

## MINOR PIECES.

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MAHMOUD.\*

I have just read a most amazing thing,  
A true and noble story of a king:  
And to show all men, by these presents, how  
Good kings can please a Liberal, even now  
I'll vent the warmth it gave me in a verse:  
But recollect—these kings and emperors  
Are very scarce; and when they do appear,  
Had better not have graced that drunken sphere,  
Which hurts the few whose brains can bear it best,  
And turns the unhappy heads of all the rest.  
*This* prince was worthy to have ruled a state  
Plain as his heart, and by its freedom great:  
But stripped of their guilt stuff, at what would t'others rate?

There came a man, making his hasty moan,  
Before the Sultan Mahmoud on his throne,  
And crying out—"My sorrow is my right,  
And I *will* see the Sultan, and to-night."  
"Sorrow," said Mahmoud, "is a reverend thing:  
I recognize its right, as king with king;  
Speak on." "A fiend has got into my house,"  
Exclaimed the staring man, "and tortures us:  
One of thine officers—he comes, the abhorr'd,  
And takes possession of my house, my board,

\* Author: Leigh Hunt / Transcribed and annotated by Alessandra Crotti.

My bed:—I have two daughters and a wife,  
And the wild villain comes and makes me mad with life.”  
“Is he there now?” said Mahmoud:—“No;—he left  
The house when I did, of my wits bereft;  
And laugh’d me down the street, because I vowed  
I’d bring the prince himself to lay him in his shroud.  
I’m mad with want—I’m mad with misery  
And, oh thou Sultan Mahmoud, God cries out for thee!”

The Sultan comforted the man, and said,  
“Go home, and I will send thee wine and bread,”  
(For he was poor) “and other comforts. Go;  
And, should the wretch return, let Sultan Mahmoud know.”

In three days’ time, with haggard eyes and beard,  
And shaken voice, the suitor re-appeared,  
And said “He’s come.”—Mahmoud said not a word,  
But rose and took four slaves, each with a sword,  
And went with the vexed man. They reach the place,  
And hear a voice, and see a female face,  
That to the window fluttered in affright:  
“Go in,” said Mahmoud, “and put out the light;  
But tell the females first to leave the room;  
And, when the drunkard follows them, we come.”

The man went in. There was a cry, and hark!  
A table falls, the window is struck dark:  
Forth rush the breathless women; and behind  
With curses comes the fiend in desperate mind.  
In vain: the sabres soon cut short the strife,  
And chop the shrieking wretch, and drink his bloody life.

“Now *light* the light,” the Sultan cried aloud.

'Twas done, he took it in his hand, and bowed  
Over the corpse, and looked upon the face;  
Then turned and knelt beside it in the place,  
And said a prayer, and from his lips there crept  
Some gentle words of pleasure, and he wept.  
In reverend silence the spectators wait,  
Then bring him at his call both wine and meat;  
And when he had refreshed his noble heart,  
He bade his host be blest, and rose up to depart.

The man amazed, all mildness now, and tears,  
Fell at the Sultan's feet, with many prayers,  
And begged him to vouchsafe to tell his slave,  
The reason first of that command he gave  
About the light; then, when he saw the face,  
Why he knelt down; and lastly, how it was,  
That fare so poor as his detained him in the place.

The Sultan said, with much humanity,  
"Since first I saw thee come, and heard thy cry,  
I could not get it from my head, that one  
By whom such daring villanies were done,  
Must be some lord of mine, perhaps a lawless son.  
Whoe'er he was, I knew my task, but feared  
A father's heart, in case the worst appeared:  
For this I had the light put out; but when  
I saw the face, and found a stranger slain,  
I knelt and thanked the sovereign arbiter,  
Whose work I had performed through pain and fear;  
And then I rose, and was refreshed with food,  
The first time since thou cam'st, and marr'dst my solitude.