

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### A NIGHT WITH THE SULTAN

**I**N THE Palace at Damascus Saladin entertained his friends and visitors from far and near in those intervals of repose which his active campaigning permitted. There was polo and the chase and the mental stimulus of chess, and beyond all these were the gatherings for social intercourse.

In his preface to "The Talisman" Scott speaks of Saladin's "sense of his own dignity, which seemed to impose a certain formality of behavior on him who entertained it." Ah, yes, unseemliness in word or manner was not tolerated by the Sultan. "He would talk with none but persons of good conversation," says Beha ed-din, "lest his ears should be offended."

Does this give the impression that an evening with the Sultan was a solemn affair, and that he was a stickler for the niceties of conventional behavior? Many of his contemporaries thought quite the contrary. Indeed, some criticized openly the free and easy goings on in his presence. Not at all, apparently, like the etiquette imposed by earlier Sultans. At Nur ed-din's receptions, for instance, men observed the strictest pro-