

CHAPTER TEN

THE OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAINS

IF EVER a man had reason to believe in his lucky star it would seem to have been Saladin at this time. Twice the malignant and fearful Old Man of the Mountains had tried to snuff out his life after his peculiar and sinister methods, and twice he had failed. This was little short of miraculous. Not often had the Assassins missed their objective. From the very beginning of this terrible organization it had been able to work its will even against the mightiest. The clever and powerful Nizam ul Mulk, one time friend and supporter of the founder of this fanatical body, was also one of its earliest victims. Even the master, the great Sultan Malek Shah, was believed to have died from poison administered by an Assassin.

Assassin is derived from hashashin, one who uses the juice of the leaves of hemp, a powerful drug; and they seemed to know much of poisons. Poison and dagger were equally favorite means for disposing of those who fell under the ban of the Grand Master of the order. Not infrequently the two were combined.

Now and then some intrepid prince had made an attempt to punish these agents of murder, among them