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"One of the most remarkable men on his staff was the Oriental Secretary, Mr. Alison. A brilliant linguist, a skilful musician, a man of shrewd and penetrating intelligence, all the more extraordinary in that he was entirely self-taught, he was too eccentric and unconventional to rise to the highest rank, and it was not until 1860 that he became British Minister in Teheran...

A good story is told of his behaviour when a Grand Vizier did not treat him with sufficient respect. In the midst of their conversation the hour for prayer arrived. The Vizir rose from the divan and proceeded to say his customary prayers on the carpet spread for the purpose by an attendant, ending with the curse upon all GIAOUR or infidels, and going through the motion of spitting first over his right and then his left shoulder to show his horror of them.

The conversation was then resumed, but before many minutes had passed Mr. Alison in turn rose, and, going into the corner of the room, knelt down and repeated a long extempore prayer in Turkish calling down the maledictions of Heaven upon the followers of Islam. Now, death was the penalty in Turkey for reviling the religion of the Prophet, and the Grand Vizir leapt to his feet with rage when he heard the horrid blasphemy. Whereupon Mr. Alison quietly told the irate Turk that he had only done his Christian duty by saying HIS prayers at that particular hour, and, as for the curses, he had little doubt that they were as much a matter of form as the Grand Vizir's had been."