

Result of Short Story Competition.

OUR Short Story Competition, the result of which is given below, proved, as far as numbers went, a very great success, no fewer than 3,500 stories having been sent in. Those that won the prizes are:—

FIRST PRIZE £250.

“REDEMPTION,” by Oswald Wildridge, Newby Croft, Rimington, near Clitheroe.
(Published in this number.)

SECOND PRIZE £100.

“THE FLOWER-SHOW AT KWALIZ,” by Herbert Tremaine, 122, Kilbury Road, Letchworth, Herts.
(This story will be published in next month's STRAND.)

THIRD PRIZE £50

is divided between

“THE VICTORIANS,” by C. K. M. Scott Moncrieff, 136, Ebury Street, London, S.W., and

“THE DECOYS,” by Robin Forsythe, Ardlui, Hawes Lane, West Wickham, Kent.
(The former will be published in “The Grand Magazine” and the latter in “John o' London's Weekly.”)

The following table shows at a glance the selections made by each of the six judges:—

	Sir A. Conan Doyle.	Sir H. Rider Haggard.	Mr. H. G. Wells.	Editor, “Strand Magazine.”	Editor, “Grand Magazine.”	Editor, “John o' London's Weekly.”
1	The Flower-Show.	Redemption.	The Flower-Show.	Redemption.	Redemption.	Redemption.
2	The Decoys.	The Flower-Show.	Redemption.	The Flower-Show.	The Victorians	The Flower-Show.
3	The Call.	The Call.	The Victorians	The Decoys.	The Call.	The Problem of Kesa Gozen

The well-known authors who were good enough to act as judges in this competition were:—

SIR A. CONAN DOYLE,
SIR H. RIDER HAGGARD,
MR. H. G. WELLS,
MR. CHARLES GARVICE,

but the lamented death of the latter reduced the number to three. We append herewith the opinions of these judges on the winning stories. Their comments, of course, were made in ignorance of the writers' identities, in accordance with the conditions of the competition.

SIR H. RIDER HAGGARD.

“Briefly, I think ‘Redemption’ very good. It has power, and the

drawing of Swale's character is excellent. It seems to me to be the work of a practised hand, or, if not, then of one who should succeed, at any rate, in the writing of stories of the sea. Of the tales which you have sent me, to my mind, this one should come first.

“‘The Flower-Show at Kwaliz,’ which I have placed second, is, of course, in quite a different flight. It has certain weaknesses; for instance, Nekkan really has no adequate motive for the destruction of his beloved city, although this might have been supplied by a slight variation in the tale. However, presuming it to be original, undoubtedly the story shows considerable imagination of a sort which is not usual amongst English writers. The descrip-

tion of the growth of the beans and the way in which the hellish natural power within them overcomes the forces of man is really fine. The only thing which I can recall as resembling it comes in one of Wells's books, where a red weed, introduced by the Martians, spreads over the whole of England.

"On the whole, I think this story should take the second place.

"The third position I should give to 'The Call,' by 'Stub-tenon.' It is not particularly original, but the plot is well conceived and its development is not bad; though the last scene in the theatre might, to my mind, have been greatly strengthened."

SIR A. CONAN DOYLE.

"The Flower-Show at Kwaliz."—"A very beautiful and original story."

"The Decoys."—"Original in idea, dramatic, and has humour, which is so essential."

"The Call."—"Very fine, but rather too large a canvas for a short story, and in some ways unsatisfying."

MR. H. G. WELLS.

"The Flower-Show at Kwaliz' has real imagination.

"Redemption' is a good story in a recognized style."

In addition to the four prizewinners given above, two stories came into the first six, namely, "The Crêpe de Chine Blouse," by Ella S. Boswell, and "The Call," by W. A. Johnson. We have made arrangements with the authors of these stories for their publication in "The Grand Magazine."

Two stories which would certainly have been well in the running for a prize unfortunately had to be disqualified for exceeding the limit of 6,000 words. We have, however, made arrangements with the authors of these stories to publish them in this magazine.

Mr. Oswald Wildridge, the author of the story winning the first prize, has favoured us with the following interesting account of his previous experience as a writer :—

"MY record up to a certain point may be compressed within a single sentence. I am a son of the North, born at Workington, on the Solway Firth, and the major portion of my workaday life has been spent in journalism in Lancashire. Concerning my adventures in literature, I confess myself one of the landsmen who write sea-stories. No doubt because the sea is in my blood. I am one of a race of sailors, generation after generation, men who commanded Cumberland brigs, East Indiamen, Pacific traders; one got his name on the map; one when ashore was press-ganged and fought under Nelson. My first serious attempt at fiction was accepted by the first editor to whom it was offered and appeared in the *Windsor* in 1904. The glow of that first success was renewed last year, when *Maga* opened its pages to me and expressed a desire to see more of my work. My first novel was published by Ward, Lock, and Co. in 1907, my second in 1910. Afterwards, utilizing most of the moments that Blackburn journalism left, I contributed many short stories, dealing with Cumberland seaboard and dale life, to various magazines. Then the influence of my seafaring kin secured a treasured privilege on the Mersey

and enabled me to study the life of the river, its ships and men, from the bridges and cabins of its wonderful tugboats. One result was the publication by Blackwood's, in 1918, of 'Captain Co and Co,' a romance of river-docking and the deep-sea tow. Last Christmas Chambers published 'The

Luck Penny' (following its issue in *Chambers's Journal*)—a novel inspired by the mystery of the *Marie Celeste*—and my latest book, 'Clipper Folk,' is in Blackwood's current spring list.

"For my participation in THE STRAND competition all credit must go to my wife and daughter. 'Redemption' was not intended nor was it written as a competition story; my own impression was that the absence of a love element would probably rule it out, and I had not the time for another. But when it was finished I was deeply impressed by the enthusiasm of my two critics, whose judgment I have abundant reason to respect, and so I yielded to their pleading. My daughter's verdict was: 'Well, there are three prizes, and I'm certain there cannot be three stories better than father's.' In the light of the judges' decision, may I modestly claim that once more wisdom is justified of her children?"



MR. OSWALD
WILDRIDGE.

Photo. Rudeni, Blackburn.



"NEKKAN STRUGGLED FIERCELY IN THE GRIP OF HIS ENEMY'S LONG ARMS. HE FLASHED HIS DAGGER FROM ITS SHEATH AND STRUCK AT BALASTOOR"

(See page 511.)



The FLOWER-SHOW AT KWALIZ

By
HERBERT
TREMAINE

ILLUSTRATED BY
RENE BULL

The following story won the Second Prize of £100 in our recent Short Story Competition, and two of the six judges—Sir A. Conan Doyle and Mr. H. G. Wells—gave it first place on their lists. Sir A. Conan Doyle's comment was: "A very beautiful and original story"; while Mr. H. G. Wells said: "The Flower-Show at Kwaliz' has real imagination."

THE flower-show was held on the twelfth day of the month in the market-square of the city of Kwaliz. The Princess, a woman deeply learned in floriculture, came down from her palace on the Fourth Terrace to act as judge; and the first prize—a bag of gold and ten acres of land—was awarded to Balastoor, the son of Theimo.

On the evening of the same day, when the people were feasting and dancing in the square, a little man, leading a mule, came into the city by the Western Gate. The mule was laden with packages which seemed to be precious rather than heavy; for, when they swung, jostling, against the brass pillar at one side of the gate, the little man's hands went fluttering out in a swift, protective gesture.

"Flower-seeds and cuttings?" the young gatekeeper asked, grinning. The grin was a mocking and unfriendly one, and a wash of red surged up under the jaded, dust-gritted skin of the little man's face. He nodded and passed through the gate.

"But you will win no prizes this time!" the gatekeeper shouted after him as the big brass gates closed with a boom. "You are too late this time, Nekkan!"

The tired little man started and swung round, a question on his lips; but doubtless

his pride made him think better of it and he went on, with the gatekeeper's derisive laugh ringing in his ears.

The city of Kwaliz was built in a basin-shaped hollow that made a big dimple in the middle of a circle of low-lying land. In the centre of the basin stood the market-place, surrounded by the public buildings—the baths, the court-houses, the prisons, and temples. On the sloping sides of the basin there were dwelling-houses, trees, and strips of flower-gardens, arranged in four great circular terraces, one above another. On the lowest terrace, called the First, the poorest citizens lived. On the highest were the palaces of the noblemen and the Princess. The gates of the city opened into the splendour of these; but the truth is that—owing to the peculiar natures of the building materials which were most plentiful in that district—there were no houses in Kwaliz that did not look magnificent. Leading his mule down the street of steps that led from the Fourth Terrace to the First, Nekkan saw on either side of him, rising above the masses of blossoming trees and still gilded here and there by the yellow glow of sunset, walls and towers and casements that gleamed with the pallor of marble and alabaster, and shot out, from their incrustations of gems, the yellow and scarlet, the violet and blue fires of

The Flower-Show at Kwaliz

bloodstone and amethyst and sapphire. The steps of the street were paved with porphyry, and the lamps were of gold and silver. In Kwaliz nothing was precious except rare flowers. Flowers made all the business of the city and of the great belt of rich land surrounding it. Millions of seeds and cut blooms and growing plants were every day exported; and the trained gardeners of Kwaliz were sought out by the kings of distant countries.

Nekkan lived on the First Terrace; but, on the Third, he suddenly paused and put his hand to his ear. His long journeying across the gritty desert had stopped up his ears and nostrils with dust; but he thought that he heard sounds of music and the stir of a big crowd. When he reached the Second Terrace he could no longer doubt. The market-place was full of revelry. If that son of evil, the gatekeeper, had spoken the truth and the flower-show had already taken place——!

The tired little man hurried down to the First Terrace, the mule's feet slipping on the porphyry flags. Looking down into the well of swinging lights and shadows and joyous sounds that was the market-square, Nekkan reeled, sick and faint with his disappointment. There had been a mistake, there had been a mistake—he repeated it to himself, piteously. Somehow the flower-show had been held that day though he had been told that it was to be held on the twentieth day of the month.

While the sick stupor produced by the shock lasted, Nekkan was the gentlest of tired little men. He unloaded his mule and, leading it through a passage of green marble to the stable, he fed and watered it and shook down a bed of long soft grasses with pink and purple blossoms. He himself hardly wished to eat or rest, and there was no one in the house to press him to do so; but, sitting on a carpet in his doorway, he gulped down three or four cupfuls of wine from one of the two tall crystal bottles that stood on a brass tray just inside the door.

Afterwards, in his pathetic attempt to excuse himself, Nekkan pleaded that he had made a mistake between the two wine-bottles; and, instead of refreshing himself with the mild white wine drunk daily in Kwaliz, had recklessly swallowed more than a pint of the *lenhi-foljar*—the "liquid fire" that was imported from foreign cities beyond the hills and beyond the sea.

Nekkan rose, with a head that swam a little, and went down the steps leading from the First Terrace into the deep market-place. Two or three of the revellers, seeing him, grinned unkindly; others called out condolences on his late arrival. Nekkan replied to looks and speeches with only his

odd characteristic little nods of the head; and continued to push his way towards the decorated canopy which he could see over the heads of the people. It was the custom in Kwaliz that, on the evening of the day of the flower-show, the first-prize-winner should sit under this canopy and receive not only the congratulations of his friends, but visits from the leading men of the city.

A touch fell on Nekkan's arm, and he paused, looking into the face of a mild-eyed young man who, like most of the revellers, wore bright-coloured garments and a big flower in his white turban.

"You have had a long journey, Nekkan," the young man said. "Was it worth while?"

The friendly smile, the tactful avoidance of the subject of the flower-show, were comforting to the tired little man. He brightened.

"Worth while?" he said. "Truly it was worth while. I have brought back a marvel, Yenan—a plant the like of which has never been seen nor heard of. But——" and Nekkan fell back into despondency—"it is too late."

"Too late for what?" the other said, gently rallying him. "Too late for the annual flower-show of Kwaliz? A year will soon pass, Nekkan. It is an eternity to a child—not to a man of your age and learning."

"I may be dead before a year has passed," Nekkan answered, sombrely. "It is not merely the loss of the prize that distresses me—though I feel that the gold and the ten acres of land are mine by right. It is this, Yenan: that the foolish laws of the flower-show and of Kwaliz forbid me the right to appeal, before another year has passed, for even a piece of earth in which I can plant my treasure."

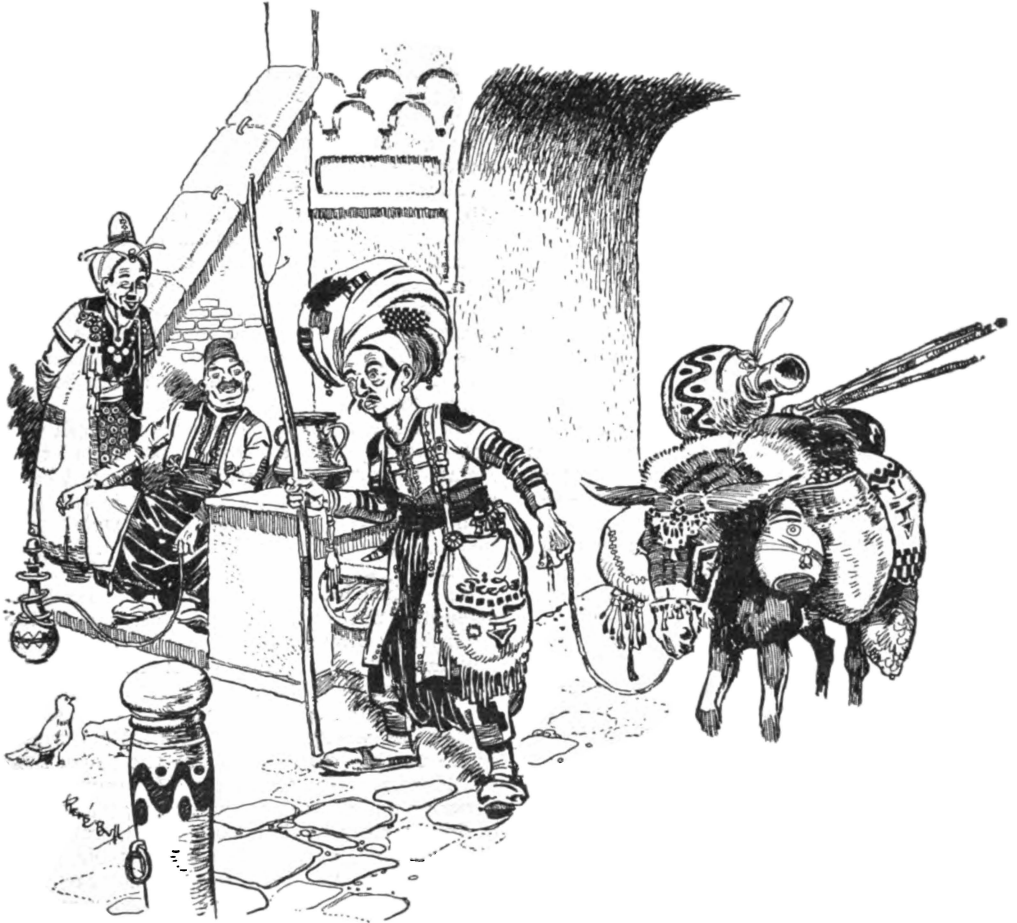
At this revolutionary criticism of the rigid laws of the city, Yenan glanced nervously around, fearful lest the words might have been overheard.

"A piece of earth, Nekkan!" he said, good-naturedly trying to soothe his companion. "But you have your two acres outside the gates; and although they are full of beautiful things—who has not heard of Nekkan's flowers and fruits?—you can surely find a little corner for your new wonder?"

"A little corner"—aye, that's just it!" Nekkan cried, with a frantic gesture. "It is not a little corner that it needs, nor an acre, nor five acres!"

The young man's mild eyes rounded in amazement and curiosity.

"In the name of all wonderful things, Nekkan! What kind of plant is it and how have you carried it home? Is it a great cedar?"



“‘You will win no prizes this time!’ the gatekeeper shouted. ‘You are too late, Nekkan!’”

“Do not ask me questions about it,” Nekkan said, with a touch of the specialist’s jealous distrust. He had been cheated so often, poor fellow: his seeds had been stolen, his secret manures had been dug up and analysed: he had been jeered at and maligned by rivals. At least, Nekkan felt sure that all these things had been done. It seemed to him that they formed the only possible explanation of his repeated failure to carry off the first prize.

“So be it. I will ask you nothing,” Yenan replied, with a smile. “But it surprises me,” he added, “that a man who has travelled so far and brought back so amazing a plant should be disturbed by such things as the winning or losing of a prize or a year’s wait for success.”

“I have waited so many years, Yenan!” the other said, piteously. “And I have been cheated—I have been wronged. It is true

that I have been to far-distant countries; but all my life is in Kwaliz. It is by the praise of Kwaliz or the contempt of Kwaliz that I live or die.”

It was true. This curious little man was of so narrow a mind that he took no interest in any people beyond the belt of gardens that surrounded Kwaliz. His soul, intensively cultured like his garden, had become a seed-plot for rivalries, suspicions, and grievances.

Yenan shrugged.

“Kwaliz is indeed a fair city,” he said, looking up to the terraces and towers which were beginning to be eyed with coloured lights. “But even Kwaliz may perish one day. Perhaps,” he went on, smiling, “when Kwaliz is in ruins your marvellous seeds will be a great forest.”

“Who said that I brought home seeds?” Nekkan whispered; but, overcome by his

own enthusiasm and the honesty of Yenán's gaze, he went on, clutching at the young man's arm—

"It must have a large piece of ground. Then it can be controlled, then it will spread horizontally, growing almost under the earth, only the little tufts that bear the flowers showing above. Then it will bear great edible bulbs under the clay, and they will absorb its force, they will keep it stretched out like a great carpet with weights upon it. If it does not find a great flat piece of soft soil, if it falls among rocks, for example, it will become impatient, it will grow upwards instead of horizontally. And that is a terrible misfortune. For one thing, the rapid growth exhausts its strength: it flowers, but the seeds are starved, they will not mature. That is a great loss to a gardener. But there is more than that. Without the earth over it—especially if the sun touches the ripe seeds—it is a danger—a danger—"

Nekkan broke off as if scared by his own garrulity; and, loosening his grasp on Yenán's arm, moved away, the mild-eyed young man staring after him as if doubtful of his sanity.

Nekkan reached the place where the canopy stood. Seated on a carpet under it, and surrounded by a small ring of dignitaries, was a tall man, red-bearded, dressed in green and crowned with flowers. It was Balastoor, the son of Theimo; and a half-year before, when Nekkan had been about to start on his journey, Balastoor had told him that the flower-show was to be held on the twentieth day of the sixth month.

Nekkan's heart was gnawed by regret for those seven days of rest that he had granted to himself when the shining city of Kwaliz was almost in sight. Nekkan's brain was on fire with fury at the understanding of Balastoor's treachery.

An error? No; Nekkan knew that Balastoor would say that it had been an error; that Balastoor would laugh, sneer, patronize, as he had always laughed, sneered, patronized. Nekkan cursed his own simplicity in having accepted the liar's word when Balastoor came running after him as he rode out at the Western Gate. Running and panting, with a great display of generous eagerness to let Nekkan know that the date of the flower-show had been postponed!

Nekkan went to a drinking-booth where he bought some of the mild white wine and some food. He sat down, eating and drinking carelessly, his mind working like a wheel. He argued with himself, using the reasonable speech of Yenán. Time enough; a year would soon pass. On the day of the annual flower-show those citizens of Kwaliz who had acquired reputations as gardeners were permitted to make appeal for pieces of land

for special purposes. As Nekkan had said to Yenán, the laws were stringent, no appeal not made on the proper day would be listened to; indeed, it was an offence against the laws to make such an appeal on any but that one day. As Nekkan had said, he had lost that chance; but, as Yenán had said, the chance would come again. A year would soon pass.

Why, long before then, the seeds might be stolen! Nekkan's hands clutched at his travel-soiled garments as he thought of his words to Yenán in that crowded market-place. Anyone might have overheard; and he was surrounded by the envious, the unscrupulous. At that moment even his house was perhaps being searched. A clever thief might think of looking in the stable behind the mule's litter—

Or he himself might die; his strength was not great. It was even probable that Balastoor, guessing that he had brought back something precious, might arrange to have him murdered. Balastoor was rich; yet he had always been envious of his poor rival.

The white wine was mild; but its little strength, uniting with the potency of the *lenhi-foljar* already drunk, worked madly in Nekkan's brain. The wheel in his head became a wheel of fire. He imagined, wildly, speeches that he would make to the crowd, telling his wrongs; appeals that he would make to the Princess and to the great men of Kwaliz. He saw himself confronting, denouncing Balastoor; snatching the crown of flowers from the handsome head, trampling it underfoot, tearing the honourable green mantle from the long limbs. It was part of Nekkan's wrong that Balastoor was a fine-looking man, and young. He had health and riches and the love of women; and yet he had stolen this poor Nekkan's prize.

NEKKAN rose and moved swayingly into the crowd, the people in the booth looking after him. The dancers were beginning to grow indifferent and groups of musicians were laying down their instruments. It was easier now to make one's way to the canopy where Balastoor still sat in the centre of the carpet, weary, smiling, polite; deprecating himself and all his people and all his doings to the two noblemen who had come down from the Fourth Terrace.

Nekkan stepped on to the carpet and bowed. As he lifted his head he thought he saw a look of amusement flutter across Balastoor's face as he responded to the salutation.

"Balastoor, son of evil," Nekkan said, "you are a liar and a thief."

The two noblemen scrambled to their feet; and Nekkan went on:—

"For years you have stolen from me and

slandered me. You have hired outcasts from strange, unclean places to nip my plants and to put foul reptiles, slugs, and caterpillars on my land. When I was leaving the city by the Western Gate, six months ago, you ran after me, you son of falseness, to tell me that I could be absent on my journey another eight days. I believed you; and because my strength is no longer in its prime, I cherished the hope of an easier journey and rejoiced in this deed of kindness from a rival. Therefore you are the more deeply cursed for my faith. I will tear the crown from——"

Nekkan did not try to finish the sentence, for he saw that the two noblemen, coming out of the helplessness of their amazement, were giving orders to someone in the crowd. Leaping on his enemy, Nekkan grasped the flowery crown and with it (not without intention) a certain quantity of Balastoor's long soft red hair. Nekkan dashed down the wreath; but he could not carry out his intention of trampling upon it; because his feet were swung in the air as Balastoor closed with him.

Nekkan struggled fiercely in the grip of the long arms and rejoiced to hear the rending of the green silk mantle. But his breath was already spent and others had now rushed to Balastoor's aid. Kicking, wriggling, and clutching, Nekkan suddenly felt his fingers touch something hard. It was the sheathed dagger which he—like all citizens of Kwaliz when they went abroad—carried in the girdle of his travelling-dress.

The shape of the dagger was so familiar that Nekkan's action was almost instinctive. He flashed it from its sheath and struck at Balastoor. He heard a sudden great uproar from the people; and saw Balastoor, pale and terrified, shrink back, with blood squirting from a rent in the shoulder of the green robe.

He had always felt sure that Balastoor was a coward.

THEY tried Nekkan in the grey marble court-house, inlaid with peridot and silver.

Fortunately Balastoor had suffered only a flesh wound and a shock; but there were special circumstances which rendered Nekkan's crime as grave as if it had been the murder of Balastoor on an ordinary day. By the law of Kwaliz the prize-winner on the day of the flower-show ranked as a nobleman until midnight; he bore the title "Suffi Shenna" ("Lord of the Gardens") and his person was, not exactly sacred, but highly respected. Nekkan was therefore guilty of having shed the blood of a nobleman and also—which was considered quite as bad—of having spoken to him in a quite improper way.

Nekkan might, therefore, have been condemned to death. But he was known to be an ardent and not unsuccessful cultivator and the winner of several consolation prizes. Moreover, Yenan, whose father was an important seed exporter, appeared in court, and, giving Nekkan a better character than he really possessed, pleaded earnestly that the great, if imaginary, provocation that he had received might be considered. Balastoor, bandaged and with tears in his eyes, swore that he had never injured Nekkan in thought, word, or deed; but admitted that the little man had had delusions concerning him. The mistake about the date of the flower-show had been due, Balastoor thought, to Nekkan's hardness of hearing. Nekkan was saved from the death penalty and condemned to perpetual banishment from the city. He was to leave at dawn on the following morning.

Though moved by Yenan's kindness, Nekkan thought that the young man's interference had made a bad matter worse. Nekkan's feeling was that he did not want to live outside of Kwaliz, that there was nothing to live for outside of Kwaliz! It did not enter his parochial little mind that his skill in gardening might win him a welcome in some foreign country; nor did he desire to astonish strange peoples with the wonder that he had brought back to his own city. He considered himself lost, his life over, his name henceforth a byword. While sentence was being pronounced a terrible look of rage was in his face; but he bowed before the judge and—in the softest and humblest of voices—made his appeal for the one favour which the law of Kwaliz granted to all condemned to banishment or death.

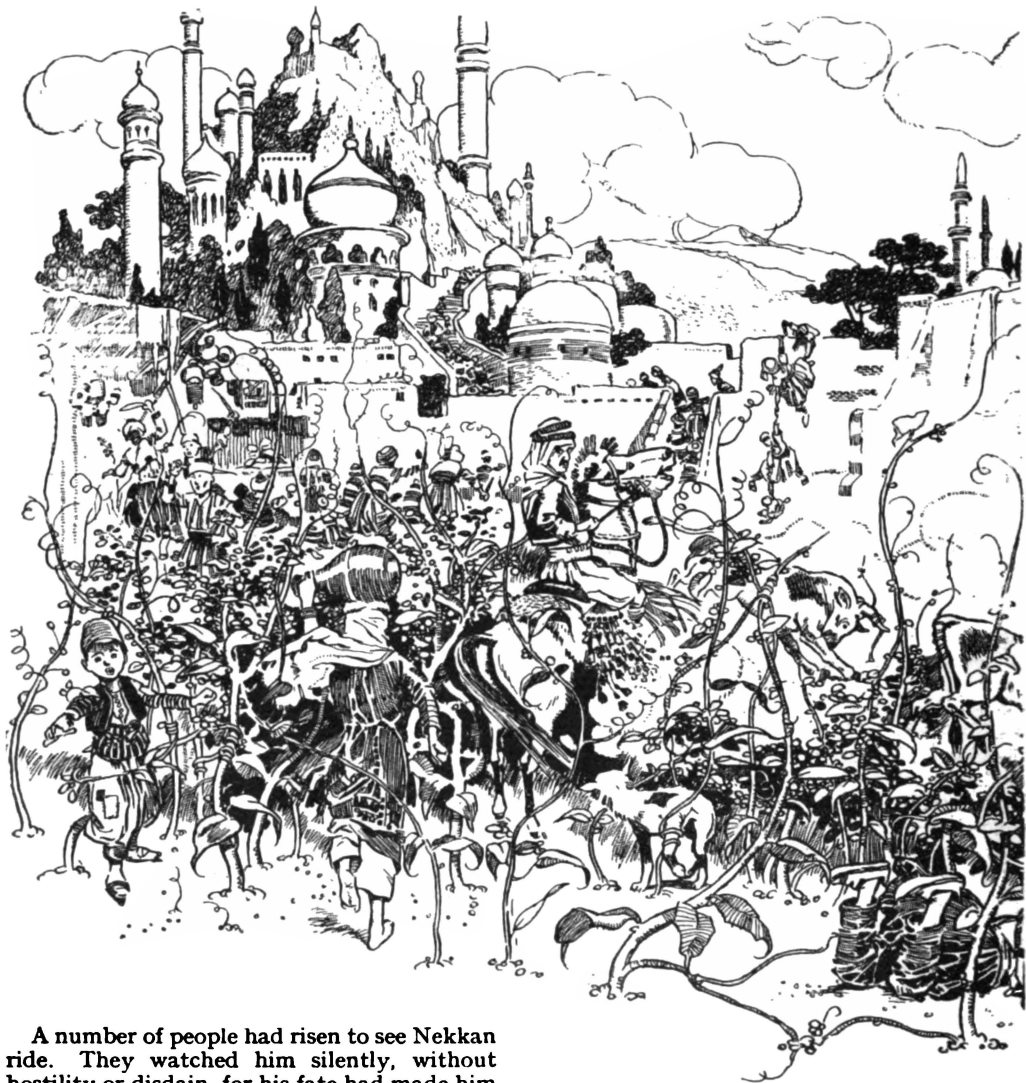
The judge replied formally that Nekkan was free to make his appeal.

"I should like," Nekkan said, meekly, "to ride on my mule, before dawn, through Kwaliz."

The request seemed touching to many present. It was granted; and Nekkan—in accordance with the dignified and humane custom of the city—was let go free till the following dawn; when he would be expected to meet the authorities at the Northern Gate and ride forth from Kwaliz.

IN the very early morning Nekkan, seated on his grey mule, began his farewell progress.

On one of the mule's flanks a skin of wine and water was hung, on the other a great square bag of plaited straw. When Nekkan left his own home in the First Terrace, and rode down into the market-place, the sky was still purple and velvety, punctured with great stars. But before he had ridden round the Fourth Terrace, the buildings were taking on hues of opal and pearl from the faintly changing eastern sky.



A number of people had risen to see Nekkan ride. They watched him silently, without hostility or disdain, for his fate had made him a dignified figure. These sensation-mongers were mostly men, but there were women and children among them. It was a quick-eyed little girl who first noticed that there was a hole in one corner of the straw-plaited bag, and that light, roundish objects, of about the size of dates, were slowly dropping through the hole and falling on the streets. The early morning wind caused some of these to roll into the gutters or into the flower-beds bordering the pavements. The child's mother ventured to call Nekkan's attention to this accident.

"Your food will all be lost, Nekkan," she said; and, stooping, picked up one of the dry, husky bodies which were of a bean-like shape, whity-brown and wrinkled like the hands of a very old man.

"It does not matter," Nekkan said, and rode on. A few of the people grinned in an awkward attempt to relieve the melancholy of the occasion; but the smiles died away for lack of popular encouragement.

In the glory of a golden dawn, Nekkan—followed at a little distance by the swiftly-swelling crowd—came to the Northern Gate. It was a stern structure of iron; and its two great enwrought leaves stood open, showing the pale expanse of the desert; for the belt of gardens ceased at a distance of half a mile on either side of this gate. Three noblemen on white mules and a contingent of police were waiting to receive him. He passed through the gateway and the iron leaves closed behind him with a clang; then,



“Cries of astonishment went up as the roots grew longer and longer. They tangled round the people’s ankles and legs, and some were twining round their necks.”



casting one glance over his shoulder, he galloped out into the desert.

A sigh, compounded of awe, pity, and sensational enjoyment, rose from the crowd.

As long as they could see the little cloud of dust kicked up by the mule’s heels, they remained gazing through the gates. Then they slowly disbanded, the curious among

them picking up the things which had dropped from the straw bag and wondering, as they examined them, what strange sort of food was this that Nekkan had so carelessly packed for his journey.

They found that the objects were easy to crack. Inside each there was a pinkish-white body, juicy, with a strong odour, and attached by a short filament to the depression in the bean.

Then, as the people went homewards in the spreading sunlight, they heard all around them a series of popping noises like tiny air-guns. The children laughed and ran about, seeking the strange seeds that they might tread on them; but the elder people noticed, with interest and wonder, that the bean-like bodies were of themselves cracking and splitting open in the light. A moment later short white roots were darting from the pinkish bodies inside the beans; and these roots quickly grew longer and waved about as if seeking a resting-place. Many of them wormed their way into crevices between the pavement stones; while those which had had the luck to fall on flower-beds dug down into the soil.

THAT a people so keenly interested in floriculture should be excited and pleased by such a phenomenon was only natural. The citizens of Kwaliz thought no more of the banished man; in groups they fell on their knees and eagerly watched the strange seeds as they rolled and cracked and shot forth swaying, seeking suckers. Cries of astonishment went up as those roots which could not readily find a morsel of soil grew longer and longer in their search; even climbing up to the flower-laden balconies and window-boxes of the houses to embed themselves in the clay.

It was then that the delight of the people began to change into fear. Children began to cry, women to scream, men to shout and run for their knives. For the streets of Kwaliz and its market-place were already a mass of pinky-white roots, growing momentarily stouter and stronger. They tangled round the people's ankles and legs, round the pasterns of the mules of the water-carriers. A herd of cattle, driven in from the country, stampeded, frightened by the pale vegetable serpents that climbed up their legs and tails; a stall of tin-ware fell down with a clatter and dazzle as the beasts charged to and fro in the square.

Some of the roots were twining round people's necks. A cry went up that a child had been strangled, and there were frantic rushes for the houses.

Then clusters of leaves began to dart from the roots; and from the middle of each cluster there bounded a great muscular,

jointed branch. As the branches grew—feebly warred against by the knives and daggers of the people—a new cluster of leaves broke forth at each joint with a swish, like the unfurling of a fan. Men threw down their knives and fetched their heaviest gardening tools—hoes, forks, shears, sickles. Blacksmiths ran for their hammers. But the muscular branches, though bruised and bleeding, wrapped themselves about the tools and about the limbs and bodies of the wielders. There was the sound of cracking ribs; and all those who had escaped the creeper's grasp climbed and struggled to the houses and, rushing inside, bolted the doors and shuttered the windows.

Even through the walls they could hear the growth of the creeper; and those who ventured to peep through the slats of the shutters saw that the branches were as thick as great tree-trunks. Every now and then came the swish of a new fan of leaves unfurling. Those leaves increased in size and stiffness as the branches grew stouter; so that the swishing noise gradually became a sort of rattling, harsh and horrible. From the heart of each new cluster a new and higher branch darted like a big-muscled snake. They folded themselves round the buildings—round the court-houses and baths in the market-place, round the houses in the three lower terraces, round the tall palaces in the Fourth Terrace, round the walls and the metal gates of Kwaliz. The buildings cracked in those awful embraces as the human frames had cracked; and the gushing sound of falling dust and the tinklings of glass and gold and iron and silver mingled with the wail sent up by the people.

At noon, in a blaze of sunshine, the creeper was waving its topmost branches above the city. Feathery tufts of green fronds came out, beautiful and soft against the blue sky; and from the centres of these tufts big flowers burst forth, glowing red and orange, exultantly opening their bosoms to the heat.

At sunset the flowers suddenly wrinkled and shrank round anæmic bean-shaped seed-cases. Then the leaves withered; and, laden with their brown clusters, the great branches, flabby and palsied, relaxed their grip and fell down, bringing with them the stones of Kwaliz. Next morning the giant creeper lay, looking like a heap of dirty leather harness, in a mass of crumbled marble and agate, porphyry and alabaster, sparkling with the dust of gold and silver and many-coloured gems. The dead were all hidden in these lovely ruins of the loveliest of cities.

A TIRED little man, leading a grey mule, entered the gate of the town of Lurooula, many miles north of Kwaliz.