

## A LOOM-MASTER OF IRAN.

## I.

IN the angle of a broken mud wall, on a bare hillside above the Persian village of Sofian, a boy knelt at the foot of a new grave and prayed, — not the worn formula of the Mussulman, but the desolate cry of his heart: —

“Allah, Thou art all powerful, and Thou art just. Oh, take his soul into thy Paradise. Let the ripe pomegranate moisten his lips, and the song of flowing water bring him rest.”

The lean muezzin, a stark figure on the minaret of the little mosque farther down the hill, was crying in a querulous key the hour of evening prayer. The sun, red through the haze of consuming heat, cast back a rosy glow on the mosque tower and its lonely occupant, and turned the polished tiles of the roof to flame. Through the long street of the town, from the fields where they had grazed during the day, a line of slow-striding camels wound to the door of the inn. The mellow tinkle of their many bells, in somnolent rotation, seemed to pierce the sultry air with long, cool shafts of sound. One after another they ceased, as the foremost animals passed into the inclosure and halted. Then the more distant ones, coming nearer, added their changes to the melody. The boy went on praying: —

“Allah, Thou art kind. Suffer those who hunger here to come to Thee, and feast in eternity on the bread of thy tables.”

With dusk, a single star appeared, burning like a feverish eye. Lamp-lights began to blink from the caravanserai. The innkeeper's lout, scuffling upon sandals, came out to the stream which filtered across the roadway, and dipped up dirty water into a battered brass samovar, which he then carried

back into the hostelry. One by one the soldiers, charvadars, and camel-drivers, sinewy, sunburnt, their motley clothing gray with the dust of the highway, dropped into places on the mud-cement seat outside the door, and the serving man brought them tea in little glasses. They stirred it briskly, to dissolve the chunks of beet sugar which had been hacked stingily from a tall, blue-white cone on the uncleanly shelf within.

The boy, from his place among the shadows, watched these familiar wayfarers coming and going about their shelter, as one watches marionettes, with apathy, and something akin to pity. Day after day, as long as he could remember, he had looked at this same panorama; listened to these same sounds. To-night it all seemed meaningless, and purposeless, and far away. At last, with a sigh of “Allah, Allah!” half prayer, half protest, he rose, rearranged upon the mound the frayed fragment which did duty as a mourning carpet, and then stole out of the graveyard. He descended the hill slowly, crossed the road, and sat down, without making any noise, in the shadow of a crumbled pillar, which before the Russian cannon passed that way had been part of a pretentious portico. Hidden there, he listened numbly to the chaffer of the caravanjis. They were talking of him.

“Hamd ul Ullah! Thank God there is only one. How he is to be fed it is hard to say. He's too little even to drive the asses, and the wood is farther away every year. Hakim was thrifty, but who can save a penny nowadays, with barley as dear as a dervish's charms? And beasts must eat if they are to carry a living for their masters.”

“Groan, Sadak; groan. One would think it was you who had been left penniless and friendless and with a big ap-

petite, instead of having a kettle full of coin buried under the wall of your garden in Zenjan, to say nothing of your other hoardings. Mashallah! If you should dig down there, one day, you would find plenty of food for this little one of Hakim's, and it would stand you in good stead with the Prophet, too, since you have failed to give him chick or child of your own."

At this sally, and the dry rattle of laughter that followed it, the old man flushed through his tan, till his wrinkled face was almost as red as the henna that stained his beard. He stumped away to his pack horses, which munched their measures of broken barley straw from mangers cut in the walls about the inn-yard.

Leaning forward, the boy looked out timidly at the idlers, from behind his pillar.

"Allah! Here's the little beggar, now. Come out here, you son of a burnt father, and tell us how the old man died. Stop your snuffing. Did you think he was going to live forever?"

"No, but it was too soon. Allah had already taken my mother. He was not sick, either, only weak from hunger. There had been nothing for him, not for a long time. He gave me the whole sheet of bread, always."

"And kept the mutton pilaff for himself, eh?"

"No, there never was pilaff. If he had owned a sheep we might have had it. There was not even curds, not for many days. Who was to give us the milk to make it? Even the seyyid he was fetching the wood for did not pay, and one must not press for pay from descendants of the Prophet. And so, my father was feeble from walking beside the loads, and — the sun smote him."

"More's the pity." Sadak, in the company of his beasts, had regained something of his composure, and returned to the skirmishing. "Descendants of the Prophet," he sniffed. "They

are only three millions in Iran. Why should you suffer, boy? Put on a green sash, and keep your face clean — and long, and when you're hungry, demand food. Nobody will dare refuse you. It's the law — of the Prophet; and you are as much seyyid as nine tenths of them."

"Enough of that, you old scoffer," a hoarse voice broke in. "He was a good Shiah, was Hakim. If you want to teach his brat to be an unbeliever, you'd better put him on one of your starved camels and take him along. If the mollah catches you here, talking like a Babi, you'll fare harder than your cattle do."

Again a chuckle ran up and down the line, at the expense of Sadak, and the hot color overspread his face. Turning aside to the fox-faced muleteer who had harried him, he set his feet far apart, stroked his beard, and said tauntingly:

"Now listen; there are those who care for their own children, and there are those who care for the children of others. Is it not so? Yes. Well, I am going now, and I'm going to take this boy with me, just to spite you. You don't know a good bargain when you see it. And I can afford to take him, for I know he is n't mine. Look through your brood when you get home, Ilat, and tell me the next time I see you, if the faces of half of them are not Kurdi."

The mule-driver reached toward a long dagger that glistened at his girdle, and nobody laughed, nor spoke, nor moved, least of all Sadak. With one hand thrust into the depths of his vestment, in readiness, and with the evil light of challenge in his squinting eyes, he waited for the outcome, sinfully happy to see that his shaft had gone deep home. But there was no movement from the other side. It was a matter of common knowledge along the highroad that the last man who had come to conclusions with old Sadak had been buried behind a boulder in the hills beyond Khoi, with three pistol bullets in his breast.

Slowly, and with a scornful glance behind, he strode over, and thrusting the boy before him passed into the caravan-serai yard. There was a belligerent ring in his voice as he called to his men, who had stretched out on the great heaps of dung-cakes stored there for the winter's fuel. They dragged themselves out of sleep, and began to lash the saddles on. Half an hour later the line moved away from the inn, in the gathering darkness, Sadak riding at its head, erect and grim. A small bundle, curled up at the top of a camel's load, was the orphan of Hakim.

## II.

All night long the caravan followed stony roads, that led through waste places. It drifted phantom-like by ruined villages, where remnants of ancient walls cast sharp shadows in the moonlight. Now and then, from a mud house at the roadside, a dog came baying, roused by the mysterious music of the camel bells, and, in turn, waking the boy from the dreams into which the motion of his beast had lulled him. Then there followed long intervals of stillness, broken only by the shouts of the caravanjis, during which all the scenes of the past fortnight were enacted and reenacted in his remembrance.

And grizzled Sadak. His thoughts were busy, too. Inured to wakefulness, seasoned to the hardships of the road, he had learned to fill his lonesome hours with flattering meditations of gain. Each day's life was a commerce to him; each night merely a casting of balances. But here was a new element in traffic; he had never before dealt directly in flesh and blood. It was well to have turned the tables on the mockers at the caravan-serai, to have secured, at so small cost, another hewer of wood and drawer of water, a young pair of legs which should hurry for his water pipe, young eyes

which should some day count his profits for him, and spy upon his malfasant servants. And it was particularly well to have rebuked the tradition that he was a miser, and substituted for it, in an instant, a name for generosity and human kindness. But his vanity over this reflection was a little shamefaced. He rummaged for a long time among the memories of his years of trade, but admitted to himself, by way of conclusion, that they had been pretty barren years, barren of everything that life owes a man, — except riches; and now, how short the time! Another week, another day, his hour might come. And then who would care? There was an unfamiliar griping at his penurious old heart-strings, — which, his envious neighbors said, were only his purse-strings after all, — and he cast a yearning look at the little shape swaying and nodding above the bales of rugs.

When morning came, the boy opened his eyes upon a new world, a world of green things. The caravan had stopped, but the air lay like a cool hand on his hot forehead. He thought he must have slept for a long time, to have left the arid tract so far behind. His back and legs ached unbearably, but the breath of the morning, issuing out of the verdure, enwrapped and possessed him. On the right the plain stretched far away, in violet light; on the left the green hills rose like a great altar. Along the brow of the first height was a row of tall, pale poplars, the backs of their fluttering leaves as white as silver filigrains. From among them broke a turbulent mill-stream. The faint rhythm of its dashing came to him, as it descended, through a clumsy wooden conduit, to rest in the broad basin below the mill. The camels, set free from their burdens of silk, and rugs, and spices, drank deep, and then, dispersing slowly over the hillside, browsed greedily. Under a broad-armed willow the caravanjis spread an old carpet of Khorassan, and its sheen blent

with the softness of the morning. While the blue smoke curled away from the slender crown of the samovar, and amber tea kept coming and going in the frail glasses, Sadak rolled many cigarettes from tobacco of Anatolia, carried in a dainty trinket of Ispahan workmanship. He drew the sweet solace slowly and fondly through a holder of black amber, thanking Allah meanwhile for the good gift of riches.

A little way off, half hid in the long grass, lay the boy, his thin brown hands outstretched to caress the blossoms that were all about him. Scarlet of the poppy, blue of the larkspur, heliotrope, yellow, — and everywhere, as far as he could see, the glorious carpet of green. He was unheedful of everything, forgetful of everything, even of his hunger. But later they brought kid's flesh, and bread, and crisp green fennel, and chives, and salt cheese cut in cubes and freshly taken from the earthen vessel of brine. Summoned to a place beside his benefactor on the carpet, he fell to and ate, Sadak watching him with an awkward contentment, and a strange kindness shining in his shrewd old eyes. The picture of his declining years which he had drawn in the still hours of the night took even a pleasanter aspect in the daylight. The boy's presence seemed somehow to shorten the time, and give common things a life and color they had never known before.

"Son," he said at last, "I am wondering what I shall do with you. The world is before you now, but it is a world where all must work. And yet, it is the right of every man to say what his work shall be. What is your choice?"

In the joy of release from his dismal surroundings, in the diversion of new sights and sounds, in the unwonted stimulation of plenteous food, the lad had forgotten the wretched problem of existence, in whose dire shadow he had always lived. Now it had all come back again. The smile fled from his face, and

he answered blankly, "Why, — Master, I do not know."

"From now until the sun is low we shall rest here," said the merchant; "in that time you can think of it, and in whatever path you choose, I will do by you as I would do by my own."

Slowly the boy turned and walked away into the deep grass again, and sinking into it lay, staring long at the clear water, where it leapt forth, crusting the herbage all about the foot of the chute with pearls. The birds — hoopoes with their arrogant crests, sirens, clad in green and brown and gold, opulent bluejays, and even the dingy gray crows — came and sported there, and their notes made the air resound.

Sadak smoked on in contemplative stillness. The drivers, their brown faces shining, lay sprawled in the sun.

So the hours wore away. When the day was declining and long shadows were outspread upon the plain, a deep voice roused the boy from his reverie.

"Son, you love the earth. Will you till it, and bring forth grain and fruits in the good years, and feed the hungry from your store? If so, there is my farm beyond Maragha."

"No, Master, by your leave. For some are the broad acres, and the oxen and buffaloes straining in the furrows, and the wealth of the harvest. For me, I am small, and my field must be a little one."

"What will you, then? Flocks? Will you be a shepherd, and learn to shear the wool, at the bend of the stream, when the water is in plenty, and pluck the kurk from the goats, and then bring the spun yarn to the market towns for the selling? These, too, I can give you."

"Master, it is none of these that I want. I will be a weaver. The warp and weft shall be my field, and I will labor in it while the time lasts. To be a weaver is to teach men the best lessons of life, even after one is dead, as did the Weaver of Kashan."

A baffled, hopeless look had crept into the face of Sadak. His vision of happiness, tardy and poor though it was, had cheered him for a day; now he saw it vanishing away like morning vapor. One appeal was left him, the one he had never known to fail in all his years of uninterrupted increase.

"But the weaver is poor," he cried. "In his yarns there is no white like the lustre of the silver. It is with money that you can do good." He was beseeching now. "Look yonder; mine the camels, mine the sturdy horses of Karabagh and Anatolia; mine the bales, of silks, and carpets, and spices, and many that shall come after them. And the worth of all these will be yours when I am gone."

The boy looked across the soft haze of afternoon, but he saw neither the haughty camels, nor the sleek horses with their gay-colored pack trappings, nor yet the bales of merchandise ranged at the roadside. What he saw was the water, lying unruffled, with images of trees looking back from its bosom, and the pleading faces of the flowers, peering at him through their little rents in the mantle of green.

"No," he replied. "You are kind, Master, but I will not be beholden. Suffer me only to go with you to the city. I will fare as the weaver fares."

"It is well spoken," said Sadak heavily. And then, the cool of the evening being come, the loads were placed again upon the backs of the camels, and they journeyed on.

### III.

Through the dust, and odors, and jangling voices of that swarming warren men call the bazaars walked an American, first colonist from his land. Listless eyes followed him as he went trailing a streamer of strong smoke from his barbarous short pipe. Then — the Persian's bitterest criticism is silence —

bearded dealers, squatting cross-legged at the front of their shops, merely looked at one another. It was an inexplicable being, this, whose home was beyond Ferenghistan, beyond Inglezistan, and — wonder of Allah's greatness! — beyond a thousand farsakhs of sea after that; but he bought things, and he had money to pay weavers.

At his elbow, walking submissively, stole a tall, sombre Persian. Beside a shoemaker's shop, gay with its show of sandals in red and green leather, a flight of steep, irregular, and mouldy steps led down out of the din into a spacious place, — not a cellar, for above it were no shops, no floors, nothing but the mud-covered roof and the brazen summer sky. The clamor of trade, which forever went on above ground, never entered this murky workshop. It had dirt, and smells, and a babel of its own.

Such light as there was penetrated through small, high windows, and once it had entered here, the dust and foulness seemed to take its life away, and leave it pallid as the pinched faces of the tenants. It was broken, too, by the tall timbers of looms, — rough-hewn timbers, reaching almost to the roof, stained with age, warped and bent by the burden of rugs they had borne. Between these, side by side, hung bright fabrics in all stages of incompleteness, and close together on both sides of wool-littered gangways child weavers sat, facing the silent looms and white expanses of warp, and playing with swift fingers in the woven masses of flowers at the bottom, which were always changing, always growing. Little, weazened faces, from which all gladness seemed to have passed into the carpets they worked at; heavy wool caps jammed down upon ears that had grown bent with the load; long, skirted, old-mannish black coats, buttoned with clerical exactness straight up to the chin. The legs of every lad were curled up under him, and his shabby sandals placed behind him on the dirty

stone floor. Above the rows of wool-covered heads hung spools and balls of yarn of many hues. The little knives, with their hooked points, flew in and out among the serried warp-threads, whisking the yarns through, and then severing them deftly; there was the clank of heavy, curved shears, trimming away the ends of the pile, and a vibrant whirl when the steel comb fell, beating down the knot-rows. At long intervals sounded the dreary creak of a "piece-beam," turned to wind up a little more of the finished carpet. The place was alive with industry, but it was the drowsy, deliberate industry of the East. There was no clatter, no rush of belting, no flying circles of steel. The music of this labor was a low droning of many small voices, singing monotonously in minor keys the song of the patterns.

Suddenly the singing stopped, as the door swung back on strident hinges, and a whisper passed from loom to loom, "The Sahib!" Every boy looked furtively and fearfully at his latest stitches.

Then a big voice was speaking, in the Turkish dialect of northern Persia, but with a harsh, foreign emphasis. Its owner had halted before an empty loom, and was calculating the height and breadth.

"You must bear in mind, Ibrahim," he said, "that this carpet is n't any common thing."

"No, Sahib," sighed the Persian, bowing and crossing his hands before him after the manner of his race in the presence of those whose masters they are not.

"And I don't want any cheap work on it, not even to save wool."

"No, Sahib, not even to save wool."

"It won't be any of your Sahend wool, either, mind you, and there must be no loose dyes."

"No, Sahib." The Persian's accents had never changed.

Silently the idle weavers had drawn near to listen, until they formed a com-

pact and swarthy circle. The American began to undo a long roll of paper. At sight of it Ibrahim the foreman, servile to the tips of his henna-stained fingernails, bent slowly from the ready hinges of his waist and said: "Ah, Sahib, I know that the carpet is the most famous in the world. I am glad. It is good to show them that our art is not dead, that we can weave as well in the factory as they used to do in the palace."

"Well, you'd better," was the crisp answer, "or there'll be some vacancies around here."

"Yes, Sahib," answered the Persian, bowing again, like a man upon whom honor had been conferred.

"Now, is there any one in the place who can run this loom, or must I send away somewhere for a competent man?"

The genius of local pride, sore hurt, looked out darkling from the ox-eyes of the Persian, but his voice was as the sound of running water.

"Sahib, God is God. You need never seek beyond Azerbaijan, even if it were the Heir Apparent's garden of flowers, or the clouds of the sunset, you wanted woven. There is one. He has seen only twelve years, but his eyes are the eyes of the falcon; designs are to him as the first sura of the Koran which we learn in our cradles; and his hands, Sahib; his hands might have woven the petals of the tulips."

"How old did you say? Twelve? Nonsense! He may be good enough to weave a border, and he may not; but master of this loom,—it's absurd."

"Sahib, fifty springs have I seen the snow water rushing against the bridge in the Adji Chai. I am not mistaken."

As he spoke, the dusky Ibrahim looked around the factory. Work had ceased. The gaunt looms and the very flowers in the half-finished rugs seemed to be listening and expectant. There, standing on the lower cross-beam of an empty frame, his puny arm around the upright,

looking down wistfully over the heads of the group, was the waif of Sofian. At a sign from the foreman he stepped down, the American superintendent watching him as he came, and smiling a smile of unbelief.

"What's your name?" he asked.

The lad's calm voice sounded like a rebuke to all Occidental abruptness: "My father's name was Hakim."

"From Hamadan?"

"No, Sahib; my father came long ago from Tusurkan, — not so far from Hamadan."

"And you weave Hamadanji?"

"No, Sahib; in Hamadan they weave all of one color," and his lips contracted in a smile of something like contempt; "but my mother was Kirmanli, and there they are true Persian weavers. They weave flowers."

"And do you think you could run the loom for this carpet?" As he spoke, the American spread out the great Viennese color plate of that fabric which is one of the wonders of the South Kensington. The boy bent forward with an eager gesture, his large eyes staring wide.

"What is it, Sahib? What is it?" His voice was faint.

The other watched him curiously. "It is the carpet that lay in the mosque at Ardebil."

The boy's face went a shade paler, and the hand, grimy with factory dust, which he held out for the pattern was trembling.

"Not, Sahib" — he stammered, — "not the carpet which was woven by — by the Weaver of Kashan?"

"Yes."

Stooping above the fine tangle of colors, following with a small, dingy finger the intricacies of the creepers, and tracing the arabesques in the rich borders of the design, the orphan had forgotten the crowd of weavers, who stood like sheep, staring mutely. There came upon his face again the cool, fresh breath of a

far-away morning, and he heard nothing but the silver notes of camel bells, the songs of birds, and the dashing of a limpid mill-stream on the green hillside of Sevend.

When at last he looked up, it was like one waking from sleep. He laughed, but the big, dark eyes were wet.

Next day they stretched a snowy warp on the gray old timbers, and the work began.

#### IV.

One morning, creeping at daybreak from his chink of a sleeping place in a near-by caravanserai, to wait for the man who carried the factory key, the boy found a group of drovers and caravanjis at the tall gates, talking earnestly.

"Is it the real plague?"

"Of a truth," answered another. "They say he was from Hamadan, who brought it. It is only five days away, and the city has been infected for a month."

"Not so, friends," said a third. "The priest who sat by the gate at sunset, yesterday, told me it was a lean dervish, who came out from Seistan, by way of Meshhed."

"Oh, of course!" It was a wrinkled old man, with a deep stain of the henna in his beard, who spoke. "Of course," he repeated; "whatever a priest says, it is true. But I saw the fellow, and believe me, though I am no priest and have no white turban, it was not a dervish at all."

"You saw him?" and a score of eager listeners crowded up, with fear in their questioning faces.

"Yes, I said I saw him."

"And who was he?"

"Who but an Arab, who came up from the Gulf and across the mountains. He was sick and groaning, in the inn at the north side of the city, when I got there. They thought he had only the low fever, or that he had taken some

malady of the night air in crossing the marshes. He whined and cried out about the pain in his legs, but they only mocked at him, for he was an Arab, and he was poor. I covered him with my blanket, and gave him tea, but" —

The auditors, looking into the eyes of one another, edged off.

The old man observed the movement, and glanced around at them with quiet scorn. Then he went on: —

"But his end came quickly. The deadly pain came upon him, and he raved."

One by one, with dread in their faces, the listeners were slipping away. The old man did not notice. He was staring at the ground while he spoke, as if again there lay before him the writhing figure of the sufferer at the inn.

"At last," he said, half musing, "the spots came out on his face. He knew nothing. When I went to him next, he was dead, poor soul."

After some seconds of meditation the narrator looked up to see what impression his tale had made. Only one hearer remained to him, a little lad dressed in black, who stood waiting patiently.

"Do you not know me, Master?"

"Allah! Is it you, son?" and he threw two sinewy arms about the boy, and kissed him. "And how fares it?"

"Better than I dreamed, Master. I am weaving the holy carpet of Ardebil. They will not let you in now, but in a week you shall see."

"In a week, alas! I shall be far along the way to Trebizond by that time, but the road will be shorter, now that I have such good news of you; and when I come back, I shall find you gone, to be sure, to be master of the Shah's artisans in Teheran? And to think that I wanted to make a farmer of you!"

The slant light of morning saw old Sadak riding again at the head of his caravan across the plain, and the boy once more in place behind the company of tiny weavers who were working out

the wondrous design of the Ardebil. He had become a ruling spirit to them, crooning ceaselessly his song of the stitches, watching with tireless eyes the growth of the manifold flowers. They had come to dread that small forefinger, which shot out over their shoulders to point out an error. His piping word of reproof stung them like the branding iron. He tested the yarns for color, he watched the dwindling spools, and stopped the work now and then to cut out coarse and bunched places.

It was almost finished now, and the American superintendent's greatest delight was to lay a spirit level across the top row of knots, and to note, day after day, that it held true. They had finished the small inscription in the top of the field, — the few lines of Hafiz and the modest record of the workman who had wrought the design long centuries before. There remained only the resplendent sweep of border across the end, and then all would be done.

But every day the hush in the bazaars grew deeper. The richer merchants went away to the mountains, and board shutters hid many shop windows. The European buyers had made a hasty departure. Venders of green herbs and vegetables and mountain water cried their wares in subdued voices. Little knots of men with clouded faces gathered about the tea booths at corners in the bazaars and along the stone coping of stagnant fountains in the caravanserais, and hung there through long hours. Day and night an endless procession of funerals moved through the streets to the cemetery on the mountain side, where the city's dogs as well as the mourners were always howling.

The plague, which had come on the heels of famine, was spreading, and none had power to check it. Until summer should be gone, it must reap its harvest unopposed. There were no disinfectants. The Mission doctors did what they could, but it was little. The



punishment of uncleanness had come. The soil, saturated with the filth of three thousand years of crowded, neglectful life, sent up ever renewed contribution to the pestilence; the burning sun nurtured it. Upturned places festered in the heat. Foul water, creeping through the streets, became a carrier.

One day a weaver was missing from the Ardebil loom; then, another. Lads from other carpets took their places. There was only the narrow stripe now to finish. With flushed cheeks, doom's mark on him, the boy was crowding the new hands to the work. The American came, looked into the little loom-master's face, and noticed that the dark eyes were glazed.

"Are you sick, son?" he asked.

"No, Sahib, I am only tired," and he drew himself together and began again the sing-song that set all the fingers flying. "But, Sahib," he said, halting again, "I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"I don't know; something about the carpet. Nothing must happen to the carpet, Sahib, but" — lowering his voice almost to a whisper — "something has happened. The colors are — all — all grown — cold. The flowers, and the lamps — they — they" — He stopped, with a vacant stare.

"They what?"

The boy looked up at him helplessly, trying to remember, shivered, and began to cry. Then, as his gaze fell upon the pattern in his hand, he held it up before him and resumed his singing again, mechanically. The superintendent went away, with the contented reflection that there was n't another inch to do.

Noontime, hot, high noon, and the dirty weavers, one after another, left the looms and went out silently. The boy stayed. When he was alone he sat down listlessly on a bale of carpet, drew a folded sheet of flat barley bread from

the skirt pocket of his coat, and tried to eat. It sickened him. Intuitively he restored the poor food to his pocket, and went to the big earthen water vessel that stood in the corner and drank, and drank. Then, stealing around, feebly, half groping, to the back of the loom, where the glory of the Ardebil shone in the gloom, he prayed. When he went back to work, something in the side of his throat was choking him. A sudden, sharp pain pierced his chest. A little, muffled cry was the only sign he gave, but he knew, and to himself he said, smiling as if in recognition, "It is the 'demon's arrow.'"

That afternoon they whipped in the few colored threads of weft which made the small, striped web at the top of the carpet. At sunset it lay finished on the ground in the bazaar hard by, and black-browed dealers, elbowing one another, marveled at its maze of blossoms. All around it were strewn the fabrics of Kurdistan, and Shiraz, and Djushagan; they were dull and dead by contrast. The boy had disappeared.

"When you see the little rascal again, send him to me, Ibrahim," said the superintendent; "I want to make him a present. He's done himself credit."

Morning broke clear and hot over the stricken city. Fierce light was beating down through openings in the roof of the bazaars when the first comers sauntered in. There, with its thousands of little flowers smiling up to greet the day, lay the great carpet of Ardebil, and prone upon it, a thin, still, small figure in a long black coat.

Just above him, as if for epitaph, shone from the quaint medallion the lines woven so long ago by his idol, the nameless Weaver of Kashan: —

"Outside this Thy threshold am I,  
Of every other refuge robbed;  
Nor beyond this portal find I  
Where to rest my weary head."

*John Kimberly Mumford.*