner death where escape was wellnigh impossible, and I rushed up the grand flight of steps, which took me to the eastern portico of the stupendous edifice, landing me in a large, hexagonal space. It had the dimensions of a court,—which it was not, but a vestibule with one main entrance and two side-doors to the great court, a peristyle circumscribed by columns of artistic chiselling, back of which were numerous recesses adorned by statues of gods. With no one to question my intrusion into the sacred fane, I stood undetermined and purposeless, when a subterraneous force shook the rock-built foundation of the entablature, which descended with a crash, wrecking the fine statuary by the weight of the fragments. A scream of horror drew me irresistibly in the direction of the voice that uttered it, where, behind a pedestal, I saw a damsel stretched on the floor writhing in convulsions. Bending over the form and raising it from the ground, I held in my arms a being too perfect to be mortal, too substantial to be divine. She was unhurt, except for fright, and, bearing her to the open quadrangle of the peristyle, I seated myself on the floor, allowing her head and shoulders to rest on my lap. 'Art thou the goddess to whom this temple is dedicated?' breathed I. In answer a pair of eyes opened wide, to my indescribable confusion, eyes that would tame the tiger and charm the hydra; but they soon closed again.

"Sheykh, I have seen Sisygambis, Persia's imperial mistress, the dame of Darius, her cheek shaming the jewelled tiara meant to grace majesty. On the tide of the Cydnus, on a galley, carved, gilded, and inlaid with ivory, gliding to the rhythmic stroke of polished oars, under sails of silk, I saw Cleopatra reclining on the deck, in the shade of a star-spangled canopy, arrayed as Venus, in the midst of voluptuous music, with her women dressed as nymphs, and little boys as Cupids; she moved me no more than did a scone of others famed for beauty in their time. But stirred and stricken was I by the matchless damsel chance had thrown in my way, and there I sat intoxicated by a quaff from some heavenly spring thitherto unknown to me. 'If thou wert mine,

eternity! what would it matter to me whether the heavens favor me or curse?' muttered I half audibly.

"Once more her opened eyelids laid bare the fountains of bliss, and once more I asked, 'Art thou that one whom the denizens of Balbec worship?'

"Like one waking from a vision she raised her head, raised herself, rose to her height a majestic figure, and, looking down to me with an expression of awe, she answered my question with a question: Whether I was one of the gods to whose worship her father had consecrated her? 'I am the priestess of chaste Istar. Only a god could save me as thou didst,' cried the maiden, sinking prostrate before me.

"A momentary rocking of the entire structure left but few of the remaining columns erect. The others brought down the Corinthian capitals and the heavy entablature with a tremendous fall, and the great court was one mass of *debris* scattered in every direction.

"The eastern portico being barred by a confused pile of broken columns, the only escape left open was the western end, and hither I carried the fainting priestess, issuing with my burden from the wreck, and finding myself before another building still more beautiful and not yet greatly injured. This was Balbec's Temple of the Sun, a blossom of architecture and sculpture, profusely ornamented by figures of gods and heroes, and finished with a great lavishness of skill and art.

"It was the end of the day, and anxious to shun observation I labored up the stately stairway to seek a refuge in the safer place, not on my own account but for the sake of the precious creature in my charge. Through a lofty portal I reached two staircases to my right and left, each one leading to the upper story, which was the Temple proper. Here I stopped to take breath, the burden having proved too much for me, and here again I had to look into those open eyes that beamed unutterable things for me.—'Save me, save me, and I will praise and worship thee, god of the sun,' whispered the deluded creature.

" 'Be undeceived, fair mistress, I am no god but a man of flesh and blood and untold woes, woes unknown to any mortal but myself,' said I.

" 'Thou no god, and a man of untold woes?— Thou art unlike any mortal in look, and who sent thee hither to save me, all others having deserted this fane, priest and priestess fleeing for life? Surely thou art more than mortal, thus to face death undeterred?'

" 'Let not a guilt-encumbered fugitive practice deception on thee, mistress of Istar. Thou art right, alas! I am not mortal; but cursed to wander and suffer, because of a great sin committed thousands of years ago,' cried I, and briefly enlightened her as to my nature and my doom. Tender compassion radiated from her immaculate countenance as, seizing my hand with a hold that thrilled my frame with ravishing delight, she spoke these words:

" 'O, let me alleviate thy suffering by sharing thy misery, poor, erring man, who didst offend Zicara and his progeny! Yea, I will pray in thy behalf!—Hear me, Zicara, the all-powerful, and thou, Ea, the holder of life and knowledge, the ruler of the abyss, the king of the rivers and gardens, the mate of Bahu, who begot Bal Merodach,—hear me and restrain the seven evil spirits from besetting Al Zameri, but send the good ones to placate his conscience, that he have rest and peace, after an atonement long and awful! Yea, my life for his, Zicara, if propitiation cannot otherwise be had, since he has imperilled his life for mine!'

"Even while these fervid words dropped from the sweet lips of the kneeling supplicant, the roving mania seized me deliriously. I turned my face toward the nearest exit, but felt my garment caught by the hands that had been folded in prayer.—'Flee not hence before I kiss the hands which brought me succor,' cried the maiden passionately stirred. Burning kisses covered my



hands; a tingling woe permeated the core of my being; I kissed the head, the cheek, the mouth of the one in the wide world, who had offered to share my fate, had offered her life for mine. But adamant chains could not check my madness to fly; I broke away from her embrace, whose lamentations cut into my heart.

“A pack of hell-hounds yelping at my heels would have added little to the mad pace that carried me to the dreary haunts of the mountains,—the wailing of the girl, and her image, following me as new fuel to feed the fire of despair. Broken by overwhelming wretchedness, I fell where a steep rock barred my way, and then, after a chain of tearless cycles, I wept,—yea, and prayed for mercy,—ah! to be delivered as it may please Him, whom I displeased!

“With sleep came a figure clad in supernatural brightness,—‘Matatron the messenger of grace, who spreads man’s prayers before the Throne, speaks to thee, Al Zameri! Between thy prayer and His Mercy stands a world of evil, fostered by the fetich of thy making. Thou hast seduced the people chosen to redeem mankind. When the race shall deem the chase of gold a thing as base as rapine, as vile as lust,—then will the fever of thy soul abate. Till then live on, the symbol of insatiate greed, a living Sodom, weltering in the fetid pool of spiritual stagnancy!’ ” And Al Zameri was silent, burying his wretched face in his hands.

“Truly, gold in itself is not an evil; it is the root of the world’s evil, the leprosy of the heart, incurable as the lung’s consumption that reddens the cheek while it drains the life, and thy guilt in reference thereunto is as dark as thy punishment is great,” spoke Ali. “I am that country’s lord where I have been slave; courage has done much for me, but gold the most,—yea, and the worst to make woman foul, and man her villain. Here Mammon is the king of kings. Ali Bey is a fugitive from assassins bought for gold, and Islam’s Caliph depends for sovereign ease and safety less on valor and byalty than on the bribe. Thou hast raised gold to be an idol, on whose altars man’s heart, his honor and his peace, and woman’s virtue, are too often sacrificed. Therefore, run thy course, Al Zameri; fulfil great Allah’s decree, that man take heed lest in His just anger He drown this world in a boiling flood of liquid gold!”

A few stones removed from the entrance of the cave enabled the cursed roamer to slip out like a phantom, and with him passed the storm, leaving a chill around the heart of the Bey.

“Allah akbar! This meeting forebodes Ali’s downfall, I fear. It is my evil star that caused the wretch to thwart my way,” said Ali Bey to himself. Subsequent developments proved his presentiment prophetic; in an ambush placed for his destruction, the celebrated Sheykh met his death.