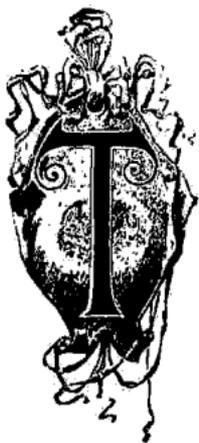


The Blood Feud
of El Hanouchi.



I. LILIAS TROTTER.



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HERE lived in a village in the edge of the hills a lad named Mustapha. He was an orphan and lonely, for his father and others of his relations had been killed in a blood feud with a neighbouring tribe, and he knew well that as soon as he came to be master of a beard, his own life would be sought, but he feared not, for he said, "I will advise my head, and take care of myself."

One day, when they were coming back from his work in the field, he was saluted by a stranger of full age and well dressed, who asked him of his welfare, and spoke to him in a kindly fashion. He answered in simplicity, and was pleased, for strangers seldom come that way. A few days after the same stranger met him outside the village, and saluted him with friendliness, and said to him, "I have come from afar, but I have known thy father's family for years, and have rendered many services to the people of thy house: and now I hear that thou art a grown man, and also that thou art a fine man and intelligent, and I wish to seek thee in case I might be of use like-

wise to thee in the world, for thou dost waste thy years in this village, where nothing is to be seen but the fields, and nothing to be gained beyond figs and bishna." Now this flattered Mustapha much, and when the man asked him to come with him to the Gargoutier for a meal, he followed him willingly. And the sky had not yet turned golden, and not many people were about; but there was an old man in the corner of the gargoutier's shop who watched with anxiety the two talking over their meal. When the stranger had paid for their food, and Mustapha had thanked him and wished him well, he departed, and Mustapha lingered at the door looking after him, rejoicing over the good chances that might be coming to him, till the work of hoeing in the fields seemed tasteless. And thus he stood gazing down the road till the stranger was out of sight. When he had disappeared in the distance, the old man, whose name was Si Boualem, came cautiously from the corner, and said, "Come with me, my son, I have a tale to tell thee." Now the lad was not inclined for work, so went gladly and sat with Si Boualem under a clump of olives outside the village. And the old man said in a low voice: "O my son, beware of the one with whom thou hast been speaking. He belongs to the tribe of El Hanouchi, which has vowed

vengeance on thee and on thy father's house, and it will be with no good intent that he makes thee a show of friendship. Once he has thrown his glance on thee, he will leave thee never more till he has worked thy death. It may be he will not dare to assault thee publicly, but he will seek to beguile thee into some side path where he will slay thee in secret."

And Mustapha found his heart tormented by these words, for already the poison of the stranger's flattery had begun to work in him and to blind his eyes to fear: and it was only when Si Boualem had talked long and earnestly that he began to awake from the dreams of pleasure and gain that were laying hold of him and to see his danger: and at last he said: "Good, I will take care if he comes again."

But Si Boualem said: "O my son, thy care of thyself will not suffice to save thy head, for El Hanouchi is full of cunning and power, and he can work on thee till thou dost follow him as a sheep to the slaughter. There is one way of safety, and I will tell it thee. Thou seest the mountains far away to the East: up there, out of sight, lies the town of El Melja. The Prince of that town has been all his days the friend of thy father's house: he intervened for him in the feud, and by so doing drew on him-

self the utmost wrath of the family of El Hanouchi, insomuch that they set on him with the intent to kill him: and now the edict has gone out from the government that all the Hanouchis are banished from El Melja, and they dare not set foot in it. If thou canst escape there, O my son, the enemy cannot touch a hair of thy head. Be advised, and haste thee there before he comes again: Go in peace."

Then there followed days when the mind of Mustapha was much perplexed, for others also warned him that El Hanouchi had been seen around and was watching how to entrap him, and yet his heart would not give him the needs-be of seeking refuge among strangers in a strange place, for he clung to his village.

So passed some weeks, and he heard no more. But one day, as he went by the village café, he noticed El Hanouchi sitting at the door, and they saluted each other: and, looking round to make sure that they were not being watched, El Hanouchi signed to Mustapha that he had something to say to him. For a moment curiosity and fear were side by side in the boy's heart, but curiosity conquered him, and they went up the road together. Then said El Hanouchi: "I know that many fools in yonder village have warned thee against me, but I will prove once for

all that my intent is only good. Thou art the master of an arm and canst help me, and it will be well worth thy while. Up in the edge of the forest yonder I have found a matmour of olden days, and in it already I have come on treasure; if thou wilt help me dig further, half that we find shall be thine." The bait was too tempting, both for the sake of the gain and the adventure, for they planned to start as soon as the moon should rise, which would be at two o'clock in the night, that they might work as much as possible before the world should be awake: and the lad went to the baths to sleep, that he might slip out unnoticed.

They met on the edge of the forest, and by moonrise found the hole of the matmour, and Mustapha went down into it and El Hanouchi after him. The lad began to feel a little anxious, for there were no signs of tools or marks of any previous digging, and he suddenly felt how easy it would be for his enemy to kill him and bury him there. Looking up, he saw an evil glitter in El Hanouchi's eyes, and his heart sprang in terror. Just then from far down the road there came the sound of an old voice singing, and Mustapha recognized the voice of Si Boualem, and, before El Hanouchi could stop him, he had leapt up to the level ground and raced to his friend. "Praise be to God," said Si

Boualem under his breath: "Come off with me with all speed": and they went back to the edge of the village in silence.

Then spake Mustapha: "O my friend, how came it that thou didst follow me in the night?" And Si Boualem answered, "I, too, was sleeping in the baths, and thou wert tossing and talking in thy sleep, and I gathered that El Haunochi was after thee, for I knew that he had been seen yesterday. And while I waited thou didst rise and go out, and, by the mercy of God, I followed thee . . . else wert thou by now a dead man. And now, O my son, believe my words, there is an evil, even unto death, planned for thee, and El Hanouchi's thirst for thy blood will not be quenched until he has shed it. Even now, while he is still in hiding, flee to El Melja, stay not to bid farewell to thy house, take the way of the East . . . the morning star will show it thee . . . seek not to keep to the high roads for the sake of ease, but go straight across country without swerving: salute no man, and hold thy way with the one purpose of getting there before he finds thee: once within the city gate he can touch thee no more." And Mustapha bade farewell with a full heart to Si Boualem, for he knew that his words were truth, and Si Boualem watched him dive into the underwood and disappear.

Now time fails to follow the steps of his three days' journey, and in truth nothing special happened to hinder him, for he followed the old man's counsel and kept his way straight, and as far as might be from the dwellings or the roads of man.

And in the evening of the second day he saw in the distance the walls of El Melja lit up in the gold of sunset, and he knew that during the night he could reach it. But he knew also that this last night would be the time of the greatest danger, for that if El Hanouchi knew of his intentions, he could well by now be watching round the gate.

And so in truth it happened. For when dawn broke Mustapha was nearing the city, and he knew that at sunrise the gates would be opened. And just as the sun rose in glory behind the houses he could see in the distance that the gates were flung wide, as though in welcome. But in that very moment as he passed near the last cluster of bushes on the hillside there darted from them the form of his enemy. The lad ran like the wind, and El Hanouchi behind him: and round the gates the watchmen gathered with an eager longing that the boy should win, and among them stood the Prince.

And at last, as Mustapha neared the gate there were but a

few metres between him and his enemy, and El Hanouchi drew his long knife and hurled it at his head. But as it whistled through the air, Mustapha bent himself low, and it flew over him harmlessly, and in another moment, bowed to the ground, and almost fainting, he flung himself across the threshold of the gate, and the Prince stooped and lifted him with his own hand, and drew him in. And, with a look of passionate hatred and disappointment, El Hanouchi turned on his heel and fled down the hillside. And the Prince, speaking to the watchmen, said, "I know this lad, and I know his enemy, rejoice with me that he is safe." And a great rest of body and spirit came to Mustapha, for he knew that the haven was reached, and all he had to do was to there abide, for never could El Hanouchi enter within those walls, nor face the Prince who ruled there.

My brother, there is one who has had a blood feud with the human race from the days of our father Adam until now, and not only with the human race as a whole, but with each member of it. And he hates thee with a hatred that is like a thirst for thy blood: this enemy is the devil, therefore fear him and his wiles.

But to fear him will not be enough to deliver thee, for he has a cunning and a perseverance which are far above thy head, and thou knowest not at what corner of thy life's path he may lie in wait for thy eternal ruin.

Therefore we come to warn thee that there is only one place where thou canst find a refuge. We tell thee, in the words of the Prophet Isaiah, "We have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks"; and Christ the Lord says, "I am the Door, by Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved." And the meaning of this is, that when a man has learned to fear Satan, the accursed one, it is not in doing battle with him that he can escape, but in fleeing to Christ the Lord, and casting himself on Him, to receive him and keep him; for God has given into His hand this right to receive sinners, and to keep them safe, and He has said of all who come to Him, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand."

And this door does not only mean the door of Heaven, it means shelter which begins here and now. Therefore turn thy face to Christ, O my brother, and flee to Him as for thy life. No matter if thou must forsake all that thou hast in seeking refuge

with Him, for " what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? "

And be not surprised if, as in the story of Mustapha, thine enemy the devil lies in wait for thee with increasing eagerness as thou dost approach the gates of salvation, and use his every effort against thee as thy soul reaches out to Christ. For if he cannot entice thee into the paths of sin he will bend all his power to hinder thine entrance into the gate that God opens to thee in Christ, lest thou dost escape from his hand. Therefore does Christ say in His Holy Gospel, " Strive to enter in at the straight gate " : not that there is any hindrance from within, but because the devil will do his utmost from without to stop thy way.

And therefore there is no safety for thee if thou art almost persuaded to be a Christian, rather is that a place of terrible danger to thy soul. Fling thyself forward at the feet of Christ, Who stands ready to welcome thee, for it is only when He touches thee and bears thee into the shelter that His death has provided for thee, that thou wilt be out of the grasp of the Evil One, and only as thou dost abide with Him Who is Prince and Saviour, canst thou abide in safety. And into this shelter may God bring thee, O my brother, and keep thee evermore.

