

FRANK HARRIS

AKBAR: THE "MIGHTIEST"

THE STORY OF THE SOUL OF A WORLD CONQUEROR

IN the heart of Asia, in the great temple of Samarkand, are three tombs: one to Timour, the first of the Mughal Conquerors who overran Asia; one to Akbar, his descendant, who as a youth won India and established an empire, and one to Akbar's master and counsellor, Abulfazl. Akbar's tomb, erected by himself, is quite a small and insignificant one, and there the Conqueror rests quietly enough these three hundred years and more now at the feet of his teacher. The simple grandeur of the great sarcophagi, the humility of the invincible Emperor, quickened my curiosity, first awakened by the name given to him of "Akbar," which means the "Mightiest" or "Highest," and is generally used as an attribute of God. Was he really a great man? Who gave him the astounding title? How came it to stick to him? Why was he the only conqueror in recorded time whose empire endured for centuries after his death?

Samarkand, too, interested me. It is one of the oldest cities in the world: even the stones of the strong houses are eaten into by the centuries and coloured with the patine of time, and its chief citizens are tanners now and goldsmiths as they were two thousand years before Christ, when it was called Marcanda. But again and again I left the bazaars and dark shops—with their silk praying-rugs that take a generation to weave, and barbaric jewels, sky-blue turquoise large as filberts, carved amethysts as big as hens' eggs, and sapphires sold by the ounce—to return to the Temple.

One day, in an Armenian's den in the bazaar, I found a Crusader's sword, and a suit of chain armour that must have belonged to one of the knights who followed St. Louis to the Holy Land. The owner of the shop talked the Levantine jargon, which is based on modern Greek, and so I could make

myself fairly understood. In his cautious way, he took a polite interest in me, as a customer, and when I explained to him that I was interested in the cathedral and especially in Akbar and his life, he told me he would send a compatriot of his to the caravansary, a learned Sunni, who would give me all the information on the subject I could desire.

The next day I found a Sufi waiting for me, who looked the priestly part, whatever his practice may have been. He was of middle height, yet impressive by reason of impassivity. The slow quiet ways of the immemorial East seemed to have moulded his gentle, deferential manners. I have never seen so expressive a face that changed so little. It was of the purest Persian type: a narrow oval, the features almost perfectly regular, though the nose was slightly long and beaked, the eyes long, too, and dark brown, almost the black-brown of strong coffee; he might have been anywhere between thirty and forty-five. He introduced himself as having been sent to me by the merchant, and placed himself at my disposal. I told him that what I wanted to know was the story of Akbar—how he came to power, why he built himself a small tomb at the feet of his Teacher? Was there any reason for his humility, any spiritual significance in it? Had he no woman in his life, but only a man-friend?—a host of questions.

The Sufi bowed and told me he would do his best to answer me: would I care to hear the popular story? I responded eagerly that was just what I wanted. Then he was afraid his knowledge of Greek might be insufficient: would I mind if now and then he availed himself of a dictionary? And he pulled a little, shabby, dog-eared booklet out of his pocket, which was issued in Leipzig, and contained words in Persian, Hindu, and modern Greek.

I assured him I was chiefly curious about Akbar himself. Did the great fighter really become a sort of religious teacher and put forth a new religion? He assured me he would tell me everything, as it had been told to him when a boy. I thanked him—that was what I desired.

Every one knows, he began, that Akbar's real name was Jelal-ed-Din Muhammad. He was born at Amarkot, in 1542, when his father was fleeing to Persia from Delhi. In 1555, when the boy was thirteen years of age, his father died. Jelal gave the control of his kingdom to Bairam Khan as regent, and occupied himself with games and physical exercises. Bairam Khan set to work to subdue the provinces that had revolted from Jelal's father. He carried out his work with such relentless cruelty that his name became a byword from the banks of the Ganges to the Caspian: he brought peace, it was said, the peace of death!

When Jelal was about eighteen, he had his first trial, and it influenced the whole of his after life. Up to this time he had given himself to sports and poetry and thought little about governing. He was the most enthusiastic polo player of his day, and one story told about him depicts his strength of body and impetuous intensity of character better than pages of description. He was surprised once by nightfall in the middle of a close game; he resolved to go on until he had gained the victory. Accordingly he had balls made of palas wood that burns a long time, and with these fiery balls he continued the game till his side had won. I always see Akbar, in my mind, galloping furiously in the dark after a ball of fire—that seems to me symbolic of the intense spirit of the young conqueror. When he was sixteen or seventeen, he began to listen to criticisms of Bairam Khan. He even made some pertinent suggestions; and the Minister-General, jealous of his power, looked him out a lovely girl and persuaded him to take her to wife. With the cunning of the East, Bairam Khan knew that the best way to lead Princes was with such silken strings.

A year or two later the King was poisoned and came near death; only recovered indeed because he took violent emetics on his own initiative before the Doctor had time to come to his assistance. Who were the culprits? The King knew intuitively. "There must be a conspiracy between two" he said: between the chief cook who alone prepared his food and his wife who

had cajoled him into eating it without waiting to have it tasted. He had the chief cook before him, and in five minutes wrung the truth out of him and found that his suspicions were correct. His dismissal of the wretch was equivalent to a sentence of death: the culprit was strangled before he left the ante-chamber. While that was going on Jelâl strove to compose his spirit by writing a sonnet, but he could hardly please himself even with the first verse.

He could not shirk the question: What was to be done with the girl? At length Jelâl called her before him and asked her simply why she had conspired with the cook? What had he done to make her hate him?

The girl shrugged her shoulders disdainfully and kept silent.

“Do you love cooks better than kings?” asked the monarch at last; and the girl burst forth:

“We women love those who love us and care for us. When did you ever care for any one but yourself? You think more of winning a chaugan game than of winning love. A woman to you is a plaything: how can you expect love when you never give it?”

The King was shaken with surprise and doubt. After all, the girl was right enough and what she said was true. He had always treated her as an instrument of pleasure. Why should he expect gratitude and affection from her?

What was he to do with her? . . . this woman he had loved and trusted?

He was utterly at a loss till a thought struck him. In spite of his diabolic cruelty or because of it, Bairam Khan had been successful in life. He had conquered provinces, and subdued cities, he should know how to deal with a faithless woman. So Bairam Khan was summoned to the Presence and asked by the King for his advice. The old warrior pronounced himself decisively.

“A great ruler should be beloved by his friends,” he said, “and feared by all the rest of the world. The Emperor Jelâl is already beloved by all who know him. He must make

himself feared so that whoever in the future dares to think of revolt should have the cold of death in his nostrils. The girl should be hung up in public and sliced to death with a tulwar. That was the most lingering and most painful death that could be inflicted on a woman. It might be so managed," he concluded, "by beginning with the hands and going on to the feet that the agony would be prolonged for more than an hour. The Emperor himself should preside at the ceremony."

The young monarch heard him to the end attentively, and then :

"What would the pain of the woman profit me?" he asked sharply.

Bairam Khan answered: "The punishment of the wrongdoer is the protection of the powerful."

The young King stared at him. "The powerful don't need protection," he said, and after a pause added in a loud, severe voice :

"You have taught me, Bairam Khan, that what men say about you and your cruelty is true. Hitherto I have lived for my pleasures and left the care of my Kingdom to you. Now I'll take the rule into my own hands and allow you to make the Holy Pilgrimage." (This was practically an order to Bairam Khan to make that pilgrimage to Mecca which ensures salvation.) And the young King with that generosity which was always a marked trait in his character added :

"A suitable jaghír out of the parganás of Hindustan shall be assigned for your maintenance and transmitted to you regularly."

Thus dismissed, Bairam Khan stood stock still for a moment and then salaamed till his forehead rested on the floor before he rose and backed out of the hall.

Jelál then called the defiant girl before him again. "You can keep the jewels," he said, "and all the other gifts my love bestowed upon you." The girl glanced aside indifferently as if she had not heard. "I cannot punish where I have loved," the King went on slowly, "nor give you pain who have given me pleasure."

The girl looked at him still in suspicion, unconvinced.

“What are your gifts to me?” she snapped. “I shall be killed before I leave the palace.”

And the King answered: “You shall go in peace still keeping the name and honour of the King’s chosen.”

On hearing this the girl cried aloud: “The King is indeed the King!” and, falling on her knees, bowed herself before him.

And the King continued: “One of these days I shall come to Agra and there build you a house and you shall live in it and speak to me freely.”

And the woman looked long at him as if seeking to divine his meaning, and then turned and left the Court without a word and went to live in Agra. And from her the King learned many things only known to women . . .

When the rule was taken away from Bairam Khan he rebelled, but was quickly broken in battle by the King, and then as quickly forgiven and sent on his way to Mecca. On the point of embarking he was stabbed in the back by one he had wronged, and died with all his sins unpardoned. Jelâl continued the promised jaghír to his children . . .

Ten years later the young King had overrun all India north of the Deccan and subdued it, spreading his fame the while from Delhi to the Dardanelles, indeed from end to end of the civilised world as the civilised world then was. Men began to wonder at him, and his constant successes awed them: some even passed from praise to adoration, calling him “Akbar”; but he would not use the name. Didn’t deserve it, he said; his victories had all been easy . . .

It was after he had subdued Kashmir that the crowning trial of his life took place. The King of distant Khandesh had sent an embassy to him congratulating him on his conquests, and according to custom the Emperor sent him back a firman, thanking him and saying that he would take one of his daughters to wife as pledge of enduring amity.

The King replied that he felt himself greatly honoured by the

proposal, and with the letter dispatched his youngest daughter with a great retinue and many gifts. She turned out to be a beautiful girl, as those Northern women sometimes are ; but very proud : the Emperor being only thirty-two at the time fell to desire of her at the first meeting. Strange to say, she held aloof from him, would not go into the Harem even as a queen, and was not to be won by prayers or promises.

When the King in a moment of passion threatened to take her by force, she plainly told him he could take her body, perhaps, but her spirit and her heart were her own and he would never gain them by violence.

The King then tried to win her by gifts and kindness, by rich jewels and great shows staged in her honour, shows in which hundreds of wild beasts fought for days, such shows as had never been seen before in the world. The girl was flattered and pleased in spite of herself. One combat in especial interested her. When she saw a pair of wild stallions fighting with superb pride and fierceness she cried out with delight and admiration. For the wild desert horses fought standing up on their hind legs, striking with their front feet and ever seeking with open mouth to seize the adversary by the crest and hurl him to the earth. This conflict pleased the girl much more than the deadlier, bloodier strugglings of tigers and bulls which the Emperor staged for her amusement.

But when it came to love-making she withdrew into herself and again and again denied the monarch, now passionately, now sullenly.

One day the King threatened to send her back home, and she retorted that nothing would please her better, and when he questioned her further, she confessed boldly that one of the young nobles about her father's Court had attracted her. It appeared that the courtship had not gone beyond glances : the girl admitting ruefully that her father would never allow her to marry a mere subject, as he believed himself to be directly descended from God. This new and unexpected difficulty

enraged the Emperor: he was at a loss, too, irritated by his own indecision and fear of taking a wrong step.

Fortunately good counsel was at hand. An Arab named Mubarak, whose ancestors had settled in Rajputana, was renowned for wisdom, and as his two sons grew to manhood they became famous as having inherited their father's genius. Shaik Faizi, the elder, was known everywhere as a doctor and poet; he had composed many books and won popularity by always attending the poor for nothing. His younger brother Abulfazl was an even greater man. When only fifteen years old his learning was the wonder of the district, and by twenty he had begun to teach in the mosques. The Persian proverb says that no tree grows very high which comes to maturity quickly; but Abulfazl was an exception to this rule. Jelal induced him to abandon his intention of giving himself up wholly to a life of meditation at twenty-three, and took him into his own suite. Though eleven years older than Abulfazl, the King grew to respect him more and more and their intimacy developed into a mutual understanding and affection. At his wits' end to know how to win his proud wife, Jelal turned to Abulfazl.

"In love and war," he said, "no one should ask for counsel. But in this absurd difficulty I'd like to know whether anyone can find a way where I see no sure outlet."

After some time for thought, Abulfazl told him there were many ways and they all reached the goal—with time.

"I'm faint with desire," cried the King, "wild with impatience."

"Is she wonderful in beauty, or in mind, or in character?" asked Abulfazl.

"In all!" exclaimed the King; "she's without a peer in the world."

Abulfazl smiled: "The madness of love speaks through you. Such desire is mere ignorance. Enjoy her once and the glamour will be gone."

"But the joy will be mine," cried the King, "and the

memory. The illusion of love and desire are the chiefest pleasures in life. Bare us of them and what would life be worth?"

"More than you would believe now," said Abulfazl; "but what is her real power over you?"

The King thought in silence. "Her courage," he replied, "and, to tell you the truth, her disdain of me and of course her loveliness."

"It is a great opportunity," said Abulfazl, "to win the great fight with one blow. The only course worthy of my lord is that he should conquer himself and subdue his passion."

"Impossible," cried the King, "she is in my blood, in my brain, in my heart. If I don't win her, I shall have lost the world."

"So it seems to you now," rejoined Abulfazl, smiling, "and were you any one else I would advise you to go into Persia far away from her and there give yourself up to other beauties and lose all memory even of this one woman; but my lord should take the high way. If you can conquer such a passion you can do anything. It is not the food that gives the pleasure, but the appetite. Restraint will increase your desire, and any new girl will seem wonderful to you."

"Do you know what you are advising?" asked the King, turning on him with hard eyes.

Abulfazl nodded his head.

With one movement Jelal was on his feet.

"So be it," he said, quietly, after a pause. "If you have made a mistake, you shall be impaled. If by following your advice I lose my joy of life and my delight in living, I shall see you die with pleasure; but if you are right and by conquering myself I win content, you shall be master in my kingdom and I shall be second to you."

"You would not be my master," replied Abulfazl, quietly, "if you could thus punish your best friend."

"I am my own best friend," retorted the King, gloomily; "but love is surely a madness, and there may be some wisdom in your counsel."

For a month the King went in and out and paid no attention to the girl or to Abulfazl. He then started off suddenly to Agra and when he returned he sent for Abulfazl again.

"You were right in one thing," he said, "and wrong in another: fasting sharpens appetite amazingly, but you were wrong when you said any dish would give pleasure. I want nothing but this one woman: no other can tempt me, and I am mad with longing for her."

"I have thought, too, while my lord was absent," said Abulfazl: "it may be that the Princess is indeed the King's complement and meant for him. In that case seek her out, get to know her soul and body and give her time and occasion to know you. As you are greater than she is, she will be drawn to you—that's the law; the greater draws the less; besides, she is already curious about you. She will love you. In this way you may both win love and make love your servant."

The King broke in: "The woman at Agra told me to hide my desire and make the girl fear she had lost me. Women, she said, all want what they can't have or what is above them."

"All men too," said Abulfazl, meeting the King's eyes and smiling as he spoke, for he saw that the master was again at one with him, "the woman's counsel is wise, wiser perhaps than mine."

Jelal then began what he always afterwards called his "discipline," combining the advice of Abulfazl and that of his divorced wife.

It was a long struggle and only a few incidents in it were decisive. Each day the woman was told to attend the King while he gave judgments in the Great Hall. Now and again in difficult cases he would ask her advice, but he seldom took it, and soon the girl had to admit to herself that the monarch knew life and men better than she did. But just when she was getting impatient under cumulative evidence of her inferiority, the King with fine wit took care to praise her for some mental quality or grace of spirit she did not possess, and this appreciation made her eager for more.

In spite of his passion Jelal pretended to take only a mild interest in her and showed himself always engrossed in affairs of state. Still the girl would sometimes smile to herself as if she saw through his acting. But when she let her eyes rest on his, or encouraged him by smile and word and he would turn away to talk to some Minister, she would grow thoughtful and the women of the hareem said her temper was not so even as it used to be.

As soon as the woman at Agra learned that the King had aroused the girl's interest and made her doubt her empire over him, she advised him to send for her lover and offer to marry them and the King consented, for the counsel pleased him. He himself had noticed from time to time an uncertain humility in the girl's manner and in her eyes a sort of appeal. Others noticed that she had begun to drape her tall figure after the fashion of the women in the hareem and now swathed herself so closely that her shape could be seen through the soft stuffs just as if she had been coming from the bath.

It was in this mood that the lover of her girlhood appeared to her. Half unconsciously she had idealised him and exaggerated his charm to herself and now she saw that the attraction he had had for her had disappeared, and to her consternation she realised that he was much more concerned to win the Emperor's favour than her love; he seemed to her paltry and immature; yet she could not bear to admit her mistake to the great King. What was to be done? She resolved to carry it through.

In full court the King came to her, leading the Khandesh noble: "Here, lady," he said, "is one who loves you and your father consents to your marriage."

"Only if Akbar wishes it," added the unfortunate youth, bowing low.

As the girl flushed with anger at her suitor's obsequiousness, the King turned away and shortly afterwards left the Palace.

Next day the girl heard that he had gone again to Agra and the women of the hareem assured her that he had gone back to his first wife, for men only visited women for one thing. It was

noticed that the girl seldom spoke to her betrothed, and when the King returned she prayed him to see her.

Schooled by the woman of Agra, the King replied he would surely see her as soon as he had concluded some urgent business, and he kept her waiting nearly a week. By this time the girl had grown sick with fear lest she had lost the monarch's love. When she was admitted to his presence she could only cry :

“ My lord, my lord.”

“ What can I do to pleasure you ? ” asked the King. “ Will you be married to your compatriot at once ? ”

The girl saw that his eyes were laughing and took it that he despised her.

“ As the King does not want me,” she retorted proudly, “ I wish to be sent back to my father.”

“ But you said you didn't want the King,” persisted the monarch, “ and you loved this young man. Why have you changed ? ”

“ I was young,” she said, gulping down the lump in her throat, “ and knew no better.”

“ And now ? ” asked the King.

“ There is only one man in the world for me,” she said, “ and that is the King,” and she lifted her eyes to his and gave herself in the look.

Though his heart thrilled with joy, the King kept his control: “ Go to the hareem,” he said, “ and wait for me.” And she turned, glowing, and went like a child.

In the hareem the King found her another woman; after he had convinced her of his love she broke into praises of his looks and strength, and when he said that there were many handsomer and stronger men she wouldn't listen, but covered his mouth with her hand and declared that there was no one in the world like him and that he was the most splendid man in the Court though he was only a little taller than the average.

Because she was very fair, with skin like ivory and eyes as blue as sapphires, she praised his black eyes and hair and his loud, deep voice and even the small wart on the left side

of his nose; he was her god, the Most High—"Akbar," she exclaimed, and she would never call him by any other name.

But when he told her he would have to earn it first and thus recalled to his ambitions made ready to leave her, he found another woman still.

"You shall not go," she cried boldly, "the cook's mistress at Agra calls, you shall not go."

And when he said that he went to Agra for counsel and not for love, for the woman was cunning and had taught him much, she wouldn't have it.

"You shall not see her," she panted, "not yet, not till you know me better, promise, not till I give you leave!"

She was so imperious in her pleading that the King promised and caressed her, and then she burst into tears and said he might go if he liked; but it would break her heart and she was very unhappy and—her tears set off her beauty better than her pleading or her pride, and her quick changes of mood charmed the King, who could not help showing his astonishment. He had thought her proud and reserved at first, he said, and at that she burst out laughing, saying love was a magician and fashioned a woman to her lord's desire.

"But you did not love me at first," he said; "it was only by feigning indifference and holding off that I won you."

At that she looked up at him from the divan, smiling. "It was the wise Abulfazl, was it not, who gave Akbar that counsel?" And she said this though she knew in her heart the counsel came from the woman at Agra, but she would not keep her memory alive by making mention of her.

The King was astonished by her intuition.

"How did you guess," he asked, "that I went to him for counsel?"

She pouted and said carelessly:

"If I had not loved Akbar from the beginning, no holding off would have won me."

"But if you loved me why did you plague me so at first by pretending coldness and aversion?"

“Because I loved,” she said. “I saw that all things came to Akbar too easily and so I held away, though when he took me in his strong arms and kissed me in spite of my resistance I almost yielded.”

“Akbar blamed himself afterwards for forcing you,” said the monarch.

Again, unexpectedly, she laughed aloud :

“You child,” she cried, “you child! you would never have tasted my lips had I not let you; the resistance like the coldness was all feigned. There! I’ve given my secret away. We women are all traitors to ourselves!”

In wonder the King exclaimed :

“I believe you know more about women than even the woman I have called ‘wise’ at Agra!”

The smile left her face and a change came over her : “All women know women,” she said, “but she is a vile creature fit only for the bazaar.”

“Why do you say that?” asked the King, and the girl responded : “If anyone killed my lover I would never forgive him, never. When he put his hands on me I should feel the blood sticking on them : hate would be in my heart for him, and I’d curse him by day and by night.”

“He was only a cook,” said Akbar.

But the girl wouldn’t have it.

“If I had stooped to my lover, still more would I have felt his loss : it is our sacrifices for you that endear you to us!”

Suddenly the King turned on her for he was curious :

“Why did you resolve all at once to yield to me?”

She answered quietly :

“When Akbar brought that man here and offered me to him before the Court, my heart was as water lest I had lost my lord’s love : I had had enough of the struggle, or”—and she took his head in her hands and kissed his mouth—“I wanted you—” and she sighed in content.

This first communion with his love showed the King that the instinct of his desire had been right and that he had an extra-

ordinary mistress ; as changeful as the sky in the monsoon and charming with all the gaiety and liveliness of girlhood : but he was soon to find that she was more.

Almost from the first day she made up to Abulfazl and not only won his admiration and affection, but found out from him quickly sides of the King's character which she might otherwise have been years in discovering. From this counsellor she learned that the deepest motive in the King was his ambition, and not ambition merely to conquer, or even to consolidate his empire, but to grow spiritually, to become wiser and better than any man on earth ; her lover was indeed a King of Kings.

She even found out from Abulfazl without his knowing it the true explanation of the kindness shown to the woman at Agra.

“ The King doesn't keep her now for counsel,” he said, “ but to remind him of what he first learned by forgiving. He wishes now that he had forgiven the cook. I believe,” he added, “ that if the cook had lived, the King would long ago have sent him to his love at Agra.”

At that the girl gasped ; for such magnanimity was beyond her. But she had learned the chief lesson, that Akbar, like all great and generous natures, was to be moved by an appeal to the highest much more easily than by tempting the animal in him or by urging his own self-interest. And with this key in her hands and her woman's intuition that everything is to be done with a man by praise, she became a real companion to her lord and an inspiring helpmate. She pleaded for the gentler virtues, and Akbar having already begun to realise that a great man should have a good deal of the woman in him, was ready to listen to whatever was wise in what she said and to profit by the new insight.

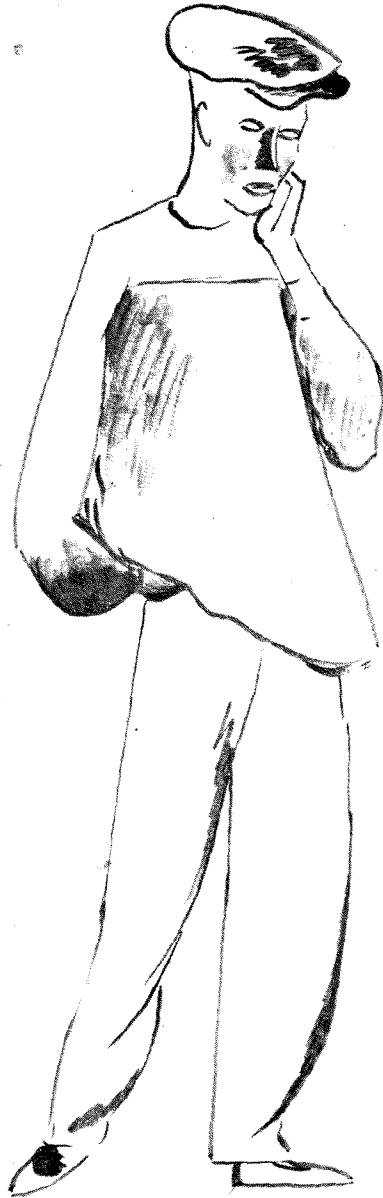
And here the Sufi stopped as if he had come to the end of the story : but I was too interested in Akbar to let him off so easily.

“ You have told me half the tale,” I began, “ and have told it fairly well for a learned man ; but you have left the more

ETHELBERT WHITE



ZAVADO



important part unexplained. I understand now why 'Akbar' honoured Abulfazl and why men honoured Akbar; but I don't see yet why Abulfazl wrote Akbar's deeds and words and showed such unfeigned admiration of his master."

"Jelâl was not called 'Akbar' for nothing," replied the Sufi: "he was the first Conqueror whose empire survived him, and it survived because it was built on sympathy and not on suspicion, on love and freedom and not on fear and hate."

"What do you mean exactly?" I asked.

"Previous conquerors," he said, "held down each province they subdued by a standing army. Akbar not only allowed each province to govern itself: but gave the peoples greater freedom than they had had before, while insisting on complete religious toleration. Personal ambition even found scope and security under his rule. That was why his empire lasted till the white traders conquered Hindustan two hundred years later."

And again the Sufi paused.

"You have yet to tell me," I persisted, "when and why he took the name of 'Akbar': was it pride or——?"

"The best Mussulmans," said the Sufi, "blame him for taking the divine attribute—'The Highest,' but if ever a man deserved it, he did. His mind was never at rest. When there were no more foes to conquer, he invited to his Court Lamas from Tibet and Padres from Goa, and was the first to declare that Jesus was not only a great prophet, as Muhammed had said; but greater than Muhammed himself, the greatest of all. Jesus and Muhammed, he used often to say, were like stars in the heaven and greater and brighter luminaries would yet come to throw radiance on the ways of men. He even went so far," and the Sufi whispered the words as if in dread of some eaves-dropper, "as to assert that every man might be Muhammed and Jesus besides being himself, for he too had come from God as they had come."

"Interesting," I said, "and so Akbar lived and died as a god, 'happy ever after.'"

"No, no," cried the Sufi, with Eastern wisdom; "happiness

is not for wise men or great: Akbar was tried beyond the ordinary. His two favourite sons drank themselves to death, and the son who ultimately succeeded him in the Empire revolted against him and got his friend Abulfazl murdered. That grief and disappointment changed all life for Akbar. What good was vengeance and what profit was there in anger when he knew by a sort of instinct that wild envy and jealousy had induced his son to kill a better man than himself?

“Akbar saw he might as well forgive his son, for nothing he could do would bring Abulfazl back to life, or put light again in those kindly hazel eyes which were always warm with love for him.

“The murder of Abulfazl, who was too gentle to have any enemies, brought the nothingness of life very close to Akbar. From the afternoon when the sad news reached him, he resolved to live as if every day were to be his last; that marked his conversion to the ideal life . . .

“In maturity he had been gross of body as strong men often are who carry the appetites of youth into middle age; but after this Akbar became an ascetic and lived mainly on fruit.”

“Did he ever take the title of Akbar himself?” I interjected.

“It was given to him very early,” explained the Sufi, “by many when he was only thirty; but he never took it himself till after Abulfazl’s death. We can see how he came to it,” the Sufi added, as if in apology, “for he was always frank and sincere as a child. His studies of various prophets had taught him that they were all alike in some qualities, and recognising in himself in later life the same characteristics of gentleness and lovingkindness, he came to believe that he, too, was divine, and sent by God as his Vicegerent on earth, or Khalifah.”

“Very interesting,” I could not help interjecting; “did he, then, speak of himself as the Khalifah?”

“He did,” replied the Sufi, solemnly, “and in this conviction he put forth a new creed, Din-i-Ilahi: ‘The Divine Faith’—which contained the best in a dozen religions, and so long as he lived it was adopted throughout the Empire.”

“ You amaze me,” I cried ; “ what was this new religion ? ”

“ Akbar,” replied the Sufi, slowly, “ took the ceremonies of it from the Parsees and the spirit from Jesus, and he built the Ibadat-Khana or palace-temple at Fatepur-Sikri for men of learning and genius ; and there he gathered about him prophets from Persia and painters from Francia ; and allotted pensions to writers and saints and men of talent of all kinds, and his fame spread abroad throughout the world. All over his Empire he built roads and founded schools, for there was peace in his time, though men said he had ‘ forgotten how to punish.’ . . . ”

“ But was his religion followed ? ” I asked, in amazement. “ Had he any converts ? ”

“ Myriads of disciples and hakim,” replied the Sufi, “ for in love of his wife he took Muhammed’s heaven into his gospel, and said that perfect happiness was only to be found in the love of woman . . . ”

“ What was his end ? ” I asked.

“ Alas ! alas ! ” exclaimed the Sufi, “ it came all too soon : he worked too vehemently (always galloping in the dark after that flaming ball), so that he died worn out when he was only a little over sixty ; but he had the consciousness of having lived a great life and left a noble example. Some of us still believe,” added the Sufi, as if speaking to himself, “ that he was indeed a son of God, the true Khalifah, and the faith he set forth was worthy of the name he gave it—The Divine.

“ Towards the end of his life, though he always passed much of his time in the hareem, it was for counsel chiefly, and there I dare to say he was happy, for he would have no other companion but his wife, the King’s daughter, though she was childless, and she was at his side when the darkness took him.”