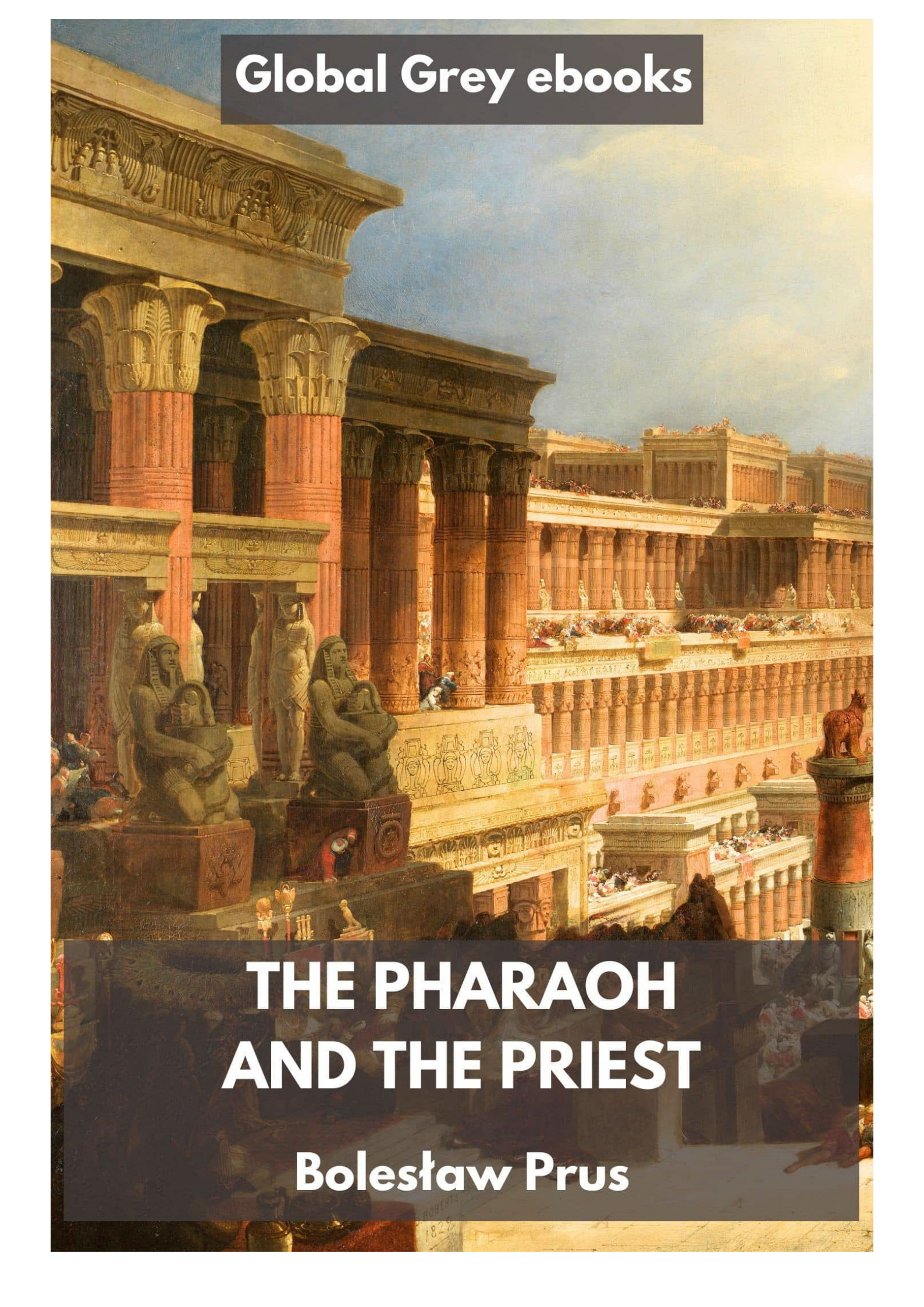




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THE PHARAOH AND THE PRIEST

Bolesław Prus

THE PHARAOH
AND THE PRIEST

BOLESŁAW PRUS

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Prefatory Remarks

THE position of Ancient Egypt was unique, not in one, but in every sense. To begin at the very foundation of life in that country, we find that the soil was unlike any other on earth in its origin. Every acre of fruitful land between the first cataract and the sea had been brought from Inner Africa, and each year additions were made to it. Out of this mud, borne down thousands of miles from the great fertile uplands of Abyssinia by rivers, grew everything needed to feed and clothe man and nourish animals. Out of it also was made the brick from which walls, houses, and buildings of various uses and kinds were constructed. Though this soil of the country was rich, it could be utilized only by the unceasing co-ordinate efforts of a whole population constrained and directed. To direct and constrain was the task of the priests and the pharaohs.

Never have men worked in company so long and successfully at tilling the earth as the Egyptians, and never has the return been so continuous and abundant from land as in their case.

The Nile valley furnished grain to all markets accessible by water; hence Rome, Greece, and Judæa ate the bread of Egypt. On this national tillage was founded the greatness of the country, for from it came the means to execute other works, and in it began that toil, training, and skill indispensable in rearing the monuments and doing those things which have made Egypt famous forever, and preserved to us a knowledge of the language, religion, modes of living, and history of that wonderful people who held the Nile valley. No civilized person who has looked on the pyramid of Ghizeh, the temple of Karnak, and the tombs of the pharaohs in the Theban region, can ever forget them. But in those monuments are preserved things of far greater import than they themselves are. In the tombs and temples of Egypt we see on stone and papyrus how that immense work of making speech visible was accomplished, that task of presenting language to the eye instead of the ear, and preserving the spoken word so as to give it to eye or ear afterwards. In other terms, we have the history of writing from its earliest beginnings to the point at which we connect it with the system used now by all civilized nations excepting the Chinese. In those monuments are preserved the history of religion in Egypt, not from the beginning of human endeavor to explain first what the world is and then what we ourselves are and what we and the world mean together, but from a time far beyond any recorded by man in other places.

Egyptians had the genius which turned a narrow strip of Abyssinian mud and a triangular patch of swamp at the end of it into the most fruitful land of antiquity. They had also that genius which impels man to look out over the horizon around him, see more than the material problems of life, and gaze into the beyond, gaze intently and never cease gazing till he finds what his mind seeks. It was the possession of these two kinds of genius and the union of the two which made the position of Egypt in history unique and unapproachable.

The greatness of Egypt lay primarily in her ideas, and was achieved through a perfect control over labor by intellect. While this control was exerted even approximately in accordance with the nation's historical calling, it was effectual and also unchallenged. But when the exercise of power, with the blandishments and physical pleasures

which always attend it, had become dearer to the priesthood and to pharaohs than aught else on earth or in their ideals, then began the epoch of Egypt's final doom: foreign bondage and national ruin.

The action presented in the volume before us relates to those days when the guiding intellect of Egypt became irrevocably dual, and when between the two parts of it, the priests and the pharaohs, opposition appeared so clearly defined and incurable that the ruin of both sides was evident in the future.

The ruin of a pharaoh and the fall of his dynasty, with the rise of a self-chosen sovereign and a new line of rulers, are the double consummation in this novel. The book ends with that climax, but the fall of the new priestly rulers is a matter of history, as is the destruction wrought on Egypt by tyrants from Assyria and Persia. The native pharaohs lost power through the priesthood, whose real interest it was to support them; but fate found the priests later on, and pronounced on them also the doom of extinction.

Alexander Glovatski was born in 1847 in Mashov, a village of the Government of Lublin. He finished his preliminary studies in the Lublin Gymnasium, and was graduated from the University of Warsaw. He took part in the uprising of 1863, but was captured, and liberated after some months' detention. As a student he showed notable power, and was exceptionally attracted by mathematics and science, to which he gives much attention yet, though occupied mainly in literature.

Glovatski's published works are in seventeen volumes. These books, with the exception of "The Pharaoh and the Priest," are devoted to modern characters, situations, and questions. His types are mainly from Polish life. Very few of his characters are German or Russian; of Polish types some are Jewish.

Alexander Glovatski is a true man of letters, a real philosopher, retiring, industrious, and modest. He spends all his winters in Warsaw, and lives every summer in the country. He permits neither society nor coteries, nor interests of any sort, to snatch away time from him, or influence his convictions. He goes about as he chooses, whenever he likes and wherever it suits him. When ready to work he sits down in his own house, and tells the world carefully and with kindness, though not without irony, what he sees in it. What he sees is exhibited in the seventeen volumes, which contain great and vivid pictures of life at the end of the recent century. Men and women of various beliefs, occupations, and values, are shown there.

Glovatski is entirely unknown to Americans. This book will present him.

Excepting the view in the temple of Luxor the illustrations given in this volume are from photographs taken by me in 1899, while I was travelling in Egypt.

The title of this volume has been changed from "The Pharaoh" to "The Pharaoh and the Priest," at the wish of the author.

JEREMIAH CURTIN.

Bristol, Vermont, U. S. A.,
July 28, 1902.

Introduction

IN the northeastern corner of Africa lies Egypt, that land of most ancient civilization. Three, four, and even five thousand years ago, when the savages of Central Europe wore untanned skins for clothing and were cave-dwellers, Egypt had a high social organization, agriculture, crafts, and literature. Above all, it carried out engineering works and reared immense buildings, the remnants of which rouse admiration in specialists of our day.

Egypt is that rich ravine between the Libyan sands and the Arabian desert. Its depth is several hundred metres, its length six hundred and fifty miles, its average width barely five. On the west the gently sloping but naked Libyan hills, on the east the steep and broken cliffs of Arabia form the sides of a corridor on the bottom of which flows the river Nile.

With the course of the river northward the walls of the corridor decrease in height, while a hundred and twenty-five miles from the sea they expand on a sudden, and the river, instead of flowing through a narrow passage, spreads in various arms over a broad level plain which is shaped like a triangle. This triangle, called the Delta of the Nile, has for its base the shore of the Mediterranean; at its apex, where the river issues from the corridor, stands the city of Cairo, and near by are the ruins of Memphis, the ancient capital.

Could a man rise one hundred miles in the air and gaze thence upon Egypt, he would see the strange outlines of that country and the peculiar changes in its color. From that elevation, on the background of white and orange colored sands, Egypt would look like a serpent pushing with energetic twists through a desert to the sea, in which it has dipped already its triangular head, which has two eyes,—the left Alexandria, the right Damietta.

In October, when the Nile inundates Egypt, that long serpent would be blue, like water. In February, when spring vegetation takes the place of the decreasing river, the serpent would be green, with a blue line along its body and a multitude of blue veins on its head; these are canals which cut through the Delta. In March the blue line would be narrower, and the body of the serpent, because of ripening grain, would seem golden. Finally, in the first days of June the line of the Nile would be very narrow and the serpent's body gray from dust and drought. The chief climatic feature in Egypt is heat. During January it is 57° above zero, in July $99\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$; sometimes the heat reaches 149° which answers to the temperature of a Roman bath. Moreover, in the neighborhood of the Mediterranean, on the Delta, rain falls barely ten times a year; in Upper Egypt it falls once during ten years.

In these conditions Egypt, instead of being the cradle of civilization, would have been a desert ravine like one of those which compose the Sahara, if the waters of the sacred Nile had not brought life to it annually. From the last days of June till the end of September the Nile swells and inundates almost all Egypt; from the end of October to the last days in May the year following it falls and exposes gradually lower and lower platforms of land. The waters of the river are so permeated with mineral and organic matter that their color becomes brownish; hence, as the waters decrease, on inundated lands is deposited fruitful mud which takes the place of the best fertilizer.

Owing to this mud and to heat, Egyptian earth-tillers, fenced in between deserts, have three harvests yearly and from one grain of seed receive back about three hundred.

Egypt, however, is not a flat plain, but a rolling country; some portions of its land drink the blessed waters during two or three months only; others do not see it every year, as the overflow does not reach certain points annually. Besides, seasons of scant water occur, and then a part of Egypt fails to receive the enriching deposit. Finally, because of heat the earth dries up quickly, and then man has to irrigate out of vessels.

In view of all these conditions people inhabiting the Nile valley had to perish if they were weak, or regulate the water if they had genius. The ancient Egyptians had genius, hence they created civilization.

Six thousand years ago they observed that the Nile rose when the sun appeared under Sirius, and began to fall when it neared the constellation Libra. This impelled them to make astronomical observations and to measure time.

To preserve water for the whole year, they dug throughout their country a network of canals many thousand miles in length. To guard against excessive waste of water, they built mighty dams and dug reservoirs, among which the artificial lake Moeris occupied three hundred square kilometres of surface and was fifty-four metres deep. Finally, along the Nile and the canals they set up a multitude of simple but practical hydraulic works; through the aid of these they raised water and poured it out upon the fields; these machines were placed one or two stories higher than the water. To complete all, there was need to clear the choked canals yearly, repair the dams and build lofty roads for the army, which had to march at all seasons.

These gigantic works demanded knowledge of astronomy, geometry, mechanics, and architecture, besides a perfect organization. Whether the task was the strengthening of dams or the clearing of canals, it had to be done and finished within a certain period over a great area. Hence arose the need of forming an army of laborers, tens of thousands in number, acting with a definite purpose and under uniform direction,—an army which demanded many provisions, much means, and great auxiliary forces.

Egypt established such an army of laborers, and to them were due works renowned during ages. It seems that Egyptian priests or sages created this army and then drew out plans for it, while the kings, or pharaohs, commanded. In consequence of this the Egyptians in the days of their greatness formed as it were one person, in which the priestly order performed the rôle of mind, the pharaoh was the will, the people formed the body, and obedience gave cohesion.

In this way nature, striving in Egypt for a work great, continuous, and ordered, created the skeleton of a social organism for that country as follows: the people labored, the pharaoh commanded, the priests made the plans. While these three elements worked unitedly toward the objects indicated by nature, society had strength to flourish and complete immortal labors.

The mild, gladsome, and by no means warlike Egyptians were divided into two classes,—earth-tillers and artisans. Among earth-tillers there must have been owners of small bits of land, but generally earth-tillers were tenants on lands belonging to the pharaohs, the priests, and the aristocracy. The artisans, the people who made clothing, furniture, vessels, and tools, were independent; those who worked at great edifices formed, as it were, an army.

Each of those specialties, and particularly architecture, demanded power of hauling and moving; some men had to draw water all day from canals, or transport stones from the quarries to where they were needed. These, the most arduous mechanical occupations, and above all work in the quarries were carried on by criminals condemned by the courts, or by prisoners seized in battle.

The genuine Egyptians had a bronze-colored skin, of which they were very proud, despising the black Ethiopian, the yellow Semite, and the white European. This color of skin, which enabled them to distinguish their own people from strangers, helped to keep up the nation's unity more strictly than religion, which a man may accept, or language, which he may appropriate.

But in time, when the edifice of the state began to weaken, foreign elements appeared in growing numbers. They lessened cohesion, they split apart society, they flooded Egypt and absorbed the original inhabitants.

The pharaohs governed the state by the help of a standing army and a militia or police, also by a multitude of officials, from whom was formed by degrees an aristocracy of family. By his office the pharaoh was lawgiver, supreme king, highest judge, chief priest; he was the son of a god, a god himself even. He accepted divine honors, not only from officials and the people, but sometimes he raised altars to his own person, and burnt incense before images of himself.

At the side of the pharaoh and very often above him were priests, an order of sages who directed the destinies of the country.

In our day it is almost impossible to imagine the extraordinary rôle which the priests played in Egypt. They were instructors of rising generations, also soothsayers, hence the advisers of mature people, judges of the dead, to whom their will and their knowledge guaranteed immortality. They not only performed the minute ceremonies of religion for the gods and the pharaohs, but they healed the sick as physicians, they influenced the course of public works as engineers, and also politics as astrologers, but above all they knew their own country and its neighbors.

In Egyptian history the first place is occupied by the relations which existed between the priests and the pharaohs. Most frequently the pharaoh laid rich offerings before the gods and built temples. Then he lived long, and his name, with his images cut out on monuments, passed from generation to generation, full of glory. But many pharaohs reigned for a short period only, and of some not merely the deeds, but the names disappeared from record. A couple of times it happened that a dynasty fell, and straightway the cap of the pharaohs, encircled with a serpent, was taken by a priest.

Egypt continued to develop while a people of one composition, energetic kings, and wise priests co-operated for the common weal. But a time came when the people, in consequence of wars, decreased in number and lost their strength through oppression and extortion; the intrusion of foreign elements at this period undermined Egyptian race unity. And when the energy of pharaohs and the wisdom of priests sank in the flood of Asiatic luxury, and these two powers began to struggle with each other for undivided authority to plunder the toiling people, then Egypt fell under foreign control, and the light of civilized life, which had burnt on the Nile for millenniums, was extinguished.

The following narrative relates to the eleventh century before Christ, when the twentieth dynasty fell, and after the offspring of the sun, the eternally living Rameses

XIII., San-Amen-Herhor, the high priest of Amon and ever-living offspring of the sun, forced his way to the throne and adorned his head with the ureus.

Chapter I

IN the thirty-third year of the happy reign of Rameses XII., Egypt celebrated two festivals which filled all its faithful inhabitants with pride and delight.

In the month of Mechir—that is, during January—the god Khonsu returned to Thebes covered with costly gifts. For three years and nine months he had travelled in the country of Buchten, where he restored health to the king's daughter, Bentres, and expelled an evil spirit not only from the royal family, but even from the fortress.

So in the month Farmuti (February) Mer-Amen-Rameses XII., the lord of Upper and Lower Egypt, the ruler of Phœnicia and nine nations, after consultation with the gods to whom he was equal, named as erpatr, or heir to the throne, his son, aged twenty years, Cham-Sem-Merer-Amen-Rameses.

This choice delighted the pious priests, the worthy nomarchs, the valiant army, the faithful people, and every creature living in Egypt, because the older sons of the pharaoh, who were born of a Hittite princess, had been visited by an evil spirit through enchantments which no one had the power to investigate. One son of twenty-seven years was unable to walk after reaching maturity; the second opened his veins and died; the third, through poisoned wine, which he would not cease drinking, fell into madness, and believing himself a monkey, passed whole days among tree branches.

But the fourth son, Rameses, born of Queen Nikotris, daughter of the priest Amenhôtep, was as strong as the bull Apis, as brave as a lion, and as wise as the priests. From childhood he surrounded himself with warriors, and while still a common prince, used to say,—

“If the gods, instead of making me the youngest son of his holiness, had made me a pharaoh, like Rameses the Great, I would conquer nine nations, of which people in Egypt have never heard mention; I would build a temple larger than all Thebes, and rear for myself a pyramid near which the tomb of Cheops would be like a rosebush at the side of a full-grown palm-tree.”

On receiving the much desired title of heir, the young prince begged his father to be gracious and appoint him to command the army corps of Memphis. To this his holiness, Rameses XII., after consultation with the gods, to whom he was equal, answered that he would do so in case the heir could give proof that he had skill to direct a mass of troops arrayed for battle.

A council was called under the presidency of the minister of war, San-Amen-Herhor, high priest of the great sanctuary of Amon in Thebes.

The council decided in this way: “The heir to the throne, in the middle of the month Mesore, will take ten regiments, disposed along the line which connects Memphis with the city of Pi-Uto, situated on the Bay of Sebenico.

“With this corps of ten thousand men prepared for battle, provided with a camp and with military engines, the heir will betake himself eastward along the highroad from Memphis toward Hittite regions, which road lies on the boundary between the land of Goshen and the wilderness. At this time General Nitager, commander of the army

which guards the gates of Egypt from attacks of Asiatic people, will move from the Bitter Lakes against the heir, Prince Rameses.

“Both armies, the Asiatic and the Western, are to meet near Pi-Bailos, but in the wilderness, so that industrious husbandmen in the land of Goshen be not hindered in their labors.

“The heir will be victorious if he does not let himself be surprised by Nitager, that is, if he concentrates all his forces and succeeds in putting them in order of battle to meet the enemy.

“His worthiness Herhor, the minister of war, will be present in the camp of Prince Rameses, and will report to the pharaoh.”

Two ways of communication formed the boundary between the land of Goshen and the desert. One was the transport canal from Memphis to Lake Timrah; the other was the highroad. The canal was in the land of Goshen, the highroad in the desert which both ways bounded with a half circle.

The canal was visible from almost every point upon the highroad. Whatever artificial boundaries might be, these neighboring regions differed in all regards. The land of Goshen, though a rolling country, seemed a plain; the desert was composed of limestone hills and sandy valleys. The land of Goshen seemed a gigantic chessboard the green and yellow squares of which were indicated by the color of grain and by palms growing on their boundaries; but on the ruddy sand of the desert and its white hills a patch of green or a clump of trees and bushes seemed like a lost traveller.

On the fertile land of Goshen from each hill shot up a dark grove of acacias, sycamores, and tamarinds which from a distance looked like our lime-trees; among these were concealed villas with rows of short columns, or the yellow mud huts of earth-tillers. Sometimes near the grove was a white village with flat-roofed houses, or above the trees rose the pyramidal gates of a temple, like double cliffs, many-colored with strange characters. From the desert beyond the first row of hills, which were a little green, stared naked elevations covered with blocks of stone. It seemed as if the western region, sated with excess of life, hurled with regal generosity to the other side flowers and vegetables, but the desert in eternal hunger devoured them in the following year and turned them into ashes.

The stunted vegetation, exiled to cliffs and sands, clung to the lower places until, by means of ditches made in the sides of the raised highroad, men conducted water from the canals to it. In fact, hidden oases between naked hills along that highway drank in the divine water. In these oases grew wheat, barley, grapes, palms, and tamarinds. The whole of such an oasis was sometimes occupied by one family, which when it met another like itself at the market in Pi-Bailos might not even know that they were neighbors in the desert.

On the fifteenth of Mesore the concentration of troops was almost finished. The regiments of Prince Rameses, which were to meet the Asiatic forces of Nitager, had assembled on the road above the city of Pi-Bailos with their camp and with some military engines.

The heir himself directed all the movements. He had organized two parties of scouts. Of these the first had to watch the enemy, the other to guard its own army from attack, which was possible in a hilly region with many ravines. Rameses, in the course of a week, rode around and examined all the regiments, marching by various roads, looking carefully to see if the soldiers had good weapons and warm mantles

for the night hours, if in the camps there was dried bread in sufficiency as well as meat and dried fish. He commanded, besides, that the wives, children, and slaves of warriors marching to the eastern boundary should be conveyed by canal; this diminished the number of chariots and eased the movements of the army.

The oldest generals admired the zeal, knowledge, and caution of the heir, and, above all, his simplicity and love of labor. His court, which was numerous, his splendid tent, chariots, and litters were left in the capital, and, dressed as a simple officer, he hurried from regiment to regiment on horseback, in Assyrian fashion, attended by two adjutants.

Thanks to this concentration, the corps itself went forward very swiftly, and the army was near Pi-Bailos at the time appointed.

It was different with the prince's staff, and the Greek regiment accompanying it, and with some who moved military engines.

The staff, collected in Memphis, had the shortest road to travel; hence it moved latest, bringing an immense camp with it. Nearly every officer, and they were young lords of great families, had a litter with four negroes, a two-wheeled military chariot, a rich tent, and a multitude of boxes with food and clothing, also jars full of beer and wine. Besides, a numerous troop of singers and dancers, with music, had betaken themselves to journey behind the officers; each woman must, in the manner of a great lady, have a car drawn by one or two pair of oxen, and must have also a litter.

When this throng poured out of Memphis, it occupied more space on the highway than the army of Prince Rameses. The march was so slow that the military engines which were left at the rear moved twenty-four hours later than was ordered. To complete every evil the female dancers and singers, on seeing the desert not at all dreadful in that place, were terrified and fell to weeping. To calm these women it was necessary to hasten with the night camp, pitch tents, arrange a spectacle, and a feast afterward.

The night amusement in the cool, under the starry sky, with wild nature for a background, pleased dancers and singers exceedingly; they declared that they would travel thenceforth only through the desert. Meanwhile Prince Rameses sent an order to turn all women back to Memphis at the earliest and urge the march forward.

His dignity Herhor, minister of war, was with the staff, but only as a spectator. He had not brought singers himself, but he made no remarks to officers. He gave command to carry his litter at the head of the column, and accommodating himself to its movements, advanced or rested under the immense fan with which his adjutant shaded him.

Herhor was a man of forty and some years of age, strongly built, concentrated in character. He spoke rarely, and looked at people as rarely from under his drooping eyelids. He went with arms and legs bare, like every Egyptian, his breast exposed; he had sandals on his feet, a short skirt about his hips, an apron with blue and white stripes. As a priest, he shaved his beard and hair and wore a panther skin hanging from his left shoulder. As a soldier, he covered his head with a small helmet of the guard; from under this helmet hung a kerchief, also in blue and white stripes; this reached his shoulders. Around his neck was a triple gold chain, and under his left arm a short sword in a costly scabbard. His litter, borne by six black slaves, was attended always by three persons: one carried his fan, another the mace of the minister, and the third a box for papyrus. This third man was Pentuer, a priest, and

the secretary of Herhor. He was a lean ascetic who in the greatest heat never covered his shaven head. He came of the people, but in spite of low birth he occupied a high position in the state; this was due to exceptional abilities.

Though the minister with his officials preceded the staff and held himself apart from its movements, it could not be said that he was unconscious of what was happening behind him. Every hour, at times every half hour, some one approached Herhor's litter,—now a priest of lower rank, an ordinary "servant of the gods," a marauding soldier, a freedman, or a slave, who, passing as it were indifferently the silent retinue of the minister, threw out a word. That word Pentuer recorded sometimes, but more frequently he remembered it, for his memory was amazing.

No one in the noisy throng of the staff paid attention to these details. The officers, sons of great lords, were too much occupied by running, by noisy conversation, or by singing, to notice who approached the minister; all the more since a multitude of people were pushing along the highway.

On the sixteenth of Mesore the staff of Prince Rameses, together with his dignity the minister, passed the night under the open sky at the distance of five miles from the regiments which were arranged in battle order across the highway beyond the city of Pi-Bailos.

In that early morning which precedes our six o'clock, the hills grew violet, and from behind them came forth the sun. A rosy light flowed over the land of Goshen. Villages, temples, palaces of magnates, and huts of earth-tillers looked like sparks and flames which flashed up in one moment from the midst of green spaces. Soon the western horizon was flooded with a golden hue, and the green land of Goshen seemed melting into gold, and the numberless canals seemed filled with molten silver. But the desert hills grew still more marked with violet, and cast long shadows on the sands, and darkness on the plant world.

The guards who stood along that highway could see with the utmost clearness fields, edged with palms, beyond the canal. Some fields were green with flax, wheat, clover; others were gilded with ripening barley of the second growth. Now earth-tillers began to come out to field labor, from huts concealed among trees; they were naked and bronze-hued; their whole dress was a short skirt and a cap. Some turned to canals to clear them of mud, or to draw water. Others dispersing among the trees gathered grapes and ripe figs. Many naked children stirred about, and women were busy in white, yellow, or red shirts which were sleeveless.

There was great movement in that region. In the sky birds of prey from the desert pursued pigeons and daws in the land of Goshen. Along the canal squeaking sweeps moved up and down, with buckets of fertilizing water; fruit-gatherers appeared and disappeared among the trees, like colored butterflies. But in the desert, on the highway, swarmed the army and its servants. A division of mounted lancers shot past. Behind them marched bowmen in caps and petticoats; they had bows in their hands, quivers on their shoulders, and broadswords at their right sides. The archers were accompanied by slingers who carried bags with missiles and were armed with short swords.

A hundred yards behind them advanced two small divisions of footmen, one division armed with darts, the other with spears. Both carried rectangular shields; on their breasts they had thick coats, as it were armor, and on their heads caps with kerchiefs behind to ward off the sun-rays. The caps and coats had blue and white stripes or yellow and black stripes, which made those soldiers seem immense hornets.

Behind the advance guard, surrounded by a retinue of mace-bearers, pushed on the litter of the minister, and behind it, with bronze helmets and breastplates, the Greek companies, whose measured tread called to mind blows of heavy hammers. In the rear was heard the creaking of vehicles, and from the side of the highway slipped along the bearded Phœnician merchant in his litter borne between two asses. Above all this rose a cloud of golden dust, and heat also.

Suddenly from the vanguard galloped up a mounted soldier and informed Herhor that Prince Rameses, the heir to the throne, was approaching. His worthiness descended from the litter, and at that moment appeared a mounted party of men who halted and sprang from their horses. One man of this party and the minister began to approach each other, halting every few steps and bowing.

“Be greeted, O son of the pharaoh; may he live through eternity!” said the minister.

“Be greeted and live long, O holy father!” answered Rameses; then he added,—

“Ye advance as slowly as if your legs were sawn off, while Nitager will stand before our division in two hours at the latest.”

“Thou hast told truth. Thy staff marches very slowly.”

“Eunana tells me also,” here Rameses indicated an officer standing behind him who was covered with amulets, “that ye have not sent scouts to search ravines. But in case of real war an enemy might attack from that side.”

“I am not the leader, I am only a judge,” replied the minister, quietly.

“But what can Patrokles be doing?”

“Patrokles is bringing up the military engines with his Greek regiment.”

“But my relative and adjutant, Tutmosis?”

“He is sleeping yet, I suppose.”

Rameses stamped impatiently, and was silent. He was a beautiful youth, with a face almost feminine, to which anger and sunburn added charm. He wore a close-fitting coat with blue and white stripes, a kerchief of the same color behind his helmet, a gold chain around his neck, and a costly sword beneath his left arm.

“I see,” said the prince, “that thou alone, Eunana, art mindful of my honor.”

The officer covered with amulets bent to the earth.

“Tutmosis is indolent,” said the heir. “Return to thy place, Eunana. Let the vanguard at least have a leader.”

Then, looking at the suite which now surrounded him as if it had sprung from under the earth on a sudden, he added,—

“Bring my litter. I am as tired as a quarryman.”

“Can the gods grow tired?” whispered Eunana, still standing behind him.

“Go to thy place!” said Rameses.

“But perhaps thou wilt command me, O image of the moon, to search the ravines?” asked the officer, in a low voice. “Command, I beg thee, for wherever I am my heart is chasing after thee to divine thy will and accomplish it.”

"I know that thou art watchful," answered Rameses. "Go now and look after everything."

"Holy father," said Eunana, turning to the minister, "I commend my most obedient service to thy worthiness."

Barely had Eunana gone when at the end of the marching column rose a still greater tumult. They looked for the heir's litter, but it was gone. Then appeared, making his way through the Greek warriors, a youth of strange exterior. He wore a muslin tunic, a richly embroidered apron, and a golden scarf across his shoulder. But he was distinguished above all by an immense wig with a multitude of tresses, and an artificial beard like cats' tails.

That was Tutmosis, the first exquisite in Memphis, who dressed and perfumed himself even during marches.

"Be greeted, Rameses!" exclaimed the exquisite, pushing aside officers quickly.

"Imagine thy litter is lost somewhere; thou must sit in mine, which really is not fit for thee, but it is not the worst."

"Thou hast angered me," answered the prince. "Thou sleepest instead of watching the army."

The astonished exquisite stopped.

"I sleep?" cried he. "May the man's tongue wither up who invented that calumny! I, knowing that thou wouldst come, have been ready this hour past, and am preparing a bath for thee and perfumes."

"While thus engaged, the regiment is without a commander."

"Am I to command a detachment where his worthiness the minister of war is, and such a leader is present as Patrokles?"

Rameses was silent; meanwhile Tutmosis, approaching him, whispered,—

"In what a plight thou art, O son of the pharaoh! Without a wig, thy hair and dress full of dust, thy skin black and cracked, like the earth in summer. The queen, most deserving of honor, would drive me from the court were she to look at thy wretchedness."

"I am only tired."

"Then take a seat in my litter. In it are fresh garlands of roses, roast birds, and a jug of wine from Cyprus. I have kept also hidden in the camp," added he in a lower voice, "Senura."

"Is she here?" asked the prince; and his eyes, glittering a moment before, were now mist covered.

"Let the army move on," said Tutmosis; "we will wait here for her."

Rameses recovered himself.

"Leave me, tempter! The battle will come in two hours."

"What! a battle?"

"At least the decision as to my leadership."

"Oh, laugh at it!" smiled the exquisite. "I would swear that the minister of war sent a report of it yesterday, and with it the petition to give thee the corps of Memphis."

“No matter if he did. To-day I have no thought for anything but the army.”

“In thee this wish for war is dreadful, war during which a man does not wash for a whole month, so as to die in— Brr! But if thou couldst see Senura, only glance at her—”

“For that very reason I shall not glance at her,” answered Rameses, decisively.

At the moment when eight men were bringing from beyond the Greek ranks the immense litter of Tutmosis for the use of Rameses, a horseman raced in from the vanguard. He dropped from his horse and ran so quickly that on his breast the images of the gods or the tablets with their names rattled loudly. This was Eunana in great excitement.

All turned to him, and this gave him pleasure apparently.

“Erpatr, the loftiest lips,” cried Eunana, bending before Rameses. “When, in accordance with thy divine command, I rode at the head of a detachment, looking carefully at all things, I noticed on the highroad two beautiful scarabs. Each of these sacred beetles was rolling an earth ball toward the sands near the roadside—”

“What of that?” interrupted Rameses.

“Of course,” continued Eunana, glancing toward Herhor, “I and my people, as piety enjoins, rendered homage to the golden symbols of the sun, and halted. That augury is of such import that no man of us would make a step forward unless commanded.”

“I see that thou art a pious Egyptian, though thou hast the features of a Hittite,” answered the worthy Herhor; and turning to certain dignitaries standing near, he added,—

“We will not advance farther by the highway, for we might crush the sacred beetles. Pentuer, can we go around the road by that ravine on the right?”

“We can,” answered the secretary. “That ravine is five miles long, and comes out again almost in front of Pi-Bailos.”

“An immense loss of time!” interrupted Rameses, in anger.

“I would swear that those are not scarabs, but the spirits of my Phœnician usurers,” said Tutmosis the exquisite. “Not being able, because of their death, to receive money from me, they will force me now to march through the desert in punishment!”

The suite of the prince awaited the decision with fear; so Rameses turned to Herhor,—

“What dost thou think of this, holy father?”

“Look at the officers,” answered the priest, “and thou wilt understand that we must go by the ravine.”

Now Patrokles, leader of the Greeks, pushed forward and said to the heir,—

“If the prince permit, my regiment will advance by the highway. My soldiers have no fear of beetles!”

“Your soldiers have no fear of royal tombs even,” added the minister. “Still it cannot be safe in them since no one has ever returned.”

The Greek pushed back to the suite confounded.

“Confess, holy father,” hissed the heir, with the greatest anger, “that such a hindrance would not stop even an ass on his journey.”

“True, but no ass will ever be pharaoh,” retorted the minister, calmly.

“In that case thou, O minister, wilt lead the division through the ravine!” exclaimed Rameses. “I am unacquainted with priestly tactics; besides, I must rest. Come with me, cousin,” said he to Tutmosis; and he turned toward some naked hills.

Chapter II

STRAIGHTWAY his worthiness Herhor directed his adjutant who carried the mace to take charge of the vanguard in place of Eunana. Then he commanded that the military engines for hurling great stones leave the road, and that the Greek soldiers facilitate passage for those engines in difficult places. All vehicles and litters of staff-officers were to move in the rear.

When Herhor issued commands, the adjutant bearing the fan approached Pentuer and asked,—

“Will it be possible to go by this highway again?”

“Why not?” answered the young priest. “But since two sacred beetles have barred the way now, we must not go farther; some misfortune might happen.”

“As it is, a misfortune has happened. Or hast thou not noticed that Prince Rameses is angry at the minister? and our lord is not forgetful.”

“It is not the prince who is offended with our lord, but our lord with the prince, and he has reproached him. He has done well; for it seems to the young prince, at present, that he is to be a second Menes.”

“Or a Rameses the Great,” put in the adjutant.

“Rameses the Great obeyed the gods; for this cause there are inscriptions praising him in all the temples. But Menes, the first pharaoh of Egypt, was a destroyer of order, and thanks only to the fatherly kindness of the priests that his name is still remembered,—though I would not give one brass uten on this, that the mummy of Menes exists.”

“My Pentuer,” added the adjutant, “thou art a sage, hence knowest that it is all one to us whether we have ten lords or eleven.”

“But it is not all one to the people whether they have to find every year a mountain of gold for the priests, or two mountains of gold for the priests and the pharaoh,” answered Pentuer, while his eyes flashed.

“Thou art thinking of dangerous things,” said the adjutant, in a whisper.

“But how often hast thou thyself grieved over the luxuries of the pharaoh’s court and of the nomarchs?” inquired the priest in astonishment.

“Quiet, quiet! We will talk of this, but not now.”

In spite of the sand the military engines, drawn each by two bullocks, moved in the desert more speedily than along the highway. With the first of them marched Eunana, anxiously. “Why has the minister deprived me of leadership over the vanguard? Does he wish to give me a higher position?” asked he in his own mind.

Thinking out then a new career, and perhaps to dull the fears which made his heart quiver, he seized a pole and, where the sands were deeper, propped the balista, or urged on the Greeks with an outcry.

They, however, paid slight attention to this officer.

The retinue had pushed on a good half hour through a winding ravine with steep naked walls, when the vanguard halted a second time. At this point another ravine crossed the first; in the middle of it extended a rather broad canal.

The courier sent to the minister of war with notice of the obstacle brought back a command to fill the canal immediately.

About a hundred soldiers with pickaxes and shovels rushed to the work. Some knocked out stones from the cliff; others threw them into the ditch and covered them with sand.

Meanwhile from the depth of the ravine came a man with a pickaxe shaped like a stork's neck with the bill on it. He was an Egyptian slave, old and entirely naked. He looked for a while with the utmost amazement at the work of the soldiers; then, springing between them on a sudden, he shouted,—

“What are ye doing, vile people? This is a canal.”

“But how darest thou use evil words against the warriors of his holiness?” asked Eunana, who stood there.

“Thou must be an Egyptian and a great person, I see that,” said the slave; “so I answer thee that this canal belongs to a mighty lord; he is the manager and secretary of one who bears the fan for his worthiness the nomarch of Memphis. Be on thy guard or misfortune will strike thee!”

“Do your work,” said Eunana, with a patronizing tone, to the Greek soldiers who began to look at the slave.

They did not understand his speech, but the tone of it arrested them.

“They are filling in all the time!” said the slave, with rising fear. “Woe to thee!” cried he, rushing at one of the Greeks with his pickaxe.

The Greek pulled it from the man, struck him on the mouth, and brought blood to his lips; then he threw sand into the canal again.

The slave, stunned by the blow, lost courage and fell to imploring.

“Lord,” said he, “I dug this canal alone for ten years, in the night time and during festivals! My master promised that if I should bring water to this little valley he would make me a servant in it, give me one fifth of the harvests, and grant me freedom—do you hear? Freedom to me and my three children!—O gods!”

He raised his hands and turned again to Eunana,—

“They do not understand me, these vagrants from beyond the sea, descendants of dogs, brothers to Jews and Phœnicians! But listen, lord, to me! For ten years, while other men went to fairs and dances or sacred processions, I stole out into this dreary ravine. I did not go to the grave of my mother, I only dug; I forgot the dead so as to give freedom with laud to my children, and to myself even one free day before death. Ye, O gods, be my witnesses how many times has night found me here! how many times have I heard the wailing cries of hyenas in this place, and seen the green eyes of wolves! But I did not flee, for whither was I, the unfortunate, to flee, when at every path terror was lurking, and in this canal freedom held me back by the feet? Once, beyond that turn there, a lion came out against me, the pharaoh of beasts. The pickaxe dropped from my hands, I knelt down before him, and I, as ye see me, said these words: ‘O lord! is it thy pleasure to eat me? I am only a slave.’ But the lion took

pity, the wolf also passed by; even the treacherous bats spared my poor head; but thou, O Egyptian—”

The man stopped; he saw the retinue of Herhor approaching. By the fan he knew him to be a great personage, and by the panther skin, a priest. He ran to the litter, therefore, knelt down, and struck the sand with his forehead.

“What dost thou wish, man?” asked the dignitary.

“O light of the sun, listen to me!” cried the slave. “May there be no groans in thy chamber, may no misfortune follow thee! May thy works continue, and may the current not be interrupted when thou shalt sail by the Nile to the other shore—”

“I ask what thy wish is,” repeated Herhor.

“Kind lord,” said the man, “leader without caprice, who conquerest the false and createst the true, who art the father of the poor, the husband of the widow, clothing for the motherless, permit me to spread thy name as the equal of justice, most noble of the nobles.”¹

“He wishes that this canal be not filled in,” said Eunana.

Herhor shrugged his shoulders and pushed toward the place where they were filling the canal. Then the despairing man seized his feet.

“Away with this creature!” cried his worthiness, pushing back as before the bite of a reptile.

The secretary, Pentuer, turned his head; his lean face had a grayish color. Eunana seized the man by the shoulders and pulled, but, unable to drag him away from the minister’s feet, he summoned warriors. After a while Herhor, now liberated, passed to the other bank of the canal, and the warriors tore away the earth-worker, almost carrying him to the end of the detachment. There they gave the man some tens of blows of fists, and subalterns who always carried canes gave him some tens of blows of sticks, and at last threw him down at the entrance to the ravine.

Beaten, bloody, and above all terrified, the wretched slave sat on the sand for a while, rubbed his eyes, then sprang up suddenly and ran groaning toward the highway,—

“Swallow me, O earth! Cursed be the day in which I saw the light, and the night in which it was said, ‘A man is born!’ In the mantle of justice there is not the smallest shred for a slave. The gods themselves regard not a creature whose hands are for labor, whose mouth was made only for weeping, and whose back is for clubs. O death, rub my body into ashes, so that there, beyond on the fields of Osiris, I be not born into slavery a second time.”

¹ Authentic speech of a slave.

Chapter III

PANTING with anger, Prince Rameses rushed up the hill, while behind him followed Tutmosis. The wig of the exquisite had turned on his head, his false beard had slipped down, and he carried it in his hand. In spite of exertion he would have been pale had it not been for the layers of rouge on his face.

At last Rameses halted at the summit. From the ravine came the outcry of warriors and the rattle of the onrolling balistas; before the two men stretched the immense plain of Goshen, bathed continually in sun-rays. That did not seem land, but a golden cloud, on which the mind painted a landscape in colors of silver, ruby, pearl, and topaz.

“Look,” cried the heir to Tutmosis, stretching out his hand, “those are to be my lands, and here is my army. Over there the loftiest edifices are palaces of priests, and here the supreme chief of the troops is a priest! Can anything like this be suffered?”

“It has always been so,” replied Tutmosis, glancing around with timidity.

“That is not true! I know the history of this country, which is hidden to thee. The leaders of armies and the masters of officials were the pharaohs alone, or at least the most energetic among them. Those rulers did not pass their days in making offerings and prayers, but in managing the state.”

“If it is the desire of his holiness to pass his days that way?” said Tutmosis.

“It is not my father’s wish that nomarchs should govern as they please in the capitals of provinces. Why, the governor of Ethiopia considered himself as almost equal to the king of kings. And it cannot be my father’s wish that his army should march around two golden beetles because the minister of war is a high priest.”

“He is a great warrior,” whispered Tutmosis, with increasing timidity.

“He a great warrior? Because he dispersed a handful of Libyan robbers ready to flee at the mere sight of Egyptians. But see what our neighbors are doing. Israel delays in paying tribute and pays less and less of it. The cunning Phœnician steals a number of ships from our fleet every year. On the east we are forced to keep up a great army against the Hittites, while around Babylon and Nineveh there is such a movement that it is felt throughout all Mesopotamia.

“And what is the outcome of priestly management? This, that while my great-grandfather had a hundred thousand talents of yearly income and one hundred and sixty thousand troops, my father has barely fifty thousand talents and one hundred and twenty thousand troops.

“And what an army! Were it not for the Greek corps, which keeps them in order as a dog watches sheep, the Egyptian soldiers to-day would obey only priests and the pharaoh would sink to the level of a miserable nomarch.”

“Whence hast thou learned this?” asked Tutmosis, with astonishment.

“Am I not of a priestly family? And besides, they taught me when I was not heir to the throne. Oh, when I become pharaoh after my father,—may he live through eternity!—I will put my bronze-sandalled foot on their necks. But first of all I will seize their

treasures, which have always been bloated, but which from the time of Rameses the Great have begun to swell out, and to-day are so swollen that the treasure of the pharaoh is invisible because of them."

"Woe to me and to thee!" sighed Tutmosis. "Thou hast plans under which this hill would bend could it hear and understand them. And where are thy forces, thy assistance, thy warriors? Against thee the whole people will rise, led by a class of men with mighty influence. But who is on thy side?"

Rameses listened and fell to thinking. At last he said,—

"The army—"

"A considerable part of it will follow the priests."

"The Greek corps—"

"A barrel of water in the Nile."

"The officials—"

"Half of them belong to the priests."

The prince shook his head sadly, and was silent.

From the summit they went down by a naked and stony slope to the opposite base of the hill. Then Tutmosis, who had pushed ahead somewhat, cried,—

"Has a charm fallen on my eyes? Look, Rameses! Why, a second Egypt is concealed between these cliffs!"

"That must be an estate of some priest who pays no taxes," replied the prince, bitterly.

In the depth before their feet lay a rich valley in the form of a fork the tines of which were hidden between cliffs. At the juncture of the tines a number of servants' huts were visible, and the beautiful little villa of the owner or manager. Palm-trees grew there, grapes, olives, figs with aerial roots, cypresses, even young baobabs. In the centre flowed a rivulet, and at the source of it, some hundreds of yards higher up, small gardens were visible.

When they had gone down among grape-vines covered with ripe clusters, they heard a woman's voice which called, or rather sang in pensive notes:

"Where art thou gone from me, where art thou, hen of mine? Thou hast fled, thou art gone from me. I give thee drink and clean grain; what I give is so good that slaves envy thee. Where art thou gone, my hen—wilt thou not answer me? Night will come down on thee, think of that; thou wilt not reach thy home, where all are at work for thee. Come; if thou come not, a falcon will fly from the desert and tear the heart out of thee. If he come thou wilt call in vain, as I now call in vain to thee. Give answer, or I shall be angry and leave this place. If I leave thou'lt go home on thy own feet."

The song came toward the two men. The songstress was a few yards from them when Tutmosis thrust his head from between the bushes, and said,—

"Just look, Rameses, but that is a beautiful maiden!"

Instead of looking, the prince sprang into the path and stopped the road before the songstress. She was really a beautiful maiden, with Grecian features and a complexion like ivory. From under the veil on her head peeped forth an immense mass of dark hair, wound in a knot. She wore a white trailing robe which she held on

one side with her hand; under the transparent covering were maiden breasts shaped like apples.

“Who art thou?” cried Rameses.

The threatening furrows vanished from his forehead and his eyes flashed.

“O Jehovah! O Father!” cried she, frightened, halting motionless on the path.

But she grew calm by degrees, and her velvety eyes resumed their expression of mild sadness.

“Whence hast thou come?” inquired she of Rameses, with a voice trembling a little. “I see that thou art a soldier, but it is not permitted soldiers to come here.”

“Why is it not permitted?”

“Because this is the land of a great lord named Sesofris.”

“Ho! ho!” laughed Rameses.

“Laugh not, for thou wilt grow pale soon. The lord Sesofris is secretary to the lord Chaires, who carries his fan for the most worthy nomarch of Memphis. My father has seen him and fallen on his face before him.”

“Ho! ho! ho!” repeated Rameses, laughing continually.

“Thy words are very insolent,” said the maiden, frowning. “Were kindness not looking from thy face, I should think thee a mercenary from Greece or a bandit.”

“He is not a bandit yet, but some day he may become the greatest bandit this land has ever suffered,” said Tutmosis the exquisite, arranging his wig.

“And thou must be a dancer,” answered the girl, grown courageous. “Oh! I am even certain that I saw thee at the fair in Pi-Bailos, enchanting serpents.”

The two young men fell into perfect humor.

“But who art thou?” asked Rameses of the girl, taking her hand, which she drew back.

“Be not so bold. I am Sarah, the daughter of Gideon, the manager of this estate.”

“A Jewess,” said Rameses; and a shadow passed over his face.

“What harm in that? what harm in that?” cried Tutmosis. “Dost think that Jewesses are less sweet than Egyptian girls? They are only more modest and more difficult, which gives their love an uncommon charm.”

“So ye are pagans,” said Sarah, with dignity. “Rest, if ye are tired, pluck some grapes for yourselves, and go with God. Our servants are not glad to see guests like you.”

She wished to go, but Rameses detained her.

“Stop! Thou hast pleased me, and may not leave us in this way.”

“The evil spirit has seized thee; no one in this valley would dare to speak thus to me,” said Sarah, now indignant.

“Yes; for, seest thou,” interrupted Tutmosis, “this young man is an officer of the priestly regiment of Ptah, and a secretary of the secretary of a lord who carries his fan over the fan-carrier of the nomarch of Habu.”

“Surely he must be an officer,” answered Sarah, looking with thoughtfulness at Rameses. “Maybe he is a great lord himself?” added she, putting her finger on her lips.

“Whoever I am, thy beauty surpasses my dignity,” answered he, suddenly. “But tell me, is it true that the Jews eat pork?”

Sarah looked at him offended; and Tutmosis added,—

“How evident it is that thou knowest not Jewesses! I tell thee that a Jew would rather die than eat pork, which, for my part, I do not consider as the worst—”

“But do they eat cats?” insisted Rameses, pressing Sarah’s hand and looking into her eyes.

“And that is a fable, a vile fable!” exclaimed Tutmosis. “Thou mightst have asked me about those things instead of talking nonsense. I have had three Jewish mistresses.”

“So far thou hast told the truth, but now thou art lying,” called out Sarah. “A Jewess would not be any man’s mistress,” added she, proudly.

“Even the mistress of the secretary of a lord who carries the fan for the nomarch of Memphis?” asked Tutmosis, jeeringly.

“Even—”

“Even the mistress of the lord who carries the fan?”

Sarah hesitated, but answered,—

“Even.”

“Then perhaps she would not become the mistress of the nomarch?”

The girl’s hands dropped. With astonishment she looked in turn at the young men; her lips quivered, and her eyes filled with tears.

“Who are ye?” inquired she, alarmed. “Ye have come down from the hills, like travellers who wish bread and water, but ye speak to me as might the greatest lords. Who are ye? Thy sword,” said she, turning to Rameses, “is set with emeralds, and on thy neck is a chain of such work as even our lord, the great Sesofris, has not in his treasury.”

“Better tell me if I please thee,” insisted Rameses, pressing her hand and looking into her eyes tenderly.

“Thou art beautiful, as beautiful as the angel Gabriel; but I fear thee, for I know not who thou art.”

Then from beyond the hilltop was heard the sound of a trumpet.

“They are calling thee!” cried Tutmosis.

“And if I were as great a lord as thy Sesofris?” asked Rameses.

“Then maybe—” answered Sarah.

“And if I carried the fan of the nomarch of Memphis?”

“Thou mayest be even as great as that—”

Somewhere beyond the hill was heard the second trumpet.

“Come, Rameses!” insisted the frightened Tutmosis.

“But if I were—heir to the throne, wouldst thou come to me?” cried the prince.

“O Jehovah!” exclaimed Sarah, dropping on her knees.

From various points trumpets summoned, now urgently.

“Let us run!” cried Tutmosis, in desperation. “Dost thou not hear the alarm in the camp?”

Rameses took the chain from his neck quickly and threw it on Sarah.

“Give this to thy father. I will buy thee from him. Be in health.”

He kissed her lips passionately, and she embraced his knees. He tore away, ran a couple of paces, turned again, and again fondled her beautiful face and dark hair with kisses, as if he heard not those impatient calls to the army.

“In the name of his holiness the pharaoh, I summon thee, follow me!” cried Tutmosis; and he seized the prince’s hand.

They ran toward the trumpet-calls. Rameses tottered at moments like a drunken man, and turned his head. At last they were climbing the opposite hill.

“And this man,” thought Tutmosis, “wants to battle with the priesthood!”

Chapter IV

RAMESES and his comrade ran about a quarter of an hour along the rocky ridge of the hill, drawing ever nearer to the trumpets, which sounded more and more urgently. At last they reached a point where they took in at a glance the whole region. Toward the left stretched the highway; beyond that were seen clearly the city of Pi-Bailos, the regiments of the heir drawn up behind it, and an immense cloud of dust which rose above his opponent hastening forward from the east.

On the right yawned a broad ravine, along the middle of which the Greek regiment was dragging military engines. Not far from the road the ravine was lost in another and a broader one which began in the depth of the desert.

At this point something uncommon was happening. The Greeks stood unoccupied not far from the junction of the two ravines; but at the juncture itself, and between the highway and the staff of Rameses, marched out four dense lines of some other army, like four fences, bristling with glittering darts.

In spite of the steep road the prince rushed down at full speed to his division, to the place where the minister of war stood surrounded by officers.

"What is happening?" called he, threateningly. "Why sound an alarm instead of marching?"

"We are cut off," said Herhor.

"By whom?"

"Our division by three regiments of Nitager, who has marched out of the desert."

"Then the enemy is there, near the highway?"

"Yes, the invincible Nitager himself."

It seemed in that moment that the heir to the throne had gone mad. His lips were contorted, his eyes were starting out of their sockets. He drew his sword, rushed to the Greeks, and cried,—

"Follow me against those who bar the road to us."

"O heir, live forever!" cried Patrokles, who drew his sword also. "Forward, descendants of Achilles!" said he, turning to his men. "We will teach those Egyptian cowkeepers not to stop us!"

Trumpets sounded the attack. Four short but erect Greek columns rushed forward, a cloud of dust rose, and a shout in honor of Rameses.

After a couple of minutes the Greeks found themselves in the presence of the Egyptian regiments, and hesitated.

"Forward!" cried the heir, rushing on, sword in hand.

The Greeks lowered their spears. On the opposing side there was a movement, a murmur flew along the ranks, and spears also were lowered.

"Who are ye, madmen?" asked a mighty voice.

“The heir to the throne!” shouted Patrokles.

A moment of silence.

“Open ranks!” commanded the same voice, mighty as before.

The regiments of the eastern army opened slowly, like heavy folding-doors, and the Greek division passed between them.

Then a gray-haired warrior in golden helmet and armor approached Prince Rameses and said with a low obeisance,—

“Erpatr,² thou hast conquered. Only a great warrior could free himself from difficulty in that way.”

“Thou art Nitager, the bravest of the brave!” cried the prince.

At that moment Herhor approached. He had heard the conversation, and said abruptly,—

“Had there been on your side such an awkward leader as the erpatr, how could we have finished the manœuvres?”

“Let the young warrior alone!” answered Nitager. “Is it not enough for thee that he has shown the iron claws, as was proper for a son of the pharaoh?”

Tutmosis, noting the turn which the conversation had taken, asked Nitager,—

“Whence hast thou come, that thy main forces are in front of our army?”

“I knew how incompetently the division was marching from Memphis, when the heir was concentrating his regiments near Pi-Bailos, and for sport I wished to capture you young lords. To my misfortune the heir was here and spoiled my plans. Act that way always, Rameses, of course in presence of real enemies.”

“But if, as to-day, he meets a force three times superior?” inquired Herhor.

“Daring keenness means more than strength,” replied the old leader. “An elephant is fifty times stronger than a man; still he yields to him, or dies at his hands.”

Herhor listened in silence.

The manœuvres were declared finished. Prince Rameses with the minister and commanders went to the army near Pi-Bailos. There he greeted Nitager’s veterans, took farewell of his own regiments, commanded them to march eastward, and wished success to them.

Then, surrounded by a great suite, he returned by the highway to Memphis amid crowds from the land of Goshen, who with green garlands and in holiday robes congratulated the conqueror.

When the highway turned toward the desert, the crowd became thinner, and when they approached the place where the staff of the heir had entered the ravine because of the scarabs, there was no one.

Rameses nodded to Tutmosis, and pointing to the naked hill, whispered,—

“Thou wilt go to Sarah—”

“I understand.”

² Heir.

“Tell her father that I will give him land outside Memphis.”

“I understand. Thou wilt have her to-morrow.”

After this conversation Tutmosis withdrew to the troops marching behind the suite, and vanished.

Almost opposite the ravine along which the army had passed in the morning, some tens of steps from the road, stood a tamarind-tree which, though old, was not large. At this point a halt was made by the guard which had preceded the suite.

“Shall we meet scarabs again?” asked Rameses, with a laugh.

“We shall see,” answered Herhor.

They looked; on the slender tree a naked man was hanging.

“What does this mean?” asked the heir, with emotion.

Adjutants ran to the tree, and saw that the hanging man was that old slave whose canal they had closed in the morning.

“He did right to hang himself!” cried Eunana among the officers. “Could ye believe it, that wretch dared to seize the feet of his holiness the minister!”

On hearing this, Rameses reined in his horse, dismounted, and walked up to the ominous tree.

The slave was hanging with his head stretched forward; his mouth was opened widely, his hands turned toward the spectators, and terror was in his eyes. He looked like a man who had wished to say something, but whose voice had failed him.

“The unfortunate!” sighed Rameses, with compassion.

On returning to the retinue he gave command to relate to him the history of the man, and then he rode a long time in silence.

Before his eyes was the picture of the suicide, and in his heart was the feeling that a great wrong had been done,—such a wrong that even he, the son and the heir of the pharaoh, might halt in face of it.

The heat was unendurable, the dust dried up the water and pierced the eyes of man and beast. The division was detained for a short rest, and meanwhile Nitager finished his conversation with the minister.

“My officers,” said the old commander, “never look under their feet, but always straight forward.”

“That is the reason, perhaps, why no enemy has ever surprised me.”

“Your worthiness reminds me, by these words, that I am to pay certain debts,” remarked Herhor; and he commanded the officers and soldiers who were near by to assemble.

“And now,” said the minister, “summon for me Eunana.”

The officer covered with amulets was found as quickly as if he had been waiting for this summons a long time. On his countenance was depicted delight, which he restrained through humility, but with effort.

Herhor, seeing Eunana before him, began,—

“By the will of his holiness, supreme command of the army comes into my hands again with the ending of the manoeuvres.”

Those present bowed their heads.

“It is my duty to use this power first of all in meting out justice.”

The officers looked at one another.

“Eunana,” said the minister, “I know that thou hast always been one of the most diligent officers.”

“Truth speaks through thy lips, worthy lord,” replied Eunana. “As a palm waits for dew, so do I for the commands of superiors. And when I do not receive them, I am like an orphan in the desert when looking for a pathway.”

Nitager’s scar-covered officers listened with astonishment to the ready speech of Eunana, and thought, “He will be raised above others!”

“Eunana,” said the minister, “thou art not only diligent, but pious; not only pious, but watchful as an ibis over water. The gods have poured out on thee every virtue: they have given thee serpent cunning, with the eye of a falcon.”

“Pure truth flows from thy lips, worthiness,” added Eunana. “Were it not for my wonderful sight, I should not have seen the two scarabs.”

“Yes, and thou wouldst not have saved our camp from sacrilege. For this deed, worthy of the most pious Egyptian, I give thee—”

Here the minister took a gold ring from his finger.

“I give thee this ring with the name of the goddess Mut, whose favor and prudence will accompany thee to the end of thy worldly wandering, if thou deserve it.”

His worthiness delivered the ring to Eunana, and those present uttered a great shout in honor of the pharaoh, and rattled their weapons.

As Herhor did not move, Eunana stood and looked him in the eyes, like a faithful dog which having received one morsel from his master is wagging his tail and waiting.

“And now,” continued the minister, “confess, Eunana, why thou didst not tell whither the heir to the throne went when the army was marching along the ravine with such difficulty. Thou didst an evil deed, for we had to sound the alarm in the neighborhood of the enemy.”

“The gods are my witnesses that I know nothing of the most worthy prince,” replied the astonished Eunana.

Herhor shook his head.

“It cannot be that a man gifted with such sight, a man who at some tens of yards away sees sacred scarabs in the sand, should not see so great a personage as the heir to the throne is.”

“Indeed I did not see him!” explained Eunana, beating his breast. “Moreover no one commanded me to watch Rameses.”

“Did I not free thee from leading the vanguard? Did I assign to thee an office?” asked the minister. “Thou wert entirely free, just like a man who is called to important deeds. And didst thou accomplish thy task? For such an error in time of war thou shouldst suffer death surely.”

The ill-fated officer was pallid.

“But I have a paternal heart for thee, Eunana,” said Herhor, “and, remembering the great service which thou hast rendered by discovering the scarabs, I, not as a stern minister, but as a mild priest, appoint to thee a very small punishment. Thou wilt receive fifty blows of a stick on thy body.”

“Worthiness!”

“Eunana, thou hast known how to be fortunate, now be manful and receive this slight remembrance as becomes an officer in the army of his holiness.”

Barely had the worthy Herhor finished when the officers oldest in rank placed Eunana in a commodious position at the side of the highroad. After that one of them sat on his neck, another on his feet, while a third and a fourth counted out fifty blows of pliant reeds on his naked body.

The unterrified warrior uttered no groan; on the contrary, he hummed a soldier song, and at the end of the ceremony wished to rise. But his stiffened legs refused obedience, so he fell face downward on the sand; they had to take him to Memphis on a two-wheeled vehicle. While lying on this cart and smiling at the soldiers, Eunana considered that the wind does not change so quickly in Lower Egypt as fortune in the life of an inferior officer.

When, after the brief halt, the retinue of the heir to the throne moved on its farther journey, Herhor mounted his horse and riding at the side of Nitager, spoke in an undertone about Asiatic nations and, above all, about the awakening of Assyria.

Then two servants of the minister, the adjutant carrying his fan and the secretary Pentuer, began a conversation also.

“What dost thou think of Eunana’s adventure?” asked the adjutant.

“And what thinkest thou of the slave who hanged himself?”

“It seems to me that this was his best day, and the rope around his neck the softest thing that has touched him in life. I think, too, that Eunana from this time on will watch the heir to the throne very closely.”

“Thou art mistaken,” answered Pentuer. “Eunana from this time on will never see a scarab, even though it were as large as a bullock. As to that slave, dost thou not think that in every case it must have been very evil for him—very evil in this sacred land of Egypt?”

“Thou knowest not slaves, hence speakest thus—”

“But who knows them better?” asked Pentuer, gloomily. “Have I not grown up among them? Have I not seen my father watering land, clearing canals, sowing, harvesting, and, above all, paying tribute? Oh, thou knowest not the lot of slaves in Egypt.”

“But if I do not, I know the lot of the foreigner. My great-grandfather or great-great-grandfather was famous among the Hyksos, but he remained here, for he grew attached to this country. And what wilt thou say? Not only was his property taken from him, but the stain of my origin rests on me at present. Thou thyself knowest what I bear frequently from Egyptians by race, though I have a considerable position. How, then, can I take pity on the Egyptian earth-worker, who, seeing my yellow complexion, mutters frequently, ‘Pagan! foreigner!’ The earth-worker is neither a pagan nor a foreigner.”

“Only a slave,” added Pentuer,—“a slave whom they marry, divorce, beat, sell, slay sometimes, and command always to work, with a promise besides that in the world to come he will be a slave also.”

“Thou art a strange man, though so wise!” said the adjutant, shrugging his shoulders. “Dost thou not see that each man of us occupies some position, low, less low, or very low, in which he must labor? But dost thou suffer because thou art not pharaoh, and thy tomb will not be a pyramid? Thou dost not ponder at all over this, for thou knowest it to be the world’s condition. Each creature does its own duty: the ox ploughs, the ass bears the traveller, I cool his worthiness, thou rememberest and thinkest for him, while the earth-worker tills land and pays tribute. What is it to us that some bull is born Apis, to whom all render homage, and some man a pharaoh or a nomarch?”

“The ten years’ toil of that man was destroyed,” whispered Pentuer.

“And does not the minister destroy thy toil?” asked the adjutant. “Who knows that thou art the manager of the state, not the worthy Herhor?”

“Thou art mistaken. He manages really. He has power and will; I have only knowledge. Moreover, they do not beat thee, nor me, like that slave.”

“But they have beaten Eunana, and they may beat us also. Hence there is need to be brave and make use of the position assigned us; all the more since, as is known to thee, our spirit, the immortal *Ka*, in proportion as it is purified rises to a higher plane, so that after thousands or millions of years, in company with spirits of pharaohs and slaves, in company with gods even, it will be merged into the nameless and all-mighty father of existence.”

“Thou speakest like a priest,” answered Pentuer, with bitterness. “I ought rather to have this calm! But instead of it I have pain in my soul, for I feel the wretchedness of millions—”

“Who tells it to thee?”

“My eyes and my heart. My heart is like a valley between mountains which never can be silent, when it hears a cry, but must answer with an echo.”

“I say to thee, Pentuer, that thou thinkest too much over dangerous subjects. It is impossible to walk safely along precipices of the eastern mountains, for thou mayst fall at any moment; or to wander through the western desert, where hungry lions are prowling, and where the raging simoom springs up unexpectedly.”

Meanwhile the valiant Eunana moved on in the vehicle, which only added to his pain. But to show that he was valiant he requested food and drink; and when he had eaten a dry cake rubbed with garlic and had drunk sour beer from a thick-bellied pot, he begged the driver to take a branch and drive the flies from his wounded body.

Thus lying on the bags and packs in that squeaking car, with his face toward the earth, the unfortunate Eunana sang with a groaning voice the grievous lot of the inferior officer,—

“Why dost thou say that the scribe’s lot is worse than the officer’s? Come and see my blue stripes and swollen body; meanwhile I will tell thee the tale of a downtrodden officer.

“I was a boy when they brought me to the barracks. For breakfast I had blows of fists in the belly, till I fainted; for dinner fists in the eyes, till my mouth gaped; and for supper I had a head covered with wounds and almost split open.

“Go on! let me tell how I made the campaign to Syria. Food and drink I had to carry on my back, I was bent down with weight as an ass is bent. My neck became stiff, like an ass’s neck, and the joints of my back swelled. I drank rotten water, I was like a captive bird in the face of the enemy.

“I returned to Egypt, but here I am like a tree into which a worm is boring always. For any trifle they put me on the ground and beat me till I am breaking. I am sick and must lie at full length; they carry me in a car, meanwhile serving-men steal my mantle and escape with it.

“So change thy mind, O scribe, about the happiness of officers.”³

Thus sang the brave Eunana; and his tearful song has outlived the Egyptian kingdom.

³ Authentic.

Chapter V

AS the suite of the heir approached Memphis, the sun was near its setting, while from countless canals and the distant sea came a wind filled with cool moisture. The road descended again to the fertile region, where on fields and among bushes continuous ranks of people were working, a rosy gleam was falling on the desert, and the mountain summits were in a blaze of sunlight.

Rameses halted and turned his horse. His suite surrounded him quickly, the higher officers approached with some leisure, while the marching regiments drew nearer slowly and with even tread. In the purple rays of the setting sun, the prince had the seeming of a divinity, the soldiers gazed at him with affection and pride, the chiefs looked admiringly.

He raised his hand. All were silent.

“Worthy leaders,” began he, “brave officers, obedient soldiers! To-day the gods have given me the pleasure of commanding you. Delight has filled my heart. And since it is my will that leaders, officers, and soldiers should share my happiness at all times, I assign one drachma to each soldier of those who have gone to the east, and to those who return with us from the eastern boundary; also one drachma each to the Greek soldiers who to-day, under my command, opened a passage out of the ravine; and one drachma to each man in the regiments of the worthy Nitager who wished to cut off the way to us.”

There was a shout in the army.

“Be well, our leader! Be well, successor of the pharaoh, may he live eternally!” cried the soldiers; and the Greeks cried the loudest.

The prince continued,—

“I assign five talents to be divided among the lower officers of my army and that of the worthy Nitager. And finally I assign ten talents to be divided between his worthiness the minister and the chief leaders—”

“I yield my part for the benefit of the army,” answered Herhor.

“Be well, O heir!—be well, O minister!” cried the officers and the soldiers.

The ruddy circle of the sun had touched the sands of the western desert. Rameses took farewell of the army and galloped towards Memphis; but his worthiness Herhor, amid joyous shouts, took a seat in his litter and commanded also to go in advance of the marching divisions.

When they had gone so far that single voices were merged into one immense murmur, like the sound of a cataract, the minister, bending toward the secretary, asked of him,—

“Dost thou remember everything?”

“Yes, worthy lord.”

“Thy memory is like granite on which we write history, and thy wisdom like the Nile, which covers all the country and enriches it,” said Herhor. “Besides, the gods have granted thee the greatest of virtues,—wise obedience.”

The secretary was silent.

“Hence thou mayest estimate more accurately than others the acts and reasons of the heir, may he live through eternity!”

The minister stopped awhile, and then added,—

“It has not been his custom to speak so much. Tell me then, Pentuer, and record this: Is it proper that the heir to the throne should express his will before the army? Only a pharaoh may act thus, or a traitor, or—a frivolous stripling, who with the same heedlessness will do hasty deeds or belch forth words of blasphemy.”

The sun went down, and soon after a starry night appeared. Above the countless canals of Lower Egypt a silvery mist began to thicken,—a mist which, borne to the desert by a gentle wind, freshened the wearied warriors, and revived vegetation which had been dying through lack of moisture.

“Or tell me, Pentuer,” continued the minister, “and inquire: whence will the heir get his twenty talents to keep the promise which he made this day to the army with such improvidence? Besides, it seems to me, and certainly to thee, a dangerous step for an heir to make presents to the army, especially now, when his holiness has nothing with which to pay Nitager’s regiments returning from the Orient. I do not ask what thy opinions are, for I know them, as thou knowest my most secret thoughts. I only ask thee to the end that thou remember what thou hast seen, so as to tell it to the priests in council.”

“Will they meet soon?” inquired Pentuer.

“There is no reason yet to summon them. I shall try first to calm this wild young bull through the fatherly hand of his holiness. It would be a pity to lose the boy, for he has much ability and the energy of a southern whirlwind. But if the whirlwind, instead of blowing away Egypt’s enemies, blows down its wheat and tears up its palm-trees!—”

The minister stopped conversation, and his retinue vanished in the dark alley of trees which led to Memphis.

Meanwhile Rameses reached the palace of the pharaoh.

This edifice stood on an elevation in a park outside the city. Peculiar trees grew there: baobabs from the south; pines, oaks, and cedars from the north. Thanks to the art of gardeners, these trees lived some tens of years and reached a considerable height.

The shady alley led to a gate which was as high as a house of three stories. From each side of the gate rose a solid building like a tower in the form of a truncated pyramid, forty yards in width with the height of five stories. In the night they seemed like two immense tents made of sandstone. These peculiar buildings had on the ground and the upper stories square windows, and the roofs were flat. From the top of one of these pyramids without apex, a watch looked at the country; from the other the priest on duty observed the stars.

At the right and left of these towers, called pylons, extended walls, or rather long structures of one story, with narrow windows and flat roofs, on which sentries paced back and forth. On both sides of the main gate were two sitting statues fifteen feet in height. In front of these statues moved other sentries.

When the prince, with a number of horsemen, approached the palace, the sentry knew him in spite of the darkness. Soon an official of the court ran out of the pylon. He was clothed in a white skirt and dark mantle, and wore a wig as large as a headdress.

“Is the palace closed already?” inquired the prince.

“Thou art speaking truth, worthy lord,” said the official. “His holiness is preparing the god for sleep.”

“What will he do after that?”

“He will be pleased to receive the war minister, Herhor.”

“Well, and later?”

“Later his holiness will look at the ballet in the great hall, then he will bathe and recite evening prayers.”

“Has he not commanded to receive me?” inquired Rameses.

“To-morrow morning after the military council.”

“What are the queens doing?”

“The first queen is praying in the chamber of her dead son, and thy worthy mother is receiving the Phœnician ambassador, who has brought her gifts from the women of Tyre.”

“Did he bring maidens?”

“A number of them. Each has on her person treasures to the value of ten talents.”

“Who is moving about down there with torches?” asked the prince, pointing to the lower park.

“They are taking thy brother, worthiness, from a tree where he has been sitting since midday.”

“Is he unwilling to come down?”

“He will come down now, for the first queen’s jester has gone for him, and has promised to take him to the inn where dissectors are drinking.”

“And hast thou heard anything of the manoeuvres of to-day?”

“They say that the staff was cut off from the corps.”

“And what more?”

The official hesitated.

“Tell what thou hast heard.”

“We heard, moreover, that because of this five hundred blows of a stick were given to a certain officer at thy command, worthiness.”

“It is all a lie!” said one of the adjutants of the heir in an undertone.

“The soldiers, too, say among themselves that it must be a lie,” returned the official, with growing confidence.

Rameses turned his horse and rode to the lower part of the park where his small palace was situated. It had a ground and an upper story and was built of wood. Its form was that of an immense hexagon with two porticos, an upper and a lower one

which surrounded the building and rested on a multitude of pillars. Lamps were burning in the interior; hence it was possible to see that the walls were formed of planks perforated like lace, and that these walls were protected from the wind by curtains of various colors. The roof of the building was flat, surrounded by a balustrade; on this roof stood a number of tents.

Greeted heartily by half-naked servitors, some of whom ran out with torches, while others prostrated themselves before him, the heir entered his residence. On the ground floor he removed his dusty dress, bathed in a stone basin, and put on a kind of great sheet which he fastened at the neck and bound round his waist with a cord for a girdle. On the first floor he ate a supper consisting of a wheaten cake, dates, and a glass of light beer. Then he went to the terrace of the building, and lying on a couch covered with a lion skin, commanded the servants to withdraw and to bring up Tutmosis the moment he appeared there.

About midnight a litter stopped before the residence, and out of it stepped the adjutant. When he walked along the terrace heavily yawning as he went, the prince sprang up from the couch and cried,—

“Art thou here? Well, what?”

“Then art thou not sleeping yet?” replied Tutmosis. “O gods, after so many days of torture! I think that I should sleep until sunrise.”

“What of Sarah?”

“She will be here the day after to-morrow, or thou wilt be with her in the house beyond the river.”

“Only after to-morrow!”

“Only? I beg thee, Rameses, to sleep. Thou hast taken too much bad blood to thy heart, fire will strike to thy head.”

“What about her father?”

“He is honorable and wise. They call him Gideon. When I told him that thou hadst the wish to take his daughter, he fell on the ground and tore his hair. Of course I waited till this outburst of fatherly suffering was over; I ate a little, drank some wine, and at last proceeded to bargaining. The weeping Gideon swore first of all that he would rather see his daughter dead than the mistress of any man. Then I told him that near Memphis, on the Nile, he would receive land which gives two talents of yearly income and pays no taxes. He was indignant. Then I stated that he might receive another talent yearly in gold and silver. He sighed and declared that his daughter had spent three years at school in Pi-Bailos; I added another talent. Then Gideon, still disconsolate, remembered that he would lose his very good position of manager for the lord Sesofris. I told him that he need not lose that place, and added ten milch cows from thy stables. His forehead cleared somewhat; then he confessed to me, as a profound secret, that a certain very great lord, Chaires, who bears the fan of the nomarch of Memphis, was turning attention toward Sarah. I promised then to add a young bull, a medium chain of gold, and a large bracelet. In this way thy Sarah will cost thee land, two talents yearly in money, ten cows, a young bull, a chain and a gold bracelet, immediately. These thou wilt give to her father, the honest Gideon; to her thou wilt give whatever pleases thee.”

“What did Sarah say to this?”

“While we were bargaining she walked among the trees. When we had finished the matter and settled it by drinking good Hebrew wine, she told her father—dost thou know what?—that if he had not given her to thee, she would have gone up the cliff and thrown herself down head foremost. Now thou mayst sleep quietly, I think,” ended Tutmosis.

“I doubt it,” answered Rameses, leaning on the balustrade and looking into the emptiest side of the park. “Dost thou know that on the way back we found a man hanging from a tree?”

“Oh! that is worse than the scarabs!”

“He hanged himself from despair because the warriors filled the canal which he had been digging for ten years in the desert.”

“Well, that man is sleeping now quietly. So it is time for us.”

“That man was wronged,” said the prince. “I must find his children, ransom them, and rent a bit of land to them.”

“But thou must do this with great secrecy,” remarked Tutmosis, “or all slaves will begin to hang themselves, and no Phœnician will lend us, their lords, a copper uten.”

“Jest not. Hadst thou seen that man’s face, sleep would be absent to-night from thy eyes as it is from mine.”

Meanwhile from below, among the bushes, was heard a voice, not over-powerful, but clear,—

“May the One, the All-Powerful, bless thee, Rameses,—He who has no name in human speech, or statue in a temple.”

Both young men bent forward in astonishment.

“Who art thou?” called out the prince.

“I am the injured people of Egypt,” replied the voice, slowly and with calmness.

Then all was silent. No motion, no rustle of branches betrayed human presence in that place.

At command of Rameses servants rushed out with torches, the dogs were unchained, and every bush around the house was searched. But they found no one.

“Who could that have been, Tutmosis?” asked the prince, with emotion. “Perhaps it was the ghost of that slave who hanged himself?”

“I have never heard ghosts talking, though I have been on guard at temples and tombs more than once. I should think, rather, that he who has just called to us is some friend of thine.”

“Why should he hide?”

“But what harm is that to thee? Each one of us has tens, if not hundreds, of invisible enemies. Thank the gods, then, that thou hast even one invisible friend.”

“I shall not sleep to-night,” whispered the excited prince.

“Be calm. Instead of running along the terrace listen to me and lie down. Thou wilt see Sleep—that is a deliberate divinity, and it does not befit him to chase after those who run with the pace of a deer. If thou wilt lie down on a comfortable couch, Sleep,

who loves comfort, will sit near thee and cover thee with his great mantle, which covers not only men's eyes, but their memories."

Thus speaking, Tutmosis placed Rameses on a couch; then he brought an ivory pillow shaped like a crescent, and arranging the prince, placed his head on this pillow.

Then he let down the canvas walls of the tent, laid himself on the floor, and both were asleep in some minutes.

Chapter VI

THE entrance to the pharaoh's palace at Memphis was through a gate placed between two lofty towers or pylons. The external walls of these buildings were of gray sandstone covered from foundation to summit with bas-reliefs.

At the top of the gate rose the arms of the state, or its symbol: a winged globe, from behind which appeared two serpents. Lower down sat a series of gods to which the pharaohs were bringing offerings. On side pillars images of the gods were cut out also in five rows, one above the other, while below were hieroglyphic inscriptions.

On the walls of each pylon the chief place was occupied by a flat sculpture of Rameses the Great, who held in one hand an uplifted axe and grasped in the other, by the hair of the head, a crowd of people tied in a bundle, like parsley. Above the king stood or sat two rows of gods; still higher, a line of people with offerings; at the very summit of the pylons were winged serpents intertwined with scarabs.

Those pylons with walls narrowing toward the top, the gate which connected them, the flat sculptures in which order was mingled with gloomy fantasy and piety with cruelty, produced a tremendous impression. It seemed difficult to enter that place, impossible to go out, and a burden to live there.

From the gate, before which stood troops and a throng of small officials, those who entered came into a court surrounded by porticos resting on pillars. That was an ornamental garden, in which were cultivated aloes, palms, pomegranates, and cedars in pots, all placed in rows and selected according to size. In the middle shot up a fountain; the paths were sprinkled with colored sand.

Under the gallery sat or walked higher officials of the state, speaking in low tones.

From the court, through a high door, the visitor passed to a hall of twelve lofty columns. The hall was large, but as the columns also were large, the hall seemed diminutive. It was lighted by small windows in the walls and through a rectangular opening in the roof. Coolness and shade prevailed there; the shade was almost a gloom, which did not, however, prevent him who entered from seeing the yellow walls and pillars, covered with lines of paintings. At the top leaves and flowers were represented; lower down, the gods; still lower, people who carried their statues or brought them offerings; and between these groups were lines of hieroglyphs.

All this was painted in clear, almost glaring colors,—green, red, and blue.

In this hall, with its varied mosaic pavement, stood in silence, white robed and barefoot, the priests, the highest dignitaries of State, Herhor, the minister of war, also the leaders Nitager and Patrokles, who had been summoned to the presence of the pharaoh.

His holiness Rameses XII., as usual before he held council, was placing offerings before the gods in his chapel. This continued rather long. Every moment some priest or official ran in from the more distant chambers and communicated news touching the course of the service.

“The lord has broken the seal to the chapel— He is washing the sacred divinity— Now he is putting it away— Now he has closed the door—”

On the faces of courtiers, notwithstanding their offices, concern and humility were evident. But Herhor was indifferent, Patrokles impatient, and Nitager now and then disturbed with his deep voice the solemn silence. After every such impolite sound from the old leader, the courtiers moved, like frightened sheep, and looked at one another, as if saying,—

“This rustic has been hunting barbarians all his life, we may pardon him.”

From remoter chambers were heard the sound of bells and the clatter of weapons. Into the hall came in two ranks some tens of the guard in gilt helmets, in breastplates, and with drawn swords, next two ranks of priests, and at last appeared the pharaoh, carried in a litter, surrounded by clouds of smoke and incense.

The ruler of Egypt, Rameses XII., was nearly sixty years old. His face was withered. He wore a white mantle; on his head was a red and white cap with a golden serpent; in his hand he held a long staff.

When the retinue showed itself, all present fell on their faces, except Patrokles, who, as a barbarian, stopped at a low bow, while Nitager knelt on one knee, but soon rose again.

The litter stopped before a baldachin under which was an ebony throne on an elevation. The pharaoh descended slowly from the litter, looked awhile at those present, and then, taking his seat on the throne, gazed fixedly at the cornice on which was painted a rose-colored globe with blue wings and green serpents.

On the right of the pharaoh stood the chief scribe, on the left a judge with a staff; both wore immense wigs.

At a sign from the judge all sat down or knelt on the pavement, while the scribe said to the pharaoh,—

“Our lord and mighty ruler! Thy servant Nitager, the great guard on the eastern boundary, has come to render thee homage, and has brought tribute from conquered nations: a vase of green stone filled with gold, three hundred oxen, a hundred horses, and the fragrant wood teshep.”

“That is a mean tribute, my lord,” said Nitager. “Real treasures we can find only on the Euphrates, where splendid kings, though weak so far, need much to be reminded of Rameses the Great.”

“Answer my servant Nitager,” said the pharaoh to the scribe, “that his words will be taken under careful consideration. But now ask him what he thinks of the military ability of my son and heir, whom he had the honor of meeting near Pi-Bailos yesterday.”

“Our lord, the master of nine nations, asks thee, Nitager—” began the scribe.

But the leader interrupted quickly, to the great dissatisfaction of the courtiers,—

“I hear myself what my lord says. Only the heir to the throne could be his mouth when he turns to me; not thou, chief scribe.”

The scribe looked with consternation at the daring leader, but the pharaoh answered,—

“My faithful Nitager speaks truth.”

The minister of war bowed.

Now the judge announced to all present—to the priests, the officials, and the guards that—they might go to the palace courtyard; and he himself, bowing to the throne, was the first to go thither. In the hall remained only the pharaoh, Herhor, and the two leaders.

“Incline thy ears, O sovereign, and listen to complaints,” began Nitager. “This morning the official priest, who came at thy command to anoint my hair, told me that in going to thee I was to leave my sandals in the entrance hall. Meanwhile it is known, not only in Upper and Lower Egypt, but in the Hittite country, Libya, Phoenicia, and the land of Punt, that twenty years ago thou didst give me the right to stand before thee in sandals.”

“Thou speakest truth,” said the pharaoh. “Various disorders have crept into the court ceremonial.”

“Only give command, O king, and my veterans will produce order immediately,” added Nitager.

At a sign given by the minister of war, a number of officials ran in: one brought sandals and put them on Nitager’s feet; others put down costly stools for the minister and leaders.

When the three dignitaries were seated, Rameses XII. said,—

“Tell me, Nitager, dost thou think that my son will be a leader?—But tell pure truth.”

“By Amon of Thebes, by the glory of my ancestors in whom was blood royal, I swear that thy heir, Prince Rameses, will be a great leader, if the gods permit,” replied Nitager. “He is a young man, a lad yet; still he concentrated his regiments, eased their march, and provided for them. He pleased me most of all by this, that he did not lose his head when I cut off the road before him, but led his men to the attack. He will be a leader, and will conquer the Assyrians, whom we must vanquish to-day if they are not to be seen on the Nile by our grandchildren.”

“What dost thou say to that?” inquired the pharaoh of Herhor.

“As to the Assyrians, I think that the worthy Nitager is concerned about them too early. We must strengthen ourselves well before we begin a new war. As to the heir, Nitager says justly that the young man has the qualities of a leader: he is as keen as a fox, and has the energy of a lion. Still he made many blunders yesterday.”

“Who among us has not made them?” put in Patrokles, silent thus far.

“The heir,” continued the minister, “led the main corps wisely, but he neglected his staff; through this neglect we marched so slowly and in such disorder that Nitager was able to cut off the road before us.”

“Perhaps Rameses counted on your dignity,” said Nitager.

“In government and war we must count on no man: one unreckoned little stone may overturn everything,” said the minister.

“If thou, worthiness,” answered Patrokles, “had not pushed the columns from the road because of those scarabs—”

“Thou, worthiness, art a foreigner and an unbeliever,” retorted Herhor, “hence this speech. But we Egyptians understand that when the people and the soldiers cease to reverence the scarabs, their sons will cease to fear the ureus (the serpent). From contempt of the gods is born revolt against the pharaohs.”

“But what are axes for?” asked Nitager. “Whoso wishes to keep a head on his shoulders let him listen to the supreme commander.”

“What then is your final opinion of the heir?” asked the pharaoh of Herhor.

“Living image of the sun, child of the gods,” replied the minister. “Command to anoint Rameses, give him a grand chain and ten talents, but do not appoint him yet to command the corps in Memphis. The prince is too young for that office, too passionate and inexperienced. Can we recognize him as the equal of Patrokles, who has trampled the Ethiopians and the Libyans in twenty battles? Or can we place him at the side of Nitager, whose name alone brings pallor to our northern and eastern enemies?”

The pharaoh rested his head on his hand, meditated, and said,—

“Depart with my favor and in peace. I will do what is indicated by wisdom and justice.”

The dignitaries bowed low, and Rameses XII., without waiting for his suite, passed to remoter chambers.

When the two leaders found themselves alone in the entrance hall, Nitager said to Patrokles,—

“Here priests rule as in their own house. I see that. But what a leader that Herhor is! He vanquished us before we spoke; he does not grant a corps to the heir.”

“He praised me so that I dared not utter a word,” said Patrokles.

“He is far seeing, and does not tell all he thinks. In the wake of the heir various young lords who go to war taking singers would have shoved themselves into the corps, and they would occupy the highest places. Naturally old officers would fall into idleness from anger, because promotion had missed them; the exquisites would be idle for the sake of amusement, and the corps would break up without even meeting an enemy. Oh, Herhor is a sage!”

“May his wisdom not cost thee more than the inexperience of Rameses,” whispered Patrokles.

Through a series of chambers filled with columns and adorned with paintings, where at each door priests and palace officials gave low obeisances before him, the pharaoh passed to his cabinet. That was a lofty hall with alabaster walls on which in gold and bright colors were depicted the most famous events in the reign of Rameses XII., therefore homage given him by the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, the embassy from the King of Buchten, and the triumphal journey of the god Khonsu through the land of that potentate.

In this hall was the malachite statue of the bird-headed Horus, adorned with gold and jewels. In front of the statue was an altar shaped as a truncated pyramid, the king’s armor, costly armchairs and stools, also tables covered with trifles and small objects.

When the pharaoh appeared, one of the priests burnt incense before him, and one of the officials announced Prince Rameses, who soon entered and bowed low before his father. On the expressive face of the prince feverish disquiet was evident.

“Erpatr, I rejoice,” said the pharaoh, “that thou hast returned in good health from a difficult journey.”

“Mayst thou live through eternity, holiness, and thy affairs fill the two worlds!” replied Rameses.

“My military advisers have just informed me of thy labor and prudence.”

The heir’s face quivered and changed. He fixed great eyes on the pharaoh and listened.

“Thy deeds will not remain without reward. Thou wilt receive ten talents, a great chain, and two Greek regiments with which thou wilt exercise.”

Rameses was amazed, but after a while he asked with a stifled voice,—

“But the corps in Memphis?”

“In a year we will repeat the manœuvres, and if thou make no mistake in leading the army thou wilt get the corps.”

“I know that Herhor did this!” cried the prince, hardly restraining his anger.

He looked around, and added, “I can never be alone with thee, my father; strangers are always between us.”

The pharaoh moved his brows slightly, and his suite vanished, like a crowd of shadows.

“What hast thou to tell me?”

“Only one thing, father. Herhor is my enemy. He accused me to thee and exposed me to this shame!”

In spite of his posture of obedience the prince gnawed his lips and balled his fists.

“Herhor is thy friend and my faithful servant. It was his persuasion that made thee heir to the throne. But—I—will not confide a corps to a youthful leader who lets himself be cut off from his army.”

“I joined it,” answered the crushed heir; “but Herhor commanded to march around two beetles.”

“Dost thou wish that a priest should make light of religion in the presence of the army?”

“My father,” whispered Rameses, with quivering voice, “to avoid spoiling the journey of the beetles a canal was destroyed, and a man was killed.”

“That man raised his own hands on himself.”

“But that was the fault of Herhor.”

“In the regiments which thou didst concentrate near Pi-Bailos thirty men died from over-exertion, and several hundred are sick.”

The prince dropped his head.

“Rameses,” continued the pharaoh, “through thy lips is speaking not a dignitary of the state who is thinking of the soundness of canals and the lives of laborers, but an angry person. Anger does not accord with justice any more than a falcon with a dove.”

“Oh, my father,” burst out the heir, “if anger carries me away, it is because I feel the ill-will of the priests and of Herhor.”

“But thou art thyself the grandson of a high priest; the priests taught thee. Thou hast learned more of their secrets than any other prince ever has.”

“I have learned their insatiable pride, and greed of power. And because I will abridge it they are my enemies. Herhor is not willing to give me even a corps, for he wishes to manage the whole army.”

When he had thrown out these incautious words, the heir was frightened. But the ruler raised his clear glance, and answered quietly,—

“I manage the state and the army. From me flow all commands and decisions. In this world I am the balance of Osiris, and I myself weigh the services of my servants, be they the heir, a minister, or the people. Imprudent would he be who should think that all intrigues are not known to me.”

“But, father, if thou hadst seen with thy own eyes the course of the manœuvres—”

“I might have seen a leader,” interrupted the pharaoh, “who in the decisive moment was chasing through the bushes after an Israelite maiden. But I do not wish to observe such stupidity.”

The prince fell at his father’s feet, and whispered,—

“Did Tutmosis speak to thee of that, lord?”

“Tutmosis is a child, just as thou art. He piles up debts as chief of staff in the corps of Memphis, and thinks in his heart that the eyes of the pharaoh cannot reach to his deeds in the desert.”

Chapter VII

SOME days later Prince Rameses was summoned before the face of his most worthy mother, Nikotris, who was the second wife of the pharaoh, but now the greatest lady in Egypt. The gods were not mistaken when they called her to be the mother of a pharaoh. She was a tall person, of rather full habit, and in spite of forty years was still beautiful. There was in her eyes, face, and whole form such majesty that even when she went unattended, in the modest garb of a priestess, people bowed their heads to her.

The worthy lady received Rameses in her cabinet, which was paved with porcelain tiles. She sat on an inlaid armchair under a palm-tree. At her feet, on a small stool, lay a little dog; on the other side knelt a black slave woman with a fan. The pharaoh's wife wore a muslin robe embroidered with gold, and on her wig a circlet in the form of a lotus, ornamented with jewels.

When the prince had bowed low, the little dog sniffed him, then lay down again; while the lady, nodding her head, made inquiry,—

“For what reason, O Rameses, hast thou desired an interview?”

“Two days ago, mother.”

“I knew that thou wert occupied. But to-day we both have time, and I can listen.”

“Thy speech, mother, acts on me as a strong wind of the desert, and I have no longer courage to present my petition.”

“Then surely it is a question of money.”

Rameses dropped his head; he was confused.

“But dost thou need much money?”

“Fifteen talents—”

“O gods!” cried the lady, “but a couple of days ago ten talents were paid thee from the treasury. Go, girl, into the garden; thou must be tired,” said she to the black slave; and when alone with her son she asked,—

“But is thy Jewess so demanding?”

Rameses blushed, but raised his head.

“Thou knowest, mother, that she is not. But I promised a reward to the army, and—I am unable to pay it.”

The queen looked at him with calm loftiness.

“How evil it is,” said she, after a while, “when a son makes decisions without consulting his mother. Just now I, remembering thy age, wished to give thee a Phœnician slave maiden sent me by Tyre with ten talents for dowry. But thou hast preferred a Jewess.”

“She pleased me. There is not such a beauty among thy serving maidens, mother, nor even among the wives of his holiness.”

“But she is a Jewess!”

“Be not prejudiced, mother, I beg of thee. It is untrue that Jews eat pork and kill cats.”

The worthy lady laughed.

“Thou art speaking like some boy from a primary school,” answered she, shrugging her shoulders, “and hast forgotten the words of Rameses the Great: ‘The yellow people are more numerous than we and they are richer; let us act against them, lest they grow too powerful, but let us act carefully.’ I do not think, therefore, that a girl of that people is the one to be first mistress of the heir to the throne.”

“Can the words of Rameses the Great apply to the daughter of a poor tenant?” asked the prince. “Besides, where are the Jews? Three centuries ago they left Egypt, and to-day they form a little state, ridiculous and priest-governed.”

“I see,” answered the worthy lady, frowning slightly, “that thy mistress is not losing time. Be careful, Rameses; remember, that their leader was Messu (Moses), that traitor priest whom we curse to this day in our temples. Remember that the Jews bore away out of Egypt more treasures than the labor of their few generations was worth to us; they took with them not only gold, but the faith in one god, and our sacred laws, which they give out to-day as their own faith and laws. Last of all, know this,” added she, with great emphasis, “that the daughters of that people prefer death to the bed of a foreigner. And if they give themselves even to hostile leaders, it is to use them for their policy or to kill them.”

“Believe me, mother, that it is our priests who spread all these reports. They will not admit to the footstool of the throne people of another faith lest those people might serve the pharaoh in opposition to their order.”

The queen rose from the armchair, and crossing her arms on her breast, gazed at her son with amazement.

“What they tell me is true then, thou art an enemy of our priests. Thou, their favorite pupil!”

“I must have the traces of their canes to this day on my shoulders,” said Rameses.

“But thy grandfather and my father, Amenhôtep, was a high priest, and possessed extensive power in this country.”

“Just because my grandfather was a pharaoh, and my father is a pharaoh also, I cannot endure the rule of Herhor.”

“He was brought to his position by thy grandfather, the holy Amenhôtep.”

“And I will cast him down from it.”

The mother shrugged her shoulders.

“And it is thou,” answered she, with sadness, “who wishest to lead a corps? But thou art a spoiled girl, not a man and a leader—”

“How is that?” interrupted the prince, restraining himself with difficulty from an outburst.

“I cannot recognize my own son. I do not see in thee the future lord of Egypt. The dynasty in thy person will be like a Nile boat without a rudder. Thou wilt drive the priests from the court, but who will remain with thee? Who will be thy eye in the

Lower and the Upper Country, who in foreign lands? But the pharaoh must see everything, whatever it be, on which fall the divine rays of Osiris."

"The priests will be my servants, not my ministers."

"They are the most faithful servants. Thanks to their prayers thy father reigns thirty-three years, and avoids war which might be fatal."

"To the priests?"

"To the pharaoh and the state!" interrupted the lady. "Knowest thou what takes place in our treasury, from which in one day thou takest ten talents and desirest fifteen more? Knowest thou that were it not for the liberality of the priests, who on behalf of the treasury even take real jewels from the gods and put false ones in their places, the property of the pharaoh would be now in the hands of Phœnicians?"

"One fortunate war would overflow our treasury as the increase of the Nile does our fields."

"No. Thou, Rameses, art such a child yet that we may not even reckon thy godless words as sinful. Occupy thyself, I beg, with thy Greek regiments, get rid of the Jew girl as quickly as may be, and leave politics to us."

"Why must I put away Sarah?"

"Shouldst thou have a son from her, complications might rise in the State, which is troubled enough as matters now are. Thou mayst be angry with the priests," added she, "if thou wilt not offend them in public. They know that it is necessary to overlook much in an heir to the throne, especially when he has such a stormy character. But time pacifies everything to the glory of the dynasty and the profit of Egypt."

The prince meditated; then he said suddenly,—

"I cannot count, therefore, on money from the treasury."

"Thou canst not in any case. The grand secretary would have been forced to stop payment to-day had I not given him fourteen talents sent from Tyre to me."

"And what shall I do with the army?" asked the prince, rubbing his forehead impatiently.

"Put away the Jewess, and beg the priests. Perhaps they will make a loan to thee."

"Never! I prefer a loan from Phœnicians."

The lady shook her head.

"Thou art erpatr, act as may please thee. But I say that thou must give great security, and the Phœnicians, when once thy creditors, will not let thee go. They surpass the Jews in treachery."

"A part of my income will suffice to cover such debts."

"We shall see. I wish sincerely to help thee, but I have not the means," said the lady, sadly. "Do, then, as thou art able, but remember that the Phœnicians in our state are like rats in a granary; when one pushes in through a crevice, others follow."

Rameses loitered in leave-taking.

"Hast thou something more to tell me?" inquired the queen.

"I should like to ask— My heart divines that thou, mother, hast some plans regarding me. What are they?"

She stroked his face.

"Not now—not yet. Thou art free to-day, like every young noble in the country; then make use of thy freedom. But, Rameses, the time is coming when thou wilt have to take a wife whose children will be princes of the blood royal and whose son will be thy heir. I am thinking of that time—"

"And what?"

"Nothing defined yet. In every case political wisdom suggests to me that thy wife should be a priest's daughter."

"Perhaps Herhor's?" said the prince, with a laugh.

"What would there be blamable in that? Herhor will be high priest in Thebes very soon, and his daughter is only fourteen years of age."

"And would she consent to occupy the place of the Jewess?" asked Rameses, ironically.

"Thou shouldst try to have people forget thy present error."

"I kiss thy feet, mother, and I go," said the prince, seizing his own head. "I hear so many marvellous things here that I begin to fear lest the Nile may flow up toward the cataract, or the pyramids pass over to the eastern desert."

"Blaspheme not, my child," whispered the lady, gazing with fear at Rameses. "In this land most wonderful miracles are seen."

"Are not they this, that the walls of the palace listen to their owners?" asked her son, with a bitter smile.

"Men have witnessed the death of pharaohs who had reigned a few months only, and the fall of dynasties which had governed nine nations."

"Yes, for those pharaohs forgot the sword for the distaff," retorted Rameses.

He bowed and went out.

In proportion as the sound of Rameses' steps grew less in the immense antechamber, the face of the worthy lady changed; the place of majesty was taken by pain and fear, while tears were glistening in her great eyes.

She ran to the statue of the goddess, knelt, and sprinkling incense from India on the coals, began to pray,—

"O Isis, Isis, Isis! three times do I pronounce thy name. O Isis, who givest birth to serpents, crocodiles, and ostriches, may thy name be thrice praised. O Isis, who preservest grains of wheat from robber whirlwinds, and the bodies of our fathers from the destructive toil of time, O Isis, take pity on my son and preserve him! Thrice be thy name repeated—and here—and there—and beyond, to-day and forever, and for the ages of ages, as long as the temples of our gods shall gaze on themselves in the waters of the Nile."

Thus praying and sobbing, the queen bowed down and touched the pavement with her forehead. Above her at that moment a low whisper was audible,—

"The voice of the just is heard always."

The worthy lady sprang up, and full of astonishment looked around. But there was no one in the chamber. Only the painted flowers gazed at her from the walls, and from above the altar the statue of the goddess full of superterrestrial calm.

Chapter VIII

THE prince returned to his villa full of care, and summoned Tutmosis.

“Thou must,” said Rameses, “teach me how to find money.”

“Ha!” laughed the exquisite; “that is a kind of wisdom not taught in the highest school of the priests, but wisdom in which I might be a prophet.”

“In those schools they explain that a man should not borrow money,” said Rameses.

“If I did not fear that blasphemy might stain my lips, I should say that some priests waste their time. They are wretched, though holy! They eat no meat, they are satisfied with one wife, or avoid women altogether, and—they know not what it is to borrow. I am satisfied, Rameses,” continued the exquisite, “that thou wilt know this kind of wisdom through my counsels. To-day thou wilt learn what a source of sensations lack of money is. A man in need of money has no appetite, he springs up in sleep, he looks at women with astonishment, as if to ask, ‘Why were they created?’ Fire flashes in his face in the coolest temple. In the middle of a desert shivers of cold pass through him during the greatest heat. He looks like a madman; he does not hear what people say to him. Very often he walks along with his wig awry and forgets to sprinkle it with perfume. His only comfort is a pitcher of strong wine, and that for a brief moment. Barely has the poor man’s thoughts come back when again he feels as though the earth were opening under him.

“I see,” continued the exquisite, “that at present thou art passing through despair from lack of money. But soon thou wilt know other feelings which will be as if a great sphinx were removed from thy bosom. Then thou wilt yield to the sweet condition of forgetting thy previous trouble and present creditors, and then— Ah, happy Rameses, unusual surprises will await thee! For the term will pass, and thy creditors will begin to visit thee under pretence of paying homage. Thou wilt be like a deer hunted by dogs, or an Egyptian girl who, while raising water from the river, sees the knotty back of a crocodile—”

“All this seems very gladsome,” interrupted Rameses, smiling; “but it brings not one drachma.”

“Never mind,” continued Tutmosis. “I will go this moment to Dagon, the Phœnician banker, and in the evening thou wilt find peace, though he may not have given thee money.”

He hastened out, took his seat in a small litter, and surrounded by servants vanished in the alleys of the park.

Before sunset Dagon, a Phœnician, the most noted banker in Memphis, came to the house of Rameses. He was a man in the full bloom of life, yellow, lean, but well built. He wore a blue tunic and over it a white robe of thin texture. He had immense hair of his own, confined by a gold circlet, and a great black beard, his own also. This rich growth looked imposing in comparison with the wigs and false beards of Egyptian exquisites.

The dwelling of the heir to the throne was swarming with youth of the aristocracy. Some on the ground floor were bathing and anointing themselves, others were

playing chess and checkers on the first story, others in company with dancing-girls were drinking under tents on the terrace. Rameses neither drank, played, nor talked with women; he walked along one side of the terrace awaiting the Phœnician impatiently. When he saw him emerge from an alley in a litter on two asses, he went to the first story, where there was an unoccupied chamber.

After awhile Dagon appeared in the door. He knelt on the threshold and exclaimed,—

“I greet thee, new sun of Egypt! Mayst thou live through eternity, and may thy glory reach those distant shores which are visited by the ships of Phœnicia.”

At command of the prince, he rose and said with violent gesticulations,—

“When the worthy Tutmosis descended before my mud hut—my house is a mud hut in comparison with thy palaces, erpatr—such was the gleam from his face that I cried at once to my wife, ‘Tamara, the worthy Tutmosis has come not from himself, but from one as much higher than he as the Lebanon is higher than the sand of the seashore.’ ‘Whence dost thou know, my lord, that the worthy Tutmosis has not come for himself?’ ‘Because he could not come with money, since he has none, and he could not come for money, because I have none.’ At that moment we bowed down both of us to the worthy Tutmosis. But when he told us that it was thou, most worthy lord, who desirest fifteen talents from thy slave, I asked my wife, ‘Tamara, did my heart teach me badly?’ ‘Dagon, thou art so wise that thou shouldst be an adviser to the heir,’ replied my Tamara.”

Rameses was boiling with impatience, but he listened to the banker,—he, Rameses, who stormed in the presence of his own mother and the pharaoh.

“When we, lord, stopped and understood that thou wert desirous of my services, such delight entered my house that I ordered to give the servants ten pitchers of beer, and my wife Tamara commanded me to buy her new earrings. My joy was increased so that when coming hither I did not let my driver beat the asses. And when my unworthy feet touched thy floor, O prince, I took out a gold ring, greater than that which the worthy Herhor gave Eunana, and presented it to thy slave who poured water on my fingers. With permission, worthiness, whence came that silver pitcher from which they poured the water?”

“Azarias, the son of Gaber, sold it to me for two talents.”

“A Jew? Erpatr, dost them deal with Jews? But what will the gods say?”

“Azarias is a merchant, as thou art,” answered Rameses.

When Dagon heard this, he caught his head with both hands, he spat and groaned,—

“O Baal Tammuz! O Baaeth! O Astoreth!—Azarias, the son of Gaber, a Jew, to be such a merchant as I am. Oh, my legs, why did ye bring me hither? Oh, my heart, why dost thou suffer such pain and palpitation? Most worthy prince,” cried the Phœnician, “slay me, cut off my hand if I counterfeit gold, but say not that a Jew can be a merchant. Sooner will Tyre fall to the earth, sooner will sand occupy the site of Sidon than a Jew be a merchant. They will milk their lean goats, or mix clay with straw under blows of Egyptian sticks, but they will never sell merchandise. Tfu! tfu! Vile nation of slaves! Thieves, robbers!”

Anger boiled up in the prince, it is unknown why, but he calmed himself quickly. This seemed strange to Rameses himself, who up to that hour had not thought self-restraint needed in his case in presence of any one.

“And then,” said the heir on a sudden, “wilt thou, worthy Dagon, loan me fifteen talents?”

“O Astoreth! Fifteen talents? That is such a great weight that I should have to sit down to think of it properly.”

“Sit down then.”

“For a talent,” said Dagon, sitting in an armchair comfortably, “a man can have twelve gold chains, or sixty beautiful milch cows, or ten slaves for labor, or one slave to play on the flute or paint, and maybe even to cure. A talent is tremendous property—”

The prince’s eyes flashed,—

“Then thou hast not fifteen talents?”

The terrified Phœnician slipped suddenly from the chair to the floor.

“Who in the city,” cried he, “has not money at thy command, O child of the sun? It is true that I am a wretch whose gold, precious stones, and whole property is not worth one glance of thine, O prince, but if I go around among our merchants and say who sent me, I shall get fifteen talents even from beneath the earth. Erpatr, if thou shouldst stand before a withered fig-tree and say ‘Give money!’ the fig-tree would pay thee a ransom. But do not look at me in that way, O son of Horus, for I feel a pain in the pit of my heart and my mind is growing blunted,” finished the Phœnician, in tones of entreaty.

“Well, sit in the chair, sit in the chair,” said the prince, laughing.

Dagon rose from the floor and disposed himself still more agreeably in the armchair.

“For how long a time does the prince wish fifteen talents?”

“Certainly for a year.”

“Let us say at once three years. Only his holiness might give back fifteen talents in the course of a year, but not the youthful heir, who must receive young pleasant nobles and beautiful women.—Ah, those women!—Is it true, with thy permission, that thou hast taken to thyself Sarah the daughter of Gideon?”

“But what per cent dost thou wish?” interrupted Rameses.

“A trifle, which thy sacred lips need not mention. For fifteen talents the prince will give five talents yearly, and in the course of three years I will take back all myself, so that thou, worthiness, wilt not even know—”

“Thou wilt give me to-day fifteen talents, and during three years take back thirty?”

“Egyptian law permits percentage to equal the loan,” answered Dagon, confusedly.

“But is that not too much?”

“Too much?” cried out Dagon. “Every great lord has a great court, a great property, and pays no per cent save a great one. I should be ashamed to take less from the heir to the throne; if I did the prince himself might command to beat me with sticks and to drive me out of his presence.”

“When wilt thou bring the money?”

“Bring it? O gods, one man would not have strength to bring so much. I will do better: I will make all payments for the prince, so that, worthiness, thou wilt not need to think of such a wretched matter.”

“Then dost thou know my debts?”

“I know them a little,” answered Dagon, carelessly.

“The prince wishes to send six talents to the Eastern army; that will be done by our bankers. Three talents to the worthy Nitager and three to the worthy Patrokles; that will be done here immediately. Sarah and her father I can pay through that mangy Azarias—even better to pay them thus, for they would cheat the prince in reckoning.”

Rameses began to walk through the room impatiently.

“Then am I to give a note for thirty talents?”

“What note? why a note? what good would a note be to me? The prince will rent me for three years lands in the provinces of Takens, Ses, Neha-Chent, Neha-Pechu, in Sebt-Het, in Habu.”

“Rent them?” said the prince. “That does not please me.”

“Whence then am I to get back my money, my thirty talents?”

“Wait! I must ask the inspector of my granaries how much these properties bring me in yearly.”

“Why so much trouble, worthiness? What does the inspector know? He knows nothing; as I am an honest Phœnician, he knows nothing. Each year the harvest is different, and the income different also. I may lose in this business, and the inspector would make no return to me.”

“But seest thou, Dagon, it seems to me that those lands bring far more than ten talents yearly.”

“The prince is unwilling to trust me? Well, at command of the heir I will drop out the land of Ses. The prince is not sure of my heart yet? Well, I will yield Sebt-Het also. But what use for an inspector here? Will he teach the prince wisdom? O Astoreth! I should lose sleep and appetite if such an overseer, subject and slave, dared to correct my gracious lord. Here is needed only a scribe who will write down that my most worthy lord gives me as tenant for three years lands in such and such a province. And sixteen witnesses will be needed to testify that such an honor from the prince has come to me. But why should servants know that their lord borrows money from Dagon?”

The wearied heir shrugged his shoulders.

“To-morrow,” said he, “thou wilt bring the money, and bring a scribe and witnesses. I do not wish to think of it.”

“Oh, what wise words!” cried the Phœnician. “Mayst thou live, worthiest lord, through eternity!”

Chapter IX

ON the right bank of the Nile, on the edge of the northern suburb of Memphis, was that land which the heir to the throne had given as place of residence to Sarah the daughter of Gideon.

That was a possession thirty-five acres in area, forming a quadrangle which was seen from the house-top as something on the palm of the hand. The land was on a hill and was divided into four elevations. The two lowest and widest, which the Nile always flooded, were intended for grain and for vegetables. The third, which at times was untouched by the overflow, produced palms, figs, and other fruit-trees. On the fourth, the highest, was a garden planted with olives, grapes, nuts, and sweet chestnuts; in the middle garden stood the dwelling.

This dwelling was of wood, one story, as usual, with a flat roof on which was a tent made of canvas. On the ground dwelt the prince's black slave; above Sarah with her relative and serving-woman Tafet. The place was surrounded by a wall of partially burnt brick, beyond which at a certain distance were houses for cattle, workmen, and overseers.

Sarah's chambers were not large, but they were elegant. On the floor were divans, at the doors and windows were curtains with stripes of various colors. There were armchairs and a carved bed, inlaid boxes for clothing, three-legged and one-legged tables on which were pots with flowers, a slender pitcher for wine, boxes and bottles of perfume, golden and silver cups and goblets, porcelain vases and dishes, bronze candlesticks. Even the smallest furniture or vessel was ornamented with carving or with a colored drawing; every piece of clothing with lace or bordering.

Sarah had dwelt ten days in this retreat, hiding herself before people from fear and shame, so that almost no one of the servants had seen her. In the curtained chamber she sewed, wove linen on a small loom, or twined garlands of living flowers for Rameses. Sometimes she went out on the terrace, pushed apart the sides of the tent with care, and looked at the Nile covered with boats in which oarsmen were singing songs joyfully. On raising her eyes she looked with fear at the gray pylons of the pharaoh's palace, which towered silent and gloomy above the other bank of the river. Then she ran again to her work and called Tafet.

"Sit here, mother," said she; "what art thou doing down there?"

"The gardener has brought fruit, and they have sent bread, wine, and game from the city; I must take them."

"Sit here and talk, for fear seizes me."

"Thou art a foolish child," said Tafet, smiling. "Fear looked at me too the first day from every corner; but when I went out beyond the wall, there was no more of it. Whom have I to fear here? All fall on their knees before me. Before thee they would stand on their heads even! Go to the garden; it is as beautiful as paradise. Look out at the field, see the wheat harvest; sit down in the carved boat the owner of which is withering from anxiety to see thee and take thee out on the river."

"I am afraid."

“Of what?”

“Do I know? While I am sewing, I think that I am in our valley and that my father will come right away; but when the wind pushes the curtain aside from the window and I look on this great country it seems to me,—knowest what?—that some mighty vulture has caught and borne me to his nest on a mountain, whence I have no power to save myself.”

“Ah, thou—thou! If thou hadst seen what a bathtub the prince sent this morning, a bronze one; and what a tripod for the fire, what pots and spits! And if thou knew that to-day I have put two hens to set, and before long we shall have little chicks here.”

Sarah was more daring after sunset, when no one could see her. She went out on the roof and looked at the river. And when from afar a boat appeared, flaming with torches, which formed fiery and bloody lines along the dark water, she pressed with both hands her poor heart, which quivered like a bird caught that instant. Rameses was coming, and she could not tell what had seized her,—delight because that beautiful youth was approaching whom she had seen in the valley, or dread because she would see again a great lord and ruler who made her timid.

One Sabbath evening her father came for the first time since she had settled in that villa. Sarah rushed to him with weeping; she washed his feet herself, poured perfumes on his head, and covered him with kisses. Gideon was an old man of stern features. He wore a long robe reaching his feet and edged at the bottom with colored embroidery; over this he wore a yellow sleeveless kaftan. A kind of cape covered his breast and shoulders. On his head was a smallish cap, growing narrow toward the top.

“Thou art here! thou art here!” exclaimed Sarah; and she kissed his head again.

“I am astonished myself at being here,” said Gideon, sadly. “I stole to the garden like a criminal; I thought, along the whole way from Memphis, that all the Egyptians were pointing me out with their fingers and that each Jew was spitting.”

“But thou didst give me thyself to the prince, father.”

“I did, for what could I do? Of course it only seems to me that they point and spit. Of Egyptians, whoever knows me bows the lower the higher he is himself. Since thou art here our lord Sesofris has said that he must enlarge my house; Chaires gave me a jar of the best wine, and our most worthy nomarch himself has sent a trusty servant to ask if thou art well, and if I will not become his manager.”

“But the Jews?” inquired Sarah.

“What of the Jews! They know that I did not yield of my own will. Every one of them would wish to be constrained in like manner. Let the Lord God judge us all. Better tell how thou art feeling.”

“In Abraham’s bosom she will not have more comfort,” said Tafet. “Every day they bring us fruit, wine, bread, meat, and whatever the soul wishes. And such baths as we have, all bronze, and such kitchen utensils!”

“Three days ago,” interrupted Sarah, “the Phœnician Dagon was here. I did not wish to see him, but he insisted.”

“He gave me a gold ring,” added Tafet.

“He told me,” continued Sarah, “that he was a tenant of my lord; he gave me two anklets, pearl earrings, and a box of perfumes from the land of Punt.”

“Why did he give them to thee?” asked her father.

“For nothing. He simply begged that I would think well of him, and tell my lord sometimes that Dagon was his most faithful servant.”

“Very soon thou wilt have a whole box of earrings and bracelets,” said Gideon, smiling. But after a moment he added: “Gather up a great property quickly and let us flee back to our own land, for here there is misery at all times, misery when we are in trouble, and still more of it when we are prosperous.”

“And what would my lord say?” asked Sarah, with sadness.

Her father shook his head.

“Before a year passes thy lord will cast thee aside, and others will help him. Wert thou an Egyptian, he would take thee to his palace; but a Jewess—”

“He will cast aside?” said Sarah, sighing.

“Why torment one’s self with days to come, which are in the hand of God? I am here to pass the Sabbath with thee.”

“I have splendid fish, meat, cakes, and wine of the Jews,” put in Tafet, quickly. “I have bought also, in Memphis, a seven-branched candlestick and wax tapers. We shall have a better supper than has Lord Chaires.”

Gideon went out on the flat roof with his daughter.

“Tafet tells me,” said he, when they were alone, “that thou art always in the house. Why is this? Thou shouldst look at least on the garden.”

“I am afraid,” whispered Sarah.

“Why be afraid of thy own garden? Here thou art mistress, a great lady.”

“Once I went out in the daytime. People of some sort stared at me, and said to one another, ‘Look! that is the heir’s Jewess; she delays the overflow.’”

“They are fools!” interrupted Gideon. “Is this the first time that the Nile is late in its overflow? But go out in the evening.”

Sarah shook her head with greater vigor.

“I do not wish, I do not wish. Another time I went out in the evening. All at once two women pushed out from a side path. I was frightened and wished to flee, when one of them, the younger and smaller, seized my hands, saying, ‘Do not flee, we must look at thee;’ the second, the elder and taller, stood some steps in front and looked me in the eyes directly. Ah, father, I thought that I should turn into stone. What a look, what a woman!”

“Who could she be?” asked Gideon.

“The elder woman looked like a priestess.”

“And did she say anything?”

“Nothing. But when going and they were hidden behind trees, I heard surely the voice of the elder say these words: ‘Indeed she is beautiful!’”

Gideon fell to thinking.

“Maybe they were great ladies from the court.”

The sun went down, and on both banks of the Nile dense crowds of people collected waiting impatiently for the signal of the overflow, which in fact was belated. For two days the wind had been blowing from the sea and the river was green; the sun had passed the star Sothis already, but in the well of the priest in Memphis the water had not risen even the breadth of a finger. The people were alarmed, all the more since in Upper Egypt, according to signals, the overflow proceeded with regular increase and even promised to be perfect.

“What detains it at Memphis then?” asked the anxious earth-tillers waiting for the signal in disquiet.

When the stars had appeared in the sky, Tafet spread a white cloth on the table, placed on it the candlestick with seven lighted torches, pushed up three armchairs, and announced that the Sabbath supper would be served immediately.

Gideon covered his head then, and raising both hands above the table, said with his eyes looking heavenward,—

“God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Thou who didst lead our people out of Egypt, who didst give a country to the slave and exile, who didst make with the sons of Judah an eternal covenant, O Jehovah, O Adonai, permit us to enjoy without sin the fruits of the enemies’ country. Bring us out of sorrow and fear in which we are buried, and restore us to the banks of the Jordan, which we left for Thy glory.”

At the moment a voice was heard from beyond the wall,—

“His worthiness Tutmosis, the most faithful servant of his holiness and of his son Prince Rameses!”

“May he live through eternity!” called a number of voices from the garden.

“His worthiness,” said a single voice again, “sends greeting to the most beautiful rose of Lebanon.”

When the voice ceased, the sound of harps and flutes was heard.

“That is music!” exclaimed Tafet, clapping her hands. “We shall pass the Sabbath with music.”

Sarah and her father, frightened at first, began to laugh, and sat down again at the table.

“Let them play,” said Gideon; “their music is not bad for the appetite.”

The flute and harp played, then a tenor voice sang,—

“Thou art more beautiful than all the maidens who look at themselves in the Nile. Thy hair is blacker than the feathers of a raven, thy eyes have a milder glance than the eyes of a deer which is yearning for its fawn. Thy stature is the stature of a palm, and the lotus envies thee thy charm. Thy bosoms are like grape clusters with the juice of which kings delight themselves.”

Again the flute and harp were heard, and next a song,—

“Come and repose in the garden. The servants which belong to thee will bring various vessels and beer of all kinds. Come, let us celebrate this night and the dawn which will follow it. In my shadow, in the shadow of the fig, giving sweet fruit, thy lover will rest at thy right hand; and thou wilt give him to drink and consent to all his wishes—”

Next came the flutes and harps, and after them a new song,—

“I am of a silent disposition, I never tell what I see, I spoil not the sweetness of my fruits with vain tattling.”⁴

⁴ Authentic.

Chapter X

THE song ceased, drowned by an uproar and by a noise as of many people running.

“Unbelievers! Enemies of Egypt!” cried some one. “Ye are singing when we are sunk in suffering, and ye are praising the Jewess who stops the flow of the Nile with her witchcraft.”

“Woe to you!” cried another. “Ye are trampling the land of Prince Rameses. Death will fall on you and your children.”

“We will go, but let the Jewess come out so that we may tell our wrongs to her.”

“Let us flee!” screamed Tafet.

“Whither?” inquired Gideon.

“Never!” said Sarah, on whose mild face appeared a flush of anger. “Do I not belong to the heir, before whose face those people all prostrate themselves?”

And before her father and the old woman had regained their senses, she, all in white, had run out on the roof and called to the throng beyond the wall,—

“Here I am! What do ye want of me?”

The uproar was stilled for a moment, but again threatening voices were raised,—

“Be accursed, thou strange woman whose sin stops the Nile in its overflow!”

A number of stones hurled at random whistled through the air; one of them struck Sarah’s forehead.

“Father!” cried she, seizing her head.

Gideon caught her in his arms and bore her from the terrace. In the night were visible people, in white caps and skirts, who climbed over the wall below.

Tafet screamed in a heaven-piercing voice, the black slave seized an axe, took his place in the doorway, and declared that he would split the head of any man daring to enter.

“Stone that Nubian dog!” cried men from the wall to the crowd of people.

But the people became silent all at once, for from the depth of the garden came a man with shaven head; from this man’s shoulders depended a panther skin.

“A prophet! A holy father!” murmured some in the crowd. Those sitting on the wall began now to spring down from it.

“People of Egypt,” said the priest, calmly, “with what right do ye raise hands on the property of the erpatr?”

“The unclean Jewess dwells here, who stops the rise of the Nile. Woe to us! misery and famine are hanging over Lower Egypt.”

“People of weak mind or of evil faith,” said the priest, “where have ye heard that one woman could stop the will of the gods? Every year in the month Thoth the Nile begins to increase and rises till the month Choeak. Has it ever happened otherwise,

though our land has been full at all times of strangers, sometimes foreign priests and princes, who groaning in captivity and grievous labor might utter the most dreadful curses through sorrow and anger? They would have brought on our heads all kinds of misfortune, and more than one of them would have given their lives if only the sun would not rise over Egypt in the morning, or if the Nile would not rise when the year began. And what came of their prayers? Either they were not heard in the heavens, or foreign gods had no power in presence of the gods of Egypt. How then is a woman who lives pleasantly among us to cause a misfortune which is beyond the power of our mightiest enemies?"

"The holy father speaks truth. Wise are the words of the prophet!" said people among the multitude.

"But Messu (Moses), the Jewish leader, brought darkness and death into Egypt!" said one voice.

"Let the man who said that step forth," cried the priest. "I challenge him, let him come forward, unless he is an enemy of the Egyptian people."

The crowd murmured like a wind from afar blowing between trees, but no man came forward.

"I speak truth," continued the priest; "evil men are moving among you like hyenas in a sheepfold. They have no pity on your misery, they urged you to destroy the house of the heir and to rebel against the pharaoh. If their vile plan had succeeded and blood had begun to flow from your bosoms, they would have hidden before spears as they hide now before my challenge."

"Listen to the prophet! Praise to thee, man of God!" cried the people, inclining their foreheads.

The most pious fell to the earth.

"Hear me, Egyptian people. In return for your faith in the words of a priest, for your obedience to the pharaoh and the heir, for the honor which ye give to a servant of the god, a favor will be shown you. Go to your houses in peace, and even before ye have left this hill the Nile will be rising."

"Oh, may it rise!"

"Go! The greater your faith and piety the more quickly will ye see the sign of favor."

"Let us go! Let us go! Be blessed, O prophet, thou son of prophets!"

They began to separate, kissing the robe of the priest. With that some one shouted,—

"The miracle, the miracle is accomplished."

On the tower in Memphis a light flamed up.

"The Nile is rising! See, more and more lights! Indeed a mighty saint spoke to us. May he live through eternity!"

They turned toward the priest, but he had vanished among shadows.

The throng raging a little while earlier, amazed and filled now with gratitude, forgot both its anger and the wonder-working priest. It was mastered by a wild delight; men rushed to the bank of the river, on which many lights were burning and where a great hymn was rising from the assembled people,—

“Be greeted, O Nile, sacred river, which appearest on this country! Thou comest in peace, to give life to Egypt. O hidden deity who scatterest darkness, who moistenest the fields, to bring food to dumb animals, O thou the precious one, descending from heaven to give drink to the earth, O friend of bread, thou who gladdenest our cottages! Thou art the master of fishes; when thou art in our fields no bird dares touch the harvest. Thou art the creator of grain and the parent of barley; thou givest rest to the hands of millions of the unfortunate and for ages thou securest the sanctuary.”⁵

At this time the illuminated boat of Rameses sailed from the shore opposite amid songs and outcries. Those very persons who half an hour earlier wished to burst into his villa were falling now on their faces before him, or hurling themselves into the water to kiss the oars and the sides of the boat which was bearing the son of their ruler.

Gladsome, surrounded by torches, Rameses, in company with Tutmosis, approached Sarah’s dwelling. At sight of him Gideon said to Tafet,—

“Great is my alarm for my daughter, but still greater my wish to avoid Prince Rameses.”

He sprang over the wall, and amid darkness through gardens and fields he held on in the direction of Memphis.

“Be greeted. O beauteous Sarah!” cried Tutmosis in the courtyard. “I hope that thou wilt receive us well for the music which I sent to thee.”

Sarah appeared, with bandaged head on the threshold, leaning on the black slave and her female attendant.

“What is the meaning of this?” cried the astonished Rameses.

“Terrible things!” called out Tafet. “Unbelievers attacked thy house; one hurled a stone and struck Sarah.”

“What unbelievers?”

“But those—the Egyptians!” explained Tafet.

The prince cast a contemptuous glance at her, but rage mastered him straightway.

“Who struck Sarah? Who threw the stone?” shouted he, seizing the arm of the black man.

“Those from beyond the river,” answered the slave.

“Hei, watchman!” cried the prince, foaming at the mouth, “arm all the men in this place for me and follow that rabble!”

The black slave seized his axe again, the overseers fell to summoning workmen from the buildings, some soldiers of the prince’s suite grasped their sword-hilts mechanically.

“By the mercy of Jehovah, what art thou doing?” whispered Sarah, as she hung on the neck of Rameses.

“I wish to avenge thee,” answered he; “whoso strikes at that which is mine strikes at me.”

⁵ Authentic.

Tutmosis grew pale, and shook his head.

“Hear me, lord,” said he; “wilt thou discover in the night and in a multitude the men who committed the crime?”

“All one to me. The rabble did it, and the rabble must give answer.”

“No judge will say that,” reflected Tutmosis. “But thou art to be the highest judge.”

The prince became thoughtful. Tutmosis continued,—

“Stop! what would the pharaoh our lord say to-morrow? And what delight would reign among our foes in the east and the west, if they heard that the heir to the throne, almost at the royal palace, was attacked in the night by his own people?”

“Oh, if my father would give me even half the army, our enemies on all sides of the world would be silent forever!” said the prince, stamping on the pavement.

“Finally, remember that man who hanged himself; thou wert sorry when an innocent man lost his life. But to-day is it possible that thou art willing thyself to slay innocent people?”

“Enough!” interrupted Rameses, in a deep voice. “My anger is like a water-jar. Woe to him on whom it falls! Let us enter.”

The frightened Tutmosis drew back. The prince took Sarah by the hand and went to the terrace. He seated her near the table on which was the unfinished supper, and approaching the light drew the bandage from her forehead.

“Ah!” cried he, “this is not even a wound, it is only a blue spot.”

He looked at Sarah attentively.

“I never thought,” said he, “that thou wouldst have a blue spot. This changed thy face considerably.”

“Then I please thee no longer?” whispered Sarah, raising on him great eyes full of fear.

“Oh, no! this will pass quickly.”

Then he called Tutmosis and the black, and commanded to tell him what had happened that evening.

“He defended us,” said Sarah. “He stood, with an axe, in the doorway.”

“Didst thou do that?” asked the prince, looking quickly into the eyes of the Nubian.

“Was I to let strange people break into thy house, lord?”

Rameses patted him on the curly head.

“Thou hast acted,” said he, “like a brave man. I give thee freedom. To-morrow thou wilt receive a reward and mayst return to thy own people.”

The black tottered and rubbed his eyes, the whites of which were shining. Suddenly he dropped on his knees, and cried as he struck the floor with his forehead,—

“Do not put me away, lord.”

“Well,” replied Rameses, “remain with me, but as a free warrior. I need just such men,” said he, turning to Tutmosis. “He cannot talk like the overseer of the house of books, but he is ready for battle.”

And again he inquired for details of the attack, when the Nubian told how a priest had approached, and when he related his miracles the prince seized his own head, exclaiming,—

“I am the most hapless man in all Egypt! Very soon I shall find a priest in my bed even. Whence did he come? Who was he?”

The black servitor could not explain this, but he said that the priest’s action toward the prince and toward Sarah was very friendly; that the attack was directed not by Egyptians, but by people who, the priest said, were enemies of Egypt, and whom he challenged to step forward, but they would not.

“Wonders! wonders!” said Rameses, meditating, and throwing himself on a couch. “My black slave is a valiant warrior and a man full of judgment. A priest defends a Jewess, because she is mine. What a strange priest he is! The Egyptian people who kneel down before the pharaoh’s dogs attack the house of the erpatr under direction of unknown enemies of Egypt. I myself must look into this.”

Chapter XI

THE month Thoth has ended and the month Paofi (the second half of July) has begun. The water of the Nile, from being greenish and then white, has become ruddy and is rising continually. The royal indicator in Memphis is filled to the height of two men almost, and the Nile rises two hands daily. The lowest land is inundated; from higher ground people are removing hastily flax, grapes, and cotton of a certain species. Over places which were dry in the early morning, waves splash as evening approaches. A mighty, unseen whirlwind seems to blow in the depth of the Nile. This wind ploughs up broad spaces on the river, tills the furrows with foam, then smooths for a moment the surface, and after a time twists it into deep eddies. Again the hidden wind ploughs, again it smooths out, whirls, pushes forward new hills of water, new rows of foam, and raises the rustling river, wins without ceasing new platforms of land. Sometimes the water, after reaching a certain boundary, leaps across in a twinkle, pours into a low place, and makes a shining pond where a moment earlier withered grass was breaking up into dust heaps.

Though the rise of the river has reached barely one third of its height, the whole region near the banks is under water. Every hour some little height takes on the semblance of an island, divided from others by a narrow channel, which widens gradually and cuts off the house more and more from its neighbors. Very often he who walked out to work comes home in a boat from his labor.

Boats and rafts appear more and more frequently on the river. From some of them men are catching fish in nets; on others they bring the harvest to granaries, or bellowing cattle to their stables. With other boats visits are made to acquaintances to inform them amid shouts and laughter that the river is rising. Sometimes boats gather in one place, like a flock of daws, and then shoot apart on all sides before a broad raft bearing down from Upper Egypt immense blocks of stone hewn out in quarries near the river.

In the air, as far as the ear can hear, extend the roar of the rising water, the cries of frightened birds, and the gladsome songs of people. The Nile is rising, there will be bread in abundance.

During a whole month investigation continued in the affair of the attack on the house of Rameses. Each morning a boat with officials and warriors came to some small estate. People were snatched from their labor, overwhelmed with treacherous questions, beaten with sticks. Toward evening two boats returned to Memphis: one brought officials, the other brought prisoners.

In this way some hundreds of men were caught, of whom one half knew nothing, the other half were threatened by imprisonment or toil for a number of years in the quarries. But nothing was learned of those who led the attack, or of that priest who had persuaded the people to leave the place. Prince Rameses had qualities which were uncommonly contradictory. He was as impetuous as a lion and as stubborn as a bullock, but he had a keen understanding and a deep sense of justice.

Seeing that this investigation by officials gave no result whatever, he sailed on a certain day to Memphis and commanded to open the prison.

The prison was built on an eminence surrounded by a lofty wall, and was composed of a great number of stone, brick, and wooden buildings. These buildings for the main part were merely the dwellings of overseers. Prisoners were placed in subterranean dens hewn out in a cliff of limestone.

When Prince Rameses passed the gate, he saw a crowd of women washing and feeding some prisoner. This naked man, who resembled a skeleton, was sitting on the ground, having his hands and feet in four openings of a square plank which took the place of fetters.

“Has this man suffered long in this way?” asked Rameses.

“Two months,” said the overseer.

“And must he sit here much longer?”

“A month.”

“What did he do?”

“He was insolent to a tax gatherer.”

The prince turned and saw another crowd, composed of women and children. Among them was an old man.

“Are these prisoners?”

“No, most worthy lord. That is a family waiting for the body of a criminal who is to be strangled—oh, they are taking him already to the chamber,” said the overseer.

Then, turning to the crowd, he said,—

“Be patient a short time, dear people. Ye will get the body soon.”

“We thank thee greatly, worthy lord,” answered an old man, doubtless the father of the delinquent. “We left home yesterday evening, our flax is in the field, and the river is rising.”

The prince grew pale, and halted.

“Dost thou know,” asked he of the overseer, “that I have the right of pardon?”

“Erpatr, thou hast that right,” answered the overseer, bowing; and then he added: “The law declares, O child of the sun, that in memory of thy presence men condemned for offences against the state and religion, but who conduct themselves properly, should receive some abatement. A list of such persons will be placed at thy feet within a month.”

“But he who is to be strangled this moment, has he not the right to my grace?”

The overseer opened his arms, and bent forward in silence.

They moved from place to place, and passed a number of courts. In wooden cases on the bare ground were crowded men sentenced to imprisonment. In one building were heard awful screams; they were clubbing prisoners to force confession.

“I wish to see those accused of attacking my house,” said the heir, deeply moved.

“Of those there are more than three hundred,” said the overseer.

“Select according to thy own judgment the most guilty, and question them in my presence. I do not wish, though, to be known to them.”

They opened to Rameses a chamber in which the investigating official was occupied. The prince commanded him to take his usual place, but sat himself behind a pillar.

The accused appeared one by one. All were lean; much hair had grown out on them, and their eyes had the expression of settled bewilderment.

“Dutmoses,” said the official, “tell how ye attacked the house of the most worthy erpatr.”

“I will tell truth, as at the judgment seat of Osiris. It was the evening of that day when the Nile was to begin rising. My wife said to me, ‘Come, father, let us go up on the hills, where we can have an earlier sight of the signal in Memphis.’ Then we went up where we could see the signal in Memphis more easily. Some warrior came to my wife and said, ‘Come with me into that garden. We will find grapes there, and something else also.’ Then my wife went into the garden with that warrior. I fell into great rage, and I looked at them through the wall. But whether stones were thrown at the prince’s house or not I cannot tell, for because of the trees and darkness I could not see anything.”

“But how couldst thou let thy wife go with a warrior?” asked the official.

“With permission, worthiness, what was I to do? I am only an earth-worker, and he is a warrior and soldier of his holiness.”

“But didst thou see the priest who spoke to you?”

“That was not a priest,” said the man, with conviction. “That must have been the god Num himself, for he came out of a fig-tree and he had a ram’s head on him.”

“But didst thou see that he had a ram’s head?”

“With permission I do not remember well whether I saw myself or whether people told me. My eyes were affected by anxiety for my wife.”

“Didst thou throw stones at the garden?”

“Why should I throw stones, lord of life and death? If I had hit my wife, I should have made trouble for a week. If I had hit the warrior, I should have got a blow of a fist in the belly that would have made my tongue stick out, for I am nothing but an earth-worker, and he is a warrior of our lord who lives through eternity.”

The heir leaned out from behind the column. They led away Dutmoses, and brought in Anup. He was a short fellow. On his shoulders were scars from club-strokes.

“Tell me, Anup,” began the official again, “how was it about that attack on the garden of the heir to the throne?”

“Eye of the sun,” said the man, “vessel of wisdom, thou knowest best of all that I did not make the attack, only a neighbor comes to me and says he, ‘Anup, come up, for the Nile is rising.’ And I say to him, ‘Is it rising?’ And he says to me, ‘Thou art duller than an ass, for an ass would hear music on a hill, and thou dost not hear it.’ ‘But,’ says I, ‘I am dull, for I did not learn writing; but with permission music is one thing and the rise of the river is another.’ ‘If there were not a rise,’ says he, ‘people would not have anything to be glad about and play and sing.’ So I say to thy justice, we went to the hill, and they had driven away the music there and were throwing stones at the garden.”

“Who threw stones?”

"I could not tell. The men did not look like earth-workers, but more like unclean dissectors who open dead bodies for embalming."

"And didst thou see the priest?"

"With thy permission, O watchfulness, that was not a priest, but some spirit that guards the house of the erpatr—may he live through eternity!"

"Why a spirit?"

"For at moments I saw him and at moments he went somewhere."

"Perhaps he was behind the people?"

"Indeed the people sometimes were in front of him. But at one time he was higher and at another time lower—"

"Maybe he went up on the hill and came down from it?"

"He must have gone up and come down, but maybe he stretched and shortened himself, for he was a great wonder-worker. Barely had he said, 'The Nile will rise,' and that minute the Nile began to rise."

"And didst thou throw stones, Anup?"

"How should I dare to throw stones into the garden of the erpatr? I am a simple fellow, my hand would wither to the elbow for such sacrilege."

The prince gave command to stop the examination, and when they had led away the accused, he asked the official,—

"Are these of the most guilty?"

"Thou hast said it, lord," answered the official.

"In that case all must be liberated to-day. We should not imprison people because they wished to convince themselves that the holy Nile was rising or for listening to music."

"The highest wisdom is speaking through thy lips, erpatr," said the official. "I was commanded to find the most guilty, hence I have summoned those whom I have found so; but it is not in my power to return them liberty."

"Why?"

"Look, most worthy, on that box. It is full of papyruses on which are written the details of the case. A judge in Memphis receives a report on the progress of the case daily, and reports to his holiness. What would become of the labor of so many learned scribes and great men if the accused were set free?"

"But they are innocent!" cried the prince.

"There was an attack, therefore an offence. Where there is an offence there must be offenders. Whoever has fallen once into the hands of power, and is described in acts, cannot get free without some result. In an inn a man drinks and pays; at a fair he sells something and receives; in a field he sows and harvests; at graves he receives blessings from his deceased ancestors. How, then, could any one after he has come to a court return with nothing, like a traveller stopping half-way on his journey and turning back his steps homeward without attaining his object?"

"Thou speakest wisely," answered the heir. "But tell me, has not his holiness the right to free these people?"

The official crossed his arms on his breast and bent his head,—

“He is equal to the gods, he can do what he wishes; liberate accused, nay, condemned men, and destroy even the documents of a case,—things which if done by a common man would be sacrilege.”

The prince took farewell of the official, and said to the overseer, “Give the accused better food at my expense.” Then he sailed, greatly irritated, to the other bank, stretching forth his hands toward the palace continually, as if begging the pharaoh to destroy the case.

But that day his holiness had many religious ceremonies and a counsel with the ministers, hence the heir could not see him. The prince went immediately to the grand secretary, who next to the minister of war had most significance at the court of the pharaoh. That ancient official, a priest at one of the temples in Memphis, received the prince politely but coldly, and when he had heard him he answered,—

“It is a marvel to me that thou wishest, worthiness, to disturb our lord with such questions. It is as if thou wert to beg him not to destroy locusts which devour what is on the fields.”

“But they are innocent people.”

“We, worthy lord, cannot know that, for law and the courts decide as to guilt and innocence. One thing is clear to me, the state cannot suffer an attack on any one’s garden, and especially cannot suffer that hands should be raised against property of the erpatr.”

“Thou speakest justly, but where are the guilty?” answered Rameses.

“Where there are no guilty there must at least be men who are punished. Not the guilt of a man, but the punishment which follows a crime, teaches others that they are not to commit the crime in question.”

“I see,” interrupted the heir, “that your worthiness will not support my prayer.”

“Wisdom flows from thy lips, erpatr,” answered the priest. “Never shall I give my lord a counsel which would expose the dignity of power to a blow.”

The prince returned home pained and astonished. He felt that an injury had been done to some hundreds of people, and he saw that he could not save them any more than he could rescue a man on whom an obelisk or the column of a temple had fallen.

“My hands are too weak to rear this edifice,” thought the prince, with anguish of spirit.

For the first time he felt that there was a power infinitely greater than his will,—the interest of the state, which even the all-powerful pharaoh acknowledges and before which he the erpatr must bend himself.

Night had fallen. Rameses commanded his servants to admit no one, and walked in loneliness on the terrace of his villa, thinking,—

“A wonderful thing! Down there at Pi-Bailos the invincible regiments of Nitager opened before me, while in Memphis an overseer of prisons, an investigating official, and a scribe bar the way to me. What are they? Mere servants of my father,—may he live through eternity!—who can cast them down to the rank of slaves at any moment and send them to the quarries. But why should not my father pardon the innocent?

The state does not wish him to do so. And what is the state? Does it eat? where does it sleep? where are its hands and its sword, of which all are in terror?"

He looked into the garden, and among the trees on the summit of an eminence he saw two immense silhouettes of pylons, on which sentry lights were burning. The thought came to him that that watch never slept, those pylons never ate, but still they existed. Those pylons had existed for ages, mighty, like Rameses the Great, that potentate who had reared them.

Could he lift those edifices and hundreds of similar grandeur; could he escape those guards and thousands of others who watch over the safety of Egypt; could he disobey laws established by Rameses the Great and other preceding pharaohs still greater, laws which twenty dynasties had consecrated by their reverence?

In the soul of the prince for the first time in life a certain idea, dim but gigantic, began to fix itself in outline,—the idea of the state. The state is something more magnificent than the temple in Thebes, something grander than the pyramid of Cheops, something more ancient than the subterranean temple of the Sphinx, something more enduring than granite—in that immense though invisible edifice people are like ants in some cranny of a cliff, and the pharaoh a mere travelling architect who is barely able to lay one stone in the wall of the edifice and then go on farther. But the walls increase from generation to generation and the edifice continues.

He, the son of the pharaoh, had never felt yet his littleness as in that moment, when his glance in the midst of the night was wandering beyond the Nile among pylons of the pharaoh's palace, and the indefinite but imposing outlines of the Memphis temples.

At that moment from among the trees whose branches touched the terrace, he heard a voice.

"I know thy anxiety and I bless thee. The court will not free the prisoners. But the case will drop, and they may return to their houses if the overseer of thy land does not support the complaint of attack."

"Then did my overseer make the charge?" asked the astonished prince.

"Thou hast spoken truth. He made the charge in thy name. But if he does not go to the court, there will be no injured person; and there is no offence if there is no injured person."

The thicket rustled.

"Stop!" cried Rameses; "who art thou?"

No one gave answer. But it seemed to the prince that in a streak of light from a torch burning on the lower floor a naked head was visible for an instant, and also a panther skin.

"A priest," whispered the heir. "Why does he hide himself?"

But at that moment it occurred to him that the priest might answer grievously for giving counsel which stopped the dispensation of justice.

Chapter XII

RAMESES passed most of the night in feverish imaginings. Once the vision of the state appeared to him as an immense labyrinth with strong walls through which no one could force a way, then again he saw the shadow of a priest who with one wise opinion had indicated to him the method of escape from that labyrinth. And now appeared unexpectedly before him two powers,—the interest of the state, which he had not felt thus far, though he was heir to the throne; and the priesthood, which he wished to debase and then make his servant.

That was a burdensome night. The prince turned on his bed repeatedly, and asked himself whether he had not been blind, and if he had not received sight that day for the first time in order to convince himself of his folly and nothingness. How differently during those night hours did the warnings of his mother appear to him, and the restraint of his father in enouncing the supreme will, and even the stern conduct of the minister, Herhor.

“The state and the priesthood!” repeated the prince, half asleep, and covered with cold perspiration.

The heavenly deities alone know what would have happened had there been time to develop and ripen those thoughts which were circling that night in the soul of Rameses. Perhaps if he had become pharaoh he would have been one of the most fortunate and longest-lived rulers. Perhaps his name, carved in temples above ground and underground, would have come down to posterity surrounded with the highest glory. Perhaps he and his dynasty would not have lost the throne, and Egypt would have avoided great disturbance and the bitterest days of her history.

But the serenity of morning scattered the visions which circled above the heated head of the heir, and the succeeding days changed greatly his ideas of the inflexible interests of Egypt.

The visit of the prince to the prison was not fruitless. The investigating official made a report to the supreme judge immediately, the judge looked over the case again, examined some of the accused himself, and in the course of some days liberated the greater number; the remainder he brought to trial as quickly as possible.

When he who had complained of the damage done the prince’s property did not appear, though summoned in the hall of the court and on the market-place, the case was dropped, and the rest of the accused were set at liberty.

One of the judges remarked, it is true, that according to law the prince’s overseer should be prosecuted for false complaint, and, in case of conviction, suffer the punishment which threatened the defendants. This question too they passed over in silence.

The overseer disappeared from the eyes of justice, he was sent by the heir to the province of Takens, and soon the whole box of documents in the case vanished it was unknown whither.

On hearing this, Prince Rameses went to the grand secretary and asked with a smile,—

“Well, worthy lord, the innocent are liberated, the documents concerning them have been destroyed sacrilegiously, and still the dignity of the government has not been exposed to danger.”

“My prince,” answered the grand secretary, with his usual coolness, “I did not understand that thou offerest complaints with one hand and wishest to withdraw them with the other. Worthiness, thou wert offended by the rabble; hence it was thy affair to punish it. If thou hast forgiven it, the state has nothing to answer.”

“The state!—the state!” repeated the prince. “We are the state,” added he, blinking.

“Yes, the state is the pharaoh and—his most faithful servants,” added the secretary.

This conversation with such a high official sufficed to obliterate in the prince’s soul those ideas of state dignity which were growing and powerful, though indistinct yet.

“The state, then, is not that immovable, ancient edifice to which each pharaoh is bound to add one stone of glory, but rather a sand-heap, which each ruler reshapes as he pleases. In the state there are no narrow doors, known as laws, in passing through which each must bow his head, whoever he be, erpatr or earth-worker. In this edifice are various entrances and exits, narrow for the weak and small, very wide, nay, commodious for the powerful.”

“If this be so,” thought the prince, as the idea flashed on him, “I will make the order which shall please me.”

At that moment Rameses remembered two people,—the liberated black who without waiting for command had been ready to die for him, and that unknown priest.

“If I had more like them, my will would have meaning in Egypt and beyond it,” said he to himself, and he felt an inextinguishable desire to find that priest.

“He is, in all likelihood, the man who restrained the crowd from attacking my house. On the one hand he knows law to perfection, on the other he knows how to manage multitudes.”

“A man beyond price! I must have him.”

From that time Rameses, in a small boat managed by one oarsman, began to visit the cottages in the neighborhood of his villa. Dressed in a tunic and a great wig, in his hand a staff on which a measure was cut out, the prince looked like an engineer studying the Nile and its overflows.

Earth-tillers gave him willingly all explanations concerning changes in the form of land because of inundations, and at the same time they begged that the government might think out some easier way of raising water than by sweeps and buckets. They told too of the attack on the house of Prince Rameses, and said that they knew not who threw the stones. Finally they mentioned the priest who had sent the crowd away so successfully; but who he was they knew not.

“There is,” said one man, “a priest in our neighborhood who cures sore eyes; there is one who heals wounds and sets broken arms and legs. There are some priests who teach reading and writing; there is one who plays on a double flute, and plays even beautifully. But that one who was in the garden of the heir is not among them, and they know nothing of him. Surely he must be the god Num, or some spirit watching over the prince,—may he live through eternity and always have appetite!”

“Maybe it is really some spirit,” thought Rameses.

In Egypt good or evil spirits always came more easily than rain.

The water of the Nile from being ruddy became brownish, and in August, the month of Hator, it reached one half its height. The sluices were opened on the banks of the river, and the water began to fill the canals quickly, and also the gigantic artificial lake, Moeris, in the province Fayum, celebrated for the beauty of its roses. Lower Egypt looked like an arm of the sea thickly dotted with hills on which were houses and gardens. Communication by land ceased altogether, and such a multitude of boats circled around on the water—boats white, yellow, red, dark—that they seemed like leaves in autumn. On the highest points of land people had finished harvesting the peculiar cotton of the country, and for the second time had cut clover and begun to gather in olives and tamarinds.

On a certain day, while sailing along over inundated lands, the prince saw an unusual movement. On one of the temporary mounds was heard among the trees the loud cry of a woman.

“Surely some one is dead,” thought Rameses.

From a second mound were sailing away in small boats supplies of wheat and some cattle, while people standing at buildings on the land threatened and abused people in the boats.

“Some quarrel among neighbors,” said the prince to himself.

In remoter places there was quiet, and people instead of working or singing were sitting on the ground in silence.

“They must have finished work and are resting.”

But from a third mound a boat moved away with a number of crying children, while a woman wading in the water to her waist shook her fist and threatened.

“They are taking children to school,” thought Rameses.

These happenings began to interest him.

On a fourth mound he heard a fresh cry. He shaded his eyes and saw a man lying on the ground; a negro was beating him.

“What is happening there?” asked Rameses of the boatman.

“Does not my lord see that they are beating a wretched earth-tiller?” answered the boatman, smiling. “He must have done something, so pain is travelling through his bones.”

“But who art thou?”

“I?” replied the boatman, proudly. “I am a free fisherman. If I give a certain share of my catch to his holiness, I may sail the Nile from the sea to the cataract. A fisherman is like a fish or a wild goose; but an earth-tiller is like a tree which nourishes lords with its fruit and can never escape but only squeaks when overseers spoil the bark on it.”

“Oho! ho! but look there!” cried the fisherman, pleased again. “Hei! father, don’t drink up all the water, or there will be a bad harvest.”

This humorous exclamation referred to a group of persons who were displaying a very original activity. A number of naked laborers were holding a man by the legs and plunging him head first in the water to his neck, to his breast, and at last to his waist. Near them stood an overseer with a cane; he wore a stained tunic and a wig made of sheepskin.

A little farther on some men held a woman by the arms, while she screamed in a voice which was heaven-piercing.

Beating with a stick was as general in the happy kingdom of the pharaoh as eating and sleeping. They beat children and grown people, earth-tillers, artisans, warriors, officers, and officials. All living persons were caned save only priests and the highest officials—there was no one to cane them. Hence the prince looked calmly enough on an earth-worker beaten with a cane; but to plunge a man into water roused his attention.

“Ho! ho!” laughed the boatman, meanwhile, “but are they giving him drink! He will grow so thick that his wife must lengthen his belt for him.”

The prince commanded to row to the mound. Meanwhile they had taken the man from the river, let him cough out water, and seized him a second time by the legs, in spite of the unearthly screams of his wife, who fell to biting the men who had seized her.

“Stop!” cried Rameses to those who were dragging the earth-tiller.

“Do your duty!” cried he of the sheepskin wig, in nasal tones. “Who art thou, insolent, who dares—”

At that moment the prince gave him a blow on the forehead with his cane, which luckily was light. Still the owner of the stained tunic dropped to the earth, and feeling his wig and head, looked with misty eyes at the attacker.

“I divine,” said he in a natural voice, “that I have the honor to converse with a notable person. May good humor always accompany thee, lord, and bile never spread through thy bones—”

“What art thou doing to this man?” interrupted Rameses.

“Thou inquirest,” returned the man, speaking again in nasal tones, “like a foreigner unacquainted with the customs of the country and the people, to whom he speaks too freely. Know, then, that I am the collector of his worthiness Dagon, the first banker in Memphis. And if thou hast not grown pale yet, know that the worthy Dagon is the agent and the friend of the erpatr,—may he live through eternity!—and that thou hast committed violence on the lands of Prince Rameses; to this my people will testify.”

“Then know this,” interrupted the prince; but he stopped suddenly. “By what right art thou torturing in this way one of the prince’s earth-tillers?”

“Because he will not pay his rent, and the treasury of the heir is in need of it.”

The servants of the official, in view of the catastrophe which had come on their master, dropped their victim and stood as helpless as the members of a body from which its head has been severed. The liberated man began to spit again and shake the water out of his ears, but his wife rushed up to the rescuer.

“Whoever thou art,” groaned she, clasping her hands before Rameses, “a god, or even a messenger of the pharaoh, listen to the tale of our sufferings. We are earth-tillers of the heir to the throne,—may he live through eternity!—and we have paid all our dues: in millet, in wheat, in flowers, and in skins of cattle. But in the last ten days this man here has come and commands us again to give seven measures of wheat to him. ‘By what right?’ asks my husband; ‘the rents are paid, all of them.’ But he throws my husband on the ground, stamps, and says, ‘By this right, that the worthy Dagon has commanded.’ ‘Whence shall I get wheat,’ asks my husband, ‘when we have none and

for a month past we have eaten only seeds, or roots of lotus, which are harder and harder to get, for great lords like to amuse themselves with flowers of the lotus?"

She lost breath and fell to weeping. The prince waited patiently till she calmed herself, but the man who had been plunged into the water grumbled.

"This woman will bring misfortune with her talk. I have said that I do not like to see women meddle."

Meanwhile the official, pushing up to the boatman, asked in an undertone, indicating Rameses,—

"Who is this?"

"Ah, may thy tongue wither!" answered the boatman. "Dost thou not see that he must be a great lord: he pays well and strikes heavily."

"I saw at once," answered the official, "that he must be some great person. My youth passed at feasts with noted persons."

"Aha! the sauces have stuck to thy dress after those feasts," blurted out the boatman.

The woman, after crying, continued,—

"To-day this scribe came with his people, and said to my husband, 'If thou hast not money, give thy two sons. The worthy Dagon will not only forgive thee the rent, but will pay thee a drachma a year for each boy.'"

"Woe to me because of thee!" roared the half-drowned husband; "thou wilt destroy us all with thy babbling. Do not listen to her," continued he, turning to Rameses. "As a cow thinks that she frightens off flies with her tail, so it seems to a woman that she can drive away collectors with her tongue; and neither cow nor woman knows that she is stupid."

"Thou art stupid!" said the woman. "Sunlike lord with the form of a pharaoh—"

"I call to witness that this woman blasphemes," said the official to his people in a low voice.

"Odorous flower, whose voice is like a flute, listen to me!" implored the woman of Rameses. "Then my husband answered this official, 'I would rather lose two bulls, if I had them, than give my boys away, though thou wert to give me four drachmas; for when a boy leaves home for service no one ever sees him after that.'"

"Would that I were choked! would that fish were eating my body in the bottom of the Nile!" groaned the earth-tiller. "Thou wilt destroy all our house with thy complaints, woman."

The official, seeing that he had the support of the side mainly interested, stepped forth and began, in nasal tones, a second time,—

"Since the sun rises beyond the palace of the pharaoh and sets over the pyramids, various wonders have happened in this country. In the days of the Pharaoh Sememphes marvellous things appeared near the pyramid of Kochom, and a plague fell on Egypt. In the time of Boetus the ground opened near Bubastis and swallowed many people. In the reign of Neferches the waters of the Nile for eleven days were as sweet as honey. Men saw these and many other things of which I know, for I am full of wisdom. But never has it been seen that some unknown man came up out of the water and stopped the collection of rent in the lands of the heir to the throne of Egypt."

“Be silent,” shouted Rameses, “and be off out of this place! No one will take thy children,” said he to the woman.

“It is easy for me to go away,” said the collector, “for I have a swift boat and five rowers. But, worthiness, give me some sign for my lord Dagon.”

“Take off thy wig and show him the sign on thy forehead,” said Rameses. “And tell Dagon that I will put marks of the same kind all over his body.”

“Listen to that blasphemy!” whispered the collector to his men, drawing back toward the bank with low bows.

He sat down in the boat, and when his assistants had moved off and pushed away some tens of yards, he stretched out his hand and shouted,—

“May gripe seize thy intestines, blasphemer, rebel! From here I will go straight to Prince Rameses and tell him what is happening on his lands.”

Then he took his cane and belabored his men because they had not taken part with him.

“So it will be with thee!” cried he to Rameses.

The prince sprang into his boat and in a rage commanded the boatman to pursue the insolent servant of the usurer. But he of the sheepskin wig threw down the cane, took an oar himself, and his men helped him so well that pursuit became impossible.

“Sooner could an owl overtake a lark than we overtake them, my beautiful lord,” cried the prince’s boatman, laughing. “But who art thou? Thou art not a surveyor, but an officer, maybe even an officer of the guard of his holiness. Thou dost strike right always on the forehead! I know about this; I was five years in the army. I always struck on the forehead or the belly, and I had not the worst time in the world. But if any one struck me, I understood right away that he must be a great person. In our Egypt—may the gods never leave the land!—it is terribly crowded; town is near town, house is near house, man is near man. Whoso wishes to turn in this throng must strike in the forehead.”

“Art thou married?” asked the prince.

“Pfu! when I have a woman and place for a person and a half, I am married; but for the rest of the time I am single. I have been in the army, and I know that a woman is good, though not at all times. She is in the way often.”

“Perhaps thou wouldst come to me for service? Who knows, wouldst thou be sorry to work for me?”

“With permission, worthiness, I noticed that thou couldst lead a regiment in spite of thy young face. But I enter the service of no man. I am a free fisherman; my grandfather was, with permission, a shepherd in Lower Egypt, our family comes of the Hyksos people. It is true that dull Egyptian earth-tillers revile us, but I laugh at them. The earth-tillers and the Hyksos, I say, worthiness, are like an ox and a bull. The earth-tiller may go behind the plough or before it, but the Hyksos will not serve any man, unless in the army of his holiness,—that is warrior life.”

The boatman was in the vein and talked continually, but the prince heard no longer. In his soul very painful questions grew louder and louder, for they were new altogether. Were those mounds, then, around which he had been sailing, on his property? A marvellous thing, he knew not at all where his lands were nor what they looked like. So in his name Dagon had imposed new rents on the people, and the

active movement on which he had been looking while moving along the shores was the extortion of rents. It was clear that the man whom they had been beating on the shore had nothing to pay with. The children who were crying bitterly in the boat were sold at a drachma per head for a twelvemonth, and that woman who was wading in the water to her waist and weeping was their mother.

“Women are very unquiet,” said the prince to himself. “Sarah is the quietest woman; but others love to talk much, to cry and raise an uproar.”

He remembered the man who was pacifying his wife’s excitement. They had been plunging him into the water and he was not angry; they did nothing to her, and still she made an uproar.

“Women are very unquiet!” repeated he. “Yes, even my mother, who is worthy of honor. What a difference between her and my father! His holiness does not wish to know at all that I left the army for a girl, but the queen likes to occupy herself even with this, that I took into my house a Jewess. Sarah is the quietest of women whom I know; but Tafet cries and makes an uproar for four persons.”

Then the prince recalled the words of the man’s wife,—that for a month they had not eaten wheat, only seeds and roots of lotus. Lotus and poppy seeds are similar; the roots are poor. He could not eat them for three days in succession. Moreover, the priests who were occupied in medicine advised change of diet. While in school they told him that a man ought to eat flesh with fish, dates with wheat bread, figs with barley. But for a whole month to live on lotus seeds! Well, cows and horses? Cows and horses like hay, but barley straw must be shoved into their throats by force. Surely then earth-workers prefer lotus seeds as food, while wheat or barley cakes, fish and flesh they do not relish. For that matter, the most pious priests, wonder-workers, never touch flesh or fish. Evidently magnates and king’s sons need flesh, just as lions and eagles do; but earth-tillers grass, like an ox.

“Only that plunging into the water to pay rent. Ei! but didn’t he once in bathing with his comrades put them under water, and even dive himself? What laughing they had in those days! Diving was fun. And as to beating with a cane, how many times had they beaten him in school? It is painful, but evidently not for every creature. A beaten dog howls and bites; a beaten ox does not even look around. So beating may pain a great lord, but a common man cries only so as to cry when the chance comes. Not all cry; soldiers and officers sing while belabored.”

But these wise reflections could not drown the small but annoying disquiet in the heart of Rameses. So his tenant Dagon had imposed an unjust rent which the tenants could not pay!

At this moment the prince was not concerned about the tenants, but his mother. His mother must know of this Phœnician management. What would she say about it to her son? How she would look at him! How sneeringly she would laugh! And she would not be a woman if she did not speak to him as follows: “I told thee, Rameses, that Phœnicians would desolate thy property.”

“If those traitorous priests,” thought the prince, “would give me twenty talents to-day, I would drive out that Dagon in the morning, my tenants would not be plunged under water, would not suffer blows, and my mother would not jeer at me. A tenth, a hundredth part of that wealth which is lying in the temples and feeding the greedy eyes of those bare heads would make me independent for years of Phœnicians.”

Just then an idea which was strange enough flashed up in the soul of Rameses,—that between priests and earth-tillers there existed a certain opposition.

“Through Herhor,” thought he, “that man hanged himself on the edge of the desert. To maintain priests and temples about two million Egyptian men toil grievously. If the property of the priests belonged to the pharaoh’s treasury, I should not have to borrow fifteen talents and my people would not be oppressed so terribly. There is the source of misfortunes for Egypt and of weakness for its pharaohs!”

The prince felt that a wrong was done the people; therefore he experienced no small solace in discovering that priests were the authors of this evil. It did not occur to him that his judgment might be unjust and faulty. Besides, he did not judge, he was only indignant. The anger of a man never turns against himself,—just as a hungry panther never eats its own body; it twirls its tail and moves its ears while looking for a victim.

Chapter XIII

THE expedition of the heir to the throne, undertaken with the object of discovering the priest who had saved Sarah and had given him legal advice, had a result that was unexpected.

The priest was not discovered, but among Egyptian earth-tillers legends began to circulate which concerned Rameses.

Some mysterious man sailed about from village to village and told the people that the heir to the throne freed the men who were in danger of condemnation to the quarries for attacking his dwelling. Besides, he had beaten down an official who was extorting unjust rent from tenants. Finally, the unknown person added that Prince Rameses was under the special guardianship of Amon, who was his father.

Simple people listened to these tidings eagerly, first, because they agreed with facts, second, because the man who told the story was himself like a spirit—it was not known whence he came nor whither he had vanished.

Prince Rameses made no mention whatever of his tenants to Dagon; he did not even summon him. He felt ashamed in presence of the Phœnician from whom he had taken money and might require money yet more than one time.

But a few days after the adventure with Dagon's scribe the banker came himself to the heir, holding in his hand some covered object.

On entering the prince's chamber he bent down, untied a white kerchief, and drew forth from it a very beautiful gold goblet; the goblet was set with stones of various colors, and covered with carving in relief which on the lower part represented the gathering and pressing out of grapes and on the cup part a feast.

"Accept this goblet, worthy lord, from thy slave," said the banker, "and use it for a hundred, a thousand years, to the end of ages."

The prince understood what the Phœnician wanted; so, without touching the golden gift, he said with a stern expression,—

"Dost thou see, Dagon, that purple reflection inside the goblet?"

"I do, indeed," replied the banker; "why should I not see that which shows the goblet to be the purest gold?"

"But I declare that to be the blood of children seized away from their parents," said the heir, angrily.

And he turned and went to an interior chamber.

"O Astoreth!" groaned the Phœnician.

His lips grew blue, and his hands trembled so that he was hardly able to wrap up the goblet.

A couple of days later Dagon sailed down with his goblet to Sarah's house. He was arrayed in robes interwoven with gold; in his thick beard were glass globulets from which issued perfumes, and he had fastened two plumes to his head.

“Beautiful Sarah,” began he, “may Jehovah pour on thy family as many blessings as there are waters in the Nile at present! We Phœnicians and ye Jews are brethren and neighbors. I am inflamed with such ardor of love for thee that didst thou not belong to our most worthy lord I would give Gideon ten talents for thee, and would take thee for my lawful wife. So enamored am I.”

“May God preserve me,” answered Sarah, “from wanting another lord beyond the one who is mine at this moment. But whence, worthy Dagon, did the desire come to thee to-day of visiting our lord’s servant?”

“I will tell thee the truth, as if thou wert Tamara, my wife, who, a real daughter of Sidon, though she brought me a large dowry, is old now and not worthy to take off thy sandals.”

“In the honey flowing from thy lips there is much wormwood,” put in Sarah.

“Let the honey,” replied Dagon, sitting down, “be for thee and let the wormwood poison my heart. Our lord Prince Rameses—may he live through eternity!—has the mouth of a lion and the keenness of a vulture. He has seen fit to rent his estate to me. This has filled my stomach with delight; but he does not trust me, so I lay awake whole nights from anxiety, I only sigh and cover my bed with tears, in which bed would that thou wert resting with me, O Sarah, instead of my wife Tamara, who cannot rouse desire in me any longer.”

“That is not what thou wishest to say,” interrupted the blushing Sarah.

“I know not what I wish to say, since I have looked on thee, and since our lord, examining my activity on his estates, struck with a cane and took health from my scribe who was collecting dues there from tenants. And these dues were not for me. Sarah, but for our lord. It is not I who will eat the figs and wheaten bread from those lands, but thou and our lord. I have given money to our lord and jewels to thee. Why then should the low Egyptian rabble impoverish our lord and thee, Sarah? To show how greatly thou rousest my desire and that from these estates I wish nothing but reserve all for thee and our lord, I give this goblet of pure gold set with jewels and covered with carving at which the gods themselves would be astonished.”

Then Dagon drew forth from the cloth the goblet refused by Prince Rameses.

“I do not even wish that thou shouldst have the goblet in the house and give the prince to drink from it. Give this goblet of pure gold to Gideon, whom I love as my own brother. And thou, Sarah, tell thy father these words: ‘Thy twin brother Dagon, the unfortunate tenant on the lands of Prince Rameses, is ruined. Drink then, my father, from this goblet, think of thy twin brother, and beg Jehovah that our lord, Prince Rameses, may not beat his scribes, and bring to revolt tenants who even now have no wish to pay tribute.’ And know this, Sarah, that if thou wouldst admit me to confidence I would give thee two talents, and thy father one talent, and, besides, I should be ashamed of giving thee so little, for thou deservest that the pharaoh himself should fondle thee, and the heir of the throne, and the worthy minister Herhor, and the most valiant Nitager, and the richest bankers of the Phœnicians. There is such a taste in thee that I grow faint when I gaze at thee, and when I see thee not, I close my eyes and lick my lips. Thou art sweeter than figs, more fragrant than roses. I would give thee five talents. Take this goblet, Sarah.”

Sarah drew back with drooping eyes.

"I will not take the goblet," answered she; "my lord forbade me to take gifts from any one."

Dagon was astonished, and looked with widely opened eyes at her.

"Then it must be that thou knowest not, Sarah, the value of this goblet. But I give it to thy father, who is my brother."

"I cannot take it," whispered Sarah.

"Oh!" cried Dagon. "Then thou, Sarah, wilt pay me for this goblet in another way, without speaking to thy lord. But a woman as beautiful as thou must have gold and jewels, and should have her own banker to bring her money when she pleases, not alone when her lord likes."

"I cannot!" whispered Sarah, without concealing her repulsion for the banker.

The Phœnician changed his tone in the twinkling of an eye, and said laughing,—

"Very good, Sarah! I only wished to convince myself that thou art faithful to our lord. I see that thou art faithful, though foolish, as people say."

"What?" burst out Sarah, rushing at Dagon with clinched fist.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the Phœnician. "What a pity that our lord could not hear and see thee this moment! But I will tell him, when he is in good humor, that thou art not only as faithful as a dog to him, but even that thou wouldst not accept a gold goblet because he has not permitted thee to take presents. And this goblet, believe me, Sarah, has tempted more than one woman, and women who were not of small importance."

Dagon sat awhile admiring the virtue and obedience of Sarah; at last he took farewell of her with much feeling, sat down in his tented boat, and sailed away toward Memphis. When the boat had pushed off from the country house, the smile vanished from the banker's face, and an expression of anger came out thereon. When Sarah's house was hidden behind the trees, Dagon stood up and raised his hands.

"O Baal of Sidon, O Astoreth!" said he, "avenge my insult on this cursed daughter of a Jew. Let her treacherous beauty perish as a drop of rain in the desert! May disease devour her body, and madness bind her soul! May her lord hunt her out of his house like a mangy swine! And as to-day she pushed my goblet aside, may the hour come when people will push her withered hand aside, when in thirst she begs them for a cup of dirty water."

Then he spat and muttered words with hidden and dreadful meaning; a black cloud covered the sun for a while, and the water near the side of the boat began to grow muddy and rise in a mighty wave. When he finished, the sun had grown bright again; but the river was disturbed, as if a new inundation were moving it.

Dagon's rowers were frightened, and ceased their singing; but separated from their master by the side of the boat, they could not see his ceremonies.

Thenceforth the Phœnician did not appear before Prince Rameses. But on a certain day when the prince came to his residence, he found in his bedchamber a beautiful Phœnician dancer, sixteen years of age, whose entire dress was a golden circlet on her head, and a shawl, as delicate as spider webs, thrown across her shoulders.

"Who art thou?" asked the prince.

"I am a priestess, and thy servant; the lord Dagon has sent me to frighten away thy anger against him."

"How wilt thou do that?"

"Oh, in this way—sit down there," said she, seating him in an armchair. "I will stand on tiptoe, so as to grow taller than thy anger, and with this shawl, which is sacred, I will drive evil spirits from thee. A kish! a kish!" whispered she, dancing in a circle.

"Rameses, let my hands remove gloom from thy hair, let my kisses bring back to thy eyes their bright glances. Let the beating of my heart fill thy ears with music, lord of Egypt.—A kish! a kish! he is not yours, but mine.—Love demands such silence that in its presence even anger must grow still."

While dancing, she played with the prince's hair, put her arms around his neck, kissed him on the eyes. At last she sat down wearied at his feet, and, resting her head on his knees, turned her face toward him quickly, panting with parted lips.

"Thou art no longer angry with thy servant Dagon?" whispered she, stroking his face.

Rameses wished to kiss her on the lips, but she sprang away from his knees, crying,—

"Oh, that is not possible!"

"Why so?"

"I am a virgin and priestess of the great goddess Astoreth. Thou wouldst have to love my guardian goddess greatly, and honor her before thou couldst kiss me."

"But is it permitted thee?"

"All things are permitted me, for I am a priestess, and have sworn to preserve my virginity."

"Why hast thou come hither, then?"

"To drive out thy anger. I have done so, I depart. Be well and kind always," added she, with a piercing glance.

"Where dost thou dwell? What is thy name?" asked Rameses.

"My name is Fondling, and I dwell— Ei, why should I tell? Thou wilt not come soon to me."

She waved her hand and vanished. The prince, as if stunned, did not move from his chair. When after a while he looked through the window, he saw a rich litter which four Nubians bore toward the Nile swiftly.

Rameses was not sorry for the departing woman; she astonished, but did not attract him.

"Sarah is calmer," thought he, "and more beautiful. Moreover, it seems to me that that Phoenician must be cold, and her fondlings are studied."

But from that time the prince ceased to be angry at Dagon, all the more since on a day when he was at Sarah's earth-tillers came to him, and thanking him for protection declared that the Phoenician forced them to pay new rents no longer.

That was the case close to Memphis, but on other lands the prince's tenants made good Dagon's losses.

Chapter XIV

IN the month of Choeak (from the middle of September to the middle of October), the waters of the Nile were highest, and began to fall slightly. In the gardens people gathered tamarinds, dates, olives; and trees blossomed a second time.

At this juncture his holiness Rameses XII. left his sun-bright palace in Memphis, and with a grand suite on some tens of stately barges sailed to Thebes, to thank the gods there for the bounteous inundation, and also to place offerings on the tombs of his eternally living ancestors.

The most worthy ruler took farewell of his heir very graciously; but the direction of state affairs during his absence he left with Herhor.

Rameses felt this proof of want of confidence so greatly that for three days he took no food and did not leave his villa; he only wept. Later he ceased to shave, and transferred himself to Sarah's house, so as not to meet Herhor or annoy his own mother, whom he considered the cause of his failures.

On the following day Tutmosis visited him in this retreat, bringing two boats filled with musicians and dancers, and a third containing baskets of food and flowers, with pitchers of wine. But the prince commanded the musicians and dancers to depart, and taking Tutmosis to the garden, he said,—

“Of course my mother—may she live through eternity!—sent thee to separate me from the Jewess? Tell her worthiness that were Herhor to become not merely viceroy, but the son of my father, I should do that which pleases me. I know how to do it. To-day they wish to deprive me of Sarah, and to-morrow they would take my power from me; I will show them that I shall not renounce anything.”

The prince was irritated. Tutmosis shrugged his shoulders, and remarked finally,—

“As a whirlwind sweeps a bird into a desert, so does anger cast a man on the shores of injustice. How canst thou wonder if the priests are displeased because the heir to the throne has connected his life with a woman of another country and a strange religion? Sarah does not please them, especially since thou hast her alone. Hadst thou a number of various women, like all noble youths, they would not mind the Jewess. But have they done her harm? No. On the contrary, even some priest defended her against a raging crowd which it pleased thee to liberate from imprisonment.”

“But my mother?”

Tutmosis laughed.

“Thy worthy mother loves thee as her own eyes and heart. Of course Sarah does not please her, either, but dost thou know what her worthiness said once to me? This,—that I should entice Sarah from thee. What a jest on her part! To this I answered with a second jest: ‘Rameses has given me a brace of hunting dogs and two Syrian horses because he has grown tired of them; perhaps some day he will give me his mistress too, of course I shall have to take her with other things.’”

“Do not think of it. I would not give Sarah to any man, were it only for this, because of her my father has not appointed me viceroy.”

Tutmosis shook his head.

“Thou art greatly mistaken,” answered he, “so much mistaken that I am terrified. Dost thou not really understand the causes of the disfavor? Every enlightened Egyptian knows them.”

“I know nothing.”

“So much the worse,” said the anxious Tutmosis. “Thou dost not know, then, that warriors, since the manœuvres, especially Greek warriors, drink thy health in every dramshop.”

“They got money to do so.”

“True; but not to cry out, with all the voice that is in them, that when thou shalt succeed to his holiness—may he live through eternity!—thou wilt begin a great war, after which there will be changes in Egypt.”

“What changes? And who is the man who during the life of the pharaoh may dare to speak of the plans of his successor?”

Now the prince grew gloomy.

“That is one thing, but I will tell thee another,” said Tutmosis, “for misfortunes, like hyenas, never come singly. Dost thou know that the lowest people sing songs about thee,—sing how thou didst free the attackers from prison, and what is worse, they repeat again, that, when thou shalt succeed his holiness, rents will be abolished. It must be added that when common people speak of injustice and rents, disturbances follow; and either a foreign enemy attacks our weakened state, or Egypt is divided into as many parts as there are nomarchs. Finally, judge for thyself, is it proper that any man’s name should be mentioned oftener than the pharaoh’s, and that any man should stand between the people and our lord? If thou permit, I will tell how priests look on this matter.”

“Of course, speak.”

“Well, a very wise priest who from the summit of the temple of Amon examines celestial movements, has thought out this statement: ‘The pharaoh is the sun, the heir to the throne the moon. When the moon follows the god of light from afar, we have brightness in the daytime and clearness at night. When the moon wishes to be too near the sun, it disappears itself and the nights are dark. But if the moon stands before the sun there is an eclipse, and in the world great terror—’”

“And all this babble,” interrupted Rameses, “goes to the ears of his holiness. Misfortune on my head! Would that I had never been the son of a pharaoh!”

“The pharaoh, as a god upon earth, knows everything; but he is too mighty to care for the drunken shouts of soldiers or the whispers of earth-tillers. He understands that every Egyptian would die for him, and thou first of all.”

“Thou hast spoken truth!” answered the anxious prince. “But in all this I see new vileness and deceit of the priests,” added he, rousing himself. “It is I, then, who hide the majesty of our lord, because I free the innocent from prison, or do not let my tenant torture earth-workers with unjust tribute. But when his worthiness Herhor manages the army, appoints leaders, negotiates with foreign princes, and directs my father to spend his time in prayers—”

Tutmosis covered his ears, and, stamping, cried,—

“Be silent! be silent! every word of thine is blasphemy. His holiness alone directs the state, and whatever is done on earth proceeds from his will. Herhor is a servant of the pharaoh and does what his lord enjoins on him. If thou wilt convince thyself—oh, that my words be not ill understood—”

The prince grew so gloomy that Tutmosis broke off the conversation and took farewell of his friend at the earliest. When he sat down in his boat, which was furnished with a baldachin and curtains, he drew a deep breath and draining a large goblet of wine, thought,—

“Brr! I thank the gods for not giving me such a character as that which Rameses has. He is a most unhappy man in the happiest conditions. He might have the most beautiful women in Memphis, but he sticks to one to annoy his mother. Meanwhile it is not his mother that he annoys, but all the virtuous virgins and faithful wives who are withering from sadness that the heir to the throne, and moreover a youth of great comeliness, does not snatch from them virtue or force them to unfaithfulness. He might not only drink but even swim in the best wine; meanwhile he prefers the wretched camp beer, and bread rubbed with garlic. Whence came these low inclinations? I cannot imagine. Or was it that the worthy Nikotris in her critical period looked at workmen while they were eating?

“He might do nothing from daylight till darkness. If he wished, the most famous lords, with their wives, sisters, and daughters, would serve food to him. He not only stretches forth his own hands to take food, but, to the torment of our noble youths, he washes himself, dresses himself, and his barber spends whole days in snaring birds and thus wastes his abilities.

“O Rameses, Rameses!” sighed the exquisite. “Is it possible that fashion should be developed in the time of such a prince? We wear the same aprons from one year to another, and we retain wigs, only thanks to court dignitaries, for Rameses will not wear any wig. This is a great offence to the whole order of nobles. And all brought about by cursed politics, brr! Oh, how happy I am that I need not divine what they are thinking of in Tyre or Nineveh; break my head over wages for the army; calculate how many people have been added to Egypt or taken from it, and what rents must be collected. It is a terrible thing to say to one’s self, ‘My tenant does not pay what I need and expend, but what the increase of the Nile permits.’”

Thus meditated the exquisite Tutmosis, while he strengthened his anxious soul with golden wine. Before the boat had sailed up to Memphis, heavy sleep had mastered him in such wise that his slaves had to carry their lord to the litter.

After the departure of Tutmosis, which resembled a flight, the heir fell to thinking deeply; he even felt fear.

Rameses was a sceptic. As a pupil of the priests, and a member of the highest aristocracy, he knew that when certain priests had fasted many months and mortified their senses they summoned spirits, while others spoke of spirits as a fancy, a deception. He had seen, too, that Apis, the sacred bull before which all Egypt fell prostrate, received at times heavy blows of a cane from inferior priests, who gave the beast food and brought cows to him.

He understood, finally, that his father, Rameses XII., who for the common crowd was a god who lived through eternity, and the all-commanding lord of this world, was

really just such a person as others, only a little more weakly than ordinary old men, and very much limited in power by the priestly order.

The prince saw all this, and jeered in his soul and even in public at many things. But all his infidelity fell before the actual truth,—that no one was permitted to trifle with the titles of the pharaoh.

Rameses knew the history of his country, and he remembered that in Egypt many things were forgiven the mighty. A great lord might ruin a canal, kill a man in secret, revile the gods privately, take presents from ambassadors of foreign states, but two sins were not forgiven,—the betrayal of priestly secrets, and treason to the pharaoh. A man who committed one or the other disappeared, sometimes after a year, from among his friends and servants. But where he had been put or what had been done with him, no one even dared to mention.

Rameses felt that he was on an incline of this sort from the time that the army and the people began to mention his name and speak of certain plans of his,—changes in the state, future wars. Thinking of this, the prince felt as if a nameless crowd of rebels and unfortunates were pushing him violently to the point of the highest obelisk, from which he must tumble down and be crushed into jelly.

Later on, when, after the longest life of his father possible, he became pharaoh, he would have the right and the means to accomplish many deeds of which no one in Egypt could even think without terror. But to-day he must in truth have a care, lest they declare him a traitor and a rebel against the fundamental laws of Egypt. In that state there was one visible ruler,—the pharaoh. He governed, he desired, he thought for all, and woe to the man who dared to doubt audibly the all-might of the sovereign, or mention plans of his own, or even changes in general.

Plans were made in one place alone,—in that hall where the pharaoh listened to advice from his aiding council, and expressed to it his own opinions. No changes could come save from that place. There burned the only visible lamp of political wisdom, the light of which illuminated Egypt. But touching that light, it was safer to be silent.

All these considerations flew through the prince's head with the swiftness of a whirlwind while he was sitting on the stone bench under the chestnut-tree in Sarah's garden, and looking at the landscape there around him.

The water of the Nile had fallen a little, and had begun to grow as transparent as a crystal. But the whole country looked yet like an arm of the sea thickly dotted with islands on which rose buildings, gardens, and orchards, while here and there groups of great trees served as ornament.

Around all these islands were well-sweeps, with buckets by which bronze-hued naked men with dirty breech clouts raised water from the Nile and poured it into higher reservoirs. One such place was in the prince's mind especially. That was a steep eminence on the side of which three men were working at three well-sweeps. One poured water from the river into the lowest well; another drew from the lowest and raised water two yards higher to a middle place; the third raised water from the middle to the highest place. There some people, also naked, drew water in buckets, and irrigated beds of vegetables, or watered trees from sprinkling-pots.

The movement of the sweeps going down and rising, the turn of the buckets, the gushing of the pots was so rhythmic that the men who caused it might be thought automatons. No one of them spoke to his neighbor, no man changed place or looked

about him; he merely bent and rose in one single method from daylight until evening, from one month to another, and doubtless he had worked thus from childhood and would so work till death took him.

“And creatures such as these,” thought the prince, as he looked at their toil, “desire me to realize their imaginings. What change in the state can they wish? Is it that he who draws from the lowest well should go to the highest, or instead of pouring from a bucket should sprinkle trees with a watering-pot?”

Anger rose to his head, and humiliation crushed him because he, the heir to the throne, thanks to the fables of creatures like those who nodded all their lives over wells of dirty water, was not now the vice-pharaoh.

At that moment he heard a low rustle among the trees, and delicate hands rested on his shoulder.

“Well, Sarah?” asked the prince, without turning his head.

“Thou art sad, my lord. Moses was not so delighted at sight of the promised land as I was at those words of thine: ‘I am coming to live with thee.’ But thou art a day and a night here, and I have not seen thy smile yet. Thou dost not even speak to me, but movest about in gloom, and at night thou dost not fondle me, but only sighest.”

“I have trouble.”

“Tell me what it is. Grief is like a treasure given to be guarded. As long as we guard it ourselves even sleep flees away, and we find relief only when we put some one else to watch for us.”

Rameses embraced Sarah, and seated her on the bench at his side.

“When an earth-tiller,” said he, smiling, “is unable to bring in all his crops from the field before the overflow, his wife helps him. She helps him to milk cows too, she takes out food to the field for him, she washes the man on his return from labor. Hence the belief has come that woman can lighten man’s troubles.”

“Dost thou not believe this, lord?”

“The cares of a prince,” answered Rameses, “cannot be lightened by a woman, even by one as wise and powerful as my mother.”

“In God’s name, what are thy troubles? Tell me,” insisted Sarah, drawing up to the shoulder of Prince Rameses. “According to our traditions, Adam left Paradise for Eve; and he was surely the greatest king in the most beautiful kingdom.”

The prince became thoughtful.

“Our sages also teach,” said he, “that man has often abandoned dignities for woman, but it has not been heard that any man ever achieved something great through a woman; unless he was a leader to whom a pharaoh gave his daughter, with a great dowry and high office. But a woman cannot help a man to reach a higher place or even help him out of troubles.”

“This may be because she does not love as I do,” whispered Sarah.

“Thy love for me is wonderful, I know that. Never hast thou asked for gifts, or favored those who do not hesitate to seek success even under the beds of princes’ favorites. Thou art milder than a lamb, and as calm as a night on the Nile. Thy kisses are like perfume from the land of Punt, and thy embrace as sweet as the sleep of a wearied laborer. I have no measure for thy beauty, or words for thy attractions. Thou art a

marvel among women; women's lips are rich in trouble and their love is very costly. But with all thy perfection how canst thou ease my troubles? Canst thou cause his holiness to order a great expedition to the East and name me to command it? Canst thou give me the army corps in Memphis, for which I asked, or wilt thou, in the pharaoh's name, make me governor of Lower Egypt? Or canst thou bring all subjects of his holiness to think and feel as I, his most devoted subject?"

Sarah dropped her hands on her knees, and whispered sadly, "True, I cannot do those things—I can do nothing."

"Thou canst do much. Thou canst cheer me," replied Rameses, smiling. "I know that thou hast learned to dance and sing. Take off those long robes, therefore, which become priestesses guarding fire, and array thyself in transparent muslin, as Phœnician dancers do. And so dance and fondle me as they."

Sarah seized his hands and cried with flaming eyes,—

"Hast thou to do with outcasts such as these? Tell me—let me know my wretchedness; send me then to my father, send me to our valley in the desert. Oh, that I had never seen thee in it!"

"Well, well, calm thyself," said the prince, toying with her hair. "I must of course see dancers, if not at feasts, at royal festivals, or during services in temples. But all of them together do not concern me as much as thou alone; moreover, who among them could equal thee? Thy body is like a statue of Isis, cut out of ivory, and each of those dancers has some defect. Some are too thick; others have thin legs or ugly hands; still others have false hair. Who of them is like thee? If thou wert an Egyptian, all our temples would strive to possess thee as the leader of their chorus. What do I say? Wert thou to appear now in Memphis in transparent robes, the priests would be glad if thou wouldst take part in processions."

"It is not permitted us daughters of Judah to wear immodest garments."

"Nor to dance or sing? Why didst thou learn, then?"

"Our women dance, and our virgins sing by themselves for the glory of the Lord, but not for the purpose of sowing fiery seeds of desire in men's hearts. But we sing. Wait, my lord, I will sing to thee."

She rose from the bench and went toward the house. Soon she returned followed by a young girl with black, frightened eyes, who was bearing a harp.

"Who is this maiden?" asked the prince. "But wait I have seen that look somewhere. Ah! when I was here the last time a frightened girl looked from the bushes at me."

"This is Esther, my relative and servant," answered Sarah. "She has lived with me a month now, but she fears thee, lord, so she runs away always. Perhaps she looked at thee sometime from out the bushes."

"Thou mayst go, my child," said the prince to the maiden, who seemed petrified, and when she had hidden behind the bushes, he asked,—

"Is she a Jewess too? And this guard of thy house, who looks at me as a sheep at a crocodile?"

"That is Samuel the son of Esdras; he also is a relative. I took him in place of the black man to whom thou hast given freedom. But hast thou not permitted me to choose my servants?"

“That is true. And so also the overseer of the workmen is a Jew, for he has a yellow complexion and looks with a lowliness which no Egyptian could imitate.”

“That,” answered Sarah, “is Ezechiel, the son of Reuben, a relative of my father. Does he not please thee, my lord? These are all thy very faithful servants.”

“Does he please me,” said the prince, dissatisfied, drumming with his fingers on the bench. “He is not here to please me, but to guard thy property. For that matter, these people do not concern me. Sing, Sarah.”

Sarah knelt on the grass at the prince’s feet, and playing a few notes as accompaniment, began,—

“Where is he who has no care? Who is he who in lying down to slumber has the right to say: This is a day that I have spent without sorrow? Where is the man who lying down for the grave, can say: My life has passed without pain, without fear, like a calm evening on the Jordan.

“But how many are there who moisten their bread with tears daily, and whose houses are filled with sighing.

“A wail is man’s earliest speech on this earth, and a groan his farewell to it. Full of suffering does he come into life, full of sorrow does he go to his resting-place, and no one asks him where he would like to be.

“Where is that offspring of man who has not tasted the bitterness of being? Is it the child which death has snatched from its mother, or is it the babe whose mother’s breast was drained by hunger ere the little one could place lips to it?

“Where is the man who is sure of his fate, the man who can look with unfailing eye at the morrow? Does he who toils on the field know that rain is not under his power, and that not he shows its way to the locust swarm? Does the merchant who gives his wealth to the winds, which come he knows not whence, and his life to the waves on that abyss which swallows all, and returns nothing?

“Where is the man without dread in his spirit? Is it the hunter who chases the nimble deer and on the road meets a lion which mocks at his arrows? Is it the warrior who goes forth to gain glory with toiling, and meets a forest of sharp lances and bronze swords which are thirsting for his life blood? Is it the great king who under his purple puts on heavy armor, who spies out with sleepless eye the treachery of overpowering neighbors, and seizes with his ear the rustle of the curtain lest treason overturn him in his own tent?

“For this reason men’s hearts in all places and at all times are overflowing with sadness. In the desert the lion and the scorpion are his danger, in the cave lurks the dragon, among flowers the poisonous serpent. In the sunshine a greedy neighbor is thinking how to decrease his land, in the night the active thief is breaking through the door to his granary. In childhood he is incompetent, in old age stripped of strength. When full of power, he is surrounded by perils, as a whale is surrounded by abysses of water.

“Therefore, O Lord, my Creator, to Thee the tortured human soul turns itself. Thou hast brought it into a world full of ambushes, Thou hast grafted into it the terror of extinction. Thou hast barred before it all roads of peace, save the one road which leads to Thee. And as a child which cannot walk grasps its mother’s skirt lest it fall, so wretched man stretches forth his hands toward Thy tenderness, and struggles out of uncertainty.”

Sarah was silent; the prince fell into meditation, and then said,—

“Ye Jews are a gloomy nation. If men in Egypt believed as thy song teaches, no one would laugh on the banks of the Nile. The wealthy would hide in underground temples through terror, and the people, instead of working, would flee to caves, look out and wait for mercy which would never come to them.

“Our world is different: in it a man may have everything, but he himself must do everything. Our gods help no idleness. They come to the earth only when a hero dares a deed which is superhuman and when he exhausts every power present. Such was the case with Rameses the Great when he rushed among two thousand five hundred hostile chariots, each of which carried three warriors. Only then did Amon the eternal father reach his hand down and end the battle with victory. But if instead of fighting he had waited for the aid of your God, long ago would the Egyptians have been moving along the Nile, each of them bearing a brick and a bucket, while the vile Hittites would be masters going around with clubs and papyrus.

“Therefore, Sarah, thy charms will scatter my sorrows sooner than thy song. If I had acted as your Jewish song teaches, and waited for divine assistance, wine would have flowed away from my lips, and women would have fled from my household.

“Above all, I could not be the pharaoh’s heir any more than my brothers, one of whom does not leave his room without leaning on two slaves, while the other climbs along tree trunks.”

Chapter XV

THE next day Rameses sent his black men with commands to Memphis, and about midday came a great boat toward Sarah's house from the direction of the city. The boat was filled with Greek soldiers in lofty helmets and gleaming breastplates.

At command sixteen men armed with shields and short darts landed and stood in two ranks. They were ready to march to the house, when a second messenger from the prince detained them. He commanded the soldiers to remain at the shore, and summoned only their leader, Patrokles.

They halted and stood without movement, like two rows of columns covered with glittering armor. After the messenger went Patrokles in a helmet with plumes, wearing a purple tunic over which he had gilded armor ornamented on the breast with the picture of a woman's head bristling with serpents instead of hair.

The prince received the famous general at the garden gate. He did not smile as usual, did not even answer the low bow of Patrokles, but said coldly,—

“Worthiness, tell the Greek warriors that I will not review them until their lord, his holiness, appoints me leader a second time. They have lost that honor by uttering in dramshops shouts worthy of drunkards. These shouts offend me. I call attention also to this, worthiness, that the Greek regiments do not show sufficient discipline. In public places the soldiers of this corps discuss politics and a certain possible war. This looks like treason to the state. Only the pharaoh and members of his supreme council may speak of such matters. But we, soldiers and servants of our lord, whatever position we occupy, may only execute the commands of our most gracious ruler, and be silent at all times. I beg thee to communicate these considerations to my regiments, and I wish all success to thee, worthiness.”

“It will be as commanded, worthiness,” answered the Greek.

He turned on his heel, and standing erect moved with a rattle toward the boat. He knew about these discussions of the soldiers in the dramshops, and understood straightway that something disagreeable had happened to the heir, whom the troops worshipped. Therefore, when he had reached the handful of armed men on the bank, he assumed a very angry mien, and, waving his hands with rage, cried,—

“Valiant Greek soldiers! mangy dogs, may the leprosy consume you! If, from this time on, any Greek mentions the name of the heir to the throne in a dramshop, I will break a pitcher on his head, cram the pieces down his throat, and then drive him out of the regiment! One and another of you will herd swine for Egyptian earth-workers, and hens will lay eggs in your helmets. Such is the fate waiting for stupid soldiers who know not how to keep their tongues quiet. And now—to the left! to the rear! turn! and march to the boat, may the plague strike you! A soldier of his holiness should drink first of all to the health of the pharaoh and the prosperity of the worthy minister of war, Herhor,—may they live through eternity!”

“May they live through eternity!” repeated the soldiers.

All took their places in the boat, looking gloomy. But when near Memphis Patrokles smoothed out his wrinkled forehead and commanded them to sing the song of that

priest's daughter who so loved soldiers that she put a doll in her bed and passed the whole night in the booth of the sentries. Keeping time to this song, they always marched best, and moved the oars with most nimbleness.

In the evening another boat approached Sarah's dwelling, out of which came the chief steward of the prince's property.

Rameses received this official at the garden gate also. Perhaps he did this through sternness, or perhaps not to constrain the man to enter the house of his mistress and a Jewess.

"I wished," said the heir, "to see thee and to say that among my people certain improper conversations circulate concerning decrease of rent, or something of that kind. I wish those people to know that I will not decrease rents. But should any man in spite of warnings persist in his folly and talk about rents, he will receive blows of canes."

"Perhaps it would be better if he paid a line,—an uten or a drachma, whatever is commanded, worthiness," said the chief steward.

"Yes; but the worst offender might be beaten."

"I make bold to offer a remark, worthiness," said the steward in a low tone, inclining continually, "that the earth-workers, roused by some unknown person, really did talk for a time about decrease of rent. But some days ago they ceased on a sudden."

"In that case we might withhold the blows of canes," said Rameses.

"Unless as preventive means," put in the steward.

"Would it not be too bad to spoil the canes?"

"We shall never lack articles of that sort."

"But with moderation in every case. I do not wish it to go to his holiness that I torture men without need. For rebellious conversation we must beat and take fines in money, but when there is no cause for punishment we may be magnanimous."

"I understand," answered the steward, looking into the eyes of Rameses.

"Let them cry out as much as they like if they do not whisper blasphemy."

These talks with Patrokles and the steward were reported throughout Egypt.

After the steward's departure, the prince yawned and looking around with a tired glance, he said to himself,—

"I have done all I could, but now, if I can, I will do nothing."

At that moment, from the direction of the outhouses, low groans and the sound of frequent blows reached the prince. Rameses turned his head, and saw that the overseer of the workmen, Ezechiel, son of Reuben, was beating some subordinate with a cane, pacifying him meanwhile,—

"Be quiet! be silent, low beast!"

The beaten workman, lying on the ground, closed his mouth with his hand so as not to cry.

At first the prince rushed like a panther toward the outhouses. Suddenly he halted.

"What am I to do?" whispered he. "This is Sarah's place, and the Jew is her relative."

He bit his lips, and disappeared among the trees, the more readily since the flogging was finished.

“Is this the management of the humble Jews?” thought Rameses. “Is this the way? That man looks at me as a frightened dog might, but he beats the workmen. Are the Hebrews all like him?”

And for the first time the thought was roused in the prince’s soul, that under the guise of kindness Sarah, too, might conceal falsehood.

Certain changes had indeed taken place in Sarah; above all, moral changes.

From the moment when she met Rameses in the valley of the desert he had pleased her, but that feeling grew silent immediately beneath the influence of the stunning news that the shapely youth was a son of the pharaoh and heir to the throne of Egypt. When Tutmosis bargained with Gideon to take her to the prince’s house, Sarah fell into a state of bewilderment.

She would not renounce Rameses for any treasure, nor at the cost of life, but one could not say that she loved him at that time. Love demands freedom and time to give forth its most beautiful blossoms; neither freedom nor time had been left to her. She made the acquaintance of the prince on a certain day; the following day they took her away almost without consulting her wishes, and bore her to that villa opposite Memphis. In a couple of days she became the prince’s favorite, astonished, frightened, not understanding what had taken place with her.

Moreover, before she could make herself used to the new impressions, the Jewess was disturbed by ill-will from surrounding people; then the visit of unknown ladies; finally, that attack on the villa.

Then, because Rameses took her part and wished to rush on the rioters, she was still more terrified. She lost presence of mind at the thought that she was in the hands of a man of such power and so violent, who, if it suited him, had the right to shed blood, to slay people.

Sarah fell into despair for the moment: it seemed to her that she would go mad. She heard the terrible commands of the prince who summoned the servants to arms. But at that very moment a slight thing took place, one little word was heard which sobered Sarah, and gave a new turn to her feelings.

The prince, thinking that she was wounded, drew the bandage from her head; but when he saw the bruise, he cried,—

“That is only a blue spot! How that blue spot changes the face!”

At these words Sarah forgot pain and fear. New alarm seized her: so she had changed to such a degree that it astonished the prince, but he was only astonished.

The blue spot disappeared in a couple of days, but feelings unknown up to that time remained in Sarah’s soul and increased there. She began to be jealous of the prince, and to fear that he would reject her.

And still another anxiety tortured the Jewess. She felt herself a servant, a slave in respect to Rameses. She was and wished to be his faithful servant, his devoted slave, as inseparable as his shadow, but at the same time she desired that he, at least when he fondled her, should not treat her as though he were lord and master.

She was his indeed, but he was hers also. Why does he not show, then, that he belonged to her, even in some degree? But with every word and motion he makes her

understand that a certain gulf is between them. What kind of gulf? Has she not held him in her embraces? Has he not kissed her lips and bosom?

A certain day the prince came to her with a dog. He stayed only a couple of hours; but during that entire interval the dog lay at his feet in Sarah's place, and when she wished to sit there the dog growled. And the prince laughed and thrust his fingers into the hair of that unclean creature, as he had into her hair. And the dog looked into the prince's eyes just as she had,—with this difference, perhaps, that he looked with more confidence.

She could not pacify herself, and she hated the clever beast which was taking a part of the tenderness due to her, paying no attention whatever to her, and bearing itself with an intimacy towards its lord that she did not dare to claim. She would have been unable to have such an indifferent mien, or to look in another direction if the prince's hand had rested on her head.

Not long before this incident the prince mentioned dancers a second time. Then Sarah burst out angrily,—

“How did he permit himself to be familiar with those naked, shameless women? And Jehovah looking down from high heaven did not hurl His thunders at those monstrous creatures!”

It is true that Rameses told her that she was dearer than all else to him, but these words did not pacify Sarah; they only produced this effect,—that she determined not to think of aught beyond her love.

What would come on the morrow? Never mind. And when at the feet of the prince she sang that hymn about those sufferings which pursue mankind from the cradle to the grave, she described in it the state of her own soul, and her last hope, which was Jehovah.

That day Rameses was with her; hence she had enough, she had all the happiness which life could give. But just there began for Sarah the greatest bitterness.

The prince lived under one roof with her, he walked with her in the garden, and sometimes went out on the Nile in a boat with her. But he was not more accessible by the width of one hair than when he was on the other side of the river, within the limits of the pharaoh's palace.

He was with her, but his mind was in some other place, Sarah could not even divine where. He embraced her, or toyed with her hair, but he looked toward the city, at those immense many-colored pylons of the pharaoh's palace, or at some unknown object.

At times he did not even answer her questions, or he looked at her suddenly as if roused from sleep, or as if he wondered that he saw her there beside him.

Chapter XVI

THUS seemed those moments of approach between Sarah and her princely lover, which were rare enough withal. For after he had given those commands to Patrokles and the steward, Rameses spent the greater part of the day away from the villa, generally in a boat or sailing on the Nile. He caught with a net fish which swam in thousands in the blessed river, or he went into swamps, and hidden among lofty lotus stems brought down with arrows wild birds, which circling in noisy flocks were as numerous as flies are. But even at those times ambitious thoughts did not desert him; so he turned the hunting into a kind of predicting or soothsaying. More than once, when he saw a flock of yellow geese upon the water, he drew his bow and said, "If I hit I shall be like Rameses the Great."

The arrow made a low whistle, and the stricken bird, fluttering its wings, gave out cries so painful that there was a movement in the whole swampy region. Clouds of geese, ducks, and storks rose in the air, and making a great circle above their dying comrade, dropped down to other places.

When there was silence again, the prince pushed his boat farther, with caution guiding himself by the movement of reeds or the broken calls of birds, and when in the green growth he saw a spot of clear water and a new flock, he drew his bow again, and said,—

"If I hit I shall be pharaoh; if I miss—"

This time the arrow struck the water, and bounding a number of times along its surface, disappeared among lotuses. The excited prince sent more and more arrows, killing birds or only frightening flocks of them. From the villa they knew where he was by the noisy cloud of birds which rose from time to time and circled above the boat in which he was sailing.

When toward evening he returned to the villa wearied, Sarah waited on the threshold with a bronze basin, a pitcher of light wine, and a garland of roses. The prince smiled at her, stroked her face, but looking into her eyes, which were full of tenderness, he thought,—

"Would she beat Egyptian people, like her relatives who look frightened all the time? Oh, my mother is right not to trust Jews, though Sarah may be different from others."

Once, returning unexpectedly, he saw in the space before the villa a crowd of naked children playing joyously. All were yellow, and at sight of him they vanished with cries like wild geese from a swampy meadow. Before he reached the terrace they were gone, not a trace was left.

"Who are those little things," asked he, "who rushed away from me?"

"Those are children of my servants," replied Sarah.

"Of Jews?"

"Of my brothers."

"Gods, what a numerous people!" laughed Rameses. "And who is that again?" added he, pointing to a man who looked timidly from beyond the wall.

"That is Aod, son of Barak, my relative. He wants to serve thee, lord. May I take him?"

The prince shrugged his shoulders.

"This is thy place," answered he; "take those who please thee. But if these people increase so, they will soon master Memphis."

"Thou canst not endure my brethren," whispered Sarah, as she dropped to his feet frightened.

The prince looked at her with astonishment.

"I do not even think of them," answered he, proudly.

These little happenings, which fell on Sarah's soul like drops of fire, did not change Rameses with regard to her. He was kind and as fond as he had been, though his eyes turned more frequently to the other bank of the river, and rested on the mighty pylons of his father's palace.

Soon he discovered that others were yearning because he was in a banishment of his own choosing. A certain day from the opposite shore a stately royal barge pushed out into the river; it crossed the Nile from Memphis, and then circled near the prince's villa, so near that Rameses could recognize the persons in it. In fact he recognized beneath the purple baldachin his mother among court ladies, and opposite, on a low stool, the vice-pharaoh, Herhor. They did not look toward the villa, it is true, but the prince divined that they saw him.

"Ha! ha!" thought he. "My worthy mother and his worthiness the minister would be glad to entice me hence before his holiness returns to Memphis."

The month Tobi (the end of October and beginning of November) came. The Nile had fallen a distance equalling the stature of a man, and one-half in addition, uncovering daily new strips of black clammy earth. Wherever the water withdrew a narrow plough appeared drawn by two oxen. Behind the plough went a naked ploughman, at the side of the oxen a driver with a short club, and behind him a sower, who, wading to his ankles in earth, carried wheat in an apron, and scattered it almost in handfuls.

The most beautiful season of the year was beginning in Egypt,—the winter. Heat did not go beyond 70° Fahrenheit; the earth was covered quickly with emerald green, from out which sprang narcissus and violets. The odor of them came forth oftener and oftener amid the odor of earth and water.

A number of times the barge bearing the worthy lady Nikotris and the vice-pharaoh Herhor appeared near Sarah's dwelling. Each time the prince saw his mother conversing with the minister joyously, and convinced himself that they refrained ostentatiously from looking toward him, as if to show indifference.

"Wait!" whispered he, in anger, "I will show you that life does not annoy me, either."

So when one day, shortly before sunset, the queen's gilded barge appeared with a purple tent having ostrich plumes on each of its four corners, Rameses gave command to prepare a boat for two persons, and told Sarah that he would sail with her.

“O Jehovah!” cried she, clasping her hands. “But thy mother is there, and the viceroy!”

“But in this boat will be the heir to the throne. Take thy harp, Sarah.”

“And the harp, too?” cried Sarah. “But if her worthiness were to speak to thee! I should throw myself into the river.”

“Be not a child,” replied Rameses, laughing. “My mother and his worthiness love songs immensely. Thou mayest even win their favor if thou sing some splendid song of the Hebrews. Let there be love in it.”

“I know no song of that kind,” answered Sarah, in whom the prince’s words had roused hope of some sort. Her song might please those powerful rulers, and then what?

On the royal barge they saw that the heir to the throne was sitting in a simple boat and rowing.

“Dost thou see, worthiness,” whispered the queen to the minister, “that he is rowing toward us with his Jewess?”

“The heir has borne himself with such correctness toward his warriors and his people, and has shown so much compunction in withdrawing from the limits of the palace, that his mother may forgive small errors,” answered Herhor.

“Oh, if he were not sitting in that boat, I would give command to break it!” said the worthy lady.

“For what reason?” asked the minister. “The prince would be no descendant of high priests and pharaohs if he did not break through restraints which the law, alas, puts on him, or perhaps our mistaken customs. He has given proof in every case that in serious junctures he is able to command himself. He is even able to recognise his errors,—a rare power and priceless in an heir to the throne of Egypt. The very fact that the prince wishes to rouse our curiosity with his favorite shows that the position in which he finds himself pains him; besides, his reasons are among the noblest.”

“But the Jewess!” whispered the lady, crushing her feather fan between her fingers.

“At present I am quite at rest regarding her,” continued Herhor. “She is shapely, but dull; she never thinks of using influence on the prince, nor could she do so. Shut up in a cage which is not over-costly, she takes no gifts, and will not even see any one. In time, perhaps, she might learn to make use of her position even to the extent of decreasing the heir’s treasury by some talents. Before that day comes, however, Rameses will be tired of her.”

“May the all-knowing Amon speak through thy mouth,” said the lady.

“The prince, I am sure of this, has not grown wild over a favorite, as happens often to young lords in Egypt. One keen, intriguing woman may strip a man of property and health, nay, bring him to the hall of judgment. The prince is amused with her as a grown-up man might be amused with a slave girl. And Sarah is pregnant.”

“Is that true?” cried the queen. “How dost thou know?”

“It is not known to his worthiness the heir, or even to Sarah,” said Herhor, smiling.

“We must know everything. This secret, however, was not difficult to get at. With Sarah is her relative Tafet, an incomparable gossip.”

“Have they summoned a physician already?”

“Sarah knows nothing of this, I repeat, but the worthy Tafet, from fear lest the prince might grow indifferent to her foster child, would be glad to twist the neck of this secret. But we do not let her. That will be the prince’s child also.”

“But if it is a son? Thou knowest that he may make trouble,” put in the lady.

“All is foreseen,” replied Herhor. “If the child is a daughter, we will give her a dowry and the education proper for young ladies of high station. If a son, he will become a Jew—”

“Oh, my grandson, a Jew!”

“Do not take thy heart too soon from him. Our envoys declare that the people of Israel are beginning to desire a king. Before the child matures their desires will ripen, and then—we may give them a ruler, and of good blood indeed.”

“Thou art like an eagle which takes in East and West at a glance,” said the queen, eying the minister with amazement. “I feel that my repulsion for this maiden begins to grow weaker.”

“The least drop of the pharaoh’s blood should raise itself above nations, like a star above the earth,” added Herhor.

At that moment the heir’s boat moved at a few tens of paces from the royal barge, and the queen, shielded by her fan, looked at Sarah through its feathers.

“In truth the girl is shapely,” whispered Queen Nikotris.

“Thou art saying those words for the second time, worthy lady.”

“So thou hast noted that?” laughed her worthiness.

Herhor dropped his eyes.

In the boat was heard a harp, and Sarah began a hymn, with trembling voice,—

“How great is Jehovah, O Israel! how great is Jehovah, thy God.”

“A most beautiful voice,” whispered the queen.

The high priest listened with attention.

“His days have no beginning,” sang Sarah, “and His dwelling has no limit. The eternal heavens change beneath His eye, like a garment which a man puts on his body and then casts away from him. The stars flash up, and are quenched, like sparks from fuel, and the earth is like a brick which a traveller touches once with his foot while going ever farther.

“How great is thy Lord, O Israel! There is no being who can say to Him, ‘Do this!’ there is no womb which could have given birth to Him. He created the bottomless deeps above which He moves when He wishes. He brings light out of darkness, and from the dust of the earth He creates living things which have voices.

“For Him savage lions are as locusts, the immense elephant He looks on as nothing, before Him the whale is as weak as an infant.

“His tricolored bow divides the heavens into two parts and rests on the ends of the earth plain. Where are the gates which could equal Him in loftiness? Nations are in terror at the thunder of His chariot, and there is naught beneath the sun which could stand His flashing arrows.

“His breath is the north wind at midnight, which freshens trees when withering, His anger is like the chamsin which burns what it touches.

“When He stretches His hands above the waters, they are petrified. He pours the sea into new places, as a woman pours out leaven. He rends the earth as if it were old linen, and clothes in silvery snow the naked tops of mountains.

“In a grain of wheat He hides one hundred other grains, and causes birds to incubate. From the drowsy chrysalis He leads to life a golden butterfly, and makes men’s bodies wait in tombs until the day of resurrection.”

The rowers, absorbed in the song, raised their oars, and the purple barge dropped slowly down with the sweep of the river. All at once Herhor rose, and commanded,—

“Turn now toward Memphis!”

The oars fell; the barge turned where it stood, and raised the water with noise. After it followed Sarah’s hymn decreasing gradually,—

“He sees the movement of hearts, the silent hidden ways on which pass the innermost thoughts in men’s breasts. But no man can gaze into His heart and spy out His purposes.

“Before the gleam of His garments mighty spirits hide their faces. Before His glance the gods of great cities and nations turn aside and shrink like withering leaves.

“He is power, He is life, He is wisdom. He is thy Lord, thy God, O Israel!”

“Why command, worthiness, to turn away our barge?” asked the worthy Nikotris.

“Lady, dost thou know that hymn?” asked Herhor, in a language understood by priests alone. “That stupid girl is singing in the middle of the Nile a prayer permitted only in the most secret recesses of our temples.”

“Is that blasphemy then?”

“There is no priest in the barge except me,” replied the minister. “I have not heard the hymn, and if I had I should forget it. Still I am afraid that the gods will lay hands on that girl yet.”

“But whence does she know that awful prayer, for Rameses could not have taught it to her?”

“The prince is not to blame. But forget not, lady, that the Jews have taken from our Egypt many such treasures. That is why, among all nations on earth, we consider them alone as sacrilegious.”

The queen seized the hand of the high priest.

“But my son—will no evil strike him?” whispered she, looking into his eyes.

“I say, worthiness, that no evil will happen to any one. I heard not the hymn, and I know nothing. The prince must be separated from that Jewess.”

“But separated mildly; is that not the way?” asked the mother.

“In the mildest way possible and the simplest, but separation is imperative. It seemed to me,” continued the high priest, as if to himself, “that I foresaw everything. Everything save an action for blasphemy, which threatens the heir while he is with that strange woman.”

Herhor thought awhile, and added,—

“Yes, worthy lady! It is possible to laugh at many of our prejudices; still the son of a pharaoh should not be connected with a Jewess.”

Chapter XVII

SINCE the evening when Sarah sang in the boat, the royal barge had not appeared on the Nile, and Prince Rameses was annoyed in real earnest.

The month Mechir (December) was approaching. The waters decreased, the land extended more widely each day, the grass became higher and thicker, and in the grass flashed up flowers of the most varied hues and of incomparable odor. Like islands in a green sea appeared, in the course of a single day, flowery places, as it were white, azure, yellow, rosy, or many-colored carpets from which rose an intoxicating odor. Still the prince was wearied, and even feared something. From the day of his father's departure he had not been in the palace, and no one from the palace had come to him, save Tutmosis, who since the last conversation had vanished like a snake in the grass. Whether they respected the prince's seclusion, or desired to annoy him, or simply feared to pay him a visit because he had been touched by disfavor, Rameses had no means of knowing.

"My father may exclude me from the throne, as he has my elder brothers," thought the heir sometimes; and sweat came out on his forehead, while his feet became cold.

"What would he do in that case?"

Moreover Sarah was ill, thin, pale, her great eyes sank; at times she complained of faintness which attacked her in the morning.

"Surely some one has bewitched the poor thing," groaned the cunning Tafet, whom the prince could not endure for her chattering and very bad management.

A couple of times, for instance, the heir noticed that in the evening Tafet sent off to Memphis immense baskets with food, linen, even vessels. Next day she complained in heaven-piercing accents that flour, wine, and even vessels were lacking. Since the heir had come to the villa ten times more of various products had been used there than formerly.

"I am certain," thought Rameses, "that that chattering termagant robs me for her Jews, who vanish in the daytime but are prowling around in the night, like rats in the nastiest corners!"

The prince's only amusement in these days was to look at the date harvest. A naked man took his place at the foot of a high palm without side branches, surrounded the trunk and himself with a circular rope which resembled the hoop of a barrel. Then he raised himself on the tree by his heels, his whole body bent backward, but the hoop-like rope held him by squeezing his body to the tree. Next he shoved the flexible hoop up the trunk some inches, raised himself by his heels again, then shoved the rope up. In this way he climbed, exposed meanwhile to the peril of breaking his neck, till he reached the top, where grew a crown of great leaves and dates.

The prince was not alone when he saw these gymnastics; Jewish children also were spectators. At first there was no trace of them. Then among bushes and from beyond the wall curly heads and black gleaming eyes appeared. Afterward, when they saw that the prince did not drive them away, these children came out each from a hiding-place and approached the tree gradually. The most daring among the girls picked up

a beautiful date which she brought to Rameses. One of the boys ate the smallest date, and then the children began to eat and to give the prince fruit. At first they brought him the best, then inferior dates, finally some that were spoilt altogether.

The future ruler of the world fell to thinking, and said to himself,—

“They crawl in at all points, and will treat me always in this way: they will give the good as a bait, and what is spoiled out of gratitude.”

He rose and walked away gloomily; but the children of Israel rushed, like a flock of birds, at the labor of the Egyptian, who high above their heads was singing unmindful of his bones and of this, that he was harvesting not for his own use.

Sarah’s undiscovered disease, her frequent tears, her vanishing charms, and above all the Jews, who, ceasing to hide, managed the place with increasing tumult, disgusted Rameses to the utmost degree with that beautiful corner. He sailed no more in a boat, he neither hunted nor watched the date harvest, but wandered gloomily through the garden, or looked from his roof at the palace. He would never go back to that palace unless summoned, and now he thought of a trip to his lands near the sea, in Lower Egypt.

In such a state of mind was he found by Tutmosis, who on a certain day came in a ceremonial barge to the heir with a summons from the pharaoh.

“His holiness is returning from Thebes, and wishes the heir to go forth and meet him.”

The prince trembled, he grew pale and crimson, when he read the gracious letter of his lord and ruler. He was so moved that he did not notice his adjutant’s new immense wig, which gave out fifteen different perfumes, he did not see his tunic and mantle, more delicate than mist, nor his sandals with gold rings as ornaments.

After some time Rameses recovered, and inquired without looking at Tutmosis,—

“Why hast thou not been here for such a period? Did the disfavor into which I have fallen alarm thee?”

“Gods!” cried the exquisite. “When wert thou in disfavor, and in whose? Every courier of his holiness inquired for thy health; the worthy lady, Nikotris, and his worthiness Herhor have sailed toward this villa repeatedly, thinking that thou wouldst make a hundred steps toward them after they had made a couple of thousand toward thee. I say nothing of the troops. In time of review the warriors of thy regiments are as silent as palm-trees, and do not go from the barracks. As to the worthy Patrokles, he drinks and curses all day from vexation.”

So the prince had not been in disfavor, or if he had been the disfavor was ended. This thought acted on Rameses like a goblet of good wine. He took a bath quickly, anointed his body, put on fresh linen, a new kaftan, a helmet with plumes, and then went to Sarah.

Sarah screamed when she saw the prince arrayed thus. She rose up, and seizing him around the neck, whispered,—

“Thou art going, my lord! Thou wilt not come back to me.”

“Why not?” wondered the heir. “Have I not gone away often and returned afterward?”

“I remember thee dressed in just this way—over there in our valley,” said Sarah. “Oh, where are those hours! So quickly have they passed, and so long is it since they vanished.”

“But I will return and bring the most famous physician.”

“What for?” inquired Tafet. “She is well, my dear chick—she needs only rest. But Egyptian physicians would bring real sickness.”

The prince did not look at the talkative woman.

“This was my pleasantest month with thee,” said Sarah, nestling up to Rameses, “but it has not brought happiness.”

The trumpets sounded on the royal barge, repeating a signal given higher up on the river.

Sarah started.

“Dost thou hear, lord, that terrible outburst? Thou hearest and smilest, and, woe to me, thou art tearing away from my embraces. When trumpets call nothing can hold thee, least of all thy slave, Sarah.”

“Wouldst thou have me listen forever to the cackling of hens in the country?” interrupted the prince, now impatient. “Be well, and wait for me joyously.”

Sarah let him go from her grasp, but she had such a mournful expression that Rameses grew mild and stroked her.

“Only be calm. Thou fearest the sound of our trumpets. But were they ill-omened the first day?”

“My lord,” answered Sarah, “I know that over there they will keep thee, so grant me this one, this last favor. I will give thee,” continued she, sobbing, “a cage of pigeons. They were hatched out and reared here; hence, as often as thou rememberest thy servant, open the cage and set one of them free; it will bring me tidings of thee, and I will kiss and fondle it as—as— But go now!”

The prince embraced her and went to the barge, telling his black attendant to wait for the pigeons.

At sight of the heir, drums and fifes sounded, and the garrison raised a loud shout of welcome. When he found himself among warriors, the prince drew a deep breath, and stretched out his arms, like a man liberated from bondage.

“Well,” said he to Tutmosis, “women have tormented me, and those Jews— O Cyrus! command to roast me on a slow fire at once, but put me not in the country a second time.”

“So it is,” confirmed Tutmosis; “love is like honey. It must be taken by sips, a man must not swim in it. Brr! shudders pass over me when I think that thou hast passed nearly two months fed on kisses in the evening, dates in the morning, and asses’ milk at midday.”

“Sarah is a very good girl,” said Rameses.

“I do not speak of her, but of those Jews who have settled down at that villa like papyrus in swamp land. Dost thou see, they are looking out at thee yet, and perhaps are sending greetings,” said the flatterer.

The prince turned to another side with displeasure, and Tutmosis winked joyfully at the officers, as if to tell them that Rameses would not leave their society very soon this time.

The higher they ascended the Nile the denser on both banks were spectators, the more numerous were boats on the river, and the more did flowers, garlands, and bouquets float down; these had been thrown at the barge of the pharaoh.

About five miles above Memphis there were multitudes of people with banners, with statues of gods, and with music; an immense roar was heard, like the sound of a tempest.

“There is his holiness!” cried Tutmosis, delighted.

One spectacle was presented to the eyes of the onlookers: in the middle of a broad bend in the river sailed the great barge of the pharaoh, rising in front like the breast of a swan. At the right and left sides of it, like two giant wings, pushed forward the countless boats of his subjects, and in the rear, like a rich fan, stretched the retinue of the ruler of Egypt.

Every one living shouted, sang, clapped hands, and threw flowers at the feet of the lord whom no one even saw. It was enough that under that gilded canopy and those ostrich plumes waved a ruddy blue flag, denoting that the pharaoh was present.

The people in the boats were as if drunk, the people on the shore as if mad. Every moment some boat struck or overturned a boat and some man fell into the water, out of which luckily the crocodiles had fled, frightened by the unparalleled uproar. On the banks men ran into one another, for no one paid heed to his neighbor, his father, or his child, but fixed his wild eyes on the gilded beak of the barge and the tent of the pharaoh. Even people who were trampled, whose ribs the wild crowd broke stupidly, and whose joints they put out, had no cry save this,—

“May he live through eternity, O our ruler!—Shine on, thou the sun of Egypt!”

The madness of greeting spread to the barge of Rameses: officers, soldiers, and oarsmen pressed into one throng and strove to shout one another. Tutmosis, forgetting the heir to the throne, clambered up on the prow, and almost flew into the water.

Meanwhile a trumpet sounded from the pharaoh’s barge, and soon after one answered from the barge of Rameses. A second signal, and the barge of the heir touched the great barge of the pharaoh.

Some official called to Rameses. From barge to barge they extended a gangway of cedar with carved railings, and the prince found himself next in the embrace of his father.

The presence of the pharaoh, or the storm of shouts roaring about him, so stunned Prince Rameses that he could not utter a syllable. He fell at his father’s feet, and the lord of the world pressed the heir to his sacred bosom.

A moment later the side walls of the tent rose, and all the people on both banks of the Nile saw their ruler on a throne, and on the high step of it Rameses kneeling, with his head on the breast of his father.

Such silence followed that the rustling of banners on the barges was audible. Then on a sudden burst forth one immense roar, greater than all which had preceded. With

this the Egyptian people honored the reconciliation of son and father; they greeted their present, and saluted their future ruler.

If any man had reckoned on dissensions in the sacred family of the pharaoh, he might convince himself then that the new royal branch held to its parent trunk firmly.

His holiness looked very ill. After the tender greeting of his son, he commanded him to sit at the side of the throne.

“My soul was rushing forth toward thee, Rameses,” said he, “and all the more ardently the better were the tidings which I had of thee. To-day I see not only that thou hast the heart of a lion, but that thou art a man full of prudence, who knows how to estimate his own acts, who is able to restrain himself, and who feels for the interests of Egypt.”

When the prince, filled with emotion, was silent and kissed his father’s feet, the pharaoh continued,—

“Thou hast done well to renounce command of the Greek regiments, because from this day the corps in Memphis is thine, thou art its commander.”

“My father!” whispered the heir, trembling.

“Besides, in Lower Egypt, which is open on three sides to attacks of hostile nations, I need a wise, active man, who will watch all things round him, weigh them well in his heart, and act promptly. For this reason I appoint thee my lieutenant in that half of the kingdom.”

Abundant tears flowed from the prince’s eyes. With those tears he bade farewell to his youth; he greeted power, to which his soul had turned for years with uncertainty and longing.

“I am now weak and wearied,” said the ruler, “and were it not for anxiety touching thy youth and the future of Egypt, I would this day beg my deathless ancestors to call me to their glory. Each day is for me more difficult, and therefore, Rameses, thou wilt begin to share the burden of rule with me. As a hen teaches her chicks to search out grains of corn and hide before the hawk, so I will teach thee that toilsome art of ruling a state and watching the devices of enemies. May thou fall on them in time, like an eagle on timid partridges.”

The pharaoh’s barge and its well-ordered retinue had descended to a point opposite the palace. The wearied ruler took a seat in his litter, and at that moment Herhor approached Rameses.

“Permit me, worthy prince,” said he, “to be the earliest among those who are delighted with thy elevation. May thou lead the army with as much success as thou shalt govern the most important part of the state to the glory of Egypt.”

Rameses pressed his hand firmly.

“Didst thou do this, O Herhor?” asked he.

“It belonged to thee,” replied the minister.

“Thou hast my gratitude, and wilt see that it is of value.”

“Thou hast rewarded me already in speaking thus,” replied Herhor.

The prince wished to depart; Herhor detained him.

“A brief word. Be careful, O heir, that one of thy women, Sarah, does not sing religious hymns.”

When Rameses looked at him with astonishment, he added,—

“During our sail on the Nile that maiden sang our most sacred hymn, a hymn to which only the pharaoh and high priests have the right to listen. Poor child! she might have suffered for her skill and for her ignorance of what she was singing.”

“Then has she committed sacrilege?” inquired Rameses, in confusion.

“Yes, unconsciously,” answered Herhor. “It is lucky that I was the only man who understood it, and my decision is that between that song and our hymn the resemblance is remote. In every case let her never repeat it.”

“Well, and should she purify herself?” asked the prince. “Will it suffice her, as a foreign woman, if she gives thirty cows to the temple of Isis?”

“Yes, let her give them,” replied Herhor, with a slight grimace. “The gods are not offended by gifts.”

“Do thou, noble lord,” said Rameses, “be pleased to accept this miraculous shield, which I received from my sacred grandfather.”

“I?—the shield of Amenhôtep?” exclaimed the minister, with emotion. “Am I worthy of it?”

“By thy wisdom thou art equal to my grandfather, and thou wilt equal him in position.”

Herhor made a low bow in silence. That golden shield set with precious stones, besides its great value in money, had moreover the virtue of an amulet; hence it was a regal present.

But the prince’s words might have the loftier meaning that Herhor would equal Amenhôtep in position. Amenhôtep had been the father-in-law of a pharaoh. Had the heir decided already to marry Herhor’s daughter?

That was the fond dream of Queen Nikotris and the minister. But it must be acknowledged that Rameses in speaking of the future dignities of Herhor had not thought in the least of marrying his daughter, but of giving him new offices, of which there was a multitude at the court and in the temples.

Chapter XVIII

FROM the day that he became viceroy of Lower Egypt a life unparalleled in troubles set in for Rameses,—such a life as he had not even imagined, though born and reared in the pharaoh's palace.

People simply tortured him; his torturers were persons who had interests of various kinds and who were of various social classes.

On the very first day, at sight of the throngs of people, who crowded and pushed one another with eagerness, trampled his lawns, broke his trees, and injured even the wall which enclosed his villa, the heir demanded a guard for protection. But on the third day he was forced to flee from his own dwelling to the precincts of the palace proper, where, because of numerous sentries and above all because of high walls, access to him was made difficult.

During the ten days which preceded his departure, representatives of all Egypt, if not of the whole world of that period, passed before the eyes of the new viceroy.

First of all were admitted great personages. Hence to congratulate him came the high priests of temples, ministers, ambassadors, Phœnician, Greek, Hebrew, Assyrian, Nubian, men whose dresses even he could not remember. Next came the chiefs of neighboring provinces, judges, secretaries, the higher officers of the army corps in Memphis, and landowners.

These people desired nothing, they simply expressed their delight at honor shown him. But the prince, while listening to these persons from morning till midday and from midday till evening, felt confusion in his head, and a quivering in all his members.

After these came representatives of the lower classes with gifts: merchants bringing gold, foreign stuffs, amber, fruits, and perfumes. Then bankers and men who loaned money for interest. Further, architects with plans for new buildings, sculptors with projects for statues and carvings in relief, masons, potters, makers of ordinary and ornamental furniture, blacksmiths, founders, tanners, wine-merchants, weavers, even dissectors who opened the bodies of the departed.

The procession of those men rendering homage had not finished when an army of petitioners approached the viceroy. Invalids, widows, and orphans of officers requested pensions; noble lords required court offices for their sons. Engineers presented new methods of irrigating Egypt; physicians offered means against diseases of all sorts; soothsayers offered horoscopes. Relatives of prisoners petitioned to lessen punishments; those condemned to death begged for life; the sick implored the heir to touch them, or to bestow on them his spittle.

Finally, beautiful women announced themselves, the mothers of stately daughters begging the heir humbly but insistently to receive them into his mansion. Some indicated the amount of the pension demanded, praising their virginity and their talents.

After ten days of looking every moment at new persons and faces, and hearing petitions which only the possession of a world and divine power to dispense it could

satisfy, Prince Rameses was exhausted. He could not sleep; he was so excited that the buzz of a fly pained his nerves, and at moments he did not understand what people said when they talked to him.

In this position Herhor came again to assist the viceroy. He commanded to inform the wealthy that the prince would not receive any more persons on questions of interest; and against common people, who, in spite of repeated invitations to disperse, were still waiting, he sent a company of Numidians with clubs. These succeeded with incomparably more ease than Rameses in meeting popular wishes, for before an hour had passed the petitioners had vanished from the square, like mist, while one and another of them for a couple of succeeding days poured water on their heads, or other bruised parts of their bodies.

After this trial of supreme power the prince felt profound contempt for men and became apathetic. He lay two days on a couch with his hands beneath his head gazing vacantly at the ceiling. He did not wonder that his sacred father passed his time at the altars of the gods, but he could not understand how Herhor was able to manage the avalanche of business, which, like a storm, not only surpassed the strength of a man, but might even crush him.

“How carry out plans in this case when a throng of petitions fetter our will, devour our thoughts, drink our blood? At the end of ten days I am sick, at the end of a year I should be an idiot. In this office it is impossible to carry out any plan; a man can just defend himself from madness.”

He was so alarmed by his weakness in the position of ruler that he summoned Herhor, and with a complaining voice told of his suffering.

The statesman listened with a smile to the complaints of the young steersman of the ship of state, and at last said in answer,—

“Knowest thou, lord, that this immense palace in which we dwell was reared by one architect, named Senebi, who moreover died before it was finished? And to a certainty thou wilt understand how this famous architect could carry out his plan without weariness and be always in a cheerful temper.”

“I am curious.”

“Well, he did not do everything himself; he did not hew the beams or cut the stones, he did not make the bricks, he did not carry them to the scaffolding. He did not lay them into the wall and fasten them together. He only drew the plan, and moreover he had assistants. But thou, prince, hadst the wish to do all things thyself, to listen in person and transact every business. That goes beyond human strength.”

“How should I do otherwise if among petitioners there are some who have suffered without cause, or if there is unrewarded service? Of course the foundation of the state is justice.”

“How many canst thou hear in a day without weariness?” asked Herhor.

“Well, twenty.”

“Thou art happy. I hear at the most six or ten, but they are not interested in the petitions,—they are chief secretaries, overseers, and ministers. These men report to me no details, only the most important things that are done in the army, on the estates of the pharaoh, in questions of religion, in the courts, in the provinces, and touching movements of the Nile. Therefore they report no trivial matter, because

each man before he comes to me must hear ten inferior secretaries. Each inferior secretary and overseer collected information from ten sub-secretaries and sub-inspectors, and they in their turn have heard reports from ten officials who are under them. In this manner I and his holiness speaking with only ten people daily know all that is most important in a hundred thousand points of Egypt and the world beyond it.

“The watchman in charge of one part of a street in Memphis sees only a few houses. A decurion of ten policemen knows the whole street, a centurion a division of the city, the chief knows all the city. The pharaoh stands above them all, as if he were standing on the highest pylon of the temple of Ptah, and sees not only Memphis, but the cities, Sochem, On, Cherau, Turra, Tetani, with their suburbs, and a portion of the western desert.

“From that height his holiness is unable, it is true, to see the people who are wronged, or those who are unrewarded, but he is able to see the crowd of laborers who have collected without work. He cannot see warriors in the dramshops, but he can know what regiment is exercising. He cannot see what a given earth-tiller or citizen is preparing for dinner, but he can see a fire beginning in a given quarter of the city.

“This order in the state,” continued Herhor, with growing animation, “is our strength and glory. Snofru, a pharaoh of the first dynasty, asked a certain priest what monument he should rear to himself.

“‘Draw on the earth, O lord,’ replied the priest, ‘a square, and put on it six million unhewn stones; they will represent the people. On that foundation place sixty thousand hewn stones; they will be the lower officials. On them place six thousand polished stones; they will be thy higher officials. On these put sixty covered with carvings; those will be thy most intimate counsellors and chief leaders, and on the summit place one monolith with its pedestal and the golden image of the sun; that will be thyself.’

“The Pharaoh Snofru followed that advice. Thus rose the oldest pyramid, the step pyramid, a tangible image of our state; from that pyramid all others had their origin. Those are immovable buildings, from the summits of which the rim of the world is visible, and they will be a marvel to the remotest generations.

“In this system resides our superiority over all neighbors. The Ethiopians were as numerous as we, but their king himself took care of his own cattle, and beat his own subjects with a club; he knew not how many subjects he had, nor was he able to collect them when our troops invaded his country. There was not a united Ethiopia, but a great crowd of unorganized people. For that reason they are our vassals at present.

“The Prince of Libya judges all disputes himself, especially among the wealthy, and gives so much time to them that he cannot attend to his own business. So at his side whole bands of robbers rise up; these we exterminate.

“Were there in Phœnicia a single ruler who knew what was happening and who commanded in all parts, that country would not pay us one uten of tribute. But what a happiness for us that the kings of Nineveh and Babylon have each only one minister, and are tormented with the onrush of business as thou art this day. They wish to see, judge, and command everything; hence the affairs of their states are entangled for a century to come. But were some insignificant scribe to go from Egypt

to those kings, explain their errors of management, and give them our official system, our pyramid, in a year's time Judæa and Phœnicia would fall into the hands of the Assyrians, and in a few tens of years powerful armies, coming from the East and the North by land and by sea, would hurl themselves on us, armies which we might not be able to vanquish."

"Therefore let us fall on them to-day and take advantage of their want of order," cried Rameses.

"We are not cured yet of previous victories," answered Herhor, coldly; and he began to take leave of the viceroy.

"Have victories weakened us?" burst out the heir. "Or have we not brought home treasures?"

"But does not the axe with which we cut wood become blunted?" inquired Herhor; and he went out.

The prince understood that the great minister wished peace at all costs, in spite of the fact that he was chief of the armies.

"We shall see," whispered Rameses to himself.

A couple of days before his departure Rameses was summoned to his holiness. The pharaoh was sitting in an armchair in a marble hall; no other person was present, and the four entrances were guarded by Nubian sentries.

At the side of the royal armchair was a stool for the prince, and a small table covered with documents written on papyrus. On the walls were colored bas-reliefs showing the occupations of field-workers, and in the corners of the hall were ungraceful statues of Osiris smiling pensively.

When the prince at command of his father sat down, his holiness spoke to him,—

"Here, my son, are thy documents as leader and viceroy. Well, have the first days of power wearied thee?"

"In thy service, holiness, I shall find strength."

"Flatterer!" said the pharaoh, smiling. "Remember that I do not require overwork on thy part. Amuse thyself; youth needs recreation. This does not mean, however, that thou art not to have important affairs to manage."

"I am ready."

"First I will disclose my cares to thee. Our treasury has a bad aspect; the inflow of revenue decreases yearly, especially in Lower Egypt, and expenditures are rising."

The pharaoh fell to thinking.

"Those women—those women, Rameses,—they swallow up the wealth, not of mortal men only, but my wealth. I have some hundreds of them, and each woman wishes to have as many maids as possible, as many dressmakers, barbers, slaves,—slaves for her litter, slaves for her chamber,—horses, oarsmen, even her own favorites and their children— Little children! When I was returning from Thebes one of those ladies, whom I do not even remember, ran into my road and, showing a sturdy boy of three years, desired that I should designate for him a property, since he was, as she said, a son of mine. My son, and three years of age. Canst thou understand this? The affair was simple. I could not argue with a woman, besides, in such a delicate question. But

for a man of noble birth it is easier to be polite than find money for every fancy of that sort."

He shook his head and continued,—

"Meanwhile incomes since the beginning of my reign have decreased one-half, especially in Lower Egypt. I ask what this means. They answer: people have grown poor, many citizens have disappeared, the sea has covered a certain extent of land on the north, and the desert on the east, we have had a number of bad harvests; in a word, tale follows tale while the treasury becomes poorer and poorer. Therefore I beg thee to explain this matter. Look about, learn to know well-informed men who are truthful, and form of them an examining commission. When they begin to report, trust not over-much to papyrus, but verify here and there in person. I hear that thou hast the eye of a leader; if that be true, one glance will tell thee how accurate the statements of the commission are. But hasten not in giving thy opinion, and above all, do not herald it. Note down every weighty conclusion which comes to thy head on a given day, and when a few days have passed reëxamine that question and note it down a second time. This will teach thee caution in judgment and accuracy in grasping subjects."

"It will be as thou commandest," replied the prince.

"Another mission which thou must accomplish is truly difficult. Something is happening in Assyria which begins to alarm my government. Our priests declare that beyond the Northern sea stands a pyramidal mountain covered with green at its base and with snow on the summit. This mountain has marvellous qualities. After many years of quiet it begins all at once to smoke, roar, and tremble, and then it hurls out as much liquid fire as there is water in the Nile. This fire, which flows down its sides in various directions and over an immense stretch of country, ruins the labor of earth-tillers.

"Well, Assyria is a mountain of that sort. For whole ages calm and quiet reign in that region, till all on a sudden a tempest bursts out there, great armies pour forth from it and annihilate peaceful neighbors. At present around Nineveh and Babylon seething is audible: the mountain is smoking. Thou must learn therefore how far that smoke indicates an outburst, and think out means of precaution."

"Shall I be able to do so?" asked the prince, in a low voice.

"Thou must learn to observe. If thou hast the wish to learn anything well, be not satisfied with the witness of thy own eyes, but strengthen thyself with the aid of a number of others. Confine not thyself to the judgment of Egyptians alone, for each people, each man has a special way of looking at subjects, and neither one grasps the whole truth in any question. Listen therefore to what the Phœnicians, the Hebrews, the Hittites, and the Egyptians think of the Assyrians, and weigh in thy own heart with care all that agrees in their judgments concerning Assyria. If all tell thee that danger is coming from that point, thou wilt know that it is coming; but if different men speak variously, be on thy guard also, for wisdom commands us to look for less good and more evil."

"Thy speech is like that of the gods," whispered the heir of Egypt.

"I am old, and from the height of the throne things are seen of which mortal men have not even a suspicion. Wert thou to inquire of the sun what he thinks of this world's affairs, he would tell thee things still more curious."

“Among the people from whom I am to gain knowledge of Assyria, thou hast not mentioned the Greeks, O father,” put in Rameses.

The pharaoh nodded, and said with a kindly smile,—

“The Greeks! oh, the Greeks! A great future is in store for that people. In comparison with us they are in childhood, but what a spirit is in them!

“Dost remember my statue made by a Greek sculptor? That is my second self, a living person! I kept it a month in the palace, but at last I gave it to the temple in Thebes. Wilt thou believe, fear seized me lest that stone *I* should rise from its seat and claim one-half of the government. What a disorder would rise then in Egypt!

“The Greeks! Hast thou seen the vases which they make, the palaces which they build? From that clay out there and from stone something comes that delights my old age and forbids me to think of my feebleness.

“And their language! O gods, it is music and sculpture and painting. In truth, I say that if Egypt could ever die as a man dies, the Greeks would take all its property. Nay more, they would persuade the world that everything done by us was their work, and that we never existed. And still they are only the pupils of our primary schools, for, as thou knowest, we have no right to communicate the highest knowledge to foreigners.”

“Still, father, it seems that thou hast no trust in the Greeks.”

“No, for they are peculiar; one can trust neither Greek nor Phœnician. The Phœnician, when he wishes, sees and will tell thee genuine truth of Egypt, but thou wilt never know when he is telling it. The Greek, as simple as a child, would tell the truth always, but he is never able.

“The Greeks look at the world in a manner different altogether from our way. In their wonderful eyes everything glitters, assumes colors and changes, as the sky and the water of Egypt. How then could we rely on their judgment?

“In the days of the Theban dynasty, far away toward the north, was the little town of Troy. We have in Egypt twenty thousand as large as it. Various Greek vagrants laid siege to that hamlet, and so annoyed its few inhabitants that after ten years of trouble they burned their little fortress and moved to other places. An every-day robber narrative! Meanwhile just see what songs the Greeks sing of the Trojan combats. We laugh at those wonders and heroisms, for our government had accurate information of events there. We see the lies which strike any one, but still we listen to those songs, as a child does to tales which its nurse tells, and we cannot tear ourselves free from them.

“Such are the Greeks: born liars, but fascinating; yes, and valiant. Every man of them would rather die than tell truth. They do not lie for profit, as do the Phœnicians, but because their mind constrains them.”

“Well, what am I to think of the Phœnicians?”

“They are wise people of mighty industry and daring, but hucksters: for them life means profit, be it great or the greatest. The Phœnicians are like water: they bring much with them, but bear away much, and push in at all points. One must give them the least possible, and above all watch that they enter not through hidden crannies into Egypt. If thou pay them well and offer hope of still greater profit, they will be

excellent assistants. What we know to-day of secret movements in Assyria we know through Phœnicians."

"And the Jews?" asked the prince, dropping his eyes.

"A quick people, but gloomy fanatics and born enemies of Egypt. Only when they feel on their necks the iron-shod sandal of the Assyrian, will they turn to us. May that time not come too late to them! It is possible to use their services, not here, of course, but in Nineveh and Babylon."

The pharaoh was wearied now. Hence the prince fell on his face before him, and when he had received the paternal embrace he went to his mother.

The lady, sitting in her study, was weaving delicate linen to make garments for the gods, and her ladies in waiting were sewing and embroidering robes or making bouquets. A young priest was burning incense before the statue of Isis.

"I come," said the prince, "to thank thee, my mother, and take farewell."

The queen rose and putting her arms around her son's neck, said to him tearfully,—

"Hast thou changed so much? Thou art a man now! I meet thee so rarely that I might forget thy features did I not see them in my heart every moment. Thou art unkind. How many times have I gone with the first dignitary of the state toward thy villa, thinking that at last thou wouldst cease to be offended, but thou didst bring out thy favorite in my presence."

"I beg thy pardon—I beg thy pardon!" said Rameses, kissing his mother.

She conducted him to a garden in which peculiar flowers grew, and when they were without witnesses, she said,—

"I am a woman, so a woman and a mother has interest for me. Dost thou wish to take that girl with thee on thy journey? Remember that the tumult and the movement which will surround thee may harm her, for in her condition calm and quiet are needed."

"Art thou speaking of Sarah?" inquired Rameses, astonished. "She has said nothing to me of that condition."

"She may be ashamed; perhaps she does not herself know," replied the queen. "In every case the journey—"

"I have no intention of taking her!" exclaimed Rameses. "But why does she hide this from me—as if the child were not mine?"

"Be not suspicious," chided the lady. "This is the usual timidity of young women. Moreover, she may be hiding her condition from fear lest thou cast her away from thee."

"For that matter, I shall not take her to my court!" broke out the prince, so impatiently that the queen's eyes were smiling, but she covered them with their long lashes.

"It is not well to be over-harsh with a woman who loved thee. I know that thou hast given an assured support to her. We will give her something also. And a child of the royal blood must be reared well, and have property."

“Naturally,” answered Rameses. “My first son, though without princely rights, must be so placed that I may not be ashamed of him, and he must not regret separation from me.”

After parting with the queen, Rameses wished to go to Sarah, and with that object returned to his chambers.

Two feelings were roused in him,—anger at Sarah for hiding the cause of her weakness, and pride that he was going to be a father.

He a father! This title gave him an importance which, as it were, supported his titles of commander and viceroy. Father! that did not mean a stripling who must look perforce with reverence on older people.

He was roused and enraptured. He wished to see Sarah, to scold, then embrace her and give her presents.

But when he returned to his part of the palace he found there two nomarchs from Lower Egypt who had come to report on their provinces, and when he had heard them out, he was wearied. Besides, he was to hold an evening reception and did not wish to be late in beginning.

“And again I shall not be with her,” thought he. “Poor girl! for twenty days she has not seen me—”

He summoned the negro.

“Hast thou that cage which Sarah gave thee when we went to greet his holiness?”

“I have.”

“Take a pigeon from it, and let the bird loose.”

“The pigeons are eaten.”

“Who ate them?”

“Thou. I told the cook that those birds came from the Lady Sarah; so he made a roast and pies out of them for thee, worthiness.”

“May the crocodiles eat you both!” cried the prince, in anger.

He sent for Tutmosis and despatched him immediately to Sarah. He explained to him the history of the pigeons, and said,—

“Give her emerald earrings, bracelets, anklets, and two talents. Say that I am angry because she concealed her condition, but that I will forgive her if the child is healthy and handsome. Should she have a boy, I will give her another place,” finished he with a smile. “But—but—persuade her to put away even a few Jews, and to take even a few Egyptian men and women. I do not wish my son to be born into such company; besides, he might play with Jew children. They would teach him to give his father the worst dates of the harvest.”

Chapter XIX

THE foreign quarter in Memphis lay on the northeastern extremity of the city near the river. There were several hundred houses in that place and many thousand people,—Assyrians, Greeks, Jews, most of all, Phœnicians.

That was a wealthy quarter. A street thirty paces in width formed its leading artery. This street was rather straight, and paved with flat stones. On both sides were houses of sandstone, brick, or limestone, varying in height from three to five stories. In the cellars were stores of raw materials; on the ground floors were arched rooms; on the first stories dwellings of wealthy people; higher were the workshops of weavers, tailors, jewellers; highest of all, the crowded dwellings of laborers.

The buildings of this quarter, like those in the whole city, were mainly white; but one might see stone houses as green as a meadow, as yellow as a wheat-field, as blue as the sky, or as red as blood.

The front walls of many houses were ornamented with pictures representing the occupations of people who dwelt in them. On the house of a jeweller long rows of pictures announced that its owner sold to foreign kings chains and bracelets of his own making which roused their amazement. The immense palace of a merchant was covered with pictures representing the labors and perils of a trafficker: on the sea dreadful monsters with fish tails were seizing the man; in the desert winged dragons breathing fire were grasping after him, and on distant islands he was tormented by a giant whose sandals were larger than any ship of the Phœnicians.

A physician on the wall of his office represented persons who, thanks to his aid, had recovered lost hands and feet, even teeth and youthfulness. On a building occupied by a government administrator of the quarter were to be seen a keg into which people were throwing gold rings; a scribe into whose ears some one was whispering; an offender, stretched on the ground, whom two other men were beating.

The street was full. Along the walls stood litter-bearers, men with fans, messengers and laborers, ready to offer their services. In the middle of the street moved an unbroken line of merchants' wares carried by men, asses, or oxen attached to vehicles. On the sidewalks pushed forward noisy sellers of fresh water, grapes, dates, dried fish, and among them hucksters, flower-girls, musicians, and tricksters of various descriptions.

In this torrent of people which flowed forward and separated, in which men bought and sold, crying out in various tones, policemen were prominent. Each had a brownish tunic reaching to his knees, bare legs, an apron with blue and red stripes, a short sword at his side, and a strong stick in his hand. This official walked along on the sidewalk; sometimes he conversed with a colleague; most frequently, however, he stood on a stone at the edge of the street, so as to take in more accurately the crowd which flowed past in front of him.

In view of such watchfulness street thieves had to do their work cleverly. Usually two began to fight, and when a crowd had gathered around them and the police clubbed both spectators and quarrellers, other confederates in the art did the stealing.

About half-way between the two ends of the street stood the inn of Asarhadon, a Phœnician from Tyre. In this inn, for easier control, all were forced to dwell who came from beyond the boundaries of Egypt. It was a large quadrangular building which on each side had a number of tens of windows, and was not connected with other houses; hence men could go around the place and watch it from all points. Over the principal gate hung the model of a ship; on the front wall were pictures representing his holiness Rameses XII. placing offerings before the gods, or extending his protection to foreigners, among whom the Phœnicians were distinguished by a sturdy stature and very ruddy faces.

The windows were narrow, always open, and only in case of need shaded by curtains of linen or by colored slats. The chambers of the innkeeper and of travellers occupied three stories; the ground floor was devoted to a wineshop and an eating-place. Sailors, carriers, handicraftsmen, and in general the poorer class of travellers ate and drank in a courtyard which had a mosaic pavement and a linen roof resting on columns, so that all guests might be under inspection. The wealthier and better born ate in a gallery which surrounded the courtyard. In the courtyard the men sat on the pavement near stones which were used instead of tables; in the galleries, which were cooler, there were tables, stools, and armchairs, even low couches, with cushions, on which guests might slumber.

In each gallery there was a great table on which were bread, meat, fish, and fruits, also jugs holding several quarts of beer, wine, and water. Negroes, men and women, bore around food to the guests, removed empty vessels, and brought from the cellars full pitchers, while scribes watching scrupulously over the tables noted down carefully each piece of bread, bulb of garlic, and flagon of water. In the courtyard two inspectors stood on an elevation with sticks in their grasp; these men kept their eyes on the servants and the scribes on the one hand, and on the other by the aid of the sticks they settled quarrels between the poorer guests of various nations. Thanks to this arrangement thefts and battles happened rarely; they were more frequent in the galleries than the courtyard.

The Phœnician innkeeper himself, the noted Asarhadon, a man beyond fifty, dressed in a long tunic and a muslin cape, walked among the guests to see if each received what he had ordered.

“Eat and drink, my sons!” said he to the Greek sailors, “for such pork and beer there is not in all the world as I have. I hear that a storm struck your ship about Rafia? Ye should give a bounteous offering to the gods for preserving you. In Memphis a man might not see a storm all his life, but at sea it is easier to meet lightning than a copper uten. I have mead, flour, incense for holy sacrifices, and here, in the corner, stand the gods of all nations. In my inn a man may still his hunger and be pious for very slight charges.”

He turned and went to the gallery among the merchants. “Eat and drink, worthy lords,” incited he, making obeisance. “The times are good. The most worthy heir—may he live for ever!—is going to Pi-Bast with an enormous retinue, but from the upper kingdom a transport of gold has come, of which more than one of you will win a good portion. I have partridges, young goslings, fish direct from the river, perfect roast venison. And what wine they have sent me from Cyprus! May I be turned into a Jew if a goblet of that luxury is not worth two drachmas, but to you, my benefactors and fathers, I will give it to-day for one drachma,—only to-day, to make a beginning.”

“Give it for half a drachma a goblet, and we will taste it,” said one of the merchants.

“Half a drachma!” repeated the host. “Sooner will the Nile flow upward toward Thebes than I give such sweetness for half a drachma, unless I do it for thee, Lord Belezis, who art the pearl of Sidon. Hei, slaves! bring to our benefactors the largest pitcher of wine from Cyprus.”

When the innkeeper had walked on, the merchant named Belezis said to his companions,—

“May my hand wither if that wine is worth half a drachma! But never mind! We shall have less trouble with the police hereafter.”

Conversation with guests of all nations and conditions did not prevent the host from looking at the scribes who noted down food and drink, at the watchman who stared at the scribes and the servants, and above all at a traveller who had seated himself on cushions in the front gallery, with his feet under him, and who was dozing over a handful of dates and a goblet of pure water. That traveller was about forty years old, he had abundant hair and beard of raven color, thoughtful eyes, and wonderfully noble features which seemed never to have been wrinkled by anger or distorted by fear.

“That is a dangerous rat!” thought the innkeeper, frowning. “He has the look of a priest, but he wears a dark coat. He has left gold and jewels with me to the value of a talent, and he neither eats meat nor drinks wine. He must be a great prophet or a very great criminal.”

Two naked serpent-tamers came into the courtyard bearing a basket full of poisonous reptiles, and began their exhibition. The younger one played on a flute, while the elder wound around his body snakes big and little, any one of which would have sufficed to drive away guests from the inn “Under the Ship.”

The flute-player gave out shriller and shriller notes; the serpent-tamer squirmed, foamed at the mouth, quivered convulsively, and irritated the reptiles till one of them bit him on the hand, another on the face, while he swallowed alive a third one, the smallest.

The guests and the servants looked at the exhibition of the serpent-tamer with alarm. They trembled when he irritated the reptiles, they closed their eyes when they bit him; but when the performer swallowed one of the snakes, they howled with delight and wonder.

The traveller in the front gallery, however, did not leave his cushions, he did not deign even to look at the exhibition. But when the tamer approached for pay, he threw to the pavement two copper utens, giving a sign with his hand not to come nearer.

The exhibition lasted half an hour perhaps. When the performers left the courtyard, a negro attending to the chambers of the inn rushed up to the host and whispered something anxiously. After that, it was unknown whence, a decurion of the police appeared, and when he had conducted Asarhadon to a remote window, he conversed long with him. The worthy owner of the inn beat his breast, clasped his hands, or seized his head. At last he kicked the black man in the belly, and commanded him to give the police official a roast goose and a pitcher of Cyprus wine; then he approached the guest in the front gallery, who seemed to doze there unbrokenly, though his eyes were open.

"I have evil news for thee, worthy lord," said the host, sitting at the side of the traveller.

"The gods send rain and sadness on people whenever it pleases them," replied the guest, with indifference.

"While we were looking at the snake-tamers," continued the host, pulling at his parti-colored beard, "thieves reached the second story and stole thy effects,—three bags and a casket, of course very precious."

"Thou must inform the court of my loss."

"Wherefore the court?" whispered the host. "With us thieves have a guild of their own. We will send for their elder, and value the effects; thou wilt pay him twenty per cent of the value and all will be found again. I can assist thee."

"In my country," replied the guest, "no man compounds with thieves, and I will not. I lodge with thee, I trusted thee with my property, and thou wilt answer."

The worthy Asarhadon began to scratch his shoulder-blades.

"Man of a distant region," continued he, in a lower voice, "ye Hittites and we Phœnicians are brothers, hence I advise thee sincerely not to turn to an Egyptian court, for it has only one door,—that by which a man enters, but none by which he goes out."

"The gods can conduct an innocent man through a wall," said the Hittite.

"Innocent! Who of us in the land of bondage is innocent?" whispered the host. "Look in that direction; over there that commander of ten policemen is finishing a goose, an excellent young goose, which I myself would have eaten gladly. But dost thou know why, taking it from my own mouth, I gave that goose to him?"

"It was because the man came to inquire about thee."

When he said this, the Phœnician looked askance at the traveller, who did not lose calmness for an instant.

"He asked me," continued the host, "that master of ten policemen asked, 'What sort of man is that black one who sits two hours over a handful of dates?' I replied: 'A very honorable man, the lord Phut.' 'Whence comes he?' 'From the country of the Hittites, from the city of Harran; he has a good house there of three stories, and much land.' 'Why has he come hither?' 'He has come,' I replied, 'to receive five talents from a certain priest, talents lent by his father.'"

"And dost thou know, worthy lord," continued the innkeeper, "what that decurion answered? 'Asarhadon,' said he, 'I know that thou art a faithful servant of his holiness, thou hast good food and pure wines; for this reason I warn thee, look to thyself. Have a care of foreigners who make no acquaintances, who avoid wine and every amusement, and are silent. That Phut of Harran may be an Assyrian spy.' The heart died in me when I heard this. But these words do not affect thee," said he, indignantly, when he saw that the terrible suspicion of espionage did not disturb the calm face of the Hittite.

"Asarhadon," said the guest, after a while, "I confided to thee myself and my property. See to it, therefore, that my bags and my casket are returned to me, for in the opposite case I shall complain of thee to that same chief of ten who is eating the goose which was intended for thee."

“Well, but permit me to pay the thieves only fifteen per cent of the value of the things,” cried the host.

“Thou hast no right to pay.”

“Give them even thirty drachmas.”

“Not an uten.”

“Give the poor fellows even ten drachmas.”

“Go in peace, Asarhadon, and beg the gods to return thee thy reason,” answered the traveller, with the same unchanging calmness.

The host sprang up, panting from anger.

“The reptile!” thought he. “He has not come for a debt simply. He is doing some business here. My heart tells me that he is a rich merchant, or maybe an innkeeper who, in company with priests and judges, will open another inn somewhere near this one. May the first fire of heaven burn thee! May the leprosy devour thee! Miser, deceiver, criminal from whom an honest man can make nothing.”

The worthy Asarhadon had not succeeded yet in calming himself when the sounds of a flute and a drum were heard on the street, and after a while four dancers, almost naked, rushed into the courtyard. The carriers and sailors greeted them with shouts of delight, and even important merchants in the galleries looked at them with curiosity and made remarks on their beauty. The dancers with motions of the hands and with smiles greeted all the company. One began to play on a double flute, another accompanied with a drum, and the two others danced around the court in such fashion that there was hardly a guest whom their muslin shawls did not strike as they whirled.

Those who were drinking began to sing, shout, and call to the dancers, while among the common herd a quarrel sprang up which the inspectors settled with canes. A certain Libyan, angered at sight of the canes, drew a knife, but two black men seized his arms, took from him some bronze rings as pay for food, and hurled him out to the street. Meanwhile one of the dancers remained with the sailors, two went among the merchants who offered them wine and cakes, and the oldest passed among the tables to make a collection.

“By the sanctuary of the divine Isis!” cried she, “pious strangers, give offerings to the goddess who guards all creation. The more you give the more happiness and blessing will come to you. For the sanctuary of Mother Isis!”

They threw onto her drum coils of copper wire, sometimes a grain of gold. One merchant asked if it were permitted to visit her, to which she nodded with a smile.

When she entered the front gallery, Phut of Harran reached for his leather bag and took out a gold ring, saying,—

“Istar is a great and good goddess; take this for her sanctuary.”

The priestess looked quickly at him and whispered,—

“Anael, Sachiel—”

“Amabiel, Abalidot,” answered the traveller, in the same low tone.

“I see that thou lovest Mother Isis,” said the priestess, aloud. “Thou must be wealthy and art bountiful, so it is worth while to soothsay for thee.”

She sat down near him, ate a couple of dates, and looking at his hand began,—

“Thou art from a distant region, from Bretor and Hagit.⁶ Thou hast had a pleasant journey. *For some days the Phœnicians are watching thee*,” added she, in a lower voice.

“Thou hast come for money, though thou art not a merchant. *Visit me this day after sunset*. Thy wishes will be accomplished,” said she, aloud. “They should be accomplished. *I live on the Street of Tombs in the house of the Green Star*,” whispered she. “But beware of thieves who are watching for thy property,” finished she, seeing that the worthy Asarhadon was listening.

“There are no thieves in my house!” burst out the Phœnician. “None steal except those who come from the street.”

“Be not angry, old man,” replied the priestess, jeeringly, “or a red line will come out on thy neck right away; that means an unlucky death.”

When he heard this, Asarhadon spat three times, and in a low voice repeated a charm against evil predictions. When he had moved away to the depth of the gallery, the priestess began to coquet with the Harran man. She gave him a rose from her crown, embraced him at parting, and went to the other tables.

The traveller beckoned to the host.

“I wish,” said he, “that woman to come to me. Give command to conduct her to my chamber.”

Asarhadon looked into his eyes, clapped his hands, and burst out laughing.

“Typhon has possessed thee, O man of Harran!” cried he. “If anything of that sort happened in my house with an Egyptian priestess, they would drive me out of the city. Here it is permissible to receive only foreign women.”

“In that case I will go to her,” answered Phut, “for she is a wise and devout person, and has told me of many happenings. After sunset thou wilt give me a guide, so that I may not go astray.”

“All the evil spirits have entered thy heart,” said Asarhadon. “Dost thou know that this acquaintance will cost thee two hundred drachmas, perhaps three hundred, not counting that which thou must give the servants and the sanctuary. For such a sum, or say five hundred drachmas, thou mayst make the acquaintance of a young and virtuous woman, my daughter, who is now fourteen years of age, and like a prudent girl is collecting for herself a dowry. Do not wander in the night through a strange city, for thou wilt fall into the hands of the police or of thieves, but make use of that which the gods give thee at home. Dost thou wish?”

“But will thy daughter go with me to Harran?” inquired Phut.

The innkeeper looked at him with astonishment. All at once he struck his forehead, as if he had divined a secret, and seizing the traveller by the hand, he drew him to a quieter place at the window.

“I know all,” whispered he, excitedly. “Thou art dealing in women. But remember that for taking away one Egyptian woman thou mayst lose thy property and go to the

⁶ The spirits of the northern and eastern parts of the world.

quarries. But—perhaps thou wilt take me into thy company, for here I know every road.”

“In that case show me the road to the priestess,” said Phut. “Remember that after sunset thou art to have a guide for me, and to-morrow my bags and casket, otherwise I shall complain to the court.”

Then Phut left the gallery and went to his chamber on a higher story.

Asarhadon with anger approached a table at which Phœnician merchants were drinking, and called aside one of them named Kush.

“Thou bringest beautiful guests to me!” said he, unable to restrain the quivering of his voice. “That Phut eats almost nothing, and now, as if to insult my house, he is going out to an Egyptian dancer instead of giving presents to my women.”

“What wonder in that?” answered Kush, smiling. “He could find a Phœnician woman in Sidon, but here he prefers an Egyptian. A fool is he who in Cyprus does not taste Cyprus wine, but Tyrian beer—”

“But I say,” broke in the host, “that that man is dangerous. He seems to be a citizen, though he looks like a priest.”

“Thou, Asarhadon, hast the look of a high priest, though thou art only an innkeeper. A bench does not cease to be a bench, though it has a lion’s skin on it.”

“But why does he go to priestesses? I would swear that that is a pretence, and that this churlish Hittite, instead of going to a feast with women, is going to some meeting of conspirators.”

“Anger and greed have darkened thy reason,” answered Kush, with impatience.

“Thou art like a man who looking for melons on a fig-tree sees not the figs on it. It is clear to any merchant that if Phut is to collect five talents from a priest he must win favors from all who go around in the sanctuaries. But thou hast no understanding.”

“My heart tells me that this must be an Assyrian ambassador watching to destroy his holiness.”

Kush looked with contempt on Asarhadon.

“Watch him, then; follow every step of his. If thou discover anything, perhaps thou wilt get some part of his property.”

“Oh, now thou hast given wise counsel,” said the host. “Let that rat go to the priestesses, and from them to places unknown to me. But I will send after him my vision, from which nothing will be secret.”

Chapter XX

ABOUT nine in the evening Phut left the inn "Under the Ship" in company with a negro who carried a torch. Half an hour earlier Asarhadon sent out a confidential servant, commanding him to observe carefully if the guest from Harran left the house of the "Green Star," and if so to follow him.

A second confidential servant went at a certain distance behind Phut; in the narrower streets he hid among the houses, on the broader ones he feigned drunkenness.

The streets were empty; carriers and hucksters were sleeping. There was light only in the houses of artisans who were at work, or in those of rich people who were feasting on the terraces. In various houses were heard the sounds of harps and flutes, songs, laughter, the blows of hammers, the sound of saws in the hands of cabinet makers; at times the cry of a drunken man, or a call for assistance.

The streets along which Phut and the slave passed were narrow for the greater part, crooked and full of holes. As they approached the end of the journey, the stone houses were lower and lower, those of one story more frequent, and there were more gardens, or rather palms, fig-trees, and stunted acacias, which, inclining out from between the walls, seemed to have the intention to escape from their places. On the Street of Tombs the view changed on a sudden. In place of stone buildings there were broad gardens, and in the middle of them splendid villas. The negro stopped before one of the gates and quenched his torch.

"Here is the 'Green Star,'" said he, and, making a low bow to Phut, he turned homeward.

The man of Harran knocked at the gate. After a while the gatekeeper appeared. He looked attentively at the stranger, and muttered,—

"Anael, Sachiel."

"Amabiel, Abalidot," answered Phut.

"Be greeted," said the gatekeeper; and he opened quickly to the visitor.

When he had passed some tens of steps between trees, Phut found himself in the antechamber of the villa, where the priestess whom he knew greeted him. Farther in stood some man with black beard and hair; so much like the man of Harran was he, that Phut could not hide his astonishment.

"He will take thy place in the eyes of those who are spying thee," said the priestess, smiling.

The man who was disguised as Phut put a garland of roses on his head, and in company with the priestess went to the first story, where the sound of flutes and the clatter of goblets were heard soon after. Meanwhile two inferior priests conducted Phut to a bath in the garden. After the bath they curled his hair and put white robes on him.

From the bath all three went out again among the trees, passed a number of gardens, and found themselves in an empty space finally.

“There,” said one of the priests, “are the ancient tombs; on that side is the city, and here the temple. Go whithersoever thou wishest. May wisdom point out the road to thee, and sacred words guard thee from perils.”

The two priests went back to the garden, and Phut was in solitude. The moonless night was rather clear. From afar, covered with mist, glittered the Nile; higher up gleamed the seven stars of the Great Bear. Over the head of the stranger was Orion, and above the dark pylons flamed the star Sirius.

“The stars shine in our land more brightly,” thought Phut.

He began to whisper prayers in an unknown tongue, and turned toward the temple.

When he had gone a number of steps, from one of the gardens a man pushed out and followed him. But almost at that very moment such a thick fog fell on the place that it was quite impossible to see aught save the roofs of the temple.

After a certain time the man of Harran came to a high wall. He looked up at the sky and began to go westward. From moment to moment night birds and great bats flew above him. The mist had become so dense that he was forced to touch the wall so as not to lose it. The journey had lasted rather long when all at once Phut found himself before a low door with a multitude of bronze nail heads. He fell to counting these from the left side on the top; at the same time he pressed some of them powerfully, others he turned.

When he had pressed the last nail at the bottom, the door opened. The man of Harran advanced a few steps, and found himself in a narrow niche where there was utter darkness.

He tried the ground carefully with his foot till he struck upon something like the brink of a well from which issued coolness. He sat down then and slipped fearlessly into the abyss, though he found himself in that place and in Egypt for the first time.

The opening was not deep. Phut stood erect on a sloping pavement, and began to descend along a narrow corridor with as much confidence as if he had known the passage for a lifetime.

At the end of the corridor was a door. By groping the stranger found a knocker, and struck three times with it. In answer came a voice, it was unknown from what direction.

“Hast thou, who art disturbing in a night hour the peace of a holy place, the right to enter?”

“I have done no wrong to man, child, or woman. Blood has not stained my hands. I have eaten no unclean food. I have not taken another’s property. I have not lied. I have not betrayed the great secret,” answered the man of Harran, calmly.

“Art thou he for whom we are waiting, or he who in public thou declarest thyself to be?” inquired the voice, after a while.

“I am he who was to come from brethren in the East; but that other name is mine also, and in the northern city I possess a house and land, as I have told other persons.”

The door opened, and Phut walked into a spacious cellar which was lighted by a lamp burning on a small table before a purple curtain. On the curtain was embroidered in gold a winged globe with two serpents.

At one side stood an Egyptian priest in a white robe.

“Dost thou who hast entered,” asked the priest, pointing at Phut, “know what this sign on the curtain signifies?”

“The globe,” answered the stranger, “is an image of the world on which we live; the wings indicate that it is borne through space like an eagle.”

“And the serpents?” asked the priest.

“The two serpents remind him who is wise that whoso betrays the great secret will die a double death,—he will die soul and body.”

After a moment of silence the priest continued,—

“If thou art in real fact Beroes” (here he inclined his head), “the great prophet of Chaldea” (he inclined his head a second time), “for whom there is no secret in heaven or on earth, be pleased to inform thy servant which star is the most wonderful.”

“Wonderful is Hor-set,⁷ which encircles heaven in the course of twelve years; for four smaller stars go around it. But the most wonderful is Horka,⁸ which encircles heaven in thirty years; for it has subject to it not only stars, but a great ring which vanishes sometimes.”

On hearing this, the Egyptian priest prostrated himself before the Chaldean. Then he gave him a purple scarf and a muslin veil, indicated where the incense was, and left the cave with low obeisances.

The Chaldean remained alone. He put the scarf on his right shoulder, covered his face with the veil, and, taking a golden spoon sprinkled into it incense, which he lighted at the lamp before the curtain. Whispering, he turned three times in a circle, and the smoke of the incense surrounded him with a triple ring, as it were.

During this time a wonderful disturbance prevailed in the cave. It seemed as if the top were rising and the sides spreading out. The purple curtain at the altar quivered, as if moved by hidden fingers. The air began to move in waves, as if flocks of unseen birds were flying through it.

The Chaldean opened the robe on his bosom, and drew forth a gold medal covered with mysterious characters. The cave trembled, the sacred curtain moved with violence, and little flames appeared in space at various points.

Then the seer raised his hands and began,—

“O Heavenly Father, gracious and merciful, purify my spirit. Send down on Thy unworthy servant a blessing, and extend Thy almighty arm against rebellious spirits, so that I may manifest Thy power.

“Here is the sign which I touch in thy presence. Here I am—I, leaning on the assistance of that God, the foreseeing and the fearless. I am mighty, and summon and conjure thee. Come hither with obedience,—in the name of Aye, Saraye, Aye, Saraye!”

At that moment from various sides were heard voices as of distant trumpets. Near the lamp some bird flew past, then a robe of ruddy color, afterward a man with a tail, finally a crowned cock which stood on the table before the curtain.

⁷ Jupiter.

⁸ Saturn.

The Chaldean spoke again,—

“In the name of the Almighty and Eternal—Amorul, Taneha, Rabur, Latisten.”

Distant sounds of trumpets were heard for a second time.

“In the name of the just and ever-living Eloy, Archima, Rabu, I conjure and summon thee. In the name of the star, which is the sun, by this its sign, by the glorious and awful name of the living God.”

The trumpets sounded again, and stopped on a sudden. Before the altar appeared a crowned vision with a sceptre in its hand, and sitting on a lion.

“Beroes! Beroes!” cried the vision, with a restrained voice. “Why dost thou summon me?”

“I wish my brethren of this temple to receive me with sincere hearts, and incline their ears to the words which I bring them from brethren in Babylon,” said the Chaldean.

“Be it so,” said the vision, and vanished.

The Chaldean stood as motionless as a statue, with his head thrown back, with hands lifted upward. He stood thus half an hour in a position impossible for an ordinary person.

During this time a part of the wall which formed one side of the cave pushed back, and three Egyptian priests entered. At sight of the Chaldean, who seemed to lie in the air, resting his shoulders on an invisible support, the priests looked at one another with amazement. The eldest said,—

“Long ago there were men like this among us, but no one has such power in our day.”

They walked around him on all sides, touched his stiffened members, and looked with fear at his face, which was bloodless and sallow, like that of a corpse.

“Is he dead?” asked the youngest.

After these words the body of the Chaldean, which had been bent backward, returned to a perpendicular position. On his face appeared a slight flush, and his upraised hands dropped. He sighed, rubbed his eyes like a man roused from sleep, looked at the priests, and said after a while, turning to the eldest,—

“Thou art Mefres, high priest of the temple of Ptah in Memphis. Thou art Herhor, high priest of Amon in Thebes, the first dignity in this state after the pharaoh. Thou,” he indicated the youngest, “art Pentuer, the second prophet in the temple of Amon, and the adviser of Herhor.”

“Thou art undoubtedly Beroes, the high priest and sage of Babylon, whose coming was announced to us a year ago,” answered Mefres.

“Thou hast told truth,” said the Chaldean.

He embraced them in turn, and they inclined before him.

“I bring you great words from our common fatherland, which is Wisdom,” said Beroes. “Be pleased to listen and act as is needful.”

At a sign from Herhor, Pentuer withdrew to the rear of the cave and brought out three armchairs of light wood for his superiors, and a low stool for his own use. He seated himself near the lamp, and took from his bosom a small dagger and wax-covered tablets.

When all three had occupied their chairs, the Chaldean began,—

“Mefres, the highest college of priests in Babylon addresses thee: ‘The sacred order of priests in Egypt is falling. Many priests collect money and women, and pass their lives amid pleasure. Wisdom is neglected. Ye have no power over the world which is invisible. Ye have no power over your own souls. Some of you have lost the highest faith, and the future is concealed from you. Things worse than this even happen; for many priests, feeling that their spiritual power is exhausted, have entered the way of falsehood and deceive simple people by cunning devices.’

“The highest college says this: ‘If ye wish to return to the good road, Beroes will remain some years with you, so as to rouse true light on the Nile by the aid of a spark brought from the high altar of Babylon.’”

“All is as thou sayest,” answered Mefres, confused. “Remain with us therefore a number of years, so that the youth growing up at present may remember thy wisdom.”

“And now, Herhor, to thee come words from the highest college.”

Herhor inclined his head.

“Because ye neglect the great secrets, your priests have not noted that evil years are approaching Egypt. Ye are threatened by internal disasters from which only virtue and wisdom can save you. But the worst is that if in the course of the coming decade ye begin war with Assyria, she will defeat your forces. Her armies will come to the Nile and destroy all that has existed here for ages.

“Such an ominous juncture of stars as is now weighing on Egypt happened first during the XIV. dynasty, when the Hyksos kings captured and plundered this country. It will come for the third time in five or six hundred years from Assyria and the people of Paras, who dwell to the east of Chaldea.”

The priests listened in terror. Herhor was pale; the tablets fell from Pentuer’s fingers; Mefres held the amulet hanging on his breast, and prayed while his lips were parching.

“Be on your guard then against Assyria,” continued the Chaldean, “for her hour is the present. The Assyrians are a dreadful people! They despise labor, they live by war. They conquer, they impale on stakes or flay living people, they destroy captured cities and lead away their inhabitants to bondage. For them to kill savage beasts is repose; to pierce prisoners with arrows or scoop out their eyes is amusement. Temples they turn into ruins, the vessels of the gods they use at their banquets, and make buffoons of priests and sages. They adorn their walls with skins torn from living people, and their tables with the blood-stained skulls of their enemies.”

When the Chaldean ceased speaking, the worthy Mefres answered,—

“Great prophet, thou hast cast fear on our souls, and dost not indicate a remedy. It may be true, and to a certainty is so, since thou hast said it, that the fates for a certain time will be against us, but how avoid this predicament? In the Nile there are dangerous places through which no boat can pass safely; so the wisdom of the helmsmen avoids deadly whirlpools. It is the same with misfortunes of nations. A nation is a boat, and an epoch is the river, which at certain periods has whirlpools. If the frail boat of a fisherman can avoid peril, why should not millions of people escape under similar conditions?”

“Thy words are wise,” replied Beroes, “but I can answer in part only.”

“Dost thou not know all that will happen?” asked Herhor.

“Ask me not touching that which I know, but which I may not disclose at this moment. Most important in your case is to keep peace for ten years with Assyria. Ye have power to do that. Assyria still dreads you; she knows not the juncture of evil fates above Egypt, and desires to wage war with northern and eastern nations who live near the seacoast. Ye might, therefore, conclude a treaty to-day with Assyria.”

“On what conditions?” asked Herhor.

“On very good ones. Assyria will yield to you the land of Israel as far as the city of Akko, and the land of Edom to the city of Elath. So your boundaries will be advanced ten days march toward the north without war, and ten days toward the east also.”

“But Phœnicia?” inquired Herhor.

“Approach not temptation!” exclaimed Beroes. “If the pharaoh were to stretch his hand to-day toward Phœnicia, in a month Assyrian armies intended for the north and east would turn southward, and a year hence or earlier their horses would be swimming in your sacred river.”

“Egypt cannot renounce influence over Phœnicia,” interrupted Herhor, with an outburst.

“Should she not renounce she would prepare her own ruin,” said the Chaldean.

“Moreover, I repeat the words of the highest college: ‘Tell Egypt,’ declared the brothers in Babylon, ‘to cower to the earth for ten years, like a partridge, for the falcon of evil fate is watching her. Tell her that we Chaldeans hate Assyria more than do the Egyptians, for we endure the burden of its rule; but still we recommend to the Egyptians peace with that bloodthirsty nation. Ten years is a short period; after that not only can ye regain your ancient place, but ye can save us.’”

“That is true!” added Mefres.

“Only consider,” continued the Chaldean, “should Assyria begin war with you, she would involve also Babylon, which hates warfare. War will exhaust our wealth and stop the labor of wisdom. Even were ye not defeated your country would be ruined for a long period. Ye would lose not only people, but the fertile soil, which would be buried by sand in the absence of earth-tillers.”

“We understand that,” replied Herhor; “hence we have no thought of attacking Assyria. But Phœnicia—”

“What harm will it be to you,” asked Beroes, “if the Assyrian robber squeezes the Phœnician thief? Your merchants and ours will gain by such action. But if ye want Phœnicians, let them settle on your shores. I am sure that the richest and most adroit of them would flee from Assyrian conquest.”

“What would happen to our fleet, if the Assyrians settled in Phœnicia?” inquired Herhor.

“That is not your fleet, but the Phœnician,” replied Beroes. “When Tyrian and Sidonian ships are lost to you, ye will build your own, and exercise Egyptians in navigation. If ye have mind and a practical character, ye will drive out Phœnician commerce from western regions.”

Herhor waved his hand.

"I have told that which was commanded me," said Beroes, "and do ye that which pleaseth you. But remember that ten evil years are impending."

"It seems to me, holy father," said Pentuer, "that thou didst speak of internal troubles which threaten Egypt in the future. What will they be, if it please thee to answer thy servant?"

"Do not ask. Those are things which ye ought to know better than I, who am a stranger. Clear sight will discover the disease, and experience will give the remedy."

"Our working people are terribly oppressed by the great," whispered Pentuer.

"Devotion has decreased," added Mefres.

"There are many who sigh for a foreign war," began Herhor. "I have seen this long time that we cannot carry on one, unless ten years hence—"

"Then will ye conclude a treaty with Assyria?" inquired the Chaldean.

"Amon, who knows my heart," answered Herhor, "knows how repugnant that treaty is to me. It is not so long since those vile Assyrians paid us tribute. But if thou, holy father, and the highest college say that the fates are against us, we must make the treaty."

"We must indeed," added Mefres.

"In that case inform the priests in Babylon of your decision, and they will arrange that King Assar shall send an embassy to Egypt. This treaty, believe me, is of great advantage; without war ye will increase your possessions. Indeed our priesthood have given deep thought to this question."

"May all blessings fall on you, wealth, power, and wisdom," said Mefres. "Yes, we must raise our priestly order, and do thou, holy Beroes, assist us."

"There is need, above all, to assuage the suffering of the people," put in Pentuer.

"The priests! the people!" said Herhor, as if to himself. "Above all, it is needful in this case to restrain those who wish war. It is true that his holiness the pharaoh is with me, and I think I have gained influence over the heir,—may he live through eternity! But Nitager, to whom war is as water to a fish; but the leaders of our mercenary forces, who only in war have significance; but our aristocracy, who think that war will pay Phœnician debts and give them property—"

"Meanwhile earth-tillers are fainting beneath an avalanche of labor, and public workmen are revolting against demands of overseers," added Pentuer.

"He is always expressing his thought!" said Herhor, in meditation. "Think thou, Pentuer, of earth-tillers and laborers; thou, Mefres, of the priests. I know not what ye will effect, but I swear that if my own son favored war I would bind and destroy him."

"Act in this way," said Beroes,— "let him carry on war who wishes, but not in those regions where he can meet Assyria."

With this the session ended. The Chaldean put his scarf on his shoulder and the veil on his face; Mefres and Herhor, one on each side of him, and behind him Pentuer, all turned toward the altar.

When Beroes had crossed his hands on his breast, he whispered, and again subterranean disturbance set in, and they heard as it were a distant uproar, which astonished the assistants.

“Baralanensis, Baldachiensis, Paumachiaë,” said the seer, aloud, “I summon thee to witness our stipulations and support our wishes.”

The sound of trumpets was heard so distinctly that Mefres bowed to the earth, Herhor looked around in astonishment, while Pentuer knelt, fell to trembling, and covered his ears.

The purple curtain at the altar shook, and its folds took such a form as if a man were behind who wished to pass through it.

“Be witnesses,” cried the Chaldean, in a changed voice, “ye powers above and ye powers beneath! And cursed be he who observes not this treaty or betrays its secret.”

“Cursed!” repeated some voice.

“And destroyed!”

“And destroyed.”

“In this visible and in that invisible life. By the ineffable name of Jehovah, at the sound of which the earth trembles, the sea draws back, fire quenches, and the elements of nature become evident.”

A real tempest rose in the cave. The sound of trumpets was mingled with voices, as it were, of distant thunders.

The curtain of the altar rose almost horizontally, and behind it, amid glittering lightning, appeared wonderful creatures, half human, half plant and animal, crowded and mingled together.

Suddenly all was silent, and Beroes rose slowly in the air, higher than the heads of the priests there attending.

At eight o’clock next morning Phut of Harran returned to the Phœnician inn “Under the Ship” to which his bags and casket stolen by thieves had been returned safely. A few minutes later came Asarhadon’s confidential servant, whom the innkeeper took to the cellar and examined briefly,—

“Well?”

“I was all night on the square where the temple of Set is,” answered the servant. “At ten in the evening out of the garden which lies about four places farther than the house of the ‘Green Star,’ came three priests. One of them, with black beard and hair, turned his steps through the square toward the temple of Set. I ran after him, but mist fell, and he vanished from my eyes. Whether he returned to the ‘Green Star’ or when, I know not.”

The innkeeper, when he had heard this account, struck his forehead and muttered to himself,—

“So my man from Harran, if he dresses as a priest and goes to a temple, must be a priest; and if he wears beard and hair, he must be a Chaldean priest. But if he meets priests here in secret, there must be some rogue’s tricks. I will not tell the police, for I might be caught. But I will inform some great man from Sidon, for there may be profit in this, if not for me, for our people.”

Soon the other messenger returned. Asarhadon went down to the cellar with this one also, and heard the following narrative,—

“I stood all night in front of the ‘Green Star.’ The man of Harran was there; he got drunk and raised such shouts that the policeman warned the doorkeeper.”

“Did he?” inquired the innkeeper. “The man of Harran was at the ‘Green Star’ all night, and thou didst see him?”

“Not only I, but the policeman.”

Asarhadon brought down the first servant, and commanded each to repeat his story. They repeated the stories faithfully, with the utmost conviction. It appeared then that Phut of Harran had remained all night at the “Green Star” without leaving the place for a moment; at the same time he went to the temple of Set, and did not return from it.

“Oh,” muttered Asarhadon, “in all this there is some very great villany. I must inform the elders of the Phœnician society, as quickly as possible, that this Hittite knows how to be in two places at once. I shall also beg him to move out of my inn. I do not take people who have two forms,—one their own, the other in supply. For a man of that kind is a great criminal, a wizard, or a conspirator.”

Asarhadon was afraid of such things; so he secured himself against enchantment by prayers to all the gods which adorned his inn. Then he hurried to the city, where he notified the elder of the Phœnician society and the elder of the guild of thieves of what had happened. Then, returning home, he summoned the decurion of police, and informed him that Phut might be a dangerous person. Finally he asked the man of Harran to leave the inn, to which he brought no profit, nothing but loss and suspicion.

Phut agreed to the proposition willingly, and informed the innkeeper that he intended to sail for Thebes that same evening.

“May thou never return!” thought the hospitable host. “May thou rot in the quarries, or fall into the river to be eaten by crocodiles.”

Chapter XXI

PRINCE Rameses began his journey in the most beautiful season of the year, during the month Phamenoth (end of December and beginning of January). The river had fallen to half its height, laying bare new strips of land day by day. From Thebes many barges with wheat were sailing down toward the sea; in Lower Egypt clover and beans had been harvested. Orange and pomegranate trees were covered with blossoms; in the fields earth-tillers had sown lupines, flax, barley, and had planted various beans, cucumbers, and other garden products.

Escorted to the landing of Memphis by priests, the highest dignitaries of the state, the guards of his holiness the pharaoh, the heir entered a gilded barge about ten in the morning. Under the bridge, on which were costly tents, twenty soldiers worked the oars, at the mast and at both ends of the boat the best naval engineers had taken their places. Some looked after the sails, others commanded the rowers, while still others steered the vessel.

Rameses had invited to his boat the most worthy high priest Mefres and the holy father Mentezufis, who were to be with him on the journey and in governing. The prince had invited also the worthy nomarch of Memphis, who conducted him to the boundary of his province.

Some hundreds of yards in front of the viceroy sailed the beautiful boat of the worthy Otoes, nomarch of Aa, a province adjoining the capital. Behind the prince came countless barges occupied by the court, by priests, by officials and officers.

Provisions and servants had been despatched earlier.

The Nile flows to Memphis between two lines of mountains. Farther the mountains turn eastward and westward, and the river divides into a number of arms in which the water flows through a broad plain to the Mediterranean.

When the barge had pushed away from the landing, the prince wished to converse with Mefres, the high priest. But at that moment such a shout broke forth that he was forced to leave his tent and show himself to the people.

The uproar grew greater, however, instead of subsiding. On both shores stood and increased every moment throngs of half-naked laborers, or people of the city dressed in holiday garments. Very many had garlands on their heads, almost all held green branches in their hands. Some groups sang; among others were heard the beating of drums and the sound of flutes.

Well-sweeps planted thickly along the river with buckets stood idle, but on the Nile circled a swarm of small boats, the occupants of which cast flowers at the barge of the viceroy. Some of them sprang into the water and swam after the vessel.

“They greet me as they would his holiness,” thought the viceroy.

And great pride possessed his heart at sight of so many stately barges which he could detain at one sweep of the hand, and those thousands who had left their occupations and ran the risk even of death just to see his divine countenance.

Rameses was delighted, especially by that immense shout which rose from the people without ceasing for an instant. That shout filled his breast, rose to his head, exalted him. It seemed to the prince that if he should spring from the barge he would not touch water, for the enthusiasm of the multitude would seize him and bear him aloft above the earth, as a bird is borne in flying.

The barge approached the left bank somewhat; the forms of people were outlined more clearly, and the prince saw something which he had not expected. While persons in the first ranks were clapping their hands and singing, in farther ones clubs were visible falling thickly and swiftly on backs that were hidden.

The astonished heir turned to the nomarch of Memphis.

“But look, worthiness, sticks are at work there.”

The nomarch shaded his eyes with his hand, his neck became red. “Pardon, most worthy prince, but I see badly.”

“They are beating—surely they are beating!”

“That is possible,” answered the nomarch. “Undoubtedly the priests have caught a band of thieves there.”

Not over-pleased with this conversation, the heir went toward the stern to the engineers, who turned the barge suddenly toward the middle of the river, and from that point he looked back at Memphis.

Both banks higher up the Nile were almost deserted, the boats had disappeared, the well-sweeps were moving as if nothing had happened.

“Is the solemnity over?” inquired the prince of an engineer, pointing to a higher place on the river.

“It is. The people have returned to their work,” said the engineer.

“Very quickly.”

“They must recover lost time,” said the engineer, incautiously.

The heir quivered, and looked at the man sharply. But he calmed himself soon and returned to the tent. For him shouts were of no further interest. He was gloomy and silent. After an outburst of pride, he felt contempt for that throng which passed so promptly from enthusiasm to well-sweeps and baling up muddy water.

At that point the Nile begins to separate into branches. The barge of the chief of Aa turned toward the west, sailed an hour, and stopped at the river bank. The crowds were still greater than at Memphis. A multitude of pillars had been set up with banners and triumphal arches entwined with green garlands. Among the people foreign faces and garments were more and more frequent.

When the prince landed, the priests approached with a baldachin, and the worthy nomarch Otoes began,—

“Be greeted, viceroy of the divine pharaoh, within the borders of Aa. As a sign of thy favor, which for us is as heavenly dew, be pleased to make an offering to the god Ptah, who is our patron, and take under thy protection and control this province, with its temples, officials, people, cattle, grain, and all that is here existent.”

Then he presented a group of young exquisites, fragrant, rouged, arrayed in gold-embroidered garments. Those were the remoter and nearer relatives of the nomarch, the local aristocracy.

Rameses looked at them with attention.

“Aha!” said he. “It seemed to me that these gentlemen lacked something, and now I see what it is,—they have no wigs.”

“Because thou, most worthy prince, dost not wear wigs, our young men have vowed not to wear them,” replied the nomarch.

After this explanation one of the young men stood behind the prince with a fan, another with a shield, a third with a dart, and the procession began. The heir walked under the baldachin, before him a priest with a tube in which incense was burning; there were maidens also who scattered roses on the path over which the prince was to travel.

The people in holiday garments, with branches in their hands, formed a line and shouted; they sang songs, or prostrated themselves before the lieutenant of the pharaoh. But the prince saw that in spite of the loud sounds of joy their faces were unenlivened and anxious. He saw also that the crowd was divided into groups which people of some sort were directing, and that the rejoicing took place by command. And again he felt in his heart a chill of contempt for that throng which knew not how to rejoice even.

Gradually the retinue approached the walled column which indicated the boundary between Aa and Memphis. On three sides of the column were inscriptions describing the extent of the province, its population, and the number of its cities; on the fourth side was a statue of Ptah, surrounded from foot to breast with an envelope; he had the usual cap on his head and a staff in his hand.

One of the priests gave the prince a golden spoon with burning incense. The heir uttered prescribed prayers, whirled the censer to the height of the divinity’s head, and bowed low a number of times in succession.

The shouts of the people and of the priests rose ever higher, though among youthful exquisites smiles and jests were observable. Since his reconciliation with Herhor the prince had shown great respect for gods and priests; so he frowned somewhat. In one moment the young men changed their bearing. All became serious, while some fell on their faces before the column.

“Indeed,” thought the prince, “people of noble birth are better than that rabble. Whatever nobles do they do it with spirit, not like those who make an uproar in my honor but are glad to hurry back to their workshops and stables.”

Now he measured better than ever the distance between him and the lowest people, and he understood that the aristocracy was the only class to which he was bound by a community of feeling. If suddenly they should vanish, those stately young men and beautiful women whose flashing glances followed every one of his movements, so as to serve him straightway and carry out his orders,—if they should vanish, the prince would feel more alone among the countless throngs of people than in a desert.

Eight negroes brought a litter adorned above the baldachin with ostrich feathers; the prince took his place in it, and advanced to the capital of Sochem, where he dwelt in a government palace.

The prince's stay in that province, which was only a few miles from Memphis, lasted a month. All this time he passed in receiving petitions, in accepting homage, in official receptions, and at feasts.

The feasts were of two kinds,—one in the palace, at which the aristocracy were present; the other in the outer court, where whole oxen were roasted, loaves of bread were eaten by the hundred, and hundreds of pitchers of beer drunk. At these appeared servants of the prince and the lower officials of the province.

Rameses admired the munificence of the nomarch, and the affection of the great lords around him, alert to every beck of his and ready to carry out his orders.

Wearied at last by amusements, Rameses declared to the worthy Otoes that he wished to become more nearly acquainted with the management of the province, for he had received a command from his holiness the pharaoh to study it.

His desire was satisfied. The nomarch requested the prince to sit in a litter borne by only two men, and with a great retinue escorted him to the temple of Hator. There the retinue remained in the antechamber, but the nomarch commanded the bearers to carry the prince to the summit of a pylon, which he himself ascended.

From the summit of a tower, ninety feet high, whence priests observed the sky and communicated through colored flags with the neighboring temples in Memphis, Atribis, and Anu, the eye surveyed in the radius of some miles almost a whole province.

From that place, too, the worthy Otoes showed Rameses the fields and vineyards of the pharaoh; he showed what canal they were clearing, what sluice they were repairing; he showed furnaces for smelting copper; he showed where the royal granaries stood, where the lotus and papyrus swamps were, what fields were covered with sand, and so on till he had finished.

Rameses was charmed with the beautiful view, and thanked Otoes warmly for the pleasure which he experienced. But when he returned to the palace, and, according to the advice of the pharaoh, noted impressions, he convinced himself that his knowledge of the economic conditions of Aa had not widened.

After some days he asked explanations again of Otoes touching the administration of the province. The worthy lord commanded all the officials to assemble and pass before the prince, who sat in the main court on an elevation.

Before the viceroy moved great and petty treasurers; scribes of grain, wine, cattle, woollen stuffs; chief masons, ditch diggers, naval and land engineers, healers of various diseases, officers over regiments of laborers, police scribes, judges, inspectors of prisons, even executioners and dissectors. After them the worthy nomarch presented the prince's own officials in that province to him. Rameses learned therefore, with no small astonishment, that in Aa and in the city of Sochem he had his own personal charioteer, torch-bearer, shield-bearer, dart-bearer, mace-bearer, some tens of litter-bearers, a number of cooks, cup-bearers, barbers, and many other servitors distinguished for attachment and faithfulness, though he had not even heard their names and did not know them.

Tortured and tired by a barren review of officials, the prince's courage fell. He was terrified by the thought that he understood nothing, hence was unfitted to rule; but he feared to confess this even to himself.

If Rameses could not rule Egypt, and others were able to rule it, what remained to him? Nothing but death. Without the throne he could have no happiness. He felt that for him life would be impossible unless he had power.

But when he had rested a few days, in so far as rest was attainable in that chaos of court life, he summoned Otoes, and said to him,—

“Worthiness, I have begged thee to acquaint me with the secret of governing Aa. Thou hast done so, thou hast shown me the country and the officials, but still I know nothing. On the contrary. I am like a man in the underground divisions of a temple who sees so many passages about him that he is unable at last to find his way out into daylight.”

The nomarch was confused.

“What am I to do?” asked he. “What dost thou wish of me, O ruler? Only say the word and I will yield to thee office, property, even life.”

And, seeing that the prince received this assurance with graciousness, he continued,—

“During thy journey thou hast seen the people of this province. Thou wilt say that all were not present. Agreed. I will command all to assemble, and they are, men, women, old men, and children, about two hundred thousand. From the summit of the pylon thou wert pleased to survey our whole province. But if it be thy wish, we can examine from near by every field, every village, and every street of the city of Sochem. Finally I have shown thee the officials; it is true, the very lowest were absent. But command and all will stand before thee to-morrow and fall on their faces. What am I to do more? Tell me, most worthy lord.”

“I believe that thou art most faithful,” answered Rameses. “Therefore explain to me two things: first, why has the income of his holiness diminished? second, what art thou doing thyself in the province?”

Otoes was confused, and the prince added quickly,—

“I wish to know what thou art doing here, and by what methods, since I am young and only commencing to govern.”

“Thou hast the wisdom of a century,” whispered the nomarch.

“Therefore it is proper,” continued the prince, “that I should ask men of experience and that thou shouldst give me knowledge.”

“I will show thee all, and give every explanation,” said Otoes. “But we should go to a place where there is no uproar.”

In fact, in the palace which the prince occupied as many people thronged in the inner and outer court as at a fair. They ate, drank, sang, raced or rested, and all this to enhance the glory of the viceroy whom they were serving.

About three in the afternoon, the nomarch gave command to bring two horses, and with the prince he rode forth from the city westward. The court remained in the palace and amused itself with still greater gladness.

The day was beautiful, cool; the earth was covered with plants and flowers. Over the heads of the horsemen were heard the songs of birds, the air was full of fragrance.

“How pleasant it is here!” exclaimed Rameses. “Now I am able to collect my thoughts for the first time in a month. I had begun to think that a whole regiment of chariots

had assembled in my head, and that from morning till evening reviews were held there.”

“Such is the fate of a ruler in this world,” said the nomarch.

They halted on an eminence. At their feet lay an immense meadow, cut through by a blue stream. On the north and on the south were white walls of towns; beyond the meadow on the rim of the horizon extended the reddish sands of the western desert, from which came an occasional breath of heated air, as if from a furnace.

On the meadow were countless herds of animals,—horned and hornless oxen, sheep, goats, asses, antelopes, even rhinoceroses.

Here and there were visible swampy places covered with water plants and reeds in which were teeming wild geese, ducks, doves, storks, pelicans, and ibises.

“Behold, lord,” said Otoes, “a picture of our country, Queneh, Egypt. Osiris fell in love with this strip of land in the midst of deserts; he covered it with plants and living creatures, so as to have from them profit. Then the kindly god took a human form and became the first pharaoh. When he felt that his body was withering, he left it and entered into his son, and later on into his son’s son.

“Thus Osiris lives among us, since the beginning of ages, as pharaoh, and he gains profit from Egypt and its wealth which he himself created. The lord has extended like a mighty tree. All the pharaohs are his roots, the nomarchs and priests his larger branches, the nobles the smaller branches. The visible god sits on the throne of the earth and receives the income which belongs to him from Egypt; the invisible god receives offerings in the temples, and declares his will through the lips of the priesthood.”

“Thou utterest truth,” said the viceroy. “Thus is it written.”

“Since Osiris the pharaoh,” continued the nomarch, “cannot himself be occupied in the management of the country, he has appointed us nomarchs, who come of his blood, to watch over his property.”

“That is true,” said Rameses. “Sometimes even the sun god becomes incarnate in a nomarch and begins a new dynasty. Thus rose the dynasties of Memphis, Elephantina, Thebes, and Ksoi.”

“Thou hast said it,” continued Otoes. “But now I will answer that which thou hast asked of me.

“Thou hast asked what I do in this province? I guard the property of Osiris, the pharaoh, and my own part in it. Look at those flocks; thou seest various animals. Some give milk, others flesh, others wool and skins. The people of Egypt give wheat, wine, woollen stuffs, vessels, houses. My affair is to take from each what he should give, and lay it down at the feet of the pharaoh.

“In watching over the numerous herds I could not succeed alone; so I have chosen watchful dogs and wise shepherds. Some of my servants milk animals, shear them, remove their skins; others watch them so that thieves may not steal or the plunderer injure. So with the province. I could not collect all the taxes and guard men from evil; hence I have officials who do what is proper, and render account of their action—”

“All this is true,” interrupted the prince. “I know and understand what thou sayest. But I cannot comprehend why the income of his holiness decreases, though guarded well, as thou hast told me.”

“Be pleased to remember,” continued the nomarch, “that Set, though a full brother of the radiant Osiris, hates that god, wars with him, and deforms all his labors. He sends deadly diseases on beasts and on men; he causes the overflow of the Nile to be scant or over-violent, and he hurls clouds of sand in time of heat upon Egypt.

“When a year is good, the Nile reaches the desert; when it is bad, the desert comes down to the Nile, and then the royal income decreases.

“Look!” continued he, pointing at the meadow. “The flocks there are numerous, but in my youth they were greater in number. But who is the cause of this? No other than Set, whom human power cannot vanquish. This meadow, great to-day, was once greater, and from this spot they could not see the desert, which now is a terror.

“When the gods are battling, men can do nothing; where Set conquers Osiris, who can bar the way to him?”

The worthy Otoes finished; the prince hung his head. In school he had heard not a little about the love of Osiris and the malice of Set, and while still a child he was angry that no one had forced Set to a final reckoning.

“When I grow up,” thought he at that time, “and carry a javelin, I will seek out Set and we will make a trial.”

And he was looking now at that measureless sand space, that kingdom of the ominous godhead which was decreasing the income of Egypt; but he had no thought to do battle with Set. For how can man fight with the desert? Man can only avoid it or perish.

Chapter XXII

HIS stay in Aa had so wearied Rameses that to seek rest and rally his thoughts he commanded to stop all solemnities in his honor, and directed that during his journey people should never come forth to greet him.

The prince's retinue were astonished, even somewhat offended; but they carried out the command, and Rameses again found some quiet. He had time to review his troops, which was his most agreeable occupation, and he could collect his scattered thoughts in some measure.

Shut up in the remotest corner of the palace, the prince began to consider how far he had carried out the commands of the pharaoh his father.

He had surveyed Aa with his own eyes,—its fields, towns, population, officials. He had verified the fact that the eastern edge of the province was yielding to the advance of the desert. He had observed that laborers were indifferent and stupid; that they did only what was commanded, and that with unwillingness. Finally, he had convinced himself that really faithful and loving subjects were to be found only among the aristocracy, for they were related to the family of the pharaohs, or were of the noble order, and were grandsons of the men who had fought under the great Rameses.

In every case those people rallied to the dynasty heartily, and were ready to serve it with genuine readiness; not like the low people, who when they had shouted a greeting ran back with all speed to their pigs and their oxen.

But the chief object of his mission was not explained yet. Rameses not only did not see clearly causes for the decrease of the royal income, but he did not know how to formulate this question: Why is there evil, and how can we correct it? He only felt that the legendary war of the god Set with Osiris furnished no true explanation, and gave no means of cure whatever.

But the prince, as the coming pharaoh, wished to have a great income, like that of former rulers in Egypt. He was boiling with anger at the very thought that when he had mounted the throne he would be as poor as his father and perhaps even poorer.

"Never!" cried the prince, balling his fists.

To increase the royal property he was ready to rush sword in hand against Set and hew that god into pieces, as Set had hewn his own brother Osiris. But instead of the cruel divinity and his legions he saw around him ignorance, the desert, and silence.

Under the influence of these struggles with his own thoughts, he seized once the high priest Mefres.

"Tell me, holy father, to whom all wisdom is familiar, why does the income of the state decrease, and in what manner can we add to it?"

Mefres raised his hands.

"May the spirit be blessed, worthy lord," cried the priest, "which whispered such thoughts to thee. Oh, mayest thou follow in the steps of mighty pharaohs who built

temples in all parts of Egypt, and through canals and sluices increased the area of fertile land in this country."

The old man was so moved that he fell to weeping.

"First of all," said the prince, "answer what I ask; for how think of temples and canals when the treasury is empty? The greatest misfortune has befallen Egypt: its rulers are threatened with indigence. We must examine this, first of all, and cure it; after that the rest will come easily."

"This, prince, thou wilt learn only in temples, at the foot of the altar," said the high priest. "There alone can thy noble curiosity be pacified."

Rameses started up with impatience.

"Before thy eyes, worthy father, the temple hides the whole country, even the treasury of the pharaoh. I am, for that matter, a priestly pupil. I was reared in the shadow of a temple, I know the secret of the spectacles in which the malice of Set is represented, with the death and re-birth of Osiris, and what does that profit me? When my father asks how to replenish the treasury, I can give him no answer. Should I persuade him to pray longer and oftener than he does at the present?"

"Prince, thou art blaspheming, thou knowest not the high ceremonies of religion. If thou knew them thou couldst answer many questions which torment thee; and hadst thou seen that which I have, thou wouldst know that the highest interest of Egypt is to support priests and temples."

"Men in old age become children," thought Rameses; and he stopped the conversation.

Mefres had been very pious at all times, but he had then grown eccentric.

"I should end well," thought Rameses, "if I yielded to priests and assisted at puerile ceremonies. Perhaps Mefres would even command me to stand for whole hours at an altar, as he himself does, beyond doubt, while expecting a miracle."

In the month Pharmuthi (end of January and beginning of February) the prince took leave of Otoes, before starting for Hak, the next province. He thanked the nomarchs and lords for their splendid reception, but at heart he was sad, for he knew that he had not mastered the problem put forth by his father.

Escorted by the family and court of Otoes, the prince with his retinue crossed to the right bank of the river, where he was greeted by Ranuzer, the worthy nomarch, together with the lords and the priests of his province.

When the prince reached the land of Hak, the priests raised a statue of Atmu, patron god of the province, and the officials fell prostrate; then the nomarch brought a golden sickle to Rameses, and begged him to open the harvest as viceroy of the pharaoh, that being the time to gather in barley.

Rameses took the sickle, cut a couple of handfuls of ears, and burnt them with incense before the god the guardian of the boundaries. After him the nomarch and the great lords cut barley also, and at last harvesters fell to reaping. They cut only ears, which they packed into bags; the straw remained on the field behind them.

When he had heard a tedious service before the god, the prince mounted a two-wheeled car, a division of the army moved on, and the priests followed. Two lords led the horses of the heir by the bridles. After the heir, on a second car, rode the nomarch, and next an immense train of lords and court servitors. The people,

agreeable to the will of Rameses, did not present themselves, but laborers in the fields, at sight of the procession, fell on their faces.

In this manner when he had passed a number of pontoon bridges thrown over arms of the Nile and canals, the prince reached toward evening the city of Anu, the capital.

For some days feasts of greeting continued; they rendered homage to the heir, and presented officials. At last Rameses begged to interrupt the festivities, and requested the nomarch to acquaint him with the wealth of the province.

Next morning the review began, and lasted a fortnight. Every day in the court of that palace where the heir had his residence appeared various guilds of craftsmen. These came under command of guild officers, to exhibit their productions. In turn came armorers and swordsmiths, makers of spears and axes, manufacturers of musical instruments,—fifes, trumpets, drums, harps. After these came the great guild of cabinetmakers, who exhibited armchairs, tables, couches, litters, and carriages, ornamented with rich drawings, made of various wood, mother-of-pearl, and ivory; then they brought kitchen utensils, things for the fire,—spits, two-eared pots, and flat pans with covers; jewellers rivalled one another with gold rings of wonderful beauty, amber bracelets and anklets, or chains made of gold mixed with silver. All these were carved with artistic skill, and inlaid with precious stones or enamel of various colors.

The procession was closed by potters who carried more than a hundred kinds of earthen vessels. They brought vases, pots, plates, pitchers, and jugs of the most varied forms and sizes, covered with paintings ornamented with beast and bird heads.

Each guild made an offering to the prince of its most beautiful productions. These filled a large hall, though among them no two things were similar.

At the end of the curious but interesting exhibition, his worthiness Ranuzer asked the prince if he was satisfied.

The heir thought awhile.

“More beautiful things I have not seen except in the temples or in the palaces of my father. But since only rich people can buy them, I do not see how the state treasury can have much profit from those objects.”

The nomarch was astonished at the young lord’s indifference, and was alarmed by his anxiety about income; but wishing to satisfy Rameses, he began then to conduct him through the royal factories.

One day they went to buildings where slaves were grinding flour in many hundred hand-mills and in mortars. They went to bakeries where men were baking bread and rusks to feed the army, and to places where preserved fish and meat were in course of preparation. They examined great tanneries, and shops where sandals were made, foundries where copper was cast into arms and utensils. After that, brickyards, guilds of weavers and tailors.

These establishments were situated in the eastern part of the city. Rameses at first looked at them with interest, but very soon he was disgusted with the sight of laborers who were timid, lean, sickly in complexion, and who had scars left by sticks on their shoulders. Thenceforth he stopped only briefly at factories. He preferred to look at the environs of the city of Anu. Far to the east he could see the desert where a year earlier the manœuvres had taken place between his corps and Nitager’s. He saw, like a thing on the palm of his hand, the road by which his regiments had marched,

the place where because of the beetles the military engines had to turn to the desert, and perhaps even the tree on which the canal digger had hanged himself.

From that elevation over there in company with Tutmosis he had looked at the blooming land of Goshen and cursed the priesthood. And there among the hills he had met Sarah, toward whom his heart had flamed up on a sudden.

To-day what changes! He had ceased to hate the priests from the hour that by the influence of Herhor he had received the army corps and the office of viceroy. He had become indifferent to Sarah, but that child whose mother she would be grew to him more and more important.

"What is she doing there?" thought the prince. "I have not had news from her this long time."

While he was looking on those eastern hills in this way, and thinking of the recent past, Ranuzer at the head of his escort felt certain that the prince had observed abuses in the factories and was meditating over means of punishment.

"I am curious to know what he discovered," thought the worthy nomarch. "Is it that half the bricks are sold to the Phœnicians, or that ten thousand sandals are lacking in the factory, or perhaps some low wretch has whispered to him about the foundries?"

And the nomarch's heart was anxious.

Suddenly the prince turned toward the escort and called Tutmosis, who was bound to be at all times near his person.

Tutmosis ran up. The heir went to one side with him.

"Hear me," said he, pointing toward the desert. "Dost thou see those hills?"

"We were there last year," sighed the courtier.

"I remember Sarah."

"I will burn incense to the gods at once," cried Tutmosis, "for I thought that your worthiness had forgotten faithful servants since becoming viceroy."

The prince looked at him and shrugged his shoulders.

"Select," said he, "from the gifts brought me, some of the most beautiful vessels, utensils, stuffs, and, above all, chains and bracelets, and take them to Sarah."

"Live through eternity, O Rameses!" exclaimed the exquisite, "for thou art high-minded."

"Tell her," continued the prince, "that for her my heart is always full of favor. Say that I wish her to care for her health. Tell Sarah that when the time of freedom comes and I have carried out the commands of my father, she will come to me and live in my house. I cannot endure that the mother of my child should be grieving in loneliness. Go, do as I have said, and return with pleasant tidings."

Tutmosis prostrated himself before the noble ruler, and took the road straightway. The retinue of Rameses, unable to divine the conversation, envied Tutmosis the favor of the viceroy, while the worthy Ranuzer felt alarm rising in his soul.

"Oh," said he, anxiously, "may I not need to raise hands on myself and leave my house in the bloom of my years! Why did I, the unfortunate, when taking the pharaoh's goods, not think of the hour of trial?"

His face became yellow, and his legs tottered under him. But the prince, mastered by a wave of reminiscences, took no note of this change in the nomarch.

Chapter XXIII

IN the city of Anu a series of feasts and amusements now followed. The worthy nomarch brought the choicest wines from his cellars; from the three neighboring provinces came the most beautiful dancers, the most famous musicians, the adroitest of jugglers. The prince's time was occupied thoroughly,—every morning reviews of troops and receptions; later feasts, spectacles, hunting, and feasts again.

But just when Ranuzer felt certain that the viceroy was tired of questions of administration and economy, the latter summoned him, and asked,—

“Thy province, worthiness, is among the richest in Egypt, is it not?”

“Yes, though we have had a number of hard years,” replied Ranuzer; and again his heart sank and his legs began to tremble.

“But this astonishes me,” said the prince, “that year after year the income of his holiness decreases. Canst thou not explain to me the cause of this?”

“Lord,” said the nomarch, bending his head to the earth, “I see that my enemies have sown distrust in thy soul; whatever I might say, therefore, would not convince thee. Permit me not to speak. Better let scribes come with documents, which thou canst touch with thy hand and verify.”

The prince was somewhat astonished at the unexpected outburst, but he accepted the offer; nay, he was glad of it. He thought, of course, that the report of these scribes would explain to him the secret of government.

The next day, therefore, came the chief scribe of Hak, and with him his assistants. They brought from ten to twenty rolls of papyrus written on both sides. When unwound, they formed a strip three spans of a great hand in width and in length sixty paces. For the first time the prince saw so gigantic a document, containing an inventory of one province only and that for one year.

The chief scribe sat on the floor with his legs doubled under him, and began,—

“In the thirty-third year of the reign of his holiness Mer-Amen-Rameses the Nile was late in its overflow. Earth-tillers, ascribing this misfortune to the black art of foreigners resident in the province of Hak, fell to wrecking the houses of Hittites, Jews, and Phœnicians, during which time a number of persons were slain by them. At command of his worthiness the nomarch, those guilty were brought to the court; twenty-five earth-tillers, two masons, and five sandal-makers were condemned to the quarries, one boatman was strangled—”

“What is that document?” interrupted the prince.

“It is the report of the court intended for the feet of his holiness.”

“Put it aside, and read about the income of the treasury.”

The assistants of the chief scribe folded the rejected document, and gave him others. Again the official began,—

“On the fifth day of the month Thoth six hundred measures of wheat were brought to the granaries of the pharaoh; for these a receipt was issued by the chief overseer.

“On the seventh day of Thoth the chief scribe discovered and verified a statement that from the supply of the previous year one hundred and forty-eight measures of wheat had vanished. During the verification two laborers stole a measure of grain and hid it among bricks. When this was proven they were brought to judgment and sent to the quarries for raising their hands to the property of his holiness.”

“But the hundred and forty-eight measures?” asked the heir.

“The mice ate them,” replied the scribe, and read on.

“On the eighth day of Thoth twenty cows and eighty-four sheep were sent to the slaughter; these, at command of the overseer of oxen, were issued to the Sparrow-Hawk regiment.”

In this manner the viceroy learned day after day how much wheat, barley, beans, and lotus seed were weighed into the granaries, how much given out to the mills, how much stolen, and how many laborers were condemned to the quarries for stealing. The report was so wearisome and chaotic that in the middle of the month Paofi the prince gave command to stop reading.

“Tell me, chief scribe,” said Rameses, “what dost thou understand from this? What dost thou learn from it?”

“Everything which thy worthiness commands.”

And he began again at the beginning, but from memory,—

“On the fifth of the month Thoth they brought to the granaries of the pharaoh—”

“Enough!” cried the enraged prince; and he commanded the man to depart.

The scribes fell on their faces, gathered up their papyruses quickly, and bore them away in a twinkling.

The prince summoned the nomarch. He came with crossed hands, but with a calm face, for he had learned from the scribes that the viceroy could understand nothing from reports, and that he did not give ear to them.

“Tell me, worthiness,” began the heir, “do they read reports to thee?”

“Every day.”

“And dost thou understand them?”

“Pardon, most worthy lord, but—could I manage a province if I did not understand?”

The prince was confused and fell to thinking. Could it be really that he, Rameses, was the only incompetent? But in this case what would become of his power?

“Sit down,” said he, after a while, indicating a chair to the nomarch. “Sit down and tell me how thou governest the province.”

The dignitary grew pale, and the whites of his eyes turned upward. Rameses noticed this, and began explaining,—

“Do not think that I have not trust in thy wisdom. On the contrary, I know no man who could manage better. But I am young and curious to know the art of government, so I beg thee to deal out to me crumbs of thy knowledge. Thou art ruling the province—I know that. Now explain to me the process.”

The nomarch drew breath and began,—

"I will relate, worthiness, the whole course of my life, so thou shalt know how weighty my work is.

"In the morning I bathe, then I give offerings to the god Amut; next I summon the treasurer, and ask him whether the taxes for his holiness are collected properly. When he answers yes, I praise him; when he says that these and those people have not paid, I issue an order to imprison the disobedient. Then I summon the overseers of the royal granaries, to learn how much grain has been delivered. If much, I praise them; if little, I issue an order to inflict stripes on the guilty.

"Later comes the chief scribe, and tells me which of the estates of his holiness needs troops, officials, and laborers, and I command to send them in return for a receipt. When he gives out less, I praise him; when more, I commence an investigation.

"In the afternoon come Phœnician merchants, to whom I sell wheat and bring money to the treasury of the pharaoh. Afterward I pray and confirm the sentences of the court; toward evening the police inform me of what has happened. No longer ago than the day before yesterday people from my province fell upon the territory Ka and desecrated a statue of the god Sebak. I was delighted in heart, for that god is not our patron; still I condemned some of the guilty to strangulation, some of them to the quarries, and all to receive stripes.

"Hence peace and good habits prevail in my province, and the taxes flow in daily."

"Though the income of the pharaoh has decreased here also," added Rameses.

"Thou speakest truth, lord," sighed the worthy nomarch. "The priests say that the gods are angry with Egypt because of the influx of foreigners; but I see that even the gods do not condemn gold and precious stones brought by Phœnicians."

At that moment the priest Mentezufis, preceded by an officer in waiting, entered the hall to beg the prince and the nomarch to a public devotion. Both dignitaries consented, and the nomarch exhibited so much piety that the prince was astonished. When Ranuzer left the company with obeisances, Rameses said to the priest,—

"Since with me, holy prophet, thou takest the place of the most venerable Herhor, I beg thee to explain one thing which fills my heart with anxiety—"

"Shall I be able to explain?" asked the prophet.

"Thou wilt answer me, for thou art filled with wisdom, of which thou art the servant. But consider what I say— Thou knowest why his holiness sent me hither."

"He sent thee, prince, to become familiar with the wealth of the country and its institutions," said Mentezufis.

"I am obeying. I examine the nomarchs, I look at the country and the people. I listen to reports of scribes, but I understand nothing; this poisons my life and astounds me.

"When I have to do with the army, I know everything,—how many soldiers there are, how many horses, chariots, which officers drink or neglect their service, and which do their duty. I know, too, what to do with an army. When on a plain there is a hostile corps, I must take two corps to beat it. If the enemy is in a defensive position, I should not move without three corps. When the enemy is undisciplined and fights in unordered crowds against a thousand, I send five hundred of our soldiers and beat him. When the opposing side has a thousand men with axes, and I a thousand, I rush at them and finish those troops, if I have a hundred men with slings in addition.

“In the army, holy father,” continued Rameses, “everything is as visible as the fingers on my hand, and to every question an answer is ready which my mind comprehends. Meanwhile in the management of a province I not only see nothing, but there is such confusion in my head that more than once I forget the object of my journey.

“Answer me, therefore, sincerely, as a priest and an officer: What does this mean? Are the nomarchs deceiving me, or am I incompetent?”

The holy prophet fell to thinking.

“Whether they attempt to deceive thee, worthiness,” answered he, “I know not, for I have not examined their acts. It seems to me, however, that they explain nothing, because they themselves comprehend nothing. The nomarchs and their scribes,” continued the priest, “are like decurions in an army; each one knows his ten men and reports on them. Each commands those under him. But the decurion knows not the general plan made by leaders of the army. The nomarchs and the scribes write down everything that happens in their province, and lay those reports at the feet of the pharaoh. But only the supreme council extracts from them the honey of wisdom.”

“But that honey is just what I need,” said the prince. “Why do I not get it?”

Mentezufis shook his head.

“Wisdom of the state,” said he, “belongs to the priesthood; therefore only the man who is devoted to the gods can obtain it. Meanwhile, worthiness, though reared by priests, thou pushest thyself away from the temples decisively.”

“How is that? Then, if I do not become a priest, will ye not explain to me?”

“There are things, worthiness, which thou mayest know even now, as erpatr, there are others which thou wilt know when thou art the pharaoh. There are still others which only a high priest may know.”

“Every pharaoh is a high priest,” interrupted the prince.

“Not every pharaoh. Besides, even among high priests there are grades of difference.”

“Then,” cried the enraged heir, “ye hide the order of the state from me, and I shall not be able to carry out the commands of my father?”

“What the prince needs may be known,” answered Mentezufis, quietly, “for thou hast the inferior priestly consecration. Those things, however, are hidden behind the veil in temples, which no one will dare to draw aside without due preparation.”

“I will draw it.”

“May the gods defend Egypt from such a misfortune!” replied the priest, as he raised both his hands. “Dost thou not know, worthiness, that a thunderbolt would kill any man who without the needed ceremonies should touch the veil? Were the prince to take to the temple any slave or condemned criminal and let him stretch out his hand, the man would die that same instant.”

“For ye would kill him.”

“Each one of us would die just like an ordinary criminal were he to approach the altar sacrilegiously. In presence of the gods, my prince, a pharaoh or a priest means as little as a slave.”

“What am I to do, then?” asked Rameses.

“Seek an answer to thy trouble in the temple, after thou hast purified thyself by prayers and fasting,” answered the priest. “While Egypt is Egypt, no ruler has gained wisdom of state in another way.”

“I will meditate over this,” said the prince. “Though I see from thy words that the most venerable Mefres, and thou, holy prophet, wish to involve me in ceremonies as ye have involved my father.”

“Not at all. Worthiness, if thou as pharaoh would limit thyself to commanding the army, thou mightst take part in ceremonies a few times a year merely, for on other occasions the high priest would be thy substitute. But if thou wish to learn the secrets of temples, thou must honor the gods, for they are the fountain of wisdom.”

Chapter XXIV

RAMESES saw now that either he would not carry out the commands of the pharaoh or that he must yield to the will of the priesthood; this filled him with dislike and anger. Hence he did not hurry toward the secrets hidden in temples. He had time yet for fasting and devotional exercises; so he took part all the more zealously in feasts which were given in his honor.

Tutmosis, a master in every amusement, had just returned, and brought the prince pleasant news from Sarah. She was in good health and looked well, which concerned Rameses less at that time. But the priests gave such a horoscope to the coming child that the prince was delighted.

They assured him that the child would be a son, greatly gifted by the gods, and if his father loved him he would during life obtain high honor.

The prince laughed at the second part of this prediction. "Their wisdom is wonderful," said he to Tutmosis. "They know that it will be a son, while I, its father, do not know; and they doubt whether I shall love it, though it is easy to divine that I shall love the child even should it be a daughter. And as to honor for it, let them be at rest; I will occupy myself with that question."

In the month Pachons (January, February) the heir passed through the province of Ka, where he was received by the nomarch Sofra. The city of Anu lay about seven hours of a foot journey from Atribis, but the prince was three days on this journey. At thought of the fasts and prayers which were awaiting him during initiation into temple secrets, Rameses felt a growing wish for amusements. His retinue divined this; hence pleasure followed pleasure.

Again, on the road over which he travelled to Atribis, appeared throngs of people with shouts, flowers, and music. The enthusiasm reached its height at the city. It even happened that a certain gigantic laborer threw himself under the chariot of the viceroy. But when Rameses held in the horses, a number of young women stepped forth from the crowd and wreathed the whole chariot with flowers.

"Still they love me!" thought the prince.

In the province of Ka he did not ask the nomarch about the income of the pharaoh, he did not visit factories, he did not command to read reports to him; he knew that he would understand nothing, so he deferred those occupations till the time of his initiation. But once, when he saw that the temple of the god Sebak stood on a lofty eminence, he desired to ascend the pylon and examine the surrounding country.

The worthy Sofra accomplished at once the will of the heir, who, when he found himself on the summit of the pylon, passed a couple of hours with great delight there.

The province of Ka was a fertile plain. A number of canals and branches of the Nile passed through it in every direction, like a network of silver and lapis lazuli. Melons and wheat sown in November were ripening. On the fields were crowds of naked people who were gathering cucumbers or planting cotton. The land was covered with small buildings which at points were close together and formed villages.

Most of the dwellings, especially those in the fields, were mud huts covered with straw and palm leaves. In the towns the houses were walled, had flat roofs, and looked like white cubes with holes in places where there were doors and windows. Very often on such a cube was another somewhat smaller, and on that a third still smaller, and each story was painted a different color. Under the fiery sun of Egypt those houses looked like great pearls, sapphires, and rubies, scattered about on the green of the fields, and surrounded by palms and acacias.

From that place Rameses saw a phenomenon which arrested his attention. Near the temples the houses were more beautiful, and more people were moving in the fields about them.

“The lands of the priests are the most valuable,” thought he; and once again he ran over with his eyes the temples great and small, of which he saw between ten and twenty from the pylon.

But since he had agreed with Herhor, and needed the services of the priesthood, he did not care to occupy himself longer with that problem.

In the course of the following days the worthy Sofra arranged a series of hunts for Rameses, setting out toward the east from Atribis. Around the canals they shot birds with arrows; some they snared in an immense net trap which took in a number of tens of them, or they let out falcons against those which were flying at freedom. When the prince’s retinue entered the eastern desert, great hunts began with dogs and panthers against wild beasts. Of these they killed and seized, in the course of some days, a couple of hundred.

When the worthy Sofra noticed that the prince had had enough of amusement in the open air and of company intents, he ceased hunting and brought his guest by the shortest road to Atribis.

They arrived about four hours after midday, and the nomarch invited all to a feast in his palace.

He conducted the prince to a bath, he assisted at the bathing, and brought out from his own chest perfumes wherewith to anoint Rameses. Then he oversaw the barber who arranged the viceroy’s hair; next he kneeled down on the pavement and implored the prince to accept new robes from him.

These were a newly woven tunic covered with embroidery, a skirt worked with pearls, and a mantle interwoven with gold very thickly, but so delicate that it could be held between a man’s ten fingers.

The heir accepted this graciously, declaring that he had never received a gift of such beauty.

The sun set, and the nomarch conducted the prince to the hall of entertainment.

It was a large court surrounded by columns and paved with mosaic. All the walls were covered with paintings representing scenes in the lives of the ancestors of Sofra; hence expeditions by sea, hunts, and battles. Over the space, instead of a roof, was a giant butterfly with many-colored wings which were moved by hidden slaves to freshen the atmosphere. In bronze holders fastened to the columns blazed bright tapers which gave out smoke with fragrance.

The hall was divided into two parts: one was empty, the other filled with chairs and small tables for guests. Aside in the second part rose a platform on which, under a costly tent with raised sides, was a table and a couch for Rameses.

At each small table were great vases with palms, acacias, and fig-trees. The table of the heir was surrounded with plants having needle-like leaves; these filled the space round about with the odor of balsam.

The assembled guests greeted the prince with a joyful shout, and when Rameses occupied his place beneath a baldachin whence there was a view of the court, his retinue sat down at the tables.

Harps sounded, and ladies entered in rich, muslin robes with open bosoms; precious stones were glittering upon their persons. Four of the most beautiful surrounded Rameses; the others sat near the dignitaries of his retinue.

In the air was the fragrance of roses, lilies of the valley, and violets; the prince felt the throbbing of his temples.

Slaves, male and female, in white, rose-colored, and blue tunics, brought in cakes, roasted birds, and game, fish, wine, fruits, also garlands of flowers with which the guests crowned themselves. The immense butterfly moved its wings more and more quickly, and in the unoccupied part of the court was a spectacle. In turn appeared dancers, gymnasts, buffoons, performers of tricks, swordsmen; when any one gave an unusual proof of dexterity, the spectators threw to him gold rings or flowers from their garlands.

The feast lasted some hours, interspersed with shouts of guests wishing happiness to the prince, and to the nomarch and his family.

Rameses, who was in a reclining position on a couch covered with a lion's skin which had golden claws, was served by four ladies. One fanned him; another changed the garland on his head; the other two offered food to him. Toward the end of the feast the one with whom the prince talked with most willingness brought a goblet of wine. Rameses drank half, and gave the remainder to the woman; when she had drunk that half, he kissed her lips.

Slaves quenched the torches then quickly, the butterfly ceased to move its wings, there was night in the court, and silence interrupted by the nervous laughter of women.

All on a sudden the quick tramping of people was heard and a terrible shouting.

"Let me in!" cried a hoarse voice. "Where is the heir? Where is the viceroy?"

There was a dreadful disturbance in the hall. Women were terrified; men called out,—

"What is it?—An attack on the heir! Hei, guards!"

The sound of broken dishes was heard, and the rattle of chairs.

"Where is the heir?" bellowed the stranger.

"Guards! Defend the life of the heir!" shouted men in the courtyard.

"Light the torches!" called the youthful voice of the heir. "Who is looking for me? Here I am!"

Torches were brought. In the hall were piles of overturned and broken furniture behind which guests were in hiding. On the platform the prince tore away from the women, who screamed while they held to his legs and arms firmly. Near the prince was Tutmosis, his wig torn, a bronze pitcher in his hand with which he was ready to open the head of any one who dared to go nearer the viceroy. At the door of the hall appeared warriors with swords drawn for action.

“What is this? Who is here?” cried the terrified nomarch.

At last they beheld the author of the disturbance, a gigantic man, naked, and mud-covered. He had bloody stripes on his shoulders; he was kneeling on the steps of the platform and stretching his hands toward Rameses.

“This is the murderer,” shouted the nomarch. “Seize him!”

Tutmosis raised his pitcher; soldiers rushed up from the door. The wounded man fell with his face to the steps, crying,—

“Have mercy, sun of Egypt!”

The soldiers were ready to seize him when Rameses pulled himself free of the women and approached the unfortunate giant.

“Touch him not!” cried Rameses to the warriors. “What dost thou wish, man?”

“I wish, lord, to tell thee of the wrongs which we suffer.”

At that moment the nomarch stepped up to the viceroy and whispered,—

“This is a Hyksos. Look, worthiness, at his shaggy hair and his beard. But the insolence with which he burst in proves that the criminal is not a genuine Egyptian.”

“Who art thou?” asked Rameses.

“I am Bakura, a laborer in the regiment of diggers in Sochem. We have no work now, so the nomarch Otoes commanded us—”

“He is a drunkard and a madman!” whispered the excited Sofra. “How dares he speak to thee, lord—”

The prince gave such a look to the nomarch that he bent double and moved backward.

“What did the worthy Otoes command you the workers?” asked the viceroy of Bakura.

“He commanded us, lord, to go along the bank of the Nile, swim in the river, stand at the roads, make an uproar in thy honor, and he promised to give us what was proper for doing so. For two months before that, we, O lord, received nothing,—neither barley cakes, nor fish, nor olive oil for our bodies.”

“What is thy answer to this, worthy lord?” asked the prince of the nomarch.

“He is a dangerous drunkard, a foul liar,” answered Sofra.

“What noise didst thou make in my honor?”

“That which was commanded,” said the giant. “My wife and daughter cried with the others, ‘May he live through eternity!’ I sprang into the water and threw a garland at thy barge, worthiness; for this they promised an uten. When thou wert pleased graciously to enter the city of Atribis, I approached to throw myself under the horses and stop thy chariot—”

The prince laughed.

“As I live,” said he, “I did not think that we should end the feast with such joyousness. But how much did they pay thee for falling under the chariot?”

“They promised three utens, but have paid nothing to me or my wife or my daughter. Nothing has been given to the whole regiment of diggers to eat for two months past.”

“On what do ye live then?”

“On begging, or on that which we earn from some earth-worker. In this sore distress we revolted three times, and desired to go home. But the officers and scribes either promised to give something or commanded to beat us.”

“For the noise made in my honor?” put in the prince, laughing.

“Thy worthiness speaks truth. Yesterday the revolt was greatest, for which the worthy nomarch Sofra gave command to take the tenth man. Every tenth man was clubbed, and I got the most, for I am big and have three mouths to feed,—my own, my wife’s, and my daughter’s. When I was clubbed I broke away from them to fall down, O lord, in thy presence, and tell thee our sorrows. Beat us if we are guilty, but let the scribes give us that which is due, for we are dying of hunger,—we, our wives, and our children.”

“This man is possessed!” exclaimed Sofra. “Be pleased, lord, to see the damage he has wrought here. I would not take ten talents for those dishes, pitchers, and tables.”

Among the guests, who now were recovering their senses, a muttering began.

“This is a bandit!” said they. “Look at him, really a Hyksos. Boiling up in him is the cursed blood of his ancestors, the men who invaded and ruined Egypt. Such costly furniture, such splendid vessels, broken into fragments!”

“The loss caused the state by one rebellion of unpaid laborers is greater than the value of these vessels,” said Rameses.

“Sacred words! They should be written on monuments,” said some among the guests. “Rebellion takes people from their labor and grieves the heart of his holiness. It is not proper that laborers should be unpaid for two months in succession.”

The prince looked with contempt on those courtiers, changeable as clouds; he turned then to the nomarch.

“I give thee,” said he, threateningly, “this punished man. I am certain that a hair of his head will not fall from him. To-morrow morning I wish to see the regiment to which he belongs and learn whether he speaks truth or falsehood.”

After these words Rameses went out, leaving the nomarch and the guests in vexation.

Next morning the prince, while dressing with the aid of Tutmosis, asked him,—

“Have the laborers come?”

“They have, lord; they have been waiting for thy commands since daybreak.”

“And is that man Bakura among them?”

Tutmosis made a wry face and answered,—

“A marvellous thing has happened. The worthy Sofra gave command to shut the fellow up in an empty cellar of the palace. Well, the disorderly rascal, a very strong

man, broke the door to another place where there is wine; he overturned a number of pots of very costly wine, and got so drunk that—”

“That what?” asked the prince.

“That he perished.”

The prince sprang up from his chair.

“And dost thou believe that he drank himself to death?”

“I must believe, for I have no proof that they killed him.”

“But if I look for proof?” burst out the prince.

He ran through the room, and snorted like an angry lion. When he was somewhat quieted, Tutmosis added,—

“Seek not for proof where it is not to be discovered, for thou wilt not find even witnesses. If any man strangled that laborer at command of the nomarch, he will not confess; the laborer himself is dead, and will not say anything; besides, what would his complaint against the nomarch amount to? In these conditions no court would begin to investigate.”

“But if I command?” asked the viceroy.

“In that case they will investigate and prove the innocence of Sofra. Then thou wilt be put to shame, and all the nomarchs with their relatives and servants will become thy enemies.”

The prince stood in the middle of the chamber and pondered.

“Finally,” said Tutmosis, “everything seems to show this, that the unfortunate Bakura was a drunkard or a maniac, and, above all, a man of foreign blood. If a genuine Egyptian in his senses were to go without pay for a year, and be clubbed twice as much as this man, would he dare to break into the palace of the nomarch and appeal to thee with such an outcry?”

Rameses bent his head, and seeing that there were nobles in the next chamber, he said in a voice somewhat lowered,—

“Knowest thou, Tutmosis, since I set out on this journey Egypt begins to appear somehow strange to me? At times I ask my own self if I am not in some foreign region. Then again my heart is disturbed, as if I had a curtain before me, behind which all kinds of villany are practised, but which I myself cannot see with my own eyes.”

“Then do not look at them; for if thou do, it will seem at last to thee that we should all be sent to the quarries,” said Tutmosis, smiling. “Remember that the nomarchs and officials are the shepherds of thy flock. If one of them takes a measure of milk for himself, or kills a little sheep, of course thou wilt not kill him or drive the man away. Thou hast many sheep, and it is not easy to find shepherds.”

The viceroy, now dressed, passed into the hall of waiting, where his suite stood assembled,—priests, officers, and officials. Then he left the palace with them, and went to the outer courtyard.

That was a broad space, planted with acacias, under the shade of which the laborers were waiting for the viceroy. At the sound of a trumpet the whole crowd sprang up, and stood in five ranks before him.

Rameses, attended by a glittering retinue of dignitaries, halted suddenly, wishing, first of all, to look at the regiment from a distance. The men were naked, each with a white cap on his head, and girt about the hips with stuff like that of which the cap was made. In the ranks Rameses could distinguish easily the brown Egyptian, the negro, the yellow Asiatic, the white inhabitants of Libya, and also the Mediterranean islands.

In the first rank stood workers with pickaxes, in the second those with mattocks, in the third those with shovels. The fourth rank was composed of carriers, of whom each had a pole and two buckets; the fifth was also of carriers, but with large boxes borne by two men. These last carried earth freshly dug.

In front of the ranks, some yards distant, stood the overseers; each held a long stick in his hand, and either a large wooden circle or a square measure.

When the prince approached them, they cried in a chorus,—

“Live thou through eternity!” and kneeling, they struck the earth with their foreheads. The heir commanded them to rise, and surveyed them again with attention.

They were healthy, strong persons, not looking in the least like men who had lived two months on begging.

Sofra with his retinue approached the prince. But Rameses, feigning not to see him, turned to one of the overseers,—

“Are ye earth-tillers from Sochem?” inquired he.

The overseer fell at full length with his face to the earth.

The prince shrugged his shoulders, and called out to the laborers,—

“Are ye from Sochem?”

“We are earth-workers from Sochem,” answered they, in chorus.

“Have ye received pay?”

“We have received pay; we are sated and happy servants of his holiness,” answered the chorus, giving out each word with emphasis.

“Turn around!” commanded the prince.

They turned. It is true that each had frequent and deep scars from the club, but no fresh stripes on their bodies.

“They are deceiving me,” thought the heir.

He commanded the laborers to go to their barracks, and, without greeting the nomarch or taking leave of him, he returned to the palace.

“Wilt thou, too, tell me,” said he to Tutmosis on the road, “that those men are laborers from Sochem?”

“But they say that they are, they themselves give answer,” replied the courtier.

Rameses gave command to bring his horse, and he rode to the army encamped beyond the city. He reviewed the regiments all day. About noon, on the field of exercise, appeared, at command of the nomarch, some tens of carriers with food and wine, tents and furniture. But the prince sent them back to Atribis; and when the

hour came for army food, he commanded to serve that to him; so he ate dried meat with oat cakes.

These were the mercenary regiments of Libya. When the prince ordered them to lay aside arms in the evening, and took farewell of the men, it seemed as though the soldiers and officers had yielded to madness. Shouting "May he live through eternity!" they kissed his hands and feet, made a litter of their spears and mantles, and bore him to the city, disputing on the way with one another for the honor of carrying the heir on their shoulders.

The nomarch and the officials of the province were frightened, when they saw the enthusiasm of the Libyans, and the favor which the heir showed barbarians.

"Here is a ruler!" whispered the chief secretary to Sofra. "If he wished, those people would kill us and our children."

The troubled nomarch sighed to the gods, and commended himself to their gracious protection.

Late at night Rameses found himself in his own palace, and there the servants told him that another bedchamber had been given him.

"Why is this?"

"Because in the first chamber people saw a poisonous serpent, which hid, and no one could find it."

In a wing near the house of the nomarch was a new sleeping chamber,—a four-cornered room surrounded by columns on all sides. Its walls were of alabaster, covered with painted bas-reliefs; below were plants in vases; higher up garlands of olive and laurel.

Almost in the centre of the room stood a great bed inlaid with ebony, gold, and ivory. The chamber was lighted by two fragrant tapers; under the colonnade were small tables with wine, food, and garlands of roses. In the ceiling was a large quadrangular opening covered with linen.

The prince bathed and lay on the soft bed; his servants went to remote chambers. The tapers were burning out; cool air filled with the odor of flowers moved in the chamber. At the same time low music from harps was heard above him.

Rameses raised his head. The linen canopy of the chamber slipped to one side, and through the opening he saw the constellation Leo, and in it the brilliant star Regulus. The music of harps became louder.

"Are the gods preparing to make me a visit?" thought the viceroy, with a smile.

In the opening of the ceiling shone a broad streak of light; it was powerful but tempered. A moment later a litter appeared in the form of a golden boat, bearing a small arbor with flowers in it; the pillars of the arbor were entwined with garlands of roses, the top of it covered with lotuses and violets.

On ropes, entwined with green, the golden boat descended to the chamber in silence. It stopped on the pavement, and from beneath the flowers came forth a naked maiden of unparalleled beauty. Her body had the smoothness of marble; from her amber-like waves of hair came an intoxicating odor.

The maiden stepped from the litter and knelt before Rameses.

"Art thou the daughter of Sofra?" asked he.

“Thou speakest truth, Lord Rameses.”

“And still thou hast come to me!”

“To implore thee to pardon my father. He is unhappy; since midday he has been shedding tears and covering his head with ashes.”

“And if I would not forgive him, wouldst thou leave me?”

“No,” whispered she.

Rameses drew her toward him and kissed her with passion. His eyes flashed.

“For this I forgive him.”

“Oh, how good thou art!” cried she, nestling up to Rameses; then she added with sweetness,—

“Wilt thou command a reward for the damages done by that mad laborer?”

“I will command.”

“And wilt thou take me to thy household?”

Rameses looked at her.

“I will take thee, for thou art a beauty.”

“Really?” asked she, putting her arm around his neck. “Look at me better. Among the beauties of Egypt I hold only the fourth place.”

“What does that mean?”

“In Memphis, or near there, dwells thy first; happily she is only a Jewess! In Sochem is the second—”

“I know nothing of that one,” interrupted Rameses.

“Oh, thou dove! Then surely thou knowest nothing of the third one in Anu.”

“Does she too belong to my household?”

“Ungrateful!” cried the girl, striking him with a lotus flower. “Thou wouldst be ready to say the same of me a month hence. But I will not let myself be injured.”

“Like thy father.”

“Hast thou not forgotten him yet? Remember that I will go—”

“Stay, stay!”

Next day the viceroy was pleased to receive homage and a feast from Sofra. He praised in public the nomarch’s government of the province, and to reward him for the damages caused by the drunken laborer, Rameses presented him with one-half of the furniture and vessels presented in Anu.

The second half of those gifts was taken by the beautiful Abeb, daughter of the nomarch, as lady of the court. Besides, she commanded that five talents be given her from the treasury of the viceroy, for clothes, slaves, and horses.

In the evening the prince, while yawning, spoke thus to Tutmosis,—

“His holiness my father gave me a great lesson when he said that women are very costly.”

“The position is worse when there are no women,” replied the exquisite.

“But I have four, and I do not even know clearly how. I might give thee two of them.”

“And Sarah?”

“Not her, especially if she has a son.”

“If thou wilt assign a good dowry, husbands will be found for those charmers most easily.”

The prince yawned a second time.

“I do not like to hear of dowries,” said he. “Aaa! What luck, that I shall tear away from thee and settle among the priests!”

“Wilt thou indeed?”

“I must. At last I shall learn of them why the pharaohs are growing poorer. Well, I shall sleep.”

Chapter XXV

THAT same day, in Memphis, Dagon the Phœnician, the viceroy's worthy banker, lay on a couch under the veranda of his mansion. Around him were fragrant potted bushes with needle-like leaves. Two black slaves cooled the rich man with fans, and he, while playing with a young ape, was listening to accounts read by his scribe to him.

At that moment a slave with a sword, helmet, dart, and shield (the banker loved military dress), announced the worthy Rabsun, a Phœnician merchant then settled in Memphis.

The guest entered, bowed profoundly, and dropped his eyelids in such fashion that Dagon commanded the scribe and the slaves to withdraw from the veranda. Then, as a man of foresight, he surveyed every corner, and said to the visitor,—

"We may talk."

Rabsun began without prelude,—

"Dost thou know, worthiness, that Prince Hiram has come from Tyre?"

Dagon sprang up from the couch.

"May the leprosy seize him and his princeship!" shouted the banker.

"He has just reminded me," continued the guest, calmly, "that there is a misunderstanding between him and thee."

"What misunderstanding?" cried Dagon. "That thief has robbed, destroyed, ruined me. When I sent my ships after other Tyrian vessels to the west for silver, the helmsmen of that thief Hiram cast fire on them, tried to push them into a shallow. Well, my ships came back empty, burnt, and shattered. May the fire of heaven burn him!" concluded the raging banker.

"But if Hiram has for thee a profitable business?" inquired the guest, stolidly.

The storm raging in Dagon's breast ceased on a sudden.

"What business can he offer me?" asked the banker, with a voice now calmed completely.

"He will tell this himself, but first he must see thee."

"Well, let him come to me."

"He thinks that thou shouldst go to him. He, as is known to thee, is a member of the chief council of Tyre."

"He will perish before I go to him," cried the banker, enraged a second time.

The guest drew an armchair to the couch, and slapped Dagon's thigh.

"Dagon," said he, "have sense."

"Why have I not sense, and why dost thou, Rabsun, not say to me worthiness?"

“Dagon, be not foolish!” answered the guest. “If thou wilt not go to him and he will not come to thee, how will ye do business?”

“Thou art foolish, Rabsun!” burst out Dagon again. “Before I go to Hiram let my hand wither; with that politeness I should lose half the profit.”

The guest thought awhile.

“Now thou hast uttered a wise word,” said he; “so I will tell thee something. Come to me and Hiram will come also; ye can talk of that business in my house.”

Dagon bent his head, and half closing his eyes, inquired roguishly,—

“Ei, Rabsun!—Tell, outright how much did he give thee?”

“For what?”

“For this, that I should come to thy house and transact business with him, the mangy scoundrel.”

“This business interests all Phœnicia, so I need no profit on it,” replied the indignant Rabsun.

“That is as true as that all thy debtors will pay thee.”

“May they fail to pay me if I make anything in this! Only let not Phœnicia lose!” cried Rabsun, in anger.

They took farewell of each other.

Toward evening the worthy Dagon seated himself in a litter carried by six slaves. He was preceded by two outrunners with staffs, and two with torches; behind the litter went four men armed from head to foot. Not for security, but because for a certain time Dagon loved to surround himself with armed men, like a noble.

He came out of the litter with great importance, supported by two men; a third carried a parasol over him. He entered Rabsun’s house.

“Where is that—Hiram?” inquired he, haughtily.

“He is not here.”

“How is this? Must I wait for him, then?”

“He is not in this room, but he is in the third one talking with my wife,” answered the host. “He is making a visit to my wife.”

“I will not go there!” said the banker, sitting down on a couch.

“Thou wilt go to the next chamber, and he will enter it at the same time with thee.”

After a short resistance Dagon yielded, and a moment later, at a sign from the master of the house, he entered the second chamber. At the same time from distant apartments appeared a man, not of tall stature, with gray beard, dressed in a gold-embroidered toga, and with a gold band on his head.

“This is,” said the host, standing in the middle of the room, “his grace Prince Hiram, a member of the supreme council of Tyre.—This is the worthy Dagon, banker of the heir to the throne and viceroy of Lower Egypt.”

The two dignitaries bowed, each with his hand on his breast, and both sat down on stools in the middle of the chamber. Hiram pushed aside his toga somewhat in order

to show the great gold medal on his breast; in answer to this Dagon began to toy with a large gold chain which he had received from Prince Rameses.

"I, Hiram," said the old man, "congratulate thee, Lord Dagon. I wish thee much property, and success in thy business."

"I, Dagon, congratulate thee, Lord Hiram, and I wish thee the same as thou wishest me—"

"Dost thou desire to dispute?" interrupted Hiram, irritated.

"How dispute? Rabsun, say if I am disputing."

"Better talk of business, your worthinesses," replied the host.

After a moment of thought Hiram proceeded,—

"Thy friends in Tyre congratulate thee greatly through me."

"Is that all they have sent me?" asked Dagon, in reviling accents.

"What didst thou wish?" inquired Hiram, raising his voice.

"Quiet! Concord!" put in the host.

Hiram sighed a number of times deeply, and said,—

"It is true that we need concord. Evil times are approaching Phœnicia."

"Has the sea flooded Tyre and Sidon?" asked Dagon, smiling.

Hiram spat, and inquired,—

"Why art thou so ill-tempered to-day?"

"I am always ill-tempered when men do not call me worthiness."

"But why dost thou not say grace to me? I am a prince."

"Perhaps in Phœnicia. But in Assyria thou wouldst wait three days in the forecourt of any satrap for an audience, and when he deigned to receive thee thou wouldst be lying on thy belly, like any Phœnician merchant."

"But what couldst thou do in presence of a wild man who would perhaps impale thee on a stake?" inquired Hiram.

"What I would do, I know not. But in Egypt I sit on one sofa with the heir to the throne, who to-day is viceroy."

"Concord, worthiness! Concord, grace!" said the host.

"Concord!—concord, because this man is a common Phœnician merchant, and is unwilling to render me respect," cried out Dagon.

"I have a hundred ships!" shouted Hiram.

"And his holiness has twenty thousand cities, towns, and villages."

"Your worthinesses are destroying this business and all Phœnicia," said Rabsun, with a voice which was loud now.

Hiram balled his fists, but was silent.

"Thou must confess, worthiness," said he, after a while, "that of those twenty thousand towns his holiness owns few in reality."

"Thou wishest to say, grace," answered Dagon, "that seven thousand belong to the temples, and seven thousand to great lords. Still six thousand belong clearly to his holiness."

"Not altogether! For when thou takest, worthiness, about three thousand which are mortgaged to the priests, and two thousand which are rented to our Phœnicians—"

"Thou speakest the truth, grace," said Dagon. "But there remain always to his holiness about two thousand very rich cities."

"Has Typhon possessed thee?" roared Rabsun, in his turn. "Wilt thou go now to counting the cities of the pharaoh,—may he—"

"Pst!" whispered Dagon, springing up.

"When misfortune is hanging over Phœnicia—" finished Rabsun.

"Let me but know what the misfortune is," interrupted Dagon.

"Then let Hiram speak and thou wilt know."

"Let him speak."

"Dost thou know, worthiness, what happened in the inn 'Under the Ship' to our brother Asarhadon?" began Hiram.

"I have no brothers among innkeepers," interrupted Dagon, sneeringly.

"Be silent!" screamed Rabsun, in anger; and he grasped the hilt of his dagger. "Thou art as dull as a dog barking in sleep."

"Why is he angry, that—that dealer in bones?" inquired Dagon; and he readied for his knife also.

"Quiet! Concord!" said the gray-headed prince; and he dropped his lean hand to his girdle.

For a while the nostrils of all three men were quivering and their eyes flashing. At last Hiram, who calmed himself first, began again, as if nothing had happened.

"A couple of months ago, in Asarhadon's inn, lodged a certain Phut from the city of Harran——"

"He had to receive five talents from some priest," interrupted Dagon.

"What further?" asked Hiram.

"Nothing. He found favor with a certain priestess, and at her advice went to seek his debtor in Thebes."

"Thou hast the mind of a child and the talkativeness of a woman," said Hiram. "This Harran man is not from Harran at all. He is a Chaldean, and his name is not Phut, but Beroes—"

"Beroes?—Beroes?" repeated Dagon, trying to remember. "I have heard that name in some place."

"Thou hast heard it!" repeated Hiram, with contempt. "Beroes is the wisest priest in Babylon, the counsellor of Assyrian princes and of the king himself."

"Let him be counsellor; if he is not the pharaoh, what do I care?" said the banker.

Rabsun rose from his chair, and threatening Dagon with his fist under the nose, cried,—

"Thou wild boar, fatted on the pharaoh's swill, Phœnicia concerns thee as much as Egypt concerns me. Thou wouldst sell thy country for a drachma hadst thou the chance, leprous cur that thou art!"

Dagon grew pale and answered with a calm voice,—

"What is that huckster saying? In Tyre my sons are learning navigation; in Sidon lives my daughter with her husband. I have lent half my property to the supreme council, though I do not receive even ten per cent for it. And this huckster says that Phœnicia does not concern me!"

"Rabsun, listen to me," added he, after a while. "I wish thy wife and children and the shades of thy fathers to be as much thought of by thee as each Phœnician ship is by me, or each stone of Tyre and Sidon, or even of Zarpath and Achsibu."

"Dagon, tell truth," put in Hiram.

"I not care for Phœnicia!" continued the banker, growing excited. "How many Phœnicians have I brought here to make property, and what do I gain from having done so! I not care? Hiram ruined two ships of mine and deprived me of great profit; still, when Phœnicia is in question, I sit in one room with him."

"For thou didst think to talk with him of cheating some one," said Rabsun.

"As much as thou didst think of dying, fool!" retorted Dagon. "Am I a child? do I not understand that when Hiram comes to Memphis he need not come for traffic? O thou Rabsun! thou shouldst clean my stables a couple of years."

"Enough of this!" cried Hiram, striking the table with his fist.

"We never shall finish with this Chaldean priest," muttered Rabsun, with as much calmness as if he had not been insulted a moment before.

Hiram coughed, and said,—

"That man has a house and land really in Harran, and he is called Phut there. He got letters from Hittite merchants to merchants in Sidon, so our caravans took him for the journey. He speaks Phœnician well, he pays liberally. He made no demands in particular; so our people came to like him, even much.

"But," continued Hiram, stroking his beard, "when a lion covers himself with an ox skin, even a little of his tail will stick out. This Phut was wonderfully wise and self-confident; so the chief of the caravan examined his effects in secret, and found nothing save a medal of the goddess Astaroth. This medal pricked the heart of the leader of the caravan: 'How could a Hittite have a Phœnician medal?'

"So when they came to Sidon he reported straightway to the elders, and thenceforth our secret police kept this Phut in view.

"Meanwhile he is such a sage that when he had remained some days all came to like him. He prayed and offered sacrifices to the goddess Astaroth, paid in gold, borrowed no money, associated only with Phœnicians. And he so befogged all that watchfulness touching him was weakened, and he went in peace to Memphis.

"In this place again our elders began to watch him, but discovered nothing; they divined simply that he must be a great lord, not a simple man of Harran. But Asarhadon discovered by chance, and did not even discover, he only came on traces, that this pretended Phut passed a whole night in the ancient temple of Set, which here is greatly venerated."

“Only high priests enter it for important counsels,” interrupted Dagon.

“And that alone would mean nothing,” said Hiram. “But one of our merchants returned a month ago from Babylon, with wonderful tidings. In return for a great present a certain attendant of the Satrap of Babylon informed him that misfortune was threatening Phoenicia.

“‘Assyria will take you,’ said the attendant, ‘and Egypt will take Israel. On that business the Chaldean high priest Beroes has gone to the priests of Thebes, and with them he will make a treaty.’

“Ye must know,” continued Hiram, “that Chaldean priests consider the priests in Egypt as their brothers, and that Beroes enjoys great esteem in the Court of King Assar, so reports concerning that treaty may be very truthful.”

“Why does Assyria want Phoenicia?” inquired Dagon, as he bit his finger-nails.

“Why does a thief want another man’s granary?” replied Hiram.

“What good is a treaty made by Beroes with Egyptian priests?” put in Rabsun, thinking deeply.

“Thou art dull!” answered Dagon. “Pharaoh does nothing except what the priests ordain.”

“There will be a treaty with the pharaoh, never fear!” interrupted Hiram. “We know to a certainty in Tyre that the Assyrian ambassador Sargon is coming to Egypt with gifts and with a great retinue. He pretends that it is to see Egypt and agree with ministers, not to inscribe in Egyptian acts that Assyria pays tribute to the pharaohs. But in fact he is coming to conclude a treaty about dividing the countries which lie between our sea and the Euphrates River.”

“May the earth swallow them!” imprecated Rabsun.

“What dost thou think of this Dagon?” inquired Hiram.

“But what would ye do if Assar attacked you really?”

Hiram shook his head with anger.

“What? We should go on board of ships with our families and treasures and leave to those dogs the ruins of cities and the rotting corpses of slaves. Do we not know greater and more beautiful countries than Phoenicia, where we can begin a new and richer fatherland?”

“May the gods guard us from such a thing,” said Dagon.

“This is just the question, to save the present Phoenicia from destruction,” said Hiram. “And thou, Dagon, art able to do much in this matter.”

“What can I do?”

“Thou mayst learn from the priests whether Beroes met them, and whether he and they made an agreement.”

“A terribly difficult thing,” whispered Dagon. “But I may find a priest who will tell me.”

“Thou canst prevent at the court of the pharaoh a treaty with Sargon,” continued Hiram.

“It is very difficult. I could not do that, unassisted.”

"I will be with thee, and Phœnicia will find the gold. A tax is in course of collection at present."

"I have given two talents!" whispered Rabsun.

"I will give ten," added Dagon. "But what shall I get for my labor?"

"What? Well, ten ships," answered Hiram.

"And how much wilt thou gain?" inquired Dagon.

"Is ten not enough? Thou wilt get fifteen."

"I ask, what wilt thou get?" insisted Dagon.

"We will give—twenty ships. Does that suffice thee?"

"Let it be so. But will ye show my ships the road to the country of silver?"

"We will show it."

"And the place where ye get tin? Well—"

"And the place where amber is found?" continued Dagon.

"May thou perish at once!" answered the gracious Prince Hiram, extending his hand.

"But thou wilt not keep up a malignant heart toward me because of those two little flat boats?"

Dagon sighed.

"I will work to forget. But—what a property I should have now if thou hadst not driven them off at that time!"

"Enough!" interrupted Rabsun; "talk of Phœnicia."

"Through whom wilt thou learn of Beroes and the treaty?" asked Hiram of Dagon.

"Let that drop. It is dangerous to speak of it, for priests will be involved in the matter."

"And through whom couldst thou ruin the treaty?"

"I think—I think that perhaps through the heir to the throne. I have many notes of his."

Hiram raised his hand, and replied,—

"The heir—very well, for he will be pharaoh, perhaps even soon—"

"Pst!" interrupted Dagon, striking the table with his fist. "May thou lose speech for such language!"

"Here is a wild boar for thee!" cried Rabsun, threatening the banker's nose.

"And thou art a dull huckster," answered Dagon, with a reviling laugh. "Thou, Rabsun, shouldst sell dried fish and water on the streets, but not mix up in questions between states. An ox hoof rubbed in Egyptian mud has more sense than thou, though thou art living five years in the capital of light! Oh that pigs might devour thee!"

"Quiet! quiet!" called Hiram. "Ye do not let me finish."

"Speak, for thou art wise and my heart understands thee," said Rabsun.

"If thou, Dagon, hast influence over the heir, that is well," continued Hiram. "For if the heir wishes to have a treaty with Assyria there will be a treaty, and besides one written with our blood on our own skins. But if the heir wishes war with Assyria, he will make war, though the priests were to summon all the gods against him."

"Pst!" interrupted Dagon. "If the priests wish greatly, there will be a treaty. But perhaps they will not wish."

"Therefore, Dagon, we must have all the military leaders with us," said Hiram.

"We can."

"And the nomarchs."

"We can have them too."

"And the heir," continued Hiram.

"But if thou alone urge him to war with Assyria, that is nothing. A man, like a harp, has many strings, and to play on them fingers are needed, while thou, Dagon, art only one finger."

"But I cannot tear myself into ten parts."

"Thou mayst be like one hand which has five fingers. Thou must so act that no one may suspect that thou art for war, but every cook in the heir's kitchen must want war, every barber of his must want war, all the bath men, and litter-bearers, scribes, officers, charioteers must want war with Assyria; the heir should hear war from morning till night, and even when he is sleeping."

"That will be done."

"But dost thou know his mistresses?" asked Hiram.

Dagon waved his hand.

"Stupid girls!" said he. "They think only about dressing, painting, and perfuming themselves; but whence these perfumes come, and who brings them to Egypt, they know not."

"We must give him a favorite who will know."

"Where shall we find her?" asked Dagon. "Ah, I have it!" cried he, stroking his forehead. "Dost thou know Kama, the priestess of Astaroth?"

"What?" interrupted Rabsun, astounded. "The priestess of the holy goddess Astaroth to be a favorite of an Egyptian?"

"Thou wouldst prefer that she were thine," sneered Dagon. "She can even cease to be high priestess when it is necessary to bring her near the court."

"Thou speakest truth," said Hiram.

"But that is sacrilege!" said Rabsun, indignantly.

"And the priestess who commits it is to die," said the gray-haired Hiram.

"If only that Jewess, Sarah, does not hinder," added Dagon, after a moment of silence. "She is waiting for a child to which the prince is attached already. If a son is born, all our plans may be thwarted."

"We shall have money for Sarah too," added Hiram.

"She will take nothing!" burst out Dagon. "That pitiful creature has refused gold and a precious goblet, which I carried to her."

"She did, for she thought that thou hadst the wish to deceive her," remarked Rabsun. Hiram nodded.

"There is no cause for trouble," said he. "Where gold has not power, then the father, the mother, or the mistress may have it. And if the mistress is powerless, there is still—"

"The knife," hissed Rabsun.

"Poison," whispered Dagon.

"A knife is a very rude weapon," concluded Hiram.

He stroked his beard, thought awhile; at last he rose, took from his bosom a purple ribbon on which were fastened three golden amulets with a portrait of the goddess Astaroth. He drew from his girdle a knife, cut the ribbon into three parts, and gave two of these with the amulets to Dagon and Rabsun.

Then all three went to the middle of the room to the corner where stood a winged statue of the goddess; they put their hands on the statue, and Hiram repeated in a low voice, but clearly,—

"To thee, O Mother of Life, we swear faithfully to observe our agreements, and not to rest till the sacred places be secure from enemies,—may they be destroyed by hunger, fire, and pestilence.

"And should one of us fail in his obligations, or betray a secret, may all calamities and disgrace fall on him! May hunger twist his entrails, and sleep flee from his bloodshot eyes! May the hand of the man wither who hastens to him with rescue and pities him in his misery! May the bread on his table turn into rottenness, and the wine into stinking juice! May his children die out, and his house be filled with bastards who will spit on him and expel him! May he die groaning through many days in loneliness, and may neither earth nor water receive his vile carcass, may no fire burn it, no wild beasts devour it!"

"Thus let it be!"

After this terrible oath, which Hiram began, and the second half of which all shouted forth in voices trembling from rage, the three panting Phœnicians rested. After that Rabsun conducted them to a feast where with wine, music, and dancers they forgot for a time the work awaiting them.

Chapter XXVI

NOT far from the city of Pi-Bast stood the temple of the goddess Hator.

In the month Paoni (March-April), on the day of the vernal equinox, about nine in the evening, when the star Sirius inclined toward its setting, two wayfaring priests and one penitent stopped in the gateway. The penitent, who was barefoot, had ashes on his head, and was covered with a coarse cloth which concealed his visage.

Though the air was clear, it was impossible to distinguish the faces of those wayfarers. They stood in the shadow of two immense statues of the cow-headed divinity which guarded the entrance to the temple and with kindly eyes protected the province of Habu from pestilence, southern winds, and bad overflows.

When he had rested somewhat, the penitent fell with his face to the earth and prayed long in that position. Then he rose, took a copper knocker, and struck a blow. A deep metallic sound went through all the courts, reverberated from the thick walls of the temple, and flew over the wheat-fields, above the mud cottages of earth-tillers, over the silvery waters of the Nile, where the faint cry of wakened birds answered it.

After a long time a murmur was heard inside, and the question,—

“Who rouses us?”

“Rameses, a slave of the divinity,” said the penitent.

“For what hast thou come?”

“For the light of wisdom.”

“What right hast them to ask for it?”

“I received the inferior consecration, and in great processions within the temple I carry a torch.”

The gates opened widely. In the centre stood a priest in a white robe; he stretched forth his hand, and said slowly and distinctly,—

“Enter. When thou crossest this threshold, may divine peace dwell in thy soul, and may that be accomplished for which thou implorest humbly.”

When the penitent had fallen at his feet, the priest, making some signs above his head, whispered,—

“In the name of Him who is, who has been, and who will be, who created everything, whose breath fills the visible and the invisible world, and who is life eternal.”

When the gate had closed, the priest took Rameses by the hand, and in the gloom amid the immense columns of the forecourt he led him to the dwelling assigned to him. It was a small cell lighted by a lamp. On the stone pavement lay a bundle of dry grass; in a corner stood a pitcher of water, and near it was a barley cake.

“I see that here I shall have rest indeed after my occupations with the nomarchs,” said Rameses, joyously.

“Think of eternity,” replied the priest; and he withdrew.

This answer struck Rameses disagreeably. Though he was hungry, he did not wish to eat a cake or drink water. He sat on the grass, and looking at his feet wounded from the journey, asked himself why he had come, why he had put himself voluntarily out of his office.

Seeing the walls of the cell and its poverty, he recalled the years of his boyhood passed at a priests' school. How many blows of sticks he had received there, how many nights he had passed on a stone floor as punishment! Even then Rameses felt the hatred and fear which he had felt before toward that harsh priest who to all his prayers and questions answered only with, "Think of eternity."

After some months of uproar to drop into such silence, to exchange the court of a prince for obscurity and loneliness, and instead of feasts, women, and music, to feel around and above him the weight of walls! "I have gone mad! I have gone mad!" muttered Rameses.

There was a moment when he wished to leave the temple at once; but afterward he thought that they might not open the gate to him. The sight of his dirty legs, of the ashes falling out of his hair, the roughness of his penitential rags, all this disgusted him. If he had had his sword even! But would he, dressed as he was in that place, dare to use it?

He felt an overpowering dread, and that sobered him. He remembered that the gods in temples send down fear on men, and that this fear must be the beginning of wisdom.

"Moreover, I am the viceroy and the heir of the pharaoh," thought he; "who will harm me in this temple?"

He rose and went out of the cell. He found himself in a broad court surrounded by columns. The stars were shining brightly; hence he saw at one end of the court an immense pylon, at the other an open entrance to the temple.

He went thither. At the door there was gloom, and somewhere far off flamed a number of lamps, as if in the air and unsupported. Looking more attentively, he saw standing closely together between the entrance and the lamps a forest of columns, the tops of which were lost in darkness. At a distance, perhaps two hundred yards from him, he saw indistinctly the gigantic legs of a sitting goddess with her hands resting on her knees, from which the lamplight was reflected dimly.

All at once he heard a sound from afar. From a side passage a row of white figures pushed forth, moving in couples. This was a night procession of priests, who, singing in two choruses, gave homage to the statue of the goddess: *Chorus I*. "I am He who created heaven and earth and made all things contained in them." *Chorus II*. "I am He who created the waters and the great overflow, He who made for the bull his mother whose parent he himself is." *Chorus I*. "I am He who made heaven and the secrets of its horizon; as to the gods I it was who placed their souls in them." *Chorus II*. "I am He who when he opens his eyes there is light in the world and when he closes them darkness is present." *Chorus I*. "The waters of the Nile flow when he commands." *Chorus II*. "But the gods do not know what his name is."⁹

⁹ Authentic.

The voices, indistinct at first, grew stronger, so that each word was audible, and when the procession disappeared the words scattered among the columns, growing ever fainter. At last every sound ceased.

“And still those people,” thought Rameses, “not only eat, drink, and gather wealth—they really perform religious services even in the night-time; though, how is that to affect the statue?”

The prince had seen more than once the statues of boundary divinities bespattered with mud by the inhabitants of another province, or shot at from bows or slings by mercenary soldiers. “If gods are not offended by insult, they must also care little for prayers and processions. Besides, who has seen gods?” said the prince to himself.

The immensity of the temple, its countless columns, the lamps burning in front of the statue,—all this attracted Rameses. He wished to look around in that mysterious immensity, and he went forward. Then it seemed to him that some hand from behind touched his head tenderly. He looked around. No one was there; so he went farther.

This time the two hands of some person seized him by the head, and a third, a great hand, rested on his shoulder.

“Who is here?” cried the prince; and he rushed in among the columns. But he stumbled and almost fell: some one caught him by the feet. Again terror mastered Rameses more than in the cell. He fled distracted, knocking against columns which seemed to bar the way to him, and darkness closed around the man on all sides.

“Oh, save, holy goddess, save me!” whispered he.

At this moment he stopped: some yards in front of him was the great door of a temple through which the starry sky was visible. He turned his head. Amid the forest of gigantic columns lamps were burning, and the gleam of them was reflected faintly from the bronze knees of the holy Hator.

The prince returned to his cell, crushed and excited; his heart throbbed like that of a bird caught in a net. For the first time in many years he fell with his face to the earth and prayed ardently for favor and forgiveness.

“Thou wilt be heard,” answered a sweet voice above him.

Rameses raised his head quickly, but there was no one in the cell: the door was closed, the walls were thick. He prayed on therefore more ardently, and fell asleep in that position, with his face on the stones and his arms extended.

When he woke next morning, he was another man: he had experienced the might of the gods, and favor had been promised.

From that time through a long series of days he gave himself to devotional exercises with faith and alacrity. In his cell he spent long hours over prayers, he had his head shaven, and put on priestly garments, and four times in twenty-four hours he took part in a chorus of the youngest priests.

His past life, taken up with amusements, roused in him aversion, and the disbelief which he had acquired amid foreigners and dissolute youth filled him with dread in that interval. And if that day the choice had been given him to take either the throne or the priestly office, he would have hesitated.

A certain day the great prophet of the temple summoned the prince, and reminded him that he had not entered for prayers exclusively, but to learn wisdom. The prophet praised his devotion, declared that he was purified then from worldly

foulness, and commanded him to become acquainted with the schools connected with that temple.

Rather through obedience than curiosity, the prince went directly from him to the interior court, where the department of reading and writing was situated.

That was a great hall, lighted through an opening in the roof. On mats some tens of naked pupils were seated holding wax tablets in their hands. One wall was of smooth alabaster; before it stood a teacher who wrote characters with chalks of various colors.

When the prince entered, the pupils, almost all of the same age that he was, fell on their faces. The teacher bowed, and stopped his actual labor to explain to the youths the great meaning of knowledge.

“My beloved,” said he, “a man who has no heart for wisdom must occupy himself with handwork and torment his eyesight. But he who understands the worth of knowledge and forms himself accordingly may gain all kinds of power and every court office. Remember this.¹⁰

“Look at the wretched fate of men unacquainted with writing. A smith is black and grimy, his hands are full of lumps, and he toils night and day all his lifetime. The quarryman pulls his arms out to satisfy his stomach. The mason while forming a capital in lotus shape is hurled off by wind from the scaffold. A weaver has bent knees, a maker of weapons is ever travelling: barely does he come to his house in the evening when he must leave it. The fingers of a wall painter smell disagreeably, and his time passes in trimming up trifles. The courier when taking farewell of his family must leave a will, for he may have to meet wild beasts or Asiatics.

“I have shown you the lot of men of various labors, for I wish you to love writing, which is your mother, and now I will present to you its beauties. It is not an empty word on earth, it is the most important of all occupations. He who makes use of writing is respected from childhood; he accomplishes every great mission. But he who takes no part in it lives on in wretchedness. School sciences are as difficult as mountains, but one day of them lasts through eternity. So learn quickly and you will love them. The scribe has a princely position; his pen and his book win him wealth and acceptance.”

After a sounding discourse on the dignity of knowledge, a discourse which Egyptian pupils had heard without change for three millenniums, the master took chalk and on the alabaster wall began to write the alphabet. Each letter was expressed through a number of hieroglyphs, or a number of demotic characters. The picture of an eye, a bird, or a panther signified *A*, a sheep or a pot *B*, a man standing or a boat *K*, a serpent *R*, a man sitting or a star *S*. The abundance of signs expressing each sound made the art of reading or writing extremely laborious.

Rameses was wearied by mere listening, during which the only relief was when the teacher commanded some pupil to draw, or to name some letter, and beat him with a cane when he failed in his effort.

Taking farewell of the teacher and the pupils, the prince from the school of scribes passed to the school of surveyors. There they taught youth to draw plans of fields which were for the most part rectangular, also to take the elevation of land by means of two laths and a square. In this department also they explained the art of writing

¹⁰ Authentic.

numbers no less involved in hieroglyphic or demotic characters. But pure arithmetical problems formed a higher course, and were solved by means of bullets. Rameses had enough of this, and only after some days would he visit the school of medicine.

This was also a hospital, or rather great garden containing a multitude of fragrant plants and trees. Patients passed whole days in the open air and in sunlight, on beds where strips of stretched canvas took the place of mattresses.

The greatest activity reigned when the prince entered. Some patients were bathing in a pond of running water; attendants were rubbing one man with fragrant ointments, and burning perfumes before another. There were some whom they had put to sleep by looking at them and by stretching out their bodies; one patient was groaning while they were setting his sprained ankle.

To a certain woman who was grievously sick the priest was giving some mixture from a goblet, while uttering an enchantment which had power in connection with this remedy,—

“Go, cure, go, drive that out of my heart, out of my members.”¹¹

Then the prince in company with a great leech went to the pharmacy, where one of the priests was preparing cures from plants, honey, olive oil, from the skins of serpents and lizards, from the bones and fat of beasts. When Rameses questioned him, the man did not take his eyes from the work. He looked continually, and ground the materials, uttering a prayer as he did so,—

“Thou hast cured Isis, thou hast cured Isis, thou hast cured Horus—O Isis, great enchantress, make me well, free me from all evil, from harmful red things, from fever of the god, from fever of the goddess¹²—

“O Shauagat, eenagate, synie! Erukate! Kauaruchagate! Paparauka paparaka paparura.”

“What is he saying?” asked the prince.

“A secret,” answered the leech, putting his finger on his lips.

When they came out to an empty court, Rameses said to the great leech,—

“Tell me, holy father, what is the art of curing, and what are its methods. For I have heard that sickness is an evil spirit which settles in a man and torments him, because it is hungry, until it receives the food that it wishes. And that one evil spirit or sickness feeds on honey, another on olive oil, and a third on the excreta of animals. A leech, therefore, should know first what spirit has settled in the sick man, and then what kind of nourishment is required by that spirit, so that it should not torture the patient.”

The priest thought awhile and then answered,—

“What sickness is and in what way it falls on the human body, I cannot tell, O Rameses. But to thee I will explain, for thou hast been purified, how we govern ourselves in giving medicine.

¹¹ Authentic.

¹² Authentic.

“Suppose a given man to be sick in the liver. We priests know that the liver is under the star Peneter-Deva,¹³ that the cure must depend on that star.

“But here the sages are divided into two schools. Some assert that it is necessary to give the man who is sick in his liver things over which Peneter-Deva has influence, therefore copper, lapis lazuli, extract of flowers, above all verbena and valerian, finally, various parts of the body of the turtle-dove and the goat. Other leeches consider that when the liver is diseased it is necessary to cure it with just the opposite remedies, and the opponent of Peneter-Deva being Sebek,¹⁴ to give quicksilver, emerald, and agate, hazel-wood and coltsfoot, also parts of the body of a toad and an owl rubbed into powder.

“But this is not all, for it is necessary to think of the day, the month, and the hour of the day, for each of these spaces of time are under the influence of a star which must support or weaken the action of the medicine. Besides, it is needful to remember what star and what sign of the Zodiac rules the sick person. Only when the leech considers all these can he prescribe an infallible remedy.”

“And do ye help all sick people in the temple?”

The priest shook his head.

“No. The mind of man, which should take in all these details of which I have spoken, makes mistakes very easily. And what is worse, envious spirits, the geniuses of other temples, jealous of their fame, frequently hinder the leech and destroy the effect of his medicines. The result, therefore, may be that one patient will return to perfect health, another simply grows better, while a third remains without change, though there happen some who become still sicker, or even die— This is as the gods will!”

The prince listened with attention, but confessed in soul that he did not understand greatly. All at once he recalled the object of his visit to the temple, and inquired of the great leech unexpectedly,—

“Ye were to show me, holy father, the secret of the treasure of the pharaoh. Was it those things which we have seen?”

“By no means. We know nothing of state affairs. But when the great seer comes, the holy priest Pentuer, he will remove from thy eyes the curtain.”

Rameses took leave of the leech with increased curiosity as to what they were to show him.

¹³ Planet Venus.

¹⁴ Planet Mercury.

Chapter XXVII

THE temple received Pentuer with great honor, and the inferior priests went out half an hour's journey to greet him. From all the wonderful places of Lower Egypt many prophets had assembled with the intent to hear words of wisdom. A couple of days later came the high priest Mefres and the prophet Mentezufis. These two rendered honor to Pentuer, not only because he was a counsellor of Herhor and notwithstanding his youth a member of the supreme college, but because this priest enjoyed favor throughout Egypt. The gods had given him a memory which seemed more than human; they had given him eloquence, and above all a marvellous gift of clear vision. In every affair he saw points hidden from others, and was able to explain them in a way understood by all listeners.

More than one nomarch, or high official of the pharaoh, on learning that Pentuer was to celebrate a religious solemnity in the temple of Hator, envied the humblest priest, since he would hear a man inspired by divinities.

The priests who went forth to greet Pentuer felt sure that that dignitary would show himself in a court chariot, or in a litter borne by eight slaves. What was their amazement at beholding a lean ascetic, bareheaded, wearing a coarse garment, riding on a she ass, and unattended! He greeted them with great humility, and when they conducted him to the temple he made an offering to the divinity and went straightway to examine the place of the coming festival.

Thenceforth no one saw Pentuer, but in the temple and the adjoining courts there was an uncommon activity. Men brought costly furniture, grain, garments. A number of hundreds of pupils and workmen were freed from their employments; with these Pentuer shut himself up in the court and worked at preparations.

After eight days of hard labor he informed the high priest of Hator that all things were ready.

During this time Prince Rameses, who was hidden in his cell, gave himself up to prayer and fasting. At last on a certain date about three hours after midday a number of priests, arrayed in two ranks, came and invited him to the solemnity.

In the vestibule of the temple the high priest greeted the prince, and with him burned incense before the great statue of Hator. Then they turned to a low, narrow corridor, at the end of which a fire was burning. The air of the corridor was filled with the odor of pitch which was boiling in a kettle. Near the kettle, through an opening in the pavement, rose dreadful groans and curses.

"What does that mean?" inquired Rameses of a priest among those attending him.

The priest gave no answer; on the faces as far as could be seen emotion and terror were evident.

At this moment the high priest Mefres seized a great ladle, took boiling pitch from the kettle, and said in loud accents,—

"May all perish thus who divulge temple secrets!"

Next he poured pitch into the opening in the pavement, and from below came a roar,—

“Ye are killing me. Oh, if ye have in your hearts even a trace of compassion,” groaned a voice.

“May the worms gnaw thy body,” said Mentezufis, as he poured melted pitch into the opening.

“Dogs—jackals!” groaned the voice.

“May thy heart be consumed by fire and its ashes be hurled into the desert,” said the next priest, repeating the ceremony.

“O gods! is it possible to suffer as I do?” was the answer from beneath the pavement.

“May thy soul, with the image of its shame and its crime, wander onward through places where live happy people,” said a second priest; and he poured another ladle of burning pitch into the aperture.

“Oh, may the earth devour you!—mercy!—let me breathe!”

Before the turn came to Rameses the voice underground was silent.

“So do the gods punish traitors,” said the high priest of the temple to the viceroy.

The prince halted, and fixed on him eyes full of anger. It seemed to Rameses that he would burst out with indignation, and leave that assembly of executioners; but he felt a fear of the gods and advanced behind others in silence.

The haughty heir understood now that there was a power before which the pharaohs incline. He was seized by despair almost; he wished to flee, to renounce the throne. Meanwhile he held silence and walked on, surrounded by priests chanting prayers.

“Now I know,” thought he, “where people go who are unpleasant to the servants of divinity.” But this thought did not decrease his horror.

Leaving the narrow corridor full of smoke, the procession found itself on an elevation beneath the open sky. Below was an immense court surrounded on three sides by low buildings instead of a wall. From the place where the priests halted was a kind of amphitheatre with five broad platforms by which it was possible to pass along the whole court or to descend to the bottom.

In the court no one was present, but certain people were looking out of buildings.

The high priest Mefres, as chief dignitary in the assembly, presented Pentuer to the viceroy. The mild face of the ascetic did not harmonize with the horrors which had taken place in the corridor; so the prince wondered. To say something, he said to Pentuer,—

“It seems to me that I have met thee somewhere, pious father?”

“The past year at the manœuvres near Pi-Bailos. I was there with his worthiness Herhor.”

The resonant and calm voice of Pentuer arrested the prince. He had heard that voice on some uncommon occasion. But where and when had he heard it?

In every case the priest made an agreeable impression. If he could only forget the cries of that man whom they had covered with boiling pitch!

“We may begin,” said Mefres.

Pentuer went to the middle of the amphitheatre and clapped his hands. From the low buildings a crowd of female dancers issued forth, and priests came out with music, also with a small statue of the goddess Hator. The musicians preceded, the dancers followed, performing a sacred dance; finally the statue moved on surrounded by the smoke of censers. In this way they went around the court and stopping after every few steps, implored the divinity for a blessing, and asked evil spirits to leave the enclosure, where there was to be a solemnity full of secrets.

When the procession had returned to the buildings, Pentuer stepped forward. Dignitaries present to the number of two or three hundred gathered round him.

“By the will of his holiness the pharaoh,” began Pentuer, “and with consent of the supreme priestly power, we are to initiate the heir to the throne, Rameses, into some details of life in Egypt, details known only to the divinities who govern the country and the temples. I know, worthy fathers, that each of you would enlighten the young prince better in these things than I can; ye are full of wisdom, and the goddess Mut speaks through you. But since the duty has fallen on me, who in presence of you am but dust and a pupil, permit me to accomplish it under your worthy inspection and guidance.”

A murmur of satisfaction was heard among the learned priests at this manner. Pentuer turned to the viceroy.

“For some months, O servant of the gods, Rameses, as a traveller lost in the desert seeks a road, so thou art seeking an answer to the question: Why has the income of the holy pharaoh diminished, and why is it decreasing? Thou hast asked the nomarchs, and though they explained according to their power, thou wert not satisfied, though the highest human wisdom belongs to those dignitaries. Thou didst turn to the chief scribes, but in spite of their efforts these men were like birds in a net, unable to free themselves without assistance, for the reason of man, though trained in the school of scribes, is not in a position to take in the immensity of these questions. At last, wearied by barren explanations, thou didst examine the lands of the provinces, their people, the works of their hands, but didst arrive at nothing. For there are things of which people are silent as stones, but concerning which even stones will give answer if light from the gods only falls on them.

“When in this manner all these earthly powers and wisdoms disappointed thee, thou didst turn to the gods. Barefoot, thy head sprinkled with ashes, thou didst come in the guise of a penitent to this great sanctuary, where by means of suffering and prayer thou hast purified thy body and strengthened thy spirit. The gods—but especially the mighty Hator—listened to thy prayers, and through my unworthy lips give an answer, and mayst thou write it down in thy heart profoundly.”

“Whence does he know,” thought the prince, meanwhile, “that I asked the scribes and nomarchs? Aha! Mefres and Mentezufis told him. For that matter, they know everything.”

“Listen,” continued Pentuer, “and I will discover to thee, with permission of these dignitaries, what Egypt was four hundred years ago in the reign of the most glorious and pious nineteenth Theban dynasty, and what it is at present.

“When the first pharaoh of that dynasty, Ramen-Pehuti-Ramessu, assumed power over the country, the income of the treasury in wheat, cattle, beer, skins, vessels, and various articles rose to a hundred and thirty thousand talents. If a people had existed who could exchange gold for all these goods, the pharaoh would have had yearly one

hundred and thirty-three thousand minas of gold.¹⁵ And since one warrior can carry on his shoulders the weight of twenty-six minas, about five thousand warriors would have been needed to carry that treasure.”

The priests whispered to one another without hiding their wonder. Even the prince forgot the man tortured to death beneath the pavement.

“To-day,” said Pentuer, “the yearly income of his holiness for all products of his land is worth only ninety-eight thousand talents. For these it would be possible to obtain as much gold as four thousand warriors could carry.”

“That the income of the state has decreased greatly, I know,” said Rameses, “but what is the cause of this?”

“Be patient, O servant of the gods,” replied Pentuer. “It is not the income of his holiness alone that is subject to decrease. During the nineteenth dynasty Egypt had under arms one hundred and eighty thousand warriors. If by the action of the gods every soldier of that time had been turned into a pebble the size of a grape—”

“That cannot be!” said Rameses.

“The gods can do anything,” answered Mefres, the high priest, severely.

“But better,” continued Pentuer, “if each soldier were to place on the ground one pebble, there would be one hundred and eighty thousand pebbles; and, look, worthy fathers, these pebbles would occupy so much space.” He pointed to a quadrangle of reddish color in the court. “In this figure the pebbles deposited by warriors of the time of Rameses I. would find their places. This figure is nine yards long and about five wide. This figure is ruddy; it has the color of Egyptian bodies, for in those days all our warriors were Egyptian exclusively.”

The priests began to whisper a second time. The prince frowned, for that seemed to him a reprimand, since he loved foreign soldiers.

“To-day,” said Pentuer, “we assemble one hundred and twenty thousand warriors with great difficulty. If each one of those cast his pebble on the ground, they would form a figure of this sort. Look this way, worthiness.” At the side of the first quadrangle lay a second of the same width, but considerably shorter; its color was not uniform either, but was composed of a number of colors. “This figure,” said Pentuer, “is about five yards wide, but is only six yards in length. An immense number of men is now lacking,—our army has lost one-third of its warriors.”

“Wisdom of men like thee, O prophet, will bring more good to the state than an army,” interrupted the high priest.

Pentuer bent before him and continued,—

“In this new figure which represents the present army of the pharaoh ye see, worthy men, besides the ruddy color which designates Egyptians by blood, three other stripes,—black, white, and yellow. They represent mercenary divisions,—Ethiopians, Asiatics, Greeks, and Libyans. There are thirty thousand of them altogether, but they cost as much as fifty thousand Egyptians.”

“We must do away with foreign regiments at the earliest,” said Mefres. “They are costly, unsuitable, and teach our people infidelity and insolence. At present there are

¹⁵ Mina = one and a half kilograms.

many Egyptians who do not fall on their faces before the priests; more, some of them have gone so far as to steal from graves and temples.”

“Therefore away with the mercenaries!” said Mefres, passionately. “The country has received from them nothing save harm, and our neighbors suspect us of hostile ideas.”

“Away with mercenaries! Dismiss these unruly infidels!” cried the priests.

“When in years to come, O Rameses, thou wilt ascend the throne,” added Mefres, “thou wilt fulfil this sacred duty to the gods and to Egypt.”

“Yes, fulfil it! free thy people from unbelievers!” cried the priests.

Rameses bent his head, and was silent. The blood flew to his heart. He felt that the ground was trembling under him.

He was to dismiss the best part of the army,—he, who would like to have twice as great an army and four times as many mercenary warriors.

“They are pitiless with me,” thought Rameses.

“Speak on, O Pentuer, sent down from heaven to us,” said Mefres.

“So then, holy men,” continued Pentuer, “we have learned of two misfortunes,—the pharaoh’s income has decreased, and his army is diminished.”

“What need of an army?” grumbled the high priest, shaking his head contemptuously.

“And now, with the favor of the gods and your permission, I will explain why it has happened thus, why the treasury will decrease further, and troops be still fewer in the future.”

The prince raised his head and looked at the speaker. He thought no longer now of the man put to death beneath the corridor.

Pentuer passed a number of steps along the amphitheatre, and after him the dignitaries.

“Do ye see at your feet that long, narrow strip of green with a broad triangular space at the end of it? On both sides of the strip lie limestone, granite, and, behind these, sandy places. In the middle of the green flows a stream, which in the triangular space is divided into a number of branches.”

“That is the Nile! That is Egypt!” cried the priests.

“But look,” interrupted Mefres, with emotion. “I will discover the river. Do ye see those two blue veins running from the elbow to the hand? Is not that the Nile and its canals, which begins opposite the Alabaster mountains and flows to Fayum? And look at the back of my hand: there are as many veins there as the sacred river has branches below Memphis. And do not my fingers remind you of the number of branches through which the Nile sends its waters to the sea?”

“A great truth!” exclaimed the priests, looking at their hands.

“Here, I tell you,” continued the excited high priest, “that Egypt is the trace of the arm of Osiris. Here on this land the great god rested his arm: in Thebes lay his divine elbow, his fingers reached the sea, and the Nile is his veins. What wonder that we call this country blessed!”

“Evidently,” said the priest, “Egypt is the express imprint of the arm of Osiris.”

“Has Osiris seven fingers on his hand,” interrupted the prince, “for the Nile has seven branches falling into the sea?”

Deep silence followed.

“Young man,” retorted Mefres, with kindly irony, “dost suppose that Osiris could not have seven fingers if it pleased him?”

“Of course he could!” said the other priests.

“Speak on, renowned Pentuer,” said Mentezufis.

“Ye are right, worthy fathers,” began Pentuer: “this stream with its branches is a picture of the Nile; the narrow strip of green bounded by stones and sand is Upper Egypt, and that triangular space, cut with veins, is a picture of Lower Egypt, the most extensive and richest part of the country.

“Well, in the beginning of the nineteenth dynasty, all Egypt, from the cataract to the sea, included five hundred thousand measures of land. On every measure lived sixteen persons: men, women, and children. But during four hundred succeeding years almost with each generation a piece of fertile soil was lost to Egypt.”

The speaker made a sign. A number of young priests ran out of the building and sprinkled sand on various parts of the green area.

“During each generation,” continued the priest, “fertile land diminished, and the narrow strip of it became much narrower. At present our country instead of five hundred thousand measures has only four hundred thousand—or during two dynasties Egypt has lost land which supported two millions of people.”

In the assembly again rose a murmur of horror.

“And dost thou know, O Rameses, servant of the gods, whither those spaces have vanished where on a time were fields of wheat and barley, or where flocks and herds pastured? Thou knowest that sands of the desert have covered them. But has any one told thee why this came to pass? It came to pass because there was a lack of men who with buckets and ploughs fight the desert from morning till evening. Finally, dost thou know why these toilers of the gods disappeared? Whither did they go? What swept them out of the country? Foreign wars did it. Our nobles conquered enemies, our pharaohs immortalized their worthy names as far away as the Euphrates River, but like beasts of burden our common men carried food for them, they carried water, they carried other weights, and died along the road by thousands.

“To avenge those bones scattered now throughout eastern deserts, the western sands have swallowed our fields, and it would require immense toil and many generations to win back that dark Egyptian earth from the sand grave which covers it.”

“Listen! listen!” cried Mefres, “some god is speaking through the lips of Pentuer. It is true that our victorious wars are the grave of Egypt.”

Rameses could not collect his thoughts. It seemed to him that mountains of sand were falling on his head at that moment.

“I have said,” continued Pentuer, “that great labor would be needed to dig out Egypt and restore the old-time wealth devoured by warfare. But have we the power to carry out that project?”

Again he advanced some steps, and after him the excited listeners. Since Egypt became Egypt, no one had displayed so searchingly the disasters of the country, though all men knew that they had happened.

“During the nineteenth dynasty Egypt had eight millions of inhabitants. If every man, woman, old man, and child had put down in this place one bean, the grains would make a figure of this kind.”

He indicated with his hand a court where one by the side of another lay eight great quadrangles covered with red beans.

“That figure is sixty yards long, thirty yards wide, and as ye see, pious fathers, the grains composing it are of the same kind, for the people of that time were from Egyptian grandfathers and great-grandfathers. But look now.”

He went farther, and indicated another group of quadrangles of various colors.

“Ye see this figure which is thirty yards wide, but only forty-five yards in length. Why is this? Because there are in it only six quadrangles, for at present Egypt has not eight, but only six millions of inhabitants. Consider, besides, that as the former figure was composed exclusively of red Egyptian beans, in the present one are immense strips of black, yellow, and white beans. For in our army and among the people there are now very many foreigners: black Ethiopians, yellow Syrians and Phœnicians, white Greeks and Libyans.”

They interrupted him. The priests who listened began to embrace him; Mefres was weeping.

“Never yet has there been such a prophet. One cannot imagine when he could make such calculations,” said the best mathematician in the temple of Hator.

“Fathers,” said Pentuer, “do not overestimate my services. Long years ago in our temples the condition of the state was represented in this manner. I have only disinterred that which later generations had in some degree forgotten.”

“But the reckoning?” asked the mathematician.

“The reckonings are continued unbrokenly in all the provinces and temples,” replied Pentuer. “The general amounts are found in the palace of his holiness.”

“But the figures?” exclaimed the mathematician.

“Our fields are arranged in just such figures, and the geometers of the state study them at school.”

“We know not what to admire most in this priest, his wisdom or his humility,” said Mefres. “Since we have such a man, the gods have not forgotten us.”

At that moment the guard watching on the pylons of the temple summoned those present to prayer.

“In the evening I will finish the explanations,” said Pentuer; “now I will say a few words in addition.

“Ye inquire, worthy fathers, why I use beans for these pictures. I do so because a grain put in the ground brings a harvest to the husbandmen yearly; so a man brings tribute every year to the treasury.

“If in any province two million less beans are sown than in past years, the following harvest will be notably less, and the earth-tillers will have a poorer income. In the

state also, when two millions of population are gone, the inflow of taxes must diminish.”

Rameses listened with attention, and walked away in silence.

Chapter XXVIII

WHEN the priests and the heir to the throne returned to the courtyard in the evening, several hundred torches were gleaming so brightly that it was as clear there as in the daytime.

At a sign from Mefres there came out again a procession of musicians, dancers, and minor priests carrying a statue of the cow-headed Hator; and when they had driven away evil spirits, Pentuer began to explain again.

"Ye see, worthy fathers," said he, "that since the time of the nineteenth dynasty a hundred thousand measures of land and two million people have vanished out of Egypt. This explains why the income of the state has decreased thirty-two thousand talents; that it has decreased is known to all of us.

"But this is only the beginning of misfortunes to the state and the treasury. Ninety-eight thousand talents of income apparently remain to his holiness. But do ye think that the pharaoh receives all this income?

"I will tell you what his worthiness Herhor discovered in the province of the Hare.

"During the nineteenth dynasty twenty thousand people dwelt in that province; they paid three hundred and fifty talents of yearly taxes. To-day there are hardly fifteen thousand, and these, of course, pay the treasury only two hundred and seventy talents. Meanwhile the pharaoh, instead of receiving two hundred and seventy talents, receives one hundred and seventy.

"Why is that?" inquired Herhor; and this is what an investigation discovered: During the nineteenth dynasty there were in the district about one hundred officials, and these received each one thousand drachmas yearly salary. To-day in that same district, though the people have decreased, there are more than two hundred officials who receive two thousand five hundred drachmas yearly.

"It is unknown to his worthiness Herhor if this is the case in every district. But this much is certain, that the treasury of the pharaoh, instead of ninety-eight thousand talents annually, has only seventy-four thousand—"

"Say, worthy father, fifty thousand," interrupted Rameses.

"I will explain that too," replied Pentuer. "In every case remember, prince, that the pharaoh's treasury pays to-day twenty-four thousand talents to officials, while it gave only ten thousand during the nineteenth dynasty."

Deep silence reigned among the dignitaries, for more than one of them had a relative in office, well paid moreover. But Pentuer was unterrified.

"Now," continued he, "I will show thee, O heir, the manner of life among officials, and the lot of common people in those old times and in our day."

"Will it not take too much time? Besides, every man can see for himself," murmured the priests, very promptly.

"I wish to know this," said the prince, with decision.

The murmur ceased. Pentuer went down along the steps of the amphitheatre to the court, and after him went the prince, the high priests, Mefres and the others.

They halted before a long curtain of mats, forming as it were a palisade. At a sign from Pentuer some tens of minor priests hastened up with blazing torches. Another sign, and a portion of the curtain fell.

From the lips of those present came a shout of admiration. They had before them a brightly illuminated tableau in which about one hundred persons were the characters.

The tableau was divided into three stories; on the lower story stood earth tillers, on a higher were officials, and on the highest was the golden throne of the pharaoh resting on two lions whose heads were the arms of the throne.

“It was in this way,” said Pentuer, “during the nineteenth dynasty. Look at the earth-tillers. At their ploughs ye see sometimes oxen, sometimes asses; their picks, spades, and shovels are bronze, and hence are lasting. See what stalwart men they are! To-day one could find such only in the guard of his holiness. Their hands and feet are strong, their breasts full, their faces smiling. All are bathed and anointed with olive oil. Their wives are occupied in preparing food and clothing or in washing house utensils; the children are at school or are playing.

“The laborer of that time, as ye see, ate wheaten bread, beans, flesh, fish, and fruit; he drank beer or wine, and see how beautiful were the plates and pitchers. Look at the caps, aprons, and capes of the men: all adorned with various-colored needlework. Still more beautifully embroidered were the skirts of women. And note how carefully they combed their hair, what brooches, earrings, and bracelets they had. Those ornaments were made of bronze and colored enamel; even gold was found among them, though only in the form of wire.

“Raise now your eyes to officials. They wore mantles, but every laborer wore just such a dress on holidays. They lived exactly as did laborers,—that is, in sufficiency, but modestly. Their furniture was ornamented somewhat more than that of laborers, and gold rings were found oftener in their caskets. They made journeys on asses, or in cars drawn by oxen.”

Pentuer clapped his hands and on the stage there was movement. The laborers gave the officials baskets of grapes, bags of barley, peas and wheat, jugs of wine, beer, milk and honey, game and stuffs, many pieces white or colored. The officials took these products, kept a portion for themselves, but the choicest and most costly they put up higher, for the throne. The platform where stood the symbol of the pharaoh’s power was covered with products which formed as it were a small mountain.

“Ye see, worthy men,” said Pentuer, “that in those times, when earth-tillers were satisfied and wealthy, the treasury of his holiness could hardly find place for the gifts of his subjects. But see what is happening in our day.”

At a new signal a second part of the curtain fell, and another tableau appeared, similar to the preceding in general outline.

“Here are our laborers of the present,” said Pentuer, and in his voice indignation was evident. “Their bodies are skin and bones, they look like sick persons, they are filthy and have forgotten to anoint themselves with olive oil, but their backs are wounded from beating.

“Neither oxen nor asses are near them, for what need is there of those beasts if ploughs are drawn by women and children? Picks and shovels are wooden, they spoil easily and that increases men’s labor. They have no clothes whatever; only women wear coarse shirts, and not even in a dream do they look at embroidery, though their grandfathers and grandmothers wore it.

“Look now at the food of the earth-tillers. At times barley and dried fish, lotus seed always, rarely a wheat cake, never flesh, beer, or wine.

“Ask them where their utensils and furniture are. They have none, unless a pitcher for water; nothing could find room in the dens which they inhabit.

“Pardon me now for that to which I turn your attention: Over there a number of children are lying on the ground; that means that they are dead. It is wonderful how many children of laborers die from toil and hunger. And those that die are the happiest, for they who survive go under the club of the overseer, or are sold to the Phœnician as lambs to the—”

Emotion stopped his voice; he rested awhile, and then continued amid the angry silence of the priesthood,—

“And now look at the officials,—how animated they are in rouge, how beautiful their clothes are! Their wives wear gold bracelets and earrings, and such fine garments that princes might envy them. Among laborers not an ox or an ass is now visible, but to make up officials journey on horseback or in litters. They drink only wine, and that of good quality.”

He clapped his hands, and again there was movement. The laborers gave the officials bags of wheat, baskets of fruit, wine, game. These objects the officials as before placed near the throne, but in quantities considerably smaller. On the pharaoh’s platform there was no longer a mountain of products, but the platform of the officials was covered.

“This is the Egypt of our day,” continued Pentuer. “Laborers are in indigence, scribes are wealthy, the treasury is not so full as it once was. But now—”

He gave a sign, and a thing unexpected took place there before them.

Certain hands seized grain, fruit, stuffs from the platforms of the pharaoh and the officials; and when the amount of the goods had decreased greatly, those same hands began to seize and lead away laborers, their wives and children.

The spectators looked with amazement at the peculiar methods of those mysterious persons. Suddenly some one cried out,—

“Those are Phœnicians! They plunder us in that way.”

“That is it, holy fathers,” said Pentuer. “Those are the hands of Phœnicians concealed in the midst of us; they plunder the pharaoh and the scribes, and lead away laborers captive when there is nothing to drag from them.”

“Yes! They are jackals! A curse on Phœnicians! Expel them, the wretches!” cried the priests. “It is they who inflict the greatest damage on Egypt.”

Not all, however, shouted in that way.

When there was silence, Pentuer commanded to take the torches to the other side of the court, and thither he conducted his hearers. There were no tableaux there, but a kind of industrial exhibition.

“Be pleased to look,” said he. “During the nineteenth dynasty foreigners sent us these things: we received perfumes from Punt; gold, iron weapons, and chariots of war came from Syria. That is all.

“But Egypt manufactured in those days. Look at these immense pitchers,—how many forms, and what a variety of colors.

“Or the furniture: that armchair was made of ten thousand pieces of gold, mother-of-pearl, and woods of various hues. Look at the robes of that period: what embroidery, what delicacy of material, how many colors! And the bronze swords, the brooches, bracelets, earrings and implements of tillage and crafts of various descriptions. All these were made in this country during the nineteenth dynasty.”

He passed to the next group of objects.

“But to-day, look: the pitchers are small and almost without ornament, the furniture is simple, the stuffs coarse and devoid of variety. Not one thing made to-day can we compare as to shape, durability, or beauty with those of former ages. Why has this happened?”

He advanced a number of steps again, surrounded by torches.

“Here is a great number of things,” said he, “which the Phœnicians bring us from various regions. Some tens of kinds of incense, colored glass, furniture, vessels, woven stuffs, chariots, ornaments,—all these come from Asia and are bought by us.

“Do ye understand now, worthy fathers, why the Phœnicians tear away grain, fruit, and cattle from the scribes and the pharaoh? In pay for those foreign goods which have destroyed our artisans as locusts destroy vegetation.

“Among things obtained through Phœnicians for his holiness, the nomarchs, and the scribes, gold has the first place.

“This kind of commerce is the most accurate picture of calamities inflicted on Egypt by Asia.

“When a man borrows gold to the amount of one talent, he is obliged in three years to return two talents. But most frequently the Phœnicians, under pretext of decreasing trouble for the debtor, assure payment in their own way: that is, debtors for each talent borrowed give them as tenants for three years two measures of land and thirty-two people.

“See there, worthy fathers,” said he, pointing to a part of the court which was better lighted. “That square of land one hundred and ten yards in length and as wide signifies two measures; the men, women, and children of that crowd mean eight families. All that together: people and land pass for three years into dreadful captivity. During that time their owner, the pharaoh or a nomarch, has no profit at all from them; at the end of that term he receives the land back exhausted, and of the people, twenty in number at the very highest, the rest have died under torture!”

Those present shuddered with horror.

“I have said that the Phœnician takes two measures of land and thirty-two people for three years in exchange for one talent. See what a space of land and what a crowd of people; look now at my hand.

“This piece of gold which I grasp here, this lump, less than a hen’s egg in size, is a talent.

“Can you estimate the complete insignificance of the Phœnicians in this commerce? This small lump of gold has no real value: it is yellow, it is heavy, a man cannot eat it,—and that is the end of the matter. A man does not clothe himself with gold and he cannot stop his hunger or thirst with it. If he had a lump of gold as big as the pyramid, he would be as poor at the foot of it as a Libyan wandering through the western desert where there is neither a date nor a drop of water.

“And see, for a piece of this barren metal a Phœnician takes a piece of land which suffices to feed and clothe thirty-two people, and besides that he takes the people. For three years he exercises power over beings who know how to cultivate land, gather in grain, make flour and beer, weave garments, build houses, and make furniture.

“At the same time the pharaoh or the nomarch is deprived for three years of the services of those people. They pay him no tribute, they carry no burdens for the army, but they toil to give income to the greedy Phœnician.

“Ye know, worthy fathers, that at present there is not a year during which in this or that province an insurrection does not break out among laborers exhausted by hunger, borne down by toil, or beaten with sticks. And some of those men perish, others are sent to the quarries, while the country is depopulated more and more for this reason only, that the Phœnician gave a lump of gold to some landowner! Is it possible to imagine greater misery? And is Egypt not to lose land and people yearly under such conditions? Victorious wars undermined Egypt, but Phœnician gold-dealers are finishing it.”

On the faces of the priests satisfaction was depicted; they were more willing to hear of the guile of Phœnicians than the excesses of scribes throughout Egypt.

Pentuer rested awhile, then he turned to the viceroy.

“For some months,” said he, “Rameses, O servant of the gods, thou hast been inquiring why the income of his holiness is diminished. The wisdom of the gods has shown thee that not only the treasure has decreased but also the army, and that both those sources of royal power will decrease still further. And the end will be utter ruin for this country, unless heaven sends down a ruler who will stop the inundation of misery which for some hundreds of years is overwhelming Egypt.

“The treasury of the pharaohs was full when we had more land and people. We must win back from the desert the fertile lands which it has swallowed, and remove from the people those burdens which weaken and kill them.”

The priests were alarmed again, lest Pentuer might mention scribes for the second time.

“Thou hast seen, prince, with thy own eyes and before witnesses, that in the epoch when people were well nourished, stalwart, and satisfied, the treasury of the pharaoh was full. But when people began to look wretched, when they were forced to plough with their wives and children, when lotus seed took the place of wheat and flesh, the treasury grew needy. If thou wish therefore to bring the state to that power which it had before the wars of the nineteenth dynasty, if thou desire that the pharaoh, his scribes, and his army should live in plenty, assure long peace to the land and prosperity to the people. Let grown persons eat flesh again and dress in embroidered garments, and let children, instead of groaning and dying under blows, play, or go to school.

“Remember, finally, that Egypt bears within its bosom a deadly serpent.”

Those present listened with fear and curiosity.

“That serpent which is sucking at the blood of the people, the property of the nomarchs, and the power of the pharaoh is the Phœnician!”

“Away with the Phœnicians!” cried the priests. “Blot out all debts to them. Admit not their ships and merchants.”

Silence was enforced by the high priest Mefres, who with tears in his eyes turned to Pentuer.

“I doubt not,” said he, “that the holy Hator is speaking through thy lips to us. Not only because no man could be so wise and all-knowing as thou art, but besides I have seen two flames, as horns, above thy forehead. I thank thee for the great words with which thou hast dispelled our ignorance. I bless thee, and I pray the gods when I am summoned before them to make thee my advocate.”

An unbroken shout from the rest of the assembly supported the blessing of the highest dignitary. The priests were the better satisfied, since alarm had hung over them lest Pentuer might refer to the scribes a second time. But the sage knew how to restrain himself: he indicated the internal wound of the state, but he did not inflame it, and therefore his triumph was perfect.

Prince Rameses did not thank Pentuer, he only dropped his head to his own bosom. No one doubted, however, that the discourse of the prophet had shaken the soul of the heir, and that it was a seed from which prosperity and glory might spring up for Egypt.

Next morning Pentuer, without taking farewell of any, left the temple at sunrise and journeyed away in the direction of Memphis.

For a number of days Prince Rameses held converse with no man, he meditated; he sat in his cell, or walked up and down the shady corridors. Work in his soul was progressing.

In reality Pentuer had declared no new truth; all had been complaining of the decrease of land and people in Egypt, of the misery of workmen, the abuses of scribes, and the extortion of Phœnicians. But the discourse of the prophet had given them tangible forms, and illustrated facts very clearly.

The Phœnicians terrified the prince; he had not estimated till that time the enormity of the misfortunes brought on people of Egypt by those merchants. His horror was all the more vivid, since he had rented out his own subjects to Dagon, and was himself witness of the way in which the banker collected his dues from them.

But his entanglement in the business of Phœnicians produced strange results in Rameses. He did not wish to think of Phœnicians, and whenever anger flamed up in his mind against those strangers the feeling of shame was destroyed in him. He was in a certain sense their confederate. Meanwhile he understood perfectly how serious the decrease was in land and in people, and on this he placed the main emphasis in his lonely meditation.

“If we had,” said he to himself, “those two millions of people lost by Egypt, we might through help from them win back those fertile lands from the desert, we might even extend those lands. And then in spite of Phœnicians our laborers would be in a better

condition, and there would be also increase in the income of Egypt. But where can we find men?"

Chance gave the answer.

On a certain evening the prince, while walking through the gardens of the temple, met a crowd of captives whom Nitager had seized on the eastern boundary and sent to the goddess Hator. Those people were perfectly built, they did more work than Egyptians, and they did it because they were properly nourished, hence even satisfied with their position.

When he saw them, his mind was cleared as if by a lightning flash. He almost lost presence of mind from emotion. The country needs men, many men,—hundreds of thousands, even a million, two millions. And here are men! The only need was to turn to Asia, seize all whom they might meet on the road, and send them to Egypt. War must continue till so many were taken that every earth-tiller from the cataract to the sea might have his own bondman.

Thus rose a plan, colossal and simple, thanks to which Egypt would find population, the earth-tillers aid in their labor, and the treasury of the pharaoh an endless source of income.

The prince was enchanted, though next day a new doubt sprang up in him.

Pentuer had announced with great emphasis, while Herhor had asserted still earlier, that victorious wars were the source of misfortune for the country. From this it resulted that to raise Egypt by a new war was impossible.

"Pentuer is a great sage, and so is Herhor," thought Rameses. "If they consider war harmful, if the high priest Mefres and other priests judge in the same way, then perhaps war is in fact dangerous. It must be dangerous, if so many holy and wise men insist thus."

Rameses was deeply disappointed. He had thought out a simple method of elevating Egypt, but the priests maintained that that was the true way to ruin it. The priests are most holy, and they are wise men.

But something happened which cooled the faith of the prince somewhat in the truthful speech of the priests, or rather it roused his previous distrust of them.

Once he was going with a certain leech to the library. The way lay through a dark and narrow corridor from which the heir drew back with repulsion.

"I will not go by this way," said he.

"Why not?" inquired the leech, with astonishment.

"Dost thou not remember, holy father, that at the end of that corridor is an opening in which a certain traitor was tortured to death without pity."

"Aha!" answered the leech. "There is an opening there into which we poured boiling pitch at command of Pentuer."

"And ye killed a man—"

The leech smiled. He was a kindly, gladsome person. So, observing the indignation of the prince, he said after some meditation,—

"It is not permitted to betray temple secrets. Of course, before each of the greater solemnities, we bring this to the mind of younger candidates."

His tone was so peculiar that Rameses required explanation.

"I cannot betray secrets," replied the leech; "but promise, worthiness, to hide a story in thy breast, and I will tell thee one."

Rameses promised. The leech gave this narrative:—

"A certain Egyptian priest, while visiting temples in the unbelieving land of Aram, met at one of them a man who seemed to him in good flesh and satisfied, though he wore wretched garments. 'Explain to me,' said the priest to the gladsome poor man, 'how it is that, though thou art indigent, thy body looks as though thou wert chief of this temple.'

"That man looked around then to see if any one were listening, and answered,—

"I am fat, because my voice is very woful; hence I am a martyr at this temple. When people come to service here, I crawl into an opening and groan with all the strength that is in my body; for this they give me food abundantly throughout the year, and a large jug of beer every day when I am tortured.'

"Thus do they manage in the unbelieving land of Aram," said the leech, as he raised a finger to his lips, and added, "Remember, prince, what thou hast promised, and of boiling pitch in this place think whatever suits thee."

This story roused the prince anew; he felt relief because a man had not been killed in the temple, but all his earlier distrust of priests sprang into life again.

That they deluded simple people, he knew. He remembered the priests' procession with the sacred bull Apis, while he was in their school. The people were convinced that Apis led the priests, while every student saw that the divine beast went in whatever direction priests drove him.

Who could tell, therefore, that Pentuer's discourse was not intended for him, as that procession of Apis for the people? For that matter, it was easy to put on the ground beans of red or other colors, and also it was not difficult to arrange tableaux. How much more splendid were those exhibitions which he had seen, even the struggles of Set with Osiris, in which a number of hundreds of persons assisted. But in that case, too, did not the priests deceive people? That was given as a battle of the gods; meanwhile it was carried on by men in disguise. In it Osiris perished, but the priest who represented Osiris came out as sound as a rhinoceros. What wonders did they not exhibit there! Water rose; there were peals of thunder; the earth trembled and vomited fire. And that was all deception. Why should the exhibition made by Pentuer be true? Besides, the prince had discovered strong indications that they wished to deceive him. The man groaning underground and covered, as it were, with boiling pitch by the priests was deception. But let that pass. The prince had convinced himself frequently that Herhor did not want war; Mefres also did not want it. Pentuer was the assistant of one of them, and the favorite of the other.

Such a struggle was taking place in the prince that it seemed to him at one time that he understood everything, at another that he was surrounded by darkness; now he was full of hope, and now he doubted everything. From hour to hour, from day to day, his soul rose and fell like the waters of the Nile in the course of its yearly changes.

Gradually, however, the prince recovered his balance, and when the time came to leave the temple, he had formulated certain views of the problem.

First of all, he understood clearly that Egypt needed more land and more people. Second, he believed that the simplest way to find men was a war with Asia. But Pentuer had proved to him that war could only heighten the disaster. A new question rose then,—did Pentuer speak the truth, or was he lying? If he spoke the truth, he plunged the prince in despair, for Rameses saw no means to raise the state except war. Unless war were made, Egypt would lose population yearly, and the treasury of the pharaoh would increase its debts till the whole process would end in some ghastly overthrow, perhaps even in the reign of the coming pharaoh.

“But if Pentuer lied? Why should he lie? Evidently because Herhor, Mefres, and the whole priestly corporation had persuaded him to act thus.

“But why did priests oppose war? What interests had they in opposing? Every war brought immense profit to them and the pharaoh.

“But would the priests deceive him in an affair so far reaching? It is true that they deceived very often, but in small matters, not when it was a question of the future and the existence of the state. It was not possible to assert that they deceived always. Besides, they were the servants of the gods, and the guardians of great secrets.” Spirits resided in their temples; of this Rameses convinced himself on the first night after he had come to that temple of Hator.

“But if the gods did not permit the uninitiated to approach their altars, if they watched so carefully over temples, why did they not watch over Egypt, which is the greatest of all temples?”

When some days later Rameses, after a solemn religious service, left the temple of Hator amid the blessings of the priests, two questions were agitating him,—

Could war with Asia really harm Egypt? Could the priests in this question be deceiving him, the heir to the throne?

Chapter XXIX

THE prince journeyed on horseback in company with a number of officers to Pi-Bast, the famous capital of the province of Habu.

The month Paoni had passed, Epiphi was beginning (April and May). The sun stood high, heralding the most violent season of heat for Egypt. A mighty wind from the desert had blown in repeatedly; men and beasts fell because of heat, and on fields and trees a gray dust had begun to settle under which vegetation was dying.

Roses had been harvested and turned into oil; wheat had been gathered as well as the second crop of clover. Well-sweeps and buckets moved with double energy, irrigating the earth with dirty water to fit it for new seed. Men had begun to gather grapes and figs. The Nile had fallen, water in canals was low and of evil odor. Above the whole country a fine dust was borne along in a deluge of burning sun-rays.

In spite of this Prince Rameses rode on and felt gladsome. The life of a penitent in the temple had grown irksome; he yearned for feasts, uproar, and women.

Meanwhile the country, intersected with a net of canals, though flat and monotonous, was pleasing. In the province of Habu lived people of another origin: not the old Egyptians, but descendants of the valiant Hyksos, who on a time had conquered Egypt and governed that land for a number of generations.

The old Egyptians despised this remnant of a conquering race expelled from power afterward, but Rameses looked on them with satisfaction. They were large and strong, their bearing was proud, and there was manly energy in their faces. They did not fall prostrate before the prince and his officers, like Egyptians, but looked at him without dislike, but also without timidity. Neither were their shoulders covered with scars from beating; the scribes respected them because they knew that if a Hyksos were beaten he would return the blows, and might kill the man who gave them. Moreover the Hyksos enjoyed the pharaoh's favor, for their people furnished the choicest warriors.

As the retinue of the heir approached Pi-Bast, whose temples and palaces were visible through the haze of dust, as through a veil of muslin, the neighborhood grew more active. Along the broad highway and the canals men were taking to market cattle, wheat, fruit, wine, flowers, bread, and a multitude of other articles of daily consumption. The torrent of people and goods moving toward the city was as noisy and dense as that outside Memphis in the holiday season. Around Pi-Bast reigned throughout the whole year the uproar of a market-day, which ceased only in the night time.

The cause of this was simple. In that city stood the renowned and ancient temple of Astarte. This temple was revered throughout Western Asia and attracted throngs of pilgrims. It could be said without exaggeration that outside Pi-Bast thirty thousand strangers camped daily,—Arabs, Phœnicians, Jews, Philistines, Hittites, Assyrians, and others. The Egyptian government bore itself kindly toward these pilgrims, who brought it a considerable income; the priests endured them, and the people of neighboring provinces carried on an active trade with them.

For the space of an hour's journey from Pi-Bast the mud huts and tents of strangers covered the open country. As one neared the city, those huts increased in number and transient inhabitants swarmed more and more densely around them. Some were preparing food under the open sky, others were purchasing provisions which came in continually, still others were going in procession to the temple. Here and there were large crowds before places of amusement, where beast-tamers, serpent-charmers, athletes, female dancers, and jugglers exhibited their adroitness.

Above all this multitude of people were heat and uproar.

Before the gate of the city Rameses was greeted by his court and by the nomarch of Habu surrounded by his officials. But the greeting, despite cordiality, was so cold that the astonished viceroy whispered to Tutmosis,—

“What does this mean, that he looks on me as if I had come to measure out punishment?”

“Because thou hast the face of a man who has been associating with divinity.”

He spoke truth. Whether because of ascetic life, or the society of priests, or of long meditation, the prince had changed greatly. He had grown thin, his complexion had darkened, and in his face and bearing much dignity was evident. In the course of weeks he had grown some years older.

On one of the main streets of the city there was such a dense throng of people that the police had to open a way for the heir and his retinue. But these people did not greet the prince; they had merely gathered around a small palace as if waiting for some person.

“What is this?” asked Rameses of the nomarch, for this indifference of the throng touched the prince disagreeably.

“Here dwells Hiram,” answered the nomarch, “a prince of Tyre, a man of great charity. Every day he distributes bountiful alms, therefore poor people rush to him.”

Rameses turned on his horse, looked, and said,—

“I see there laborers of the pharaoh. So they too go for alms to the rich Phœnician?”

The nomarch was silent. Happily they approached the official palace, and the prince forgot Hiram.

Feasts in honor of the viceroy continued a number of days in succession, but they did not please him. Gladness was lacking and disagreeable incidents happened.

One day a favorite of the prince was dancing before him; she burst into tears. Rameses seized her in his arms, and asked what her trouble was.

At first she hesitated, but emboldened by the kindness of her lord, she answered, shedding tears in still greater abundance,—

“We are thy women, O ruler, we come from great families, and respect is due to us.”

“Thou speakest truth,” said Rameses.

“Meanwhile thy treasurer stints us in allowance, and would deprive us of serving-maids, without whom we cannot bathe or dress our hair.”

Rameses summoned his treasurer, and commanded sternly that his women should have all that belonged to their birth and position. The treasurer fell on his face before the prince, and promised to carry out all commands of the women. A couple of days

later, a rebellion broke out among the court slaves, who complained that their wine had been taken. The heir ordered to give them wine. But during a review two days later a deputation from the regiments came to the viceroy with a most humble complaint, that their rations of meat and bread were diminished. The prince commanded that those petitioners be satisfied.

Still, two days later a great uproar at the palace roused him in the morning. Rameses inquired what the cause was; the officer on duty explained that the pharaoh's laborers had assembled and asked for arrears due them.

They summoned the treasurer, whom the prince attacked in great anger.

"What is going on here?" cried he. "Since my return there is no day without complaints of injustice. If anything like this is repeated, I shall order an inquiry and put an end to thy management."

The trembling treasurer fell on his face again, and groaned,—

"Slay me, lord! But what am I to do when thy treasury, thy granaries, and thy storehouses are empty?"

In spite of his anger the prince thought that the treasurer might be innocent. He commanded him to withdraw, and then summoned Tutmosis.

"Listen to me," said Rameses to the favorite, "things are done here which I do not understand, and to which I am not accustomed. My women, the slaves, the army, the pharaoh's workmen do not receive what is due them, or their supplies are curtailed. When I asked the treasurer what this means, he answered that the treasury and the storehouses are empty."

"He told truth."

"How is that?" burst out the prince. "For my journey his holiness assigned two hundred talents in gold and goods. Can it be that all this is expended?"

"Yes," answered Tutmosis.

"How is that?" cried the viceroy. "Did not the nomarchs entertain us all the way?"

"Yes, but we paid them for doing so."

"Then they are rogues and robbers if they receive us as guests and then plunder us."

"Be not angry, and I will explain."

"Sit down."

Tutmosis took a seat.

"Dost thou know," asked he, "that for a month past I have eaten food from thy kitchen, drunk wine from thy pitchers, and dressed from thy wardrobe?"

"Thou hast a right to that privilege."

"But I have never acted thus hitherto. I have lived, dressed, and amused myself at my own expense, so as not to burden thy treasury. It is true that thou hast paid my debts more than once, but that was only a part of my outlay."

"Never mind the debts!"

“In a similar condition,” continued Tutmosis, “are some tens of noble youths of thy court. They maintained themselves so as to uphold the splendor of the government; but now, like myself, they live at thy expense, for they have nothing to pay with.”

“Some time I will reward them.”

“Now,” continued Tutmosis, “we take from thy treasury, for want is oppressing us; the nomarchs do the same. If they had means they would give feasts and receptions at their own cost; but as they have not the means they receive recompense. Wilt thou call them rogues now?”

“I condemned them too harshly. Anger, like smoke, covered my eyes,” said Rameses. “I am ashamed of my words; none the less I wish that neither courtiers, soldiers, nor working men should suffer injustice. But since my means are exhausted it will be necessary to borrow. Would a hundred talents suffice? What thinkest thou?”

“I think that no one would lend us a hundred talents,” whispered Tutmosis.

The viceroy looked at him haughtily.

“Is that a fit answer to the son of a pharaoh?” asked he.

“Dismiss me from thy presence,” said Tutmosis, sadly, “but I have told the truth. At present no one will make us a loan, for there is no one to do so.”

“What is Dagon for?” wondered the prince. “He is not near my court; is he dead?”

“Dagon is in Pi-Bast, but he spends whole days with other Phœnician merchants in the temple of Astarte in prayer and penance.”

“Why such devotion? Is it because that I was in a temple that my banker thinks he too should take counsel of the gods?”

Tutmosis turned on the stool.

“The Phœnicians,” said he, “are alarmed; they are even crushed by the news—”

“About what?”

“Some one has spread the report, worthiness, that when thou shalt mount the throne all Phœnicians will be expelled and their property confiscated.”

“Well, they have time enough before that,” laughed Rameses.

Tutmosis hesitated further. “They say,” continued he, in a lowered voice, “that in recent days the health of his holiness—may he live through eternity!—has failed notably.”

“That is untrue!” interrupted the prince, in alarm. “I should know of it.”

“But the priests are performing religious services in secret for the return of health to the pharaoh. I know this to a certainty.”

The prince was astonished.

“How! my father seriously ill, the priests are praying for him, but tell me nothing?”

“They say that the illness of his holiness may last a year.”

“Oh, thou hearest fables and art disturbing me. Better tell me about the Phœnicians.”

“I have heard,” said Tutmosis, “only what every one has heard,—that while in the temple thou wert convinced of the harm done by Phœnicians, and didst bind thyself to expel them.”

“In the temple?” repeated the heir. “But who knows what that is of which I convinced myself in the temple, and what I decided to do?”

Tutmosis shrugged his shoulders, and was silent.

“Was there treason, too, in the temple?” thought the prince. “Summon Dagon in every case,” said he, aloud. “I must know the source of these lies, and by the gods, I will end them.”

“Thou wilt do well, for all Egypt is frightened. Even to-day there is no one to lend money, and if those reports continue all commerce will cease. Our aristocracy have fallen into trouble from which none see the issue, and even thy court is in want. A month hence the same thing may happen in the palace of his holiness—”

“Silence!” interrupted the prince, “and call Dagon this moment.”

Tutmosis ran out, but the banker appeared no earlier than evening. Around a white mantle he wore a black belt.

“Hast thou gone mad?” cried the heir, at sight of this. “I will drive off thy sadness immediately. I need a hundred talents at once. Go, and show thyself not till thou bring them.”

The banker covered his face and wept.

“What does this mean?” asked the prince, quickly.

“Lord,” exclaimed Dagon, as he fell on his knees, “seize all my property, sell me and my family. Take everything, even our lives—but a hundred talents—where could I find wealth like that? Neither in Egypt nor Phœnicia,” continued he, sobbing.

“Set has seized thee, O Dagon,” laughed the heir. “Couldst thou believe that I thought of expelling thy Phœnicians?”

The banker fell at the prince’s feet a second time.

“I know nothing—I am a common merchant, and thy slave—as many days as there are between the new and the full moon would suffice to make dust of me and spittle of my property.”

“But explain what this means,” said the prince, again impatient.

“I cannot explain anything, and even were I able I have a great seal on my lips—I do nothing now but pray and lament.”

“Do the Phœnicians pray also?” thought the prince.

“Unable to render any service,” continued Dagon, “I will give good counsel at least. There is here in Pi-Bast a renowned Syrian, Prince Hiram, an old man, wise and tremendously wealthy. Summon him, Erpatr, ask of him a hundred talents; perhaps he will be able to gratify thee.”

Since Rameses could get no explanations from the banker, he dismissed him, and promised to send an embassy to Hiram.

Chapter XXX

NEXT day Tutmosis, with a great suite of officers and attendants, paid a visit to the Phœnician prince, and invited him to the viceroy.

In the afternoon Hiram appeared before the palace in a simple litter borne by eight poor Egyptians to whom he gave alms. He was surrounded by the most notable Phœnician merchants, and that same throng of people who stood before his house daily.

Rameses greeted with a certain astonishment the old man out of whose eyes wisdom was gazing and in whose whole bearing there was dignity. He bowed gravely before the viceroy, and raising his hands above his head, pronounced a short blessing. Those present were deeply affected.

When the viceroy indicated an armchair and commanded his courtiers to withdraw, Hiram said,—

“Yesterday thy servant Dagon informed me that the prince needs a hundred talents. I sent out my couriers at once to Sabne-Chetam, Sethroe, Pi-Uto, and other cities where there are Phœnician ships, asking them to land all their goods. I think that in a day or two thou wilt receive this small sum—”

“Small!” interrupted Rameses, with a smile. “Thou art happy if thou call a hundred talents a small sum.”

Hiram nodded.

“Thy grandfather, worthiness,” said he, after a while, “the eternally living Rameses-sa-Ptah, honored me with his friendship; I know also his holiness, thy father—may he live through eternity!—and I will even try to lay before him my homage, if I be permitted.”

“Whence could a doubt arise?” interrupted the prince.

“There are persons,” replied the guest, “who admit some to the face of the pharaoh and refuse others—but never mind them. Thou art not to blame for this; hence I venture to lay before thee one question, as an old friend of thy father and his father.”

“I am listening.”

“What means it,” asked Hiram, slowly, “that the heir to the throne and a viceroy must borrow a hundred talents when more than a hundred thousand are due Egypt?”

“Whence?” cried Rameses.

“From the tribute of Asiatic peoples. Phœnicia owes five thousand; well, Phœnicia will pay, I guarantee that, unless some events happen. But, besides, Israel owes three thousand, the Philistines and the Moabites each two thousand, the Hittites thirty thousand. Finally, I do not remember details, but I know that the total reaches a hundred and three or a hundred and five thousand talents.”

Rameses gnawed his lips, but on his vivacious countenance helpless anger was evident. He dropped his eyes and was silent.

"It is true," said Hiram, on a sudden, and looking sharply at the viceroy. "Poor Phœnicia—but also Egypt."

"What dost thou say?" asked the prince, frowning. "I understand not thy questions."

"Prince, thou knowest what it is of which I speak, since thou dost not answer my question," replied Hiram; and he rose as if to withdraw. "Still, I withdraw not my promise. Thou wilt receive a hundred talents."

He made a low bow, but the viceroy forced him to sit down again.

"Thou art hiding something," said Rameses, in a voice in which offence was evident. "I would hear thee explain what danger threatens Egypt or Phœnicia."

"Hast thou not heard?" asked Hiram, with hesitation.

"I know nothing. I have passed more than a month in the temple."

"That is just the place in which to learn everything."

"Tell me, worthiness," said the viceroy, striking the table with his fist. "I am not pleased when men are amused at my expense."

"Give a great promise not to betray me to any one and I will tell, though I cannot believe that they have not informed the heir of this."

"Dost thou not trust me?" asked the astonished prince.

"In this affair I should require a promise from the pharaoh himself," answered Hiram, with decision.

"If I swear on my sword, and the standards of my troops, that I will tell no man—"

"Enough," said Hiram.

"I am listening."

"Does the prince know what is happening at this moment in Phœnicia?"

"I know nothing of that, even," interrupted the irritated viceroy.

"Our ships," whispered Hiram, "are coming home from all parts of the earth to convey at the first signal our people and treasures to some place—beyond the sea—to the west."

"Why?" asked the astounded viceroy.

"Because Assyria is to take us under her dominion."

"Thou hast gone mad, worthy man!" exclaimed Rameses. "Assyria to take Phœnicia! But we?—Egypt—what would we say to that?"

"Egypt has consented already."

Blood rushed to the prince's head.

"The heat has disturbed thy mind, aged man," said he, in a calm voice. "Thou hast forgotten, even, that such an affair could not take place without the pharaoh's permission and mine."

"That will follow. Meanwhile the priests have concluded a treaty."

"With whom? What priests?"

“With Beroes, the high priest of Chaldea, at commission of King Assar,” said Hiram. “And who from your side? I will not state to a certainty. But it seems to me that his worthiness Herhor, his worthiness Mefres, and the holy prophet Pentuer.”

The prince became pale.

“Consider, Phœnician,” said he, “that thou art accusing of treason the highest dignitaries of Egypt.”

“Thou art mistaken, prince, this is no treason: the high priest of Egypt and the minister of his holiness have the right to make treaties with neighboring states. Besides, how dost thou know, worthiness, that all this is not done with consent of the pharaoh?”

Rameses was obliged to confess in his soul that such a treaty would not be treason, but disregard toward him, the erpatr.

So then the priests treated him in this way,—him who might be the pharaoh a year hence? That is why Pentuer criticised war, and Mefres supported him.

“When could that have happened, and where?” asked the prince.

“Very likely they concluded the treaty at night in the temple of Set at Memphis,” answered Hiram. “And when?—I know not exactly, but it seems to me that it took place when thou wert setting out from Memphis.”

“The wretches!” thought the viceroy. “That is how they respect my position! Some kind god made me doubt in the temple of Hator.”

After a time of internal conflict he added,—

“Impossible! I shall not believe till proof be given.”

“Proof there will be,” replied Hiram. “One of these days a great lord will come to Pi-Bast from Assyria, Sargon, the friend of King Assar. He will come under pretext of a pilgrimage to the temple of Astaroth, he will bring gifts to thee and to his holiness; then he will make a treaty. Ye will in fact put seals to that which the priests have determined to the ruin of Phœnicia, and perhaps to your own great misfortune.”

“Never! What return could Assyria give Egypt?”

“That speech is worthy of a pharaoh. What return would Egypt get? Every treaty is good for a state if only something be gained through it. I am astonished specially by this,” continued Hiram, “that Egypt should conclude a bad transaction: besides Phœnicia, Assyria will take almost all Asia, and to you will be left, in the form of a favor, the Israelites, the Philistines, and the peninsula of Sinai. In that case the tributes belonging to Egypt will be lost, and the pharaoh will never receive those hundred and five thousand talents.”

The viceroy shook his head.

“Thou dost not know Egyptian priests,” said he; “not one of them would accept such a treaty.”

“Why not? The Phœnician proverb says: ‘Better barley in the granary than gold in the desert.’ Should Egypt feel very weak she might prefer Sinai and Palestine to a war with Assyria. But this is what sets me to thinking: Not Egypt, but Assyria, is easy to conquer. Assyria has a quarrel on the northwest; Assyria has few troops, and those of poor quality. Were Egypt to attack she would destroy Assyria, seize immense

treasures in Babylon and Nineveh, and establish her authority in Asia at once and securely—”

“Such a treaty cannot exist, as thou seest,” interrupted Rameses.

“In one case alone could I understand such a treaty,” continued Hiram. “If ’tis the plan of the priests to set aside kingly power in Egypt; and toward this, O prince, they have been striving since the days of thy grandfather.”

“Thou art speaking aside from the question,” said Rameses, but he felt alarm in his heart.

“Perhaps I am mistaken,” answered Hiram, looking into his eyes quickly. “But hear me out, worthiness.”

He moved up his armchair to the prince, and said in a lowered voice,—

“If the pharaoh should make war on Assyria, he would have a great army attached to his person; a hundred thousand talents of tribute in arrears, about two hundred thousand talents from Nineveh and Babylon, finally about a hundred thousand talents yearly from conquered countries. Such immense wealth would enable him to redeem the property mortgaged to the priests, and put an end at once and forever to their meddling.”

The prince’s eyes glittered, and Hiram continued,—

“To-day the army depends on Herhor, and therefore on the priests; remove the foreign regiments, and the pharaoh, in case of war, could not depend on his warriors.

“Besides, the royal treasury is empty, and the greater part of the pharaoh’s property belongs to the temples. He must contract new debts yearly even to maintain his household; and since there will be no Phœnicians among you, ye must borrow of the temples. In this way, when ten years have passed, his holiness—may he live through eternity!—will lose what is left of his property, and then what?”

On the forehead of Rameses perspiration came out in drops.

“Thou seest then, worthy lord,” continued Hiram, “the priests might and even would be forced in one case to accept the most disgraceful treaty with Assyria: if they are working to lower and destroy the power of the pharaoh—well, there may be another case: if Egypt were so weak as to need peace at any price—”

The prince sprang up.

“Silence!” cried he. “I should prefer treason on the part of my most faithful servants, to such weakness in the country. Egypt yield to Assyria—why, a year later Egypt herself would fall under the yoke of Assyria, for by subscribing to such infamy she would confess her own helplessness.”

He walked up and down the room, with indignation, while Hiram looked at him with compassion or with sympathy.

All at once Rameses halted before the Phœnician,—

“This is false! Some adroit villain has deceived thee, O Hiram, with the semblance of truth, and thou hast believed him. If such a treaty existed, they would have kept it in the closest secrecy. In the present case one of the four priests whom thou hast mentioned is a traitor, not only to his own sovereign, but to his co-conspirators—”

“There might have been some fifth man who overheard them,” interrupted Hiram.

“And who sold the secret to thee?”

“It is a wonder to me,” said Hiram, “that the prince has not discovered the power of gold.”

“But stop, worthiness, our priests have more gold than thou, though thou art wealthy beyond the wealthy!”

“Still I am not angry when a drachma comes to me. Why should others refuse a talent?”

“They would because they are servants of the gods,” said the prince, passionately; “they would fear divine punishment.”

The Phœnician laughed.

“I have seen,” said he, “many temples of various nations, and in those temples great and small statues, of wood, stone, and gold even. But gods I have never met.”

“Blasphemer!” exclaimed Rameses. “I have seen a divinity, I have felt its hand on my person, I have heard its voice.”

“In what place?”

“In the temple of Hator, in its hall of entrance, and in my cell.”

“In the daytime?”

“In the night,” replied the prince; and he stopped.

“At night the prince heard speeches of the gods, and felt their hands,” replied the Phœnician, emphasizing word after word. “At night it is possible to see many things. What happened?”

“In the temple I was seized by the head, by the shoulders, by the legs; and I swear—”

“Phst!” interrupted Hiram, with a smile. “It is not proper to swear in vain.”

He looked fixedly at Rameses with his quick and wise eyes, and seeing that doubt was rising in the young man, he continued,—

“I will tell thee something, lord. Thou art inexperienced, though surrounded by a net of intrigues, but I have been the friend of thy grandfather and thy father. Now I will render thee a service: Come in the night to the temple of Astaroth, but bind thyself to keep the secret. Come alone, and thou wilt be convinced as to who the gods are who speak in the temples and touch us.”

“I will come,” said Rameses, after some meditation.

“Forewarn me, prince, on the morning of the day, and I will give thee the evening password; thou wilt be admitted. Only betray neither me nor thyself,” said the Phœnician, with a kindly smile. “Men never pardon betrayal of their secrets, though gods pardon sometimes.” He bowed, raised his eyes and hands, while he whispered a blessing.

“Deceivers!” cried the prince. “Thou prayest to gods, and dost not believe in them.”

Hiram finished the blessing, and said,—

“It is true that I have no belief in Egyptian or Assyrian, or even in Phœnician gods, but I believe in One who dwells not in temples and whose name is unknown to us.”

“Our priests believe also in One,” said Rameses.

“So do the Chaldeans, but they and your priests have conspired against us. There is no truth in this world, prince.”

After Hiram’s departure the heir shut himself up in the most remote chamber under pretext of reading sacred papyruses.

Almost in the twinkling of an eye the information received recently arranged itself in the fiery imagination of Rameses, and he formed a plan. First of all, he understood that a secret battle for life and death was raging between the priests and the Phœnicians. About what? Naturally about wealth and influence. Hiram said truly, that should the Phœnicians be expelled from Egypt, all the estates of the pharaoh, and even of the nomarchs and the entire aristocracy, would pass into possession of the temples.

Rameses had never liked the priests, and he had known and seen for a long time that the greater part of Egypt belonged to them, that their cities were the richest, their fields the best tilled, their people satisfied. He understood too that one-half the treasures which belonged to the temples would suffice to rescue the pharaoh from ceaseless troubles and give back power to him.

The prince knew this, and more than once he had said so with bitterness. But when through the influence of Herhor he became viceroy and received the corps in Memphis, he grew reconciled with the priests and stifled his previous dislike of them.

All that dislike had revived again.

Not only had the priests not told him of their negotiations with Assyria, they had not even forewarned him of the embassy of Sargon. This question might indeed be the great secret of the state and the temples. But why did they conceal the amount of tributes from various Asiatic nations, unpaid thus far? One hundred thousand talents—why, that was a sum which might restore immediately the financial status of the pharaoh! Why had they concealed from him that which even a prince of Tyre knew, a man who was of the council in that city?

What a shame for him, the heir to the throne, and the viceroy, that his eyes were first opened by foreigners! But there was something worse still: Pentuer and Mefres had proved to him in every way that Egypt must avoid war. In the temple of Hator that emphasis had seemed to him suspicious, since a war might obtain for the state thousands of legions of slaves, and raise the general prosperity of the country. To-day this seemed the more necessary since Egypt ought to receive unpaid sums and gain still more tribute.

The prince rested his arms on the table and calculated,—

“We,” thought he, “should receive a hundred thousand talents. Hiram calculates that the plunder of Nineveh and Babylon would give about two hundred thousand; together, three hundred thousand. With such a sum we might cover the cost of the mightiest war, and there would remain besides several hundred thousand as profit, and captives and a hundred thousand yearly tribute from newly conquered regions. After that,” concluded the prince, “we could reckon with the priesthood!”

Rameses was excited. Still reflection came to him,—

“But if Egypt was unable to wage a victorious war against Assyria?” His blood boiled at this question. “How Egypt? Why should Egypt not trample Assyria, when he appeared at the head of its armies, he a descendant of Rameses the Great, who had hurled himself single-handed on the Hittite war-chariots and scattered them.”

The prince could understand everything save this, that man might conquer him and that he could not snatch victory from the greatest enemy. He felt in himself endless daring, and he would have been astounded if any enemy whatever had not fled at sight of his steeds in full onrush. Did not the gods themselves stand on the war-chariot of the pharaoh to defend his shield and smite with heavenly bolts his enemies?

“But what did this Hiram say to me about gods?” thought the prince. “And what will he show me in the temple of Astaroth? We shall see.”

Chapter XXXI

THE old man kept his promise. Every day to the prince's palace in Pi-Bast came crowds of slaves and long rows of asses bearing wheat, barley, dried meat, woven stuffs, and wine. Phœnician merchants brought gold and precious stones under inspection of Hiram's assistants.

In this manner the heir received in the course of five days the hundred talents promised. Hiram accounted a lower per cent to himself,—one talent for four, in a year. He asked no pledge, but was satisfied with the receipt of the prince, certified before a tribunal.

The needs of the court were satisfied bountifully. Three favorites of the viceroy received new robes, a number of special perfumes, and female slaves of various colors. The servants had abundance of food and wine, the pharaoh's laborers received arrears of pay, unusual rations were issued to the army.

The court was delighted, the more since Tutmosis and other noble youths, at the command of Hiram, received rather large loans, while the nomarch of Habu and his higher officials received costly presents.

So feast followed feast and amusement amusement, though the heat increased always. Seeing this general delight, the viceroy was satisfied. He was troubled, however, by the bearing of Mefres and other priests. Rameses thought that those dignitaries would reproach him for having become so indebted to Hiram in spite of those lessons which he had received in the temple. Meanwhile the holy fathers were silent and did not even show themselves.

"What does this mean?" asked the prince one day of Tutmosis; "the priests do not reproach us? We have never indulged in such excesses before. Music is sounding from morning till evening; we drink, beginning with sunrise, and we fall asleep with women in our arms or pitchers at our heads."

"Why should they reproach us?" answered the indignant Tutmosis. "Are we not sojourning in the city of Astarte,¹⁶ for whom amusement is the most pleasing service, and love the most coveted sacrifice? Moreover the priests understand that after such privations and fasts rest is due thee."

"Have they said anything?" asked the prince, with disquiet.

"Yes, more than once. Only yesterday the holy Mefres smiled, and said that amusement attracted a young man like thee more than religion or the labor of ruling a state."

Rameses fell to thinking,—

"So the priests looked on him as a frivolous stripling, though he, thanks to Sarah, would become a father to-day or to-morrow. But they would have a surprise when he spoke to them in his own manner."

In truth the prince reproached himself somewhat. From the time that he left the temple of Hator he had not occupied himself one day with the affairs of Habu. The

¹⁶ Astaroth.

priests might suppose that he was either entirely satisfied with Pentuer's explanations, or that he was tired of interfering in government.

"So much the better!" whispered he. "So much the better!"

Under the influence of the endless intrigues of those around him, or suspicious of those intrigues, the instinct to deceive began in his young spirit to rouse itself. Rameses felt that the priests did not divine the subject of his conversation with Hiram, nor the plans which were forming in his head. It sufficed those blinded persons, that he was amusing himself; from this they inferred that the management of the state would remain in their hands forever.

"Have the gods so darkened their minds," thought Rameses, "that they do not even ask themselves why Hiram gave me a loan so considerable? And perhaps that crafty Tyrian has been able to lull their suspicious hearts? So much the better! So much the better!"

He had a marvellously agreeable feeling when he thought that the priests had blundered. He determined to keep them in that blunder for the future; hence he amused himself madly.

Indeed the priests were mistaken, both in Rameses and Hiram. The artful Tyrian gave himself out before them as very proud of his relations with Rameses, and the prince with no less success played the rôle of a riotous stripling.

Mefres was even convinced that the prince was thinking seriously of expelling the Phœnicians, that meanwhile he and his courtiers were contracting debts and would never pay them.

But the temple of Astaroth with its numerous courts and gardens was filled with devotees all the time. Every day, if not every hour, though the heat was excessive, some company of pilgrims to the great goddess arrived from the depth of Asia.

Those were strange pilgrims. Wearied, streaming with perspiration, covered with dust, they advanced with music, and dancing, and songs sometimes of a very lewd character. The day passed for them in unbridled license in honor of the goddess. It was possible not only to recognize every such company from afar, but to catch its odor, since those people always brought immense bouquets of fresh flowers in their hands, and in bundles all the male cats that had died in the course of the current year. The devotees gave these cats to dissectors in Pi-Bast to be stuffed or embalmed, and bore them home later on as valued relics.

On the first day of the month Messori (May-June), Prince Hiram informed Rameses that he might appear at the temple of Astaroth that evening. When it had grown dark on the streets after sunset, the viceroy girded a short sword to his side, put on a mantle with a hood, and unobserved by any servant, slipped away to the house of Hiram.

The old magnate was waiting for the viceroy.

"Well," said he, with a smile, "art thou not afraid, prince, to enter a Phœnician temple where cruelty sits on the altar and perversity ministers?"

"Fear?" repeated Rameses, looking at him almost contemptuously. "Astaroth is not Baal, nor am I a child which they might throw into your god's red-hot belly."

"But does the prince believe this story?"

Rameses shrugged his shoulders.

“An eyewitness and a trustworthy person,” answered he, “told me how ye sacrifice children. Once a storm wrecked a number of tens of your vessels. Immediately the Tyrian priests announced a religious ceremony at which throngs of people collected.” The prince spoke with evident indignation. “Before the temple of Baal situated on a lofty place was an immense bronze statue with the head of a bull. Its belly was red hot. At command of your priests the foolish Phœnician mothers put their most beautiful children at the feet of this cruel divinity—”

“Only boys,” interrupted Hiram.

“Only boys,” continued Rameses. “The priests sprinkled each boy with perfumes, decked him with flowers, and then the statue seized him with bronze hands, opened its jaws, and devoured the child, whose screams meanwhile were heaven-piercing. Flames burst each time from the mouth of the deity.”

Hiram laughed in silence.

“And dost thou believe this, worthiness?”

“I repeat what a man told me who has never lied.”

“He told what he saw. But did it not surprise him that no mother whose children they burned was weeping?”

“He was astonished, indeed, at such indifference in women, since they are always ready to shed tears even over a dead hen. But it shows great cruelty in your people.”

The old Phœnician nodded.

“Was that long ago?” asked he.

“A few years.”

“Well,” said Hiram, deliberately, “shouldst thou wish to visit Tyre some day, I shall have the honor to show thee a solemnity like that one.”

“I have no wish to see it.”

“After the ceremony we shall go to another court of the temple, where the prince will see a very fine school, and in it, healthy and gladsome, those very same boys who were burnt a few years ago.”

“How is that?” exclaimed Rameses; “then did they not perish?”

“They are living, and growing up to be sturdy mariners. When thou shall be pharaoh,—mayst thou live through eternity!—perhaps more than one of them will be sailing thy ships.”

“Then ye deceive your people?” laughed the prince.

“We deceive no one,” answered the Tyrian, with dignity. “Each man deceives himself when he does not seek the explanation of a solemnity which he does not understand.”

“I am curious,” said Rameses.

“In fact,” continued Hiram, “we have a custom that indigent mothers wishing to assure their sons a good career give them to the service of the state. In reality, those children are taken across the statue of Baal, in which there is a heated stove. This ceremony does not mean that the children are really burnt, but that they have been given to the temple, and so are as much lost to their mothers as if they had fallen into fire.

“In truth, however, they do not go to the stove, but to nurses and women who rear them for some years. When they have grown up sufficiently, the school of priests of Baal receives and educates them. The most competent become priests or officials; the less gifted go to the navy and obtain great wealth frequently. Now I think the prince will not wonder that Tyrian mothers do not mourn for their children. I will say more: thou wilt understand, lord, why there is no punishment for parents who kill their children, as there is in Egypt.”

“Wretches are found in all lands,” replied the prince.

“But there is no child murder in our country,” continued Hiram, “for with us children, when their mothers are unable to support them, are taken to the temple by the state.”

The prince fell to thinking; suddenly he embraced Hiram, and said with emotion,—

“Ye are much better than those who tell tales of you. I am greatly rejoiced at this.”

“Among us, too, there is no little evil,” answered Hiram; “but we are all ready to be thy faithful servants shouldst thou call us.”

“Is this true?” asked the prince, looking him in the eyes.

The old man put his hand on his heart.

“I swear to thee, O heir to the throne of Egypt and future pharaoh, that if thou begin at any time a struggle with our common enemy, Phœnicia will hasten as one man to assist thee.—But receive this as a reminder of our conversation.”

He drew from beneath his robe a gold medal covered with mysterious characters, and, muttering a prayer, hung it on the neck of Prince Rameses.

“With this amulet,” continued Hiram, “thou mayst travel the whole world through, and if thou meet a Phœnician he will serve thee with advice, with gold, with his sword even. But now let us go.”

Some hours had passed since sunset, but the night was clear, for the moon had risen. The terrible heat of the day had yielded to coolness. In the pure air was floating no longer that gray dust which bit the eyes and poisoned respiration. In the blue sky here and there twinkled stars which were lost in the deluge of moonbeams.

Movement had stopped on the streets, but the roofs of all the houses were filled with people occupied in amusement. Pi-Bast seemed from edge to edge to be one hall filled with music, singing, laughter, and the sound of goblets.

The prince and the Phœnician went speedily to the suburbs, choosing the less lighted sides of the streets. Still, people feasting on terraces saw them at intervals, and invited them up, or cast flowers down on their heads.

“Hei, ye strollers!” cried they, from the roofs. “If ye are not thieves called out by the night to snatch booty, come hither, come up to us. We have good wine and gladsome women.”

The two wanderers made no answer to those hospitable invitations; they hurried on in their own way. At last they came to a quarter where the houses were fewer, the gardens more frequent, the trees, thanks to damp sea-breezes, more luxuriant and higher than in the southern provinces of Egypt.

“It is not far now,” said Hiram.

The prince raised his eyes, and over the dense green of trees he saw a square tower of blue color; on it a more slender tower, which was white. This was the temple of Astaroth. Soon they entered the garden, whence they could take in at a glance the whole building.

It was composed of a number of stories. The top of the lowest was a square platform with sides four hundred yards long; its walls were a few metres high, and all of black color. At the eastern side was a projection to which came two wide stairways. Along the other three sides of this first story were small towers, ten on each side; between each pair of towers were five windows.

More or less in the centre of this lowest platform rose a quadrangular building with sides two hundred yards long. This had a single stairway, towers at the corners, and was purple. On the top of this building was another of golden color, and above it, one upon the other, two towers—one blue, the other white.

The whole building looked as if some power had placed on the earth one enormous black dice, on it a smaller one of purple, on that a golden one, on that a blue, and, highest of all, a silver dice. To each of these elevations stairs led, either double flights along the sides or single front stairs, always on the eastern walls.

At the sides of the stairs and doors stood, alternately, great Egyptian sphinxes, or winged Assyrian human-headed bulls.

The viceroy looked with delight at this edifice, which in the moonlight and against the background of rich vegetation had an aspect of marvellous beauty. It was built in Chaldean style, and differed essentially from the temples of Egypt, first, by the system of stories, second, by the perpendicular walls. Among the Egyptians every great building had sloping sides receding inward as they rose.

The garden was not empty. At various points small villas and houses were visible, lights were flashing, songs and music were heard. From time to time among trees appeared shadows of loving couples.

All at once an old priest approached them, exchanged a few words with Hiram, and said to the prince with a low obeisance,—

“Be pleased, lord, to come with me.”

“And may the gods watch over thee, worthiness,” added Hiram, as he left him.

Rameses followed the priest. Somewhat aside from the temple, in the thickest of the grove, was a stone bench, and perhaps a hundred rods from it a villa of no great size at which was heard singing.

“Are people praying there?” asked the prince.

“No,” answered the priest, without concealing his dislike; “at that house assemble the worshippers of Kama, our priestess who guards the fire before the altar of Astaroth.”

“Whom does she receive to-day?”

“No one at any time,” answered the guide, offended. “Were the priestess of the fire not to observe her vow of chastity she would have to die.”

“A cruel law,” observed Rameses.

“Be pleased, lord, to wait at this bench,” said the Phœnician priest, coldly; “but on hearing three blows against the bronze plate, go to the temple, ascend to the first platform, and thence to the purple story.”

“Alone?”

“Yes.”

The prince sat down on the bench, in the shadow of an olive-tree, and heard the laughter of women in the villa.

“Kama,” thought he, “is a pretty name. She must be young, and perhaps beautiful, and those dull Phœnicians threaten her with death. Do they wish in this way to assure themselves even a few virgins in the whole country?”

He laughed, but was sad. It was uncertain why he pitied that unknown woman for whom love would be a passage to the grave.

“I can imagine to myself Tutmosis if he were appointed priestess of Astaroth,” thought Rameses. “He would have to die, poor fellow, before he could light one lamp before the face of the goddess.”

At that moment; a flute was heard in the villa, and some one played a plaintive air, which was accompanied by female singers, “Áha-ā! áha-ā!” as in the lullaby of infants.

The flute stopped, the women were silent, and a splendid male voice was heard, in the Greek language:—

“When thy robe gleams on the terrace, the stars pale and the nightingales cease to sing, but in my heart there is stillness like that which is on earth when the clear dawn salutes it—”

“Áha-ā! áha-ā!” continued the women. The flute played again.

“When thou goest to the temple, violets surround thee in a cloud of fragrance, butterflies circle near thy lips, palms bend their heads to thy beauty.”

“Áha-ā! áha-ā!—”

“When thou art not before me, I look to the skies to recall the sweet calm of thy features. Vain labor! The heavens have no calm like thine, and their heat is cold when compared with the flame which is turning my heart into ashes.”

“Áha-ā! áha-ā!—”

“One day I stood among roses, which the gleam of thy glances clothe in white, gold, and scarlet. Each leaf of them reminded me of one hour, each blossom of one month passed at thy feet. The drops of dew are my tears, which are drunk by the merciless wind of the desert.

“Give a sign; I will seize thee, I will bear thee away to my birthplace, beloved. The sea will divide us from pursuers, myrtle groves will conceal our fondling, and gods, more compassionate toward lovers, will watch over our happiness.”

“Áha-ā! áha-ā!—”

The prince dropped his eyelids and imagined. Through his drooping lashes he could not see the garden, he saw only the flood of moonlight in which were mingled shadows and the song of the unknown man to the unknown woman. At instants that song seized him to such a degree, and forced itself into his spirit so deeply, that Rameses wished to ask: “Am I not the singer myself? nay, am I not that love song?”

At this moment his title, his power, the burdensome problems of state, all seemed to him mean, insignificant in comparison with that moonlight and those calls of a heart

which is enamored. If the choice had been given him to take the whole power of the pharaoh, or that spiritual condition in which he then found himself, he would have preferred that dreaming, in which the whole world, he himself, even time, disappeared, leaving nothing behind but desire, which was now rushing forth to infinity borne on the wings of song and of music.

Meanwhile the prince recovered, the song had ended, the lights in the villa had vanished, the white walls, the dark vacant windows were sharply outlined. One might have thought that no person had ever been in that house there. The garden was deserted and silent, even the slight breath of air stirred the leaves no longer.

One! two! three!—From the temple were heard three mighty sounds from bronze.

“Ah! I must go,” thought the prince, not knowing well whither he was to go or for what purpose.

He turned, however, in the direction of the temple, the silver tower of which rose above the trees as if summoning him.

He went as in a trance, filled with strange wishes. Among the trees it was narrow for him; he wished to ascend to the top of that tower, to draw breath, to take in with his glance some wider horizon. Again he remembered that it was the month Messori, that a year had passed since the manoeuvres; he felt a yearning for the desert. How gladly would he mount his light chariot drawn by two horses, and fly away to some place where it was not so stifling, and trees did not hide the horizon!

He was at the steps of the temple, so he mounted to the platform. It was quiet and empty there, as if all had died; but from afar the water of a fountain was murmuring. At the second stairway he threw aside his burnous and sword; once more he looked at the garden, as if he were sorry to leave the moonlight behind, and entered the temple. There were three stories above him.

The bronze doors were open; at both sides of the entrance stood winged figures of bulls with human heads; on the faces of these was dignified calmness.

“Those are kings of Assyria,” thought the prince, looking at their beards plaited in tiny tresses.

The interior of the temple was as black as night when ’tis blackest. The darkness was intensified more by white streaks of moonlight falling in through narrow high windows.

In the depth of the temple two lamps were burning before the statue of Astaroth. Some strange illumination from above caused the statue to be perfectly visible. Rameses gazed at it. That was a gigantic woman with the wings of an ostrich. She wore a long robe in folds; on her head was a pointed cap, in her right hand she held a pair of doves. On her beautiful face and in her downcast eyes was an expression of such sweetness and innocence that astonishment seized the prince, for she was the patroness of revenge and of license the most unbridled.

“Phoenicia has shown me one more of her secrets. A strange people,” thought Rameses. “Their man-eating gods do not eat, and their lewdness is guarded by virgin priestesses and by a goddess with an innocent face.”

Thereupon he felt that something had slipped across his feet quickly, as it were a great serpent. Rameses drew back and stood in the streak of moonlight.

“A vision!” said he to himself.

Almost at that moment he heard a whisper,—

“Rameses! Rameses!”

It was impossible to discover whether that was a man’s or a woman’s voice, or whence it issued.

“Rameses! Rameses!” was heard a whisper, as if from the ceiling.

The prince went to an unilluminated place and, while looking, bent down.

All at once he felt two delicate hands on his head.

He sprang up to grasp them, but caught only air.

“Rameses!” was whispered from above.

He raised his head, and felt on his lips a lotus flower; and when he stretched his hands to it some one leaned on his arm lightly.

“Rameses!” called a voice from the altar.

The prince turned and was astounded. In the streak of light, a couple of steps distant, stood a most beautiful man, absolutely like the heir to the throne of Egypt. The same face, eyes, youthful stature, the same posture, movements, and dress.

The prince thought for a while that he was before some great mirror,—such a mirror as even the pharaoh could not have. But soon he convinced himself that his second was a living man, not a picture.

At that moment he felt a kiss on his neck. Again he turned, but there was no one; meanwhile his second self vanished.

“Who is here? I wish to know!” cried the angry prince.

“It is I—Kama,” answered a sweet voice.

And in the strip of light appeared, a most beautiful woman, naked, with a golden girdle around her waist.

Rameses ran up and seized her by the hands. She did not flee.

“Art thou Kama?—No, thou art— Yes, Dagon sent thee on a time, but then thou didst call thyself Fondling.”

“But I am Fondling, too,” replied she, naïvely.

“Is it thou who hast touched me with thy hands?”

“I.”

“How?”

“Ao! in this way,” answered she, throwing her arms around his neck, and kissing him.

Rameses seized her in his arms, but she tore herself free with a force which no one could have suspected in such a slight figure.

“Art thou then the priestess Kama? Was it to thee that that Greek sang to-night?” asked the prince, pressing her hands passionately. “What sort of man is that singer?”

Kama shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

“He is attached to our temple,” was the answer.

Rameses' eyes flamed, his nostrils dilated, there was a roaring in his head. That same woman a few months before had made on him only a slight impression; but to-day he was ready to commit some mad deed because of her. He envied the Greek, and felt also indescribable sorrow at the thought that if she became his she must perish.

"How beautiful thou art," said he. "Where dost thou dwell? Ah, I know; in that villa. Is it possible to visit thee?—Of course it is. If thou receive singers, thou must receive me. Art thou really the priestess guarding the fire of this temple?"

"I am."

"And are the laws so severe that they do not permit thee to love? Ei, those are threats! For me thou wilt make exception."

"All Phœnicia would curse me; the gods would take vengeance," replied she, with a smile.

Rameses drew her again toward him; again she tore herself free.

"Have a care, prince," said she, with a challenging look. "Phœnicia is mighty, and her gods—"

"What care I for thy gods or Phœnicia? Were a hair to fall from thy head, I would trample Phœnicia as I might a foul reptile."

"Kama! Kama!" called a voice from the statue.

She was frightened.

"Thou seest they call me. They may have heard thy blaspheming."

"They may have heard my anger."

"The anger of the gods is more terrible."

She tore away and vanished in the darkness of the temple. Rameses rushed after her, but was pushed back on a sudden. The whole temple between him and the altar was filled with an immense bloody flame, in which monstrous figures appeared,—huge bats, reptiles with human heads, shades—

The flame advanced toward him directly across the whole width of the building; and, amazed by this sight, which was new to him, the prince retreated. All at once fresh air was around him. He turned his head—he was outside the temple, and that instant the bronze doors closed with a crash behind him.

He rubbed his eyes, he looked around. The moon from the highest point in the heavens had lowered toward the west. At the side of the column Rameses found his sword and burnous. He raised them, and moved down the steps like a drunken man.

When he returned to his palace at a late hour, Tutmosis, on seeing his pale face and troubled look, cried with alarm,—

"By the gods! where hast thou been, Erpatr? Thy whole court is alarmed and sleepless."

"I was looking at the city. The night is beautiful."

"Dost thou know," added Tutmosis, hurriedly, as if fearing that some one else might anticipate him, "that Sarah has given thee a son?"

"Indeed?—I wish no one in the retinue to be alarmed when I go out to walk."

“Alone?”

“If I could not go out alone when it pleases me, I should be the most wretched slave in Egypt,” said Rameses, bitterly.

He gave his sword and burnous to Tutmosis, and went to his bedroom without calling any one. Yesterday the birth of a son would have filled him with gladness; but at that moment he received the news with indifference. His whole soul was occupied with the thought of that evening, the most wonderful in all his life experience. He still saw the light of the moon; in his ears the song of the Greek was still sounding. But that temple of Astaroth!

He could not sleep till morning.

Chapter XXXII

NEXT day the prince rose late, bathed himself and dressed, then summoned Tutmosis.

The exquisite appeared at once, dressed carefully and perfumed. He looked sharply at the prince to learn in what humor he was, and to fix his own features correspondingly. But on the face of Rameses was only weariness.

"Well," asked the prince, yawning, "art thou sure that a son is born to me?"

"I have that news from the holy Mefres."

"Oho! How long is it since the prophets are occupied with my household?"

"Since the time that thou hast shown them thy favor, worthiness."

"Is that true?" asked the prince, and he fell to thinking.

He recalled the scene of the previous night in the temple of Astaroth, and compared it with a similar spectacle in the temple of Hator.

"They called my name," said he to himself, "both here and there. But there my cell was very narrow, and the walls were thick; here the person calling, namely, Kama, could hide herself behind a column and whisper. But here it was terribly dark, while in my cell it was clear." At last he said to Tutmosis,—

"When did that happen?"

"When was thy worthy son born? About ten days ago. The mother and child are well; they seem perfectly healthy. At the birth were present Menes himself, thy worthy mother's physician, and his worthiness Herhor."

"Well—well," said the prince, and again he fell to thinking: "They touched me here and there, with a hand in both cases. Was there such a difference? It seems to me that there was, maybe for the reason that here I was, and there I was not, prepared to see a miracle. But here they showed me another *myself*, which they did not succeed in doing there. Very clever are the priests! I am curious to know who represented me so well,—a god or a man? Oh, the priests are very clever, and I do not know even whom to trust more,—our priests or the Phœnicians?"

"Hear me, Tutmosis," said he, aloud. "They must come hither; I must see my son. At last no one will have the right to consider himself better than I."

"Is the worthy Sarah to come immediately with her son?"

"Let them come at the earliest, if their health permit. Within the palace bounds are many convenient buildings. It is necessary to choose a place among the trees, quiet, and, when the time of heat comes, cool. Let me, too, show the world my son."

Again he was thoughtful; this disquieted Tutmosis.

"Yes, they are clever!" thought Rameses. "That they deceive the common people, even by rude methods, I knew. Poor sacred Apis! how many prods he got during processions when people lay prostrate before him! But to deceive me, I should not have believed that,—voices of gods, invisible hands, a man covered with pitch; these

were accessories! Then came Pentuer's song about the decrease of land and population, the officials, the Phoenicians, and all that to disgust me with war."

Tutmosis said suddenly,—

"I fall on my face before thee."

"I must bring hither, gradually, regiments from cities near the sea. I wish to have a review and reward them for loyalty."

"But we, the nobles, are we not loyal to thee?" inquired Tutmosis, confused.

"The nobles and the army are one."

"But the nomarchs and the officials?"

"Even the officials are loyal," answered the prince. "What do I say? The Phoenicians even are so, though in many other points they are deceivers."

"By the gods! speak in a lower voice," whispered Tutmosis; and he looked toward the other room timidly.

"Oho!" laughed the prince, "why this alarm? So for thee, too, it is no secret that we have traitors?"

"I know of whom thou art speaking, worthiness, for thou wert always prejudiced against—"

"Against whom?"

"Against whom—I divine. But I thought that after the agreement with Herhor, after a long stay in the temple—"

"What of the temple? In the temple, and in the whole country, for that matter, I have convinced myself of one thing, that the very best lands, the most active population, and immense wealth are not the property of the pharaoh."

"Quieter! quieter!" whispered Tutmosis.

"But I am quiet always; I have a calm face at all times, so let me speak even here; besides, I should have the right to say, even in the supreme council, that in this Egypt, which belongs entirely to my father, I, his heir and viceroy, had to borrow a hundred talents from a petty prince of Tyre. Is this not a shame?"

"But how did this come to thy mind to-day?" asked Tutmosis, wishing to put an end to the perilous conversation as quickly as possible.

"How?" answered the prince; and he grew silent, to sink again into meditation.

"It would not mean so much," thought he, "if they deceived me alone; I am only heir to the pharaoh, and not admitted to all secrets. But who will assure me that they have not acted in the same way with my worthy father? He has trusted them entirely during thirty and some years; he has bowed down before miracles, given abundant offerings to the gods, for this result,—that his property and power should pass into the hands of ambitious tricksters! And no one has opened his eyes. For the pharaoh cannot, like me, enter Phœnician temples at night, and absolutely no one has admission to his holiness.

"But who will assure me to-day that the priests are not striving to overthrow the throne, as Hiram said? Even my father informed me that the Phœnicians are most truthful wherever they have an interest to be so. Assuredly it is their interest not to

be expelled from Egypt, and not to fall under the power of Assyria. The Assyrians are a herd of raging lions! Wherever they pass through a country nothing is left except ruins and dead bodies, as after a fire—”

All at once Rameses raised his head; from a distance came the sound of flutes and horns.

“What does this mean?” inquired he of Tutmosis.

“Great news!” replied the courtier, with a smile. “The Asiatics are welcoming a famous pilgrim from Babylon.”

“From Babylon? Who is he?”

“His name is Sargon.”

“Sargon?” repeated the prince. “Sargon? Ha! ha!” laughed the prince. “What is he?”

“He must be a great dignitary at the court of King Assar. He brings with him ten elephants, a herd of most beautiful steeds of the desert, crowds of slaves and servants.”

“But why has he come?”

“To bow down before the wonderful goddess Astaroth, who is honored by all Asia,” answered Tutmosis.

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed the prince, recalling what Hiram had said of the coming of the Assyrian ambassador, Sargon. “Ha! ha! ha! Sargon, a relative of King Assar, has become all at once such a devotee that for whole months he goes on a difficult journey only to do honor in Pi-Bast to the goddess Astaroth. But in Nineveh he could have found greater gods and more learned priests. Ha! ha! ha!”

Tutmosis looked at the prince with astonishment.

“What has happened to thee, Erpatr?” asked he.

“Here is a miracle not described, I think, in the chronicles of any temple. But think, Tutmosis: When thou art most occupied with the problem of catching the thief who is always plundering thee, that same thief puts his hand again into thy casket before thy eyes, in presence of a thousand witnesses. Ha! ha! ha! Sargon, a pious pilgrim!”

“I understand nothing,” whispered Tutmosis, in anxiety.

“And thou hast no need to understand,” replied the viceroy. “Remember only that Sargon has come hither for devotional purposes.”

“It seems to me that everything of which thou art speaking,” said Tutmosis, lowering his voice, “is very dangerous.”

“Then do not mention it to any one.”

“I will not; but art thou sure that thou thyself, prince, wilt not betray the secret? Thou art as quick as lightning.”

The prince placed his hand on the courtier’s shoulder.

“Be at rest,” said he, looking him in the eyes. “If ye will only be loyal to me, ye, the nobles, and the army, ye will see wonderful things, and, as regards you, evil times will be ended.”

“Thou knowest that we are ready to die at thy command,” said Tutmosis, placing his hand on his breast.

There was such uncommon seriousness on the adjutant’s face that the prince understood, moreover not for the first time, that there was concealed in that riotous exquisite a valiant man, on whose sword and understanding he could put reliance.

From that time the prince had no more such strange conversations with Tutmosis. But that faithful friend and servant divined that connected with the arrival of Sargon were some great hidden interests of state which the priests alone had decided.

For a certain time all the Egyptian aristocracy, nomarchs, higher officials, and leaders had been whispering among themselves very quietly, yes, very quietly, that important events were approaching. For the Phœnicians under an oath to keep the secret had told them of certain treaties with Assyria, according to which Phœnicia would be lost, and Egypt be covered with disgrace and become even tributary.

Indignation among the aristocracy was immense, but no one betrayed himself; on the contrary, as well at the court of Rameses as at the courts of the nomarchs of Lower Egypt, people amused themselves perfectly. It might have been thought that with the weather had fallen on men a rage not only for amusements but for riot. There was no day without spectacles, feasts, and triumphal festivals; there was no night without illuminations and uproar. Not only in Pi-Bast but in every city it had become the fashion to run through the streets with torches, music, and, above all, with full pitchers. They broke into houses and dragged out sleeping dwellers to drinking-bouts; and since the Egyptians were inclined toward festivities every man living amused himself.

During Rameses’ stay in the temple of Hator the Phœnicians, seized by a panic, passed their days in prayer and refused credit to every man. But after Hiram’s interview with the viceroy caution deserted the Phœnicians, and they began to make loans to Egyptian lords more liberally than at any time earlier.

Such abundance of gold and goods as there was in Lower Egypt, and, above all, such small per cent the oldest men could not remember.

The severe and wise priests turned attention to the madness of the upper classes; but they were mistaken in estimating the cause of it, and the holy Mentezufis, who sent a report every few days to Herhor, stated that the heir, wearied by religious practices in the temple, was amusing himself to madness, and with him the entire aristocracy.

The worthy minister did not even answer these statements, which showed that he considered the rioting of the prince as quite natural and perhaps even useful.

With such mental conditions around him Rameses enjoyed much freedom. Almost every evening when his attendants had drunk too much wine and had begun to lose consciousness, the prince slipped out of the palace. Hidden by the dark burnous of an officer, he hurried through the empty streets and out beyond the city to the gardens of the temple of Astaroth. There he found the bench before that small villa, and, hidden among the trees, listened to the song of Kama’s worshipper, and dreamed of the priestess.

The moon rose later and later, drawing near its renewal. The nights were dark, the effects of light were gone; but in spite of this Rameses continued to see that brightness of the first night, and he heard the passionate strophes of the Greek singer.

More than once he rose from his bench to go directly to Kama's dwelling, but shame seized him. He felt that it did not become the heir of Egypt to show himself in the house of a priestess who was visited by any pilgrim who gave a bountiful offering to the temple. What was more striking, he feared lest the sight of Kama surrounded by pitchers and unsuccessful admirers might extinguish the wonderful picture in the moonlight.

When Dagon had sent her to turn away the prince's wrath, Kama seemed attractive, but not a maiden for whom a man might lose his head straightway. But when he, a leader of armies and a viceroy, was forced for the first time in life to sit outside the house of a woman, when the night roused him to imaginings, and when he heard the adroit declarations of another, a strange feeling rose in him,—a mixture of sadness, desire, and jealousy.

If he could have had Kama at every call, she would have become repulsive quickly, and perhaps he would have fled from her. But Death, standing on the threshold of her bedchamber, an enamored singer, and, finally, that humiliating position of the highest dignitary before a priestess,—all this created a condition which for Rameses was unknown till that time, hence enticing.

And this was why he had appeared almost every evening of ten successive days in the gardens of the goddess Astaroth, shielding his face from all who passed him.

Once, when he had drunk much wine at a feast in his palace, Rameses slipped out with a settled purpose.

"To-night," said he to himself, "I will enter Kama's dwelling; as to her adorers—let them sing at her windows."

He passed through the city quickly; but in the gardens of the temple he lessened his steps, for again he was shamefaced.

"Has it ever been heard," thought he, "that the heir of a pharaoh ran after women like a poor scribe who cannot borrow ten drachmas anywhere? All women come to me, so should this one."

And he was ready then to turn back to his palace.

"But she cannot come," said he to himself, "for they would kill her."

He stopped and hesitated.

"Who would kill her,—Hiram, who believes in nothing, or Dagon, who knows not himself what he is? True, but there is a multitude of other Phœnicians in Egypt, and hundreds of thousands of wild and fanatical pilgrims are prowling around here. In the eyes of those idiots Kama would commit sacrilege were she to visit me."

So he went toward the villa. He did not even think that danger might threaten him there,—him, who without drawing his sword might by a mere look bring the whole world to his feet; he, Rameses, and danger!

When the prince came out from among trees, he saw that Kama's house was more brightly lighted and more noisy than usual. In fact, the terrace and the rooms were filled with guests, and around the villa were throngs of people.

"What band is this?" thought Rameses.

It was an uncommon assemblage. Not far from the house was an immense elephant, bearing on his back a gilded litter with purple curtains. At the side of the elephant,

neighing and squealing, and, in general, acting impatiently, were horses with large necks and legs, with tails plaited, and with something on their heads like metal helmets.

Among these restless, almost wild animals, some tens of men were busied,—men such as Rameses had never seen elsewhere. They had shaggy hair, great beards, pointed caps with ear-laps; some wore long robes of coarse cloth reaching to their heels; others wore short coats and skirts, and some had boots on their feet. All carried swords, bows, and darts.

At sight of these foreigners, stalwart, awkward, laughing vulgarly, smelling of tallow, and speaking an unknown and harsh language, the prince was indignant. As a lion, though not hungry, prepares to spring when he sees a common animal, so Rameses, though they had offended him in no way, felt a terrible hatred toward those strangers. He was irritated by their language, their dress, the odor from their bodies, even their horses. The blood rushed to his head, and he reached for his sword to attack those men—slay them and their beasts also. But soon he recovered his senses.

“Set has cast a spell on me,” thought Rameses.

At that moment a naked Egyptian, with a cap on his head and a girdle around his waist, passed along the path slowly. The prince felt that the man was near to him, even precious at that moment, for he was an Egyptian. He took from his purse a gold ring worth from ten to twenty drachmas, and gave it to the bondman.

“Listen,” said he; “who are those people?”

“Assyrians,” whispered the Egyptian; and hatred glittered in his eyes as he answered.

“Assyrians,” repeated the prince. “Are those Assyrians, then? And what are they doing here?”

“Their lord, Sargon, is paying court to the priestess, the sacred Kama, and they are guarding him. May leprosy devour them, the wretches, the swine sons!”

“Thou mayst go.”

The naked man made a low obeisance and ran, surely to some kitchen.

“Are those Assyrians?” thought the prince, as he looked at their strange figures and heard their hated, though un-understood language. “So already Assyrians are on the Nile, to become brothers to us, or to deceive us, and their dignitary, Sargon, is courting Kama?”

He returned home. His imaginings died before the light of a passion felt then for the first time. He, a man mild and noble, felt a deadly hatred toward the ancient enemies of Egypt, whom he had never met till that evening.

When leaving the temple of Hator, and after his interview with Hiram, he began to think of war with Asia; that was merely thinking that Egypt needed population, and the pharaoh needed treasure; and since war gave the easiest means to win them, and since, besides, it agreed with his need of glory, Rameses conceived the plan of warfare. But now he was concerned neither with slaves, nor treasures, nor glory, for in him was sounding at that moment a voice mightier than every other,—the voice of hatred. The pharaohs had struggled so long with the Assyrians, both sides had shed so much blood, the struggle had fixed its roots in their hearts so profoundly, that the prince grasped for his sword at the very sight of Assyrian warriors. It seemed that the

spirits of all the slain Egyptians, their toils and sufferings, had risen in the soul of this descendant of pharaohs and cried for retribution.

When Rameses reached the palace, he summoned Tutmosis. One of them had drunk too much, the other was raging.

“Dost thou know what I have seen just now?” asked the prince of his favorite.

“One of the priests, perhaps.”

“I have seen Assyrians. O ye gods! what I felt! What a low people! Their bodies from head to foot are covered with wool, as wild beasts are; the stench of old tallow comes from them; and what speech, what beard, what hair!”

The prince walked up and down the room quickly, panting, excited.

“I thought,” said he, “that I despised the robberies of scribes, the deceit of nomarchs, that I hated the cunning and ambition of priests; I felt repulsion for Jews, and I feared the Phœnicians; but I convinced myself to-night that those were all amusements. I know now, for the first time, what hate is, after I have seen and heard Assyrians. I understand now why a dog tears the cat which has crossed his path.”

“Thou art accustomed to Jews and Phœnicians, worthiness, thou hast met Assyrians now for the first time,” put in Tutmosis.

“Stupidity! the Phœnicians!” continued the prince, as if to himself. “The Phœnicians, the Philistines, the Arabs, the Libyans, even the Ethiopians seem, as it were, members of our own family. When they fail to pay tribute, we are angry; when they pay, we forget our feeling.

“But the Assyrians are something strange, something inimical, so that—I shall not be happy till I can count one hundred thousand of their hands cut off by us.”

Never had Tutmosis seen the prince in such a state of feeling.

Chapter XXXIII

A COUPLE of days later Rameses sent his favorite with a summons to Kama. She appeared soon in a tightly closed litter.

Rameses received her in a separate chamber.

"I was," said he, "outside thy house one evening."

"Oh, Astaroth!" cried the priestess. "To what must I attribute this high favor? And what hindered thee, worthy lord, from deigning to summon thy slave?"

"Some beasts were there,—Assyrians, I suppose."

"Then thou didst take the trouble, worthiness, in the evening? Never could I have dared to suppose that our ruler was under the open sky, a few steps from me."

The prince blushed. How she would be astounded could she know that he had passed ten evenings near her windows!

But perhaps she knew it, judging by her half-smiling lips and her eyes cast down deceitfully.

"So, then, Kama," said the prince, "thou receivest Assyrians at thy villa?"

"That man is a great magnate,—Sargon,—a relative of King Assar," answered Kama; "he has brought five talents to our goddess."

"And thou wilt repay him, Kama?" jeered the heir. "And since he is such a bountiful magnate, the Phœnician gods will not send thee death in punishment."

"What dost thou say, lord?" exclaimed Kama, clasping her hands. "Dost thou not know that if an Asiatic found me in the desert he would not lay hands on me, even were I myself to yield to him? They fear the gods."

"Why, then, does he come to thee, this malodorous—no—this pious Asiatic?"

"Because he wants to persuade me to go to the temple of Astaroth in Babylon."

"And wilt thou go?"

"I will go if thou command me, lord," said Kama, concealing her face with her veil.

The prince took her hands in silence. His lips quivered.

"Do not touch me, lord," whispered she, with emotion. "Thou art my sovereign, my support, the support of all Phœnicians in this country—but have compassion."

The viceroy let her go, and walked up and down through the chamber.

"The day is hot, is it not?" asked he. "There are countries where in the month of Mechir white down falls from the sky, it is said; this down in the fire turns to water, and makes the air cold. Oh, Kama, beg thy gods to send me a little of that down,—though what do I say? If they should cover Egypt with it, all that down might be turned into water and not cool the heart in me."

“For thou art like the divine Amon; thou art the sun concealed in human form,” replied Kama. “Darkness flees from that place whither thou turnest thy countenance, and under the gleam of thy glances flowers blossom.”

The prince turned again to her.

“But be compassionate,” whispered she. “Moreover, thou art a kind god, hence thou canst not be unjust to thy priestess.”

The prince turned away again, and shook as if wishing to cast down a burden. Kama looked from beneath her drooping lids at him, and smiled slightly.

When silence had endured too long, she said,—

“Thou hast commanded to summon me, Sovereign. Here I am, to hear what thy will is.”

“Aha!” said the prince, recovering. “But tell me, O, priestess, aha! who was that who resembled me so closely,—the man whom I saw that night in the temple?”

Kama placed a finger on her lips.

“A sacred mystery,” whispered she.

“One thing is a mystery, another is not permitted,” replied Rameses. “Let me know at least whether it was a man or a spirit?”

“A spirit.”

“But still that spirit sang under thy window.”

Kama laughed.

“I do not wish to violate the secrets of the temple.”

“Thou hast promised that to Prince Hiram,” put in the priestess.

“Well, well,” interrupted the irritated viceroy; “for this cause I shall not speak with Hiram or any other man about this miracle, only with thee. Now, Kama, tell this spirit or man who is so like me to leave Egypt at the earliest, and not to show himself to any one. For, seest thou, in no state can there be two heirs to the throne.”

All at once he tapped his forehead. Up to that instant he had spoken so as to trouble Kama, but now an idea altogether serious came to him.

“I am curious,” said he, looking sharply at Kama, “to know why thy compatriots showed me my own living picture. Do they wish to forewarn me that they have a man to supplant me? Indeed, their act is astounding.”

Kama fell at his feet.

“O lord!” whispered she, “thou who bearest on thy breast our highest talisman, canst thou suppose that the Phœnicians would do aught to injure thee? But only think—if danger threatened thee, or if thou hadst the wish to mystify enemies, would not such a man be of service? The Phœnician only wished to show thee this in the temple.”

The prince meditated a moment, and shrugged his shoulders.

“So,” thought he, “if I needed anyone’s assistance! But do the Phœnicians think that I need assistance? If I do they have chosen a poor protector.”

“Lord!” whispered Kama, “is it not known to thee that Rameses the Great had, in addition to his own person, two others to show enemies? Those two shadows of the pharaoh perished, but he survived.”

“Well, enough of this,” interrupted the prince. “But that the people of Asia may know that I am gracious, I designate Kama five talents for games, in honor of Astaroth, and a costly goblet for her temple. This gift will be received to-day by thee.”

He dismissed the priestess with a motion of his head.

After her departure a new wave of thought mastered him.

“Indeed, the Phœnicians are clever. If this, my living picture, is a man, they can make of him a great present to me, and I shall perform at times miracles such, perhaps, as have never been heard of in Egypt. The pharaoh dwells in Memphis, and at the same time he shows himself in Thebes or in Tanis. The pharaoh is marching on Babylon with an army, the Assyrians assemble their main forces there, and simultaneously the pharaoh, with another army, captures Nineveh,—I judge that the Assyrians would be greatly astounded by an event of that sort.”

And again deep hatred was roused in him against the strong Asiatics; again he saw his conquering chariot sweeping over a battlefield covered with Assyrian corpses, and whole baskets of severed hands stood before him.

For his soul war had become now as great a need as bread is for the body. For not only could he enrich Egypt by it, fill the treasury, and win glory to last through ages, but, besides, he might satisfy the instinct hitherto unknown, but roused mightily at that moment, to destroy Assyria.

Until he had seen those warriors with shaggy beards he had not thought of them. That day they had met him and made the world seem so small that one side must give way,—they or he.

What rôle had Hiram and Kama played in creating his present frame of mind? Of this he had made no estimate. He felt only that he must have war with Assyria, just as a bird of passage feels that in the month Pachons it must go northward.

A passion for war seized the prince quickly. He spoke less, laughed more rarely, sat in thoughtfulness at feasts, and also spent his time oftener and oftener with the army and the aristocracy. Seeing the favor which the heir showered on those who bore arms, the noble youth, and even older men, began to join regiments. This attracted the attention of the holy Mentezufis, who sent a letter to Herhor with the following contents:—

“From the time that the Assyrians have arrived at Pi-Bast the heir is feverish, and his court is inclined toward war very greatly. They drink and play dice as before; but all have thrown aside robes and wigs, and, disregarding the awful heat, go about in military caps and mantles.

“I fear lest this armed readiness may offend the worthy Sargon.”

To this Herhor replied immediately,—

“It is no harm that our effeminate nobles have taken a love for military appearance during the visit of Sargon, for the Assyrians will have a better opinion touching Egypt. Our most worthy viceroy, enlightened by the gods, as is evident, has divined that just now it is necessary to rattle our swords when we have with us the ambassadors of such a military people. I am certain that this valiant bearing of our

youth will give Sargon something to think of, and will make him more yielding in arguments.”

For the first time since Egypt had become Egypt it happened that a youthful prince had deceived the watchful priesthood. It is true that the Phoenicians were behind him, and had stolen the secret of the treaty with Assyria; of this the priests had not even a suspicion.

In fact, the very best mask which the heir had against suspicion was his impetuosity of character. All remembered how easily in the past year he had rushed from manœuvres at Pi-Bailos to Sarah’s quiet country villa, and how from feasts he had grown impassioned, recently, for administrative labor, and then devotion, to return to feasts afterward.

So no one believed, with the exception of Tutmosis, that that changeful youth had before him an object for which he would fight with invincible decision.

Even this time there was no need to wait long for new proofs of the prince’s mobility of temper.

To Pi-Bast, in spite of the heat, came Sarah with all her court and her infant. She was somewhat thin, her child a trifle ill, or wearied, but both looked very charming.

The prince was enchanted. He assigned a house to Sarah in the choicest part of the palace garden, and sat whole days, almost, at his son’s cradle.

Feasts, manœuvres, and gloomy meditations were forgotten; the lords of his suite had to drink and amuse themselves without him. Very soon they ungirded their swords and arrayed themselves in their most exquisite garments. The change was the more indispensable as Rameses brought some of them to Sarah’s dwelling and showed his son to them.

“See, Tutmosis,” said he once to his favorite, “what a pretty child: a real rose leaf! Well, and out of this little thing a man will grow gradually. And this rosy chick will walk about some day, talk, even learn wisdom in the schools of the priesthood.”

“Look at his little hands, Tutmosis,” said Rameses, delighted. “Remember these little hands, so as to tell of them some day when I give him a regiment, and command him to have my mace borne behind him. And this is my son, my own son.”

It is not to be wondered at that when their lord spoke thus his attendants were sorry that they could not become dry or wet nurses to the child which, though it had no dynastic rights, was still the first son of the future pharaoh.

But this idyll ended very soon, since it did not harmonize with the interests of the Phoenicians.

A certain day the worthy Hiram arrived at the palace with a great suite of merchants, slaves, and also poor Egyptians to whom he gave alms, and when he stood before the heir, he said,—

“Our gracious lord! to prove that thy heart is full of kindness toward us Asiatics also, thou hast given five talents to arrange games in honor of the goddess Astaroth. Thy will is accomplished; we have arranged the games, now we have come to implore thee to deign to honor the games with thy presence.”

While saying this, the gray-haired Tyrian prince knelt before Rameses and gave him a golden key to his box in the amphitheatre.

Rameses accepted the invitation willingly; the holy priests Mefres and Mentezufis had no objection to the presence of the prince in honoring the goddess Astaroth.

“First of all, Astaroth,” said the worthy Mefres to Mentezufis, “is the same as our Isis and the Chaldean Istar; second, if we permit Asiatics to build temples in our land it is proper to be kindly to their gods at seasons.”

“We are obliged even to show some politeness to Phœnicians after the conclusion of such a treaty with Assyria,” put in the worthy Mentezufis, smiling.

The amphitheatre, to which the viceroy, the nomarch, and the foremost officers betook themselves about four in the afternoon was built in the garden of the temple. It was a circular space surrounded by a palisade twice the height of a man. Inside the palisade, and round about, was a multitude of boxes and seats rising one above the other. The structure had no roof, but above the boxes extended cloth of various colors, cut like wings of butterflies, which, sprinkled with fragrant water, were moved to cool the atmosphere.

When the viceroy appeared in his box, the Asiatics and Egyptians present in the amphitheatre gave forth a mighty shout. The spectacle began with a procession of singers, dancers, and musicians.

The prince looked around. At his right was the box of Hiram and the most noted of the Phœnicians; on his left the box of the Phœnician priests and priestesses. In this Kama occupied one among the first places, and attracted notice by her splendid dress and by her beauty. She wore a transparent robe adorned with embroidery of various colors, gold bracelets and anklets, and on her head a circlet with a lotus flower composed most skilfully of jewels.

Kama came with her colleagues, saluted the prince with low obeisances, and returned to the box on the left, where began an animated conversation with a foreigner whose hair was somewhat gray and whose presence was imposing. The hair and beard of this man and his companions were plaited into small braids.

The prince had come almost directly from the chamber of his son, and was gladsome. But he frowned when he saw the priestess speaking with a stranger.

“Dost thou not know, Tutmosis, who that big fellow is for whom the priestess is so charming?” asked he.

“He is that famous pilgrim who has come from Babylon,—the worthy Sargon.”

“But he is an old grandfather!”

“His years are surely more than thine and mine together; but he is a stately person.”

“Could such a barbarian be stately!” said the indignant viceroy. “I am certain that he bears about the smell of tallow.”

Both were silent: the prince from anger, Tutmosis from fear because he had dared to praise a man whom Rameses hated.

Meanwhile spectacle followed spectacle on the arena. In turn appeared acrobats, serpent-charmers, dancers, buffoons, and jesters, who called forth shouts from the audience.

But Rameses was gloomy. In his soul sprang up, moment after moment, passions which had been dormant,—hatred for Assyrians and jealousy of Kama.

“How can that woman,” thought he, “fondle up to an old man who has a complexion like tanned leather, wild black eyes, and the beard of a he-goat?”

But once the prince turned a more attentive look on the arena.

A number of naked Chaldeans entered. The oldest fixed in the earth three short spears, points upward; then, with motions of his hands, he put the youngest man to sleep. After that others took the sleeping man and placed him on the spears in such fashion that one of the spears supported his head, another his loins, and the third his feet.

The man was as stiff as wood. Then the old man made motions above him with his hands, and drew out the spear supporting his feet. After a while he removed the spear on which his loins were resting, and finally that on which his head was fixed.

This took place in the clear day, before some thousands of spectators. The sleeping Chaldean rested in the air horizontally, without support, a couple of ells above the earth. At last the old man pushed him down and roused him.

The audience was astounded; no one dared to applaud or to shout, but flowers were thrown from some boxes.

Rameses too was astonished. He bent towards Hiram’s box, and asked the old prince in a low voice,—

“Could they perform that secret in the temple of Astaroth?”

“I am not conversant with all the secrets of our priests,” answered Hiram, confused.

“I know, though, that Chaldeans are very clever.”

“But we all saw that that young man rested in the air.”

“If they did not put a spell on us,” said Hiram, reluctantly; and he grew serious.

After a short interval, during which servitors took to the boxes of dignitaries fresh flowers, cool wine and cakes, the most important part of the spectacle began,—the bull fight.

To the sound of trumpets, drums, and flutes they led a strong bull into the arena, with a cloth over his head so that he should not see. Then a number of naked men ran around with darts, and one with a short sword.

At a signal, given by the prince, the leaders ran away, and one of the armed men struck the cloth from the head of the bull. The beast stood some moments in a maze; then he chased after the dart men, who vexed him by pricking.

This barren struggle continued some tens of minutes. Men tormented the bull, and he, foaming, stained with blood, reared and chased over the whole arena after his enemies without reaching any.

At last he fell, amid the laughter of the spectators.

The wearied prince, instead of looking at the arena, looked at the box of the Phœnician priests. He saw that Kama had moved nearer to Sargon and was conversing vivaciously. The Assyrian devoured her with his glances; she smiled and blushed, whispered with him, sometimes bending so that her hair touched the locks of the barbarian; sometimes she turned from him and feigned anger.

Rameses felt pain in his heart. For the first time it had happened that a woman had preferred another man to him; besides, a man who was almost old, and, moreover, an Assyrian.

Meanwhile a murmur rose in the audience. On the arena a man armed with a sword gave command to tie his left hand to his breast; others looked at their darts—a second bull was let in. When an armed man tore the cloth from his eyes, the bull turned and looked around as if to count his opponents. But when they began to prick him, he withdrew to the paling to secure the rear; then he lowered his head and followed the movements of those attacking.

At first the armed men stole up guardedly from both sides to prick him. But when the beast remained motionless, they gained courage, and began to run across in front, nearer and nearer.

The bull inclined his head still more, but stood as if fixed to the earth. The audience laughed; but their joyousness was turned to a cry of fear suddenly. The bull chose the moment, rushed forward, struck some man who held a dart, and with one motion of his horns hurled him upward.

The man struck the earth with broken bones; the bull galloped to the other side of the arena and stood in a defensive position.

The men with darts surrounded the bull again, and began to irritate the animal; but now servants of the amphitheatre rushed to the arena to carry off the wounded man, who was groaning. The bull, in spite of the redoubled pricks of darts, stood motionless; but when three servants had taken the wounded man in their arms, he rushed at that group with the swiftness of a whirlwind, overturned it, and began to dig the ground with his forefeet tremendously.

There was confusion in the audience: women screamed, men imprecated, and hurled at the bull whatever each one found nearest. Sticks, knives, even bench tops fell on the arena. Then a man with a sword rushed at the raging bull. But the dart men lost their heads and left him unsupported; hence the bull tossed him and pursued the others. A thing unparalleled in amphitheatres took place then: five men were lying on the arena; others, defending themselves badly, were fleeing before the beast, while the audience was roaring from fear or from anger.

Next there was perfect silence; the spectators rose and bent forward out of their places, the terrified Hiram grew pale and crossed his hands. Down to the arena, from the boxes of dignitaries, sprang two men,—Prince Rameses, with a drawn sword, and Sargon, with a short-handled axe.

The bull, with head down and tail in the air, was racing around the arena, leaving clouds of dust behind him. The beast rushed straight toward the prince, but, as if repulsed by the majesty of the youth, avoided him, made directly at Sargon, and dropped to the earth. The Assyrian, adroit and immensely strong, stretched him with one blow of his axe, given between the eyes.

The audience howled with delight, and threw flowers at Sargon and his victim. Rameses stood still with drawn sword, astonished and angry, seeing how Kama snatched flowers from her neighbors and threw them to the Assyrian.

Sargon received expressions of public delight with indifference. He pushed the bull with his foot to be sure that the beast was lifeless; and then, going a couple of steps

toward the prince, said something in his own speech, and bowed with the dignity of a magnate.

A bloody mist passed before the prince's eyes; he would have buried his sword in the victor's breast gladly. But he conquered himself, thought a moment, and taking a gold chain from his neck gave it to Sargon.

The Assyrian bowed again, kissed the chain, and put it around his neck. But the prince, with a bluish flush on his cheeks, returned to the door by which actors entered the arena, and amid plaudits of the audience left the amphitheatre with a feeling of deep humiliation.

Chapter XXXIV

IT was the month Thoth. In the city of Pi-Bast and its environs the concourse of people had begun, because of heat, to diminish. But the court of Rameses amused itself always, and people talked of what had happened in the amphitheatre.

Courtiers praised the courage of the prince, maladroit men wondered at the strength of Sargon, the priests whispered with important mien that in every case the heir to the throne should not involve himself in bull-fights: for that there were men who were hired, or who, at least, did not possess public veneration.

Either Rameses did not hear these various opinions, or did not consider them. As to the spectacle, two episodes were fixed in his memory: victory over the bull had been snatched from him by the Assyrian, who had also paid court to Kama, and she had received his attentions most willingly.

Since he might not bring the Phœnician priestess to his palace, he sent one day a letter to her in which he declared that he wished to see her, and inquired when she would receive him. Through the same messenger Kama replied that she would wait for him that evening.

Barely had the stars shown themselves, when the prince (with the greatest secrecy, as he thought) slipped out of the palace, and went to the villa. The garden of the temple of Astaroth was almost empty, especially near the house of the priestess. The building was silent, and inside only two tapers were burning.

When the prince knocked timidly, the priestess herself drew the door open. In the dark antechamber she kissed his hand, whispering that she would have died had the raging bull injured him in the arena.

"But now thou must be at rest, since thy lover saved me," said the prince.

When they entered the lighted chamber, Rameses saw that Kama was weeping.

"What does this mean?" inquired he.

"The heart of my lord has turned from me," said she; "but perhaps justly."

The heir laughed bitterly in answer.

"Then, sacred virgin, thou art already his mistress, or about to be?"

"Mistress? Never! But I may become the wife of that dreadful Assyrian."

Rameses sprang from his seat.

"Am I dreaming," cried he, "or has Set cast his curse on me? Thou, a priestess, guarding the fire before the altar of Astaroth,—thou, who under the threat of death must be a virgin, art thou going to marry? In truth, Phœnician deceit is worse than people's account of it."

"Hear me, lord," said Kama, wiping her tears away, "and condemn if I deserve it. Sargon wishes to take me as his first wife. According to our laws a priestess may, in very exceptional cases, become a wife, but only if the man is of kingly origin. Sargon is a relative of King Assar."

“And wilt thou marry him?”

“If the supreme council of Tyrian priests command me, what can I do?” replied she, bursting into tears again.

“And what is Sargon to that council?” asked the prince.

“Very much, perhaps,” said Kama, with a sigh. “The Assyrians will take Phœnicia in all likelihood, and Sargon will be its satrap.”

“Art thou demented?” exclaimed the prince.

“I say what I know. In our temple we have begun prayers the second time to avert misfortune from Phœnicia. We had our first prayers before thou didst come to us.”

“Why do ye pray now?”

“Because the Chaldean priest Istubar has just come to Egypt with letters, in which King Assar appoints Sargon his ambassador to conclude a treaty with you about the taking of Phœnicia—”

“But I—” interrupted the prince.

He wished to say, “know nothing,” but he restrained himself, laughed, and answered,—

“Kama, I swear to thee, on the honor of my father, that while I live Assyria will not take Phœnicia. Is that enough?”

“Oh, lord, lord!” cried she, falling at his feet.

“Then thou wilt not become the wife of that rude fellow?”

“Oh,” shuddered she, “canst thou ask such a question?”

“And thou wilt be mine,” whispered the prince.

“Dost thou wish my death?” asked she, terrified. “Well, if thou wish it, I am ready.”

“I wish thee to live,” whispered he, impassioned,—“to live, belonging to me.”

“That cannot be.”

“But the supreme council of Tyrian priests?”

“They can permit nothing but marriage.”

“But thou wilt enter my house.”

“If I enter it not as thy wife, I shall die. But I am ready even not to see to-morrow’s sun.”

“Be at rest,” replied the prince, seriously. “Whoso has my favor will not experience injustice.”

Kama knelt before him a second time.

“How can that be?” asked she, clasping her hands.

Rameses was so roused that he had forgotten his position and his duties; he was ready to promise the priestess even marriage. He was restrained from that step, not by judgment, but by some dumb instinct.

“How can this be? How can this be?” whispered Kama, devouring him with her glances and kissing his feet.

The prince raised her, seated her at a distance from him, and said with a smile,—

“Thou askest how this can be—I will explain immediately. My last teacher, before I reached maturity, was a certain old priest, who knew a multitude of marvellous histories from the lives of gods, kings, priests, even lower officials and laborers.

“This old man, famed for devotion and miracles, did not like women, I know not why; he even dreaded them. Very frequently he described the perversity of women, and once, to show how great the power is which ye wield over men, he told me the following history:—

“A certain scribe, young and indigent, who had not an uten in his purse, who had nothing save a barley cake, travelled down from Thebes to Lower Egypt while seeking for employment. Men said that in the north dwelt the richest lords and merchants, and that in case of luck he would find a place in which he might acquire extensive property.

“He walked along the Nile, for he had no coin with which to hire a boat, and he pondered,—

“‘How improvident are men inheriting a talent or two, or even ten talents! Instead of adding to their wealth by traffic, or by lending at high interest,’ thought he, ‘these men waste what they have, to no purpose. Had I a drachma,—well, one drachma is too little,—but had I one talent, or, better, a plot of land, I would increase it yearly, and toward the end of life I should be as wealthy as the wealthiest nomarch.

“‘But how begin!’ said he, sighing. ‘Only fools are favored by the gods; and I am filled with wisdom from my wig to my two naked heels. If in my heart a grain of dulness lurks, it is perhaps my inability to squander, and I should not even know how to set about a work so godless in its object.’

“As the needy scribe was thus musing, he passed a mud hut at which sat some man, neither old nor young, with a very keen glance, which reached to the depth of whatever heart came before him. The scribe, as wise as a stork, thought at once that this must be some divinity; so he bowed down and said to him,—

“‘I greet thee, worthy master of this splendid mansion. I grieve that I have neither meat nor wine, so as to divide them between us, in sign that I respect thee, and that whatever I own is thy property.’

“This kindness of the scribe was pleasing to Amon, for he it was, in human aspect. He looked at the scribe, and inquired of him,—

“‘Of what wert thou thinking while passing along here? for I see wisdom on thy forehead, and I am of those who seize words of truth as partridges pick up wheat kernels.’

“The scribe sighed.

“‘I was thinking,’ said he, ‘of my misery, and of those frivolous rich men who spend their wealth without knowing why or in what manner.’

“‘And wouldst thou not waste wealth?’ inquired the god, retaining human semblance.

“‘Look at me, lord,’ said the scribe. ‘I have a tattered rag around my hips, and on the road I have lost my sandals; but my papyrus and reed I bear with me at all times, as I do the heart in my body. Both while rising in the morning and lying down at night, I repeat that wise poverty is far better than foolish riches. If I know how to express myself in two kinds of writing and to solve the most complicated problems, if I know

all plants and every beast beneath the sky, thou mayst judge whether I, the master of such lore, am capable of wasting property.'

"The god pondered awhile, and continued,—

"Thy speech flows as vigorously as the Nile at Memphis; but if thou art so wise, indeed, write for me the name of Amon in two manners.'

"The scribe took his reed and brush, and in no long time he wrote the name Amon in two manners on the door of the hut, and so clearly that even dumb creatures would have stopped to give Lord Amon homage.

"The god was satisfied, and answered,—

"If thou art as skilled in reckoning as in writing, reckon for me the following problem: If they give me four hen eggs for one partridge, how many hen eggs should they give me for seven partridges?'

"The scribe gathered pebbles, placed them in various rows, and before the sun had set, he answered that they should give twenty-eight eggs for seven partridges.

"The almighty Amon smiled when he saw before him a sage of such uncommon proportions, and answered,—

"I recognize that thou hast spoken truth concerning thy wisdom. If thou shalt appear equally enduring in virtue I will so arrange that thou shalt be happy to the end of life, and after death thy sons shall place thy shade in a beautiful tomb. But now tell me: what wealth dost thou wish,—wealth which thou wouldst not merely refrain from wasting, but wouldst increase?'

"The scribe fell to the feet of the generous deity, and answered,—

"If I had even this hut and three measures of land, I should be wealthy.'

"Well,' said the god, 'but first look around and see if it would suffice thee.'

"He led him into the hut, and said,—

"Thou hast four caps and skirts, two mantles for bad weather, and two pairs of sandals. Here is a fire, here a bench on which thou mayst sleep, a mortar for crushing wheat, and a pan for dough.'

"But what is this?' asked the scribe, pointing to a certain figure covered with linen.

"That is one thing which thou must not touch; if thou do, thou wilt lose all thy property.'

"Ai!' cried the scribe. 'That may remain a thousand years there; I will not trouble it. With permission of thy honor, what estate is that over there?' and he bent through the hut window.

"Thou hast spoken wisely,' said Amon, 'for that is an estate, and even a fine one. It is composed of fifty measures of land. There is a spacious house on it, some tens of cattle, and ten slaves belong to the establishment. If thou prefer that estate—'

"The scribe fell at the feet of the deity.

"Is there,' inquired he, 'a man under the sun who instead of a barley cake would not prefer a loaf of wheaten bread?'

"When he heard this, Amon repeated a formula, and that moment both were in the mansion.

“‘Here thou hast,’ said the god, ‘a carved bed, five tables, and ten armchairs; thou hast embroidered clothing, thou hast pitchers, and glass bottles for wine, a lamp for olive oil, and a litter.’

“‘And what is this?’ asked the scribe, pointing to a figure robed in muslin and standing in a corner.

“‘Thou must not touch that or thou wilt lose all thy property.’

“‘Were I to live ten thousand years I would not touch it. For, after wisdom, I consider wealth the highest blessing.’

“‘But what do I see?’ inquired he after a while, pointing to an immense palace in a garden.

“‘Over there is a princely estate,’ replied the god. ‘That is a palace, five hundred measures of land, one hundred slaves, and two hundred head of cattle. That is a grand property; but if thou think thy wisdom sufficient to manage it—’

“The scribe fell again at the feet of Amon, and covered himself with tears of delight.

“‘O lord,’ said he, ‘is there on earth a mad man who instead of a goblet of beer would not take a cask of wine?’

“‘Thy words are worthy of the sage who can make the most difficult reckonings,’ said Amon.

“He pronounced the mighty words of the formula; the god and the scribe found themselves in the palace.

“‘Here thou hast,’ said the kind god, ‘a dining-hall; in it gold and gilded curtains, and armchairs, also tables inlaid with woods of various colors. In the lower story is a kitchen for five cooks; a storehouse where thou wilt find all kinds of meat, fish, bread; finally, a cellar with perfect wines in it. Thou hast a bedchamber with a movable roof, with which thy slaves will cool thee while thou art sleeping. I turn attention to the bed, which is made of cedar wood, and rests on four lion legs cast from bronze skilfully. Thou hast a wardrobe filled with linen and woollen garments; in caskets thou wilt find rings, chains, and bracelets.’

“‘But what is this?’ asked the scribe, pointing to a figure covered with a veil embroidered in gold and purple.

“‘Thou must guard thyself from this most carefully,’ warned the god. ‘If thou touch this, thy immense estate will vanish. And there are few such estates in Egypt, I assure thee. Moreover, I must say that in the treasury here there are ten talents in gold and precious stones in addition.’

“‘My sovereign,’ cried the scribe, ‘permit that the first place in this palace be held by thy sacred statue, before which I will burn incense three times daily.’

“‘But avoid that,’ replied Amon, pointing to the veiled figure.

“‘Should I lose my wisdom, and be worse than a wild boar, for which wine is no better than swill,’ said the scribe; ‘let that veiled figure do penance here for a hundred millenniums, I will not touch it.’

“‘Remember that if thou do thou wilt lose all thou hast,’ cried the god; and he vanished.

“The scribe, now made happy, walked up and down through his palace and looked out through the windows. He examined the treasury and tried the gold in his hands; it was heavy. He looked at the precious stones; they were genuine. He commanded to serve him with food; in rushed slaves immediately, bathed him, shaved him, arrayed him in fine garments. He ate and drank as he never had drunk and eaten; his hunger joined with the perfection of the food gave a marvellous taste to it. He burnt incense before the statue of Amon, and wreathed it with fresh flowers. Later he sat down at a window.

“In the courtyard a pair of horses were neighing; they were harnessed to a carved chariot. In another place a crowd of men with darts and nets were keeping down eager dogs which were tearing away to chase animals. Before a granary one scribe was receiving grain from earth-tillers; before the stable another scribe was receiving reckoning from the overseer of the shepherds.

“In the distance were visible an olive grove, high hills covered with grape-vines, wheat-fields, and on every field were date palms set out thickly.

“‘In truth,’ said he to himself, ‘I am rich to-day, just as was proper; and I only wonder how I endured life so long in abasement and misery. I must confess, too, that I do not know whether I can increase this immense property, for I need no more now, and I shall not have time to run after investments.’

“But after a while it was tedious in the house for him; so he looked at the garden, went around the fields, talked with the servants, who fell on their faces in his presence, though they were dressed in such style that yesterday he would have thought it an honor to kiss the hands of any one of them; but he was bored in the field even, so he went back to the house, and examined the supplies in his storehouses and cellars, also the furniture in the chambers.

“‘They are beautiful,’ said he to himself; ‘but it would be better if the furniture were made of gold, and the pitchers of jewels.’

“His eyes turned mechanically toward the corner where the figure was concealed under an embroidered veil—and it sighed.

“‘Sigh!’ said he, taking a censer to burn incense before the statue of Amon.

“‘He is a kind god,’ thought he, ‘who values the qualities of sages, even when barefoot, and deals out to them justice. What a beautiful estate he has given me! It is true that I showed him honor by writing *Amon* on the door of that hut in two manners. And how beautifully I reckoned how many hen eggs he would get for seven partridges. My teachers were right when they said that wisdom opens the lips of gods even.’

“He turned again toward the corner. The veiled figure sighed again.

“‘I am curious to know,’ thought the scribe, ‘why my friend Amon forbade me to touch that thing over there in the corner. Well, for such a property he had a right to impose conditions; though I should not have imposed them on him. For if all this palace is my property, if I may use all that is here, why should I not even touch this thing— I may not touch it, but I may look at it.’

“He approached the figure, drew the veil aside carefully, looked; it was indeed beautiful. It resembled a boy, but was not a boy. It had hair reaching to its knees, delicate features, and a look full of sweetness.

“‘Who art thou?’ asked the scribe of the figure.

“‘I am a woman,’ answered the figure, with a voice that penetrated his heart like a Phœnician dagger.

“‘Woman?’ thought the scribe. ‘They did not tell me about woman in the priests’ school. Woman?’ repeated he. ‘But what hast thou here?’

“‘Those are my eyes.’

“‘Eyes? What canst thou see with eyes which would melt before any light?’

“‘Those are not eyes made for me to look from, but thou must look into them.’

“‘Wonderful eyes!’ thought the scribe to himself; and he walked through the chamber.

“Again he stood before the figure, and asked,—

“‘But what hast thou here?’

“‘Those are my lips.’

“‘By the gods, thou wilt die of hunger,’ cried he, ‘for with such little lips thou couldst take in no food whatever.’

“‘They are not for eating,’ answered the figure, ‘but thou art to kiss them.’

“‘To kiss,’ repeated the scribe. ‘They did not tell me in the priests’ school of kissing. But these—what are they?’

“‘Those are my hands.’

“‘Hands? It is well that thou hast told me, for with those hands thou couldst not do anything; thou couldst not milk sheep even.’

“‘My hands are not for work.’

“‘But for what?’ wondered the scribe, spreading apart her fingers (as I do thine, Kama,” said the prince, fondling the small hands of the priestess). “‘But what are those arms for?’ inquired the scribe of the figure.

“‘To put around thy neck.’

“‘Thou wishest to say shoulder,’ cried the frightened scribe, whom the priest always seized by the shoulder when he was to get stripes.

“‘Not by the shoulder,’ said the figure, ‘but this way;’ and she put her arms around his neck thus,” said the prince (here he put his arms around the priestess), “and she nestled up to his breast thus” (here he nestled up to Kama).

“Lord, what art thou doing?” whispered Kama. “But this is my death.”

“Have no fear,” replied the prince; “I was only showing thee what the statue did to that scribe in his palace. The moment she embraced him the earth trembled, the palace disappeared, dogs, horses, slaves vanished. The hill covered with grape-vines turned into a cliff, the olive-trees into thorns, the wheat into sand. The scribe, when he recovered in the embrace of his love, understood that he was as poor as he had been on the highroad a day earlier. But he did not regret his wealth, since he had a woman who loved and who clung to him.”

“So everything vanished but the woman!” exclaimed Kama, naïvely.

“The compassionate Amon left her to the scribe to console him,” said the viceroy.

"Then Amon is compassionate only to scribes," answered Kama. "But what does that story signify?"

"Guess. But thou hast just heard what the poor scribe yielded up for the kiss of a woman—"

"But he would not yield up a throne," interrupted the priestess.

"Who knows? if he were implored greatly to do so," whispered Rameses, with passion.

"Oh, no!" cried Kama, tearing away from him; "let not the throne go so easily, for what would become then of thy promise to Phœnicia?"

They looked into each other's eyes for a long time. The prince felt a wound in his heart, and felt as if through that wound some feeling had gone from him. It was not passion, for passion remained; but it was esteem for Kama, and faith in her.

"Wonderful are these Phœnicians," thought the heir; "one may go wild for them, but 'tis not possible to trust them."

He felt wearied, and took farewell of the priestess. He looked around the chamber as though it were difficult to leave the place; and while going, he said to himself,—

"And still thou wilt be mine, and Phœnician gods will not kill thee, if they regard their own priests and temples."

Barely had Rameses left Kama's villa, when into the chamber of the priestess rushed a young Greek who was strikingly beautiful, and strikingly similar to Rameses. Rage was depicted on his face.

"Lykon!" cried the terrified Kama. "What art thou doing here?"

"Vile reptile!" replied the Greek, in his resonant voice. "A month has not passed since thy oath, declaring thy love, and that thou wouldst flee to Greece with me, and now thou art falling on the neck of another. Are the gods dead? Has justice deserted them?"

"Thou art mad with thy jealousy," interrupted the priestess; "thou wilt kill me."

"It is sure that I, and not thy stone goddess, will kill thee. With these two hands," cried he, stretching out his fingers, like talons, "I will choke thee if thou hast become the mistress—"

"Of whom?"

"Do I know? Of course, of both,—of that old Assyrian and this princeling, whose head I will split with a stone should he prowling about this place any longer. The prince! he has all the women of Egypt, and still he wants foreign priestesses. The priestesses are for priests, not for foreigners."

Kama recovered her coolness.

"But for us art thou not a foreigner?" asked she, haughtily.

"Reptile!" burst out the Greek, a second time. "I cannot be a foreigner for you Asiatics, since that gift of voice with which the gods have endowed me is turned to the use of your divinities. But how often, by means of my figure, have ye deceived dull Asiatics by telling them that the heir to the throne of Egypt belongs to your faith in secret?"

“Silence! silence!” hissed the priestess, closing his mouth with her hand.

There must have been something enchanting in her touch, for the Greek grew calm, and spoke lower.

“Hear me, Kama. Soon to the bay of Sebenico will come a Greek ship, commanded by my brother. Make the high priest send thee to Pi-Uto; we shall flee thence to northern Greece, to a place which has never yet seen a Phœnician—”

“It will see them if I hide there,” interrupted the priestess.

“Should a hair fall from thy head,” whispered the raging Greek, “I swear that Dagon, that all the Phœnicians here will lose their heads, or die in the stone quarries. They will learn what a Greek can do.”

“But I say to thee,” answered Kama, in the same tone, “that until I collect twenty talents I will not leave here. I have now only eight.”

“Where wilt thou get the other twelve?”

“Sargon and the viceroy will give them.”

“I will let Sargon give, but not the prince.”

“Foolish Lykon, dost thou not know why that stripling pleases me a little? He reminds me of thee—”

The Greek was perfectly quieted.

“Well, well,” muttered he, “I understand that when a woman has the choice between the heir to the throne and a man with my voice I have no need to tremble. But I am jealous and violent, so I beg thee to let him approach thee as little as possible.”

He kissed her, slipped out of the villa, and vanished in the dark garden.

Kama stretched her clinched fist after him.

“Worthless buffoon!” whispered she; “thou who art hardly fit to be a singing slave in my mansion.”

Chapter XXXV

WHEN Rameses on the following morning visited his son, he found Sarah weeping. He asked what the cause was. She answered at first that nothing troubled her; then she said that she was sad. At last she fell at his feet and cried bitterly.

"My lord," whispered she, "I know that thou hast ceased to love me, but at least avoid danger."

"Who said that I have ceased to love thee?" asked Rameses, astonished.

"Thou hast in thy house three new women—ladies of high family."

"Ah, so that is the trouble?"

"Besides, thou art exposing thyself for a fourth,—a wicked Phœnician."

The prince was confused. Whence could Sarah know of Kama, and know that she was wicked?

"As dust squeezes into caskets, so scandals work into the quietest houses," said Rameses. "Who has spoken to thee of a Phœnician?"

"Do I know who? My heart and an evil omen."

"Then are there omens?"

"Terrible. One old priestess learned, I suppose from a crystal ball, that we shall all perish through Phœnicians, especially I and—my son," burst out Sarah.

"And thou who believest in One, in Jehovah, fearest the fictions of some stupid old woman who is perhaps intriguing? Where is thy great Deity?"

"My God is only mine, but those others are thine; so I must revere them."

"Then that old woman spoke to thee of Phœnicians?" asked Rameses.

"She told me long ago, while in Memphis, that I should guard against a Phœnician woman," answered Sarah. "Here all are speaking of a Phœnician priestess. I cannot tell; maybe it is only something wandering in my troubled head. People say even that were it not for her spell thou wouldst not have sprung into the arena. Oh, if the bull had killed thee! Even to-day, when I think of the evil which might have happened, the heart grows cold in my bosom."

"Laugh, Sarah," interrupted Rameses, joyously. "She whom I take to myself stands so high that no fear should reach her, still less, stupid scandal."

"But misfortune? Is there a mountain top so high that the missile of misfortune may not reach it?"

"Thy sickness has wearied thee, and fever has disturbed thy mind; that is why thou art troubled without reason. Be quiet, and watch over my son. A man," said he, in deep thought, "be he Greek or Phœnician, can harm only beings like himself, but not us, who are gods of this world."

"What didst thou say of a Greek? What Greek?" asked Sarah, alarmed.

“Did I say Greek? I know nothing of a Greek. Such a word may have slipped from me; perhaps thou didst not hear correctly.”

He kissed Sarah and his son, and took farewell of them; but he did not expel fear.

“We must say once, and decisively,” thought he, “that in Egypt no secret is hidden. The priests and my attendants follow me, even when they are drunk, or pretend to be, and the serpent eyes of Phœnicia are gazing at Kama. If they have not hidden her before me thus far, they must have small regard for her virtue. Moreover, before whom?—Before me, to whom they themselves discovered the deceptions of their own temple. Kama will belong to me. They are too much involved in this to think of bringing my anger on their heads by opposition.”

A couple of days later the holy Mentezufis, assistant of the worthy Herhor, came to the erpatr. Rameses, looking at the pale face and downcast eyes of the prophet, divined that he too knew of the Phœnician woman, and perhaps wished, as a priest, to reprimand the viceroy. But this time Mentezufis did not mention affairs touching the heart of the heir.

When he had greeted the prince, with an official mien, the prophet took the seat indicated, and began,—

“From the Memphis palace of the lord of eternity they have informed me that in recent days the Chaldean high priest Istubar, the court astrologer and counsellor of his grace King Assar, has come to Pi-Bast.”

The prince desired to tell Mentezufis the reason of Istubar’s coming, but he bit his lips and was silent.

“The renowned Istubar,” continued the priest, “has brought documents in virtue of which the worthy Sargon, a satrap, and a relative of King Assar, remains with us as ambassador of that mighty sovereign.”

The prince was near bursting into laughter. The seriousness with which Mentezufis had thought fit to lay bare a small part of the secrets long known to Rameses filled him with contempt and delight also.

“This trickster,” thought the prince, “has not an inkling in his heart that I know all their villainy.”

“The worthy Sargon and the revered Istubar,” continued Mentezufis, “will go to Memphis to kiss the feet of his holiness. But first, worthiness, thou, as viceroy, wilt be pleased to receive both these dignitaries graciously, and their suite also.”

“Very willingly,” answered the prince, “and on that occasion I shall ask them when Assyria will pay the arrears of tribute?”

“Wouldst thou do that, worthiness?” asked the priest, looking him in the eyes.

“That first of all; our treasury needs tribute.”

Mentezufis rose suddenly from his seat, and said, in solemn though lowered accents,—

“O viceroy of our lord, and giver of life, in the name of his holiness I forbid thee to speak with anyone of tribute, but, above all, with Sargon, Istubar, or any man of their suite.”

The prince grew pale.

“Priest,” said he, standing up also, “on what basis dost thou speak to me as a superior?”

Mentezufis drew aside his robe, and took from his neck a chain on which was one of the pharaoh’s rings.

The viceroy looked at the ring, kissed it with devotion, returned it to the priest, and answered,—

“I will fulfil the command of his holiness, my lord and father.”

Again both sat down, and the prince asked the priest,—

“Canst thou explain to me, worthiness, why Assyria should not pay us tribute which would save the state treasury from embarrassment?”

“Because we have not the power to force Assyria to pay us tribute,” answered Mentezufis, coldly. “We have an army of a hundred and twenty thousand, Assyria has three hundred thousand warriors. I say this to thee, worthiness, in perfect confidence, as to a high state official.”

“I understand. But why did the ministry of war, in which thou servest, decrease our valiant army sixty thousand men?”

“To increase the income of his holiness twenty thousand talents,” replied the priest.

“Aha! Tell me, then, worthiness,” continued the prince, “with what object is Sargon going to the feet of the pharaoh?”

“I know not.”

“Aha! But why should I not know,—I, who am heir to the throne?”

“Because there are state secrets which barely a few dignitaries know.”

“And which even my most worthy father may not know?”

“Assuredly he may not, for there are things which even his holiness may not know, since he does not possess the highest priestly consecration.”

“It is wonderful!” said the prince, after some thought. “Egypt is the property of the pharaoh, and still things may be done in it which are unknown to him. Explain this to me, worthiness.”

“Egypt is first of all, and even only and exclusively, the property of Amon,” said the priest. “There is absolute need, therefore, that only those should know the highest secrets to whom Amon has declared his plans and purposes.”

The prince, while listening, felt as if people were turning him on a bed of dagger points under which fire was burning.

Mentezufis wished to rise; Rameses detained him.

“One word more,” said he, mildly. “Is Egypt so weak that she cannot even mention the Assyrian tribute?”

He panted.

“If Egypt is so wretched,” continued he, “then what assurance is there that Assyria will not attack us?”

“We may assure ourselves by a treaty,” answered the priest.

The heir waved his hand.

"There are no treaties for the weak!" said he. "Silver tablets inscribed with agreements will not guard boundaries unless spears and swords stand behind them."

"But who has told thee, worthiness, that they will not stand on our land?"

"Thou thyself. One hundred and twenty thousand men must yield before three hundred thousand. Were Assyrians to come here, Egypt would be turned into a desert."

Mentezufis' eyes flashed.

"If they were to invade us," cried he, "their bones would never touch their own country! We should arm all the nobles, all the regiments of laborers, even convicts in the quarries. We should take the treasures from all temples. And Assyria would meet five hundred thousand Egyptian warriors."

Rameses was delighted at this outburst of patriotism in Mentezufis. He seized him by the hand, and said,—

"Then, if we are able to have such an army, why do we not attack Babylon? Is not the great warrior Nitager imploring us for years to do so? Is not his holiness alarmed by the movement in Assyria? If we let them concentrate their forces, the struggle will be most difficult; but if we begin ourselves—"

The priest interrupted him,—

"Dost thou know, prince, what a war is to which one must go through a desert? Who will assure us that before we could reach the Euphrates half our army and carriers would not perish from hardship?"

"That would be cured by one battle," interrupted Rameses.

"A battle!" repeated the priest. "But does the prince know what a battle is?"

"I hope so!" replied the heir, striking his sword.

Mentezufis shrugged his shoulders.

"But I say, lord, that thou dost not know what a battle is; thou hast even an entirely false idea of it from manœuvres at which thou hast always been the victor, though more than once thou shouldst have been conquered."

The prince frowned. The priest put his hand beneath his robe, and said quickly,—

"Guess what I have in my hand, worthiness."

"What?" repeated Rameses, with astonishment.

"Guess quickly and truly," insisted the priest, "for if thou art mistaken two of thy regiments perish."

"Thou hast a ring," said the heir, who had grown joyous.

Mentezufis opened his hand; there was a bit of papyrus in it.

"But what have I now?" asked the priest again.

"A ring."

"Well, not a ring, but an amulet of the divine Hator. Dost see, lord, that is a battle? In time of battle Fate holds out her hand every moment, and commands us to guess at the very quickest the surprise inclosed in it. We succeed, or we fail; but woe to the

man who fails oftener than he guesses; and a hundredfold more to those on whom Fate turns her back and forces into blunders.”

“But still I believe, and I feel here,” cried the heir, striking his breast, “that Assyria must be trampled.”

“Oh, that the god Amon might speak through thy mouth,” said Mentezufis. “What thou sayst is true; Assyria will be humbled, perhaps even with thy hands, but not immediately—not immediately.”

The priest took farewell; Rameses remained alone. In his head and his heart raged a hurricane.

“So Hiram was right in saying that they deceive us,” thought he. “I am certain now that our priests have made a treaty with the Chaldeans which his holiness will be forced to sanction. Has anyone ever heard of a thing so monstrous? He, the lord of the living, and of the western world, must sign a treaty invented by intriguers!”

Breath failed him.

“The holy Mentezufis has betrayed himself. It is true, then, that in case of need Egypt can put forth an army of half a million? I did not even dream of such forces. Still they think that I fear their fables about fate, which commands us to solve riddles. Only let me have two hundred thousand men, trained like Greek and Libyan regiments, and I would undertake to solve all riddles on earth and in the heavens.”

“That is a hot head,” thought the worthy Mentezufis, while returning to his cell,—“a woman hunter, an adventurer, but strong. After the weak pharaoh of to-day he reminds us rather of Rameses the Great. In ten years the stars may change; he will ripen and crush Assyria. Of Nineveh there will remain only ruins, sacred Babylon will find its true place, and the one supreme God, the God of Egyptian and Chaldean prophets, will reign from the Libyan desert to the sacred Ganges.”

“If our youth would not make himself ridiculous by night pilgrimages to the Phœnician priestess; if he should be seen in the garden of Astaroth, or if people should think that the erpatr was inclining his ear to the faith of Phœnicia— Not much is needed in Lower Egypt to reject the ancient gods. What a mixture there is of nations here!”

Some days later the worthy Sargon informed the viceroy officially of his position as ambassador, declared the wish to salute him, and begged for an Egyptian escort which might conduct him with all safety and honor to the feet of the pharaoh.

The prince deferred his answer two days, and appointed an audience to Sargon at the expiration of two other days. The Assyrian, accustomed to eastern delay in journeys and business, was offended in no way, and wasted no time. He drank from morning till evening, played dice with Hiram and other rich men from Asia. In free moments he slipped away, like Rameses, to Kama.

As an elderly and a practical man, he offered the priestess rich presents at every visit. His feelings he explained as follows:—

“O Kama, why sit in Pi-Bast and grow thin here? While young, the service of Astaroth may please thee; but when old, a wretched fate will present itself. They will take thy costly robes from thee, and put a younger woman in the temple; thou wilt earn, then, a handful of roasted barley by telling fortunes, or by nursing women in childbirth.

Had the gods in punishment created me a woman, I should choose to be the mother and not the nurse attending her."

"Hence I say," continued Sargon, "leave the temple and join my household. I will give thee ten talents in gold; I will give forty cows, and of wheat a hundred measures. The priests will fear chastisement from the gods, so as to gain from me a better bargain. But I shall not yield a drachma; I may add, at most, a few sheep to let them celebrate a solemn service. The heavenly Astaroth will appear then, and will free thee from vows if I add a gold chain or a goblet."

While listening to these statements Kama bit her lips to restrain laughter; and he continued,—

"If thou go with me to Nineveh, thou wilt be a great lady. Thou shall have a palace; I will give thee also horses, a litter, slaves, and servants. In one month thou wilt pour out on thy person more perfume than thou offerest here in one year to thy goddess. And who knows," concluded he, "thou mayst please King Assar; if so, he would take thee to his palace. Thou wouldst be the happiest of women, and I should get back what I had spent on thee."

At the palace of the heir, on the day appointed to receive Sargon, Egyptian troops were drawn up, and a throng of people were standing near, eager for spectacles.

The Assyrian retinue appeared about midday, the hour when heat is greatest. In front marched policemen armed with swords and sticks; behind them a number of naked swift runners, and three horses. Those were trumpeters and a herald. At the corner of each street the trumpeters sounded a signal, and the herald called in a loud voice: "Behold, Sargon is approaching; the ambassador of the mighty Assar, a relative of the king, a lord of immense wealth, a conqueror in battles, a ruler of provinces. Give him, O people, due homage as a friend of the ruler of Egypt!"

After the trumpeters rode Assyrian cavalry, with pointed caps, in narrow skirts and jackets. Their shaggy and enduring horses had on their foreheads and breasts bronze armor patterned as fish-scales. Next appeared infantry in helmets, and long mantles reaching the earth. One division was armed with heavy clubs, the next with bows, the third with spears and shields. Each man had, besides, a sword, and was armored.

After the soldiers came Sargon's horses, chariots, and litters, surrounded by servants in white, red, and green garments. After them came five elephants with litters on their backs; on one rode Sargon, on another the Chaldean priest Istubar.

The procession was closed by warriors on horseback and on foot, and by harsh Assyrian music, produced by trumpets, drums, metallic plates, and pipes squealing shrilly.

Prince Rameses, surrounded by priests, nobility, and officers, dressed in various colors, and richly, was awaiting the ambassador in the great hall of audience, which was open on all sides. The heir was gladsome, knowing that the Assyrians were bringing gifts which, in the eyes of Egyptians, might pass as tribute. But when he heard the immense voice of a herald in the court praising the might of Sargon, he frowned. When the expression flew to his ears, that King Assar was the friend of the pharaoh, he grew angry. His nostrils dilated like those of an angry bull, and sparks flashed in his eyeballs. Seeing this, the officers and nobility began to assume threatening faces, and put hands to their sword-hilts. The holy Mentezufis noted their looks, and cried,—

“In the name of his holiness, I command nobles and officers to receive the worthy Sargon with the respect due a great king’s ambassador!”

The heir frowned, and strode impatiently along the raised platform where his viceregal chair was standing. But the disciplined officers and the nobles grew silent, knowing that they could not trifle with the assistant of the war minister.

Meanwhile, in the court the immense and heavily armed Assyrian warriors stood in three ranks, opposite the half-naked and slender warriors of Egypt. The two sides looked at each other like a band of tigers at a herd of rhinoceroses. In the hearts of each ancient hatred was smouldering. But command towered above hatred.

At that moment the elephants entered, the Egyptian and Assyrian trumpets roared, the troops of both armies raised their weapons, the people fell on their faces, while the Assyrian dignitaries, Sargon and Istubar, were descending from their litters.

In the hall Prince Rameses sat on an elevated chair beneath a baldachin, while at the entrance door appeared the herald.

“Most worthy lord,” said he, turning to the heir, “the ambassador of the great King Assar, the renowned Sargon, and his associate, the pious prophet Istubar, desire to salute thee and render thee honor as viceroy and heir to the pharaoh,—may he live through eternity!”

“Ask those dignitaries to enter and comfort my heart by the sight of their persons,” answered the viceroy.

Sargon entered the hall with a clattering and clinking. He was dressed in a long green robe, thickly embroidered with gold. At his side, in a snow-white mantle, walked the devout Istubar, and behind them stately Assyrian lords carried gifts for the viceroy.

Sargon approached the elevation, and said in the Assyrian language, which an interpreter repeated in Egyptian immediately,—

“I, Sargon, a leader, a satrap, and a relative of the most mighty King Assar, come to salute thee, O viceroy of the most mighty pharaoh, and in sign of eternal friendship I offer gifts to thee.”

The heir rested his palms on his knees, and sat as motionless as the statues of his ancestors.

“Interpreter,” said Sargon, “hast thou repeated badly to the prince my kindly greeting?”

Mentezufis, standing near the elevation, turned toward Rameses.

“Prince,” whispered he, “the Lord Sargon is waiting for a gracious answer.”

“Then answer him that I do not understand by what right he speaks to me as if he were my equal in dignity.”

Mentezufis was confused, which still more angered the prince, whose lips began to tremble; and again his eyes flashed. But the Chaldean, Istubar, understanding Egyptian, said quickly to Sargon,—

“Let us fall on our faces.”

“Why should I fall on my face?” inquired the indignant Sargon.

“Fall, unless thou wish to lose the favor of King Assar, and perhaps thy head also.”

Thus speaking, Istubar lay on the floor at full length, and Sargon next to him.

“Why should I lie on my belly before that stripling?” muttered Sargon, indignantly.

“Because he is viceroy,” answered Istubar.

“Have I not been viceroy of my lord?”

“But he will be king, and thou wilt not.”

“What are the ambassadors of the most mighty King Assar discussing?” inquired the prince, now satisfied, of the interpreter.

“This: whether they are to show thy worthiness the gifts intended for the pharaoh, or only to give those sent to thee,” replied the dextrous interpreter.

“I wish to see the gifts intended for his holiness my father,” said the prince, “and I permit the ambassadors to rise.”

Sargon rose, purple from rage or weariness, and sat down on the floor cross-legged.

“I knew not,” said he, “that I, a relative and an ambassador of the great Assar, should be forced to wipe with my garments dust from the pavement of an Egyptian viceroy.”

Mentezufis knew Assyrian, and commanded, without asking Rameses, to bring immediately two benches covered with cushions, on which sat at once the panting Sargon and the calm Istubar.

When Sargon had puffed himself quiet, he gave command to produce a great glass goblet, a steel sword, and to lead up before the entrance two horses decked with gold housings. When his command was obeyed he rose and, inclining, addressed Rameses,—

“My lord, King Assar sends thee, O prince, two wonderful horses,—may they bear thee only to victory! He sends also a goblet,—may gladness always flow to thy heart from it!—and a sword the like of which thou wilt not find in the armory of the mightiest ruler.”

He drew from its scabbard a rather long sword, shining like silver, and bent it. The sword bent like a bow, and then sprang out straight again.

“A wonderful weapon, indeed,” said Rameses.

“If thou permit, O viceroy, I will show thee another of its qualities,” said Sargon, who, with the chance to praise Assyrian arms, which at that time were excellent, forgot his anger.

At his request one of the Egyptian officers unsheathed a bronze sword and held it as if to attack. Then Sargon raised his steel blade, struck and cut a slice from the weapon of the other man.

In the hall rose a murmur of astonishment, and an intense flush came out on the face of Rameses.

“That foreigner,” thought he, “took the bull from me in the circus, he wishes to marry Kama, and now he shows a sword which cuts our blades into shavings.”

And he felt a still deeper hatred toward King Assar, toward all Assyrians in general, and toward Sargon especially. But he endeavored to command himself, and with politeness begged the envoy to show those gifts intended for the pharaoh.

They brought immediately immense packs made of fragrant wood; from one of these the higher Assyrian officials took articles,—goblets, pitchers, steel weapons, bows made of goat horns, gilded weapons, and shields set with jewels.

But the most splendid gift was a model of King Assar's palace in gold and silver. It looked like three edifices,—the second smaller than the first, the third smaller than the second; the second built upon the first, the third upon the second. Each was surrounded thickly by columns, and instead of a roof had a flat pavement. Each entrance was guarded by lions or winged bulls with human heads. On both sides of the stairs stood statues of vassals of the king, bearing gifts; on both sides of the entrance were carved horses in various positions. Sargon removed one wall of the model, and showed rich chambers filled with priceless furniture. Special wonder was roused by the audience hall, where were figures representing the king on a lofty throne, and near him courtiers, warriors, and vassals giving homage.

The entire model was as long as twice the height of a man, and almost as high as the height of one man. The Egyptians whispered that that gift alone was worth a hundred and fifty talents.

When the packs were carried out, the heir invited the ambassadors and their retinue to a feast, during which abundant gifts were bestowed on the Assyrians. Rameses pushed his politeness so far that when one of the women pleased Sargon the prince presented her to the ambassador, of course with her consent and the permission of her mother.

The prince was polite and bountiful, but his face was still clouded. And when Tutmosis asked him if King Assar had not a beautiful palace, the prince answered,—

“Its ruins on the ashes of Nineveh would be more beautiful to my eyes.”

At that feast the Assyrians were very abstemious. Notwithstanding the abundance of wine, they drank little, and did not shout greatly. Sargon did not even once burst into loud laughter, though that was his custom; he cast down his eyes and thought deeply.

But the two priests—Istubar, the Chaldean, and Mentezufis, the Egyptian—were calm, like men to whom the future is known, and who command it.

Chapter XXXVI

AFTER his reception by the viceroy, Sargon delayed at Pi-Bast, waiting for letters from the pharaoh at Memphis. Meanwhile strange reports began to circulate among officers and nobles.

The Phœnicians told, of course as the greatest secret, that the priests, it was unknown for what reason, not only forgave the Assyrians the unpaid tribute, not only freed them once and for all time from paying it, but, besides, to facilitate some northern war for the Assyrians, had concluded a treaty of peace for many years with them.

“The pharaoh,” said the Phœnicians, “on learning of these concessions to Assyria fell very ill. Prince Rameses is troubled, and goes around grief-stricken. But both must give way to the priests, for they are not sure of the nobles and the army.”

This enraged the Egyptian aristocracy.

“Is it possible?” whispered magnates who were in debt. “Does the dynasty not trust us? Have the priests undertaken to disgrace and ruin Egypt? For it is clear that if Assyria has a war in the distant north somewhere, now is just the time to attack her and fill the reduced treasury of the pharaoh and the aristocracy with plunder.”

One and another of the young lords made bold to ask the prince what he thought of Assyrians. Rameses was silent, but the gleam in his eyes and his fixed lips expressed his feelings sufficiently.

“It is clear,” whispered the lords, later on, “that this dynasty is bound by the priesthood. It yields not its confidence to nobles; great misfortunes are threatening Egypt.”

Silent anger was soon turned into secret councils, which had even the semblance of conspiracy. Though many persons took part in this action, the priests were self-confident, or knew nothing of this in their blindness; and Sargon, though he felt the existing hatred, did not attach to it importance. He learned that Prince Rameses disliked him, but that he attributed to the event in the arena, and to his jealousy in the affair of the priestess. Confident, however, in his position as ambassador, he drank, feasted, and slipped away almost every evening to Kama, who received with increasing favor his courting and his presents.

Such was the condition of mind in the higher circles, when on a certain night the holy Mentezufis rushed to the prince’s dwelling, and declared that he must see the viceroy immediately.

The courtiers answered that one of his women was visiting their lord, and that they would not disturb him. But when Mentezufis insisted with increasing emphasis, they called out Rameses.

The prince appeared after a time, and was not even angry.

“What is this?” asked he of the priest. “Are we at war, that thou takest the trouble to visit me at an hour like the present?”

Mentezufis looked diligently at the prince, and sighed deeply.

“Has the prince not gone out all the evening?” inquired he.

“Not a step.”

“Can I give a priest’s word for this?”

The heir was astonished.

“It seems to me,” answered he, haughtily, “that thy word is not needed, since I have given mine. What does this mean?”

They withdrew to a special chamber.

“Dost thou know, lord,” asked the excited priest, “what has happened, perhaps an hour since? Some young men attacked the worthy Sargon and clubbed him.”

“Who were they? Where did this happen?”

“At the villa of a Phœnician priestess named Kama,” answered Mentezufis, watching the face of the heir sharply.

“Daring fellows,” said the prince, shrugging his shoulders, “to attack such a stalwart man! I suppose that more than one bone was broken in that struggle.”

“But to attack an ambassador! Consider, worthy lord,—an ambassador protected by the majesty of Assyria and Egypt,” said the priest.

“Ho! ho!” laughed the prince. “Then King Assar sends ambassadors even to Phœnician dancers?”

Mentezufis was confused. All at once he tapped his forehead, and cried out also, with laughter,—

“See, prince, what a simple man I am, unfamiliar with ceremonies. I forgot that Sargon, strolling about in the night near the house of a suspected woman, is not an ambassador, but an ordinary person.”

After a while he added,—

“In every case something evil has happened. Sargon may conceive a dislike for us.”

“Priest! O priest!” cried Rameses, shaking his head. “Thou hast forgotten this,—a thing of much more importance,—that Egypt has no need to fear or even care for the good or bad feeling toward her, not merely of Sargon, but King Assar.”

Mentezufis was so confused by the appositeness of the remark, that, instead of an answer, he bowed, muttering,—

“Prince, the gods have given thee the wisdom of high priests,—may their names be blessed! I wanted to issue an order to search for these insolents, but now I prefer to follow thy advice, for thou art a sage above sages. Tell me, therefore, lord, what I am to do with Sargon and those turbulent young people.”

“First of all, wait till morning. As a priest, thou knowest best that divine sleep often brings good counsel.”

“But if before morning I think out nothing?”

“I will visit Sargon in every case, and try to efface that little accident from his memory.”

The priest took farewell of Rameses with marks of respect. On the way home, he pondered.

"I will let the heart be torn out of my breast," thought he, "if the prince had to do with that business. He neither beat Sargon, nor persuaded another to beat him; he did not even know of the incident. Whoso judges an affair with such coolness and so pointedly cannot be a confederate. In that case I can begin an investigation, and if we do not mollify the shaggy barbarian I will deliver the disturbers to justice. Beautiful treaty of friendship between two states, which begins by insulting the ambassador!"

Next morning the lordly Sargon lay on his felt couch till midday. He lay thus rather frequently, however, that is, after each drinking-feast. Near him, on a low divan, sat the devout Istubar, with eyes fixed on the ceiling, while muttering a prayer.

"Istubar," sighed the dignitary, "art thou sure that no man of our court knows of my misfortune?"

"Who could know, if thou hast seen no one?"

"But the Egyptians!" groaned Sargon.

"Of the Egyptians Mentezufis and the prince know, yes, and those madmen who surely will remember thy fists for a long time."

"They may—they may; but it seems to me that the heir was among them, and that his nose is crushed, if not broken."

"The heir has a sound nose, and he was not there, I assure thee."

"In that case," sighed Sargon, "the prince should impale a good number of those rioters on stakes. I am an ambassador; my person is sacred."

"But I tell thee," counselled Istubar, "to cast anger from thy heart, and not to complain even; for if those rioters are arraigned before a court, the whole world will learn that the ambassador of the most worthy King Assar goes about among Phœnicians, and, what is worse, visits them alone during night hours. What wilt thou answer if thy mortal enemy, the chancellor Lik-Bagus, asks thee, 'Sargon, what Phœnicians didst thou see, and of what was thy discourse with them at night, outside their temple?'"

Sargon sighed, if sounds like the growling of a lion are to be called sighs.

That moment one of the Assyrian officers rushed in. He knelt down, struck the pavement with his forehead, and said to Sargon,—

"Light of our lord's eyes! There is a crowd of magnates and dignitaries of Egypt before the entrance, and at the head of them the heir himself, with the evident intention of giving thee homage."

But before Sargon could utter a command, the prince was in the door of the chamber. He pushed the gigantic watch aside, and approached the felts quickly, while the confused ambassador, with widely opened eyes, knew not what to do,—to flee naked to another chamber, or hide beneath the covers.

On the threshold stood a number of Assyrian officers, astonished at the invasion of the heir in opposition to every etiquette. But Istubar made a sign to them, and they vanished.

The prince was alone; he had left his suite in the courtyard.

"Be greeted, O ambassador of a great king, and guest of the pharaoh. I have come to visit thee and inquire if thou hast need of anything, also to learn if time and desire will permit thee to ride in my company on a horse from my father's stables,

surrounded by our suites in a manner becoming an ambassador of the mighty Assar,—may he live through eternity!”

Sargon listened as he lay there, without understanding a syllable. But when Istubar interpreted the words of the Egyptian viceroy, the ambassador felt such delight that he beat his head against the couch, repeating the names Rameses and Assar.

When he had calmed himself, and made excuses for the wretched state in which so worthy and famous a guest had found him, he added,—

“Do not take it ill, O lord, that an earthworm and a support of the throne, as I am, show delight in a manner so unusual. But I am doubly pleased at thy coming; first, because such a superterrestrial honor has come to me; second, because in my dull and worthless heart I thought that thou, O lord, wert the author of my misfortune. It seemed to me that among the sticks which fell on my shoulders I felt thine, which struck, indeed, vigorously.”

The calm Istubar interpreted phrase after phrase to the prince. To this the heir, with genuine kingly dignity, answered,—

“Thou wert mistaken, O Sargon. If thou thyself hadst not confessed the error, I should command to count out fifty blows of a stick to thee, so that thou shouldst remember that persons like me do not attack one man with a crowd, or in the night-time.”

Before the serene Istubar could finish the interpretation of this speech, Sargon had crawled up to the prince and embraced his legs earnestly.

“A great lord! a great king!” cried he. “Glory to Egypt, that has such a ruler.”

To this the prince answered,—

“I will say more, Sargon. If an attack was made on thee yesterday, I assure thee that no one of my courtiers made it. For I judge that a man of such strength as thou art must have broken more than one skull. But my attendants are unharmed, every man of them.”

“He has told truth, and spoken wisely,” whispered Sargon to Istubar.

“But though,” continued the prince, “this evil deed has happened, not through my fault, or through that of my attendants, I feel bound to decrease thy dissatisfaction with a city in which thou wert met so unworthily; hence I have visited thy bedchamber; hence I open to thee my house at all times, as often as thou mayst wish to visit it, and I beg thee to accept this small gift from me.”

The prince drew forth from his tunic a chain set with rubies and sapphires.

The gigantic Sargon shed tears; this moved the prince but did not affect the indifference of Istubar. The priest saw that Sargon had tears, joy, or anger, at call, as befitted the ambassador of a king full of wisdom.

The viceroy sat a moment longer, and then took farewell of Sargon. While going out, he thought that the Assyrians, though barbarians, were not evil minded, since they knew how to respond to magnanimity.

Sargon was so touched that he gave order immediately to bring wine, and he drank from midday till evening.

Some time after sunset the priest, Istubar, left Sargon’s chamber for a while; he returned soon, but through a concealed doorway. Behind him appeared two men in

dark mantles. When they had pushed their cowls aside, Sargon recognized in one the high priest Mefres, in the other Mentezufis the prophet.

"We bring thee, worthy ambassador, good news," said Mefres.

"May I be able to give you the like," cried the ambassador. "Be seated, holy and worthy fathers. And though I have reddened eyes, speak to me as if I were in perfect soberness; for when I am drunk my mind is improved even. Is this not true, Istubar?"

"Speak on," said the Chaldean.

"To-day," began Mentezufis, "I have received a letter from the most worthy minister Herhor. He writes that his holiness—may he live through eternity!—awaits thy embassy at Memphis in his wonderful palace, and that his holiness—may he live through eternity!—is well disposed to make a treaty with Assyria."

Sargon tottered on his feet, but his eyes showed clear mental action.

"I will go," said he, "to his holiness the pharaoh,—may he live through eternity! In the name of my lord I will put my seal on the treaty, if it be written on bricks in cuneiform letters, for I do not understand your writing. I will lie even all day on my belly before his holiness, and will sign the treaty. But how will ye carry it out,—ha! ha! ha! that I know not," concluded he, with rude laughter.

"How darest thou, O servant of the great Assar, doubt the good-will and faith of our ruler?" inquired Mentezufis.

Sargon grew a little sobered.

"I do not speak of his holiness," replied he, "but of the heir to the throne of Egypt."

"He is a young man full of wisdom, who will carry out the will of his father and the supreme council without hesitation," answered Mefres.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the drunken barbarian again. "Your prince— O gods, put my joints out if I speak an untruth, when I say that I should wish Assyria to have such an heir as he is. Our Assyrian heir is a sage, a priest. He, before going to war, looks first at the stars in the sky; afterward he looks under hens' tails. But yours would examine to see how many troops he had; he would learn where the enemy was camping, and fall on him as an eagle on a lamb. He is a leader, he is a king! He is not of those who obey priestly counsels. He will take counsel with his own sword, and ye will have to carry out what he orders. Therefore, though I sign a treaty, I shall tell my lord that behind the sick pharaoh and the wise priests there is in Egypt a young heir to the throne who is a lion and a bull in one person,—a man on whose lips there is honey, but in whose heart lies a thunderbolt."

"And thou wilt tell an untruth," interrupted Mentezufis. "For our prince, though impulsive and riotous somewhat, as is usual with young people, knows how to respect both the counsel of sages and the highest institutions of the country."

"O ye sages learned in letters, ye who know the circuits of the stars!" said Sargon, jeering. "I am a simple commander of troops, who without my seal would not always be able to scratch off my signature. Ye are sages, I am unlearned; but by the beard of my king, I would not change what I know for your wisdom. Ye are men to whom the world of papyrus and brick is laid bare; but the real world in which men live is closed to you. I am unlearned, but I have the sniff of a dog; and, as a dog sniffs a bear from a distance; so I with reddened nose sniff a hero.

“Ye will give counsel to the prince! But ye are charmed by him already, as a dove is by a serpent. I, at least, do not deceive myself; and, though the prince is as kind to me as my own father, I feel through my skin that he hates me and my Assyrians as a tiger hates an elephant. Ha! ha! Only give him an army, and in three months he would be at Nineveh, if soldiers would rise up to him in the desert instead of falling down and dying—”

“Even though thou wert speaking truth,” interrupted Mentezufis, “even if the prince wished to go to Nineveh, he will not go.”

“But who will detain him when he is the pharaoh?”

“We.”

“Ye? ye? Ha! ha! ha!” laughed Sargon. “Ye think always that that young man does not feel this treaty. But I—but I—ha! ha! ha! I will let the skin be torn from me, and my body be impaled if he does not know everything.”

“Would the Phœnicians be so quiet if they possessed not the certainty that your young lion of Egypt would shield them before the bull of Assyria?”

Mentezufis and Mefres looked at each other stealthily. The genius of the barbarian almost terrified them; he had given bold utterance to that which they had not thought of. What would the result be, indeed, if the heir had divined their plans and wished to cross them?

But Istubar, silent thus far, rescued them from momentary trouble.

“Sargon,” said he, “thou art interfering in affairs not thy own. Thy duty is to conclude with Egypt a treaty of the kind that our lord wishes. But what the heir knows or does not know, what he will do or will not do, is not thy affair, since the supreme, eternally existent priestly council assures us that the treaty will be executed. In what way it will be executed is not a question for our heads.”

The dry tone with which Istubar declared this calmed the riotous joy of the ambassador. He nodded and muttered,—

“A pity for the man in that case! He is a grand warrior, and magnanimous.”

Chapter XXXVII

AFTER their visit to Sargon the two holy men, Mentezufis and Mefres, when they had concealed themselves carefully with their burnouses, returned home, meditating deeply.

“Who knows,” said Mentezufis, “that the view of that drunken Sargon concerning our prince is not the right one?”

“In that case Istubar’s view is still more correct,” answered Mefres, decidedly.

“Still, let us not be too hasty. We should examine the prince first,” remarked Mentezufis.

“Let us do so.”

In fact, both priests went to the heir next morning with very serious faces, and asked for a confidential talk with him.

“What has happened?” inquired the prince. “Has his worthiness Sargon gone on some new night embassy?”

“Alas! the question for us is not of Sargon,” answered Mefres. “But reports are current among people that thou, most worthy lord, art maintaining relations continually with unbelieving Phœnicians.”

From these words the prince divined why the two prophets had made the visit, and the blood boiled in him. But he saw at once that this was the beginning of a play between the priests and him, and, as became the son of a pharaoh, he mastered himself in one instant. His face assumed an expression of innocent curiosity.

“The Phœnicians are dangerous, born enemies of Egypt,” said Mefres.

The heir smiled.

“Holy fathers, if ye would lend me money, and if ye had beautiful maidens in your temples, I should see you oftener. But as things are, I must be friendly with Phœnicians.”

“Men say, Erpatr, that thou dost visit that Phœnician woman during night hours.”

“I must till the girl gains wit and moves to my house. But have no fear, I go with a sword; and if any man should bar the way to me—”

“But through that Phœnician woman thou hast conceived repulsion for King Assar’s envoy.”

“Not through her by any means, but because Sargon smells of tallow. But whither does this lead? Ye, holy fathers, are not overseers of my women; I think that the worthy Sargon has not committed his to you. What is your desire?”

Mefres was so confused that blushes appeared on his shaven forehead.

“It is true, worthiness,” answered he, “thy love affairs and the methods therein do not pertain to us. But there is a worse thing;—people are astonished that the cunning Hiram lent thee a hundred talents with such readiness, even without a pledge.”

The prince's lips quivered, but again he answered quietly,—

“It is no fault of mine that Hiram has more trust in my words than have rich Egyptians! He knows that I would rather yield the arms which I inherit from my grandfather than fail to pay the money due him. It seems to me that he must be at rest concerning interest, since he has not mentioned it. I do not think of hiding from you, holy fathers, that the Phœnicians are more dextrous than Egyptians. Our wealthy men would make sour faces before lending me one hundred talents; they would groan, make me wait a month, and at last demand immense pledges and a high rate of interest. But Phœnicians know the hearts of princes better; they give us money even without a judge or witnesses.”

The high priest was so irritated by this quiet banter that he pressed his lips together and was silent. Mentezufis rescued him by asking quickly,—

“What wouldst thou say, worthiness, were we to make a treaty with Assyria, yielding northern Asia and Phœnicia?”

While asking this question, he had his eyes fixed on the face of the heir. But Rameses answered him with perfect calmness,—

“I should say that only traitors could persuade the pharaoh to make such a treaty.”

Both priests started up. Mefres raised his hands; Mentezufis clinched his fist.

“But if danger to the state demanded it?” insisted Mentezufis.

“What do ye wish of me?” burst out the prince. “Ye interfere with my debts and women, ye surround me with spies, ye dare reproach me, and now ye give me some sort of traitorous queries. Now I will tell you: I, if ye were to poison me, would not sign a treaty like the one ye mention. Luckily that does not depend on me, but on his holiness, whose will we must all obey.”

“What wouldst thou do, then, wert thou the pharaoh?”

“What the honor and the profit of the state demanded.”

“Of that I doubt not,” said Mentezufis. “But what dost thou consider the profit of the state? Where are we to look for indications?”

“Why is the supreme council in existence?” asked Rameses, with feigned anger this time. “Ye say this council is made up of all the great sages. In that case let them take on themselves responsibility for a treaty which I should look on as a shame and as destruction.”

“Whence dost thou know, worthiness, that thy godlike father would not act in just such a manner?”

“Why ask me, then, of this matter? What investigation is this? Who gives you the right to pry into my heart?”

Rameses feigned to be so mightily indignant that the priests were satisfied.

“Thou speakest, prince,” said Mefres, “as becomes a good Egyptian. Such a treaty would pain us, too; but danger to the state forces men to yield temporarily to circumstances.”

“What forces you to yield?” cried the prince. “Have we lost a great battle, or have we no army?”

“The oarsmen on the boat in which Egypt is sailing through the river of eternity are gods,” replied Mefres, with solemnity; “but the steersman is the Highest Lord of existence. The oarsmen stop frequently, or turn the boat so as to avoid dangerous eddies which we do not even notice. In such cases we need only patience and obedience, for which, later or earlier, a liberal reward will meet us, surpassing all that mortal man can imagine.”

After this statement the priests took farewell. They were full of hope that the prince, though angry because of the treaty, would not break it, and would assure to Egypt the time of rest which she needed. After their departure the prince called his adjutant. When alone with Tutmosis, his long-restrained anger and sorrow burst forth. He threw himself on a couch; he writhed like a serpent, he struck his head with his fists, and shed tears even.

The frightened Tutmosis waited till the access of rage had subsided; then he gave Rameses wine and water, and fumed him with calming perfumes; finally he sat near his lord and inquired the cause of this unmanly outburst.

“Sit here,” said the prince, without rising. “Knowest thou, I am to-day convinced that our priests have concluded an infamous treaty with Assyria; without war, without demands even from the other side! Canst thou imagine what we are losing?”

“Dagon told me that the Assyrians wished to take Phœnicia. But the Phœnicians are now less alarmed, for King Assar has a war on the northeastern boundaries. A very valiant and numerous people inhabit that region; hence it is unknown what the end of this affair may be. The Phœnicians will have peace for a couple of years in every case,—time in which to prepare defence and find allies—”

The prince waved his hand impatiently.

“See,” said he, interrupting Tutmosis, “even Phœnicia is arming her own people, and perhaps all the neighbors who surround her; in every case, we lose the unpaid tribute of Asia, which reaches—hast thou heard the like?—more than a hundred thousand talents.”

“A hundred thousand talents,” repeated the prince. “O gods! but such a sum would fill the treasury of the pharaoh. And were we to attack Assyria at the right season, in Nineveh alone, in the single palace of Assar, we should find inexhaustible treasures. Think how many slaves we could take,—half a million—a million,—people of gigantic strength, and so wild that captivity in Egypt with the hardest labor on canals or in quarries would seem play to them. The fertility of the land would be increased; in the course of a few years our people, now wretched, would rest, and before the last Assyrian slave had died, the state would regain its ancient might and well-being. And the priests are destroying all this by the aid of a few silver tablets, and a few bricks marked with arrow-headed signs understood by no Egyptian.”

When he had heard the complaints of the prince, Tutmosis rose from the armchair and looked carefully through the adjoining chambers to see if someone in them were listening; then he sat down again near Rameses, and whispered,—

“Be of good heart, lord. As far as I know, the entire aristocracy, all the nomarchs, all the higher officers have heard something of this treaty and are indignant. Only give the sign and we will break these brick treaties on the head of Sargon, even on the head of King Assar.”

“But that would be rebellion against his holiness,” replied the prince, also in a whisper.

Tutmosis put on a sad face.

“I should not like,” said he, “to make thy heart bleed, but—thy father, who is equal to the highest god, has a grievous illness.”

“That is not true!” said the prince, springing up.

“It is true; but let not people see that thou knowest this. His holiness is greatly wearied by his stay on earth, and desires to leave it. But the priests hold him back, and do not summon thee to Memphis, so that the treaty with Assyria may be signed without opposition.”

“But they are traitors, traitors!” whispered the enraged prince.

“Therefore thou wilt have no difficulty in breaking the treaty when thou shalt inherit power after thy father,—may he live through eternity!”

Rameses thought awhile.

“It is easier,” said he, “to sign a treaty than to break it.”

“It is easy also to break a treaty,” laughed Tutmosis. “Are there not in Asia unorganized races which attack our boundaries? Does not the godlike Nitager stand on guard with his army to repulse them and carry war into their countries? Dost thou suppose that Egypt will not find armed men and treasures for the war? We will go, all of us, for each man can gain something, and in some way make his life independent. Treasures are lying in the temples—but the labyrinth—”

“Who will take them from the labyrinth?” asked the prince, doubtfully.

“Who? Any nomarch, any officer, any noble will take them if he has a command from the pharaoh, and—the minor priests will show the way to secret places.”

“They would not dare to do so. The punishment of the gods—”

Tutmosis waved his hand contemptuously.

“But are we slaves or shepherds, to fear gods whom Greeks and Phœnicians revile, and whom any mercenary warrior will insult and go unpunished?”

“The priests have invented silly tales about gods,—tales to which they themselves attach no credit. Thou knowest that they recognize only the One in temples. They perform miracles, too, at which they laugh.

“Only the lowest people strike the earth with their foreheads before statues in the old way. Even working women have doubts now about the all-might of Osiris, Set, and Horus; the scribes cheat the gods in accounts, and the priests use them as a lock and chain to secure their treasures.”

“Oho!” continued Tutmosis; “the days have passed when all Egypt believed in everything announced from temples. At present we insult the Phœnician gods, the Phœnicians insult our gods, and no thunderbolt strikes any man of us.”

The viceroy looked carefully at Tutmosis.

“How did such thoughts come to thy head?” inquired he. “But it is not so long ago that thou wouldst pale at the very mention of the priesthood.”

“Yes, because I felt alone. But to-day, after I have seen that all the nobles understand as I, I feel encouraged.”

“But who told thee and the nobles of that treaty with Assyria?”

“Dagon and other Phœnicians,” answered Tutmosis. “They even said that when the time came they would rouse Asiatic races to rebellion, so that our troops might have a pretext to cross the boundaries, and when once on the road to Nineveh, the Phœnicians and their allies would join us. And thy army would be larger than that which Rameses the Great had behind him.”

This zeal of the Phœnicians did not please the heir, but he was silent on that subject.

“But what will happen if the priests learn of your conversations?” inquired he. “None of you will escape death, be sure of that.”

“They will learn nothing,” replied Tutmosis, joyfully. “They trust too much in their power, they pay their spies badly, and have disgusted all Egypt with their pride and rapacity. Moreover, the aristocracy, the army, the scribes, the laborers, even the minor priests are only waiting for the signal to attack the temples, take out the treasures, and lay them at the feet of the pharaoh. When their treasures fail, all their power will be lost to the holy fathers. They will cease even to work miracles, for to work them gold rings are needed.”

The prince turned conversation to other subjects and gave Tutmosis the sign of withdrawal. When alone, he began to meditate.

He would have been enchanted at the hostile disposition of the nobles toward the priests, and the warlike instincts of the higher classes, if the enthusiasm had not broken out so suddenly, and if Phœnicians were not concealed behind it. This enjoined caution, for he understood that in the affairs of Egypt it was better to trust the patriotism of priests than the friendship of Phœnicians. He recalled, however, his father’s words, that Phœnicians were truth-speaking and faithful whenever truth was in their interest. Beyond doubt the Phœnicians had a great interest in not falling under control of Assyria. And it was possible to depend on them as allies in case of war, for the defeat of Egypt would injure, first of all, Phœnicia.

On the other hand, Rameses did not admit that Egyptian priests, even when concluding such a harmful treaty with Assyria, thought of treason. No, they were not traitors, they were slothful dignitaries. Peace agreed with them, for during peace their treasures grew, and they increased their influence. They did not wish for war, since war would raise the pharaoh’s power, and impose on them a grievous outlay.

So the young prince, despite his inexperience, understood that he must be cautious, that he must not hasten, that he must not condemn, but also that he must not trust too much. He had decided on war with Assyria, not because the nobles and the pharaoh desired it, but because Egypt needed slaves and also treasures.

But in making war he wished to make it with judgment. He wished to bring the priestly order to it gradually, and only in case of opposition to crush that order through the nobles and the army.

And just when the holy Mefres and Mentezufis were jeering at the predictions of Sargon, who said that the heir would not yield to the priests but force them to obedience, the prince had a plan to subject them. And he saw what power he possessed for that purpose. The moment to begin the war and the means of waging it he left to the future.

"Time will bring the best counsels," said he to himself.

He was calm and satisfied, like a man who after long hesitation knows what he must do, and has faith in his own abilities. So then, to free himself of even the traces of his recent indignation, he went to Sarah. Amusement with his little son always calmed him, and filled his heart with serenity.

He passed the garden, entered Sarah's villa, and found her in tears again.

"Oh, Sarah!" cried he, "if the Nile were in thy bosom thou wouldst weep it all away."

"I will not weep any longer," said she; but a more abundant stream flowed from her eyes.

"What is this?" asked the prince; "or hast thou brought in some witch again who frightens thee with Phœnician women?"

"I am not afraid of Phœnician women, but of Phœnicia," said Sarah; "thou knowest not, lord, what bad people the Phœnicians are."

"Do they burn children?" laughed Rameses.

"Thou thinkest that they do not?" asked she, looking at him with great eyes.

"A fable! I know, besides, from Prince Hiram, that that is a fable."

"Hiram!" cried Sarah, "Hiram! but he is the most wicked of all! Ask my father, and he will tell thee how Hiram entices young girls of distant countries to his ships, and raising the sails takes away the unfortunates to sell them. Even we had a bright-haired slave girl stolen by Hiram. She became insane from sorrow for her country. But she could not even say where her country was; and she died. Such is Hiram, such is that vile Dagon, and all those wretches."

"Perhaps; but how does this concern us?" inquired Rameses.

"Very much. Thou, O lord, art listening to Phœnician counsels; but our Jews have learned that Phœnicia wants to raise a war between Egypt and Assyria. Even their first bankers and merchants have bound themselves by dreadful oaths to raise it."

"Why should they want war?" inquired the prince, with apparent indifference.

"Because they will furnish arms to you and to Assyrians; they will furnish, also, supplies and information, and for everything they furnish they will make you pay ten prices. They will plunder the dead and wounded of both armies. They will buy slaves from your warriors and from the Assyrians. Is that little? Egypt and Assyria will ruin themselves, but the Phœnicians will build up new storehouses with wealth from both sides!"

"Who explained such wisdom to thee?" asked the prince, smiling.

"Do I not hear my father and our relatives and friends whispering of this, while they look around in dread lest some one may hear what they are saying? Besides, do I not know the Phœnicians? They lie prostrate before thee, but thou dost not note their deceitful looks; often have I seen their eyes green with greed and yellow from anger. O lord, guard thyself from Phœnicians as from venomous serpents."

Rameses looked at Sarah, and involuntarily he compared her sincere love with the calculations of the Phœnician priestess, her outbursts of tenderness with the treacherous coldness of Kama.

“Indeed,” thought he, “the Phœnicians are poisonous reptiles. But if Rameses the Great used a lion in war, why should I not use a serpent against the enemies of Egypt?”

And the more plastically he pictured to himself the perversity of Kama, the more did he desire her. At times heroic souls seek out danger.

He took farewell of Sarah, and suddenly, it is unknown for what reason, he remembered that Sargon had suspected him of taking part in the attack on his person.

The prince struck his forehead.

“Did that second self of mine,” thought he, “arrange the attack on the ambassador? But if he did, who persuaded him? Was it Phœnicians? But if they wished to connect my person with such a vile business? Sarah says, justly, that they are scoundrels against whom I should guard myself always.”

Straightway anger rose in him, and he determined to settle the question. Since evening was just coming, Rameses, without going home, went to Kama.

It concerned him little that he might be recognized; besides, in case of need, he had a sword on his person.

There was light in the villa of the priestess, but there was no servant at the entrance.

“Thus far,” thought he, “Kama has sent away her servants when I was to come. Had she a feeling that I would come to-day, or will she receive a more fortunate lover?”

He ascended one story, stood before the chamber of the priestess, and pushed aside the curtain quickly. In the chamber were Kama and Hiram; they were whispering.

“Oh, I come at the wrong time!” said Rameses, laughing. “Well, prince, art thou, too, paying court to a woman who cannot be gracious to men unless death be the penalty?”

Hiram and the priestess sprang from their seats.

“Thou wert forewarned by some good spirit that we were speaking of thee, that is clear,” said the Phœnician, bowing.

“Are ye preparing some surprise for me?” inquired the heir.

“Perhaps. Who can tell?” answered Kama, with a challenging expression.

“May those who in future wish to surprise me not expose their own necks to the axe or the halter; if they do, they will surprise themselves more than me.”

The smile grew cold on Kama’s half-open lips; Hiram, now pale, answered humbly,—

“How have we earned the anger of our lord and guardian?”

“I would know the truth,” said Rameses, sitting down and looking threateningly at Hiram. “I would know who arranged an attack on the Assyrian ambassador, and associated in that villainy a man resembling me as much as my two hands resemble each other?”

“Seest, Kama,” said the frightened Hiram, “I told thee that intimacy with that ruffian would bring great misfortune— And here it is! We have not waited long to see it.”

The priestess fell at the prince’s feet.

"I will tell all," cried she, groaning; "only cast from thy heart, lord, anger against Phœnicians. Slay me, imprison me, but be not angry at Phœnicians."

"Who attacked Sargon?"

"Lykon, the Greek, who sings in our temples," said the priestess, still kneeling.

"Aha! it was he, then, who was singing outside thy house, and he resembles me greatly?"

Hiram bent his head and placed his hand on his heart.

"We, lord, have paid that man bountifully because he is so like thee. We thought that his figure might serve thee should the need come."

"And it has," interrupted the prince. "Where is he? I wish to see this perfect singer, this living picture of myself."

Hiram held his hands apart.

"The scoundrel has fled, but we will find him," replied he, "unless he turns into a fly or an earthworm."

"But thou wilt forgive me, lord?" whispered the priestess, leaning on the knees of the prince.

"Much is forgiven women," said Rameses.

"And ye will not take vengeance on me?" asked she of Hiram, with fear.

"Phœnicia," replied the old man, deliberately and with emphasis, "forgives the greatest offence to that person who possesses the favor of our lord Rameses,—may he live through eternity! As to Lykon," added he, turning to the heir, "thou wilt have him, dead or living."

Hiram made a profound obeisance and went from the chamber, leaving the prince with the priestess.

The blood rushed to Rameses' head; he embraced the kneeling Kama, and asked,—

"Hast thou heard the words of the worthy Hiram? Phœnicia forgives thee the greatest offence! That man is faithful to me indeed. And if he has said that, what answer wilt thou find?"

Kama kissed his hands, whispering,—

"Thou hast won me—I am thy slave. But leave me in peace to-day, respect the house which belongs to Astaroth."

"Then thou wilt remove to my palace?" asked the prince.

"O gods, what hast thou said? Since the sun first rose and set, no priestess of As— But this is difficult! Phœnicia, lord, gives thee a proof of attachment and honor such as no son of hers has received at any time."

"Then?—" interrupted the prince.

"But not to-day, and not here," implored Kama.

Chapter XXXVIII

LEARNING from Hiram that the Phœnicians had given him the priestess, Rameses wished to have her in his house at the earliest, not because he could not live without her, but because she had become for him a novelty.

Kama delayed her coming; she implored the prince to leave her in peace till the inflow of pilgrims diminished, and above all till the most noted among them should go from Pi-Bast. Were she to become his favorite during their presence, the income of the temple might decrease and danger threaten the priestess.

“Our sages and great men,” said she to Rameses, “would forgive me. But the common people would call the vengeance of the gods on my head, and thou, lord, knowest that the gods have long hands.”

“May they not lose those hands in thrusting them under my roof,” said Rameses.

But he did not insist greatly, as his attention was much occupied at that juncture.

The Assyrian ambassadors, Sargon and Istubar, had gone to Memphis to put their names to the treaty. At the same time the pharaoh had summoned Rameses to give a report of his journey.

The prince commanded his scribes to write accurately of all that had happened from the time of leaving Memphis; hence the review of artisans, the visits to fields and factories, the conversations with nomarchs and officials. To present the report he appointed Tutmosis.

“Thou wilt be heart and lips for me before the face of the pharaoh,” said the prince to him, “and this is what thou must do there.

“When the most worthy Herhor asks what, to my thinking, causes the poverty of Egypt and the treasury, tell the minister to turn to his assistant, Pentuer, and he will explain my views in the same way that he did his own in the temple of Hator.

“When Herhor wishes to know my opinion of a treaty with Assyria, answer that my duty is to carry out the commands of my master.”

Tutmosis nodded in sign that he comprehended.

“But,” continued the heir, “when thou shalt stand in the presence of my father,—may he live through eternity!—and convince thyself that no one is listening, fall at his feet in my name, and say,—

“Our lord, thy son and servant, the worthy Rameses, to whom thou hast given life and power, says the following,—

“The cause of Egypt’s suffering is the loss of fertile lands taken by the desert, and the loss of men who die from want and hard labor. But know, our lord, that the damage caused thy treasury by priests is no less than that wrought by death and the desert; for not only are the temples filled with gold and jewels, which would suffice to pay our debts entirely, but the holy fathers and the prophets have the best lands, the best slaves and laborers, and lands far greater in extent than those of the divine pharaoh.

“Thy son and slave, Rameses, says this to thee,—he who all the time of his journey had his eyes open like a fish, and his ears set forward like an ass which is watching.”

The prince stopped. Tutmosis repeated the words mentally.

“If,” continued the viceroy, “his holiness asks for my opinion of the Assyrians, fall on thy face and answer,—

“Thy servant Rameses, if thou permit, makes bold to say that the Assyrians are strong and large men, and have perfect weapons; but it is evident that they have bad training. At the heels of Sargon marched the best Assyrian warriors, archers, axemen, spearmen, and still there were not six among them who could march in line warrior fashion. Besides they carry their spears crookedly, their swords are badly hung, they bear their axes like carpenters or butchers. Their clothing is heavy, their rude sandals gall their feet, and their shields, though strong, are of small use, for the men are awkward.”

“Thou speakest truth,” said Tutmosis. “I have noticed that, and I have heard the same from Egyptian officers who declare that Assyrian troops, like those which we saw here, would offer less resistance than the hordes of Libya.”

“Say also to our lord, who gives us life, that all the nobles and the Egyptian army are indignant at the mere report that Assyria might annex Phœnicia. Why, Phœnicia is the port of Egypt, and the Phœnicians the best warriors in our navy.

“Say, besides, that I have heard from Phœnicians (of this his holiness must know best of all) that Assyria is weak at the moment, for she has a war on her northern and eastern boundaries; all western Asia is arming against her. Should we attack to-day, we could win immense wealth, and take multitudes of captives who would help our slaves in their labor.

“But say, in conclusion, that the wisdom of my father excels that of all men, therefore I shall do whatsoever he commands, if only he gives not Phœnicia to King Assar; if he gives it, we are ruined. Phœnicia is the bronze door of our treasure-house, and where is the man who would yield his door to a robber?”

Tutmosis went to Memphis in the month Paofi (July and August).

The Nile was increasing mightily; hence the influx of Asiatic pilgrims to the temple of Astaroth diminished. People of the place betook themselves to the fields to gather with the utmost speed grapes, flax, and a certain plant which furnished cotton.

In one word, the neighborhood grew quiet, and the gardens surrounding the temples were almost deserted.

At that time Prince Rameses, relieved from amusements and the duties of the state, turned to his love affair with Kama. On a certain day he had a secret consultation with Hiram, who at his command gave the temple of Astaroth twelve talents in gold, a statue of the goddess wonderfully carved out of malachite, fifty cows and of wheat one hundred and fifty measures. That was such a generous gift that the high priest of the temple himself came to Rameses to fall prostrate and thank him for the favor which, as he said, people who loved the goddess would remember during all the ages.

Having settled with the temple, the prince summoned the chief of police in Pi-Bast and passed a long hour with him. Because of this the whole city was shaken some days later under the influence of extraordinary tidings: Kama, the priestess of Astaroth, had been seized, borne away and lost, like a grain of sand in a desert.

This unheard-of event occurred under the following conditions: The high priest of the temple sent Kama to the town Sabne-Chetam at Lake Menzaleh with offerings for the chapel of Astaroth in that place. To avoid summer heat and secure herself against curiosity and the homage of people, the priestess journeyed in a boat and during night hours. Toward morning, when the three wearied rowers were dozing, boats manned by Greeks and Hittites pushed out suddenly from among reeds at the shore, surrounded the boat bearing Kama, and carried off the priestess. The attack was so sudden that the Phœnician rowers made no resistance. The strangers gagged Kama, evidently, for she remained silent. The Greeks and Hittites after the sacrilege vanished in the reeds, to sail toward the sea afterward. To prevent pursuit they sank the boat which had borne the priestess.

Pi-Bast was as excited as a beehive. People talked of nothing else. They even guessed who did the deed. Some suspected Sargon, who had offered Kama the title of wife if she would leave the temple and remove to Nineveh. Others suspected Lykon, the temple singer, who long had burned with passion for the priestess. He was moreover rich enough to hire Greek slaves, and so godless that he would not hesitate to snatch away a priestess.

A Phœnician council of the richest and most faithful members was summoned to the temple. The council resolved, first of all, to free Kama from her duties as priestess and remove from her the curse against a virgin who lost her innocence in the service of the goddess.

That was a wise and pious resolution, for if some one had carried off the priestess and deprived her of sacredness against her will, it would have been unjust to punish her.

A couple of days later they announced, with sound of trumpet, to worshippers in the temple that the priestess Kama was dead, and if any man should meet a woman seeming like her he would have no right to seek revenge or even make reproaches. The priestess had not left the goddess, but evil spirits had borne her off; for this they would be punished.

That same day the worthy Hiram visited Rameses and gave him in a gold tube a parchment furnished with a number of seals of priests and signatures of Phœnician notables.

That was the decision of the spiritual court of Astaroth, which released Kama from her vows and freed her from the curse if she would renounce the name which she had borne while priestess.

The prince took this document and went after sundown to a certain lone villa in his garden. He opened the door in some unknown way and ascended one story to a room of medium dimensions, where by light from a carved lamp in which fragrant olive oil was burning, he saw Kama.

“At last!” cried he, giving her the gold tube. “Thou hast everything according to thy wishes.”

The Phœnician woman was feverish; her eyes flashed. She snatched the tube, looked at it, and threw it on the floor.

“Dost think this gold?” asked she. “I will bet my necklace that that tube is copper, and only covered on both sides with thin strips of gold.”

“Is that thy way of greeting me?” inquired the astonished Rameses.

“Yes, for I know my brethren,” said she. “They counterfeit not only gold, but rubies and sapphires.”

“Woman,” said the heir, “in this tube is thy safety.”

“What is safety to me? I am wearied in this place, and I am afraid. I have sat here four days as in prison.”

“Dost thou lack anything?”

“I lack air, amusement, laughter, songs, people. O vengeful goddess, how harshly thou art punishing!”

The prince listened with amazement. In that mad woman he could not recognize the Kama whom he had seen in the temple, that woman over whose person had floated the passionate song of the Greek Lykon.

“To-morrow,” said the prince, “thou canst go to the garden; and when we visit Memphis or Thebes, thou wilt amuse thyself as never in thy life before. Look at me. Do I not love thee, and is not the honor which belongs to me enough for a woman?”

“Yes,” answered she, pouting, “but thou hadst four women before me.”

“But if I love thee best?”

“If thou love me best, make me first, put me in the palace which that Jewess Sarah occupies, and give a guard to me, not to her. Before the statue of Astaroth I was first. Those who paid homage to the goddess, when kneeling before her, looked at me. But here what? Troops beat drums and sound flutes; officials cross their hands on their breasts, and incline their heads before the house of the Jewess—”

“Before my first-born son,” interrupted the prince, now impatient, “and he is no Jew.”

“He is a Jew!” screamed Kama.

Rameses sprang up.

“Art thou mad?” but quieting himself quickly, he added, “Dost thou not know that my son cannot be a Jew—”

“But I tell thee that he is a Jew!” cried Kama, beating the table with her fist. “He is a Jew, just as his grandfather is, just as his uncles are; and his name is Isaac.”

“What hast thou said, Phoenician woman? Dost wish that I should turn thee out?”

“Turn me out if a lie has gone from my lips. But if I have spoken truth, turn out that woman with her brat and give me her palace. I wish and deserve to be first in thy household. She deceives thee, reviles thee. But I, for thy sake, have deserted my goddess and exposed myself to her vengeance.”

“Give me proofs and the palace will be thine. No, that is false!” said Rameses. “Sarah would not permit such a crime. My first-born son!”

“Isaac—Isaac!” cried Kama. “Go to her, and convince thyself.”

Rameses, half unconscious, ran out from Kama’s house and turned toward Sarah’s villa. Though the night was starry, he lost his way and wandered a certain time through the garden. The cool air sobered him; he found the road to the villa and entered almost calmly.

Though the hour was late, they were awake there. Sarah with her own hands was washing swaddling-clothes for her son, and the servants were passing their time in eating, drinking, and music. When Rameses, pale from emotion, stood on the threshold, Sarah cried out, but soon calmed herself.

“Be greeted, lord,” said she, wiping her wet hands and bending to his feet.

“Sarah, what is the name of thy son?” inquired he.

She seized her head in terror.

“What is thy son’s name?” repeated he.

“But thou knowest, lord, that it is Seti,” answered she, with a voice almost inaudible.

“Look me in the eyes.”

“O Jehovah!” whispered Sarah.

“Thou seest that thou art lying. And now I will tell thee, my son, the son of the heir to the throne of Egypt, is called Isaac—and he is a Jew—a low Jew.”

“O God, O God of mercy!” cried Sarah, throwing herself at his feet.

Rameses did not raise his head for an instant, but his face was gray.

“I was forewarned,” said he, “not to take a Jewess to my house. I was disgusted when I saw thy country place filled with Jews; but I kept my disgust in subjection, for I trusted thee. But thou, with thy Jews, hast stolen my son from me, thou child thief!”

“The priests commanded that he should become a Jew,” whispered Sarah, sobbing at the feet of Rameses.

“The priests! What priests?”

“The most worthy Herhor, the most worthy Mefres. They said that it must be so,—that thy son would become the first king of the Jews.”

“The priests? Mefres?” repeated the prince. “King of the Jews? But I have told thee that thy son would become the chief of my archers, my secretary. I told thee this, and thou, wretched woman, didst think that the title of king of the Jews was equal to that of my secretary and archer. Mefres—Herhor! Thanks to the gods that at last I understand those dignitaries and know what fate they are preparing for my descendants.”

He thought awhile, gnawing his lips. Suddenly he called with a powerful voice,—

“Hei, servants, warriors!”

The room was filled in the twinkling of an eye. Sarah’s serving-women came in, the scribe and manager of the house, then the slaves; finally, a few warriors with an officer.

“Death!” cried Sarah, with a piercing voice.

She rushed to the cradle, seized her son, and, standing in the corner of the room, called out,—

“Kill me; but I will not yield my son!”

Rameses smiled.

“Centurion,” said he to the officer, “take that woman with her child and conduct her to the building where my household slaves dwell. That Jewess will not be mistress here; she is to be the servant of her who takes this place.

“And thou, steward,” said he, turning to the official, “see that the Jewess does not forget, to-morrow morning, to wash the feet of her mistress, who will come hither directly. If this serving-woman should prove stubborn, she is to receive stripes at command of her mistress. Conduct the woman to the servants’ quarters.”

The officer and steward approached Sarah, but stopped, as they dared not touch her; but there was no need to do so. Sarah wound a garment around the puling child, and left the room, whispering,—

“O God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, have mercy on us!”

She bowed low before the prince, and from her eyes tears flowed in silence.

While she was still in the antechamber, Rameses heard her sweet voice,—

“God of Abraham—Isa—”

When all was quiet, the viceroy called the officer and steward.

“Go with torches to the house among the fig-trees.”

“I understand,” replied the steward.

“And conduct hither, immediately, the woman who dwells there.”

“It will be done.”

“Thenceforth that woman will be thy mistress and the mistress of Sarah; the Jewess must wash the feet of her mistress every morning, pour water to her, and hold a mirror before her. That is my will, my command.”

“It shall be accomplished,” said the steward.

“And to-morrow morning thou wilt tell me if the new servant is stubborn.”

When he had given these commands, he returned home; but he did not sleep that night. He felt that without raising his voice for a moment he had crushed Sarah, the wretched Jewess, who had dared to deceive him. He had punished her as a king who with one movement of the eye dashes people down from heights into the abyss of servitude. But Sarah was merely an instrument of the priests, and the heir had too great a feeling of justice to forgive the real authors when he had broken the instrument.

His rage was intensified all the more because the priests were unassailable. He might send out Sarah with her child in the middle of the night to the servants’ house, but he could not deprive Herhor of his power, nor Mefres of the high priesthood. Sarah had fallen at his feet, like a trampled worm; but Herhor and Mefres, who had snatched his first-born from him, towered above Egypt, and, oh, shame! above him, the coming pharaoh, like pyramids.

And he could not tell how often in that year he had recalled the wrongs which priests had inflicted. At school they had beaten him with sticks till his back was swollen, or had tortured him with hunger till his stomach and spine had grown together. At the manœuvres of the year past, Herhor spoiled his whole plan, then put the blame on him, and took away the command of an army corps. That same Herhor drew on him the displeasure of his holiness because he had taken Sarah to his house, and did not

restore him to honor till the humiliated prince had passed a couple of months in a voluntary exile.

It would seem that when he had been leader of a corps and was viceroy the priests would cease tormenting him with their guardianship. But just then they appeared with redoubled energy. They had made him viceroy; for what purpose?—to remove him from the pharaoh, and conclude a shameful treaty with Assyria. They had used force in such form that he betook himself to the temple as a penitent to obtain information concerning the condition of the state; there they deceived him through miracles and terrors, and gave thoroughly false explanations.

Next they interfered with his amusements, his women, his relations with the pharaoh, his debts, and, finally, to humiliate and render him ridiculous in the eyes of Egyptians, they made his first-born a Hebrew.

Where was the laborer, where the slave, where an Egyptian convict in the quarries who had not the right to say, "I am better than thou, the viceroy, for no son of mine is a Hebrew."

Feeling the weight of the insult, Rameses understood at the same time that he could not avenge himself immediately. Hence he determined to defer that affair to the future. In the school of the priests he had learned self-command, in the court he had learned deceit and patience; those qualities became a weapon and a shield to him in his battle with the priesthood. Till he was ready he would lead them into error, and when the moment came he would strike so hard that they would never rise again.

It began to dawn. The heir fell asleep, and when he woke the first person he saw was the steward of Sarah's villa.

"What of the Jewess?" asked the prince.

"According to thy command, worthiness, she washed the feet of her new mistress," answered the official.

"Was she stubborn?"

"She was full of humility, but not adroit enough; so the angry lady struck the Jewess with her foot between the eyebrows."

The prince sprang up.

"And what did Sarah do?" inquired he, quickly.

"She fell to the pavement. And when the new mistress commanded her to go, she went out, weeping noiselessly."

The prince walked up and down in the chamber.

"How did she pass the night?"

"The new lady?"

"No! I ask about Sarah."

"According to command, Sarah went with her child to the servants' house. The women, from compassion, yielded a fresh mat to her, but she did not lie down to sleep; she sat the whole night with her child on her knees."

"But how is the child?" asked Rameses.

“The child is well. This morning, when the Jewess went to serve her new mistress, the other women bathed the little one in warm water, and the shepherd’s wife, who also has an infant, gave her breast to it.”

The prince stopped before the steward.

“It is wrong,” said he, “when a cow instead of suckling its calf goes to the plough and is beaten. Though this Jewess has committed a great offence, I do not wish that her innocent child should be a sufferer. Therefore Sarah will not wash the feet of the new lady again, and will not be kicked between the eyes by her a second time. Thou wilt set aside for her use in the servants’ house a room with food and furniture such as are proper for a woman recovered recently from childbirth. And let her nourish her infant in peace there.”

“Live thou through eternity, our ruler!” answered the steward: and he ran quickly to carry out the commands of the viceroy.

All the servants loved Sarah, and in a few days they had occasion to hate the angry and turbulent Kama.

Chapter XXXIX

THE priestess brought little happiness to the viceroy. When he came the first time to visit her in the villa occupied recently by Sarah, he thought: "I shall be met with delight now and gratitude."

Meanwhile Kama received him almost with anger.

"What is this?" cried she. "A half day has passed, and that wretched Jewess is restored to thy favor."

"Does she not dwell in the servants' house?" asked the prince.

"But my steward says that she will wash my feet no longer."

When the prince heard this, a feeling of disgust seized him.

"Thou art not satisfied, I see," said he.

"I shall not be satisfied till I humiliate that Jewess," cried Kama, "till she, by serving me and kneeling at my feet, forgets that she was once thy first woman and the mistress of this villa. I shall not be satisfied till my servants cease to look at me with fear and without confidence, and on her with compassion."

The Phœnician woman was less and less pleasing to Rameses.

"Kama," said he, "consider what I tell thee: If a servant here were to kick in the teeth a female dog that was suckling its young, I should hunt that servant out of this villa. Thou hast struck with thy foot between the eyes a woman and a mother. In Egypt mother is a great word. A good Egyptian reverences three things beyond all others,—the gods, the pharaoh, and his own mother."

"Oh, woe to me!" cried Kama, throwing herself on the couch. "Here is my reward, wretched woman, for denying my goddess. One week ago men placed flowers at my feet and burnt incense before me, but to-day—"

The prince walked out of the chamber quietly, and saw the priestess again only after some days had passed.

But she was still in evil humor.

"I implore thee, lord," cried she, "think a little more of me. My servants even begin to condemn me, the warriors look at me with a frown, and I am afraid that some one in the kitchen may poison the food prepared for me."

"I was occupied with the army, so I could not visit thee," replied the viceroy.

"That is untrue," answered Kama, in anger. "Yesterday thou wert outside the entrance to this house, and then thou didst go to the servants' house, where dwells the Jewess. Thou didst this to show—"

"Enough!" interrupted the prince. "I was neither here nor at the servants' house. If it seemed to thee that thou wert looking at me, that means that thy lover, that worthless Greek, not only has not left Egypt, but even dares to wander through my garden."

The Phœnician woman heard him with fright.

“O Astaroth!” cried she, suddenly. “Save me! Hide me, O earth! for if that wretch Lykon returns mighty misfortune is threatening me.”

The prince laughed, but he had not patience to listen to the complaints of the ex-priestess.

“Be at rest,” said he, when going, “and wonder not if after some days men bring in thy Lykon bound like a jackal. That insolent ruffian has worn out my patience.”

On returning to his palace the prince summoned Hiram and the chief of police in Pi-Bast. He told them that Lykon, the Greek with a face resembling his, was prowling around among the palaces, and he gave command to seize him. Hiram swore that if Phœnicians helped the police the Greek would be taken. But the chief shook his head.

“Dost doubt?” asked the prince.

“Yes, lord. In Pi-Bast dwell many pious Asiatics who think the priestess worthy of death because she deserted the altar. If this Greek has bound himself to kill Kama, they will help him, they will conceal the man, and facilitate flight for him.”

“What is thy answer to this?” asked the heir of Hiram.

“The worthy master of the palace speaks wisely,” replied the old Phœnician.

“But ye have freed Kama from the curse.”

“I guarantee that Phœnicians will not touch Kama, and will pursue the Greek. But what is to be done with the other adherents of Astaroth?”

“I make bold to think,” said the chief, “that nothing threatens this woman at present. If she had courage, we might employ her to decoy the Greek, and seize him here in thy palaces, O Erpatr.”

“Then go to her,” said the prince, “and lay before her whatever plan thou mayst think out. And if thou seize the man, I will give thee ten talents.”

When the heir left them, Hiram said to the chief,—

“Dignitary, I am aware that thou knowest both kinds of writing, and that the wisdom of priests is not strange to thee. When thou hast the wish, thou art able to hear through walls and see things in darkness. For this reason thou knowest the thoughts of the man who works with a bucket, the laborer, the artisan who takes sandals to market, the great lord who in the escort of his servants feels as safe as a child on the bosom of its mother.”

“Thou speakest truth,” replied the official. “The gods have given me a wonderful gift of clear insight.”

“That is it; thanks to thy gifts, thou hast guessed beyond doubt that the temple of Astaroth will appoint to thee twenty talents if thou seize that wretch who dares assume the appearance of the prince, our viceroy. Besides, in every case, the temple offers thee ten talents if news of the likeness of the wretched Lykon to the heir is not reported throughout Egypt; for it is offensive and improper that an ordinary mortal should recall by his features a personage descended from divinity.”

“Therefore let not that which thou hearest of the wretched Lykon go beyond our own hearts, nor any word touching our chase after that godless outcast.”

“I understand,” replied the official. “It may even happen that such a criminal may lose his life before we can give him to the court.”

“Thou hast said it,” replied Hiram, pressing his hand; “and every help asked by thee of Phœnicians will be furnished.”

They parted like two friends who were hunting a wild beast, and knew that the problem was not that their spear should strike, but that the beast should drop in its tracks and not go into other hands.

After some days Rameses visited Kama again, but found her in a state touching on insanity. She hid herself in the darkest room of the villa; she was hungry, her hair was not dressed, she was even unwashed. She gave the most contradictory commands to her servants; at one time she ordered all to come to her, at another she sent all away. In the night she summoned the guard of warriors, and fled to the highest chamber soon after, crying out that they wished to kill her.

In view of these actions all desire vanished from the prince’s soul, and there remained simply a feeling of great trouble. He seized his head when the steward of the palace and the officer told him of these wonders, and he whispered:

“Indeed, I did badly in taking that woman from her goddess; for the goddess alone could endure her caprices with patience.”

He went, however, to Kama, and found her emaciated, broken, and trembling.

“Woe to me!” cried she. “There are none around me but enemies. My tirewoman wishes to poison me; my hairdresser to give me some dreadful disease. The warriors are waiting an opportunity to bury swords and spears in my bosom; I am sure that instead of food, they prepare for me magic herbs in the kitchen. All are rising up to destroy me—”

“Kama!” interrupted the prince.

“Call me not by that name!” whispered she; “it will bring me misfortune.”

“But how do these ideas come to thee?”

“How? Dost thou think that in the daytime I do not see strange people who appear at the palace and vanish before I can call in my servants? And in the night do I not hear people outside the wall whispering?”

“It seems so to thee.”

“Cursed! Cursed!” cried Kama, weeping. “Ye all say that it seems to me. But the day before yesterday some criminal hand threw into my bedchamber a veil, which I wore half a day before I saw that it was not mine and that I had never worn a veil like it.”

“Where is that veil?” inquired the prince, now alarmed.

“I burned it, but I showed it first to my servants.”

“If not thine even, what harm could come of it?”

“Nothing yet. But had I kept that rag in the house two days longer, I should have been poisoned, or caught some incurable disorder. I know Asiatics and their methods.”

Wearied and irritated, the prince left her at the earliest, in spite of entreaties to stay. When he asked the servants about that veil, the tirewoman declared that it was not one of Kama’s; some person had thrown it into the chamber.

The prince commanded to double the watch at the villa and around it, and returned in desperation to his dwelling.

“Never should I have believed,” said he, “that a single weak woman could bring so much trouble. Four freshly caught hyenas are not so restless as that Kama!”

At his palace the prince found Tutmosis, who had just returned from Memphis and had barely taken time to bathe and dress after the journey.

“What hast thou to say?” inquired the prince of his favorite, divining that he had not brought pleasant tidings. “Hast thou seen his holiness?”

“I saw the sun-god of Egypt, and this is what he said to me—”

“Speak,” hurried Rameses.

“Thus spoke our lord,” answered Tutmosis, crossing his arms on his breast: “For four and thirty years have I directed the weighty car of Egypt, and I am so wearied that I yearn to join my mighty forefathers who dwell now in the western kingdom. Soon I shall leave this earth, and then my son, Rameses, will sit on the throne, and do with the state what wisdom points out to him.”

“Did my holy father speak thus?”

“Those are his words repeated faithfully. A number of times the lord spoke explicitly, saying that he would leave no command to thee, so that thou mightst govern Egypt as thy wishes indicate.”

“Oh, holy one! Is his illness really serious? Why did he not summon me?” asked the prince, in sorrow.

“Thou must be here, for thou mayst be of service in this part of Egypt.”

“But the treaty with Assyria?”

“It is concluded in this sense, that Assyria may wage war on the east and north without hindrance from Egypt. But the question of Phœnicia remains in abeyance till thou art the pharaoh.”

“O blessed! O holy ruler! From what a dreadful heritage thou hast saved me.”

“So Phœnicia remains in abeyance,” continued Tutmosis. “But still there is one bad thing. His holiness, to show Assyria that he will not hinder her in the war against northern peoples, has commanded to decrease our army by twenty thousand mercenaries.”

“What dost thou tell me!” cried the heir, astounded.

Tutmosis shook his head in sign of sorrow.

“I speak the truth, and four Libyan regiments are now disbanded.”

“But this is madness!” almost howled the heir, wringing his hands. “Why have we so weakened ourselves, and whither will those disbanded men go?”

“They have gone to the Libyan desert already, and will either attack the Libyans, which will cause us trouble, or will join them and both will attack then our western border.”

“I have heard nothing of this! What did they do, and when did they do it? No news reached us!” cried Rameses.

“The disbanded troops went to the desert from Memphis, and Herhor forbade to mention this news to any person.”

“Do neither Mefres nor Mentezufis know of this matter?”

“They know.”

“They know, and I do not.”

The prince grew calm on a sudden, but he was pale, and on his young face was depicted terrible hatred. He seized both hands of his favorite, pressed them firmly, and whispered,—

“Hear me! By the sacred heads of my father and mother, by the memory of Rameses the Great—by all the gods, if there are any, I swear that during my rule if the priests will not bow down before me I will crush them.”

Tutmosis listened in alarm.

“I or they!” finished the prince. “Egypt cannot have two lords.”

“Formerly it had only one, the pharaoh,” added Tutmosis.

“Then thou wilt be loyal to me?”

“I, all the nobles, and the army, I swear to thee.”

“Enough!” concluded Rameses. “Let them discharge the mercenary regiments, let them sign treaties, let them hide before me like bats, and let them deceive us all. But the time will come— And now, Tutmosis, rest after the journey; be with me at the feast this evening. Those people have so bound me that I can only amuse myself. Then let me amuse myself. But in time I will show them who the ruler of Egypt is,— they or I.”

From that day feasts began again. The prince, as if ashamed to meet the army, was not present at drills. Still, his palace was swarming with nobles, officers, jugglers, and singers, while at night great orgies took place, at which the sound of harps mingled with the drunken shouts of guests and the spasmodic laughter of women.

Rameses invited Kama to one of these feasts, but she refused.

The prince was offended. Seeing this, Tutmosis said,—

“They have told me, lord, that Sarah has lost thy favor.”

“Do not mention that Jewess to me,” replied Rameses. “But dost thou know what she did with my son?”

“I know; but that, it seems to me, was not her fault. I heard in Memphis that thy worthy mother and the worthy minister Herhor made thy son a Jew, so that he might rule over Israelites sometime—”

“But the Israelites have no king,—only priests and judges,” interrupted the prince.

“They have not, but they wish to have. They, too, are disgusted with priestly rule.”

The heir waved his hand contemptuously.

“A charioteer of his holiness means more than any king, especially any king of the Israelites, who as yet have no kingdom.”

“In every case, Sarah’s fault is not so great,” put in Tutmosis.

“Then know that I will pay the priests sometime.”

“They are not to blame so greatly. For instance, the worthy Herhor did this to increase the glory and power of thy dynasty. And he did it with the knowledge of thy mother.”

“But why does Mefres interfere? His single duty is to care for the temple, not influence the fate of the pharaoh’s descendants.”

“Mefres is an old man growing whimsical. The whole court of his holiness jeers at him because of practices, of which I know nothing, though I see the holy man almost daily.”

“This is curious. What does he do?”

“A number of times during twenty-four hours he performs solemn services in the most secret parts of the temple, and he commands the priests to see if the gods do not hold him suspended while praying.”

“Ha! ha!” laughed Rameses. “And all this is going on in Pi-Bast here under our eyes, and I do not know of it?”

“A priestly secret.”

“A secret of which all in Memphis are talking! Ha! ha! ha! In the amphitheatre I saw a Chaldean suspended in the air.”

“I saw him too; but that was a trick, while Mefres wishes to be borne above the earth really on the wings of his devotion.”

“Unheard-of buffoonery! What do the other priests say to this?”

“Perhaps in our sacred papyruses there is mention that in old times there were prophets among us who had the gift of suspending themselves in the air; so the desires of Mefres do not astonish priests nowadays. And since, as is known to thee, subordinates among us see whatever pleases superiors, some holy men claim that during prayer Mefres really rises a couple of fingers high above the pavement.”

“Ha! ha! ha! And with this great secret the whole court is occupied, and we, like laborers or earth-diggers, do not even suspect that miracles are wrought at one side of us. A wretched fate to be heir to the throne of Egypt!” laughed the viceroy.

When he grew calm, at the repeated request of Tutmosis, he commanded to transfer Sarah from the servants’ house to Kama’s first villa. The servants were delighted at this change; all the serving and slave women, and even the scribes conducted Sarah to her new dwelling with music and shouts of pleasure.

The Phœnician woman, when she heard the uproar, asked the reason; and when they told her that Sarah had been restored to the favor of the prince, and that from the servants’ house she had been transferred to the villa, the enraged ex-priestess sent for Rameses.

The prince came.

“Dost thou treat me in this way?” screamed she, losing control of her temper. “Thou didst promise that I should be thy first woman, but before the moon traversed half the heavens thy promise was broken. Perhaps thou thinkest that the vengeance of Astaroth will fall on the priestess alone, and not reach to princes.”

“Tell thy Astaroth,” replied Rameses, calmly, “not to threaten princes, or she may go herself to the servants’ house.”

"I understand!" exclaimed Kama. "I shall go to the servants' house, perhaps even to prison, while thou wilt spend nights with thy Jewess. Because I have left the gods for thee I have drawn down a curse on my own head. Because I left them I know no rest for a moment; I have lost my youth for thee, my life, my soul even, and this is the pay which thou givest me."

The prince confessed in his heart that Kama had sacrificed much for him, and he felt compunction.

"I have not been and shall not be with Sarah," said he. "But does it harm thee that the ill-fated woman has some comfort and can nourish her child unmolested?"

Kama trembled. She raised her clinched fist, her hair stirred, and in her eyes an ugly fire of hate was flashing.

"Is this the answer which thou givest me? The Jewess is unhappy because thou didst drive her from the villa, and I must be satisfied, though the gods have driven me out of their temples. But my soul—the soul of a priestess who is drowning in tears and in terror—does not mean more for thee than that brat of the Jew woman—this child, which, would he were dead—may he—"

"Silence!" cried the prince, shutting her mouth.

She drew back frightened.

"Then may I not even complain of my wretchedness?" inquired she. "But if thou art so careful of that child, why steal me from the temple, why promise that I should be first in thy household? Have a care," continued she, raising her voice again, "that Egypt, after learning my fate, may not call thee a faith-breaker."

The prince turned his head and laughed. But he sat down, and said,—

"My teacher was right, indeed, when he warned me against women: Ye are like ripe peaches in the eyes of a man whose tongue thirst has parched, but peaches ripe only in appearance. Woe to the fool who dares bite that fruit of fair seeming; instead of cooling sweetness he will find a nest of wasps that will sting not his lips alone, but his heart also."

"Wilt thou complain? Wilt thou not spare me even this shame after I have sacrificed to thee both my dignity of priestess and my virtue?"

The heir shook his head and smiled.

"Never could I have thought," said he, after a while, "that the story told by laborers before bedtime could have come true. But to-day I see the truth of it. Listen to me, Kama; perhaps thou wilt stop, and not force me to withdraw the good-will which I have for thee."

"He wishes now to tell a fable!" said the priestess, bitterly. "Thou hast told me one already, and I was profited by hearing it."

"This will profit thee if thou understand it."

"Will there be anything about Jewish brats in it?"

"Of priestesses there will be; only listen carefully."

"The following thing happened here long ago, in Pi-Bast:¹⁷

¹⁷ A true story.

“Once Prince Satni, on the square before the temple of Ptah, saw a very beautiful woman. She surpassed all whom he had met before, and, what was more noteworthy, she had much gold on her person.

“She pleased the prince greatly, and when he learned that she was the daughter of the high priest, he sent his equerry to her with the following offer,—

“‘I will give thee gold rings if thou wilt pass one short hour in my company.’

“The equerry went to the beautiful Tbubui and repeated the words of Prince Satni. When she had listened to him politely, she answered as became a well-bred young lady,—

“‘I am the daughter of a high priest; I am innocent, no low girl. So, if the prince wishes to have the pleasure of knowing me, let him come to my house, where everything will be ready, and where acquaintance with him will not expose me to the scandal of all the street gossips.’

“Prince Satni went to Tbubui’s chambers, the walls of which were covered with lapis lazuli and pale green enamel. There were also many couches decked with regal linen, and not a few one-legged tables on which gold goblets were standing. One of these goblets was filled with wine and given to the prince, while Tbubui said to him, ‘Be gracious, and drink.’ To this the prince answered, ‘Thou knowest that I have not come to drink wine here.’ Still the two sat down at the feast, during which Tbubui wore a long, heavy robe fastened at her neck closely. When the prince, excited by wine, wished to kiss her, she repelled him, and answered,—

“‘This house will be thine. But remember that I am no street woman, but an innocent maiden. If thou wish from me obedience, swear faith, and convey to me thy property.’

“‘Let the scribe come!’ cried the prince. When they brought in the scribe, Satni commanded him to write an act of betrothal, also a deed by which he transferred to Tbubui all his money, and all his property, personal and real.

“An hour later the servants announced to the prince that his children were waiting in the lower story. Tbubui left him then, but returned soon, attired in a transparent gauze robe. Satni wished again to embrace her, but she repelled him a second time, saying: ‘This house will be thine. But, since I am no common woman, but an innocent maiden, if thou wish to possess me, let thy children renounce every claim, lest they raise lawsuits hereafter with my children.’

“Satni called up his children, and commanded them to sign an act renouncing all claim to his possessions. They did so. But when, roused by long resistance, he approached Tbubui, she repelled him, saying,—

“‘This house will be thine. But I am no chance passing woman, I am a pure maiden. If thou love me, give consent to kill those children lest they take property from my children.’”

“This is rather a long story,” said Kama, impatiently.

“It will end right away. And dost thou know, Kama, what Satni replied to this: ‘If thou wish, let the crime be accomplished.’ Tbubui gave no chance to have these words said a second time. Before their father’s eyes she commanded to kill the children, and throw their bloody limbs to dogs and cats outside the windows. Only after that did Satni enter her chamber and repose on her bed, inlaid with ivory.”

“Tbubui did well not to trust to men’s promises,” said the irritated Kama.

“But Satni,” said the heir, “did better. He woke, for his dreadful crime was a dream only. And remember this, Kama, the surest way to rouse a man from love’s intoxication is to curse his son.”

“Be at rest, lord,” said Kama, gloomily, “I will never mention hereafter thy son or my sorrow.”

“And I will not withdraw my favor from thee, and thou wilt be happy,” said Rameses, in conclusion.

Chapter XL

AMONG the inhabitants of Pi-Bast alarming news had begun to circulate concerning the Libyans. It was said that those barbarian warriors, disbanded by the priests, began by begging on the road homeward, then they stole, and finally they fell to robbing and burning Egyptian villages, murdering the inhabitants meanwhile.

In the course of a few days they attacked and destroyed the towns of Chinen-su, Pinat, and Kasa, south of Lake Moeris, and they cut down also a caravan of merchants and Egyptian pilgrims returning from the oasis Uit-Mehe. The entire western boundary of the state was in peril, and even from Terenuthis inhabitants began to flee. And in the neighborhood beyond that, toward the sea, appeared bands of Libyans, sent, as it were, by the terrible chief, Musawasa, who, it seemed, was to declare a sacred war against Egypt.

Moreover, if any evening a western strip of sky was red for too long a time alarm fell on Pi-Bast. The people gathered along the streets; some of them went out on the flat roofs, or climbed trees, and declared that they saw a fire in Menuf or in Sechem. Some, even, in spite of darkness, saw fleeing people, or Libyan bands marching toward Pi-Bast in long black columns.

Notwithstanding the indignation of people, the rulers of provinces remained indifferent, for the central power issued no order.

Prince Rameses saw this alarm of the people and the indifference of dignitaries. Mad anger seized him, because he received no command from Memphis, and because neither Mefres nor Mentezufis spoke with him of dangers threatening Egypt.

But since neither priest visited him, and both, as it were, avoided conversation, the viceroy did not seek them, nor did he make any military preparations.

At last he ceased to visit the regiments stationed at Pi-Bast, but assembling at the palace all the young nobles, he amused himself and feasted, repressing in his heart indignation at the priests and anxiety for the fate of the country.

"Thou wilt see!" said he once to Tutmosis. "The holy prophets will manage us so that Musawasa will take Lower Egypt, and we shall have to flee to Thebes, if not to Sunnu, unless the Ethiopians drive us also from that place."

"Thou speakest truth," replied Tutmosis; "our rulers' acts resemble those of traitors."

The first day in the month of Hator (August-September) a great feast was given at the palace of the viceroy. They began to amuse themselves at two in the afternoon, and before sunset all present were drunk. It went so far that men and women rolled on the floor, which was wet with wine and covered with flowers and pieces of broken pitchers.

The prince was the soberest among them. He was not on the floor, he was sitting in an armchair, holding on his knees two beautiful dancers, one of whom was giving him wine, while the other was pouring strong perfumes on his head.

At this moment an adjutant entered the hall, and, stepping over a number of guests lying prostrate, hurried up to Rameses.

“Worthy lord,” said he, “the holy Mefres and the holy Mentezufis wish to speak at once with thee.”

The viceroy pushed the girls away, and with red face, stained garments, and tottering steps went to his chamber in the upper story. At sight of him Mefres and Mentezufis looked at each other.

“What do ye wish, worthy fathers?” asked the prince, dropping into an armchair.

“I do not know whether thou wilt be able to hear us,” answered the anxious Mentezufis.

“Ah! do ye think that I am tipsy?” cried the prince. “Have no fear. To-day all Egypt is either so mad or so stupid that most sense is found among drinkers.”

The priests frowned, but Mentezufis began,—

“Thou knowest, worthiness, that our lord and the supreme council determined to disband twenty thousand mercenary warriors?”

“Well, if I do not know?” said the heir. “Ye have not deigned to ask my advice in a question so difficult to determine, ye have not even thought it worth while to inform me that four regiments are disbanded, and that those men, because of hunger, are attacking our cities.”

“It seems to me, worthiness, that thou art criticising the commands of his holiness the pharaoh,” interrupted Mentezufis.

“Not of his holiness!” cried the prince, stamping, “but of those traitors who, taking advantage of the sickness of my father, wish to sell Egypt to Assyrians and Libyans.”

The priests were astounded. No Egyptian had ever used words of that kind.

“Permit, prince, that we return in a couple of hours, when thou shalt have calmed thyself,” said Mefres.

“There is no need of that. I know what is happening on our western boundary. Or rather it is not I who know, but my cooks, stable-boys, and laundrymen. Perhaps then ye will have the goodness, worthy fathers, to communicate your plans to me.”

Mentezufis assumed a look of indifference, and said,—

“The Libyans have rebelled and are collecting bands with the intention of attacking Egypt.”

“I understand.”

“At the desire, therefore, of his holiness,” continued Mentezufis, “and of the supreme council, thou art to take troops from Lower Egypt and annihilate the rebels.”

“Where is the order?”

Mentezufis drew forth from his bosom a parchment provided with seals, and gave it to the viceroy.

“From this moment then I command, and am the supreme power in this province,” said the viceroy.

“It is as thou hast said.”

“And I have the right to hold a military council with you?”

“Of course,” replied Mefres. “Even this moment—”

“Sit down,” interrupted the prince.

Both priests obeyed his command.

“I ask because in view of my plans I must know why the Libyan regiments were disbanded.”

“Others too will be disbanded,” caught up Mentezufis. “The supreme council desires to disband twenty thousand of the most expensive warriors, so that the treasury of his holiness may save four thousand talents yearly, without which want may soon threaten the court of the pharaoh.”

“A thing which does not threaten the most wretched of Egyptian priests,” added Rameses.

“Thou forgettest, worthiness, that it is not proper to call a priest wretched,” replied Mentezufis. “And if want threatens none of them, the merit is found in their moderate style of living.”

“In that case the statues drink the wine which is carried every day to the temples, while stone gods dress their wives in gold and jewels,” jeered Rameses. “But no more about your abstemiousness. Not to fill the treasury of the pharaoh has the council of priests disbanded twenty thousand troops and opened the gates of Egypt to bandits.”

“But why?”

“This is why: to please King Assar. And since his holiness would not agree to give Phœnicia to Assyria, ye wish to weaken the state in another way, by disbanding hired troops and rousing war on our western boundary.”

“I take the gods to witness that thou dost astonish us, worthiness,” cried Mentezufis.

“The shades of the pharaohs would be more astonished if they heard that in this same Egypt in which the power of the pharaoh is hampered, some Chaldean trickster is influencing the fate of the nation.”

“I do not believe my own ears,” replied Mentezufis. “What dost thou say of some Chaldean?”

The viceroy laughed sneeringly.

“I speak of Beroes. If thou, holy man, hast not heard of him, ask the revered Mefres, and if he has forgotten turn then to Herhor and Pentuer.”

“That is a great secret of our temples—”

“A foreign adventurer came like a thief to Egypt, and put on the members of the supreme council a treaty so shameful that we should be justified in signing it only after we had lost battles, lost all our regiments and both capitals. And to think that this was done by one man, most assuredly a spy of King Assar! And our sages let themselves be so charmed by his eloquence, that, when the pharaoh would not let them give up Phœnicia, they disbanded regiments in every case, and caused war on our western boundary. Have we ever heard of a deed like this?” continued Rameses, no longer master of himself. “When it was just the time to raise the army to three hundred thousand and hurry on to Nineveh, those pious maniacs discharged twenty thousand men and fired their own dwelling-house.”

Mefres, still and pale, listened to these jeers. At last he said,—

"I know not, worthy lord, from what source thou hast taken thy information. May it be as pure as the hearts of the highest counsellors! But let us suppose that thou art right, that some Chaldean priest had power to bring the council to sign a burdensome treaty with Assyria. If it happened thus, whence knowest thou that that priest was not an envoy of the gods, who through his lips forewarned us of dangers hanging over Egypt?"

"How do the Chaldeans enjoy your confidence to such a degree?" asked the viceroy.

"The Chaldean priests are elder brothers of the Egyptians," interrupted Mentezufis.

"Then perhaps the Assyrian king is the master of the pharaoh?"

"Blaspheme not, worthiness," said Mefres, severely. "Thou art pushing into the most sacred things frivolously, and to do that has proved perilous to men who were greater than thou art."

"Well, I will not do so. But how is a man to know that one Chaldean is an envoy of the gods, and another a spy of King Assar?"

"By miracles," answered Mefres. "If, at thy command, prince, this room should fill with spirits, if unseen powers were to bear thee in the air, we should know that thou wert an agent of the immortals, and should respect thy counsel."

Rameses shrugged his shoulders. "I, too, have seen spirits: a young girl made them. And I saw a juggler lying in the air in the amphitheatre."

"But thou didst not see the fine strings which his four assistants had in their teeth," put in Mentezufis.

The prince laughed again, and, remembering what Tutmosis had told him about the devotions of Mefres, he said in a jeering tone,—

"In the days of Cheops a certain high priest wished absolutely to fly through the air. With this object he prayed to the gods, and commanded his inferiors to see whether unseen powers were not raising him. And what will ye say, holy fathers? From that time forth there was no day when prophets did not assure the high priest that he was borne in the air,—not very high, it is true, about a finger from the pavement. But—what is that to thy power, worthiness?" inquired he of Mefres, suddenly.

The high priest, when he heard his own story, shook in the chair, and would have fallen had not Mentezufis supported him.

Rameses bustled about, gave the old man water to drink, rubbed vinegar on his temples and forehead, and fanned him.

Soon the holy Mefres recovered, rose from the chair, and said to Mentezufis,—

"May we not go now?"

"I think so."

"But what am I to do?" asked the prince, feeling that something evil had happened.

"Accomplish the duties of leader," said Mentezufis, coldly.

Both priests bowed to the prince ceremoniously, and departed. Rameses was not entirely sober, but a great weight fell on his heart. At that moment he understood that he had committed two grievous errors: He had confessed to the priests that he knew their great secret, and he had jeered, without mercy, at Mefres. He would have

given a year of his life could he have blotted from their memories all that drunken conversation. But it was too late then to do so.

"It cannot be hidden," thought he. "I have betrayed myself and procured mortal enemies. The position is difficult. The struggle begins at a moment which is for me most unfavorable. But let us go on. More than one pharaoh has struggled with the priests and conquered, even without having very strong allies."

Still he felt the danger of his position so clearly that at that moment he swore by the sacred head of his father that he would never drink wine again freely. He summoned Tutmosis. The confidant appeared at once, perfectly sober.

"We have a war, and I am commander," said the viceroy.

Tutmosis bent to the earth.

"I will never get drunk again," added the prince. "And knowest thou why?"

"A leader should abstain from wine and stupefying perfumes," said Tutmosis.

"I have not thought of that,—that is nothing; but I have babbled out a secret before the priests."

"What secret?" cried the terrified Tutmosis.

"This,—that I hate them, and jeer at their miracles."

"Oh, that is no harm. They never calculate on the love of people."

"And that I know their political secrets," added the prince.

"Ei!" hissed Tutmosis. "That is the one thing that was not needed."

"No help for it now," said Rameses. "Send out our couriers immediately to the regiments; let the chiefs meet to-morrow morning in a military council. Give command to light alarm signals, so that all the troops of Lower Egypt may march toward the western border to-morrow. Go to the nomarchs here, and command them to inform all the others to collect clothing, provisions, and weapons."

"We shall have trouble with the Nile," said Tutmosis.

"Then let every boat and barge be held at the arms of the Nile to ferry over troops. We must summon every nomarch to occupy himself in fitting out reserves."

Meanwhile Mefres and Mentezufis returned to their dwellings in the temple of Ptah. When they were alone in a cell, the high priest raised his hands, and exclaimed,—

"O Trinity of immortal gods,—Osiris, Isis, and Horus,—save Egypt from destruction! Since the world became the world, no pharaoh has ever uttered so many blasphemies as we have heard to-day from that stripling. What do I say, pharaoh?—No enemy of Egypt, no Hittite, Phœnician, or Libyan has ever dared so to insult priestly immunity."

"Wine makes a man transparent," answered Mentezufis.

"But in that youthful heart is a nest of serpents. He insults the priestly rank, he jeers at miracles, he has no belief in gods."

"But this concerns me most," said Mentezufis, thoughtfully,— "how did he learn of our negotiations with Beroes? for he knows them, I will swear to that."

"A dreadful treason has been committed," added Mefres, seizing his head.

"A very wonderful thing! There were four of us."

"Not at all four of us. The elder priestess of Isis knew of Beroes, two priests who showed him the road to the temple of Set, and a priest who received him at the door. But wait! that priest spends all his time in underground places. But if he overheard?"

"In every case he did not sell the secret to a stripling, but to some one more important; and that is dangerous."

The high priest of the temple of Ptah, the holy Sem, knocked at the door of the cell.

"Peace to you," said he, entering.

"Blessing to thy heart."

"I came, for ye were raising your voices as if some misfortune had happened. Does this war with the wretched Libyans not surprise you?"

"What dost thou think of the prince,—the heir to the throne?" asked Mentezufis, interrupting him.

"I think," answered Sem, "that he must be quite satisfied with the war and supreme command. He is a born hero. When I look at him I remember that lion, Rameses the Great. This youth is ready to rush at all the bands of Libya, and, indeed, he may scatter them."

"This youth," added Mefres, "is capable of overturning all our temples, and wiping Egypt from the face of the earth."

Holy Sem drew forth quickly a gold amulet which he wore on his breast, and whispered,—

"Flee, evil words, to the desert. Go far, and harm not the just. What art thou saying, worthiness?" continued he, more loudly, and in a tone of reproach.

"The worthy Mefres speaks truth," said Mentezufis. "Thy head would ache, and thy stomach also, should human lips repeat the blasphemous words which we have heard this day from that giddy stripling."

"Jest not, O prophet," said the high priest Sem, with indignation. "Sooner would I believe that water burns and air quenches than that Rameses would commit blasphemy."

"He did so in seeming drunkenness," said Mefres, maliciously.

"Even if he were drunk—I do not deny that the prince is frivolous, and a rioter; but a blasphemer—"

"So, too, did we think," said Mentezufis. "And we were so sure of knowing his character that when he returned from the temple of Hator we ceased even to exercise control over him."

"Thou wert sparing of gold to pay men for watching," said Mefres. "Thou seest now what results are involved in a neglect which seemed slight to thee."

"But what has happened?" inquired Sem, impatiently.

"I will answer briefly: the prince reviles the gods."

"Oho!"

"He criticises the commands of the pharaoh."

“Is it possible?”

“He calls the supreme council traitors.”

“But—”

“But from whom did he learn of the coming of Beroes, even of his interview with Mefres, Herhor, and Pentuer, in the temple of Set?”

The high priest Sem, seizing his head with both hands, walked up and down through the cell.

“Impossible!” said he. “Impossible! Has any one cast a spell over that young man? Perhaps the Phœnician priestess, whom he stole from the temple.”

This consideration seemed to Mentezufis so apposite that he looked at Mefres. But the angry high priest would not be turned aside for an instant.

“Let us see,” said he. “But first we must investigate and learn what the prince was doing day by day, after his return from the temple of Hator. He had too much freedom, too many relations with unbelievers and with enemies of Egypt. But thou wilt help us, worthy Sem.”

Because of this decision, the high priest Sem ordered to summon for the following day a solemn service at the temple of Ptah.

So they stationed on squares and at street corners, even in the fields, heralds of the priests, and called all the people with flutes and trumpets.

And when a sufficient number of hearers had assembled, they informed them that in the temple of Ptah there would be prayers and processions during three days, to the intent that the good god would bless Egyptian arms and crush Libyans; that he would send down on their leader, Musawasa, leprosy, insanity, and blindness.

As the priests wished, so was it done. From morning till late at night common people of every occupation crowded around the temple; the aristocracy and the wealthy citizens assembled in the forecourt; while the priests of the city and of the neighboring provinces made sacrifices to Ptah and repeated prayers in the most holy chapel.

Thrice daily did a solemn procession issue forth, carrying in a golden boat, concealed by curtains, the revered statue of the divinity; whereat the people prostrated themselves and confessed their faults loudly, while prophets disposed in the crowd numerous helped them to penitence by appropriate questions. A similar thing was done in the forecourt of the temple. But since officials and rich people did not like to accuse themselves openly, the holy fathers took them aside, and gave advice and exhortation in whispers.

In the afternoon the service was most solemn, for at that time the troops marching westward came to receive the blessing of the high priest, and strengthen the power of amulets which had the quality of weakening blows from the enemy.

Sometimes thunder was heard in the temple, and at night, above the pylons, there was lightning. This was a sign that the god had heard some one’s prayers, or was conversing with the priesthood.

When, after the ending of the solemnity, the three dignitaries—Sem, Mefres, and Mentezufis—met for consultation, the position had become clearer.

The solemnity had brought the temple about forty talents, but sixty talents had been given out in presents or in paying the debts of various persons of the aristocracy as well as of the highest military circles.

They had collected the following information:—

A report was current in the army, that when Prince Rameses mounted the throne, he would begin a war with Assyria, which would assure great profit to those taking part in it. The lowest soldier, they said, would not return without a thousand drachmas, or perhaps a still larger sum.

It was whispered among people that when the pharaoh returned with victory from Nineveh, he would give slaves to the earth-tillers, and remit for a number of years all taxes.

The aristocracy, on its part, judged that the new pharaoh would, first of all, take from priests and return to nobles all lands which had become temple property, and would pay also the debts of nobles. It was said, too, that the coming pharaoh would govern independently, without a supreme priestly council.

Finally, in all social circles there reigned a conviction that Rameses, to secure the aid of Phœnicia, had had recourse to the goddess Istar,¹⁸ to whom he showed marked devotion. In every case it was certain that the heir had once visited the temple of Istar, and had seen, in the night, certain miracles. Finally, rumors were current among Asiatics that Rameses had made immense presents to the temple, and in return had taken thence a priestess to confirm him in the faith of the goddess.

All these tidings were collected by the most worthy Sem and his assistants. The holy fathers, Mefres and Mentezufis, communicated to him other information which had come to them from Memphis:—

The Chaldean priest and miracle-worker, Beroes, was received in the subterranean parts of the temple of Set by the priest Osochar, who, when giving his daughter in marriage two months later, had presented her with rich jewels and bought a good estate for her and her husband. And since Osochar had no considerable income, a suspicion rose that that priest had overheard the conversation of Beroes with the Egyptian priests, and had sold to Phœnicians, criminally, the secret of the treaty, and received a great estate from them.

When he heard this, the high priest Sem added,—

“If the holy Beroes does, indeed, perform miracles, then ask him, first of all, if Osochar has betrayed the secret.”

“They inquired of Beroes,” said Mefres, “but the holy man answered that in that affair he preferred to be silent. He added, also, that even if some one had heard their conversation, and reported to Phœnicians, neither Egypt nor Chaldea would suffer any injury; and if they should find the guilty person, it would be proper to show him mercy.”

“A holy man! Indeed, a holy man!” whispered Sem.

“And what wilt thou say, worthiness,” asked Mefres, “of the prince and the disturbances which his conduct has caused in the country?”

¹⁸ Another form of Astarte.

“I will say the same as Beroes: ‘The heir does not cause harm to Egypt, so we should show him indulgence.’”

“This young man reviles the gods and miracles; he enters foreign temples, he excites the men to rebellion. These are no small matters,” said Mefres, bitterly. This priest could not pardon Rameses for having jeered at his devotion so rudely.

The high priest Sem loved Rameses; so he answered with a kindly smile,—

“What laborer is there in Egypt who would not like to have a slave, and abandon hard labor for sweet idleness? Or what man is there on earth who is without the dream of not paying taxes, since with that which he pays the treasury, his wife, he himself, and his children might buy showy clothes and use various dainties?”

“Idleness and excessive outlay spoil a man,” said Mentezufis.

“What warrior,” continued Sem, “would not desire war and covet a thousand drachmas, or even a greater sum? Further, I ask you, O fathers, what pharaoh, what nomarch, what noble pays old debts with alacrity, and does not look askance at the wealth of temples?”

“That is vile greed,” whispered Mefres.

“And, finally,” said Sem, “what heir to the throne has not dreamed of decreasing the importance of the priesthood? What pharaoh at the beginning of his reign has not tried to shake off the supreme council’s influence?”

“Thy words are full of wisdom,” said Mefres, “but to what may they lead us?”

“To this, not to accuse the heir before the supreme council, for there is no court that would condemn the prince for this, that earth-workers would be glad not to pay taxes, or that soldiers want war if they can have it. Nay, ye may receive a reprimand. For if ye had followed the prince day by day and restrained his minor excesses, we should not have at present that pyramid of complaints founded, moreover, on nothing. In such affairs the evil is not in this, that people are inclined to sin, for they have been so at all times. But the danger is here, that we have not guarded them. Our sacred river, the mother of Egypt, would very soon fill all canals with mud, if engineers ceased to watch it.”

“And what wilt thou say, worthiness, of the fictions which the prince permitted himself in speaking with us? Wilt thou forgive his foul reviling of miracles?” inquired Mefres. “Moreover this stripling has insulted me grievously in my religious practices.”

“Whoso speaks with a drunken man is himself an offender,” said Sena. “To tell the truth, ye had no right, worthy fathers, to speak with a man who was not sober about important state questions. Ye committed a fault in making a drunken man commander of an army. A leader must be sober.”

“I bow down before thy wisdom,” said Mefres; “still I vote to lay a complaint against the heir before the supreme council.”

“But I vote against a complaint,” answered Sem, energetically. “The council must learn of all acts of the viceroy, not through a complaint, but through an ordinary report to it.”

“I too am opposed to a complaint,” said Mentezufis.

The high priest, Mefres, seeing that he had two votes against him, yielded in the matter of a complaint. But he remembered the insult from the prince and hid ill-will in his bosom.

Chapter XLI

BY advice of astrologers the headquarters were to move from Pi-Bast on the seventh day of Hator. For that day was "good, good, good." Gods in heaven and men on earth rejoiced at the victory of Ra over his enemies; whoever came into the world on that day was destined to die at an advanced age surrounded by reverence.

That was a favorable day for pregnant women, and people trading in woven stuffs, but for toads and mice it was evil.

From the moment that he was appointed commander Rameses rushed to work feverishly. He received each regiment as it arrived; he inspected its weapons, its train, and its clothing. He greeted the recruits, and encouraged them to diligent exercise at drilling, to the destruction of their enemies and the glory of the pharaoh. He presided at every military council, he was present at the examination of every spy, and in proportion as tidings were brought in, he indicated on the map with his own hand the movement of Egyptian armies and the positions of the enemy.

He passed so swiftly from place to place that they looked for him everywhere, and still he swooped on them suddenly like a falcon. In the morning he was on the south of Pi-Bast and verified the list of provisions; an hour later he was north of the city, and discovered that a hundred and fifty men were lacking in the Ieb regiment. In the evening he overtook the advance guard, was at the crossing of an arm of the Nile, and passed in review two hundred war chariots.

The holy Mentezufis, who, as a representative of Herhor, understood the military art well, was overcome by astonishment.

"Ye know," said he to Sem and Mefres, "that I do not like the heir to the throne, for I have discovered his perversity and malice. But Osiris be my witness that that young man is a born leader. I will tell you a thing unparalleled: We shall concentrate our forces on the border three or four days earlier than it was possible to expect. The Libyans have lost the war already, though they have not heard the whistle of our arrows."

"So much the worse is such a pharaoh for us," interposed Mefres, with the stubbornness peculiar to old men.

Toward evening the sixth of Hator, Prince Rameses bathed and informed his staff that they would march on the morrow two hours before sunrise. "And now I wish to sleep," said he.

To wish for sleep was easier than to get it. The whole city was swarming with warriors; at the palace of the prince a regiment had encamped which had no thought of rest, but was eating, drinking, and singing.

The prince went to the remotest chamber, but even there he could not undress. Every few minutes some adjutant flew in with a report of no moment, or for an order in questions which could have been settled on the spot by the commander of a regiment. Spies were led in who brought no new information; great lords with small followings were announced; these wished to offer their services to the prince as

volunteers. Phœnician merchants broke in on him; these wanted contracts for the army, or were contractors who complained of the extortion of generals.

Even soothsayers and astrologers were not lacking, who in the last hours before marching wished to draw his horoscope for the viceroy; there were even practisers of the black art who wished to sell unfailing amulets against missiles.

These people simply broke into the prince's chamber: each one of them judged that the fate of the expedition was in his hands, and that in such a case every etiquette should vanish.

The heir satisfied all applicants patiently. But when behind an astrologer one of his own women pushed into the room with complaint that Rameses did not love her, since he had not taken farewell, and when a quarter of an hour later the weeping of another was heard outside the window, the heir could endure no longer; he summoned Tutmosis.

"Sit in this room," said he, "and if thou wish, console the women of my household. I will hide somewhere in the garden; if not, I shall not sleep and to-morrow I shall look like a hen just pulled out of a cistern."

"Where am I to seek thee in case of need?" asked Tutmosis.

"Oho! ho!" laughed the heir. "Seek me nowhere. I shall appear of myself when the trumpet is sounded."

And throwing over his shoulders a long mantle with a hood, he slipped out to the garden. Through the garden were prowling soldiers, kitchen boys, and other servants. In the whole space about the palace order had disappeared, as usual before an expedition. Noting this, Rameses turned to the densest part of the park, found a little arbor formed of grape-vines, and threw himself on a bench satisfied.

"Here neither priests nor women will find me," muttered the viceroy.

He fell asleep immediately, and slept like a stone.

Kama had felt ill for some days. To her irritation was joined some peculiar weakness and pain in the joints. Then there was an itching of her face, but especially of her forehead above the eyebrows.

These minute symptoms seemed to her so alarming that she ceased to dread assassination, but straightway she sat down before a mirror, and told her servants to withdraw and leave her. At such times she thought neither of Rameses nor the hated Sarah; all her attention was fixed on those spots which an untrained eye would not have even noticed.

"A spot—yes, these are spots," whispered she, full of terror. "Two, three— O Astaroth, but thou wilt not punish thy priestess in this way! Death would be better— But again what folly! If I rub my forehead, the spots will be redder. Evidently something has bitten me, or I have used impure oil in anointing. I will wash, and the spots will be gone by to-morrow."

The morrow came, but the spots had not vanished.

Kama called a servant.

"Listen!" said she. "Look at me!"

But as she spoke she sat down in a less lighted part of the chamber.

"Listen and look!" said she, in a stifled voice. "Dost thou see spots on my face? But come no nearer."

"I see nothing," answered the serving-woman.

"Neither under my left eye nor on my brows?" asked she, with growing irritation.

"Let the lady be pleased graciously to sit with the side of her face to the light," said the woman.

Of course that request enraged Kama.

"Away, wretch," cried she; "show thyself no more to me!"

When the serving-woman fled, her mistress rushed feverishly to the dressing-table, opened two little toilet jars, and with a brush painted her face rose-color.

Toward evening, feeling continual pain in her joints and fear in her heart, which was worse than pain, she commanded to call a physician. When they told her that the physician had come, she looked at the mirror, and was seized by a new attack, as it were of insanity. She threw the mirror to the pavement, and cried out with weeping that she did not need the physician.

During the sixth of Hator she ate nothing all day and would see no person.

When the slave woman brought in a light after sundown, Kama lay on the bed, after she had wound herself in a shawl. She ordered the slave to go out as quickly as possible; then she sat in an armchair at a distance from the lamp, and passed some hours in a half-waking stupor.

"There are no spots," said she, "and if there are, they are not spots of that kind! They are not leprosy. O ye gods!" cried she, throwing herself on the pavement. "It cannot be that I— O ye gods, save me! I will go back to the temple; I will do lifelong penance— I have no spots. I have been rubbing my skin for some days; that is why it is red. Again, how could I have it; has any one ever heard that a priestess and a woman of the heir to the throne could have leprosy? O ye gods! that never has happened since the world began. Only fishermen, prisoners, and vile Jews— Oh, that low Jewess! Heavenly powers, oh, send down leprosy to her!"

At that moment some shadow passed by the window on the first story. Then a rustle was heard, and from the door to the middle of the room sprang in—Lykon.

Kama was amazed. She seized her head suddenly, and in her eyes immense terror was depicted.

"Lykon!" whispered she. "Thou here, Lykon? Be off! They are searching for thee."

"I know," answered the Greek, with a jeering laugh. "All the Phœnicians are hunting me, and all the police of his holiness. Still I am with thee, and I have been in thy lord's chamber."

"Wert thou with the prince?"

"Yes; in his own bedchamber. And I should have left a dagger in his breast if the evil spirits had not saved him. Evidently he went to some other woman, not to thee."

"What dost thou wish here?" whispered Kama. "Flee!"

"But with thee. On the street a chariot is ready for us; on this we shall ride to the Nile, and there my boat is in waiting."

"Thou hast gone mad! But the city and the streets are filled with warriors."

"For that very reason I was able to enter this palace, and we can escape very easily. Collect all thy treasures. I shall be back here immediately and take thee."

"Whither art thou going?"

"I am seeking thy lord. I shall not go without leaving him a memento."

"Thou art mad!"

"Be silent!" interrupted Lykon, pale from anger. "Thou wishest yet to defend him."

The Phœnician woman tottered; she clinched her fists, and an evil light flashed in her eyes.

"But if thou canst not find him?"

"Then I will kill one of his sleeping warriors. I will set fire to the palace. Do I know what I shall do? But I will not go without leaving a memento."

The great eyes of the Phœnician woman had such a ghastly look that the Greek was astonished.

"What is the matter with thee?" asked Lykon.

"Nothing; listen. Thou hast never been so like the prince as to-day. Hence, if thou wish to do a good thing—"

She put her face to his ear and whispered.

The Greek listened in amazement.

"Woman," said he, "Hades speaks through thee."

"Yes; suspicion will be turned on him."

"That is better than a dagger," said Lykon, laughing. "Never could I have come on that idea. Perhaps both would be better?"

"No! Let her live. This will be my vengeance."

"What a wicked soul!" whispered Lykon. "But thou pleasest me. We will pay them both in kingly fashion."

He withdrew to the window and vanished. Kama leaned out after him, and forgetting every other thing, listened in a fever.

Perhaps a quarter of an hour after the departure of Lykon, at the side of the fig grove rose the piercing shriek of a woman. It was repeated a couple of times, and then ceased.

Instead of the expected delight, terror seized Kama. She fell on her knees, and gazed into the dark garden with a wandering stare.

Below was heard almost noiseless running; there was a squeak at the pillar in the antechamber, and in the window appeared Lykon again in a dark mantle. He was panting with violence, and his hands trembled.

"Where are thy jewels?" whispered he.

"Let me alone," replied she.

The Greek seized her by the shoulder.

“Wretch! Dost thou not understand that before sunrise they will imprison thee, and will strangle thee a couple of days later?”

“I am sick.”

“Where are thy jewels?”

“Under the bed.”

Lykon went to her bedchamber; with the light of a lamp he drew out a heavy casket, threw a mantle over Kama, and pulled her by the arm.

“Make ready! Where are the doors through which he comes to thee—that lord of thine?”

“Leave me!”

The Greek bent to her, and whispered,—

“Aha! Dost think that I will leave thee here? I care as much for thee now as I do for a dog that has lost sense of smell. But thou must go with me. Let that lord of thine know that there is a man better than he. He stole a priestess from Astaroth, I take his mistress from the heir of Egypt.”

“I tell thee that I am sick.”

The Greek drew out a slender blade, and put the point of it to her throat.

Kama trembled, and whispered,—

“I go.”

They passed through the secret door to the garden. From the direction of the palace came the noise of warriors kindling fires. Here and there among the trees were lights; from time to time some one in the service of the heir passed the pair. At the gate the guard stopped them,—

“Who are ye?”

“Thebes,” answered Lykon.

Then they went out to the street unhindered, and vanished in the alleys of the foreign quarter.

Two hours before daybreak drums and trumpets sounded through the city.

Tutmosis was lying sunk in deep sleep, when Prince Rameses pulled his mantle, and called,—

“Rise, watchful leader. The regiments are marching!”

Tutmosis sat up in bed and rubbed his drowsy eyes.

“Ah, is it thou, lord?” asked he, yawning. “Hast thou slept?”

“As never before,” replied Rameses.

“But I should like to sleep more.”

Both bathed, put on their jackets and light mail, then mounted horses, which were tearing away from the equerries.

Soon the heir, with a small suite, left the city, and on the way passed slowly moving columns. The Nile had overflowed widely, and the prince wished to be present at the passage of fords and canals.

At sunrise the last army chariot was far outside the city, and the worthy nomarch of Pi-Bast said to his servants,—

“I am going to sleep now, and woe to the man who rouses me before the hour of our feast in the evening! Even the divine sun rests when each day is past, while I have not lain down since the first day of Hator.”

Before he had finished praising his own watchfulness, a police officer entered, and begged for a special hearing in a case of immense importance.

“Would that the earth had swallowed thee!” muttered the worthy nomarch.

But still he commanded to summon the officer, and inquired with ill-humor,—

“Is it not possible to wait a few hours? The Nile will not run away, as it seems to me.”

“A terrible misfortune has happened,” replied the officer. “The son of the erpatr is killed.”

“What? Who?” cried the nomarch.

“The son of the Jewess Sarah.”

“Who killed him? When—”

“Last night.”

“But who could do this?”

The officer bent his head and spread his arms.

“I asked who killed him?” repeated the nomarch, more astonished than angry.

“Be pleased, lord, thyself to investigate. My lips will not utter what my ears have heard.”

The astonishment of the nomarch increased. He gave command to lead in Sarah’s servants, and sent for Mefres, the high priest. Mentezufis, as representative of the minister of war, had gone with the viceroy.

The astonished Mefres came. The nomarch told of the murder of the child, and said that the police official dared not give explanations.

“But are there witnesses?” inquired the high priest.

“We are waiting for thy commands, holy father.”

They brought in Sarah’s doorkeeper.

“Hast thou heard,” inquired the nomarch, “that the child of thy mistress is killed?”

The man fell to the pavement, and answered,—

“I have even seen the worthy remains broken against the wall, and I detained our lady when she ran out to the garden, screaming.”

“When did this happen?”

“At midnight. Immediately after the most worthy heir came to our lady,” answered the watch.

“How is this? Did the prince visit thy lady last night?” inquired Mefres.

“Thou hast said it, great prophet.”

“This is wonderful!” whispered Mefres to the nomarch.

The second witness was Sarah's cook, the third her waiting-woman. Both declared that after midnight the prince had entered Sarah's chamber, stayed there awhile, then run out quickly to the garden, and soon after him appeared Lady Sarah, screaming terribly.

"But the prince remained all night in his chamber; he did not leave the palace," said the nomarch.

The police-officer shook his head, and declared that some of the palace servants were waiting in the antechamber.

They were summoned. Mefres questioned them, and it appeared that the heir had not slept in the palace. He had left his chamber before midnight, and gone to the garden; he returned when the first trumpet sounded.

When the witnesses had been led out, and the two dignitaries were alone, the nomarch threw himself on the pavement, and declared to Mefres that he was grievously ill, and would rather lose his life than carry on investigations. The high priest was very pale and excited; but he replied that they must clear up a question of murder, and he commanded the nomarch in the name of the pharaoh to go with him to Sarah's dwelling. It was not far to the garden of the heir, and the two dignitaries soon found themselves at the place where the crime had been committed.

When they entered the chamber on the first story, they saw Sarah kneeling at the cradle in such a posture as if nursing the child. On the wall and the pavement were blood spots.

The nomarch grew so weak that he was forced to sit down, but Mefres was calm. He approached Sarah, touched her arm, and said,—

"We come hither, lady, in the name of his holiness."

Sarah sprang to her feet suddenly, and, looking at Mefres, cried in a terrible voice,—

"A curse on you! Ye wished to have a Jew king, and here is the king for you. Oh, why did I, unfortunate, listen to your traitorous advice!"

She dropped, and fell again at the side of the cradle, groaning,—

"My son—my little Seti! How beautiful he was,—so cunning; just stretching out his little hands to me! O Jehovah! give him back to me, for that is in Thy power. O gods of Egypt,—Osiris, Horus, Isis,—O Isis, for thou too wert a mother! It cannot be that in the heavens there is not one who will listen to my prayer. Such a dear, little child! A hyena would have spared him—"

The high priest took her by the arms, and put her on her feet. The police and the servants filled the room.

"Sarah," said the high priest, "in the name of his holiness, the lord of Egypt, I summon thee, and command thee to answer, Who killed thy son?"

She gazed straight ahead, like a maniac, and rubbed her forehead.

The nomarch gave her water and wine, and one of the women present sprinkled her with vinegar.

"In the name of his holiness," repeated Mefres, "I command thee, Sarah, to tell the name of the murderer."

Those present withdrew toward the door; the nomarch with despairing action closed both his ears.

“Who killed?” said Sarah, in a panting voice, sinking her gaze in the face of Mefres. “Who killed, dost *thou* ask? I know you, ye priests! I know *your* justice.”

“Then who killed?” insisted Mefres.

“I!” cried Sarah, in an unearthly voice. “I killed my child, because ye made him a Jew.”

“That is false!” hissed the high priest.

“I, I!” repeated Sarah. “Hei, ye people who see me and hear me,” she turned to the witnesses, “ye know that I killed him—I—I—I!” cried she, beating her breast.

At such an explicit accusation of herself the nomarch recovered, and looked with compassion on Sarah; the women sobbed, the doorkeeper wiped away tears. But the holy Mefres closed his blue lips firmly. At last he said, with emphatic voice, while looking at the police official,—

“Servants of his holiness, I surrender this woman, whom ye are to conduct to the edifice of justice—”

“But my son with me!” interrupted Sarah, rushing to the cradle.

“With thee, with thee, poor woman,” said the nomarch; and he covered his face.

The dignitaries went out of the chamber. The police officer had a litter brought, and with marks of the highest respect conducted Sarah down to it. The unfortunate woman seized a blood-stained bundle from the cradle, and took a seat, without resistance, in the litter.

All the servants went after her to the chamber of justice.

When Mefres, with the nomarch, was passing through the garden, the nomarch said,—

“I have compassion on that woman.”

“She will be punished properly for lying,” answered the high priest.

“Dost thou think so, worthiness?”

“I am certain that the gods will discover and punish the real murderer.”

At the garden gate the steward of Kama’s villa stood in the road before them.

“The Phoenician woman is gone. She disappeared last night.”

“A new misfortune,” whispered the nomarch.

“Have no fear,” said Mefres; “she followed the prince.”

From these answers the worthy nomarch saw that Mefres hated the prince, and his heart sank in him. If they proved that Rameses had killed his own son, the heir would never ascend the throne of his fathers, and the heavy yoke of the priesthood would weigh down still more mightily on Egypt.

The sadness of the nomarch increased when they told him in the evening that two physicians of the temple of Hator, when looking at the corpse of the infant, had expressed the opinion that only a man could have committed the murder. Some man, said they, seized with his right hand the feet of the little boy, and broke his skull

against the wall of the building. Sarah's hand could not clasp both legs, on which, moreover, were traces of large fingers.

After this explanation Mefres, in company with the high priest Sem, went to Sarah in the prison, and implored her by all the gods of Egypt and of foreign lands to declare that she was not guilty of the death of the child, and to describe the person of the murderer.

"We will believe thy word," said Mefres, "and thou wilt be free immediately."

But Sarah, instead of being moved by this proof of friendliness, fell into anger.

"Jackals," cried she, "two victims are not enough; ye want still more. I, unfortunate woman, did this; I,—for who else would be so abject as to kill a child—a little child that had never harmed any one?"

"But dost thou know, stubborn woman, what threatens thee?" asked the holy Mefres. "Thou wilt hold the remains of thy child for three days in thy arms, and then be fifteen years in prison."

"Only three days?" repeated Sarah. "But I would never part with my little Seti; and not only to prison, but to the grave will I go with him, and my lord will command to bury us together."

When the high priest left Sarah, the most pious Sem said,—

"I have seen mothers who killed their own children, and I have judged them; but none were like her."

"For she did not kill her child," answered Mefres, angrily.

"Who, then?"

"He whom the servants saw when he rushed into Sarah's house and fled a moment later; he who, when going against the enemy, took with him the priestess Kama, who defiled the altar; he," concluded Mefres, excitedly, "who hunted Sarah out of the house, and made her a slave because her son had been made a Jew."

"Thy words are terrible," answered Sem, in alarm.

"The criminal is still worse, and, in spite of that stupid woman's stubbornness, he will be discovered."

But the holy man did not suppose that his prophecy would be accomplished so quickly.

And it was accomplished in the following manner:—Prince Rameses, when moving from Pi-Bast with the army, had not left the palace when the chief of the police learned of the murder of Sarah's child, and the flight of Kama, and this, too,—that Sarah's servants saw the prince entering her house in the night time. The chief of police was a very keen person; he pondered over this question, Who could have committed the crime? and instead of inquiring on the spot, he hastened to pursue the guilty parties outside the city, and forewarned Hiram of what had happened.

While Mefres was trying to extort a confession from Sarah, the most active agents of the Pi-Bast police, and with them every Phœnician under the leadership of Hiram, were hunting the Greek Lykon and the priestess Kama.

So three nights after the prince had departed, the chief of police returned to Pi-Bast, bringing with him a large cage covered with linen, in which was some woman who

screamed in heaven-piercing accents. Without lying down to sleep, the chief summoned the officer who had made the investigation, and listened to his report attentively.

At sunrise the two priests, Sem and Mefres, with the nomarch of Pi-Bast, received a most humble invitation to deign immediately, should such be their will, to come to the chief of police. In fact, all three entered at the very same moment; so the chief, bending low, implored them to tell all that they knew concerning the murder of the son of the viceroy.

The nomarch, though a great dignitary, grew pale when he heard the humble invitation, and answered that he knew nothing. The high priest Sem gave almost the same answer, adding, for himself, the reflection that Sarah seemed to him innocent.

When the turn came to the holy Mefres, he said,—

“I know not whether thou hast heard, worthiness, that during the night of the crime one of the prince’s women escaped; her name was Kama.”

The chief of police feigned to be greatly astonished.

“I know not,” continued Mefres, “whether they have told thee that the heir did not pass the night in the palace, but was in Sarah’s house. The doorkeeper and two servants recognized him, for the night was rather clear. It is a great pity,” finished the high priest, “that thou hast not been here these two days past.”

The chief bowed very low to Mefres, and turned to the nomarch,—

“Wouldst thou be pleased, worthiness, to tell me, graciously, how the prince was dressed that evening?”

“He wore a white jacket, and a purple apron with gold fringe,” answered the nomarch. “I remember very well, for that evening I was one of the last who spoke with him.”

The chief of the police clapped his hands, and Sarah’s doorkeeper entered the chamber.

“Didst thou see the prince,” inquired he, “when he came in the night to the house of thy lady?”

“I opened the door to his worthiness,—may he live through eternity!”

“And dost thou remember how he was dressed?”

“He wore a jacket with yellow and black stripes, a cap of the same colors, and a blue and red apron,” answered the doorkeeper.

Both priests and the nomarch began to wonder.

Then they brought in Sarah’s servants, who repeated exactly the same description of the prince’s dress. The nomarch’s eyes flashed with delight, but on the face of the holy Mefres confusion was evident.

“I will swear,” put in the worthy nomarch, “that the prince wore a white jacket and a purple apron with gold fringe.”

“Now, most worthy men,” said the chief of police, “be pleased to come with me to the prison. There we shall see one more witness.”

They went to a subterranean hall, where under a window stood a great cage covered with linen. The chief threw back the linen with his stick, and those present saw a woman lying in a corner.

“But this is the Lady Kama!” cried the nomarch.

It was indeed Kama, sick and changed very greatly. When she rose at sight of the dignitaries, and appeared in the light, those present saw that her face had bronze-colored spots on it. Her eyes seemed wandering.

“Kama,” said the chief, “the goddess Astaroth has touched thee with leprosy.”

“It was not the goddess!” said she, with a changed voice. “It was the low Asiatics, who threw in a tainted veil to me. Oh, I am unfortunate!”

“Kama,” continued the chief, “our most famous high priests, Sem and Mefres, have taken compassion on thee. If thou wilt tell the truth, they will pray for thee, and perhaps the all-mighty Osiris will turn from thee misfortune. There is still time, the disease is only beginning, and our gods have great power.”

The sick woman fell on her knees, and pressing her face against the grating, said in a broken voice,—

“Have compassion on me! I have renounced Phœnician gods, and to the end of life will serve the gods of Egypt. Only avert from me—”

“Answer, but answer truly,” said the chief, “and the gods will not refuse thee their favor. Who killed the child of the Jewess Sarah?”

“The traitor, Lykon, the Greek. He was a singer in our temple, and said that he loved me. But he has rejected me, the infamous traitor, and seized my jewels.”

“Why did Lykon kill the child?”

“He wanted to kill the prince, but not finding him in the palace, he ran to Sarah’s villa.”

“How did the criminal enter a house that was guarded?”

“Dost thou not know that Lykon resembles the prince? They are as much alike as two leaves of one palm-tree.”

“How was Lykon dressed that night?”

“He wore a jacket in yellow and black stripes, a cap of the same material, and a red and blue apron. Do not torment me; return me my health! Be compassionate! I will be faithful to your gods! Are ye going already? Oh, hard-hearted!”

“Poor woman,” said the high priest Sem, “I will send to thee a mighty worker of miracles; he may—”

“May ye be blessed by Astaroth! No, may your almighty and compassionate gods bless you,” whispered Kama, in dreadful weariness.

The dignitaries left the prison and returned to the upper hall. The nomarch, seeing that the high priest Mefres kept his eyes cast down and his lips fixed, asked him,—

“Art thou not rejoiced, holy man, at these wonderful discoveries made by our chief?”

“I have no reason to rejoice,” answered Mefres, dryly. “The case, instead of being simplified, has grown difficult. Sarah asserts that she killed the child, while the Phœnician woman answers as if some one had taught her—”

"Then dost thou not believe, worthiness?" interrupted the chief.

"No, for I have never seen two men so much alike that one could be mistaken for the other. Still more, I have never heard that there exists in Pi-Bast a man who could counterfeit our viceroy,—may he live through eternity!"

"That man," said the chief, "was in Pi-Bast, at the temple of Astaroth. The Tyrian Prince Hiram knew him, and our viceroy has seen him with his own eyes. More than that, not long ago, he commanded me to seize him, and even offered a large reward."

"Ho! ho!" cried Mefres, "I see, worthy chief,—I see that the highest secrets of the state are concentrating about thee. But permit me not to believe in that Lykon till I see him."

And he left the hall in anger, and after him Sem, shrugging his shoulders. But when their steps had ceased to sound in the corridor, the nomarch, looking quickly at the chief, asked,—

"What dost thou think?"

"Indeed," said the chief, "the holy prophets are beginning to interfere in things which have never been under their jurisdiction."

"And we must endure this!" whispered the nomarch.

"For a time only," sighed the chief. "In so far as I know men's hearts, all the military, all the officials of his holiness, in fine, all the aristocracy, are indignant at this priestly tyranny. Everything must have its limit."

"Thou hast uttered great words," said the nomarch, pressing the chief's hand, "and some internal voice tells me that I shall see thee as supreme chief of police at the side of his holiness."

A couple of days passed. During this time the dissectors had secured from corruption the remains of the viceroy's son; but Sarah continued in prison, awaiting her trial, certain that she would be condemned.

Kama was sitting, also, confined in her cage; people feared her, for she was infected with leprosy. It is true that a miracle-working physician visited her, repeated prayers before her, gave her everything to drink, and gave her healing water. Still, fever did not leave the woman, and the bronze-colored spots on her cheeks and brows grew more definite. Therefore an order came from the nomarch to take her out to the eastern desert, where, separated from mankind, dwelt a colony of lepers.

On a certain evening the chief appeared at the temple of Ptah, saying that he wished to speak with the high priest. The chief had with him two agents, and a man covered from head to foot in a bag.

After a while an answer was sent to the chief that the high priests were awaiting him in the sacred chamber of the statue of their divinity.

The chief left the agents before the gate, took by the arm the man dressed in the bag, and, conducted by a priest, went to the sacred chamber. When he entered, he found Mefres and Sem arrayed as high priests, with silver plates on their bosoms.

He fell before them on the pavement, and said,—

"In accordance with your commands, I bring to you, holy fathers, the criminal Lykon. Do ye wish to see his face?"

When they assented, the chief rose, and pulled the bag from the man standing near him.

Both high priests cried out with astonishment. The Greek was really so like Rameses that it was impossible to resist the deception.

“Thou art Lykon, the singer from the temple of Astaroth?” asked the holy Sem of the bound Greek.

Lykon smiled contemptuously.

“And didst thou kill the child of the prince?” added Mefres.

The Greek grew blue from rage, and strove to tear off his bonds.

“Yes!” cried he, “I killed the whelp, for I could not find the wolf, his father,—may heaven’s blazes burn him!”

“In what has the prince offended thee, criminal?” asked the indignant Sem.

“In what? He seized from me Kama, and plunged her into a disease for which there is no remedy. I was free, I might have fled with life and property, but I resolved to avenge myself, and now ye have me. It was his luck that your gods are mightier than my hatred. Now ye may kill me; the sooner ye do so, the better.”

“This is a great criminal,” said Sem.

Mefres was silent and gazed into the Greek’s eyes, which were burning with rage. He admired his courage, and fell to thinking. All at once he said to the chief,—

“Worthy sir, thou mayst go, this man belongs to us.”

“This man,” replied the chief, who was indignant, “belongs to me. I seized him and I shall receive a reward from Prince Rameses.”

Mefres rose and drew forth from under his mantle a gold medal.

“In the name of the supreme council, of which I am a member,” said he, “I command thee to yield this man to us. Remember that his existence is among the highest state secrets, and indeed it would be a hundred times better for thee to forget that thou hast left him here.”

The chief fell again to the pavement, and went out repressing his anger.

“Our lord the prince will repay you when he is the pharaoh!” thought he. “And he will pay you my part—ye will see.”

“Where is the prisoner?” asked the agents standing before the gate.

“In prison,” answered the chief; “the hands of the gods have rested on him.”

“And our reward?” asked the elder agent.

“The hands of the gods have rested on your reward also. Imagine then to yourselves that ye saw that prisoner only in a dream, ye will be safer in health and in service.”

The agents dropped their heads in silence. But in their hearts they swore vengeance against the priests, who had taken a handsome reward from them.

After the chief had gone Mefres summoned a number of priests, and whispered something into the ears of the eldest. The priests surrounded the Greek and conducted him out of the chamber. Lykon made no resistance.

“I think,” said Sem, “that this man should be brought before the court as a murderer.”

“Never!” cried Mefres, with decision. “On this man weighs an incomparably greater crime, he is like the heir to the throne.”

“And what wilt thou do with him, worthiness?”

“I will reserve him for the supreme council,” said Mefres. “When the heir to the throne visits pagan temples and steals from them women, when the country is threatened with danger of war, and the power of the priests with rebellion, Lykon may be of service.”

On the following midday the high priest Sem, the nomarch, and the chief of police went to Sarah’s prison. The unfortunate woman had not eaten for a number of days, and was so weak that she did not rise from the bench even in presence of so many dignitaries.

“Sarah,” said the nomarch, whom she had known before, “we bring thee good news.”

“News,” repeated she with a pathetic voice. “My son is not living, that is the news; my breast is full of nourishment, but my heart is full of sadness.”

“Sarah,” said the nomarch, “thou art free. Thou didst not kill thy child.”

Her seemingly dead features revived. She sprang from the bench, and cried,—

“I—I killed him—only I.”

“Consider, Sarah, a man killed thy son, a Greek, named Lykon, the lover of the Phœnician Kama.”

“What dost thou say?” whispered she, seizing the nomarch’s hands. “Oh, that Phœnician woman! I knew that she would ruin us. But the Greek? I know no Greek. How could my son offend any man?”

“I know not,” continued the nomarch. “That Greek is no longer alive. But that man was so like Prince Rameses that when he entered thy chamber thou didst think him our lord. And thou hast preferred to accuse thy own self rather than our lord, and thine.”

“Then that was not Rameses?” cried she, seizing her head. “And I, wretched woman, let a strange man take my son from his cradle. Ha! ha! ha!”

Then she laughed more and more. On a sudden, as if her legs had been cut from under her, she fell to the floor, her hands hopped a couple of times, and she died in hysteric laughter.

But on her face remained an expression of sorrow which even death could not drive from it.

Chapter XLII

THE western boundary of Egypt for a distance of more than a hundred geographic miles is composed of a wall of naked limestone hills about two hundred metres high, intersected by ravines. They run parallel to the Nile, from which they are sometimes five miles distant, sometimes one kilometre.

Whoso should clamber up one of these hills and turn his face northward would see one of the strangest sights possible. He would have on his right hand the narrow but green plain cut lengthwise by the Nile; on his left he would see an endless yellow open region, varied by spots, white or brick colored.

Monotony, the irritating yellow color of the sand plain, the heat, and, above all, boundless immensity are the most peculiar traits of the Libyan desert, which extends westward from Egypt.

But viewed more nearly the desert is in fact less monotonous. Its sand is not level, but forms a series of swellings which recall immense waves of water. It is like a roused sea solidified on a sudden. But whoso should have the courage to go across that sea for an hour, two hours, a day, directly westward would see a new sight. On the horizon would appear eminences, sometimes cliffs and rocks of the strangest outlines. Under foot the sand would grow thinner, and from beneath it limestone rocks would emerge just like land out of water.

In fact that was a land, or even a country in the midst of a sand ocean. Around the limestone hills were valleys, in them the beds of streams and rivers, farther on a plain, and in the middle of it a lake with a bending line of shores and a sunken bottom.

But on these plains, hills, and heights no blade of grass grows; in the lake there is no drop of water; along the bed of the river no current moves. That is a landscape, even greatly varied with respect to forms, but a landscape from which all water has departed,—the very last atom of moisture has dried from it; a dead landscape, where not only all vegetation has vanished, but even the fertile stratum of earth has been ground into dust or dried up into rock slabs.

In those places the most ghastly event has taken place of which it is possible to meditate: Nature has died there, and nothing remains but her dust and her skeleton, which heat dissolves to the last degree, and burning wind tosses from spot to spot.

Beyond this dead, unburied region stretches again a sea of sand, on which are seen, here and there, towering up in one and another place, pointed stacks as high as a house of one story. Each summit of such a little hill is crowned by a small bunch of gray, fine, dusty leaves, of which it is difficult to say that they are living; but it may be said that they cannot wither.

One of these strange stacks signifies that water in that place has not dried up altogether, but has hidden from drought beneath the earth, and preserves dampness in some way. On that spot a tamarind seed fell, and the plant has begun to grow with endless effort.

But Typhon, the lord of the desert, has noted this, and begun to stifle it with sand. And the more the little plant pushes upward, the higher rises the stack of sand which is choking it. That tamarind which has wandered into the desert looks like a drowning man raising his arms, in vain, heavenward.

And again the yellow boundless ocean stretches on with its sand waves and those fragments of the plant world which have not the power to perish. All at once a rocky wall is in front, and in its clefts, which serve as gateways.

The incredible is before us. Beyond one of these gateways a broad green plain appears, a multitude of palms, the blue waters of a lake. Even sheep are seen pasturing, with cattle and horses. From afar, on the sides of a cliff, towers up a town; on the summit of the cliff are the white walls of a temple.

That is an oasis, or island in the sand ocean.

In the time of the pharaohs there were many such oases, perhaps some tens of them. They formed a chain of islands in the desert, along the western boundary of Egypt. They lay at a distance of ten, fifteen, or twenty geographic miles from the Nile, and varied in size from a few to a few tens of square kilometres in area.

Celebrated by Arab poets, these oases were never really the forecourts of paradise. Their lakes are swamps for the greater part; from their underground sources flow waters which are warm, sometimes of evil odor, and disgustingly brackish; their vegetation could not compare with the Egyptian. Still, these lonely places seemed a miracle to wanderers in the desert, who found in them a little green for the eye, a trifle of coolness, dampness, and some dates also.

The population of these islands in the sand ocean varied from a few hundred persons to numbers between ten and twenty thousand, according to area. These people were all adventurers or their descendants,—Europeans, Libyans, Ethiopians. To the desert fled people who had nothing to lose,—convicts from the quarries, criminals pursued by police, earth-tillers escaping from tribute, or laborers who left hard work for danger. The greater part of these fugitives died on the sand ocean. Some of them, after sufferings beyond description, were able to reach the oases, where they passed a wretched life, but a free one, and they were ready at all times to fall upon Egypt for the sake of an outlaw's recompense.

Between the desert and the Mediterranean extended a very long, though not very wide strip of fruitful soil, inhabited by tribes which the Egyptians called Libyans. Some of these worked at land tilling, others at navigation and fishing; in each tribe, however, was a crowd of wild people, who preferred plunder, theft, and warfare to regular labor. That bandit population was perishing always between poverty and warlike adventure; but it was also recruited by an influx of Sicilians and Sardinians, who at that time were greater robbers and barbarians than were the native Libyans.

Since Libya touched the western boundary of Lower Egypt, barbarians made frequent inroads on the territory of his holiness, and were terribly punished. Convinced at last that war with Libyans was resultless, the pharaohs, or, more accurately, the priesthood, decided on another system: real Libyan families were permitted to settle in the swamps of Lower Egypt, near the seacoast, while adventurers and bandits were enlisted in the army, and became splendid warriors.

In this way the state secured peace on the western boundary. To keep single Libyan robbers in order police were sufficient, with a field guard and a few regiments of regulars disposed along the Canopus arm of the great river.

Such a condition of affairs lasted almost two centuries; the last war with the Libyans was carried on by Rameses III., who cut enormous piles of hands from his slain enemies, and brought thirteen thousand slaves home to Egypt. From that time forth no one feared attack on the Libyan boundary, and only toward the end of the reign of Rameses XII. did the strange policy of the priests kindle the flame of war again in those regions.

It burst out through the following causes:—

His worthiness, Herhor, the minister of war, and high priest of Amon, because of resistance from his holiness the pharaoh, was unable to conclude with Assyria a treaty for the division of Asia. But wishing, as Beroes had forewarned him, to keep a more continued peace with Assyria, Herhor assured Sargon that Egypt would not hinder them from carrying on a war with eastern and northern Asiatics.

And since Sargon, the ambassador of King Assar, seemed not to trust their oaths, Herhor decided to give him a material proof of friendly feeling, and, with this object, ordered to disband at once twenty thousand mercenaries, mainly Libyans.

For those disbanded warriors, who were in no way guilty and had been always loyal, this decision almost equalled a death sentence. Before Egypt appeared the danger of a war with Libya, which could in no case give refuge to men in such numbers,—men accustomed only to comforts and military exercise, not to poverty and labor. But in view of great questions of state, Herhor and the priests did not hesitate at trifles.

Indeed, the disbanding of the Libyans brought them much advantage.

First of all, Sargon and his associates signed and swore to a treaty of ten years with the pharaoh, during which time, according to predictions of priests in Chaldea, evil fates were impending over Egypt.

Second, the disbanding of twenty thousand men spared four thousand talents to the treasury; this was greatly important.

Third, a war with Libya on the western boundary was an outlet for the heroic instincts of the viceroy, and might turn his attention from Asiatic questions and the eastern boundary for a long time. His worthiness Herhor and the supreme council had calculated very keenly that some years would pass before the Libyans, trained in petty warfare, would ask for peace with Egypt.

The plan was well constructed, but the authors of it failed in one point; they had not found Rameses a military genius.

The disbanded Libyan regiments robbed along the way, and reached their birthplace very quickly,—all the more quickly since Herhor had given no command to place obstacles before them. The very first of the disbanded men, when they stood on Libyan soil, told wonders to their relatives.

According to their stories, dictated by anger and personal interest, Egypt was then as weak as when the Hyksos invaded it nine hundred years earlier. The pharaoh's treasury was so poor that he, the equal of the gods, had to disband them, the Libyans, who were the chief, if not the only honor of the army. Moreover, there was hardly any army unless a mere band on the eastern boundary, and that was formed of warriors of a common order.

Besides, there was dissension between the priesthood and his holiness. The laborers had not received their wages, and the earth tillers were simply killed through taxes,

therefore masses of men were ready to rebel if they could only find assistance. And that was not the whole case, for the nomarchs, who ruled once independently, and who from time to time demanded their rights again, seeing now the weakness of the government, were preparing to overturn both the pharaoh and the supreme priestly council.

These tidings flew, like a flock of birds, along the Libyan boundary, and found credit quickly. Those barbarians and bandits ever ready to attack, were all the more ready then, when ex-warriors and officers of his holiness assured them that to plunder Egypt was easy.

Rich and thoughtful Libyans believed the disbanded men also; for during many years it had been to them no secret that Egyptian nobles were losing wealth yearly, that the pharaoh had no power, and that earth-tillers and laborers rebelled because they suffered.

And so excitement burst out through all Libya. People greeted the disbanded warriors and officers as heralds of good tidings. And since the country was poor, and had no supplies to nourish visitors, a war with Egypt was decided on straightway, so as to send off the new arrivals at the earliest.

Even the wise and crafty Libyan prince, Musawasa, let himself be swept away by the general current. It was not, however, the disbanded warriors who had convinced him, but certain grave and weighty persons who, in every likelihood, were agents of the chief Egyptian council.

These dignitaries, as if dissatisfied with things in Egypt, or offended at the pharaoh and the priesthood, had come to Libya from the seashore; they took no part in conversations, they avoided meetings with disbanded warriors, and explained to Musawasa, as the greatest secret, and with proofs in hand, that that was just his time to fall on Egypt.

“Thou wilt find there endless wealth,” said they, “and granaries for thyself, thy people, and the grandsons of thy grandsons.”

Musawasa, though a skilful diplomat and leader, let himself be caught in that way. Like a man of energy, he declared a sacred war at once, and, as he had valiant warriors in thousands, he hurried off the first corps eastward. His son, Tehenna, who was twenty years of age at that time, led it.

The old barbarian knew what war was, and understood that he who plans to conquer must act with speed and give the first blows in the struggle.

Libyan preparations were very brief. The former warriors of his holiness had no weapons, it is true, but they knew their trade, and it was not difficult in those days to find weapons for an army. A few straps, or pieces of rope for a sling, a dart or a sharpened stick, an axe, or a heavy club, a bag of stones, and another of dates,—that was the whole problem.

So Musawasa gave two thousand men, ex-warriors of the pharaoh, and four thousand of the Libyan rabble to Tehenna, commanding him to fall on Egypt at the earliest, seize whatever he could find, and collect provisions for the real army. Assembling for himself the most important forces, he sent swift runners through the oases and summoned to his standard all who had no property.

There had not been such a movement in the desert for a long time. From each oasis came crowd after crowd, such a proletariat, that, though almost naked, they deserved

to be called a tattered rabble. Relying on the opinion of his counsellors, who a month earlier had been officers of his holiness, Musawasa supposed, with perfect judgment, that his son would plunder hundreds of villages and small places from Terenuthis to Senti-Nofer, before he would meet important Egyptian forces. Finally they reported to him, that at the first news of a movement among the Libyans, not only had all laborers fled from the glass works, but that even the troops had withdrawn from fortresses in Sochet-Heman on the Soda Lakes.

This was of very good import to the barbarians, since those glass works were an important source of income to the pharaoh's treasury.

Musawasa had made the same mistake as the supreme priestly council. He had not foreseen military genius in Rameses. And an uncommon thing happened: before the first Libyan corps had reached the neighborhood of the Soda Lakes the viceroy's army was there, and was twice as numerous as its enemies.

No man could reproach the Libyans with lack of foresight. Tehenna and his staff had a very well-organized service. Their spies had made frequent visits to Melcatis, Naucratis, Sai, Menuf, and Terenuthis, and had sailed across the Canopus and Bolbita arms of the Nile. Nowhere did they meet troops; the movements of troops would have been paralyzed in those places by the overflow, but they did see almost everywhere the alarm of settled populations which were simply fleeing from border villages. So they brought their leader exact intelligence.

Meanwhile the viceroy's army, in spite of the overflow, had reached the edge of the desert in nine days after it was mobilized, and now, furnished with water and provisions, it vanished among the hills of the Soda Lakes.

If Tehenna could have risen like an eagle above the camp of his warriors, he would have been frightened at seeing that Egyptian regiments were hidden in all the ravines of that district, and that his corps might be surrounded at any instant.

Chapter XLIII

FROM the moment when the troops of Lower Egypt marched out of Pi-Bast, the prophet, Mentezufis, who accompanied the prince, received and sent away despatches daily.

One correspondence he conducted with the minister Herhor; Mentezufis sent reports to Memphis touching the advance of the troops, and the activity of the viceroy; of this activity he did not conceal his admiration. On his part, the worthy Herhor stated that every freedom was to be left to the heir, and that if Rameses lost his first battle, the supreme council would not feel angry.

“A slight defeat,” said Herhor, “would be a lesson in humility and caution to the viceroy, who even now, though as yet he has done nothing, considers himself as equal to the most experienced warriors.”

When Mentezufis answered that one could not easily suppose that the heir would meet defeat, Herhor let him understand that in that case the triumph should not be over brilliant.

“The state,” continued he, “will not lose in any way if the warriors and the impulsive heir find amusement for some years along the western border. He will gain skill himself in warfare, while the idle warriors will find their own proper work to do.”

The other correspondence Mentezufis carried on with the holy father Mefres and that seemed to him of more importance. Mefres, offended formerly by the prince, had recently, in the case of Sarah’s child, accused the prince directly of infanticide, committed under Kama’s influence.

When a week had passed, and the viceroy’s innocence was manifest, the high priest grew still more irate, and did not cease his efforts. The prince, he said, was capable of anything; he was hostile to the country’s gods, he was an ally of the vile Phœnicians.

The murder of Sarah’s child seemed so suspicious in the earlier days, that even the supreme council asked Mentezufis what he thought of it.

Mentezufis answered that he had watched the prince for days, and did not think the man a murderer.

Such were the letters which, like birds of prey, whirled around Rameses, while he was sending scouts against the enemy, consulting leaders, or urging on his warriors.

On the fourteenth day the whole army was concentrated on the south of Terenuthis. To the great delight of the heir, Patrokles came with the Greek regiment, and with him the priest Pentuer, sent by Herhor as another guardian near the viceroy.

The multitude of priests in the camp (for there were still others) did not enchant Rameses. But he resolved not to turn attention to the holy men or ask advice of them.

Relations were regulated in some way, for Mentezufis, according to instructions from Herhor, did not force himself on the prince, while Pentuer occupied himself with organizing medical aid for the wounded.

The military game began.

First of all Rameses, through his agents, had spread a report in many boundary villages that the Libyans were pushing forward in great masses, and would destroy and murder. Because of this the terrified inhabitants fled eastward and met the Egyptian warriors. The prince took them in to carry burdens for the army, the women and children he conveyed to the interior of Egypt. Next the commander sent spies to meet the approaching Libyans and discover their number and disposition. These spies returned soon, bringing accurate indications as to where the Libyans were and very exaggerated accounts as to their numbers. They asserted, too, mistakenly, though in great confidence, that at the head of the Libyan columns marched Musawasa with his son Tehenna.

The princely leader was flushed with delight that in his first war he would have such an experienced enemy as Musawasa.

He overestimated, therefore, the danger of the struggle and redoubled every caution. To have all chances on his side he had recourse to stratagem. He sent confidential men to meet the Libyans; he commanded them to feign that they were fugitives, to enter the enemies' camp and draw from Musawasa his best forces, the disbanded Libyan soldiers.

"Tell them," said Rameses to his agents, "that I have axes for the insolent, and compassion for obedience. If in the coming battle they will throw their weapons down and leave Musawasa, I will receive them back to the army of his holiness, and command to pay all arrears, as if they had never left the service."

Patrokles and the other generals saw in this a very prudent measure; the priests were silent, Mentezufis sent a despatch to Herhor and next day received an answer.

The neighborhood of the Soda Lakes was a valley some tens of kilometres long, enclosed between two lines of hills, extending from the southeast toward the northwest. The greatest width did not exceed ten kilometres; there were places narrower, almost ravines.

Throughout the whole length of that valley extended one after another about ten swampy lakes filled with bitter, brackish water. Wretched plants and bushes grew there ever coated with sand, ever withering,—plants which no beast would take to its mouth. Along both sides were sticking up jagged limestone hills, or immense heaps of sand in which a man might sink deeply.

The white and yellow landscape had a look of dreadful torpor, which was heightened by the heat, and also by the silence. No bird was ever heard there, and if any sound was given forth it was from a stone rolling down along a hillside.

Toward the middle of the valley rose two groups of buildings a few kilometres from each other; these were a fortress on the east, and glass factories on the west, to which Libyan merchants brought fuel. Both these places had been deserted because of the conflict. Tehenna's corps was to occupy both these points, and secure the road to Egypt for Musawasa's army forces.

The Libyans marched slowly from the town of Glaucus southward, and on the evening of the fourteenth day of Hator, they were at the entrance to the valley of the Soda Lakes, feeling sure that they would pass through in two days unmolested. That evening at sunset the Egyptian army moved toward the desert, passed over more than forty kilometres of sand in twelve hours, and next morning was on the hills between the huts and the fortress and hid in the many ravines of that region.

If some man that night had told the Libyans that palm-trees and wheat were growing in the valley of the Soda Lakes they would have been astonished less than if he had declared that the Egyptians had barred the way to it.

After a short rest, during which the priests had discovered and cleared out a few wells of water somewhat endurable for drinking, the Egyptian army began to occupy the hills extending along the northern side of the valley.

The viceroy's plan was quite simple. He was to cut off the Libyans from their country, and push them southward into the desert, where heat and hunger would kill them.

With this object he disposed his army on the northern side of the valley and divided it into three corps. The right wing, that which extended most toward Libya, was led by Patrokles, who was to cut off the invaders from their own town of Glaucus. The left wing, that nearest to Egypt, commanded by Mentezufis, was to stop the Libyans from advancing. Finally, the direction of the centre, at the glass huts, was taken by Rameses, who had Pentuer near his person.

On the fifteenth of Hator about seven in the morning, some tens of Libyan horsemen moved at a brisk trot through the valley. They stopped a moment at the huts, looked around, and, seeing nothing suspicious, rode back again.

At about ten in the forenoon in a heat which seemed to suck sweat and draw blood from men's bodies, Pentuer said to the viceroy,—

"The Libyans have entered the valley and passed Patrokles' division. They will be here in an hour from now."

"Whence knowest thou this?" asked the astonished prince.

"The priests know everything," replied Pentuer, smiling.

Then he ascended one of the cliffs cautiously, took from a bag a very bright object and turning it in the direction of the holy Mentezufis began to give certain signs with his hand.

"Mentezufis is informed already," said Pentuer.

The prince could not recover from astonishment and answered,—

"My eyes are better than thine, and my hearing is not worse, I think; still I see nothing, I hear nothing. How, then, dost thou see the enemy and converse with Mentezufis?"

Pentuer directed the prince to look at a distant hill, on the summit of which was a thornbush. Rameses looked at that point and shaded his eyes on a sudden. In the bush something flashed brightly.

"What unendurable glitter is that?" cried he. "It might blind a man."

"That is the priest who is aiding the worthy Patrokles; he is giving us signs," replied Pentuer. "Thou seest, then, worthy lord, that we, too, can be useful in war time."

He was silent. From the distance of the valley came a certain sound; at first low, gradually it grew clearer. At this sound the Egyptian soldiers hidden at the sides of the hill began to spring up, look at their weapons, and whisper. But the sharp commands of officers quieted them, and again the silence was deathlike along the cliffs on the north side.

Meanwhile that distant sound in the valley increased and passed into an uproar in which, on the bases of thousands of voices a man could distinguish songs, sounds of flutes, squeaks of chariots, the neighing of horses, and the cries of commanders. The prince's heart was now beating with violence; he could not resist his curiosity, and he clambered up to a rocky height whence a large part of the valley was visible.

Surrounded by rolls of yellow dust the Libyan corps was approaching deliberately, and seemed like a serpent some miles in length, with blue, white, and red spots on its body.

At its head marched from ten to twenty horsemen, one of whom, wearing a white mantle, was sitting on his horse as on a bench, both his legs on the left side of the animal. Behind the horsemen marched a crowd of slingers in gray shirts, then some dignitary in a litter, over whom a large parasol was carried. Farther was a division of spearmen in blue and red shirts, then a great band of men almost naked, armed with clubs, again slingers and spearmen, behind them a red division with scythes and axes. They came on more or less in ranks of four; but in spite of shouts of officers, that order was interrupted, and each four treading on others, broke ranks continually.

Singing and talking loudly, the Libyan serpent crawled out into the broadest part of the valley, opposite the huts and the Soda Lakes. Order was disturbed now more considerably. Those marching in advance stopped, for it had been said that there would be a halt at that point; the columns behind hurried so as to reach the halt and rest all the earlier. Some ran out of the ranks, and laying down their weapons, rushed into the lake, or took up in their palms its malodorous water; others, sitting on the ground, took dates from bags, or drank vinegar and water from their bottles.

High above the camp floated a number of vultures.

Unspeakable sadness and terror seized Rameses at this spectacle. Before his eyes flies began to circle; for the twinkle of an eye he lost consciousness; it seemed to him that he would have yielded his throne not to be at that place, and not to see what was going to happen. He hurried down from the cliff looking with wandering eyes straight out in front of him.

At that moment Pentuer approached and pulled him by the arm vigorously.

"Recover, leader," said he; "Patrokles is waiting for orders."

"Patrokles?" repeated the prince, and he looked around quickly.

Before him stood Pentuer, deathly pale, but collected. A couple of steps farther on was Tutmosis, also pale; in his trembling hand was an officer's whistle. From behind the hill bent forth soldiers, on whose faces deep emotion was evident.

"Rameses," repeated Pentuer, "the army is waiting."

The prince looked at the priest with desperate decision.

"Begin!" said he in a stifled whisper.

Pentuer raised his glittering talisman, and made some signs in the air with it. Tutmosis gave a low whistle; that whistle was repeated in distant ravines on the right and the left. Egyptian slingers began to climb up the hillsides.

It was about midday.

Rameses recovered gradually from his first impressions and looked around carefully. He saw his staff, a division of spearmen and axemen under veteran officers, finally slingers, advancing along the cliff leisurely. And he was convinced that not one of those men had the wish to die or even to fight and move around in that heat, which was terrible.

All at once, from the height of some hill was heard a mighty voice, louder than the roar of a lion,—

“Soldiers of the pharaoh, slay those Libyan dogs! The gods are with you.”

To this unearthly voice answered two voices no less powerful: the prolonged shout of the Egyptian army, and the immense outcry of the Libyans.

The prince had no need to conceal himself longer, and ascended an eminence whence he could see the hostile forces distinctly. Before him stretched a long line of Egyptian slingers who seemed as if they had grown up from the earth, and a couple of hundred yards distant the Libyan column moving forward in dust clouds. The trumpets, the whistles, the curses of barbarian officers were heard calling to order. Those who were sitting sprang up; those who were drinking snatched their weapons and ran to their places; chaotic throngs developed into ranks, and all this took place amid outcries and tumult. Meanwhile the Egyptian slingers cast a number of missiles each minute. They were as calm and well ordered as at a manœuvre. The decurions indicated to their men the hostile crowds against which they must strike, and in the course of some minutes they covered them with a shower of stones and leaden bullets. The prince saw that after every such shower a Libyan crowd scattered and very often one man remained on the earth behind the others.

Still the Libyan ranks formed and withdrew outside the reach of missiles, then their slingers pushed forward and with equal swiftness and coolness replied to the Egyptians. At times there were bursts of laughter in their ranks and shouts of delight at the fall of some Egyptian slinger.

Soon above the heads of the prince and his retinue stones began to whizz and whistle. One, cast adroitly, struck the arm of an adjutant, and broke the bone in it; another knocked the helmet from a second adjutant; a third, falling at the prince's feet, was broken against the cliff and struck the leader's face with fragments as hot as boiling water.

The Libyans laughed loudly and shouted out something: apparently they were abusing the viceroy.

Fear and, above all, compassion and pity left the soul of Rameses in an instant. He saw before him no longer people threatened by death and anguish, but lines of savage beasts which he had to kill or deprive of weapons. Mechanically he reached for his sword to lead on the spearmen awaiting command, but he was restrained by contempt of the enemy. Was he to stain himself with the blood of that rabble?

Warriors were there for that purpose.

Meanwhile the battle continued, and the brave Libyan slingers, while shouting and even singing, began to press forward. From both sides missiles whizzed like beetles, buzzed like bees, sometimes they struck one another in the air with a crack, and every minute or two on this side or that some warrior went to the rear groaning, or fell dead immediately. But this did not spoil the humor of others: they fought with malicious delight, which gradually changed to rage and self-oblivion.

Then from afar on the right wing were heard sounds of trumpets, and shouts repeated frequently. That was the untterrified Patrokles; drunk since daylight, he was attacking the rear guard of Libya.

“Charge!” said the prince.

Immediately that order was repeated by one, two, ten trumpets, and after a moment the Egyptian companies pushed out from all the ravines. The slingers disposed on the hilltops redoubled their efforts, while in the valley, without haste, but also without disorder, the Egyptian spearmen and axemen arranged in four columns moved forward gradually.

“Strengthen the centre,” said the prince.

A trumpet repeated the command. Behind two columns of the first line two new columns were placed. Before the Egyptians had finished that manœuvre, under a storm of missiles, the Libyans, following their example, had arranged themselves in eight columns against the main corps of Egypt.

“Forward, reserves!” shouted the prince. “See,” said he, turning to one of the adjutants, “whether the left wing is ready.”

To see the valley at a glance, and more accurately, the adjutant rushed in among the slingers, and fell immediately, but beckoned with his hand. Another rushed to replace him and returned quickly to state that both wings of the prince’s division were drawn up in order.

From the division commanded by Patrokles came an increasing uproar, and higher than the hill dense rolls of dark smoke were rising.

An officer from Pentuer ran to the prince reporting that the Libyan camp had been fired by the Greek regiments.

“Force the centre!” cried Rameses.

Trumpet after trumpet sounded the attack, and when they had ceased the command was heard in the central column, and then followed the rhythmic roll of drums and the beat of the infantry step, marching slowly and in time: one—two! one—two! one—two! The command was repeated on the right and on the left wing; again drums rolled and the wing columns moved forward: one—two! one—two!

The Libyan slingers began to withdraw, showering stones on the marching Egyptians. But though one warrior fell after another, the columns moved on without stopping; they marched slowly, regularly, one—two! one—two! one—two!

The yellow cloud, growing ever denser, indicated the march of the Egyptian battalions. The slingers could hurl stones no longer, and there came a comparative quiet in the midst of which were heard sobs and groans from wounded warriors.

“It is rare that they march on review so well,” cried Rameses to the staff officers.

“They are not afraid of sticks this time,” grumbled a veteran officer.

The space between the dust cloud around the Egyptians and that on the Libyan side decreased every minute, but the barbarians, halting, stood motionless, and behind their line a second cloud made its appearance. Evidently some reserve was strengthening the central column, which was threatened by the wildest of onsets.

The heir ran down from his eminence and mounted; the last Egyptian reserves poured out of the ravines, fixed themselves in ranks, and waited for the order. Behind

the infantry pushed out some hundreds of Asiatic horsemen on small but enduring horses.

The prince hurried after the columns advancing to attack, and when he had gone a hundred yards he found a new eminence, not high, but from which he could see the whole field of battle. The retinue, the Asiatic cavalry, and the reserve column hurried after him.

The prince looked impatiently toward the left wing whence Mentezufis had to come, but he was not coming. The Libyans stood immovable, the situation seemed more and more serious.

The viceroy's division was the stronger, but against it were arrayed almost all the Libyan forces. The two sides were equal as to numbers; the prince had no doubt of victory, but he dreaded the immense loss since his opponent was so manful.

Besides, battle has caprices.

Over men who have gone to attack, the leader's influence has ceased, he controls them no longer; Rameses has only a regiment of reserves, and a handful of cavalry. If one of the Egyptian columns is beaten, or if reinforcements come to the foe unexpectedly!

The prince rubbed his forehead at this thought. He felt all the responsibility of a leader. He was like a dice thrower who has staked all he owns, cast his dice, and asks, "How will they come out?"

The Egyptians are a few tens of yards from the Libyan columns. The command, the trumpets, the drums sound hurriedly, and the troops move at a run: one—two—three! one—two—three! But on the side of the enemy also a trumpet is heard, two ranks of spears are lowered, drums beat. At a run! New rolls of dust rise, then they unite in one immense cloud. The roar of human voices, the rattle of spears, the biting of scythes, then a shrill groan which is soon lost in one general uproar.

Along the whole line of battle neither men, nor weapons, nor even columns are visible, nothing but a line of yellow dust stretching along like a giant serpent. The denser cloud signifies places where the columns are struggling; the thinner, where there are breaks in the columns.

After some minutes of satanic uproar the heir sees that the dust on his left wing is bending back very slowly.

"Strengthen the left wing!" shouts Rameses.

One half of the reserve runs to the place pointed out, and disappears in the sand cloud; the left wing straightens itself, the right goes forward slowly always in one direction.

"Strengthen the centre!" cries Rameses.

The second half of the reserve advances and vanishes in the sand cloud. The shout increased for a moment, but no forward movement is visible.

"Those wretches fight desperately," said an old officer of the suite to Rameses. "It is high time that Mentezufis were here."

The prince summoned the leader of the Asiatic cavalry.

"But look to the right," said he; "there must be a bend there."

“Go cautiously so as not to trample our warriors and attack those dogs in their central column, on the flank.”

“They must be chained, for somehow they stand too long,” replied the Asiatic, smiling.

The prince has now about two hundred of his own cavalry, and these advance, with the others, at a trot, crying,—

“May our chief live forever!”

The heat passes description. The prince strains eyes and ears to see through the sand cloud. He waits—and waits. All at once he shouts with delight. The centre of the cloud quivers and moves forward slightly.

Again it stops, again it moves forward—slowly, very slowly, but still it moves forward.

The din is so tremendous that no one can decide what it means: rage, defeat, or victory.

Now the right wing begins to bend outward and withdraw in a strange manner. In the rear of the wing appears a new dust cloud. At the same moment Pentuer races up, dismounts, and shouts,—

“Patrokles is engaging the rear of the Libyans!”

The confusion on the right wing increases, and is passing to the centre. It is clear that the Libyans are beginning to withdraw, and that panic is seizing even their main column.

The whole staff of the prince, roused to the uttermost, follows the movements of the yellow dust, feverishly. In a few minutes alarm appears on the left wing. The Libyans have begun to flee in that quarter.

“May I never see another sun, if this is not a victory!” cried a veteran officer.

A courier rushes in from the priests, who from the highest hill had followed the course of the battle, and reports that on the left wing the troops of Mentezufis are visible, and that the Libyans are surrounded on three sides.

“They would fly like deer if the sand did not hinder them.”

“Victory! May our chief live forever!” cried Pentuer.

It was only two hours after midday.

The Asiatic cavalry sing loudly, and send arrows into the air in honor of Rameses. The staff officers dismount, and rush to kiss the hands and feet of the viceroy; at last they take him from the saddle, raise him in the air, shouting,—

“Here is a mighty leader! He has trampled the enemies of Egypt! Amon is on his right, and on his left, who can oppose him?”

Meanwhile the Libyans, pushing back all the time, had ascended the sandy hills on the south, and after them Egyptians. From out the cloud came horsemen every minute and rushed to Rameses.

“Mentezufis has taken them in the rear!” cried one.

“Two hundred have surrendered!” cried another.

“Patrokles has taken them in the rear!”

“Three Libyan standards are captured: the ram, the lion, and the sparrow-hawk!”

More and more men gathered round the staff: it was surrounded by warriors who were bloody and dust-covered.

“May he live through eternity! May he live through eternity, our leader!”

The prince was so excited, that he laughed and cried in turn and said to his retinue,—

“The gods have been compassionate. I feared that we had lost. Evil is the plight of a leader; without drawing a sword and even without seeing, he must answer for everything!”

“Live thou, O conquering commander, live through eternity!” cried the warriors.

“A fine victory for me!” laughed Rameses. “I do not know even how they won it.”

“He wins a victory, and wonders how it came!” cried some one in the retinue.

“I say that I saw not the face of the battle,” explained the prince.

“Be at rest, our commander,” said Pentuer. “Thou didst dispose the army so wisely that the enemy had to be beaten. And in what way? Just as if that did not belong to thee, but the regiments.”

“I did not even draw a sword. I do not see one Libyan,” complained the prince.

On the southern heights there was a struggling and a seething, but in the valley the dust had begun to settle here and there, and a crowd of Egyptian soldiers were visible as through a mist, their spears pointed upward.

Rameses turned his horse in that direction and rode out to the deserted field of battle, where just recently had been, the struggle of the central column. It was a place some hundreds of yards in width, with deep furrows filled with bodies of the dead and wounded. On the side along which the prince was approaching, Egyptians and Libyans lay intermixed, in a long line, still farther on there were almost none except Libyans.

In places bodies lay close to bodies; sometimes on one spot three or four were piled one on another. The sand was stained with brownish blood patches; the wounds were ghastly. Both hands were cut from one man, another had his head split to the body, from a third man, the entrails were dropping. Some were howling in convulsions, and from their mouths, filled with sand, came forth curses, or prayers imploring some one to slay them.

Rameses passed along hastily, not looking around, though some of the wounded men shouted feebly in his honor.

Not far from that place he met the first crowd of prisoners. They fell on their faces before him and begged for compassion.

“Proclaim pardon to the conquered and the obedient,” said he to his staff.

A number of horsemen rushed off in various directions. Soon a trumpet was heard, and after it a piercing voice,—

“By the order of his worthiness the prince in command, prisoners and wounded are not to be slain!”

In answer came wild shouts, evidently from prisoners.

“At command of the prince,” a second voice cried in singing tones in another direction, “prisoners and wounded are not to be slain!”

Meanwhile on the southern heights the battle ceased and two of the largest Libyan divisions laid down their arms before the Greek regiments.

The valiant Patrokles, in consequence of the heat, as he said himself—of ardent drink, as thought others—barely held himself in the saddle. He rubbed his tearful eyes, and turned to the prisoners.

“Mangy dogs!” cried he, “who raise sinful hands on the army of his holiness (may the worms devour you)! Ye will perish like lice under the nail of a pious Egyptian, if ye do not tell this minute where your leader is,—may leprosy eat off his nose and drink his blear eyes out!”

At that moment the prince appeared. The general greeted him with respect, but did not stop his investigation.

“I will have belts cut from your bodies! I will impale you on stakes, if I do not learn this minute where that poisonous reptile is, that son of a wild boar.”

“Ei! where our leader is?” cried one of the Libyans, pointing to a little crowd on horseback which was advancing slowly in the depth of the desert.

“What is that?” inquired the prince.

“The wretch Musawasa is fleeing!” said Patrokles, and he almost fell to the ground.

The blood rushed to Rameses’ head.

Then Musawasa was here and escaped?

“Hei! whoso has the best horse, follow me!”

“Well,” said Patrokles, laughing, “that sheep-stealer himself will bleat now!”

Pentuer stopped the way to the prince.

“It is not for thee to hunt fugitives, worthiness.”

“What?” cried the heir. “During this whole battle I did not raise a hand on any man, and now I am to give up the Libyan leader? What would be said by the warriors whom I have sent out under spears and axes?”

“The army cannot remain without a leader.”

“But are not Patrokles, Tutmosis, and finally Mentezufis, here? For what purpose am I commander if I cannot hunt the enemy? They are a few hundred yards from us and have tired horses.”

“We will come back in an hour with him. He is only an arm’s length from us!” whispered some Asiatic.

“Patrokles, Tutmosis, I leave the army to you!” cried the heir. “Rest. I will come back immediately.”

He put spurs to his horse and advanced at a trot, sinking in the sand, and behind him about twenty horsemen, with Pentuer.

“Why art thou here, O prophet?” asked Rameses. “Better sleep—to-day thou hast rendered good service.”

“I may be of use yet,” added Pentuer.

“But remain—I command thee—”

“The supreme council commands me not to go one step from thee, worthiness.”

Rameses shook himself angrily.

“But if we fall into an ambush?”

“I will not leave thee in ambush,” answered the priest.

Chapter XLIV

THERE was in his voice so much kindness that the astonished prince was silent and let him go.

They were in the desert; a couple of hundred yards behind them was an army; in front were fugitives several hundred yards in advance. But though they beat and urged on their horses, the fleeing, as well as the pursuers, advanced with great difficulty. The sun poured from above dreadful heat on them, the fine but sharp dust pushed itself into their mouths, into their nostrils, into their eyes above all; under their horses' feet the burning sand gave way at every step. In the air reigned a deathlike silence.

"But it will not continue like this," said Rameses.

"It will be worse and worse," answered Pentuer. "Dost thou see, worthiness,"—he indicated the fugitives,—“their horses are in sand to their knees?”

The prince laughed, for at that moment they came out on ground which was firmer, and trotted about a hundred yards. But soon their road was confronted by a sea of sand, and again they advanced step by step slowly.

Sweat poured from the men, there was foam on the horses.

"It is hot!" whispered the heir.

"Listen, lord," said Pentuer, "this is not a good day for hunting in the desert. This morning the sacred insects showed great disquiet, then dropped into lethargy. Also my knife of a priest went down very little in the earthen scabbard, which means intense heat. Both these phenomena—the heat, and the lethargy of insects—may announce a tempest. Let us return, for not only have we lost sight of the camp, but even sounds from there do not reach to us."

Rameses looked at the priest almost contemptuously.

"And dost thou think, O prophet," said he, "that I, having once commanded the capture of Musawasa, can return empty-handed because I fear heat and a tempest?"

They went on without stopping. At one place there was hard ground again, thanks to which they approached the fugitives to within the distance of a sling cast.

"Hei, ye there!" cried the heir, "yield."

The Libyans did not even look behind, and waded on through the sand with great effort. After a while one might suppose that they would be overtaken. Soon again, however, the prince's party struck on deep sand while the Libyans hastening forward vanished beyond an elevation.

The Asiatics cursed, the prince gritted his teeth.

At last the horses began to stumble more and to be weary, so the riders had to dismount and go on foot. All at once an Asiatic grew purple, and fell on the sand. The prince commanded to cover him with a mantle, and said,—

"We will take him on the way back."

After great toil they reached the top of the sand height, and saw the Libyans. For them too the road had been murderous, two of their horses had stopped.

The camp of the Egyptian army was hidden completely behind the rolling land, and if Pentuer and the Asiatics had not known how to guide themselves by the sun they could not have gone back to the camping-place. In the prince's party another man fell, and threw bloody foam from his mouth. He was left, with his horse. To finish their trouble, on the outline of the sands stood a group of cliffs; among these the Libyans vanished.

"Lord," said Pentuer, "that may be an ambush."

"Let it be death, and let it take me!" replied the heir, in a changed voice.

The priest gazed at him with wonder; he had not supposed such resolve in Rameses.

The cliffs were not distant, but the road was laborious beyond description. They had not only to walk themselves, but to drag their horses out of the soft sand. They waded, sinking below their ankles; they sank to their knees even in some places.

Meanwhile the sun was flaming above them,—that dreadful sun of the desert,—every ray of which not only baked and blinded, but pricked also. The men dropped from weariness: in one, tongue and lips were swollen; another had a roaring in his head, and saw black patches before his eyes; drowsiness seized a third,—all felt pain in their joints, and lost the sensation of heat. Had any one asked if it were hot, they would not have answered.

The ground grew firm under their feet again, and the party passed in between the cliffs.

The prince, who had more presence of mind than those who were with him, heard the snorting of horses; he turned to one side, and in the shade cast by the cliff saw a crowd of people lying as each man had dropped. Those were the Libyans.

One of them, a youth of twenty years, wore an embroidered purple shirt, a gold chain was around his neck, and he carried a sword richly mounted. He seemed unconscious; the eyes were turned in his head, and there was foam on his lips. In him Rameses recognized the chief. He approached him, drew the chain from his neck, and unfastened his sword.

Some old Libyan who seemed less wearied than others, seeing this, called out,—

"Though thou art victor, Egyptian, respect the prince's son, who is chief."

"Is he the son of Musawasa?" asked Rameses.

"Thou hast spoken truth," replied the Libyan. "This is Tehenna, the son of Musawasa; he is our leader; he is worthy to be even prince of Egypt."

"But where is Musawasa?"

"In Glaucus. He will collect a great army and avenge us."

The other Libyans said nothing; they did not even look at their conquerors.

At command of Rameses the Asiatics disarmed them without the least trouble, and sat down in the shade themselves.

At that moment they were all neither enemies nor friends, only men who were mortally wearied. Death was hovering over all, but beyond rest they had no desire.

Pentuer, seeing that Tehenna remained unconscious, knelt near him and bent above his head so that no one saw what he was doing. Soon Tehenna sighed, struggled, and opened his eyes; then he sat up, rubbed his forehead, as if roused from a deep sleep, which had not yet left him.

“Tehenna, leader of the Libyans, thou and thy people are prisoners of his holiness,” said Rameses.

“Better slay me here,” said Tehenna, “if I must lose my freedom.”

“If thy father, Musawasa, will submit and make peace with Egypt, thou wilt be free and happy.”

The Libyan turned his face aside, and lay down careless of everything; he seemed to be sleeping.

He came to himself, in a quarter of an hour, somewhat fresher. He gazed at the desert and cried out with delight: on the horizon a green country was visible,—water, many palms, and somewhat higher, a town and a temple.

Around him all were sleeping, both Asiatics and Libyans. But Pentuer, standing on a rock, had shaded his eyes with his hand and was looking in some direction.

“Pentuer! Pentuer!” cried Rameses. “Dost thou see that oasis?”

He sprang up and ran to the priest, whose face was full of anxiety.

“Dost thou see the oasis?”

“That is no oasis,” said Pentuer; “that is the ghost of some region which is wandering about through the desert—a region no longer in existence. But over there—over there—is reality!” added he, pointing southward.

“Are they mountains?”

“Look more sharply.”

The prince looked, and saw something suddenly.

“It seems to me that a dark mass is rising—my sight must be dulled.”

“That is Typhon,” whispered the priest. “The gods alone have power to save us, if only they have the wish.”

Indeed, Rameses felt on his face a breath, which amid the heat of the desert seemed all at once hot to him. That breath, at first very delicate, increased, growing hotter and hotter, and at the same time the dark streak rose in the sky with astonishing swiftness.

“What shall we do?” asked Rameses.

“These cliffs,” said the priest, “will shelter us from being covered with sand, but they will not keep away dust or the heat which is increasing continually. But in a day or two days—”

“Does Typhon blow that long?”

“Sometimes three and four days. But sometimes he springs up for a couple of hours, and drops suddenly, like a vulture pierced with an arrow. That happens very rarely.”

The prince became gloomy, though he did not lose courage. The priest, drawing from under his mantle a little green flask, said,—

“Here is an elixir. It should last thee a number of days. Whenever thou art afraid, or feel drowsy, drink a drop. In that way thou wilt be strengthened and endure.”

“But thou, and the others?”

“My fate is in the hands of the One. As to the rest of the people, they are not heirs to the throne of Egypt.”

“I do not wish this liquid!” cried the prince, pushing away the little bottle.

“Thou must take it!” said Pentuer. “Remember that the Egyptian people have fixed their hopes on thee. Remember that on thee is their blessing.”

The black cloud had covered half the sky, and the hot wind blew with such force that the prince and priest had to go to the foot of the cliff.

“The Egyptian people—their blessing?” repeated Rameses.

All at once he called out,—

“Was it thou who conversed with me a year ago in the garden? That was immediately after the manœuvres—”

“That same day, when thou hadst compassion on the man who hanged himself through despair because his canal was destroyed,” answered the priest.

“Thou didst save my house and the Jewess Sarah from the rabble who wished to stone her.”

“I did,” said Pentuer. “And soon after thou didst free the innocent laborers from prison, and didst not permit Dagon to torture thy people with new tribute.”

“For this people,” continued the priest in a louder voice, “for the compassion which thou hast always shown them I bless thee again to-day. Perhaps thou art the only one who will be saved here, but remember that the oppressed people of Egypt will save thee, they who look to thee for redemption.”

Hereupon it grew dark; from the south came a shower of hot sand, and such a mighty wind rose that it threw down a horse that was standing in the open. The Asiatics and the Libyan prisoners all woke, but each man merely pressed up to the cliff more closely, and possessed by great fear remained silent.

In nature something dreadful was happening. Night covered the earth, and through the sky black or ruddy clouds of sand rushed with mad impetus. It seemed as though all the sand of the desert, now alive, had sprung up and was flying to some place with the speed of a stone whirled from the sling of a warrior.

The heat was like that in a bath: on the hands and feet the skin burst, the tongue dried, breath produced a pricking in the breast. The fine grains of sand burnt like fire sparks.

Pentuer forced the bottle to the prince’s lips. Rameses drank a couple of drops and felt a marvellous change: the pain and heat ceased to torment him; his thought regained freedom.

“And this may last a couple of days?” asked he.

“It may last four,” replied Pentuer.

“But ye sages, favorites of the gods, have ye no means of saving people from such a tempest?”

The priest thought awhile, and answered,—

“In the world there is only one sage who can struggle with evil spirits. But he is not here.”

Typhon had been blowing for half an hour with inconceivable fury. It had become almost like night. At moments the wind weakened, the black clouds pushed apart; in the sky was a bloody sun, on the earth an ominous light of ruddy color. The hot stifling wind grew more violent, the clouds of sand thicker. The ghastly light was extinguished, and in the air were heard sounds and noises to which human ears are not accustomed.

It was near sunset, but the violence of the tempest increased, and the unendurable heat rose continually. From time to time a gigantic bloody spot appeared above the horizon, as if a world fire were coming.

All at once the prince saw that Pentuer was not before him. He strained his ear and heard a voice, crying,—

“Beroes! Beroes! If thou cannot help us, who can? Beroes! in the name of the One, the Almighty, who knows neither end nor beginning, I call on thee.”

On the northern extremity of the desert, thunder was heard. The prince was frightened, since thunder for an Egyptian was almost as rare a phenomenon as a comet.

“Beroes! Beroes!” repeated the priest in a deep voice. Rameses strained his eyes in the direction of the voice, and saw a dark human figure with arms uplifted. From the head, the fingers, and even from the clothing of that figure, light bluish sparks were flashing.

“Beroes! Beroes!”

A prolonged roar of thunder was heard nearer; lightning gleamed amid clouds of sand, and filled the desert with lurid flashes.

A fresh peal of thunder, and again lightning.

The prince felt that the violence of the tempest was decreasing, and the heat also. The sand which had been whirled through the air began to fall to the earth now, the sky became ashen gray, next ruddy, next milk-colored. At last all was silent, and after a while thunder was heard again, and a cool breeze from the north appeared.

The Asiatics and Libyans, tormented by heat, regained consciousness.

“Warriors of the pharaoh,” said the old Libyan on a sudden, “do ye hear that noise in the desert?”

“Will there be another tempest?”

“No; that is rain.”

In fact some cold drops fell from the sky, then more of them, till at last there was a downpour accompanied by thunder.

Among the soldiers of Rameses and their prisoners mad delight sprang up suddenly. Without caring for the thunder and lightning the men, who a moment before had been scorched with heat, and tormented by thirst, ran under the rain like small children. In the dark they washed themselves and their horses, they caught water in their caps and leather bags, and above all they drank and drank eagerly.

"Is not this a miracle?" cried Rameses. "Were it not for this blessed rain we should all perish here in the burning grasp of Typhon."

"It happens," said the old Libyan, "that the southern sandy wind rouses a wind from the sea and brings heavy rain to us."

Rameses was touched disagreeably by these words, for he had attributed the downpour to Pentuer's prayers. He turned to the Libyan, and asked,—

"And does it happen that sparks flash from people's bodies?"

"It is always so when the wind blows from the desert," answered the Libyan. "Just now we saw sparks jumping not only from men, but from horses."

In his voice there was such conviction that the prince approaching an officer of his cavalry whispered,—

"But look at the Libyans."

When he had said this some one made a noise in the darkness, and after a while tramping was heard. When a flash lighted up the desert they saw a man escaping on horseback.

"Bind these wretches!" cried the prince, "and kill any one who resists you. Woe to thee, Tehenna, if that scoundrel brings thy brethren against us. Ye will perish in dreadful tortures, thou and thy men here."

In spite of rain, darkness, and thunder the prince's soldiers hurried to bind the Libyans, who made no resistance.

Perhaps they were waiting for Tehenna's command, but he was so crushed that he had not even thought of fleeing.

The storm subsided gradually, and instead of that heat of the daytime a piercing cold seized the desert. The men and horses had drunk all they wanted; the bags were full of water; there were dates and cakes in abundance, so a good disposition prevailed. The thunder grew weak; at last even noiseless lightning flashed less and less frequently; on the northern sky the clouds parted; here and there stars twinkled.

Pentuer approached Rameses,—

"Let us return to the camp," said he. "In a couple of hours we shall be there, before the man who has escaped can lead forth an enemy."

"How shall we find the camp in such darkness?" asked Rameses.

"Have ye torches?" asked the priest of the Asiatics.

Torches, or long cords soaked in an inflammable substance they had; but there was no fire, for their wooden fire-drills were rain soaked.

"We must wait till morning," said Rameses, impatiently.

Pentuer made no answer. He took a small instrument from his bag, took a torch from one of the soldiers, and went to one side. After a while there was a low hissing, and the torch was lighted.

"He is a great magician, that priest," muttered the old Libyan.

"Before my eyes thou hast performed a second miracle," said the prince. "Canst thou explain to me how that was done?"

The priest shook his head.

“Ask of me anything, lord, and I will answer. But ask not to explain temple secrets.”

“Not even if I were to name thee my counsellor?”

“Not even then. Never shall I be a traitor, and even if I desired to be one I should be terrified by punishment.”

“Punishment?” repeated Rameses. “Aha! I remember in the temple of Hator, that man hidden under the pavement, on whom the priests were pouring burning pitch. Did they do that, indeed, and did that man die really in tortures?”

Pentuer was silent, as if not hearing the question, and drew out slowly from his wonderful bag a small statue of a divinity with crossed arms. The statue depended from a string; the priest let it hang, and whispered a prayer, while he watched it. The statue, after some turnings and quiverings, hung without motion.

Rameses, by the light of the torch, looked at these acts with astonishment.

“What art thou doing?” asked he.

“I can only say this much to thee, worthiness,” replied Pentuer, “that this divinity points with one hand at the star Eshmun.¹⁹ This hand leads Phœnician ships through the sea during night hours.”

“Then the Phœnicians, too, have this god?”

“They do not even know of him. The god which points one hand always to the star Eshmun, is known only to us and the priests of Chaldea. By the aid of this god every prophet night and day, in bad and good weather, can find his way on the sea or in the desert.”

At command of the prince, who went with a lighted torch at the side of Pentuer, the retinue and the prisoners followed the priest, northeastward. The god depending from a string trembled, but indicated with outstretched hand, the sacred star, Eshmun, the guardian of travellers.

They went on foot at a good pace, leading the horses. The cold was so sharp, that even Asiatics blew on their hands, and the Libyans trembled.

With that, something began to crackle and break underfoot. Pentuer stopped, and bent down.

“In this place,” said he, “rain has made a pool on the rock. And see, worthy lord, what has become of the water.”

Thus speaking, he raised and showed the prince what seemed a plate of glass, but which melted in his hand.

“When there is great cold,” said he, “water becomes a transparent stone.”

The Asiatics confirmed the words of the priest, and added that far away in the north, water turned into stone very often, and fog turned into a white salt which is tasteless, but breaks in the hands and causes pain in the teeth.

The prince admired Pentuer’s wisdom still more.

¹⁹ Polar star.

Meanwhile, the northern side of the heavens grew clear, showing the Great Bear and the star, Eshmun. The priest repeated a prayer again, put the guiding god into his bag, and commanded to quench the torches, and to leave only a burning cord which kept the fire, and indicated time by its gradual burning.

The prince enjoined watchfulness on his men, and taking Pentuer, pushed ahead some tens of paces.

“Pentuer,” said he, “from this hour I make thee my counsellor, both now and when it shall please the gods to give me the crown of Upper and Lower Egypt.”

“How have I deserved this favor?”

“Before my eyes thou hast done deeds which show great wisdom, and also power over spirits. Besides thou wert ready to save me. So, although it is thy resolve to keep many things from my knowledge—”

“Pardon, lord,” interrupted Pentuer. “For gold and jewels, thou wilt find traitors shouldst thou need them, among priests even. But I am not of those men. For think, were I to betray the gods, what bond could I give not to betray thee also?”

Rameses grew thoughtful.

“Thou hast answered wisely,” said he. “But it is a wonder to me why thou, a priest, hast for me kindness in thy heart. Thou didst bless me a year ago, and to-day thou wouldst not let me go alone into the desert, and hast shown me great service.”

“Because the gods have forewarned me that thou art worthy, lord; shouldst thou wish, thou mayst rescue the ill-fated people of Egypt.”

“How do the people concern thee?”

“I came from them. My father and brother raised water long days from the Nile, and received blows of sticks for their labor.”

“How can I aid the people?” asked Rameses.

Pentuer grew animated.

“Thy people,” said he, with emotion, “toil too much, they pay too much tribute, they suffer persecution and misery. Hard is the fate of the toiling man. The worm eats half his harvest, the rhinoceros the other half; in the fields, a legion of mice live; the locust comes,—the cattle trample,—the sparrows steal. What is left after these for the threshing floor the thief takes. Oh, wretched earth-tillers! Now comes the scribe to the boundary and mentions the harvest. His attendants have sticks, and black men carry palm rods. ‘Give wheat!’ say they. He answers, ‘There is none.’ They flog him; immediately they stretch him out at full length—they bind him; they hurl him into the canal, where they sink him, head downward. They bind his wife in his presence and also his children. His neighbors flee, carrying their wheat away with them.”²⁰

“I have seen that myself,” said Rameses, “and have driven off at least one scribe of that sort. But can I be everywhere to forestall injustice?”

“Thou mayst command, lord, not to torment working-men needlessly. Thou mayst decrease taxes, appoint days of rest for the earth-tillers. Thou mayst give each family a patch of land, even the harvest of which would be theirs, and serve to nourish them. In the opposite case they will feed themselves as they now do, with lotus seeds, rotten

²⁰ Original description.

fish and papyrus, till thy people will perish finally. But show them favor and they will rise."

"Indeed, I will do so!" said Rameses. "A wise owner will not let cattle starve nor work beyond the strength of their bodies, or be clubbed without reason. This must be changed."

Pentuer halted.

"Dost thou promise that, worthy lord?"

"I swear!" answered Rameses.

"Then I swear that thou wilt be the most famous of all pharaohs; before thee the fame of Rameses the Great, will grow pale!" cried the priest, mastering himself no longer.

The prince fell to thinking, then asked,—

"What can we two do against those priests who hate me?"

"They fear thee, lord," answered Pentuer. "They fear lest thou begin war too soon against Assyria?"

"What is that to them if the war be successful?"

The priest bent his head and spread his hands, but was silent.

"Then I will tell thee," cried the prince, in anger. "They want no war! They fear that I might return from it a conqueror, laden with treasures, urging on slaves in front of me. They fear this because they wish every pharaoh to be a weak tool in their grasp,—a utensil of no real value,—a utensil to be thrown aside when the wish comes. But this will not happen in my case. Either I shall do what I plan, and which I, as the son and heir of the gods have the right to do, or I shall perish."

Pentuer drew back, and muttered an exorcism.

"Speak not thus, worthy lord," said he, in confusion, "lest evil spirits circling through the desert may seize thy words. A word,—remember this, ruler,—is like a stone sent from a sling; it may strike a wall, rebound, and hit the man who hurled it."

The prince motioned with his hand contemptuously.

"It is all one," replied he. "A life in which every one stops my will has no worth for me. When the gods do not bar me, the winds of the desert do; when evil spirits are not against me, the priests are. Is the power of a pharaoh to be of such sort. I wish to do what my mind says, to give account to my deathless ancestors, and to them only, not to this or that shaven head, who pretends to interpret the will of divinity, but who is really seizing power, and turning my wealth to his own use."

At some tens of yards from them a strange cry was heard at that moment, half neighing, half bleating, and an immense shadow sped past. It went like an arrow, and as far as could be seen had a humped back and a long neck.

From the prince's retinue came sounds of fear.

"That is a griffin! I saw its wings clearly," said one and another of the Asiatics.

"The desert is swarming with monsters," added the old Libyan.

Rameses was afraid; he also thought that the passing shadow had the head of a serpent, and something resembling short wings.

“Do monsters really show themselves in the desert?” asked he of the priest.

“It is true,” said Pentuer, “that in such a lonely place evil spirits prowl about in strange guises. But it seems to me that that which has passed is rather a beast. It is like a saddle horse, only larger and quicker in movement. Dwellers in the oases say that this beast may live without drinking water at all, or at least very rarely. If that be the case, men hereafter may in crossing deserts use this strange creature, which to-day rouses fear only.”

“I should not dare to sit on the back of a great beast like that,” said Rameses, as he shook his head.

“Our ancestors said the same of the horse, which helped the Hyksos to conquer Egypt, but to-day it is indispensable to our army. Time changes men’s judgments greatly,” said Pentuer.

The last clouds had vanished from the sky and a clear night set in. Though the moon was absent the air was so clear that on the background of the white sand a man could distinguish the general outline of objects, even when small or distant. The piercing cold also diminished. All advanced now in silence, and sank, as they walked, in the sand to their ankles. Suddenly a tumult and cries rose among the Asiatics,—

“A sphinx! Look, a sphinx! We shall not escape from this desert if spectres show themselves all the time.”

Indeed, outlines of a sphinx on a white limestone hill were seen very clearly. The body of a lion, an immense head with an Egyptian cap, and as it were a human profile.

“Calm yourselves, barbarians,” said the old Libyan. “That is no sphinx; it is a lion, and he will do no harm, for he is occupied in eating.”

“Indeed, that is a lion!” confirmed the prince halting. “But how he resembles a sphinx.”

“He is the father of our sphinxes,” added the priest in a low voice. “His face recalls a man’s features, his mane is the wig.”

“And our great sphinx, that at the pyramids?”

“Many ages before Menes,” said Pentuer, “when there were no pyramids yet, there was on that spot a rock which looked like a recumbent lion, as if the gods wished in that way to indicate the beginning of the desert. The holy priests of that period commanded artists to hew the rock around with more accuracy and to fill out its lacks by additions. The artists, seeing people oftener than lions, cut out the face of a man, and thus the first sphinx had its origin.”

“To which we give divine honor,” said the prince, smiling.

“And justly,” answered the priest. “For the gods made the first features of this work and men finished them under divine guidance. Our sphinx by its size and mysteriousness recalls the desert. It has the posture of spirits wandering through it, and terrifies men as does the desert. That sphinx is really the son of the gods and the father of terror.”

“Everything has in its own way an earthly beginning,” answered the prince. “The Nile does not flow from heaven, but from certain mountains which lie beyond Ethiopia. The pyramids, which Herhor said were an image of our state, are built on the model of mountain summits. And our temples, too, with their pylons and obelisks, with

their gloom and coolness, do they not recall caves and mountains, extending along the Nile valley? How many times in hunting have I not gone astray among eastern ridges! I have always struck upon some strange collection of rocks which recalled a temple. Frequently even, on their rough sides, I have seen hieroglyphs written by wind and by rainstorms."

"In that, worthiness, thou hast proof," said Pentuer, "that our temples were reared on a plan which the gods themselves outlined. And as a small kernel cast into the ground gives birth to a heaven-touching palm tree, so the picture of a cliff, a cave, a lion, even a lotus, placed in the soul of a pious pharaoh, gives birth to an alley of sphinxes, to temples and their mighty columns. Those are the works of divinities, not men, and happy is the ruler who when he looks can discover divine thought in earthly objects and present it in a form pleasing to future generations."

"But such a ruler must have power, much wealth, and not depend on the fancies of priests," interrupted Rameses.

Before them extended a second sandy elevation, on which at that moment appeared some horsemen.

"Are they our men, or the Libyans?" asked Rameses.

The sound of a horn was heard from the eminence; to this an answer was given by the prince's retinue. The horsemen came down as quickly as the deep sand would let them. When they had approached one cried out,—

"Is the heir to the throne here?"

"He is, and is well!" cried Rameses.

They dismounted and fell on their faces.

"Oh, Erpatr!" cried the leader of the newly arrived, "thy troops are rending their garments and scattering dust on their heads, thinking that thou hast perished. All the cavalry has scattered over the desert to find traces, while the gods have permitted us, the unworthy, to be first to greet thee."

The prince named the man a centurion and commanded him to present his subordinates for a reward on the morrow.

Chapter XLV

HALF an hour later dense throngs of the Egyptian army appeared and soon the escort of the prince was in the camp. From all sides were heard trumpets sounding the recall. Warriors seized their weapons, stood in ranks and shouted. Officers fell at the feet of the prince, then raised him in their arms, bore him around before the divisions, as they had after the triumph of the day previous. The walls of the ravine trembled from the shouts: "Live through eternity, victor! The gods are thy guardians!"

The holy Mentezufis, surrounded by torches, approached now. The heir, seeing the priest, tore himself free from the arms of the officers and hurried to him.

"Know, holy father, we have caught the Libyan chief Tehenna."

"Vain is the capture," replied the priest severely, "for which the supreme chief must leave his army; especially when a new enemy may attack at any moment."

The prince felt all the justice of this reproach, but for that very cause did anger spring up in him. He clinched his fist, his eyes gleamed.

"In the name of thy mother, be silent," whispered Pentuer, standing behind him.

The heir was so astonished by the unexpected words of his adviser, that in one moment he regained self-control, and then he understood that it would be best to recognize his error.

"Thou speakest truth," answered he. "An army should never leave its leader, nor the leader his army. I thought, however, that thou wouldst take my place, since thou art a representative of the ministry of war."

The calm answer mollified Mentezufis, so the priest did not remind the prince of the manœuvres of the previous year when he left the army in the same way and incurred the pharaoh's disfavor.

At that moment Patrokles approached them with great uproar. The Grecian general was drunk again and called from afar to the viceroy,—

"See, O heir, what the holy Mentezufis has done. Thou didst proclaim pardon to the Libyans who would leave the invaders and return to the army of his holiness. Those men came to me, and owing to thy promise I broke the left wing of the enemy. But the worthy Mentezufis gave command to slay every man of them. About a thousand prisoners have perished—all recent warriors of ours, who were to have pardon."

The blood rushed to the prince's head again, but Pentuer, who stood there always behind him, whispered,—

"Be silent, for the sake of the gods, be silent."

But Patrokles had no adviser, so he continued,—

"From this moment we lose forever, not only the confidence of others, but also that of our own people. For our army must become demoralized utterly when it learns that traitors are forcing their way to the head of it."

“Vile hireling,” replied Mentezufis, coldly, “how darest thou talk thus of the army and the confidants of his holiness? Since the world became the world such blasphemy has not been uttered! And I fear lest the gods may avenge the insult wrought on them.”

Patrokles laughed loudly.

“While I sleep among the Greeks, I am not afraid of the vengeance of night gods. And while I am on the alert they will do nothing in the daytime.”

“Go to sleep! go among thy Greeks, drunkard,” said Mentezufis, “lest a thunderbolt fall on our heads because of thy offenses.”

“On thy shaven head, thou soul worth a copper, it will not fall, for it would think thy head something else,” said the Greek, half unconscious. But seeing that the prince did not support him, he withdrew to his camp ground.

“Didst thou really command to kill the prisoners in spite of my promise that they should have pardon?” asked the prince.

“Thou wert not in camp, worthiness,” replied Mentezufis, “hence responsibility falls not on thee for that deed: while I observe our military laws, which command to destroy traitorous warriors. The man who served his holiness once and joins his enemies afterward is to be slain immediately—that is the law.”

“But if I had been here?”

“As supreme leader and a son of the pharaoh thou couldst suspend the execution of certain laws which I must obey,” replied Mentezufis.

“Couldst thou not have waited till my return?”

“The law commands to kill *immediately*, so I carried out its provisions.”

The prince was so stunned that he interrupted conversation and withdrew to his tent. There falling into a seat he said to Tutmosis,—

“I am to-day a captive of the priests. They murder prisoners, they threaten officers, they do not even respect my duties. Did ye say nothing to Mentezufis when he commanded to kill those unfortunate prisoners?”

“He shielded himself with military laws, and new orders from Herhor.”

“But it is I who am leader here, though I went out for half a day.”

“Thou didst give the leadership explicitly into my hands and into those of Patrokles,” answered Tutmosis. “But when the holy Mentezufis came we had to yield to him, for he is our superior.”

The prince thought that the seizure of Tehenna was in every case purchased with surpassing misfortunes. At the same time he felt in all its force the significance of the maxim that a chief must never leave his army. He had to confess his error, but that irritated his pride the more and filled him with hatred for the priesthood.

“Behold,” said he, “I am in captivity even before I have become the pharaoh, may his holiness live through eternity. So to-day I must begin to work myself out of this slavery, and first of all to be silent. Pentuer is right: I must be silent always, and put away my anger, like precious jewels into the storehouse of memory. But when it is full, ye will pay me, O prophets.”

“Thou dost not inquire, worthiness, for the results of the battle,” said Tutmosis.

“Aha, just that. What are they?”

“More than two thousand prisoners, more than three thousand killed, and barely a few hundred escaped.”

“What, then, was the Libyan army?” asked the astonished prince.

“From six to seven thousand men.”

“That cannot be. Is it possible that almost a whole army could perish in such an encounter?”

“And still it is so; that was a terrible battle,” replied Tutmosis. “Thou didst surround them on all sides, the soldiers did the rest, well—yes—and the worthy Mentezufis. Even inscriptions on the tombs of the most famous pharaohs do not mention such a crushing of the enemies of Egypt.”

“Go to sleep, Tutmosis; I am wearied,” interrupted the prince, feeling that pride was beginning to rise to his head.

“Then have I won such a victory? Impossible!” thought he.

He threw himself on to the skins, but though mortally weary he could not sleep.

Only fourteen hours had passed since the moment when he had given the signal to begin the battle. Only fourteen hours? Was it possible!

Had he won such a battle? But he had not even seen a battle, nothing but a yellow dense cloud, whence unearthly shouts were poured out in torrents. Even now he sees that cloud, he hears the uproar, he feels the heat, but there is no battle.

Next he sees a boundless desert, in which he is struggling through the sand with painful effort. He and his men have the best horses in the army, and still they creep forward like turtles. And what heat! Impossible for man to support the like.

And now Typhon springs up, hides the light, burns, bites, suffocates. Pale sparks are shooting forth from Pentuer’s body. Above their heads thunder rolls—such thunder as he had never heard till that day. Later on, silent night in the desert. The fleeing griffin, the dark outline of the sphinx on the limestone hill.

“I have seen so much. I have passed through so much,” thought Rameses. “I have been present at the building of our temples, and even at the birth of the great sphinx, which is beyond having an age now, and—all this happened in the course of fourteen hours.”

Now the last thought flashed before the prince: “A man who has passed through so much cannot live long.”

A chill went through him from head to foot, and he fell asleep.

He woke next morning a couple of hours after sunrise. His eyes smarted, all his bones ached; he coughed a little, but his mind was clear and his heart full of courage.

Tutmosis was at the door of the tent.

“What is it?” asked the prince.

“Spies from the Libyan boundary bring strange news,” said the favorite. “A great throng of people are approaching our ravine, not troops, however, but unarmed men, with children and women; at the head of them is Musawasa, and the foremost of the Libyans.”

“What does this mean?”

“Evidently they wish to beg peace of thee.”

“After one battle?” asked the prince, with wonder.

“But what a battle! Besides, fear increases our army in their eyes. They fear invasion and death.”

“Let us see if this is a military stratagem,” answered the prince, after some thought.

“How are our men?”

“They are in good health, they have eaten and drunk, they have rested and are gladsome. But—”

“But what?”

“Patrokles died in the night,” whispered Tutmosis.

“How?” cried the prince, springing up.

“Some say that he drank too much, some—that it was the punishment of the gods. His face was blue and his mouth full of foam.”

“Like that captive in Atribis, thou rememberest him? His name was Bakura; he broke into the feasting hall with complaints against the nomarch. He died that same night—from drunkenness, of course. What dost thou think?”

Tutmosis dropped his head.

“We must be very careful, my lord,” whispered he.

“We shall try,” answered the prince, calmly. “We will not even wonder at the death of Patrokles. For what is there surprising in this, that some drunken fellow dies who insulted the gods, nay! insulted the priests even.”

Tutmosis felt a threat in these jeering words.

The prince had loved Patrokles greatly. The Greek leader had been as faithful as a dog to him. Rameses might forget many wrongs done himself, but the death of that man he would not forgive.

Before midday a fresh regiment, the Theban, arrived from Egypt at the prince’s camp, and besides that some thousands of men and several hundreds of asses bringing large supplies of provisions and also tents. At the same time, from the direction of Libya, returned spies with information that the band of unarmed people coming toward the ravine was increasing.

At command of the heir numerous small detachments of cavalry reconnoitred the neighborhood in every direction to learn if a hostile army were not hidden somewhere. Even the priests, who had brought with them a small chapel of Amon, went to the summit of the highest hill and held a religious service. Then returning to the camp, they assured Rameses that a crowd of some thousands of unarmed Libyans were approaching, but that there was no army at any point, at least none within a fifteen mile radius.

The prince laughed at the report.

“I have good sight,” said he, “but I could not see an army at that distance.”

The priests, after they had counselled together, informed the prince that if he would bind himself not to tell the uninitiated what he saw he would learn that it was possible to see at great distances.

Rameses took an oath. The priests placed the altar of Amon on a height, and began prayers. When the prince had washed, removed his sandals, offered to the god a gold chain and incense, they conducted him to a small box which was perfectly dark and told him to look at one wall of it.

After a while sacred hymns were intoned during which a bright circle appeared on the box. Soon the bright color grew darker; the prince saw a sandy plain, in the midst of it cliffs, and near them an Asiatic outpost.

The priests sang with more animation and the picture changed. Another patch of the desert was visible, and on it a group of people who looked no larger than ants. Still the movements and dress, and even the faces of the persons were so definite that the prince could describe them.

The astonishment of the heir knew no bounds. He rubbed his eyes, touched the moving picture. Suddenly he turned away his face; the picture vanished and darkness remained.

When he went out of the chapel the elder priest asked him,—

“Well, Erpatr, dost thou believe now in the might of the gods of Egypt?”

“Indeed,” answered he, “ye are such great sages that the whole world ought to give you offerings and homage. If ye can see the future in an equal degree nothing can oppose you.”

After these words a priest entered the chapel and began to pray; soon a voice was heard from the chapel, saying,—?

“Rameses! the fates of the kingdom are weighed, and before another full moon comes thou wilt be its ruler.”

“O gods!” cried the terrified prince. “Is my father so sick, then?”

He fell on his face in the sand; then an assisting priest inquired if he did not wish to learn something more.

“Tell me, Father Amon, whether my plans will be accomplished.”

After a while a voice spoke in the chapel.

“If thou begin no war in the east, if thou give offerings to the gods and respect their servants, a long life awaits thee, and a reign full of glory.”

After the miracles which had happened on the open field, in the open day, the excited prince returned to his tent.

“Nothing can resist the priests,” thought he in fear.

He found Pentuer in the tent.

“Tell me, my counsellor,” said he, “whether priests can read the heart of a man and unveil his secret purpose.”

Pentuer shook his head.

“Sooner,” answered he, “will man see what there is in the centre of a cliff than read the heart of another man. It is even closed to the gods, and death alone can discover its secrets.”

Rameses drew a deep sigh of relief, but he could not free himself from fear. When, toward evening, it was necessary to call a military council, he summoned Mentezufis and Pentuer.

No one mentioned the sudden death of Patrokles; perhaps because there was more urgent business; for Libyan envoys had come imploring in the name of Musawasa mercy for his son Tehenna, and offering to Egypt surrender and peace forever.

“Evil men,” said one of the envoys, “tempted our people saying that Egypt was weak; that her pharaoh was the shadow of a ruler. But yesterday we learned how strong your arm is, and we consider it wiser to yield and pay you tribute than expose our people to certain death and our property to ruin.”

When the military council had heard this speech the Libyans were sent from the tent, and Prince Rameses asked the holy Mentezufis directly for his opinions; this astonished even the generals.

“Only yesterday,” said the worthy prophet, “I should have been glad to refuse the prayer of Musawasa, transfer the war to Libya, and destroy that nest of robbers. But to-day I have received such important news from Memphis that I will vote for mercy to the conquered.”

“Is his holiness, my father, sick?” inquired the prince, with deep emotion.

“He is sick. But till we finish with the Libyans thou must not think of his holiness.”

When the heir dropped his head in sadness, Mentezufis added,—

“I must perform one more duty. Yesterday, worthy prince, I made bold to offer a judgment that for such a wretched captive as Tehenna, a chief should not leave his army. To-day I see that I was mistaken, for if thou hadst not seized Tehenna we should not have this early peace with Musawasa. Thy wisdom, chief, has proved higher than military regulations.”

The prince was arrested by this compunction on the part of Mentezufis.

“Why does he speak thus?” thought he. “It is evident that Amon is not alone in knowing of my holy father’s illness.”

And in the soul of the heir the old feelings were roused,—contempt for the priests and distrust of their miracles.

“So it was not the gods who told me that I should soon become pharaoh, but the news came from Memphis, and the priests tricked me in the chapel! But if they lie in one thing, who will assure me that those views of the desert shown on the wall were not deceit also?”

Since the prince was silent all the time, which was attributed to his sorrow because of his father’s illness, and the generals did not dare to say anything after the decisive words of Mentezufis, the military council ended. A unanimous decision was made to stop the war, take the very highest tribute from the Libyans, and send them an Egyptian garrison.

All expected now that the pharaoh would die. But Egypt, to celebrate a funeral worthy of its ruler, needed profound peace.

When leaving the tent of the military council the prince said to Mentezufis,—

“The valiant Patrokles died last night; do ye holy fathers think to show his remains honor?”

“He was a barbarian and a great sinner,” said the priest, “but he rendered such famous services to Egypt that it is proper to assure life beyond the grave to him. If thou permit, worthiness, we will send the body of that man this day to Memphis, so as to make a mummy of it, and take it to an eternal dwelling in Thebes among the retreats of the pharaohs.”

The prince consented willingly, but his suspicions rose.

“Yesterday,” thought he, “Mentezufis threatened me as he might a lazy pupil, and it was even a favor of the gods that he did not beat my back with a stick; but to-day he speaks to me like an obedient son to a father, and almost falls on his breast before me. Is this a sign that power is drawing near my tent, and also the hour of reckoning?”

Thus thinking, the prince increased in pride, and his heart was filled with greater wrath against the priesthood. Wrath which was the worse for being silent like a scorpion which has hidden in the sand and maims the incautious foot with its biting sting.

Chapter XLVI

AT night the sentries gave notice that a throng of Libyans imploring mercy had entered the valley. Indeed the light of their fires was visible on the desert.

At sunrise the trumpets were sounded, and all the Egyptian forces were drawn up under arms on the widest part of the valley. According to command of the prince, who wished to increase the fright of the Libyans—the carriers were arranged between the ranks of the army, and men on asses were disposed among the cavalry. So it happened that the Egyptians seemed as numerous as sands in the desert, and the Libyans were as timid as doves, over which a falcon is soaring.

At nine in the morning his gilded war chariot stood before the tent of the viceroy. The horses bearing ostrich plumes reared so that two men had to hold each of them.

Rameses came out of his tent, took his place in the chariot, and seized the reins himself, while the place of the charioteer was occupied by the priest Pentuer, who held now the position of counsellor. One of the commanders carried a large green parasol over the prince; behind, and on both sides of the chariot, marched Greek officers in gilded armor. At a certain distance behind the prince's retinue came a small division of the guard, in the midst of it Tehenna, son of the Libyan chief Musawasa.

A few hundred paces from the Egyptians, at the entrance of the ravine, stood the gloomy crowd of Libyans imploring the conqueror's favor.

When Rameses came with his suite to the eminence where he was to receive the envoys of the enemy, the army raised such a shout in his honor that the cunning Musawasa was still more mortified, and whispered to the Libyan elders,—

"I say to you, that is the cry of an army which loves its commander."

Then one of the most restless of the Libyan chiefs, a great robber, said to Musawasa,—

"Dost thou not think that in a moment like this we should be wiser to trust to the swiftness of our horses than to the kindness of the pharaoh's son? He must be a raging lion, which tears the skin even when stroking it, while we are like lambs snatched away from our mothers."

"Do as may please thee," replied Musawasa, "thou hast the whole desert before thee. But the people sent me to redeem their faults, and above all I have a son, Tehenna, on whom the prince will pour out his wrath unless I win favor."

To the crowd of Libyans galloped up two Asiatic horsemen, who declared that their lord was waiting for submission.

Musawasa sighed bitterly and went toward the height on which the conqueror had halted. Never before had he made such a painful journey. Coarse linen used by penitents covered his back imperfectly; on his head, sprinkled with ashes, the heat of the sun was burning; sharp pebbles cut his naked feet, and his heart was crushed by his own sorrow and that of his people.

He had advanced barely a few hundred paces, but he was forced to halt a couple of times to rest and recover. He looked backward frequently to be sure that the naked slaves carrying gifts to the prince were not stealing gold chains, or what was worse, stealing jewels. For Musawasa knowing life, knew that man is glad to make use of his neighbor's misfortune.

"I thank the gods," said the cunning barbarian, comforting himself in mishap, "that the lot has come to me of humbling myself to a prince who may put on the pharaoh's cap any moment. The rulers of Egypt are magnanimous, especially in time of triumph. If I succeed then in moving my lord he will strengthen my position in Libya, and permit me to collect a multitude of taxes. It is a real miracle that the heir to the throne himself seized Tehenna; and not only will he not do him wrong, but he will cover him with dignities." Thus he thought and looked behind continually, for a slave, though naked, may conceal a stolen jewel in his mouth, and even swallow it.

At thirty steps from the chariot of the heir Musawasa and those who were with him, the foremost of the Libyans, fell upon their faces and lay on the sand till command to rise was given them through the prince's adjutant. When they had approached a few steps they fell again; later they fell a third time, and rose only at command of Rameses.

During this interval Pentuer, standing at the prince's chariot, whispered to his lord,—
"Let thy countenance show neither harshness nor delight. Be calm, like the god Amon, who despises his enemies and delights in no common triumphs."

At last the penitent Libyans stood before the face of the prince, who looked at them as a fierce hippopotamus at ducklings which have no place to hide before his mightiness.

"Art thou he?" asked Rameses, suddenly. "Art thou that Musawasa, the wise Libyan leader?"

"I am thy servant," answered Musawasa, and he threw himself on the ground again. When they ordered him to rise, the prince said,—

"How couldst thou commit such a grievous sin, and raise thy hand against the kingdom of the gods? Has thy former wisdom deserted thee?"

"Lord," answered the wily Libyan, "sorrow disturbed the reason of the disbanded warriors of his holiness, so they ran to their own destruction, drawing me and mine after them. And the gods alone know how long this dreadful war might have lasted if at the head of the army of the ever living pharaoh, Amon himself had not appeared in thy semblance. Thou didst fall on us like a storm wind of the desert, when thou wert not expected, where thou wert not expected, and as a bull breaks a reed so didst thou crush thy blinded opponent. All people then understood that even the terrible regiments of Libya had value only while thy hand sent them forward."

"Thou speakest wisely, Musawasa," said the viceroy, "and thou hast done still better to meet thus the army of the divine pharaoh, instead of waiting till it came to thee. But I should be glad to know how sincere thy obedience is."

"Let thy countenance be radiant, great potentate of Egypt,"²¹ answered Musawasa. "We come to thee as subjects, may thy name be great in Libya, be thou our sun, as thou art the sun of nine nations. Only command thy subordinates to be just to us the

²¹ An inscription on the monument of Horem-Hep, 1470 years B. C.

conquered people who are joined to thy power. Let thy officials govern us justly and with conscience, and not according to their own evil wishes, reporting falsely concerning our people, and rousing thy disfavor against us and our children. Command them, O viceroy of the victorious pharaoh, to govern according to thy will, sparing our freedom, our property, our language, and the customs of our ancestors and fathers.

“Let thy laws be equal for all subjects, let not thy officials favor some too much and be too harsh toward others; let their sentences be of the same kind for all. Let them collect the tribute predestined for thy needs and for thy use, but let them not take secretly other tributes which never go into thy treasury, and enrich only thy servants and the servants of those servants.

“Command them to govern without injustice to us and our children, for thou art to us a deity and a ruler forever. Imitate the sun, which sends his light to all and gives life and strength to them. We, thy Libyan subjects, implore thy favor and fall on our faces before thee, O heir of the great and mighty pharaoh.”

So spoke the crafty Libyan prince, Musawasa, and after he had finished speaking he prostrated himself again. But when the pharaoh’s heir heard these wise words his eyes glittered, and his nostrils dilated like those of a young stallion which after good feeding runs to a field where mares are at pasture.

“Rise, Musawasa, and listen to what I tell thee. Thy fate and that of thy people depend not on me, but on that gracious lord who towers above us all, as the sky above the earth. I advise thee, then, to go and to take Libyan elders hence to Memphis, and, falling on thy face before the leader and the god in this world, to repeat the humble prayer, which I have heard here from thee.

“I know not what the effect of thy prayer will be; but since the gods never turn from him who implores and is repentant, I have a feeling that thou wilt not meet a bad reception.

“And now show me the gifts intended for his holiness, so that I may judge whether they will move the heart of the all-powerful pharaoh.”

At this moment Mentezufis gave a sign to Pentuer who was standing on the prince’s chariot.

When Pentuer descended and approached the holy man with honor, Mentezufis whispered,—

“I fear lest the triumph may rise to the head of our young lord over much. Dost thou not think it would be wise to interrupt the solemnity in some way?”

“On the contrary,” answered Pentuer, “do not interrupt the solemnity, and I guarantee that he will not have a joyous face.”

“Thou wilt perform a miracle.”

“If I succeed I shall merely show him that in this world great delight is attended by deep suffering.”

“Do as thou wishest,” said Mentezufis, “for the gods have given thee wisdom worthy a member of the highest council.”

Trumpets and drums were heard, and the triumphal review began.

At the head of it went naked slaves bearing gifts. Rich Libyans guarded these bondmen who carried gold and silver divinities, boxes filled with perfumes, enamelled vessels, stuffs, furniture, finally gold dishes dotted with rubies, sapphires, and emeralds. The slaves who bore these had shaven heads and were gagged lest some one of them might steal a costly jewel.

Rameses rested both hands on the edge of the chariot and looked from the height of the hill at the Libyans, and at his own men, as a golden-headed eagle looks down on many colored partridges. Pride filled the prince from foot to head, and all present felt that it was impossible to have more power than was possessed by that victorious commander.

But in one instant the prince's eyes lost their brightness, and on his face the bitterest surprise was depicted. Pentuer was standing near him.—

“Bend thy ear, lord,” whispered he. “Since thou hast left Pi-Bast wondrous changes have taken place there. Thy Phœnician woman, Kama, has fled with Lykon.”

“With Lykon?” repeated the prince.

“Move not, Erpatr, and show not to thousands that thou feelest sorrow in the day of thy triumph.”

Now there passed below the prince an endless line of Libyans with fruit and bread in baskets, as well as wine and olive oil in roomy pitchers for the army. At sight of this a murmur of delight was spread among the warriors, but Rameses, occupied with Pentuer's story, took no note of what was passing.

“The gods,” said the prophet in a whisper, “have punished the traitorous Kama.”

“Is she caught?” inquired the prince.

“She is caught, but they have sent her to the eastern colony, because leprosy attacked her.”

“O gods!” whispered Rameses. “But may it not threaten me?”

“Be calm, lord; if it had infected thee thou wouldst be leprous this moment.”

The prince felt a chill in every member. How easy for the gods to thrust a man down from the highest summits to the depths of the lowest misery!

“And Lykon?”

“He is a great criminal,” said Pentuer; “a criminal of such kind that the earth has given few such.”

“I know him. He is as like me as a reflection of me in a mirror,” replied Rameses.

Now came a crowd of Libyans leading strange animals. At the head of these was a one-humped camel with white hair, one of the first which they had caught in the desert, next two rhinoceroses, a herd of horses, and a tame lion caged. Then a multitude of cages holding birds of various colors, monkeys, and small dogs intended for court ladies. Behind them were driven great herds of cattle, and flocks of sheep as food for the pharaoh's army.

The prince cast an eye on the moving menagerie, and asked the priest,—

“But is Lykon caught?”

“I will tell thee now the worst news, unhappy lord,” whispered Pentuer. “But remember that the enemies of Egypt must not notice grief in thee.”

The heir moved.

“Thy second woman, Sarah the Jewess—”

“Has she run away too?”

“She died in prison.”

“O gods! Who dared imprison her?”

“She confessed that she killed thy son.”

“What?”

A great cry was heard at the prince’s feet: the Libyan prisoners captured in battle were marching past, and at the head of them the sorrowful Tehenna.

Rameses had at that moment a heart so full of pain that he nodded to Tehenna, and said,—

“Stand near thy father Musawasa, so that he may touch thee, and see thee living.”

At these words all the Libyans and the whole army gave forth a mighty shout; but the prince did not hear it.

“Is my son dead?” asked he of the priest. “Sarah accused herself of child-murder? Did madness fall on her?”

“The vile Lykon slew thy son.”

“O gods give me strength!” groaned Rameses.

“Restrain thyself, lord, as becomes a victorious leader.”

“Is it possible to conquer such pain? O gods without pity!”

“Lykon slew thy son; Sarah accused herself to save thee, for seeing the murderer in the night she mistook him for thee.”

“And I thrust her out of my house! And I made her a servant of the Phœnician!”

Now appeared Egyptian warriors bearing baskets filled with hands which had been cut from the fallen Libyans.

At sight of this Rameses hid his face and wept bitterly.

The generals surrounded the chariot at once and gave their lord consolation. The holy Mentezufis made a proposition which was received immediately, that thenceforth the Egyptian army would not cut off the hands of enemies who had fallen in battle.

With this unforeseen incident ended the first triumph of the heir to the throne of Egypt. But the tears which he shed over the severed hands attached the Libyans to him more than the victorious battle. No one wondered then that around the fires Libyan and Egyptian warriors sat in concord sharing bread, and drinking wine from the same goblet. Instead of wars which were to last for years, there was a deep feeling of peace and confidence.

Rameses gave command that Musawasa, Tehenna, and the foremost Libyans should go to Memphis straightway, and he gave them an escort, not so much to watch them as to safeguard their persons and the treasures which they were taking. The prince

withdrew to a tent then, and did not appear again until a number of hours had passed. He was like a man to whom pain is the dearest companion. He did not receive even Tutmosis.

Toward evening a deputation of Greeks appeared under the leadership of Kalippos. When the heir asked what their wish was Kalippos answered,—

“We have come, lord, to implore that the body of our leader, thy servant Patrokles, should not be given to Egyptian priests, but be burned in accord with Greek usage.”

The prince was astonished.

“Is it known to you,” asked he, “that the priests wish to make of the remains of Patrokles a mummy of the first order, and to put it near the graves of the pharaohs? Can honor greater than this meet a man anywhere?”

The Greeks hesitated; at last Kalippos took courage and answered,—

“Our lord, permit us to open our hearts to thee. We know well that the making of a mummy is of more profit to a man than to burn him, for the soul of a burned man is transferred to eternal regions immediately; the soul of a mummied man may live during thousands of years on this earth and enjoy its beauties.

“But the Egyptian priests, O chief,—let this not offend thy ears—hated Patrokles. Who will assure us, then, that these priests in making him a mummy are not detaining him on earth so as to subject him to tortures? And what would our worth be if we who suspect revenge did not protect from it the soul of our compatriot and leader?”

Great was the prince’s astonishment.

“Do,” said he, “as ye think proper.”

“But if they will not give us the body?”

“Prepare the funeral pile; I will attend to the rest of the ceremony.”

The Greeks left the tent. The prince sent for Mentezufis.

Chapter XLVII

THE priest observed the heir stealthily, and found him much changed. Rameses was pale; he had almost grown thin in a few hours; his eyes had lost their glitter and had sunk beneath his forehead.

When Mentezufis heard what the Greeks had in mind he did not hesitate a moment to surrender the body of Patrokles.

“The Greeks are right,” said the holy man, “in thinking that we have power to torment the shade of Patrokles, but they are fools to suppose that any priest of Chaldea or Egypt would permit such a crime. Let them take the body of their compatriot, if they think that after death he will be happier under protection of their own rites.”

The prince sent an officer straightway with the needful order, but he detained Mentezufis. Evidently he wished to say something to him, though he hesitated.

After some silence Rameses asked suddenly,—

“Thou knowest, of course, holy prophet, that one of my women, Sarah, is dead, and that her son was murdered?”

“That happened,” said Mentezufis, “the night that we marched from Pi-Bast.”

The prince sprang up.

“By the eternal Amon!” cried he. “Did that take place so long ago, and ye did not mention it? Ye did not even tell me that I was suspected of murdering my own son?”

“Lord,” said the priest, “the leader of an army in the day before battle has neither son nor father; he has no one whatever save the army and the enemy. Could we in extreme moments disturb thee with such tidings?”

“That is true,” replied the prince, after some thought. “If we were attacked to-day I am not sure that I could command the army. In general I am not sure of my power to regain peace of mind.

“Such a little—such a beautiful child! And that woman who sacrificed herself for me after I had wronged her grievously. Never have I thought that misfortunes of such sort could happen, and that people’s hearts could endure them.”

“Time heals—time and prayer,” whispered the priest.

The prince nodded, and again there was such silence in the tent that the dropping of sand in the hour glass was audible.

Again the heir rallied,—

“Tell me, holy father,” said he, “unless it belongs to the great secrets, what is the real difference between burning the dead and the making of mummies? for though I have heard something at school I do not understand clearly this question, to which the Greeks attach such importance.”

“We attach far more, the greatest importance to this question,” replied Mentezufis.

“To this our cities of the dead testify; they occupy a whole region in the western

desert. The pyramids testify to it also; they are the tombs of the pharaohs of the ancient kingdom, and the immense tombs which are cut in cliffs for the rulers of our period.

“Burial and the tomb are of great importance—the very greatest human importance. For while we live in bodily form fifty or a hundred years, our shades endure tens of thousands till they are perfectly purified.

“The Assyrian barbarians laugh at us, saying that we give more to the dead than the living; but they would weep over their own lack of care for the dead did they know the mystery of death and the tomb as do the priests of Egypt.”

The prince started up.

“Thou dost terrify me,” said he. “Dost forget that among the dead there are two beings dear to me, and these are not buried according to Egyptian ritual.”

“On the contrary. Just now men are embalming them. Both Sarah and thy son will have everything which may profit them in the long journey.”

“Will they?” asked Rameses, as if comforted.

“I guarantee,” answered Mentezufis, “that everything will be done which is needed, and should this earthly life ever be unpleasant to thee thou wilt find them happy in the other.”

On hearing this Rameses was greatly affected.

“Then dost thou think, holy man,” inquired he, “that I shall find my son some time, and that I shall be able to say to that woman: ‘Sarah, I know that I have been too harsh to thee?’”

“I am as certain of it as that I see thee now, worthy lord,” replied the prophet.

“Speak, speak of this!” exclaimed the prince. “A man does not think of the grave till he has put a part of himself there. This misfortune has struck me, and struck just when I thought myself more powerful than any save the pharaoh.”

“Thou hast inquired, lord,” began Mentezufis, “as to the difference between burning the dead and embalming them. We find the same difference that there is between destroying a garment and preserving it in a closet. When the garment is preserved it may be of use frequently; and if a man has only one garment it would be madness to burn it.”

“I do not understand this,” interrupted Rameses. “Ye do not explain it even in the higher schools.”

“But we can tell it to the heir of the pharaoh. Thou knowest, worthiness,” continued the priest, “that a human being is composed of three parts: the body, the divine spark, and the shade, or *Ka*, which connects the body and the divine spark.

“When a man dies his shade separates from his body as does the divine spark. If the man lives without sin the divine spark and the shade appear among the gods to live through eternity. But each man sins, stains himself in this world; therefore his shade, the *Ka*, must purify itself, for thousands of years sometimes. It purifies itself in this way, that being invisible it wanders over our earth among people and does good in its wandering,—though the shades of criminals, even in life beyond the grave, commit offences, and at last destroy themselves and the divine spark contained in them.

“Now—and this is no secret for thee, worthiness—this shade, the *Ka*, is like a man, but looks as though made of most delicate mist. The shade has a head, hands, body, it can walk, speak, throw things or carry them, it dresses like a man, and even, especially during a few hundred of the earlier years after death, must take some food at intervals. But the shade obtains its main strength from the body which remains on the earth here. Therefore if we throw a body into a grave it spoils quickly and the shade must satisfy itself with dust and decay. If we burn the body the shade has nothing but ashes with which to gain strength. But if we embalm the body, or preserve it for thousands of years the shade *Ka* is always healthy and strong; it passes the time of purification in calmness, and even agreeably.”

“Wonderful things!” whispered the heir.

“Priests in the course of investigations during thousands of years have learned important details of life beyond the grave. They have convinced themselves that if the viscera are left in the body of a dead man, his shade, the *Ka*, has a great appetite, and needs as much food as a man during earthly existence, and if food is withheld it will rush at living people and suck the blood out of them. But if the viscera are removed from the body, as we remove them, the shade lives on without food almost: its own body, embalmed and filled with plants which are strongly fragrant, suffices it for millions of years.

“It has been verified, also, that if the tomb of a dead man is empty the shade yearns for the world and wanders about in it needlessly. But if we place in a mortuary chapel the clothing, furniture, arms, vessels, utensils, things pleasant during life to the dead man, if the walls are covered with paintings depicting feasts, hunts, divine services, wars, and, in general, events in which the departed took share, if besides we add statues of members of his family, servants, horses, dogs and cattle, the shade will not go out to the world without need, for it will find what it wants in the house of the dead with its mummy.

“Finally they have convinced themselves that many shades, even after penance is finished, could not enter regions of endless bliss since they know not the needful prayers, incantations, and conversations with gods. We provide for that by winding the mummies in papyruses, on which are written sentences, and by putting the ‘Book of the Dead’ in their coffins.

“In one word, our funeral ritual assures strength to the shade, preserves it from misfortunes and yearnings after earth, facilitates its entrance to the company of gods, and secures living people from every harm which shades might inflict on them. Our great care of the dead has this in view specially; hence we erect for them almost palaces and in them dwellings with the greatest ornaments.”

The prince thought awhile, but said finally,—

“I understand that ye show great kindness to weak and defenceless shades by caring for them in this manner. But who will assure me that there are shades?”

“That there is a waterless desert,” said the priest, “I know, for I see it, I have sunk in its sands and felt heat in it. That there are countries in which water turns to stone, and steam into white down, I know also, for credible witnesses have informed me.”

“But how do ye know of shades which no man has seen, and how do ye know of their life after death since no one of them has ever returned to us?”

“Thou art mistaken, worthiness,” replied the priest. “Shades have shown themselves more than once, and even revealed their own secrets.

“It is possible to live ten years in Thebes and not see rain: it is possible to live a hundred years on earth and not meet a shade. But whoso should live hundreds of years in Thebes, or live thousands of years on earth would see more than one rain, and more than one shade.”

“Who has lived thousands of years?” inquired Rameses.

“The sacred order of priests has lived, is living, and will live,” replied Mentezufis.

“The sacred order of priests settled on the Nile thirty thousand years ago. Since then, it has scrutinized the heavens and the earth; it has created our wisdom, and made the plan of every field, sluice, canal, pyramid, and temple in Egypt.”

“That is true. The order of priests is mighty and wise, but where are the shades? What man has seen them, and who is the person who has spoken to them?”

“Know this, lord,” said Mentezufis. “There is a shade in each living man; as there are people distinguished for immense strength, or a marvellous swiftness of vision, so there are men who possess the uncommon gift that during life they can separate their own shades from their bodies.

“Our secret books are filled with the most credible narratives touching this subject. More than one prophet has been able to fall into a sleep that is deathlike. At that time his shade separated from the body and transferred itself in a moment to Tyre, Babylon, or Nineveh, examined what it wished, listened to counsels relating to us, and after the awakening of the prophet gave the most minute account of all that it had witnessed. More than one evil magician, after falling asleep in like fashion, has sent out his shade against a man whom he hated, and overturned or destroyed furniture and terrified a whole household.

“It has happened, too, that the man attacked by the shade of the magician struck the shade with a spear or a sword, and on his house bloody traces were left, while the magician received on his body that wound exactly which was inflicted on his shade.

“More than once also has a shade of a living man appeared in company with him, but some steps distant.”

“I know such shades,” said the prince ironically.

“I must add,” continued Mentezufis, “that not only people, but animals, plants, stones, buildings, and utensils have shades also. But—a wonderful thing—the shade of an inanimate object is not dead, it possesses life, moves, goes from place to place, it even thinks and expresses thought through various signs, most frequently through knocking.

“When a man dies his shade lives and shows itself to people. In our books thousands of such cases are noted; some shades asked for food, others walked about in houses, worked in a garden, or hunted in the mountains with the shades of their dogs and cats with them. Other shades have frightened people, destroyed their property, drunk their blood, even enticed living persons to excesses. But there are good shades: those of mothers nursing their children, of soldiers, fallen in battle, who give warning of an ambush of an enemy, of priests who reveal important secrets.

“In the eighteenth dynasty the shade of the pharaoh, Cheops, who was doing penance for oppressing people while building the great pyramid, appeared in Nubian gold

mines, and in compassion for the sufferings of toiling convicts showed them a new spring of water.”

“Thou tellest curious things, holy man,” replied Rameses; “let me now tell thee something. One night in Pi-Bast my own shade appeared to me. That shade was just like me, and even dressed like me. Soon, however, I convinced myself that it was no shade. It was a living man, a certain Lykon, the vile murderer of my son. He began his offences by frightening the Phœnician woman Kama. I appointed a reward for seizing him—but our police not only did not seize the man, they even permitted him to seize that same Kama and to slay a harmless infant.

“To-day I hear that they have captured Kama, but I know nothing of Lykon. Of course he is living in freedom, in good health, cheerful and rich through stolen treasures; may be making ready for new crimes even.”

“So many persons are pursuing that criminal that he must be taken at last,” said Mentezufis. “And if he falls into our hands Egypt will pay him for the sufferings which he has caused the heir to her throne. Believe me, lord, thou mayst forgive all his crimes in advance, for the punishment will be in accord with their greatness.”

“I should prefer to have him in my own hands,” said the prince. “It is always dangerous to have such a ‘shade’ while one is living.”²²

Not greatly pleased by this end of his explanation, the holy Mentezufis took leave of the viceroy. After the priest had gone, Tutmosis entered.

“The Greeks are raising the pile for their chief,” said he, “and a number of Libyan women have agreed to wail at the funeral ceremony.”

“We shall be present,” answered Rameses. “Dost thou know that my son is killed?—such a little child. When I carried him he laughed and held out his little hands to me. What wickedness may be in the human heart is beyond comprehension. If that vile Lykon had attempted my life I could understand, even forgive him. But to slay a little child—”

“But have they told thee of Sarah’s devotion?” inquired Tutmosis.

“She was, as I think, the most faithful of women, and I did not treat her justly. But how is it,” cried the prince, striking his fist on the table, “that they have not seized that wretch Lykon to this moment? The Phœnicians swore to me, and I promised a reward to the chief of police. There must be some secret in this matter.”

Tutmosis approached the prince, and whispered,—

“A messenger from Hiram has been with me. Hiram, fearing the anger of the priests, is hiding before he leaves Egypt. Hiram has heard, from the chief of police in Pi-Bast perhaps, that Lykon was captured— But quiet!” added the frightened Tutmosis.

The prince fell into anger for a moment, but soon mastered himself.

“Captured?” repeated he. “Why should that be a secret?”

“It is, for the chief of police had to yield him up to the holy Mefres at his command in the name of the supreme council.”

²² It is curious that the theory of shades, on which very likely the uncommon care of the Egyptians for the dead was built, has revived in our times in Europe. Adolf d’Assier explains it minutely in a pamphlet “*Essai sur l’humanité posthume et le spiritisme, par un positiviste.*”

“Aha! aha!” repeated the heir. “So the revered Mefres and the supreme council need a man who resembles me so much? Aha! They are to give my son and Sarah a beautiful funeral, and embalm their remains. But the murderer they will secrete safely. Aha!”

“And the holy Mentezufis is a great sage. He told me to-day all the secrets of life beyond the grave; he explained to me the whole funeral ritual, as if I were a priest at least of the third degree. But touching the seizure of Lykon, the hiding of that murderer by Mefres, not a word! Evidently the holy fathers are more occupied by minute secrets of the heir to the throne than with the great secrets of future existence. Aha!”

“It seems to me, lord, that thou shouldst not wonder at that,” interrupted Tutmosis. “Thou knowest that the priests suspect thee of ill-will, and are on their guard. All the more—”

“What, all the more?”

“Since his holiness is very ill. Very.”

“Aha! my father is ill, and I meanwhile at the head of the army must watch the desert lest the sand should run out of it. It is well that thou hast reminded me of this! Yes, his holiness must be very ill, since the priests are so tender toward me. They show me everything and speak of everything, except this, that Mefres has secreted Lykon.

“Tutmosis,” said the prince on a sudden, “dost thou think to-day that I can reckon on the army?”

“We will go to death, only give the order.”

“And dost thou reckon on the nobles?”

“As on the army.”

“That is well. Now we may render the rites to Patrokles.”

Chapter XLVIII

IN the course of those few months, during which Prince Rameses had fulfilled the duties of viceroy of Lower Egypt, his holiness the pharaoh had failed in health continually. The moment was approaching in which the lord of eternity, who roused delight in human hearts, the sovereign of Egypt, and of all lands on which the sun shone, had to occupy a place at the side of his revered ancestors in the Libyan catacombs which lie on the other side of the city Teb.

Not over advanced in age was this potentate, the equal of the gods, he who gave life to his subjects, and had power to take from husbands their wives whenever his heart so desired. But thirty and some years of rule had so wearied him that he wished, of his own accord, to rest and regain youth and beauty in that kingdom of the west, where each pharaoh reigns without care through eternity over people who are so happy that no man of them has ever wished to return to this earth from that region.

Half a year earlier the holy lord had exercised every activity connected with his office, on which rested the safety and prosperity of all visible existence.

Barely had the cocks crowed in the morning when the priests roused the sovereign with a hymn in honor of the rising sun. The pharaoh rose from his bed and bathed in a gilded basin containing water fragrant with roses. Then his divine body was rubbed with priceless perfumes amid the murmur of prayers, which had the power of expelling evil spirits.

Thus purified and incensed by prophets, the lord went to a chapel, removed a clay seal from the door and entered the sanctuary unattended, where on a couch of ivory lay the miraculous image of Osiris. This image had the wondrous quality that every night the hands, feet and head fall from it. These on a time had been cut off by the evil god Set; but after the prayer of the pharaoh all the members grew on without evident reason.

When his holiness convinced himself that Osiris was sound again he took the statue from the couch, bathed it, dressed it in precious garments, and putting it on a malachite throne burnt incense before it. This ceremony was vastly important, for if any morning the divine members would not grow together it would signify that Egypt, if not the whole world, was threatened by measureless misfortune.

After the resurrection and restoration of the god, his holiness opened the door of the chapel, so that through it blessings might flow forth to the country. Then he designated the priests, who all that day were to guard the sanctuary, not so much against the ill-will, as the frivolity of people. For more than once it happened that a careless mortal who had gone too near that most holy place received an invisible blow which deprived him of consciousness or of life, even.

After he had finished divine service, the lord went, surrounded by chanting priests to a great hall of refection, where stood a small table and an armchair for him and nineteen other tables before nineteen statues which represented the nineteen preceding dynasties. When the sovereign had seated himself youths and maidens came in with silver plates, on which were meat and cakes, also pitchers of wine. The priest, the inspector of the dishes, tasted what was on the first dish, and what was in

the first pitcher, then, on his knees, he gave these to the pharaoh, but the other plates and pitchers were placed before the statues of the pharaoh's ancestors. When the sovereign had satisfied his hunger and left the hall princes or priests had the right to eat food intended for the ancestors.

From the hall of refection the lord betook himself to the grand hall of audience. There the highest dignitaries of state, and the nearest members of the family prostrated themselves before him, after that the minister, Herhor; the chief treasurer, the supreme judge, and the supreme chief of police made reports to him. The reading was varied by religious music and dancing, during which wreaths and flowers were cast on the throne of the pharaoh.

After the audience his holiness betook himself to a side chamber and reposing on a couch slumbered lightly for a time; then he offered wine and incense to the gods, and narrated to the priests his dreams, from which those sages made the final disposition in affairs which his holiness was to settle.

But sometimes, when there were no dreams, or when the interpretation of them seemed inappropriate to the pharaoh, his holiness smiled and commanded kindly to act in this way or that in given cases. This command was law which no one might change except in the execution perhaps of details.

In hours after dinner his holiness, borne in a litter, showed himself in the court to his faithful guard, and then he ascended to the roof and looked toward the four quarters of the earth, to impart to them his blessing. At that moment on the summits of pylons banners appeared, and mighty sounds came from trumpets. Whoso heard these sounds in the city or the country, an Egyptian or a stranger, fell on his face so that a portion of supreme grace might descend on him.

At that moment it was not permitted to strike man, or beast: a stick raised over a man's back dropped of itself. If a criminal sentenced to death, declared that the sentence was read to him at the time when the lord of earth and heaven had appeared, his punishment was lessened. For before the pharaoh went might, and behind him followed mercy.

When he had made his people happy, the ruler of all things beneath the sun entered his gardens among palms and sycamores, there he sat a longer time than elsewhere, receiving homage from his women and looking at the amusements of the children of his household. When one of them arrested his attention by beauty or adroitness he called it up, and made inquiry,—

“Who art thou, my little child?”

“I am Prince Binotris, the son of his holiness,” answered the little boy.

“And what is thy mother's name?”

“My mother is the lady Amesese, a woman of his holiness.”

“What dost thou know?”

“I know how to count to ten and to write: ‘May he live through eternity our god and father, his holiness the pharaoh Rameses!’”

The lord of eternity smiled benignly and touched with his delicate, almost transparent, hand the curly head of the sprightly little boy. Then the child became a prince really, though the smile of his holiness was ever enigmatical. But whoso had

been touched by the divine hand was not to know misfortune in life and had to be raised above others.

The sovereign dined in another hall of refection and shared his meal with the gods of all the divisions of Egypt, gods whose statues were ranged along the walls there. Whatever the gods did not eat went to the priests and higher court dignitaries.

Toward evening his holiness received a visit from Lady Nikotris, the mother to the heir to the throne of Egypt; looked at religious dances and heard a concert. After that he went again to the bath and, thus purified, entered the chapel of Osiris to undress and lay to sleep the marvellous divinity. When he had finished this he closed and sealed the chapel door and then, surrounded by a procession of priests, the pharaoh went to his bedchamber.

In an adjoining apartment the priests offered up, till the following sunrise, silent prayers to the soul of the pharaoh, which found itself among gods during the sleep of the sovereign. They laid before it their prayers for a favorable transaction of current state business, for guardianship over the boundaries of Egypt, and over the tombs of the pharaohs, so that no thief might dare to enter in and disturb the endless rest of those potentates. But the prayers of the priests, because of night weariness, surely, were not always effectual, for state difficulties increased, and sacred tombs were robbed, not only of costly objects, but even of the mummies of sovereigns.

This was because various foreigners had settled in the country and unbelievers from whom the people learned to disregard the gods of Egypt and the most sacred places.

The repose of the lord of lords was interrupted exactly at midnight. At that hour the astrologers roused his holiness and informed him in what mansion the moon was, what planets were shining above the horizon, what constellations were passing the meridian and whether in general something peculiar had taken place in heavenly regions. For sometimes clouds appeared or stars fell in greater number than usual, or a fiery ball flew over Egypt.

The lord listened to the report of the astrologers. In case of any unusual phenomenon he pacified them concerning the safety of the world, and commanded to write down all observations on appropriate tablets, which were sent every month to priests of the temple of the Sphinx, the greatest sages in Egypt. Those men drew conclusions from those tablets, but the most important they declared to no one, unless to their colleagues the Chaldean priests in Babylon.

After midnight his holiness might sleep till the morning cock-crow if he thought proper.

Such a pious and laborious life had been led, not more than half a year ago, by this kind, divine person, the distributor of protection, life, and health, who watched day and night over the earth and the sky, over the world both visible and invisible. But for the last half year his eternally living soul had begun to be more and more wearied with earthly questions, and with its bodily envelope. There were long days when he ate nothing, and nights during which he had no sleep whatever. Sometimes during an audience, there appeared on his mild face an expression of deep pain, while oftener and oftener, he fainted.

The terrified Queen Nikotris, the most worthy Herhor and the priests, asked the sovereign repeatedly whether anything pained him. But the lord shrugged his shoulders, and was silent, fulfilling always his burdensome duties.

Then the court physicians began imperceptibly to give the most powerful remedies to restore strength to him. They mixed in his wine and food at first the ashes of a burnt horse and a bull; later of a lion, a rhinoceros, and an elephant; but these strong remedies seemed to have no effect whatever. His holiness fainted so frequently that they ceased to read reports to him.

On a certain day the worthy Herhor with the queen and the priests, fell on their faces; they implored the lord to permit them to examine his divine body. He consented. The physicians examined and struck him, but found no worse sign than great emaciation.

“What feelings dost thou experience, holiness?” inquired at last the wisest physician. The pharaoh smiled.

“I feel,” replied he, “that it is time for me to return to my radiant father.”

“Thou canst not do that, holiness, without the greatest harm to thy people,” said Herhor, hurriedly.

“I leave you my son, Rameses, who is a lion and an eagle in one person. And in truth, if ye will obey him, he will prepare for Egypt such a fate as the world has not heard of since the beginning of ages.”

A chill passed through holy Herhor and the other priests at that promise. They knew that the heir to the throne was a lion and an eagle in one person, and that they must obey him. But they would have preferred to have for long years that kindly lord, whose heart, filled with compassion, was like the north wind which brings rain to the fields and coolness to mankind. Therefore they fell down all of them as one man to the pavement, groaning, and they lay prostrate till the pharaoh consented to let himself be treated.

Then the physicians took him out for a whole day to the gardens, among frequent pine-trees, they nourished him with chopped meat; they gave him strong herbs with milk and old wine. These effective means strengthened his holiness for something like a week yet; then a new faintness announced itself, and to overcome that they forced their lord to drink the fresh blood of calves descended from Apis.

But neither did this blood help for a long time, and they found it needful to turn for advice to the high priest of the temple of the wicked god Set.

Amid general fear, the gloomy priest entered the bedchamber of his holiness. He looked at the sick pharaoh and prescribed a dreadful remedy.

“It is needful,” said he, “to give the pharaoh blood of innocent children to drink; each day a full goblet.”

The priests and magnates in the chamber were dumb when they heard this prescription. Then they whispered that the children of earth-tillers were best for the purpose, since the children of priests and great lords lost their innocence even in infancy.

“It is all one to me whose children they are,” said the cruel priest, “if only his holiness has fresh blood given him daily.”

The pharaoh, lying on the bed with closed eyes, heard that gory counsel, and the whispers of the frightened courtiers. And when one of the physicians asked Herhor timidly if it were possible to take measures to seek proper children, Rameses XII. recovered. He fixed his wise eyes on those present,—

“The crocodile will not devour its own little ones,” said he, “a jackal or a hyena will give its life for its whelps, and am I to drink the blood of Egyptian infants, who are my children? Indeed, I never could have believed that any one would dare to prescribe means so unworthy.”

The priest of the evil god fell to the pavement, and explained that in Egypt no one had ever drunk the blood of infants but that the infernal powers returned health by it. Such means at least were used in Phœnicia and Assyria.

“Shame on thee!” replied the pharaoh, “for mentioning in the palace of Egyptian sovereigns disgusting subjects. Knowest thou not that Phœnicians and Assyrians are barbarous? But among us the most unenlightened earth-tiller would not believe that blood, shed without cause, could be of service to any one.”

Thus spoke he who was equal to immortals. The courtiers covered their faces, spotted now with shame, and the high priest of Set went silently out of the chamber.

Then Herhor, to save the quenching life of the sovereign, had recourse to the last means, and told the pharaoh that in one of the Theban temples, Beroes, the Chaldean, lived in secret. He was the wisest priest of Babylon—a miracle-worker without equal.

“For thee, holiness,” said Herhor, “that sage is a stranger, and he has not the right to impart such important advice to the lord of Egypt. But, O Pharaoh, permit him to look at thee. I am sure that he will find a medicine to cure thy illness, and in no case will he offend thee by impious expressions.”

The pharaoh yielded this time also to persuasions from his faithful servitors. And in two days Beroes, summoned in some mysterious way, was sailing down toward Memphis.

The wise Chaldean, even without examining the pharaoh minutely, gave this counsel,—

“We must find a person in Egypt whose prayers reach the throne of the Highest. And if this person prays sincerely for the pharaoh, the sovereign will receive his health and live for long years in strength again.”

On hearing these words the pharaoh looked at the priests surrounding him, and said,—

“I see here holy men in such numbers that, if one of them thinks of me, I shall be in health again.” And he smiled imperceptibly.

“We are all only men,” interrupted Beroes; “hence our souls cannot always rise to the footstool of Him who existed before the ages. But, holiness, I will use an infallible method by which to find a man whose prayers have the utmost sincerity, and the highest effect.”

“Discover him, so that he may be a friend to me in my last hour of life,” said the pharaoh.

After this favorable answer the Chaldean desired a room with a single door, and unoccupied. And that same day, one hour before sunset, he asked that his holiness be borne into that chamber.

At the appointed hour four of the highest priests dressed the pharaoh in a robe of new linen, pronounced a great prayer above him,—this prayer expelled every evil

power absolutely,—and seating him in a litter they bore him to that simple chamber where there was but one small table.

Beroes was there already, and, looking toward the east, was praying.

When the priests had left the chamber the Chaldean closed the heavy door, put a purple scarf on his arm and placed a glass globe of black color on the table before the pharaoh. In his left hand he held a sharp dagger of Babylonian steel, in his right a staff covered with mysterious signs, and with that staff he described in the air a circle about himself and the pharaoh. Then facing in turn the four quarters of the world, he whispered,—

“Amorul, Taneha, Latisten, Rabur, Adonai have pity on me and purify me, O heavenly Father, the compassionate and gracious. Pour down on thy unworthy servant thy sacred blessing, and extend thy almighty arm against stubborn and rebellious spirits, so that I may consider thy sacred work calmly.”

He stopped and turned to the pharaoh,—

“Mer-Amen-Rameses, high priest of Amon, dost thou distinguish a spark in that black globe?”

“I see a white spark which seems to move like a bee above a flower.”

“Mer-Amen-Rameses, look at that spark and take not thy eyes from it. Look neither to the right nor the left, look not on anything whatever which may come from the sides.”

And again he whispered,—

“Baralanensis, Baldachiensis, by the mighty princes Genio, Lachidae, the ministers of the infernal kingdom, I summon you, I call you through the strength of Supreme Majesty, by which I am gifted, I adjure, I command!”

At that place the pharaoh started up with aversion.

“Mer-Amen-Rameses, what seest thou?” asked the Chaldean.

“From beyond the globe rises some horrid head—reddish hair is standing on end; a face of greenish hue; the eye looking down so that only the white of it is visible; the mouth open widely, as if to shriek.”

“That is Terror!” cried Beroes, and he held his sharp dagger point above the globe.

Suddenly the pharaoh bent to the earth.

“Enough!” cried he, “why torment me thus? The wearied body seeks rest, the soul longs to be in the region of endless light. But not only will ye not let me die; ye are inventing new torments. Oh, I wish not—”

“What dost thou see?”

“From the ceiling every instant two spider legs lower themselves—they are terrible. As thick as palm trunks; shaggy with hooks at the ends of them. I feel that above my head is a spider of immense size, and he is binding me with a web of ship ropes.”

Beroes turned his dagger point upward.

“Mer-Amen-Rameses,” said he again, “look ever at the spark, and never at the sides. Here is a sign which I raise in thy presence,” whispered he. “Here am I mightily armed with Divine aid, I, foreseeing and unterrified, who summon you with

exorcisms—Aye, Saraye, Aye, Saraye, Aye, Saraye—in the name of the all-powerful, the all-mighty and everlasting divinity.”

At that moment a calm smile appeared on the lips of the pharaoh.

“It seems to me,” said he, “that I behold Egypt—all Egypt. Yes! that is the Nile—the desert. Here is Memphis, there Thebes.”

Indeed he saw Egypt, all Egypt, but no larger than the path which extended through the garden of his palace. The wonderful picture had this trait, that when the Pharaoh turned more deliberate attention to any point of it, that point with its environments grew to be of real size almost.

The sun was going down, covering the earth with golden and purple light. Birds of the daytime were settling to sleep, the night birds were waking up in their concealments. In the desert hyenas and jackals were yawning, and the slumbering lion had begun to stretch his strong body and prepare to hunt victims.

The Nile fisherman drew forth his nets hastily, men were tying up at the shores the great transport barges. The wearied earth-worker removed from the sweep his bucket with which he had drawn water since sunrise; another returned slowly with the plough to his mud hovel. In cities they were lighting lamps, in the temples priests were assembling for evening devotions. On the highways the dust was settling down and the squeak of carts was growing silent. From the pylon summits shrill voices were heard calling people to prayer.

A moment later, the pharaoh saw with astonishment flocks of silvery birds over the earth everywhere. They were flying up out of palaces, temples, streets, workshops, Nile barges, country huts, even from the quarries. At first each of them shot upward like an arrow, but soon it met in the sky another silvery feathered bird, which stopped its way, striking it with all force and—both fell to the earth lifeless.

Those were the unworthy prayers of men, which prevented each other from reaching the throne of Him who existed before the ages.

The pharaoh strained his hearing. At first only the rustle of wings reached him, but soon he distinguished words also.

And now he heard a sick man praying for the return of his health, and also the physician, who begged that that same patient might be sick as long as possible. The landowner prayed Amon to watch over his granary and cow-house, the thief stretched his hands heavenward so that he might lead forth another man's cow without hindrance, and fill his own bags from another man's harvest.

Their prayers knocked each other down like stones which had been hurled from slings and had met in the air.

The wanderer in the desert fell on the sand and begged for a north wind, to bring a drop of rain to him, the sailor on the sea beat the deck with his forehead and prayed that wind might blow from the east a week longer. The earth-worker wished that swamps might dry up quickly after inundation; the needy fisherman begged that the swamps might not dry up at any time.

Their prayers killed each other and never reached the divine ears of Amon.

The greatest uproar reigned above the quarries where criminals, lashed together in chain gangs, split enormous rocks with wedges, wetted with water. There a party of day convicts prayed for the night, so that they might lie down to slumber; while

parties of night toilers, roused by their overseers, beat their breasts, asking that the sun might not set at any hour. Merchants who purchased quarried and dressed stones prayed that there might be as many criminals in the quarries as possible, while provision contractors lay on their stomachs, sighing for the plague to kill laborers, and make their own profits as large as they might be.

So the prayers of men from the quarries did not reach the sky in any case.

On the western boundary the pharaoh saw two armies preparing for battle. Both were prostrate on the sand, calling on Amon to rub out the other side. The Libyans wished shame and death to Egyptians; the Egyptians hurled curses on the Libyans.

The prayers of these and of those, like two flocks of falcons, fought above the earth and fell dead in the desert. Amon did not even see them.

And whithersoever the pharaoh turned his wearied glance he saw the same picture everywhere. The laborers were praying for rest and decrease of taxes, scribes were praying that taxes might increase and work never be finished. The priests implored Amon for long life to Rameses XII. and death to Phœnicians, who interfered with their interests; the nomarchs implored the gods to preserve the Phœnicians and let Rameses XIII. ascend the throne at the earliest, for he would curb priestly tyranny. Lions, jackals, and hyenas were panting with hunger and desire for fresh blood; deer and rabbits slipped out of hiding-places, thinking to preserve wretched life a day longer, though experience declared that numbers of them must perish, even on that night, so that beasts of prey might not famish. So throughout the whole world reigned cross-purposes everywhere. Each wished that which filled others with terror; each begged for his own good, without asking if he did harm to the next man.

For this cause their prayers, though like silvery birds flying heavenward, did not reach their destination. And the divine Amon, to whom no voice of the earth came at any time, dropped his hands on his knees, and sank ever deeper in meditation over his own divinity, while on the earth blind force and chance ruled without interruption.

All at once the pharaoh heard the voice of a woman,—“Rogue! Little rogue! come in, thou unruly, it is time for prayers.”

“This minute—this minute!” answered the voice of the little child.

The sovereign looked toward the point whence the voice came and saw the poor hut of a cattle scribe. The hut owner had finished his register in the light of the setting sun, his wife was grinding flour for a cake, and before the house, like a young kid, was running and jumping the six-year-old little boy, laughing, it was unknown for what reason.

The evening air full of sweetness had given him delight, that was evident.

“Rogue!—Little rogue! come here to me for a prayer,” repeated the woman.

“This minute! this minute!”

And again he ran with delight as if wild.

At last the mother, seeing that the sun was beginning to sink in the sands of the desert, put away her mill stones, and, going out, seized the boy, who raced around like a little colt. He resisted but gave way to superior force finally. The mother, drawing him to the hut as quickly as possible, held him with her hand so that he might not escape from her.

“Do not twist,” said she, “put thy feet under thee, sit upright, put thy hands together and raise them upward.—Ah, thou bad boy!”

The boy knew that he could not escape now; so to be free again as soon as possible he raised his eyes and hands heavenward piously, and with a thin squeaky voice, he said,—

“O kind, divine Amon, I thank thee, thou hast kept my papa to-day from misfortune, thou hast given wheat for cakes to my mamma. What more? Thou hast made heaven. I thank thee. And the earth, and sent down the Nile which brings bread to us. And what more? Aha, I know now! And I thank thee because out-of-doors it is so beautiful, and flowers are growing there, and birds singing and the palms give us sweet dates. For these good things which thou hast given us, may all love thee as I do, and praise thee better than I can, for I am a little boy yet and I have not learned wisdom. Well, is that enough, mamma?”

“Bad boy!” muttered the cattle scribe, bending over his register. “Bad boy! thou art giving honor to Amon carelessly.”

But the pharaoh in that magic globe saw now something altogether different. Behold the prayer of the delighted little boy rose, like a lark, toward the sky, and with fluttering wings it went higher and higher till it reached the throne where the eternal Amon with his hands on his knees was sunk in meditation on his own all-mightiness.

Then it went still higher, as high as the head of the divinity, and sang with the thin, childish little voice to him:

“And for those good things which thou hast given us may all love thee as I do.”

At these words the divinity, sunk in himself, opened his eyes—there came to the earth immense calm. Every pain ceased, every fear, every wrong stopped. The whistling missile hung in the air, the lion stopped in his spring on the deer, the stick uplifted did not fall on the back of the captive. The sick man forgot his pains, the wanderer in the desert his hunger, the prisoner his chains. The storm ceased, and the wave of the sea, though ready to drown the ship, halted. And on the whole earth such rest settled down that the sun, just hiding on the horizon, thrust up his shining head again.

The pharaoh recovered. He saw before him a little table, on the table a black globe, at the side of it Beroes the Chaldean.

“Mer-Amen-Rameses,” asked the priest, “hast thou found a person whose prayers reach the footstool of Him who existed before the ages?”

“I have.”

“Is he a prince, a noble, a prophet, or perhaps an ordinary hermit?”

“He is a little boy, six years old, who asked Amon for nothing, he only thanked him for everything.”

“But dost thou know where he dwells?” inquired the Chaldean.

“I know, but I will not steal for my own use the virtue of his prayer. The world, Beroes, is a gigantic vortex, in which people are whirled around like sand, and they are whirled by misfortune. That child with his prayer gives people what I cannot give: a brief space of peace and oblivion. Dost understand, O Chaldean?”

Beroes was silent.

Chapter XLIX

AT sunrise of the twenty-first of Hator there came from Memphis to the camp at the Soda Lakes an order by which three regiments were to march to Libya to stand garrison in the towns, the rest of the Egyptian army was to return home with Rameses.

The army greeted this arrangement with shouts of delight, for a stay of some days in the wilderness had begun to annoy them. In spite of supplies from Egypt and from conquered Libya, there was not an excess of provisions; water in the wells dug out quickly, was exhausted; the heat of the sun burned their bodies, and the ruddy sand wounded their lungs and their eyeballs. The warriors were falling ill of dysentery and a malignant inflammation of the eyelids.

Rameses commanded to raise the camp. He sent three native Egyptian regiments to Libya, commanding the soldiers to treat people mildly and never wander from the camp singly. The army proper he turned toward Memphis, leaving a small garrison at the glass huts and in the fortress.

About nine in the morning, in spite of the heat, both armies were on the road; one going northward, the other toward the south.

The holy Mentezufis approached the heir then, and said,—

“It would be well, worthiness, couldst thou reach Memphis earlier. There will be fresh horses half-way.”

“Then my father is very ill?” cried out Rameses.

The priest bent his head.

The prince gave command to Mentezufis, begging him to change in no way commands already made, unless he counselled with lay generals. Taking Pentuer, Tutmosis, and twenty of the best Asiatic horsemen, he went himself on a sharp trot toward Memphis.

In five hours they passed half the journey; at the halt, as Mentezufis had declared, were fresh horses and a new escort. The Asiatics remained at that point, and after a short rest the prince with his two companions and a new escort went farther.

“Woe to me!” said Tutmosis. “It is not enough that for five days I have not bathed and know not rose perfumed oil, but besides I must make in one day two forced marches. I am sure that when we reach Memphis no dancer will look at me.”

“What! Art thou better than we?” asked the prince.

“I am more fragile,” said the exquisite. “Thou, prince, art as accustomed to riding as a Hyksos, and Pentuer might travel on a red-hot sword. But I am so delicate.”

At sunset the travellers came out on a lofty hill, whence they saw an uncommon picture unfolded before them. For a long distance the green valley of Egypt was visible, on the background of it, like a row of ruddy fires, the triangular pyramids stood gleaming. A little to the right of the pyramids the tops of the Memphis pylons, wrapped in a bluish haze, seemed to be flaming upward.

“Let us go; let us go!” said Rameses.

A moment later the reddish desert surrounded them again, and again the line of pyramids gleamed until all was dissolved in the twilight.

When night fell the travellers had reached that immense district of the dead, which extends for a number of tens of miles on the heights along the left side of the river.

Here during the Ancient Kingdom were buried, for endless ages, Egyptians,—the pharaohs in immense pyramids, princes and dignitaries in smaller pyramids, common men in mud structures. Here were resting millions of mummies, not only of people, but of dogs, cats, birds,—in a word, all creatures which, while they lived, were dear to Egyptians.

During the time of Rameses, the burial-ground of kings and great persons was transferred to Thebes; in the neighborhood of Memphis were buried only common persons and artisans from regions about there.

Among scattered graves, the prince and his escort met a number of people, pushing about like shadows.

“Who are ye?” asked the leader of the escort.

“We are poor servants of the pharaoh returning from our dead. We took to them roses, cakes, and beer.”

“But maybe ye looked into strange graves?”

“O gods!” cried one of the party, “could we commit such a sacrilege? It is only the wicked Thebans—may their hands wither!—who disturb the dead, so as to drink away their property in dramshops.”

“What mean those fires at the north there?” interrupted the prince.

“It must be, worthiness, that thou comest from afar if thou know not,” answered they. “To-morrow our heir is returning with a victorious army. He is a great chief! He conquered the Libyans in one battle. Those are the people of Memphis who have gone out to greet him with solemnity. Thirty thousand persons. When they shout—”

“I understand,” whispered the prince to Pentuer. “Holy Mentezufis has sent me ahead so that I may not have a triumphal entry. But never mind this time.”

The horses were tired, and they had to rest. So the prince sent horsemen to engage barges on the river, and the rest of the escort halted under some palms, which at that time grew between the Sphinx and the group of pyramids.

Those pyramids formed the northern limit of the immense cemetery. On the flat, about a square kilometre in area, overgrown at that time with plants of the desert, were tombs and small pyramids, above which towered the three great pyramids: those of Cheops, Chafre, and Menkere, and the Sphinx. These immense structures stand only a few hundred yards from one another. The three pyramids are in a line from northeast to southwest. East of this line and nearer the Nile is the Sphinx, near whose feet was the underground temple of Horus.

The pyramids, but especially that of Cheops, as a work of human labor, astound by their greatness. This pyramid is a pointed stone mountain; its original height was thirty-five stories, or four hundred and eighty-one feet, standing on a square foundation each side of which was seven hundred and fifty-five feet. It occupied a little more than thirteen acres of area, and its four triangular walls would cover

twenty acres of land. In building it, such vast numbers of stones were used that it would be possible to build a wall of the height of a man, a wall half a metre thick, and two thousand five hundred kilometres long.

When the attendants of the prince had disposed themselves under the wretched trees, some occupied themselves in finding water; others took out cakes, while Tutmosis dropped to the ground and fell asleep directly. But the prince and Pentuer walked up and down conversing.

The night was clear enough to let them see on one side the immense outline of the pyramids, on the other, the Sphinx, which seemed small in comparison.

"I am here for the fourth time," said the heir, "and my heart is always filled with regret and astonishment. When a pupil in the higher school, I thought that, on ascending the throne, I would build something of more worth than the pyramid of Cheops. But to-day I am ready to laugh at my insolence when I think that the great pharaoh in building his tomb paid sixteen hundred talents (about ten million francs) for the vegetables alone which were used by the laborers. Where should I find sixteen hundred talents even for wages?"

"Envy not Cheops, lord," replied the priest. "Other pharaohs have left better works behind: lakes, canals, roads, schools, and temples."

"But may we compare those things with the pyramids?"

"Of course not," answered Pentuer, hurriedly. "In my eyes and in the eyes of all the people, each pyramid is a great crime, and that of Cheops, the greatest of all crimes."

"Thou art too much excited," said the prince.

"I am not. The pharaoh was building his immense tomb for thirty years; in the course of those years one hundred thousand people worked three months annually. And what good was there in that work? Whom did it feed, whom did it cure, to whom did it give clothing? At that work from ten to twenty thousand people perished yearly; that is, for the tomb of Cheops a half a million corpses were put into the earth. But the blood, the pain, the tears,—who will reckon them?"

"Therefore, wonder not, lord, that the Egyptian toiler to this day looks with fear toward the west, when above the horizon the triangular forms of the pyramids seem bloody or crimson. They are witnesses of his sufferings and fruitless labor.

"And to think that this will continue till those proofs of human pride are scattered into dust! But when will that be? For three thousand years those pyramids frighten men with their presence; their walls are smooth yet, and the immense inscriptions on them are legible."

"That night in the desert thy speech was different," interrupted the prince.

"For I was not looking at these. But when they are before my eyes, as at present, I am surrounded by the sobbing spirits of tortured toilers, and they whisper, 'See what they did with us! But our bones felt pain, and our hearts longed for rest from labor.'"

Rameses was touched disagreeably by this outburst.

"His holiness, my father," said he, after a while, "presented these things to me differently; when we were here five years ago, the sacred lord told me the following narrative:

“During the reign of the pharaoh Tutmosis I., Ethiopian ambassadors came to negotiate touching the tribute to be paid by them. They were all arrogant people. They said that the loss of one war was nothing, that fate might favor them in a second; and for a couple of months they disputed about tribute.

“In vain did the wise pharaoh, in his wish to enlighten the men mildly, show our roads and canals to them. They replied that in their country they had water for nothing wherever they wanted it. In vain he showed them the treasures of the temples; they said that their country concealed more gold and jewels by far than were possessed by all Egypt. In vain did the lord review his armies before them, for they asserted that Ethiopia had incomparably more warriors than his holiness. The pharaoh brought those people at last to these places where we are standing and showed them those structures.

“The Ethiopian ambassadors went around the pyramids, read the inscriptions, and next day they concluded the treaty required of them.

“Since I did not understand the heart of the matter,” continued Rameses, “my holy father explained it.

“‘My son,’ said he, ‘these pyramids are an eternal proof of superhuman power in Egypt. If any man wished to raise to himself a pyramid he would pile up a small heap of stones and abandon his labor after some hours had passed, asking: “What good is this to me?” Ten, one hundred, one thousand men would pile up a few more stones. They would throw them down without order, and leave the work after a few days, for what good would it be to them?

“‘But when a pharaoh of Egypt decides, when the Egyptian state has decided to rear a pile of stones, thousands of legions of men are sent out, and for a number of tens of years they build, till the work is completed. For the question is not this: Are the pyramids needed, but this is the will of the pharaoh to be accomplished, once it is uttered.’ So, Pentuer, this pyramid is not the tomb of Cheops, but the *will* of Cheops,—a will which had more men to carry it out than had any king on earth, and which was as orderly and enduring in action as the gods are.

“While I was yet at school they taught me that the will of the people was a great power, the greatest power under the sun. And still the will of the people can raise one stone barely. How great, then, must be the will of the pharaoh who has raised a mountain of stones only because it pleased him, only because he wished thus, even were it without an object.”

“Wouldst thou, lord, wish to show thy power in such fashion?” inquired Pentuer, suddenly.

“No,” answered the prince, without hesitation. “When the pharaohs have once shown their power, they may be merciful; unless some one should resist their orders.”

“And still this young man is only twenty-three years of age!” thought the frightened priest.

They turned toward the river and walked some time in silence.

“Lie down, lord,” said the priest, after a while; “sleep. We have made no small journey.”

“But can I sleep?” answered the prince. “First I am surrounded by those legions of laborers who, according to thy view, perished in building the pyramids— Just as if

they could have lived forever had they not raised those structures! Then, again, I think of his holiness, my father, who is dying, perhaps, at this very moment. Common men suffer, common men spill their blood! Who will prove to me that my divine father is not tortured more on his costly bed than thy toilers who are carrying heated stones to a building?

“Laborers, always laborers! For thee, O priest, only he deserves compassion who bites lice. A whole series of pharaohs have gone into their graves; some died in torments, some were killed. But thou thinkest not of them; thou thinkest only of those whose service is that they begot other toilers who dipped up muddy water from the Nile, or thrust barley balls into the mouths of their milch cows.

“But my father—and I? Was not my son slain, and also a woman of my household? Was Typhon compassionate to me in the desert? Do not my bones ache after a long journey? Do not missiles from Libyan slings whistle over my head? Have I a treaty with sickness, with pain, or with death, that they should be kinder to me than to thy toilers?

“Look there: the Asiatics are sleeping, and quiet has taken possession of their breasts; but I, their lord, have a heart full of yesterday’s cares, and of fears for the morrow. Ask a toiling man of a hundred years whether in all his life he had as much sorrow as I have had during my power of a few months as commander and viceroy.”

Before them rose slowly from the depth of the night a wonderful shade. It was an object fifty yards long and as high as a house of three stories, having at its side, as it were, a five-storied tower of uncommon structure.

“Here is the Sphinx,” said the irritated prince, “purely priests’ work! Whenever I see this, in the day or the night time, the question always tortures me: What is this, and what is the use of it? The pyramids I understand: A mighty pharaoh wished to show his power, and, perhaps, which was wiser, wished to secure eternal life which no thief or enemy might take from him. But this Sphinx! Evidently that is our sacred priestly order, which has a very large, wise head and lion’s claws beneath it.

“This repulsive statue, full of double meaning, which seems to exult because we appear like locusts when we stand near it,—it is neither a man nor a beast nor a rock— What is it, then? What is its meaning? Or that smile which it has— If thou admire the everlasting endurance of the pyramids, it smiles; if thou go past to converse with the tombs, it smiles. Whether the fields of Egypt are green, or Typhon lets loose his fiery steeds, or the slave seeks his freedom in the desert, or Rameses the Great drives conquered nations before him, it has for all one and the same changeless smile. Nineteen dynasties have passed like shadows; but it smiles on and would smile even were the Nile to grow dry, and were Egypt to disappear under sand fields.

“Is not that monster the more dreadful that it has a mild human visage? Lasting itself throughout ages, it has never known grief over life, which is fleeting and filled with anguish.”

“Dost thou not remember, lord, the faces of the gods,” interrupted Pentuer, “or hast thou not seen mummies? All immortals look on transient things with the selfsame indifference. Even man does when nearing the end of his earth-life.”

“The gods hear our prayers sometimes, but the Sphinx never moves. No compassion on that face, a mere gigantic jeering terror. If I knew that in its mouth were hidden some prophecy for me, or some means to elevate Egypt, I should not dare to put a question. It seems to me that I should hear some awful answer uttered with

unpitying calmness. This is the work and the image of the priesthood. It is worse than man, for it has a lion's body; it is worse than a beast, for it has a human head; it is worse than stone, for inexplicable life is contained in it."

At that moment groaning and muffled voices reached them, the source of which they could not determine.

"Is the Sphinx singing?" inquired the astonished prince.

"That singing is in the underground temple," replied Pentuer. "But why are they praying at this night hour?"

"Ask rather why they pray at all, since no one hears them."

Pentuer took the direction at once and went toward the place of the singing. The prince found some stone for a support and sat down wearied. He put his hands behind him, leaned back, and looked into the immense face before him.

In spite of the lack of light, the superhuman features were clearly visible; just the shade added life and character. The more the prince gazed into that face, the more powerfully he felt that he had been prejudiced, that his dislike was unreasonable.

On the face of the Sphinx, there was no cruelty, but rather resignation. In its smile there was no jeering, but rather sadness. It did not feel the wretchedness and fleeting nature of mankind, for it did not see them. Its eyes, filled with expression, were fixed somewhere beyond the Nile, beyond the horizon, toward regions concealed from human sight beneath the vault of heaven. Was it watching the disturbing growth of the Assyrian monarchy? Or the impudent activity of Phœnicia? Or the birth of Greece, or events, perhaps, which were preparing on the Jordan? Who could answer?

The prince was sure of one thing, that it was gazing, thinking, waiting for something with a calm smile worthy of supernatural existence. And, moreover, it seemed to him that if that *something* appeared on the horizon, the Sphinx would rise up and go to meet it.

What was that to be, and when would it come? This was a mystery the significance of which was depicted expressly on the face of that creature which had existed for ages. But it would of necessity take place on a sudden, since the Sphinx had not closed its eyes for one instant during millenniums, and was gazing, gazing, always.

Meanwhile Pentuer found a window through which came from the underground temple pensive hymns of the priestly chorus:

Chorus I. "Rise, as radiant as Isis, rise as Sothis rises on the firmament in the morning at the beginning of the established year."

Chorus II. "The god Amon-Ra was on my right and on my left. He himself gave into my hands dominion over all the world, thus causing the downfall of my enemies."

Chorus I. "Thou wert still young, thou wert wearing braided hair, but in Egypt naught was done save at thy command—no corner-stone was laid for an edifice unless thou wert present."

Chorus II. "I came to Thee, ruler of the gods, great god, lord of the sun. Tum promises that the sun will appear, and that I shall be like him, and the Nile; that I shall reach the throne of Osiris, and shall possess it forever."

Chorus I. "Thou hast returned in peace, respected by the gods, O ruler of both worlds, Ra-Mer-Amen-Rameses. I assure to thee unbroken rule; kings will come to thee to pay tribute."

Chorus II. "O thou, thou Osiris-Rameses! ever-living son of heaven, born of the goddess Nut, may thy mother surround thee with the mystery of heaven, and permit that thou become a god, O thou, O Osiris-Rameses."²³

"So then the holy father is dead," said Pentuer to himself.

He left the window and approached the place where the heir was sitting, sunk in imaginings.

The priest knelt before him, fell on his face, and exclaimed:

"Be greeted, O pharaoh, ruler of the world!"

"What dost thou say?" cried the prince, springing up.

"May the One, the All-Powerful, pour down on thee wisdom and strength, and happiness on thy people."

"Rise, Pentuer! Then I—then I—"

Suddenly he took the arm of the priest and turned toward the Sphinx.

"Look at it," said he.

But neither in the face nor in the posture of the colossus was there any change. One pharaoh had stepped over the threshold of eternity; another rose up like the sun, but the stone face of the god or the monster was the same precisely. On its lips was a gentle smile for earthly power and glory; in its glance there was a waiting for *something* which was to come, but *when* no one knew.

Soon the messengers returned from the ferry with information that boats would be waiting there.

Pentuer went among the palms, and cried,—

"Wake! wake!"

The watchful Asiatics sprang up at once, and began to bridle their horses. Tutmosis also rose, and yawned with a grimace.

"Brr!" grumbled he, "what cold! Sleep is a good thing! I barely dozed a little, and now I am able to go even to the end of the world, even again to the Soda Lakes. Brr! I have forgotten the taste of wine, and it seems to me that my hands are becoming covered with hair, like the paws of a jackal. And it is two hours to the palace yet.

"Happy are common men! One ragged rogue sleeps after another and feels no need of washing: he will not go to work till his wife brings a barley cake; while I, a great lord, must wander about, like a thief in the night, through the desert, without a drop of water to put to my lips."

The horses were ready, and Rameses mounted his own. Pentuer approached, took the bridle of the ruler's steed, and led, going himself on foot.

"What is this?" inquired the astonished Tutmosis.

²³ Tomb inscriptions.

He bethought himself quickly, ran up, and took Rameses' horse by the bridle on the other side. And so all advanced in silence, astonished at the bearing of the priest, though they felt that something important had happened.

After a few hundred steps the desert ceased, and a highroad through the field lay before the travellers.

"Mount your horses," said Rameses; "we must hurry."

"His holiness commands you to sit on your horses," cried Pentuer.

All were amazed. But Tutmosis recovered quickly, and placed his hand on his sword-hilt.

"May he live through eternity, our all-powerful and gracious leader Rameses!" shouted the adjutant.

"May he live through eternity!" howled the Asiatics, shaking their weapons.

"I thank you, my faithful warriors," answered their lord.

A moment later the mounted party was hastening toward the river.

Chapter L

WE know not whether the prophets in the underground temple of the Sphinx saw the new ruler of Egypt when he halted at the foot of the pyramids, and gave information touching him at the palace, and if so how they did it. The fact is that when Rameses was approaching the ferry, the most worthy Herhor gave orders to rouse the palace servants, and when their lord was crossing the Nile all priests, generals, and civil dignitaries were assembled in the great hall of audience.

Exactly at sunrise Rameses XIII., at the head of a small escort, rode into the palace yard, where the servants fell on their faces before him, and the guard presented arms to the sound of drums and trumpets.

His holiness saluted the army and went to the bathing chambers, where he took a bath filled with perfumes. Then he gave permission to arrange his divine hair; but when the barber asked most submissively if the pharaoh commanded to shave his head and beard, the lord replied,—

“There is no need. I am not a priest, but a warrior.”

These words reached the audience-hall a moment later; in an hour they had gone around the palace; about midday they had passed through every part of the city of Memphis, and toward evening they were known in all the temples of the state, from Tami-n-hor and Sabne-Chetam on the north to Sunnu and Pilak on the south.

At this intelligence the nomarchs, the nobility, the army, the people, and the foreigners were wild with delight, but the sacred order of priests mourned the more zealously the dead pharaoh.

When his holiness emerged from the bath he put on a warrior's short shirt with black and yellow stripes, and a yellow breast-piece; on his feet sandals fastened with thongs, and on his head a low helmet with a circlet. Then he girded on that Assyrian sword which he had worn at the battle of the Soda Lakes, and, surrounded by a great suite of generals, he entered with a clatter and clinking the audience-hall.

There the high priest Herhor stood before him, having at his side Sem, the holy high priest, Mefres, and others, and behind him the chief judges of Thebes and Memphis, some of the nearer nomarchs, the chief treasurer, also the overseers of the house of wheat, the house of cattle, the house of garments, the house of slaves, the house of silver and gold, and a multitude of other dignitaries.

Herhor bowed before Rameses, and said with emotion,—

“Lord! it has pleased thy eternally living father to withdraw to the gods where he is enjoying endless delight. To thee, then, has fallen the duty of caring for the fate of the orphan kingdom.

“Be greeted, therefore, O lord and ruler of the world, and, holiness, may thou live through eternity Cham-Sem-Merer-Amen-Rameses-Neter-haq-an.”

Those present repeated this salutation with enthusiasm. They expected the new ruler to show some emotion or feeling. To the astonishment of all he merely moved his brow and answered,—

“In accordance with the will of his holiness, my father, and with the laws of Egypt, I take possession of government and will conduct it to the glory of the state and the happiness of the people.”

He turned suddenly to Herhor and, looking him sharply in the eyes, inquired,—

“On thy mitre, worthiness, I see the golden serpent. Why hast thou put that symbol of regal power on thy head?”

A deathlike silence settled on the assembly. The haughtiest man in Egypt had never dreamed that the young lord would begin rule by putting a question like that to the most powerful person in the state, more powerful, perhaps, than the late pharaoh.

But behind the young lord stood a number of generals; in the courtyard glittered the bronze-covered regiments of the guard; and crossing the Nile at that moment was an army wild from the triumph at the Soda Lakes, and enamored of its leader.

The powerful Herhor grew pale as wax, and the voice could not issue from his straitened throat.

“I ask your worthiness,” repeated the pharaoh, calmly, “by what right is the regal serpent on thy mitre?”

“This is the mitre of thy grandfather, the holy Amenhôtep,” answered Herhor, in a low voice. “The supreme council commanded me to wear it on occasions.”

“My holy grandfather,” replied the pharaoh, “was father of the queen, and in the way of favor he received the right to adorn his mitre with the ureus. But, so far as is known to me, his sacred vestment is counted among the relics of the temple of Amon.”

Herhor had recovered.

“Deign to remember, holiness,” explained he, “that for twenty-four hours Egypt has been deprived of its legal ruler. Meanwhile some one had to wake and put to sleep the god Osiris, to impart blessings to the people and render homage to the ancestors of the pharaoh.

“In such a grievous time the supreme council commanded me to wear this holy relic, so that the order of the state and the service of the gods might not be neglected. But the moment that we have a lawful and mighty ruler I set aside the wondrous relic.”

Then Herhor took from his head the mitre adorned with the ureus, and gave it to the high priest Mefres.

The threatening face of the pharaoh grew calm, and he turned his steps toward the throne.

Suddenly the holy Mefres barred the way, and said while bending to the pavement,—

“Deign, holy lord, to hear my most submissive prayer.”

But neither in his voice nor his eyes was there submission when, straightening himself, he continued,—

“I have words from the supreme council of high priests.”

“Utter them,” said the pharaoh.

“It is known to thee, holiness, that a pharaoh who has not received ordination as high priest cannot perform the highest sacrifices; that is, dress and undress the miraculous Osiris—”

“I understand,” interrupted Rameses, “I am a pharaoh who has not received the ordination of high priest.”

“For that reason,” continued Mefres, “the supreme council begs thee submissively, holiness, to appoint a high priest to take thy place in religious functions.”

When they heard these decided words, the high priests and civil dignitaries trembled and squirmed as if standing on hot stones, and the generals touched their swords as if involuntarily. The holy Mefres looked at them with unconcealed contempt, and fixed his cold glance again on the face of the pharaoh.

But the lord of the world showed no trouble even this time.

“It is well,” said he, “that thou hast reminded me, worthiness, of this important duty. The military profession and affairs of state do not permit me to occupy myself with the ceremonies of our holy religion, so I must appoint a substitute.”

While speaking he looked around at the men assembled.

On the left of Herhor stood the holy Sem. Rameses glanced into his mild and honest face and inquired suddenly,—

“Who and what art thou, worthiness?”

“My name is Sem; I am high priest of the temple of Ptah in Pi-Bast.”

“Thou wilt be my substitute in religious ceremonies,” said the pharaoh, pointing toward him with his finger.

A murmur of astonishment ran through the assembly.

After long meditation and counsels it would have been difficult to select a more worthy priest for that high office.

Herhor grew much paler than before; Mefres pressed his blue lips together tightly and dropped his eyelids.

A moment later the new pharaoh sat on his throne, which instead of feet had the carved figures of princes and the kings of nine nations.

Soon Herhor gave to the lord, on a golden plate, a white and also a red crown.

The sovereign placed the crowns on his own head in silence, while those present fell prostrate.

That was not the solemn coronation; it was merely taking possession of power.

When the priests had incensed the pharaoh and had sung a hymn to Osiris, imploring that god to pour all blessings on the sovereign, dignitaries of the civil power and of the army were permitted to kiss the lowest step of the throne. Then Rameses took a gold spoon, and, repeating a prayer which the holy Sem pronounced aloud, he incensed the statues of the gods arranged in line on both sides of the pharaoh’s chapel.

“What am I to do now?” inquired he.

“Show thyself to the people,” replied Herhor.

Through a gilded, widely opened door his holiness ascended marble steps to a terrace, and, raising his hands, faced in turn toward the four sides of the universe. The sound of trumpets was heard, and from the summits of pylons banners were hung out. Whoso was in a field, in a yard, on the street, fell prostrate; the stick, raised above the back of a beast or a slave, was lowered without giving the blow, and all criminals against the state who had been sentenced that day received grace.

Descending from the terrace the pharaoh inquired,—

“Have I something more to do?”

“Refreshments and affairs of state are awaiting thee, holiness,” replied Herhor.

“After that I may rest,” said the pharaoh. “Where are the remains of his holiness, my father?”

“Given to the embalmers,” whispered Herhor.

Tears filled the pharaoh’s eyes, and his mouth quivered, but he restrained himself and looked down in silence. It was not proper that servants should see emotion in such a mighty ruler.

Wishing to turn the pharaoh’s attention to another subject, Herhor asked,—

“Wilt thou be pleased, holiness, to receive the homage due from the queen, thy mother?”

“I? Am I to receive homage from my mother?” asked Rameses, with repressed voice.

“Hast thou forgotten what the sage Eney said? Perhaps holy Sem will repeat those beautiful words to us.”

“Remember,” quoted Sem, “that she gave birth to thee and nourished thee in every manner—”

“Speak further; speak!” insisted the pharaoh, striving always to command himself.

“Shouldst thou forget that she would raise her hands to the god, and he would hear her complaint. She bore thee long beneath her heart, like a great burden, and gave thee birth when thy months had expired. She carried thee in her arms afterward, and during three years she put her breast into thy mouth. She reared thee, was not disgusted with thy uncleanness. And when thou wert going to school and wert exercised in writing, she placed before thy teacher daily bread and beer from her own dwelling.”²⁴

Rameses sighed deeply and said with calmness,—

“So ye see that it is not proper that my mother should salute me. Rather I will go to her.”

And he passed through a series of halls lined with marble, alabaster, and wood, painted in bright colors, carved and gilded; behind him went his immense suite. But when he came to the antechamber of his mother’s apartments, he made a sign to leave him. When he had passed the antechamber, he stopped a while before the door, then knocked and entered quietly.

In a chamber with bare walls, where in place of furniture there stood only a low wooden couch and a broken pitcher holding water, all in sign of mourning, Queen

²⁴ Authentic.

Nikotris, the mother of the pharaoh, was sitting on a stone. She was in a coarse shirt, barefoot; her face was smeared with mud from the Nile, and in her tangled hair there were ashes.

When she saw Rameses, the worthy lady inclined so as to fall at his feet. But the son seized her in his arms, and said with weeping,—

“If thou, O mother, incline to the ground before *me*, I shall be forced to go under the ground before *thee*.”

The queen drew his head to her bosom, wiped away his tears with the sleeve of her coarse shirt, and then, raising her hands, whispered,—

“May all the gods, may the spirit of thy father and grandfather, surround thee with blessing and solicitude. O Isis, I have never spared offerings to thee, but to-day I make the greatest; I give my beloved son to thee. Let this kingly son become thy son entirely, and may his greatness and his glory increase thy divine inheritance.”

The pharaoh embraced and kissed his mother repeatedly, then he seated her on the wooden couch and sat on the stone himself.

“Has my father left commands to me?” inquired he.

“He begged thee only to remember him, but he said to the supreme council, ‘I leave you my heir, who is a lion and an eagle in one person; obey him, and he will elevate Egypt to incomparable power.’”

“Dost thou think that the priests will obey me?”

“Remember,” answered the queen, “that the device of the pharaoh is a serpent, and a serpent means prudence, which is silent, and no one knows when it will bite mortally. If thou take time as thy confederate, thou wilt accomplish everything.”

“Herhor is tremendously haughty. To-day he dared to put on the mitre of the holy Amenhôtep. Of course I commanded him to set it aside. I will remove him from the government,—him and certain members of the supreme council.”

The queen shook her head.

“Egypt is thine,” said she, “and the gods have endowed thee with great wisdom. Were it not for that, I should fear terribly a struggle with Herhor.”

“I do not dispute with him; I remove him.”

“Egypt is thine,” repeated the queen, “but I fear a struggle with the priests. It is true that thy father, who was mild beyond measure, has made those men insolent, but it is not wise to bring them to despair through severity. Besides, think of this: Who will replace them in counsel? They know everything that has been, that is, and that will be on earth and in heaven; they know the most secret thoughts of mankind, and they direct hearts as the wind directs tree leaves. Without them thou wilt be ignorant not only of what is happening in Tyre and Nineveh, but even in Thebes and Memphis.”

“I do not reject their wisdom, but I want service,” answered the pharaoh. “I know that their understanding is great, but it must be controlled so that it may not deceive, and it must be directed lest it ruin the State. Tell me thyself, mother, what they have done with Egypt in the course of thirty years? The people suffer want, or are in rebellion; the army is small, the treasury is empty, and meanwhile two months’ distance from us Assyria is increasing like dough containing leaven, and to-day is forcing on us treaties.”

“Do as may please thee, but remember that the device of a pharaoh is a serpent, and a serpent is silence and discretion.”

“Thou speakest truth, mother, but believe me, at certain times daring is better than prudence. The priests planned, as I know to-day, that the Libyan war should last entire years. I finished it in the course of a few days, and only because every day I took some mad but decisive step— If I had not rushed to the desert against them, which by the way was a great indiscretion, we should have the Libyans outside Memphis at this moment.”

“I know that thou didst hunt down Tehenna, and that Typhon caught thee,” said the queen. “O hasty child, thou didst not think of me.”

He smiled.

“Be of good heart,” replied Rameses. “When the pharaoh is in battle, at his left and his right hand stands Amon. Who then can touch him?”

He embraced the queen once more and departed.

Chapter LI

THE immense suite of his holiness had remained in the hall of attendance, but as if split into two parts. On one side were Herhor, Mefres, and some high priests superior in years; on the other were all the generals, civil officials, and a majority of the younger priests.

The eagle glance of the pharaoh saw in one instant this division of dignitaries, and in the heart of the young sovereign joyous pride was kindled.

“And here I have gained a victory without drawing my sword,” thought Rameses.

The dignitaries drew away farther and more distinctly from Herhor and Mefres, for no one doubted that the two high priests, till then the most powerful persons in the state, had ceased to possess the favor of the new pharaoh.

Now the sovereign went to the hall of refection, where he was astonished first of all by the multitude of serving priests and the number of the dishes.

“Have I to eat all this?” inquired he, without hiding his amazement.

The priest who inspected the kitchen explained to the pharaoh that the dishes not used by his holiness went as offerings to the dynasty. And while speaking he indicated the statues placed in line along the hall.

Rameses gazed at the statues, which looked as if no one had made them an offering; next at the priests, who were as fresh of complexion as if they had eaten everything presented; then he asked for beer, also the bread used by warriors, and garlic.

The elder priest was astonished, but he repeated the order to the younger one. The younger hesitated, but repeated the command to the serving men and women. The servants at the first moment did not believe their own ears, but a quarter of an hour later they returned terrified, and whispered to the priests that there was no warriors’ bread nor garlic.

The pharaoh smiled and gave command that from that day forth there should not be a lack of simple food in his kitchen. Then he ate a pigeon, a morsel of wheaten cake, and drank some wine.

He confessed in spirit that the food was well prepared and the wine exquisite. He could not free himself from the thought, however, that the court kitchen must swallow immense sums of money.

Having burnt incense to his ancestors, the pharaoh betook himself to his cabinet to hear reports from ministers.

Herhor came first. He bent down before his lord much lower than he had when greeting him, and congratulated Rameses on his victory at the Soda Lakes with great enthusiasm.

“Thou didst rush,” said he, “holiness, on the Libyans like Typhon on the miserable tents of wanderers through the desert. Thou hast won a great battle with very small losses, and with one blow of thy divine sword hast finished a war, the end of which was unseen by us common men.”

The pharaoh felt his dislike toward the minister decreasing.

“For this cause,” continued the high priest, “the supreme council implores thee, holiness, to appoint ten talents’ reward to the valiant regiments. Do thou, as supreme chief, permit that to thy name be added ‘The Victorious.’”

Counting on the youth of the pharaoh, Herhor exaggerated in flattery. Rameses recovered from his delight and replied on a sudden,—

“What wouldst thou add to my name had I destroyed the Assyrian army and filled our temples with the riches of Nineveh and Babylon?”

“So he is always dreaming of that?” thought the high priest.

The pharaoh, as if to confirm Herhor’s fears, changed the subject.

“How many troops have we?” asked he.

“Here in Memphis?”

“No, in all Egypt.”

“Thou hadst ten regiments, holiness,” answered Herhor. “The worthy Nitager on the eastern boundary has fifteen. There are ten on the south, for Nubia begins to be disturbed; five are garrisoned throughout the country.”

“Forty altogether,” said Rameses, after some thought. “How many warriors in all?”

“About sixty thousand.”

Rameses sprang up from his chair.

“Sixty thousand instead of one hundred and twenty thousand!” shouted he. “What does this mean? What have ye done with my army?”

“There are no means to maintain more men.”

“O God!” said the Pharaoh, seizing his head. “But the Assyrians may attack us a month hence. We are disarmed—”

“We have a preliminary treaty with Assyria,” put in Herhor.

“A woman might give such an answer, but not a minister of war,” said Rameses, with indignation. “What does a treaty mean when there is no army behind it: To-day one-half of the troops which King Assar commands would crush us.”

“Deign to be at rest, holy lord. At the first news of Assyrian treason we should have half a million of warriors.”

The pharaoh laughed in his face.

“What? How? Thou art mad, priest! Thou art groping among papyruses, but I have served seven years in the army, and there was almost no day which I did not pass in drill or manœuvres. How couldst thou have an army of half a million in the course of a few months?”

“All the nobility would rise.”

“What is thy nobility? Nobility is not an army. To form an army of half a million, at least a hundred and fifty regiments are needed, and we, as thou thyself sayest, have forty. How could those men who to-day are herding cattle, ploughing land, making pots, or drinking and idling on their lands, learn the art of warfare? Egyptians are poor materials for an army. I know that, for I see them daily. A Libyan, a Greek, a

Hittite, in boyhood even uses a bow and arrows and a sling; he handles a club perfectly; in a year he learns to march passably. But only in three years will an Egyptian march in some fashion. It is true that he grows accustomed to a sword and a spear in two years, but to cast missiles four years are too short a time for him. So in the course of a few months ye could put out not an army, but half a million of a rabble which the Assyrians would break to pieces in the twinkling of an eye. For, though the Assyrian regiments are poor and badly trained, an Assyrian knows how to hurl stones and shoot arrows; he knows how to cut and thrust, and, above all, he has the onrush of a wild beast, which is lacking in the mild Egyptians altogether. We break the enemy by this, that our trained and drilled regiments are like a battering ram: it is necessary to beat down one-half of our men before the column is injured. But when the column is broken, there is no Egyptian army."

"Thou speakest wisdom," said Herhor to the panting pharaoh. "Only the gods possess such acquaintance with things. I know that the forces of Egypt are too weak; that to create new ones many years of labor are needed. For this very reason I wish to conclude a treaty with Assyria."

"But ye have concluded it already!"

"For the moment. Sargon, in view of the sickness of thy father, and fearing thee, holiness, deferred the conclusion of a regular treaty till thou shouldst ascend the throne."

The pharaoh fell into anger again.

"What?" cried he. "Then they think really of seizing Phœnicia! And do they suppose that I will sign the infamy of my reign? Evil spirits have seized all of you!"

The audience was ended. Herhor fell on his face this time, but while returning from his lord he considered in his heart,—

"His holiness has heard the report, hence he does not reject my services. I have told him that he must sign a treaty with Assyria, hence the most difficult question is finished. He will come to his mind before Sargon returns to us. But he is a lion, and not even a lion, but a mad elephant. Still he became pharaoh only because he is the grandson of a high priest. He does not understand yet that those same hands which raised him so high—"

In the antechamber the worthy Herhor halted, thought over something; at last instead of going to his own dwelling he went to Queen Nikotris.

In the garden there were neither women nor children, but from the scattered villas came groans. Those were from women belonging to the house of the late pharaoh who were lamenting that sovereign who had gone to the west. Their sorrow, it seemed, was sincere.

Meanwhile the supreme judge entered the cabinet of the new pharaoh.

"What hast thou to tell me, worthiness?" asked Rameses.

"Some days ago an unusual thing happened near Thebes," replied the judge. "A laborer killed his wife and three children and drowned himself in the sacred lake."

"Had he gone mad?"

"It seems that his act was caused by hunger."

The pharaoh grew thoughtful.

"A strange event," said he, "but I wish to hear of something else. What crimes happen most commonly in these days?"

The supreme judge hesitated.

"Speak boldly," said the pharaoh, now grown impatient, "and hide nothing from me. I know that Egypt has fallen into a morass; I wish to draw it out, hence I must know everything."

"The most usual crimes are revolts. But only common people revolt," added the judge, hastily.

"I am listening," said the pharaoh.

"In Kosem a regiment of masons and stone-cutters revolted recently; for some time needful supplies had been refused them. In Sechem earth-tillers killed a scribe who was collecting taxes. In Melcatis and Pi-Hebit also earth-tillers wrecked the houses of Phoenician tenants. At Kasa they refused to repair the canal, declaring that pay from the treasury was due them for that labor. Finally in the porphyry quarries the convicts killed their overseers and tried to escape in a body to the seacoast."

"This news does not surprise me," replied the pharaoh. "But what dost thou think?"

"It is necessary first of all to punish the guilty."

"But I think it necessary first of all to give laborers what belongs to them. A hungry ox will lie down; a hungry horse will totter on his feet and pant. How, then, can we ask a hungry man to work and not declare that he is suffering?"

"Then, holiness—"

"Pentuer will open a council to investigate these matters," interrupted the pharaoh. "Meanwhile I have no desire to punish."

"In that case a general insurrection will break out," cried the judge, in alarm.

The pharaoh rested his chin on his hands and considered,—

"Well," said he, after a while, "let the courts do their work, but as mildly as possible. And this very day Pentuer will assemble his council."

"In truth," added he, after a time, "it is easier to make a decision in battle than in the disorder which has mastered Egypt."

When the supreme judge had departed, the pharaoh summoned Tutmosis. He directed him to salute in the name of the sovereign the army returning from the Soda Lakes, and to distribute twenty talents among the officers and warriors.

Then he commanded Pentuer to come; meanwhile he received the chief treasurer.

"I wish to know," said he, "what the condition of the treasury is."

"We have," replied the dignitary, "at this moment twenty thousand talents of value in the granaries, stables, storehouses, and chests, while taxes are coming in daily."

"But insurrections are breaking out daily," added the pharaoh. "What is our general income and outgo?"

"On the army we expend yearly twenty thousand talents; on the court two to three thousand talents monthly."

"Well, what further? And public works?"

“At present they are carried on without expense,” said the treasurer, dropping his head.

“And the income?”

“We have as much as we expend,” whispered the official.

“Then we have forty or fifty thousand talents yearly. And where is the rest?”

“Mortgaged to the Phœnicians, to certain bankers, to merchants, and to the temples.”

“Well, but there is besides the inviolable treasure of the pharaohs in gold, platinum, and jewels; how much is that worth?”

“That was taken and distributed ten years ago.”

“For what purpose? To whom?”

“For the needs of the court, in gifts to nomarchs and to temples.”

“The court had incomes from current taxes. But could presents exhaust the treasury of my father?”

“Osiris Rameses, thy father, holiness, was a bountiful lord and made great offerings.”

“Is it possible? Were they so great? I wish to know about this,” said the pharaoh, impatiently.

“Exact accounts are in the archives; I remember only general figures.”

“Speak!”

“For example,” answered the treasurer, hesitatingly, “Osiris Rameses in the course of his happy reign gave to the temples about one hundred towns, one hundred and twenty ships, two million head of cattle, two million bags of wheat, one hundred and twenty thousand horses, eighty thousand slaves, two hundred thousand kegs of beer and wine, three million loaves of bread, thirty thousand garments, thirty thousand vessels of honey, olives, and incense. Besides that, one thousand talents of gold, three thousand talents of silver, ten thousand of bronze, five hundred talents of dark bronze, six million garlands of flowers, twelve hundred statues of gods, and thirty thousand precious stones.²⁵ Other numbers I do not remember at the moment, but they are all recorded.”

The pharaoh raised his hands with laughter, but after a time fell into anger, and cried, while striking the table with his fist,—

“It is an unheard of thing that a handful of priests should use so much beer and bread, so many garlands and robes, while they have their own income,—an immense income, which exceeds the wants of these holy men a hundred times.”

“Thou hast been pleased, holiness, to forget that the priests support tens of thousands of poor; they cure an equal number of sick, and maintain a number of regiments at the expense of the temples.”

“What do they want of regiments? Even the pharaohs use troops only in wartime. As to the sick, almost every man of them pays for himself, or works out what he owes the temple for curing him. And the poor? But they work for the temple: they carry water for the gods, take part in solemnities, and, above all, are connected with the working of miracles. It is they who at the gates of the temples, recover reason, sight, hearing;

²⁵ The gifts of Rameses III. to the temples were incomparably greater.

their wounds are cured, their feet and hands regain strength, while the people looking at these miracles pray all the more eagerly and give offerings to gods the more bountiful.

“The poor are like the oxen and sheep of the temples: they bring in pure profit—”

“But,” the treasurer made bold to put in, “the priests do not expend all the offerings; they lay them up, and increase the capital.”

“For what purpose?”

“For some sudden need of the state.”

“Who has seen this capital?”

“I have seen it myself,” said the dignitary. “The treasures accumulated in the labyrinth do not decrease; they increase from generation to generation, so that in case—”

“So that the Assyrians might have something to take when they conquer Egypt, which is managed by priests so beautifully!” interrupted the pharaoh. “I thank thee, chief treasurer; I knew that the financial condition of Egypt was bad, but I did not suppose the state ruined. There are rebellions, there is no army, the pharaoh is in poverty; but the treasure in the labyrinth is increasing from generation to generation.”

“If each dynasty, an entire dynasty, gave as many gifts to temples as my father has given, the labyrinth would have nineteen thousand talents of gold, about sixty thousand of silver, and so much wheat, and land, so many cattle, slaves, and towns, so many garments and precious stones, that the best accountant could not reckon them.”

The chief treasurer was crushed when taking farewell of the sovereign. But the sovereign himself was not satisfied, for after a moment's thought it seemed to him that he had spoken too plainly with officials.

Chapter LII

THE guard in the antechamber announced Pentuer. The priest prostrated himself before the pharaoh, and said that he was waiting for commands.

"I do not wish to command," said Rameses, "but to beg thee. Thou knowest that in Egypt there are riots of laborers, artisans, even convicts. There are riots from the sea to the quarries. The only thing lacking is that my warriors should rebel and proclaim as pharaoh—Herhor, for example."

"Live through eternity, holiness!" replied the priest. "There is not a man in Egypt who would not sacrifice himself for thee, and not bless thy name."

"Aha, if they knew," said the ruler, with anger, "how helpless the pharaoh is, and how poor he is, each nomarch would like to be the lord of his province. I thought that on inheriting the double crown I should signify something. But I have convinced myself during the first day that I am merely a shadow of the former rulers of Egypt; for what can a pharaoh be without wealth, without an array, and, above all, without faithful subjects? I am like the statues of the gods which they incense, and before which they place offerings. The statues are powerless and the offerings serve to fatten the priests. But, true, thou art on their side."

"It is painful to me," answered Pentuer, "that thou speakest thus, holiness, on the first day of thy reign. If news of this were to go over Egypt!"

"To whom can I tell what pains me?" interrupted Rameses. "Thou art my counsellor; I was saved by thee, or at least thou hadst the wish to save my life, not of course to publish to the world that which is happening in the ruler's heart, which heart I open before thee. But thou art right."

He walked up and down in the chamber, and said after a while in a tone considerably calmer,—

"I have appointed thee chief of a council which is to investigate the causes of those ever-recurring riots in Egypt. I wish that only the guilty be punished, and that justice be done those who are injured."

"May the god support thee with his favor," whispered the priest. "I will do what thou commandest. But the causes of the riots I know already."

"What are they?"

"More than once have I spoken of them to thee, holiness. The toiling people are hungry; they have too much work, and they pay too many taxes. He who worked formerly from sunrise till sunset must begin now an hour before sunrise and finish an hour after sunset. It is not long since a common man might go every tenth day to visit the graves of his mother and father, speak with their shades, and make them offerings. But to-day no one goes, for no one has time to go.

"Formerly a working man ate three wheat cakes in the course of the day; at present he has not even barley bread. Formerly labor on the canals, dams, and roads was deducted from the taxes; now the taxes are paid independently while public works are carried on without wages. These are the causes of riots."

"I am the poorest noble in the kingdom!" cried the pharaoh, while he tugged at his own hair. "Any landowner gives his cattle proper food and rest; but all men who work for me are tired and hungry."

"What am I to do, then, tell thou who hast begged me to improve the lot of the workers?"

"Wilt thou command me to tell, lord?"

"I will beg, I will command, as thou wishest. Only speak wisely."

"Blessed be thy rule, O true son of Osiris," answered the priest. "This is what it is proper to do: Command, lord, first of all, that pay be given for labor on public works, as was the case formerly—"

"Of course."

"Next command that field labor last only from sunrise till sunset. Then direct, as during the divine dynasties, that people rest every seventh day; not every tenth, but every seventh day. Then command that landowners shall not have the right to mortgage earth-tillers, or scribes the right to beat and torture them according to fancy."

"And finally, give the tenth part, or even the twentieth part of the land as property to the workers, so that no one may take it away or mortgage it. Let each family have as much land in extent as the pavement of this room, and it will not be hungry. Give the people desert sands as property, and in a few years gardens will be growing on them."

"Thou speakest beautifully," interrupted the pharaoh; "but what thou sayest is what thou seest in thy heart, not in the world. Men's plans, though the best, are not always in accord with the natural course of things."

"I have seen such changes and their result, holiness," answered Pentuer.

"At certain temples various trials have been made at curing the sick, teaching children, rearing cattle, cultivating plants, and reforming men, and the following has happened: When they gave a lean and lazy man good food, and rest every seventh day, the man became sturdy, willing to work, and he dug more land than before. A laborer who receives wages is more cheerful and does more work than a slave, even though beaten with whips of iron. Well-nourished people have more children than hungry and overworked ones; the children of free men are healthy and strong; those of slaves are fragile, gloomy, inclined to stealing and to lying. Men have convinced themselves that land tilled by its owner gives one half more grain and vegetables than land tilled by captives."

"I will tell a most curious thing to thee, holiness: When they play on musical instruments to ploughmen, the men and the oxen work better, more quickly, and tire themselves less than when there is no music. All this has been verified at our temples."

The pharaoh smiled.

"I must," said he, "have music on my lands and in the quarries. But if the priests convince themselves of such wonders as thou art relating, why act as they do on their own estates?"

Pentuer dropped his head.

"Because," replied he, sighing, "not all priests are sages, not all have noble hearts."

“That is it!” exclaimed the pharaoh.

“And now tell me, thou who art a son of earth-tillers, and knowest that among priests there are fools and rioters, tell me, why thou art unwilling to serve me in a struggle against the priesthood? Thou knowest that I cannot improve the lot of the working man unless first I teach the priests obedience to my orders.”

Pentuer wrung his hands.

“O lord,” replied he, “a struggle with the priesthood is godless and dangerous. More than one pharaoh began it, and was unable to finish.”

“Because he was not supported by sages like thee!” burst out Rameses. “And, indeed, I shall never understand why wise and honest priests bind themselves to a band of rogues, such as the majority of this class are.”

Pentuer shook his head and began slowly,—

“During thirty thousand years the sacred order of priests has nursed Egypt and made the country the wonder of the world, which it is at present. And how have the priests, in spite of their faults, been able to do this? Because they are the lamp in which burns the light of wisdom.

“This lamp may be foul, even malodorous; still it preserves the divine fire, without which darkness and savagery would prevail among people.

“Thou speakest, lord, of a struggle with the priesthood,” continued Pentuer. “How can that profit me? If thou lose I shall be unhappy, for thou wilt not improve the lot of the worker. And if thou win? May I not live to that! for shouldst thou break the lamp, who knows whether thou wouldst not put out the fire of wisdom which for thousands of years has illuminated Egypt and mankind.

“These, lord, are the reasons why I will not take part in thy struggle with the sacred order of priests. I feel that the struggle is approaching, and I suffer because such a worm as I am unable to prevent it. But I will not participate, for I should have to betray either thee, or the God, the creator of wisdom.”

While hearing these words the pharaoh walked up and down the chamber in thought.

“Aa!” said he, without anger, “do as may please thee. Thou art not a warrior, hence I cannot reproach thee with lack of valor. But thou canst not be my adviser, though I beg thee to form a council to investigate the riots of working men, and, when I summon thee, declare what thy wisdom enjoins.”

Pentuer knelt down in taking farewell of his lord.

“In every case,” added the pharaoh, “know this, that I have no desire to quench the divine light. Let the priests guard wisdom in their temples, but—let them not make my army useless, let them not conclude shameful treaties, and—let them not steal,”—he said this excitedly,—“the treasures of the pharaohs.

“Can they think that I will stand at their gates, like a beggar, asking that they deign to give me funds to restore the state which is ruined by their stupid and villanous management? Ha, ha! Pentuer, I should not ask the gods for that which is my power and my right—Thou mayst go.”

The priest, withdrawing with his face toward the pharaoh, went out backward with obeisance, and when in the doorway he fell with his face on the pavement.

The pharaoh remained alone.

“Mortal men,” thought he, “are like children. Herhor is wise: he knows that Egypt in case of war would need half a million of warriors; he knows that those troops need training, and still he has decreased the number of the regiments.

“The chief treasurer also is wise, but it seems to him quite in order that all the treasure of the pharaohs should go to the labyrinth.

“Finally here is Pentuer. What a strange person he is! He wants me to give earth-tillers food, land, and ever-recurring holidays. All this would decrease my income, which even now is insufficient. But if I say to him: help me to take the pharaoh’s treasures from the priesthood, he calls that godlessness and the quenching of light in Egypt. Strange man, he would be glad to turn the state bottom upwards, so far as relates to the good of earth-tillers, but he would not venture to seize a high priest and lead him forth to prison. With the utmost composure he commands me to renounce half my income, but I am sure that he would not dare to take a copper uten out of the labyrinth.”

The pharaoh smiled, and again he meditated.

“Each man wants to be happy himself; but if thou wish to give happiness to all men, each one will seize thy hand as he would if thou wert drawing an aching tooth from him.

“Therefore a pharaoh must have decision. Therefore my divine father did ill when he neglected the workers and trusted beyond bounds in the priesthood. He left me a grievous inheritance, but—I will improve it.

“At the Soda Lakes there was also a difficult question, more difficult than this one. Here are only gabblers and timid cowards; there stood armed men ready to go to death.

“One battle will open our eyes more widely than tens of years in peaceful management. Whoso says to himself, ‘I will burst through this hindrance,’ will burst through it. But he who hesitates must yield.”

Darkness came. In the palace the watches were changed, and in the remoter halls torches were lighted. But no one dared enter the sovereign’s chamber unless commanded.

Rameses, wearied by sleeplessness, by the journey of the day previous, by the occupations of that day, dropped into an armchair. It seemed to him that he had been pharaoh for centuries, and he could not believe that one day had not passed since he had been at the pyramids.

“One day? Impossible!”

Then he thought that perhaps the spirits of the former pharaohs had settled in the heart of their heir. It must be so, for otherwise whence could such a feeling of age or remoteness settle down in him? And why did governing the state seem to-day a simple thing, while two months before he was alarmed when he thought that he could not govern.

“One day?” repeated he, in spirit. “But I am a thousand years in this palace!”

Suddenly he heard a repressed voice,—

“My son! O son!”

The pharaoh sprang up from his chair.

“Who art thou?” exclaimed he.

“I am, I— Hast thou forgotten me already?”

“O my son,” said the voice again, “respect the will of the gods if thou wish to receive their blessed assistance—O respect the gods, for without their assistance the greatest power on earth is as dust and shadows—O respect the gods if thou wish that the bitterness of thy faults should not poison my existence in the happy region of the West.”

The voice ceased, Rameses ordered to bring a light. One door of the room was closed, at the other a guard stood. No stranger could enter there.

Anger and alarm tore the pharaoh’s heart. “What was that? Had the shade of his father spoken indeed to him, or was that voice only a new priestly trick?”

But if the priests, notwithstanding thick walls, could speak to him from a distance, they could overhear him. And then he, the lord of the world, was like a wild beast caged in on all sides.

It is true that in the palace of the pharaoh secret listening was common. Rameses had thought, however, that his cabinet was safe, and that the insolence of priests had stopped at the threshold of the supreme ruler.

“But if that was a spirit?”

He did not wish to sup, but betook himself to rest. It seemed to him that he could not sleep; but weariness won the victory over irritation.

In a few hours bells and a light woke him. It was midnight and the astrologer priest came to make a report on the position of the heavenly bodies. The pharaoh heard the report, and said at the end of it,—

“Couldst thou, revered prophet, make thy report to the worthy Sem hereafter? He is my substitute in matters touching religion.”

The astrologer wondered greatly at the indifference of his lord to affairs of the heavens.

“Art thou pleased, holiness,” inquired he, “to refuse those indications which the stars give to rulers?”

“Do they give them?” asked the pharaoh. “Tell what they promise me.”

Clearly the astrologer had looked for the question, so he answered directly,—

“The horizon is darkened for the moment. The lord of light has not come yet to the road of truth which leads to knowledge of the divine will. But sooner or later he will find both long life and a happy reign filled with glory.”

“Aha! I thank thee, holy man. And as soon as I know what to seek I will accommodate myself to the indication. But again I beg thee to communicate henceforth with the holy Sem. He is my substitute, but shouldst thou read anything in the stars thou wilt tell me of it in the morning.”

The priest left the bedchamber shaking his head.

“They have roused me from sleep!” said Rameses, dissatisfied.

“An hour ago Queen Nikotris, most greatly to be revered, commanded me, holiness, to ask of thee an interview,” said an adjutant, suddenly.

“Now? At midnight?” asked the pharaoh.

“Her exact words were that at midnight thou wouldst wake, holiness.”

The pharaoh meditated, then answered the adjutant that he would wait for the queen in the golden hall. He thought that there no one could overhear them.

Rameses threw a mantle over his shoulders, put on sandals unfastened and commanded to light the golden hall brightly. Then he went out, directing the servants not to go with him.

He found Nikotris in the hall; she was wearing coarse linen garments in sign that she was mourning. When she saw the pharaoh she wished to drop on her knees, but her son raised the queen and embraced her.

“Has something important happened, mother, that thou art working at this hour?” inquired Rameses.

“I was not asleep—I was praying,” replied the queen. “O my son, thou hast divined wisely that the affair is important. I have heard the sacred voice of thy father.”

“Indeed!” said the pharaoh, feeling that anger was filling him.

“Thy ever-living father,” continued the queen, “told me, full of sadness, that thou wert entering on a way of error. Thou refusest with contempt the ordination of high priest, and treatest badly the servants of divinity.”

“‘Who will remain with Rameses,’ said thy father, ‘if he angers the gods and the priests desert him? Tell him—tell him,’ repeated the revered shade, ‘that in this way he will ruin Egypt, himself, and the dynasty.’”

“Oho!” said the pharaoh, “then they threaten me thus from the first day of my reign. My mother, a dog barks loudest when he is afraid; so threats are of evil omen, but only for the priesthood.”

“But thy father said this,” repeated the anxious lady.

“My immortal father and my holy grandfather,” said the pharaoh, “being pure spirits know my heart, and see the woful condition of Egypt. But since my heart wishes to raise the state by stopping abuses they would not prevent me from carrying out my measures.”

“Then dost thou not believe that the spirit of thy father gives thee counsel?” asked the queen, with rising terror.

“I know not. But I have the right to suppose that those voices of spirits, which are heard in various corners of our palace, are some trick of the priesthood. Only priests can fear me, never the gods, and spirits. Therefore it is not spirits which are frightening us, mother.”

The queen fell to thinking; it was clear that her son’s words impressed her. She had seen many miracles in her life and some of them had seemed to her suspicious.

“In that case,” said she, with a sigh, “thou art not cautious, my son. This afternoon Herhor visited me; he was very much dissatisfied with the audience. He said that it was thy wish to remove the priests from thy court.”

“But of what use are priests to me? Are they to cause great outgo in my kitchen and cellar? Or, perhaps, to hear what I say, and see what I do?”

“The whole country will revolt,” interrupted the queen, “if the priests declare that thou art an unbeliever.”

“The country is in revolt now. But the priests are the cause of it,” replied the pharaoh. “And touching the devotion of the Egyptian people I begin to have another idea. If thou knew, mother, how many lawsuits there are in Lower Egypt for insults to the gods, and in Upper Egypt for robbing the dead, thou wouldst be convinced that for our people the cause of the priests has ceased to be holy.”

“This is through the influence of foreigners, especially Phœnicians, who are flooding Egypt,” cried the lady.

“All one through whose influence; enough that Egypt no longer considers either statues or priests as superhuman. And wert thou, mother, to hear the nobility, the officers, the warriors talk, thou wouldst understand that the time has come to put the power of the pharaoh in the place of priestly power, unless all power is to fall in this country.”

“Egypt is thine,” sighed the queen. “Thy wisdom is uncommon, so do as may please thee. But act thou with caution—oh, with caution! A scorpion even when killed may still wound an unwary conqueror.”

They embraced and the pharaoh returned to his bedchamber. But, in truth, he could not sleep that time.

He understood clearly that between him and the priesthood a struggle had begun, or rather something repulsive which did not even deserve the name struggle, and which at the first moment he, the leader, could not manage. For where was the enemy? Against whom was his faithful army to show itself? Was it against the priests who fell on their faces before him? Or against the stars which said that the pharaoh had not entered yet on the true way? What and whom was he to vanquish? Was it, perhaps, those voices of spirits which were raised amid darkness? Or was it his own mother, who begged him in terror not to dismiss priests from state offices?

The pharaoh writhed on his bed while feeling his helplessness. Suddenly the thought came to him: “What care I for an enemy which yields like mud in a hand grasp? Let them talk in empty halls, let them be angry at my godlessness. I will issue orders, and whoso will not carry them out is my enemy; against him I will turn courts, police, and warriors.”

Chapter LIII

SO in the month Hator, after thirty-four years of rule, died the Pharaoh Mer-Amen-Rameses XII., the ruler of two worlds, the lord of eternity, the giver of life and every happiness.

He died because he felt that his body was growing weak and useless. He died because he was yearning for his eternal home and he wished to confide the cares of earthly rule to hands that were more youthful. Finally he died because he wished to die, for such was his will. His divine spirit flew away, like a falcon which, circling for a time above the earth, vanishes at last in blue expanses.

As his life had been the sojourn of an immortal in the region of evanescence, his death was merely one among moments in the existence of the superhuman.

Rameses XII. woke about sunrise; leaning on two prophets, surrounded by a chorus of priests, he went to the chapel of Osiris. There, as usual, he resurrected the divinity, washed and dressed it, made offerings, and raised his hands in prayer. Meanwhile the priests sang:

Chorus I. "Honor to thee who raisest thyself on the horizon and coursest across the sky."

Chorus II. "The pathway of thy sacredness is the prosperity of those on whose faces thy rays fall."

Chorus I. "Would that I might go as thou goest, O sun! without halting."

Chorus II. "Mighty wanderer in space, thou who hast no lord, for thee hundreds of millions of years are merely the twinkle of an eye."

Chorus I. "Thou goest down, but endurest. Thou multiplieth hours, days, and nights, and remainest in solitude according to thy own laws."

Chorus II. "Thou dost illumine the earth, offering thy own self with thy own hands, when under the form of Ra thou comest up on the horizon."

Chorus I. "O star, emerging great, through thy light, thou thyself formest thy own limbs."

Chorus II. "And, not begotten of any, thou givest birth to thyself on the horizon."²⁶

At this point the pharaoh spoke:

"O thou radiant in the heavens! Permit that I enter eternity. Let me join the revered and perfect shadows of the upper land. Let me, together with them, behold thy rays in the morning, and in the evening, when thou joinest thy mother Nut. And when thou turnest thy face to the West let my hands join while praying in honor of life, which is going to sleep beyond the mountains."²⁷

Thus spoke the pharaoh with upraised hands, surrounded by a cloud of incense. All at once he ceased, and dropped into the arms of the priests behind him.

²⁶ Authentic hymn.

²⁷ Authentic.

He was no longer living.

Intelligence of the pharaoh's death flew through the palace like lightning. Servants left their occupations, overseers ceased to watch over their slaves, the guard was roused; all entrances were occupied.

In the main court a throng began to gather; cooks, cellarers, equerries, women of his holiness, and their children. Some inquired: "Is this true?" Others wondered that the sun shone in heaven, but all cried at once in heaven-piercing voices,—

"O our lord! O our father! O beloved! Can it be that thou hast gone from us? Oh it is true, he is going to Abydos! To the West, to the West, to the land of the just ones! The place which thou hast loved groans and weeps for thee!"²⁸

Terrible uproar was heard throughout all the courts, throughout the whole park. It was echoed from the eastern hills, on the wings of the wind it flew across the Nile, and disturbed the city of Memphis.

Meanwhile, the priests, amid prayers, placed the body of the deceased in a rich closed litter. Eight stood at the poles of the litter; four took ostrich feather fans in their hands, others censers, and they prepared to go forth.

At this moment Queen Nikotris ran in, and, seeing the remains in the litter, threw herself at the feet of the dead pharaoh.

"O my husband! O my brother! O my beloved!" cried she, carried away with weeping. "O beloved, remain with us, remain in thy house, withdraw not from this place on earth in which thou art dwelling!"

"In peace, in peace, to the West," sang the priests. "O mighty sovereign, go in peace to the West."

"Misfortune," said the queen, "thou art hastening to the ferry to pass to the other shore! O priests, O prophets, hasten not, leave him; for ye will return to your houses, but he will go to the land of eternity."

"In peace, in peace to the West," sang the priestly chorus. "If it please the god, when the day of eternity comes, we shall see thee, O sovereign! For now thou art going to the land which brings all men together."²⁹

At a sign given by the worthy Herhor, the attendants drew the queen from the feet of the pharaoh, and led her by force to her chambers.

The litter, borne by priests, moved on, and in it the sovereign, dressed and surrounded, as if living. On the right, and on the left, before and behind him, went generals, treasurers, judges, chief scribes, the bearers of the mace and the bow, and above all a throng of priests of various dignities.

In the courtyard, the servants fell on their faces, groaning and weeping, but the troops presented arms and the trumpets sounded, as if to greet a living pharaoh.

Between Memphis and the "Tableland of Mummies," lay a peculiar division of the city. All its buildings were devoted to the dead, and it was inhabited only by dissectors and embalmers.

²⁸ Authentic.

²⁹ Authentic.

This division was the forecourt as it were, of the cemetery proper, the bridge which joined living society with the city of endless rest. To this place were brought corpses, and mummies were made of them; here families stipulated with priests, touching the cost of funerals. Here were prepared sacred books and bandages, coffins, implements, vessels, and statues for the departed.

This district was a couple of thousand yards from Memphis. It was surrounded by a long wall provided with gates here and there.

The retinue bearing the remains of the pharaoh halted before the richest gate, and one of the priests knocked at it.

“Who is there?” inquired those within.

“Osiris-Mer-Amen-Rameses, the lord of two worlds, has come and desires that ye prepare him for his eternal journey,” replied the priests.

“Is it possible that he, the sun of Egypt, is quenched? That he is dead who himself was breath and life?”

“Such was his will,” answered a priest. “Receive, then, the lord with due honor and render all service to him, as is befitting, lest punishments meet you in this and the coming life.”

“We will do as ye say,” said a voice from within.

The priests left the litter, and went away hurriedly, so that the evil odor of remains accumulated in that place should not fall on them. Only civil officials under the lead of the supreme judge and treasurer remained there.

After they had waited a considerable time, the gate opened, and from ten to twenty persons showed themselves. They wore priestly garments and their faces were covered.

“We give you,” said the judges, on seeing them, “the body of our lord and yours. Do with it what the rules of religion enjoin, and omit nothing, so that the great deceased may not experience unquiet in that world through your fault.”

The treasurer added,—

“Use gold, silver, malachite, jasper, emerald, turquoise, and the most rare kinds of incenses for this lord, so that nothing be lacking that he may have whatever is best. I, the treasurer, say this to you. And if the wretch should be found who, instead of noble metals, gives counterfeit, and instead of genuine stones, gives Phœnician glass, let him remember that his hands will be cut off and his eyes dug out.”

“It will be as ye wish,” replied one of the veiled priests.

Others raised the litter and bore it to the interior of the district of the dead.

“Thou art going in peace to Abydos! Mayst thou go in peace to the Theban West. To the West, to the West, to the land of the just ones!”

The gate closed, the supreme judge, the treasurer, and the officials accompanying them returned to the palace.

The hooded priests bore the litter to an immense building where only the remains of pharaohs were embalmed, or those of high dignitaries who had gained the exceptional favor of a pharaoh.

The priests stopped in the antechamber, where stood the golden boat on wheels, and took the corpse from the litter.

“Look ye!” cried one of the cowed priests, “are they not criminals? The pharaoh died in the chapel of Osiris, so he must have been in ceremonial costume, while here—oh!—instead of gold ornaments—bronze; the chain is bronze, too, and on his breast false jewels!”

“True,” said another. “I am curious to know who fitted him out thus: priests, or scribes?”

“Surely priests. Oh, would that your hands withered, ye scoundrels! And some wretch—they are all such—dared command us to give the deceased what was best.”

“It was not they, but the treasurer.”

“They are all rogues.”

Thus discoursing, the embalmers took from the deceased his garments of a pharaoh, put on him a gown of cloth of gold and bore the remains to the boat.

“Thanks to the gods,” said one of the cowed men, “we have a new pharaoh. He will bring the priests to order. What they have taken with their hands they will bring back with their mouths.”

“Uuu!—they say that he will be a shrewd ruler,” put in another. “He is friendly with the Phœnicians; he passes time willingly with Pentuer, who is not of priestly family, but of such poor people as we. But the army, they say the army would let itself be burnt and drowned for the new pharaoh.”

“Besides, he conquered the Libyans most gloriously a few days ago.”

“Where is he now, that new pharaoh?” asked another. “In the desert? I am afraid that misfortune may meet him before he comes back to us.”

“What will any one do to him when he has an army behind him? May I not live to an honest burial if the young lord will not treat the priests as a buffalo treats growing wheat.”

“O thou fool!” interrupted an embalmer who had been silent till that moment. “The pharaoh conquer the priests!”

“Why not?”

“But hast thou ever seen that a lion tore down a pyramid?”

“Nonsense!”

“Or that a buffalo tossed it apart?”

“Of course he cannot toss it.”

“Or that a tempest overturned it.”

“What has this man begun at to-day?”

“Well, I tell thee that sooner will a lion, a buffalo, or a tempest overturn the great pyramid than the pharaoh put an end to the priesthood. Even if that pharaoh were a lion, a buffalo, and a tempest in one person.”

“Hei ye, there!” cried men from above. “Is the corpse ready?”

“Yes, yes; but its jaw has fallen,” answered they at the entrance.

“All one—give it up here, for Isis must go to the city an hour from now.”

After a while the golden boat with the dead pharaoh was raised by means of ropes to an internal balcony.

From the entrance it went into a great hall, painted in the color of the sky, and ornamented with golden stars. Through the whole length of the hall, from one wall to the other, was fixed a balcony in the form of an arch the ends of which were one story high and the centre a story and a half.

The hall represented the dome of heaven, the balcony the road of the sun in the sky. The late pharaoh was to represent Osiris, or the sun, which passes from the east to the west.

On the pavement of the hall stood a throng of priests and priestesses who, while waiting for the solemnity, conversed about indifferent subjects.

“Ready!” cried they from the balcony.

Conversation ceased. Above was heard the sound of a metal plate beaten thrice—and on the balcony appeared the golden boat of the sun in which the late pharaoh was advancing.

Below sounded the hymn in honor of the sun:

“Behold he appears in a cloud to separate the sky from the earth, and later to connect them.

“Hidden unceasingly in all things, he alone lives, in him all things exist through eternity.”

The boat moved gradually upward on the balcony; finally it halted at the highest point.

Then at the lower end of the arch appeared a priestess, arrayed as the goddess Isis, with her son Horus, and with equal slowness she began to ascend. That was an image of the moon, which follows the sun.

Now the boat from the top of the arch began to go toward the west, and the chorus below sang again:

“The god incarnate in all things, the spirit of Shu in all gods. He is the body of a living person, the creator of the tree which bears fruit, the causer of fertilizing overflows. Without him nothing lives in the earthly circle.”³⁰

The boat vanished at the western termination of the balcony, Isis and Horus stopped at the summit of the arch. A crowd of priests ran to the boat, took out the corpse of the pharaoh and placed it on a marble table, as Osiris to rest after his toils of the day.

Now to the dead man came the dissector, dressed as the god Typhon. On his head were a horrid mask and a red tangled wig, on his shoulders the skin of a wild boar, and in his hand an Ethiopian stone knife.

With this knife he began quickly to cut off the soles of the dead pharaoh’s sandals.

“What art thou doing, O Typhon, to thy sleeping brother?” asked Isis from the balcony.

³⁰ Authentic hymn.

"I am scraping the feet of my brother Osiris, so that he may not befoul heaven with earthly dust," replied the dissector dressed as Typhon.

When he had cut off the soles, the dissector took a bent wire, thrust it into the nostrils of the deceased and began to extract his brains. Next he made an opening in his body, and through that opening drew out quickly the heart, lungs, and viscera.

During this time the assistants of Typhon brought four great urns adorned with the heads of the gods Hape, Emset, Duamut and Quebhsneuf, and in each of those urns he placed some internal organ of the deceased pharaoh.

"But what art thou doing, O brother Typhon?" inquired Isis a second time.

"I am purifying my brother Osiris of earthly things, so that he may become more beautiful," replied the dissector.

At the side of the marble table was a vat of water with soda in solution. The dissectors, when they had cleaned the body, put it into the vat where it was to soak seventy days.

Meanwhile Isis, when she had passed over the entire vault, approached the chamber where the dissectors had cleaned the pharaoh's body. She looked at the marble table, and, seeing that it was empty, inquired in terror,—

"Where is my brother? Where is my divine consort?"

Thereupon thunder roared, trumpets and bronze plates sounded; the dissector disguised as Typhon burst into laughter, and cried,—

"O beautiful Isis, who in company with the stars delightest the night, thy consort exists not. Never again will the radiant Osiris sit in the golden boat, never again will that sun appear on the firmament. I have done this, I, Set, and I have hidden him so deeply that none of the gods, nor all the gods together will find him."

At these words the goddess rent her garments, she groaned and tore her hair. Again sounded trumpets, thunder, and plates; among the priests and priestesses an uproar began, then shouting and curses. Suddenly all rushed at Typhon crying,—

"Cursed spirit of darkness! Thou rousest the whirlwinds of the desert, thou rousest the sea, darkenest the light of day! Mayst thou fall into the pit from which the father of the gods himself could not free thee. Cursed! Cursed Set! May thy name be a disgust and a terror!"

While cursing in this way they all attacked Typhon with fists and clubs; the red-haired god fled, and rushed at last out of the building.

Again the bronze plates sounded thrice, and the solemnity was ended.

"Well, that is enough!" cried the senior priest to the assembly which had begun to fight in earnest. "Thou, Isis, mayest return to the city, but the rest of us must go to other departed ones who are waiting for our services. We must not neglect the ordinary dead, for it is unknown how much they will pay us for this one."

"Not much indeed!" interrupted the embalmer. "People say that there is nothing in the treasury, while the Phœnicians threaten to cease lending unless new rights are given them."

"May death destroy all those Phœnicians! Soon a man will be forced to beg a barley cake of them; even now they have snatched away everything."

“But unless they lend the pharaoh money we shall get nothing for the funeral.”

Conversation ceased gradually, and those present left the heavenly hall. Only at the vat where the body of the pharaoh lay steeping was a guard left.

All this solemnity, representing the legend of the slaying of Osiris (the sun) by Typhon (the god of night and crime), served to open and clean the body of the pharaoh, and in this way prepare it for the embalming proper.

During seventy days the departed must lie in a solution of soda, in memory, it seems, of this, that the wicked Typhon had sunk the body of his brother in the Soda Lakes. During all these days a priestess, dressed as Isis, came to the heavenly hall, morning and evening. There, groaning and tearing her hair, she inquired of all present whether any one had seen her divine consort and brother.

At the expiration of that time of mourning, Horus, the son and heir of Osiris, with his suite appeared in the hall, and they were the first to see the vat with the solution.

“Might we look here for the remains of my father and brother?” asked Horus.

So they searched and found; amid the immense delight of the priests, with sounds of music, they removed the body of the pharaoh from the strengthening bath.

The body was put into a stone cylinder through which passed a hot breeze for a number of days, and, when the body was dried they gave it to the embalmers.

Now began the most important ceremonies, which were performed by the supreme priests of the court of the dead:

The body of the departed, turned head southward, they washed with consecrated water and the interior with palm wine. On the pavement, which was sprinkled with ashes, sat wailing women who tore their hair and scratched their faces; they bewailed the late pharaoh. Around the couch where the body lay were assembled priests dressed as gods. These were Isis naked with a crown of the pharaohs, the youthful Horus, Anubis with a jackal head, bird-headed Tot with tablets in his hands, and many others.

Under the inspection of this worthy assembly, specialists began to fill the body with strongly odorous plants and sawdust, they even poured in odorous resin, all amid prayers. Then in his eye-sockets they inserted glass eyes set in bronze. After that the whole body was sprinkled with powdered soda.

Another priest appeared now who explained to those present that the body of the departed was the body of Osiris, that his qualities were the qualities of Osiris. “The magic qualities of his left temple are the qualities of the god Tum and his right eye is the eye of the god Tum, whose rays pierce through darkness. His left eye is the eye of Horus, which dazzles every living creature; the upper lip that of Isis, and the lower that of Nefthys. The neck of the departed is the goddess, his hands are divine spirits, his fingers the heavenly serpents, sons of the goddess Setkit. His sides are the two feathers of Amon, his back the backbone of Sib, his belly is the good Nue.”³¹

Another priest spoke,—

³¹ Maspero.

“A mouth was given me for speaking, feet for walking, hands to overturn my enemies. I rise from the dead, I exist, I open heaven; I do what has been commanded me in Memphis.”³²

Meanwhile on the neck of the departed they hung a scarab made of a precious stone, on which was this inscription: “O my heart, heart which I received from my mother, which I had when I was on earth, O heart do not rise against me and do not give evil witness in the day of judgment.”³³

Next priests wound around each arm and foot, each finger and toe of the dead, strips on which were written prayers and spells. Those strips they fastened with gum and balsam. On the breast and on the neck they placed complete manuscripts of the *Book of the Dead* with the following meditations which the priests read aloud over the body,—

“I am he before whom no god puts an obstacle.

“Who is that?

“He is Tum on his shield, he is Ra on his shield, which rises in the east of heaven.

“I am Yesterday and I know To-morrow.

“Who is he?

“Yesterday is Osiris, To-morrow is Ra on the day when he annihilates the enemies of the Lord who is above all and when he consecrates his son Horus. In other words, in the day when his father Ra meets the coffin of Osiris. He conquers the gods at command of Osiris, the lord of the mountain Amenti.

“What is that?

“Amenti is a creation of the soul of the gods, at command of Osiris, the lord of the mountain.

“In other words, Amenti is that impulse roused by Ra. Every god who arrives there carries on a battle. I know the great god who dwells there.

“I am from my country, I come from my city, I destroy evil, I set aside that which is not good, I remove uncleanness from myself, I betake myself to the country of dwellers in heaven, I enter through the mighty gate.

“O ye comrades, give me a hand, for I shall be one of you.”³⁴

When every member of the departed was covered with prayer bandages, and furnished with amulets, when he had a sufficient supply of meditations to find the way in the region of the gods, it was proper to think of a document which would open the gate of that region. For between the tomb and heaven forty-two terrible judges were waiting for the dead man; these, under presidency of Osiris, examined his earthly life. Only when the heart of the departed, weighed in the scales of justice, appeared equal to the goddess of truth, when the god Dutes, who writes on his tablets the deeds of the dead, considered it just, only then did Horus take the soul by the hand and lead it before the throne of Osiris.

So that the dead might be able to justify himself before the court it was necessary to wrap the mummy in a papyrus on which was written a general confession. While they

³² Authentic.

³³ Authentic.

³⁴ “Book of the Dead.”

were winding him in this document the priest spoke clearly and with emphasis, so that the dead might not forget:

“Lords of truth, I bring thee truth itself. I have not done evil to any man treacherously. I have not made any one near me unfortunate. I have not permitted myself any lewdness or abusive word in the house of veracity. I have had no intimacy with evil. I have committed nothing bad. As a superior I have not commanded my subordinates to work beyond their strength. No one through my fault has become afraid, poor, suffering, or unhappy. I have done nothing of any kind which the gods would despise. I have not tormented a slave. I have not killed him with hunger. I have not forced tears from him. I have not slain. I have not commanded to kill a slave treacherously. I have not lied, I have not plundered the property of temples. I have not decreased incomes devoted to the gods. I have not taken away the bread or the bandages of mummies. I have not committed sin with the priest of my district. I have not taken from him or decreased his property. I have not used false weights. I have not snatched away an infant from the breast of its nurse. I have never committed anything bestial. I have not caught in nets birds devoted to the gods. I have not hindered the inundation of water. I have not turned away the course of canals. I have not quenched fire at a time that was improper, I have not stolen from the gods offerings which they had chosen. I am pure—I am pure—I am pure.”³⁵

When the departed was able, thanks to the *Book of the Dead* to help himself in the region of eternity, and above all when he knew how to justify himself before the court of the forty-two gods, the priests furnished him still further with an introduction to this book, and explained to him orally its immense importance. In view of this the embalmers who surrounded the fresh mummy of the pharaoh withdrew and a high priest of that quarter came and whispered into the ear of the departed:

“Know that through the possession of this book thou shalt belong to the living and attain to great significance among gods. Know that, thanks to it, no one will dare to oppose thee. The gods themselves will approach thee and embrace thee, for thou wilt belong to their company.

“Know that this book informs thee of what was at the beginning. No man has uttered it, no eye has seen it, no ear has heard it. This book is truth itself, but no one has ever known it. Let it be seen only through thee and through him who will behold thee in it. Add to it no commentary which thy memory or imagination might suggest to thee. It is written entirely in the hall where the departed are embalmed. It is a great secret which no common man knows, not one in the world.

“This book will be thy nourishment in the lower region of spirits, it will give thy soul means of sojourn on the earth, it will give it life eternal, and effect this, that no one will have power over thee.”³⁶

The remains of the pharaoh were arrayed in costly garments, with a gold mask on the face, with bracelets on the wrists, and with rings on the hands, which were crossed on the breast. Under the head was put a support of ivory, such as Egyptians were accustomed to sleep on. Finally the body was inclosed in three coffins: one of paper covered with inscriptions, one of cedar which was gilt, and one of marble. The form of the first two corresponded accurately to the form of the body; even the sculptured face was like the original, though smiling.

³⁵ “Book of the Dead.” This is one of the loftiest documents left us by antiquity.

³⁶ “Book of the Dead.”

After a stay of three months in the quarter of the dead the mummy of the pharaoh was ready for a solemn funeral; therefore it was taken back to the palace.

Chapter LIV

DURING seventy days, in the course of which the revered remains were steeping in the solution of soda, Egypt was in mourning.

The temples were closed; there were no processions. All music ceased; no feasts were given. Dancing women became wailers; instead of dancing they tore their hair; this also brought them income.

No one drank wine, no one ate meat. The highest dignitaries went in coarse garments and barefoot. No one shaved (with the exception of priests); the most devoted did not wash, they smeared their faces with mud, and scattered ashes on their hair.

From the Mediterranean to the first cataract of the Nile, from the Libyan desert to the peninsula of Sinai reigned sadness and silence. The sun of Egypt had quenched, had gone to the West, the giver of life and gladness had deserted his servants.

In the highest circles the most fashionable conversation touched the universal sorrow, which was communicated even to nature.

“Hast thou not observed,” said one dignitary to another, “that the days are shorter and darker?”

“I did not wish to unburden myself of this before thee,” replied the other, “but it is so in reality. I have even noticed that fewer stars shine at night, and that the full moon lasts a shorter time, and the new moon longer than usual.”

“The shepherds say that cattle at pasture will not eat, they only bellow.”

“And I have heard from hunters that lions are reduced by weeping; they do not attack deer, for lions eat no meat at present.”

“A terrible time! Come to me this evening and we will drink a glass of mourning liquor which my cellarer has invented.”

“Thou hast, I suppose, dark beer of Sidon?”

“May the gods forbid that at this time we should use drinks which rejoice people. The liquor which my cellarer has invented is not beer; it is more like wine mixed with musk and fragrant plants.”

“A very proper drink when our lord is sojourning in the quarter of the dead, where the odor of musk and embalming herbs is always prevalent.”

Thus during seventy days did dignitaries mortify themselves.

The first quiver of delight ran through Egypt when it was announced from the quarter of the dead that the body of the sovereign had been taken from the soda bath, and that embalmers and priests were performing ceremonies over it.

That day for the first time people cut their hair and whoso had the wish washed himself. But in fact there was no need of mortification, since Horus had found the remains of Osiris. The ruler of Egypt, thanks to the art of embalmers, had received life, and, thanks to the prayers of the priests and the *Book of the Dead*, he had become equal to the gods.

From that moment on, the late pharaoh, Mer-Amen-Rameses, was called "Osiris" officially; unofficially, he had been called that since his death.

The innate joyfulness of the Egyptian people began to gain the victory over mourning, especially among warriors, artisans, and laborers. Delight took on, among common people, forms which at times were inappropriate. Reports began to circulate, it was unknown where they had originated, that the new pharaoh, whom the whole people loved instinctively, intended to occupy himself with improving the condition of earth-tillers, laborers, and even captives. For this cause it happened, an unheard-of thing, that masons, cabinet makers, potters, instead of drinking quietly and speaking of their own occupation, or family interests, dared to complain in dramshops, not only of taxes, but even to complain of the power of the priesthood. And earth-tillers, instead of devoting time free of labor to prayers and the memory of their ancestors, told one another how well it would be if each man had some bit of land as his own, and could rest one day in seven.

Of the army, and especially foreign regiments, nothing was to be said. Those men imagined that they were the most noted class in Egypt, and if they were not, they would soon be, after some fortunate war in the near future.

But the nomarchs, the nobility living on estates, and above all, the high priests of various temples mourned their deceased lord with solemnity, though they might have rejoiced, since the pharaoh had become Osiris.

Taking things as they were, the new ruler had interfered with no one thus far, hence the cause of grief for dignitaries lay in those same reports which delighted common people. The nomarchs and the nobility grieved at the thought that their earth-tillers might be idle fifty days in a year, and, what was worse, possess land, though even of an extent on which a tomb might be erected. Priests grew pale and gritted their teeth when they saw the management of Rameses XIII. and the way in which he treated them.

In fact, immense changes had taken place in the pharaoh's palace.

The pharaoh had transferred his residence to one of the wing buildings, in which almost all the chambers were occupied by generals. In the cellars Greek warriors were quartered, on the first story the guard, in the chambers along the wall, Ethiopians. Guard around the building was kept by Asiatics, and near the chambers of his holiness was quartered that squadron from which were selected the warriors who had accompanied their lord when he hunted Tehenna through the desert.

What was worse, his holiness, in spite of the recent rebellion of the Libyans restored to them his favor; he condemned none to punishment, and gave them his confidence.

That corps of priests who had been in the main palace remained with him it is true, and performed religious ceremonies under the direction of his worthiness Sem. But as the priests did not accompany the pharaoh to meals, to dinners and suppers, their food was far from exquisite.

In vain did the holy men declare that they must feed the representatives of nineteen dynasties, and a multitude of gods. The treasurer, noting the intention of the pharaoh, answered that flowers and perfumes were sufficient for gods and ancestors, and that prophets like themselves, as morality commanded, should eat barley cakes and drink beer or water. To support these rude theories the treasurer referred to the example of Sem, the holy high priest, who lived like a penitent, and what was worse, he told them that his holiness, with the generals, had a military kitchen.

In view of this, the priests of the palace began to consider whether they had not better leave the stinted house of the pharaoh and go to their own dwellings at temples where their duties would be easier, and where hunger would not twist their entrails.

They would have done this before, had not the worthy Herhor and Mefres commanded them to remain in their places.

But the position of Herhor near the new pharaoh was not favorable. The all-powerful minister, who had till of late almost never left the chambers of the pharaoh, sat now alone in his villa, and frequently he did not see the new ruler for ten days in succession. He was still minister of war, but he gave out almost no orders. The pharaoh himself settled all military questions. He alone read reports of generals; he alone decided doubtful questions, while his adjutants took from the minister of war the necessary documents.

If his worthiness Herhor was ever called before the sovereign it was only to be reprimanded.

Nevertheless, all dignitaries acknowledged that the new pharaoh worked with great diligence.

Rameses XIII. rose before sunrise, he bathed and burnt incense before the statue of Osiris. Immediately afterward he heard the reports of the supreme judge, the chief scribe of the granaries and stables in the whole country, the high treasurer, finally the chief of his palaces. This last dignitary suffered most, for there was no day when his lord did not tell him that the court cost too much, and kept too many persons.

In the palace dwelt several hundred women of the late pharaoh with a corresponding number of servants and children. The chief of the palace, being reproached continually, dismissed from day to day a number of persons, and limited the allowances of others. At the end of a month, therefore, all the ladies of the court ran weeping and wailing to Queen Nikotris, and begged her to rescue them.

The worthy lady betook herself to the pharaoh, and, falling on her face, begged him to take compassion on the women of his father, and not let them die in destitution.

The pharaoh listened to her with frowning brows and commanded the chief of the court not to extend his saving farther. But at the same time he told the most worthy lady that after the funeral of his father the women would be removed from the palace and sent to the country.

“Our court,” said he, “costs about thirty thousand talents yearly, or once and a half as much as the whole army. I cannot expend such a sum without ruining myself and the kingdom.”

“Do as may please thee,” answered the queen. “Egypt is thine. But I fear that the persons rejected from the court will become thy enemies.”

At this he took his mother by the hand, led her to the window, and pointed to a forest of spears held by infantry drilling in the courtyard.

This act of the pharaoh produced an unexpected effect. The queen’s eyes, which a moment before gleamed with pride, were filled with tears. All at once she bent and kissed her son’s hand, saying with emotion,—

“Thou art, indeed, the son of Isis and Osiris, and I did well when I yielded thee to the goddess. Egypt at last has a ruler.”

From that time the worthy lady never appealed to her son in any question. And when she was asked for protection, she answered,—

“I am the servant of his holiness and I advise you to carry out his commands without resistance. All he does comes from inspiration of the gods. And who can oppose the gods?”

After breakfast the pharaoh was occupied in affairs of the ministry of war, and the treasury; about three in the afternoon, surrounded by a great suite, he went to the troops encamped outside Memphis, and reviewed them.

Indeed, the greatest changes had taken place in the military condition.

In less than two months his holiness had organized five new regiments, or rather he had reëstablished those disbanded during the reign of his father. He dismissed officers addicted to drunkenness and gambling, also those who tortured warriors.

Into the military bureaus, where priests alone had held office, he introduced his most capable adjutants, who very soon mastered important documents relative to the army. He commanded to make a list of all men in the state who belonged to the military order, but who for years had not fulfilled any duty. He opened two new schools, one for the education of officers, and one for children of twelve years, and renewed a custom then in abeyance, that youths in the army should receive breakfast only after three hours' marching in line and in column.

Finally, no division of the army was permitted to dwell in villages, all must live in camps or in barracks. Each regiment had its fixed field of exercise, where for whole days the warriors hurled stones from slings or shot arrows from bows at marks from one to two hundred yards distant.

A command was issued to all families of military rank that the men should exercise themselves in hurling missiles under direction of officers and decurions of the army. The command was carried out straightway, therefore Egypt looked like a camp in no longer than two months after the death of the twelfth Rameses. For even village or city children, who before had played as scribes and priests, now, imitating their elders, began to play as warriors. So on every square and in every garden, from morning till evening, stones and arrows were whistling, and the courts were filled with complaints about bodily injuries.

Egypt was transformed, as it were, and in spite of complaints a great movement reigned in it, and all because of the new ruler.

The pharaoh himself was pleased and his pride increased, seeing that the whole state arranged itself to his wishes.

But a moment arrived when he became gloomy.

On the very day that the embalmers took the body of Rameses XII. from the soda bath, the chief treasurer, when making his usual report, said to the pharaoh,—

“I know not what to do. We have two thousand talents in the treasury, and for the funeral of the dead pharaoh we need at least one thousand.”

“How, two thousand?” asked Rameses, with astonishment. “When I assumed power thou didst tell me that we had twenty thousand.”

“We have expended eighteen.”

“In two months?”

“Our outlays are enormous.”

“True, but new taxes come in every day.”

“The taxes, I know not why, have decreased again, and do not come in so plentifully as I expected. But they too are expended. Be pleased to remember, holiness, that we have five new regiments; hence, about eight thousand men have left their occupations and live at the cost of the treasury.”

The pharaoh grew thoughtful.

“We must,” said he, “make a new loan. Come to an understanding with Herhor and Mefres, so that the temples may lend to us.”

“I have spoken with them. The temples will lend us nothing.”

“The prophets are offended,” said the pharaoh, smiling. “In that case we must call in unbelievers. Send to me Dagon.”

Toward evening the pharaoh’s banker came. He fell on the pavement before Rameses and offered him a golden goblet set with jewels.

“Now I can die!” said Dagon, “since my most gracious sovereign has mounted the throne.”

“But before thy death, find me a few thousand talents,” said his holiness to the kneeling banker.

The Phœnician was alarmed. Could he feign great embarrassment?

“Rather command me, holiness, to seek pearls in the Nile, for I shall perish at once, and my lord will not suspect me of ill-will toward him. But to find such a sum to-day!”

Rameses XIII. was astounded.

“How is this?” inquired he. “Then have the Phœnicians no money for me?”

“Our blood, our lives, our children we will give thee, holiness. But money—where can we find it?”

“Formerly the temples gave us loans at fifteen or twenty per cent yearly, but since, as heir to the throne, thou wert in the temple of Hator at Pi-Bast the priests have refused us every credit.

“If they could they would expel us from Egypt, or, more gladly, they would destroy us. Ah, what we suffer because of them. The earth-tillers do what they like and whenever they like. As rent they give us what drops from their noses. If we strike one of them they rebel to the last man, and if an unfortunate Phœnician goes for redress to a court he either loses his case or pays terribly.

“Our hours in this land are numbered,” wailed Dagon.

The pharaoh frowned.

“I will take up these matters,” answered he, “and the courts will give thee justice. Meanwhile, I need about five thousand talents.”

“Where shall we get them, O lord?” groaned out Dagon. “Find us purchasers, holiness, and we will sell all our property movable and immovable, only to carry out thy commands. But where are the purchasers? There are none except the priests, who would value our property at a trifle, and then not pay ready money.”

“Send to Tyre, to Sidon,” interrupted Rameses. “Each of those cities might lend, not five, but a hundred thousand talents.”

“Tyre and Sidon!” repeated Dagon. “To-day all Phœnicia is collecting gold and jewels to pay the Assyrians. Envoys of King Assar are circling about through our country and they say that if we pay a liberal sum yearly the King and the satraps not only will not oppress us, but will offer us more profits than those which we have now in Egypt, O holiness, through thy favor.”

The pharaoh grew pale and set his teeth. The banker noted this and added, quickly,—

“But why should I waste thy time, holiness, with my stupid talk? Here in Memphis is Prince Hiram; he perhaps will explain all this to my lord far better than I can, for he is a sage and a member of the supreme council in our cities.”

“Send him hither quickly,” replied Rameses, “for thy conversation with me, Dagon, is not that of a banker, but of a wailing woman at a funeral.”

The Phœnician touched the floor once again with his forehead, and inquired,—

“What if the worthy Hiram cannot come immediately? It is late now, it is true. But he is in such fear of the priests that he would rather come at night to do homage, O holiness.”

The pharaoh bit his lips, but agreed to that project; so he sent Tutmosis with the banker to conduct Hiram to the palace by secret passages.

Chapter LV

ABOUT ten in the evening Hiram stood before his lord. He was dressed in the dark robe of a Memphis huckster.

“Why dost thou steal in thus, worthiness?” inquired Rameses. “Is my palace a prison, or a house of lepers?”

“Ah, our sovereign!” sighed the old Phœnician. “Since thou hast become lord of Egypt the criminals are those who dare to see thee and not give account of what thou art pleased to tell them.”

“To whom must ye repeat my words?” inquired the pharaoh.

Hiram raised his eyes and hands to heaven.

“Holiness, thou knowest thy enemies,” said he.

“Thou knowest, worthiness, why I have summoned thee. I wish to borrow a few thousand talents.”

Hiram made a hissing noise through his teeth, so that the pharaoh permitted him to sit in his presence, which was the highest honor. When he had disposed himself comfortably and rested, Hiram said,—

“Why shouldst thou borrow, holiness, when thou mayst have a rich treasury?”

“I know, when I shall get Nineveh,” interrupted Rameses. “That time is distant and I need money this day.”

“I speak not of war,” answered Hiram; “I speak of an affair which would bring large sums to the treasury immediately, and a permanent yearly income.”

“How?”

“Permit us, holiness, and assist us to dig a canal which would join the Red Sea with the Mediterranean.”

“Art thou jesting, old man?” cried the pharaoh, springing up from his seat. “Who could do such a work, and who could wish to endanger Egypt? The sea would inundate the country.”

“What sea? Neither the Mediterranean nor the Red Sea would,” answered Hiram calmly. “I know that Egyptian priests who are engineers have examined this work and have calculated that it would give immense profit, it is the best work on earth. But they wish to do it themselves, or rather they do not wish that the pharaoh should do it.”

“Where are thy proofs?” asked Rameses.

“I have not the proofs, but I will send a priest, holiness, who will explain the whole affair to thee, with plans and estimates.”

“Who is this priest?”

Hiram thought a moment and then asked,—

“Have I thy promise, holiness, that no one will know of him except us? He, lord, will render more service than I. He knows many secrets and many iniquities of the priesthood.”

“I promise,” answered the pharaoh.

“This priest is Samentu. He is a great sage, but needs money, and he is very ambitious. And since the high priests degrade him he—he—will overturn the order of priests; for he knows many secrets—oh, many!”

Rameses meditated. He understood that that priest was a great traitor, but he estimated the magnitude of the service which the man might render.

“Well,” said the pharaoh, “I will think of this Samentu. But now let us suppose for the moment that it is possible to make such a canal; what profit shall I have from it?”

Hiram raised his left hand, and counted on his fingers.

“First, holiness, Phœnicia will give thee five thousand talents of unpaid tribute; second, Phœnicia will pay for the right of doing this work; third, when the work begins we will pay one thousand talents of yearly rent, and besides as many talents as Egypt furnishes us tens of laborers; fourth, for every Egyptian engineer we will give to thee, holiness, a talent a year; fifth, when the work is finished thou wilt give us the canal for one hundred years, and we will pay for that one thousand talents yearly. Are those small gains?” inquired Hiram.

“But now, to-day,” asked Rameses, “would ye give me those five thousand talents tribute?”

“If the treaty is made to-day we will give ten thousand, and we will add three thousand as an advance of rent for a three years’ period.”

Rameses meditated. More than once Phœnicians had proposed the cutting of this canal to the rulers of Egypt, but they had always met the unbending resistance of the priesthood. The Egyptian sages explained to the pharaoh that that canal would expose the country to inundations from the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. But Hiram asserted that such a thing would not happen; the priests knew that it would not.

“Ye Phœnicians,” said the pharaoh, after a long time, “promise to pay one thousand talents yearly for one hundred years. Ye say that that canal dug in the sand is the best affair in the world. I do not understand this, and I confess, Hiram, that I am suspicious.”

Hiram’s eyes flashed.

“Lord,” replied he, “I will tell thee everything, but I abjure thee by thy crown, by the shade of thy father, not to discover the secret to any one. This is the greatest secret of the Chaldean and Egyptian priests, and even of Phœnicia. On it depends the future of the world.”

“Well, well, Hiram,” answered the pharaoh with a smile.

“To thee, O pharaoh,” continued the Phœnician, “the gods have given wisdom, nobility, and energy, therefore, thou art on our side. Thou, alone, of earthly rulers mayst be initiated, for thou art the only one who will be able to accomplish great objects. For this reason thou wilt have power such as no man has ever reached before thee.”

Rameses felt the sweetness of pride in his heart, but he mastered his feelings.

“Praise me not for what I have not done; but explain to me what profit will come from this canal to Phœnicia and to Egypt?”

Hiram straightened himself in the chair, and began in a lowered voice,—

“Know, lord, that east, north, and south of Assyria and Babylon are not morasses inhabited by strange monsters, but immense—immense states and countries. Those countries are so great that thy foot warriors, O holiness, renowned for marching, would have to move eastward two years without halt before they could reach the end of them.”

Rameses raised his brows like one who permits some man to lie, but knows that he is lying.

“Southeast of Babylon, at the great sea, dwell one hundred millions of people who have mighty kings, who have priests wiser than those of Egypt, who have ancient books, and skilled artisans. Those people know how to make woven stuffs, implements and vessels as beautiful as those of the Egyptians, and from time immemorial they have temples above ground and underground, which are grander, richer, and larger than the temples of Egypt.”

“Speak on, speak on!” said the pharaoh. But it was impossible to learn from his face whether his curiosity was roused by the description, or he was indignant at the untruth of the Phœnician.

“In those countries,” continued Hiram, “are pearls, precious stones, gold, copper; in those countries grow the most curious grains, flowers, and fruits; finally they have forests where a man might wander whole months among trees thicker than the columns in the temples of Egypt and taller than palms. The inhabitants of those countries are mild and simple. And, holiness, if thou wouldst send thither two regiments on ships, thou wouldst be able to win an area of land larger than Egypt, richer than the treasures of the labyrinth. If thou permit, I will send thee to-morrow specimens of the woven stuffs of those regions, with bronzes and woods from them. I will send also two grains of a wondrous balsam from those countries; if a man swallows this balsam, it opens the gates of eternity before him, and he experiences the happiness which falls to divinities only.”

“I beg thee to send specimens of the stuffs, and the utensils. As to the balsam, never mind! We shall enjoy eternity and the gods without it sufficiently after death.”

“But far, very far east of Assyria,” added Hiram, “lie still greater countries—countries which have two hundred millions of inhabitants.”

“How easy millions come to you Phœnicians,” laughed Rameses.

Hiram placed his hand on his heart.

“I swear,” said he, “by the souls of my ancestors, and by my honor that I am telling truth.”

The pharaoh was moved; such a great oath arrested his attention.

“Speak on—speak!” said he.

“These last lands,” continued the Phœnician, “are very wonderful. They are inhabited by people with yellow skin and sloping eyes. Those people have a sovereign who is called the Son of Heaven, and he governs through sages, who are not priests,

however, and have not such power as priests have in Egypt. Still those people are like the Egyptians. They honor dead ancestors and take great care of their remains. They use writing which calls to mind the writing of Egyptian priests. But they wear long robes of such stuffs as are unknown in this country; they have sandals which are like little benches, and they cover their heads with pointed boxes. The roofs of their houses are pointed too at the top, and are turned up at the edges.

“Those uncommon people have a grain which is more plentiful than Egyptian wheat, and they make of it a drink which is stronger than wine. They have a plant the leaves of which give strength to the members, gladness to the mind, and which enables them even to dispense with sleep. They have paper which they adorn with many colored images, and they have clay which after it is burned shines like glass, and is as resonant as metal.

“To-morrow, if thou permit, holiness, I will send specimens of the works of these people.”

“Thou art narrating wonders, Hiram. But I do not see the connection between those things and the canal which thou wishest to dig.”

“I will tell in brief,” replied the Phœnician. “When there is a canal all the Phœnician and Egyptian fleets will sail on the Red Sea and beyond it; in the course of a couple of months they will reach those rich countries which by land are almost inaccessible.

“But dost thou not see, holiness,” continued he, with gleaming eyes, “the treasures which we shall find there? Gold, precious stones, grain, woods? I swear to thee, lord,” added he with enthusiasm, “that gold will be cheaper than copper is now, wood will be cheaper than straw, and a slave cheaper than a cow. Only let us, lord, dig the canal, and hire fifty thousand of thy warriors.”

Rameses, too, was excited.

“Fifty thousand warriors,” repeated he. “But what will ye give me for this?”

“I have said already, holiness. One thousand talents yearly for the right to work, and five thousand for the workmen, to whom we will give food and wages.”

“But ye will kill them with work?”

“May the gods forbid! There is no profit when workmen perish. Thy warriors, holiness, will not work more at the canal than to-day on roads and at fortresses—but what glory for thee, lord! what income for the treasury, what profit for Egypt! The poorest earth-tiller will have a wooden cottage, some cattle, tools, and furniture, and as I live, a slave. No pharaoh has ever raised the state to such a height or carried out such a work.

“What will dead and useless pyramids be in comparison with a canal to facilitate the passage of treasures to the whole world?”

“Yes,” added the pharaoh, “and fifty thousand warriors on the eastern boundary.”

“Of course!” exclaimed Hiram. “In view of that force, which will cost thee nothing, holiness, Assyria will not dare to stretch a hand toward Phœnicia.”

The project was so brilliant and promised such profit that Rameses XIII. felt dazed by it. But he mastered himself.

“Hiram,” said he, “thou art making splendid promises. So splendid that I fear lest thou art concealing behind them some less favorable outcome. Therefore I must think over this matter deeply and take counsel with the priests.”

“They will never consent of themselves!” exclaimed the Phœnician. “Though—may the gods forgive me the blasphemy—I am certain that if to-day the highest power were in the hands of the priests they would summon us in a couple of months to make the canal for them.”

Rameses looked with cold contempt at Hiram.

“Old man,” said he, “leave me to care for the obedience of the priests, and do thou present proofs that what thou hast said is true. I should be a very poor sovereign were I unable to remove obstacles springing up between my will and the interests of Egypt.”

“Thou art indeed a great sovereign, our lord,” whispered Hiram, bending to the floor.

It was then late at night. The Phœnician took farewell of the pharaoh and left the palace with Tutmosis. The following day he sent through Dagon a box with specimens of wealth from the unknown countries.

The pharaoh found in it statues of gods, woven stuffs, rings from India, small morsels of opium, and in a second division handfuls of rice, leaves of tea, two porcelain cups ornamented with pictures, and a number of drawings made on paper with China ink and colors. He examined them with the greatest attention and confessed that those articles were new to him: the rice, the paper, the pictures of people with pointed hats and sloping eyes.

He had no doubt now that a new region existed which differed in every way from Egypt: in mountains, trees, houses, bridges, ships.

“And that country has existed for ages undoubtedly,” thought he; “our priests know of it, they know of its wealth, but say nothing. Evidently they are traitors who wish to limit the power of the pharaoh and impoverish him so as to push him down from the height of the throne afterward.

“But O ye my ancestors and my heirs,” said he in spirit, “I call you to witness that I will put a limit to these iniquities; I will elevate wisdom, but I will stamp out deceit, and I will give Egypt hours of rest from labor.”

Thinking thus, he raised his eyes and beheld Dagon waiting for an answer.

“Thy box is very curious,” said he to the banker, “but—this is not what I asked of thee.”

The Phœnician approached him on tiptoe and, kneeling before him, whispered,—

“Deign holiness, to sign a treaty with the worthy Hiram, then Tyre and Sidon will place all their treasures at thy feet.”

Rameses frowned. He was displeased by the insolence of the Phœnicians who dared to lay down conditions to him; so he answered coldly,—

“I will reflect and give Hiram my answer. Thou mayst withdraw, Dagon.”

After the Phœnician had gone, Rameses meditated again; a reaction began in him,—

“Those hucksters,” said he in his heart, “consider me as one of themselves,—nay more, they dare to hold up to me a bag of gold from afar so as to extort a treaty! I

know not that any of the pharaohs admitted them to such confidence! I must change. The men who fall on their faces before the envoys of Assar may not say to me, 'Sign and thou wilt get!' Stupid Phœnician rats, who steal into the pharaoh's palace and look on it as their own den a moment later!"

The longer he thought over it the more precisely he recalled the bearing of Hiram and Dagon, the greater the anger that seized him,—

"How dare they—how dare they lay conditions down to me? Hei, Tutmosis!" cried he. His favorite stood before him immediately.

"What dost thou command, my lord?"

"Send some one of the younger officers to Dagon to inform him that he has ceased to be my banker. He is too stupid for such a lofty position."

"But to whom dost thou predestine the honor, holiness?"

"I know not at the moment. It will be necessary to find some one among Egyptian or Greek merchants. In the last resort we will turn to the priests."

Information of this resolve went through all the palaces, and before an hour it had reached Memphis. Throughout the whole city people said that the Phœnicians were in disfavor with the pharaoh. Towards evening the Egyptians had begun to break into the shops of the hated foreigners.

The priests drew a breath of relief. Herhor even made a visit to holy Mefres and said to him,—

"My heart felt that our lord would turn from those unbelievers who are drinking the blood of the people. I think that it is proper for us to show him gratitude."

"And perhaps open the doors to our treasures?" asked Mefres, rudely. "Hasten not, worthiness, I have divined this young man—woe to us if ever we let him get the upper hand."

"But if he has broken with the Phœnicians?"

"He will gain by that; for he will not pay his debts to them."

"In my opinion," said Herhor, after some thought, "now is the moment in which we can regain the favor of this youthful pharaoh. He is hasty in anger, but he knows how to be grateful. I have experienced that—"

"Every word is an error," interrupted the stubborn Mefres. "First of all, this prince is not the pharaoh yet, for he has not been crowned in a temple. Second, he will never be a real pharaoh, since through contempt he will never be ordained a high priest. And finally, we do not need his favor, while he needs the favor of the gods, whom he insults at every step he makes."

Mefres, who had been panting from anger, stopped and began anew,—

"He spent a month in the temple of Hator, he listened to the highest wisdom, and immediately afterward betook himself to the Phœnicians. What do I say? He visited the idol house of Astarte and took thence a priestess—an offence against all religions. After that he reviled my piety, in public; conspired with such frivolous minds as his own, and with the aid of Phœnicians stole state secrets. And when he ascended the throne—I speak incorrectly, when he had barely stood on the first step of the throne,

he tried to make the priests odious; he disturbed the earth-tillers and the warriors, and renewed vows with his friends the Phœnicians.

“Dost thou, worthy Herhor, forget all this? And if thou remember, dost thou not understand the dangers which threaten us from this milksop? Still he has under his hand the rudder of the ship of state, which he pushes in among rocks and eddies. Who will assure me that this madman, who yesterday summoned to his presence the Phœnicians, but quarrelled with them to-day, will not do something to-morrow which will expose Egypt to destruction?”

“And therefore, what?” inquired Herhor, looking into his eyes quickly.

“This—we have no reason to show him gratitude, which would really be weakness. But since he wants money at once, we will not give him money.”

“But—but then what?” inquired Herhor.

“Afterward he will govern the state and increase the army without money,” answered the irritated Mefres.

“But if his famished army wants to rob temples?”

“Ha! ha! ha!” burst out Mefres, but suddenly he grew serious and bowing said in an ironical tone,—

“That pertains to thee, worthiness. A man who for so many years has directed the state should prepare for such dangers.”

“Let us suppose,” said Herhor, slowly, “that I can find means against dangers to the state. But canst thou, worthiness, who art the senior high priest, provide against insults to the priestly order and the temples?”

They looked each other in the eyes for a moment.

“Dost thou inquire whether I can? Whether I can? I need make no effort. The gods have placed in my hands a thunderbolt which will destroy every author of sacrilege.”

“Pst!” whispered Herhor. “Let that take place.”

“With the consent or without the consent of the supreme council of priests,” added Mefres. “When a boat is overturned there is no time to discuss with the oarsmen.”

They parted in a gloomy state of mind. That same day in the evening the Pharaoh summoned them.

They came at the appointed time, each high priest separately. Each made a profound obeisance to his lord, and each stood in a separate corner without looking at the other.

“Have they quarrelled?” thought Rameses? “No harm in that!”

A moment later the holy Sem and the prophet Pentuer came in. Then Rameses sat on an elevation, indicated to the priests stools in front of him, and said,—

“Holy fathers! I have not summoned you thus far to counsel because all my orders related to military questions exclusively.”

“Thou hadst the right, holiness, not to call us,” put in Herhor.

“I have done what I was able in such a short time to strengthen the defensive power of the state. I have formed two new schools for officers and I have restored five regiments.”

"Thou hadst the right, lord," answered Mefres.

"Of other military reforms I do not speak, since those questions do not concern you, holy people."

"Thou art right," said Mefres and Herhor together.

"But there is another question," continued the pharaoh, satisfied with the assent of the two dignitaries from whom he had expected opposition. "The funeral day of my divine father is approaching, but the treasury does not possess sufficient funds."

Mefres rose from his stool.

"Osiris-Mer-Amen-Rameses," said he, "was a just lord who for many years assured peace to his people, and praise to the gods. Permit, holiness, that the funeral of this pious pharaoh be performed at the expense of the temples."

Rameses XIII. was astonished and was moved by the homage rendered his father. He was silent for a while as if unable to find an answer; at last he replied,—

"I am very thankful to you for the honor shown my father, who is equal to the gods. I permit the funeral, and once more I thank you greatly."

He stopped, rested his head on his hand and meditated, as if struggling with himself. Suddenly he raised his head; his face was animated, his eyes were gleaming.

"I am moved," said he, "by this proof of your good-will. If the memory of my father is so dear to you ye cannot have ill-will toward me."

"Thou hast no doubt, I think, holiness, touching our good-will?" said the high priest Sem.

"Thou art speaking truth," continued the pharaoh. "I suspected you unjustly of prejudice toward me. I wish to correct my suspicion; I will be sincere with you."

"May the gods bless thee, holiness," said Herhor.

"I will be sincere. My divine father, because of age, illness, and perhaps priestly occupations, could not devote so much time to affairs of state as I can. I am young, in health, free, hence I wish to rule, myself, and will rule. As a leader must direct his army on his own responsibility and according to his own plan, so shall I direct the state. This is my express will and I shall not draw back from it.

"But I understand that even were I the most experienced I could not succeed without faithful servants and wise counsellors. Therefore I shall ask your advice sometimes on various questions."

"To this end we constitute the supreme council near thy throne," remarked Herhor.

"I shall use," continued Rameses with animation, "your services immediately, even from this moment."

"Command, lord," said Herhor.

"I wish to improve the condition of the Egyptian people. But since in such affairs over-hasty action may only bring injury, I give them at first a small thing: After six days' labor the seventh for rest."

"Such was it during the reigns of the eighteenth dynasty. That law is as old as Egypt itself," said Pentuer.

“Rest every seventh day will give fifty days to each laborer during a year, or it will take from his lord fifty drachma. On a million of laborers the state will lose ten thousand talents yearly,” said Mefres. “We have calculated that in the temples.”

“That is true,” answered Pentuer, quickly, “but the losses will be during the first year only, for when the people increase in strength by rest they will recover all and more in the following years.”

“That is true,” answered Mefres, “but in every case it is necessary to have ten thousand talents for that first year. I think even that twenty thousand talents would not be amiss.”

“Thou art right, worthy Mefres,” said the pharaoh. “In view of the changes which I wish to introduce in my state twenty thousand, and even, thirty thousand talents would not be too great a sum; therefore,” added he quickly, “I shall ask assistance of you holy men.”

“We are ready to support every measure of thy holiness with prayers and processions,” said Mefres.

“Very good; pray and encourage the people to pray. But besides that give the state thirty thousand talents,” answered the pharaoh.

The high priests were silent; Rameses waited a while, then turned to Herhor,—

“Thou art silent, worthiness.”

“Thou hast said thyself, O sovereign, that the treasury has no means, even to bury Osiris-Mer-Amen-Rameses. I cannot even divine, therefore, where we could get thirty thousand talents.”

“But the treasury of the labyrinth.”

“That is a treasury of the gods, to be touched only at a moment when the state is in supreme need,” replied Mefres.

Rameses XIII. boiled up with anger.

“If earth-tillers do not need this sum, I do,” said he, striking his fist on the arm of the chair.

“Holiness,” replied Mefres, “thou canst in the course of a year receive more than thirty thousand talents, and Egypt twice as much.”

“How?”

“Very simply. Give command, sovereign, to expel the Phœnicians from Egypt.”

It seemed that the pharaoh would rush at the insolent high priest; he grew pale, his lips quivered, his eyes stared. But he restrained himself in one moment, and said, in a tone of wonderful calmness,—

“Well, sufficient. If ye are able to give only such counsels I shall get on without them. The Phœnicians have our signatures that we will pay them our debts faithfully. Has this occurred to thee, Mefres?”

“Pardon, holiness, but at that moment other thoughts occupied me. Thy ancestors, not on papyrus, but on bronze and stone carved out the statement that the gifts made by them to the gods and the temples belonged and would belong forever to the gods and the temples.”

“And to you priests,” added the pharaoh, sneeringly.

“As much to us,” replied the haughty high priest, “as the state belongs to thee, sovereign. We guard and increase those treasures; but we have not the right to spend them.”

The pharaoh left the hall panting with anger, and went to his own cabinet. His position was presented to him with terrible distinctness. Of the hatred of the priests toward him he had no doubt any longer. Those were the same dignitaries who, giddy with pride, had the past year refused him the corps of Memphis, and who had made him viceroy only when it seemed to them that he had performed an act of penitence by withdrawing from the palace—the very same who watched every movement of his, made reports regarding him, but did not tell him, the heir to the throne, even of the treaty with Assar,—the very same dignitaries who had employed deceit against him in the temple of Hator, and who at the Soda Lakes slaughtered prisoners to whom he had promised freedom.

The pharaoh recalled the obeisances of Herhor, the looks of Mefres, and the tones of voice which both used. Beneath the show of good-will, their pride and their contempt for him appeared each moment. He asks for money, they promise prayers. Nay! they dare to tell him that he is not sole ruler in the land of Egypt.

The young sovereign laughed in spite of himself, for he called to mind the hired herdsmen who told the owner of the flock that he had no right to do what he liked with it. Besides the ridiculous aspect there was in the case a point which was terrible. The treasury contained perhaps a thousand talents which, according to the recent rate of outlay would last from seven to ten days. And then what? How would the officials, the servants, and above all how would the army, exist, not only without pay, but without sustenance?

The high priests knew this position of the pharaoh—if they did not hasten to assist him they wished to ruin him, and to ruin him in the course of a few days, even before the funeral of his father.

Rameses recalled a certain event of his childhood.

He was at a school of the priests when, on the festival of the goddess Mut, after various amusements they introduced the most famous buffoon in Egypt. This artist represented an unfortunate hero: when he commanded he was not obeyed, his anger was answered with laughter, and when, to punish those who made sport of him, he seized an axe, the axe broke in his hands. At last they let out a lion at him and when the defenceless hero began to flee it turned out that not a lion was chasing him, but a pig in a lion's skin.

The pupils and the teachers laughed at those adventures till the tears came; but the little prince sat gloomily; he was sorry for the man who was eager for great things but fell covered with ridicule.

That scene and the feelings which he experienced then were revived in the memory of the pharaoh. “They want to make me like that buffoon,” thought he. Despair seized him, for he felt that his power would end when the last talent was issued, and with his power his life also.

But here came a certain revulsion. He halted in the middle of the room and thought,—

“What can happen to me? Nothing save death. I will go to my glorious ancestors, to Rameses the Great— But then, I could not tell them that I died without defending myself. After the misfortunes of this earthly life eternal shame would meet me. How was it to end? He, the conqueror at the Soda Lakes, to yield before a handful of deceivers against whom one Asiatic regiment would not have much trouble? For the reason, then, that Mefres and Herhor wish to rule Egypt and the pharaoh, his troops must suffer hunger, and a million men are not to receive rest from labor? But did not his ancestors rear these temples. Did they not fill them with spoils? And who won the battles? The priests, or the warriors? Who, then, had a right to the treasures,—the priests, or the pharaoh and his army?”

Rameses shrugged his shoulders and summoned Tutmosis. Though it was late at night the favorite came to him straightway.

“Dost thou know,” asked the pharaoh, “that the priests have refused me a loan, though the treasury is empty?”

Tutmosis straightened himself, and asked,—

“Wilt thou command to take them to prison?”

“Wouldst thou?”

“There is not an officer in Egypt who would hesitate to carry out an order from our lord and leader.”

“In that case,” said the pharaoh, deliberately, “there is no need to imprison any one. I have too much power on my side and too much contempt for the priesthood. A man does not put into a box bound with iron the carrion which he meets on the highway; he merely passes around it.”

“But a hyena is confined in a cage,” whispered Tutmosis.

“It is too early yet. I must be gracious to those men, at least till my father is buried or they might commit some indignity on his revered mummy, and destroy his spirit. But go to-morrow to Hiram and tell him to send me that priest of whom we have spoken.”

“That will be done. But I must remind thee, holiness, that to-day people attacked Phœnician houses in Memphis.”

“Oho! That was not needed.”

“It seems to me, too,” continued Tutmosis, “that since thou hast commanded Pentuer to investigate the condition of earth-tillers and laborers the priests are exciting the nomarchs and nobles. They say that it is thy wish to ruin the nobility for the sake of the people.”

“But do the nobles believe that?”

“There are some who believe, but there are others who say directly that it is an intrigue of the priests against the pharaoh.”

“But if I wish indeed to improve the condition of earth-tillers?”

“Thou wilt do, lord, that which pleases thee,” answered Tutmosis.

“Oh, I understand my position!” exclaimed Rameses. “Be at rest, and tell the nobility that not only will they lose nothing in carrying out my orders, but their own

condition will be improved notably. The wealth of Egypt must be taken at last from the hands of the unworthy and given to faithful servants."

The pharaoh dismissed his adjutant and went to rest satisfied. His temporary despair seemed to him laughable.

About noon of the following day it was announced that a deputation of Phœnician merchants had come to his holiness.

"Do they wish to complain of the attack on their houses?" inquired the pharaoh.

"No," replied the adjutant, "they wish to offer thee homage."

In fact a number of Phœnicians, under the leadership of Rabsun, declared that, according to ancient custom they had made bold to lay an insignificant gift at the feet of the sovereign who gave life to them and security to their property.

Then they placed on the tables gold plates, chains, and goblets filled with jewels.

After that, Rabsun placed on the steps of the throne a tray with the papyrus by which the Phœnicians bound themselves to give all things necessary for the army to the amount of two thousand talents.

That was a considerable gift, since all that the Phœnicians had brought represented a sum of three thousand talents.

The pharaoh answered the faithful merchants very graciously, and promised protection. He dismissed them in happiness.

Rameses XIII. drew a breath of relief: bankruptcy of the treasury, and therefore the need of using violent measures against the priests was deferred ten days longer.

In the evening, again, under the guardianship of Tutmosis, the worthy Hiram stood in the cabinet of his holiness. This time he did not complain of weariness, but he fell on his face and cursed the stupid Dagon.

"I have learned," said he, "that that mangy fellow dared to remind thee, holiness, of our talk concerning the canal to the Red Sea. May he perish! May the leprosy devour him! May his children become swineherds and his grandchildren Hebrews. But do thou, sovereign, only command, and whatever wealth Phœnicia has she will lay at thy feet without bond or treaty. Are we Assyrians—or priests," added he in a whisper, "that one word of such a mighty potentate should not suffice us?"

"But if I should require a really large sum?"

"Such as—?"

"For example, thirty thousand talents."

"Immediately?"

"No, in the course of a year."

"Thou wilt have it, holiness," answered Hiram, without hesitation.

The pharaoh was astonished at this liberality.

"But must I give you a pledge?"

"Only for form's sake," replied the Phœnician. "Give us, holiness, the quarries in pledge, so as not to rouse the suspicions of priests. Were it not for them, thou wouldst have all Phœnicia without pledge or paper."

“But the canal? Am I to sign a treaty at once?” asked Rameses.

“Not at all. Thou wilt make, O holiness, a treaty when it pleases thee.”

It seemed to the pharaoh that he was uplifted in the air. At that moment it seemed to him that he had tasted for the first time the sweetness of regal power, and tasted it, thanks to the Phoenicians.

“Hiram,” said he, controlling himself no longer, “I give thee permission this day to dig a canal which shall join the Red Sea with the Mediterranean.”

The old man fell at the feet of the pharaoh.

“Thou art the greatest sovereign ever seen on earth,” said he.

“For the time thou art not permitted to speak of this to any one, because the enemies of my glory are watching. But that thou shouldst feel certain, I give thee this from my own finger.”

He took from his finger a ring adorned with a magic stone on which was engraved the name Horus, and put it on the finger of the Phœnician.

“The property of all Phœnicia is at thy command,” said Hiram, moved profoundly.

“Thou wilt accomplish a work which will herald thy name till the sun quenches.”

The pharaoh pressed Hiram’s iron-gray head and commanded him to sit down before him.

“And so we are allies,” said he, after a while, “and I hope that from this will rise prosperity for Egypt and Phœnicia.”

“For the whole world,” added Hiram.

“But tell me, prince, whence hast thou such confidence in me?”

“I know thy noble character, holiness. If thou, sovereign, wert not a pharaoh, in a few years thou wouldst become the most renowned of Phœnician merchants and the chief of our council.”

“Let us suppose that,” replied Rameses. “But I, to keep my promises, must first bend the priests. That is a struggle the issue of which is uncertain.”

Hiram smiled.

“Lord,” said he, “if we were so insignificant as to abandon thee to-day when thy treasury is empty, and thy enemies are insolent, thou wouldst lose the battle. For a man deprived of means loses daring easily; from an impoverished king his armies turn away as well as his dignitaries and his subjects. But if thou, sovereign, have our gold and our agents, with thy army and thy generals thou wilt have as much trouble with the priests as an elephant with a scorpion. Thou wilt barely set thy foot on them and they will be crushed beneath it. But this is not my affair. The high priest Samentu is waiting in the garden, he whom thou hast summoned. I withdraw; it is his hour. But I refuse not the money. Command me to the extent of thirty thousand talents.”

He fell on his face again and then withdrew, promising that Samentu would present himself straightway.

In half an hour the high priest appeared. As became one who honored Set he did not shave his red beard and shaggy hair; he had a severe face, but eyes full of intellect. He bowed without excessive humility and met the soul-piercing gaze of the pharaoh with calmness.

“Be seated,” said the pharaoh.

The high priest sat on the floor.

“Thou pleasest me,” said Rameses. “Thou hast the bearing and the face of a Hyksos, and they are the most valiant troops in my army.” Then he inquired, on a sudden—

“Art thou the man who informed Hiram of the treaty of our priests with Assyria?”

“I am,” replied Samentu, without dropping his eyes.

“Didst thou share in that iniquity?”

“I did not. I overheard the conditions. In the temples, as in thy palaces, holiness, the walls are honeycombed with passages through which it is possible to hear on the summit of pylons what is said in the cellars.”

“And from subterranean places it is possible to converse with persons in upper chambers?” asked the pharaoh.

“And imitate voices from the gods,” added the priest seriously.

The pharaoh smiled. Then the supposition was correct that it was not the spirit of his father, but priests who spoke to him and to his mother.

“Why didst thou confide to Phœnicians a great secret of the state?” inquired Rameses.

“Because I wished to prevent a shameful treaty which was as harmful to us as to Phœnicia.”

“Thou mightst have forewarned some Egyptian dignitary.”

“Whom?” inquired the priest. “Men who were powerless before Herhor; or who would complain of me to him and expose me to death and tortures? I confided it to Hiram, for he meets dignitaries of ours whom I never see.”

“But why did Herhor and Mefres conclude such a treaty?” inquired Rameses.

“In my opinion, they are men of weak heads whom Beroes, the great Chaldean priest, frightened. He told them that for ten years evil fates would threaten Egypt; that if we began war with Assyria during that time we should be defeated.”

“And did they believe him?”

“Beroes, it seems, showed them wonders. He was even borne above the earth. Beyond doubt that is wonderful; but I cannot understand why we should lose Phœnicia because Beroes can fly above the earth.”

“Then thou dost not believe in miracles?”

“It depends upon what they are,” replied Samentu. “It seems that Beroes does perform unusual things; but our priests merely deceive people as well as rulers.”

“Thou hast a hatred for the priestly order?”

“Well, they cannot endure me, and what is worse they insult me under pretext that I am a minister of Set. Meanwhile, what do I care for gods whose hands and feet must be moved by strings. Or priests who pretend to be abstemious and devout, but have ten wives, spend some tens of talents yearly, steal the offerings placed on altars, and are little wiser than pupils of a higher school.”

“But dost thou take presents from Phœnicians?”

“From whom should I take them? The Phoenicians are the only men who really honor Set; they fear lest he might wreck their ships. With us the poor alone revere him. Were I restricted to their offerings I should die of hunger, and my children also.”

The pharaoh thought that this priest was not a bad man, though he had betrayed a temple secret. And moreover, he seemed wise and he spoke truth.

“Hast thou heard anything,” inquired Rameses again, “of a canal which is to join the Red Sea with the Mediterranean?”

“I know of that affair. Our engineers have been developing the project for some centuries.”

“But why has it not been carried out ere this time?”

“Because the priests are afraid that strangers would come who might undermine our religion, and with it the priestly income.”

“Is there truth in what Hiram says of people living in the distant East?”

“Perfect truth. We know of them for a long time, and no ten years pass that we do not receive from those countries products, precious stones, or pictures.”

The pharaoh meditated again, and asked suddenly,—

“Wilt thou serve me faithfully if I make thee my counsellor?”

“I will serve thee, holiness, with life and death. But were I to become thy counsellor, the priests, who hate me, would be indignant.”

“Dost thou not think it possible to overthrow them?”

“It is possible and very easy.”

“What would thy plan be, if I had to free myself of them?”

“To obtain possession of the treasures in the labyrinth.”

“Couldst thou go to it?”

“I have many indications; the rest I can discover, for I know where to search for them.”

“What further?” inquired the pharaoh.

“It would be necessary to bring an action against Herhor and Mefres for treason, and for secret relations with Assyria.”

“But the proofs?”

“We should find them with the help of the Phoenicians.”

“Would no danger come of that to Egypt?”

“None. Four hundred years ago the pharaoh, Amenhotep IV. overturned the power of priests by establishing the faith in one god, Re Harmachis. It is understandable that in those conditions he took treasures from the temples of the other gods. And at that time neither the people, nor the army, nor the nobility took part with the priesthood. What would the case be to-day when the old faith is greatly weakened?”

“Who assisted Amenhotep?” inquired Rameses.

“A simple priest, Ey.”

“But who, on the death of Amenhôtep, became his heir?” asked Rameses, looking quickly into the eyes of the priest.

Samentu answered, calmly,—

“Events show that Amenhôtep was incompetent, more occupied in honoring Re than in governing Egypt.”

“Indeed, thou art a real sage!” said Rameses.

“At thy service, holiness.”

“I appoint thee my counsellor,” said the pharaoh. “In that case thou mayst visit me in secret, and thou wilt dwell with me.”

“Pardon, lord, but until the members of the supreme council are in prison for negotiating with enemies of Egypt, my presence in the palace would bring more harm than profit. So I will serve thee, holiness, and advise, but in secret.”

“And wilt thou find the way to the treasure in the labyrinth?”

“I hope, lord, that before thou returnest from Thebes, I shall succeed in this matter. But when we transfer the treasure to thy palace, when the court condemns Herhor and Mefres whom thou mayst pardon afterward, with permission, I will appear openly and cease to be the priest of Set, who only frightens people and turns them from me.”

“And dost thou think that everything will go well?”

“I pledge my life on it!” cried the priest. “The people love thee, holiness, so it is easy to influence them against traitorous dignitaries. The army obeys thee as no army has obeyed a pharaoh since Rameses the Great. Who will oppose, then? In addition, holiness, thou hast the Phœnicians behind thee, and money, the greatest power on earth.”

When Samentu took farewell, the pharaoh permitted him to kiss his feet, and gave him a heavy gold chain and a bracelet ornamented with sapphires. Not every dignitary received such favor after long years of service. The visit and Samentu’s promises filled the pharaoh’s heart with new hope.

What if he should succeed in getting the treasure of the labyrinth! For a small part of it he might free the nobles from Phœnician debts, improve the lot of the laborers and redeem the mortgaged property of the court.

And with what edifices might the state be enriched!

Hence the treasure of this labyrinth might remove all the pharaoh’s troubles. For what was the result of a great loan from the Phœnicians? It would be necessary to pay a loan some time, and, sooner or later, mortgage the rest of the pharaoh’s property. That was merely to defer ruin, not avoid it.

Chapter LVI

IN the middle of the month Famenut (January) spring began. All Egypt was green with growing wheat. On black patches of land crowds of men were sowing lupines, beans, and barley. In the air was the odor of orange blossoms. The water had fallen greatly and new bits of land were laid bare day by day.

Preparations for the funeral of Osiris-Mer-Amen-Rameses were ended.

The revered mummy of the pharaoh was inclosed in a white box, the upper part of which repeated perfectly the features of the departed. The pharaoh seemed to see with enamelled eyes, while the godlike face expressed a mild regret, not for the world which the ruler had left, but for the people condemned to the sufferings of temporal existence. On its head the image of the pharaoh had an Egyptian cap with white and sapphire stripes; on its neck, a string of jewels; on its breast, the picture of a man kneeling with crossed hands; on its legs, images of the gods, sacred birds, and eyes, not set into any face, but, as it were, gazing out of infinity.

Thus arrayed, the remains of the pharaoh rested on a costly couch in a small cedar chapel, the walls of which were covered with inscriptions celebrating the life and deeds of the departed sovereign. Above hovered a miraculous falcon with a human head, and near the couch night and day watched a priest clothed as Anubis, the god of burial, with a jackal's head on his body.

A heavy basalt sarcophagus had been prepared which was to be the outer coffin of the mummy. This sarcophagus had also the form and features of the dead pharaoh. It was covered with inscriptions, and pictures of people praying, of sacred birds and also scarabs.

On the 17th of Famenut, the mummy, together with its chapel and sarcophagus, was taken from the quarter of the dead to the palace and placed in the largest hall there.

This hall was soon filled with priests, who chanted funeral hymns, with attendants and servants of the departed, and above all with his women, who screamed so vehemently that their cries were heard across the river.

"O lord! thou our lord!" cried they, "why art thou leaving us? Thou so kind, so beautiful. Thou art silent now, thou who didst speak to us so willingly. Thou didst incline to our society, but to-day thou art far from us."

During this time the priests sang,—

Chorus I. "I am Tum, who alone exists."

Chorus II. "I am Re, in his earliest splendor."

Chorus I. "I am the god who creates himself."

Chorus II. "Who gives his own name to himself, and no one among the gods can restrain him."

Chorus I. "I know the name of the great god who is there."

Chorus II. "For I am the great bird Benu which tests the existent."³⁷

After two days of groans and devotions a great car in the form of a boat was drawn to the front of the palace. The ends of this car were adorned with ostrich plumes and rams' heads, while above a costly baldachin towered an eagle, and there also was the ureus serpent, symbol of the pharaoh's dominion. On this car was placed the sacred mummy, in spite of the wild resistance of court women. Some of them held to the coffin, others implored the priests not to take their good lord from them, still others scratched their own faces, tore their hair, and even beat the men who carried the remains of the pharaoh.

The outcry was terrible.

At last the car, when it had received the divine body, moved on amid a multitude of people who occupied the immense space from the palace to the river. There were people smeared with mud, torn, covered with mourning rags, people who cried in heaven-piercing voices. At the side of these, according to mourning ritual, were disposed, along the whole road, choruses.

Chorus I. "To the West, to the mansion of Osiris, to the West art thou going, thou who wert the best among men, who didst hate the untrue."

Chorus II. "Going West! There will not be another who will so love the truth, and who will so hate a lie."

Chorus of charioteers. "To the West, oxen, ye are drawing the funeral car, to the West! Our lord is going after you."

Chorus III. "To the West, to the West, to the land of the just! The cities which thou didst love are groaning and weeping behind thee."

The throng of people. "Go in peace to Abydos! Go in peace to Abydos! Go thou in peace to the Theban West!"

Chorus of female wailers. "O our lord, O our lord, thou art going to the West, the gods themselves are weeping."

Chorus of priests. "He is happy, the most revered among men, for fate has permitted him to rest in the tomb which he himself has constructed."

Chorus of drivers. "To the West, oxen, ye are drawing the car, to the West! Our lord is going behind thee."

The throng of people. "Go in peace to Abydos! Go in peace to Abydos, to the western sea."³⁸

Every couple of hundred yards a division of troops was stationed which greeted the lord with muffled drums, and took farewell with a shrill sound of trumpets.

That was not a funeral, but a triumphal march to the land of divinities.

At a certain distance behind the car went Rameses XIII., surrounded by a great suite of generals, and behind him Queen Nikotris leaning on two court ladies. Neither the son nor the mother wept, for it was known to them then (the common people were not aware of this), that the late pharaoh was at the side of Osiris and was so satisfied

³⁷ "Book of the Dead."

³⁸ Authentic expression.

with his stay in the land of delight that he had no wish to return to an earthly existence.

After a procession of two hours which was attended by unbroken cries, the car with the remains halted on the bank of the Nile. There the remains were removed from the boat-shaped car and borne to a real barge gilded, carved, covered with pictures, and furnished with white and purple sails.

The court ladies made one more attempt to take the mummy from the priests; again were heard all the choruses and the military music. After that the lady Nikotris and some priests entered the barge which bore the royal mummy, the people hurled bouquets and garlands—and the oars began to plash.

Rameses XII. had left his palace for the last time and was moving on the Nile toward his tomb in Theban mountains. But on the way it was his duty, like a thoughtful ruler, to enter all the famed places and take farewell of them.

The journey lasted long. Thebes was five hundred miles distant higher up the river, along which the mummy had to visit between ten and twenty temples and take part in religious ceremonies.

Some days after the departure of Rameses XII. to his eternal rest, Rameses XIII. moved after him to rouse from sorrow by his presence the torpid hearts of his subjects, receive their homage and give offerings to divinities.

Behind the dead pharaoh, each on his own barge, went all the high priests, many of the senior priests, the richest landholders, and the greater part of the nomarchs. So the new pharaoh thought, not without sorrow, that his retinue would be very slender.

But it happened otherwise. At the side of Rameses XIII. were all the generals, very many officials, many of the smaller nobility and all the minor priests, which more astonished than comforted the pharaoh.

This was merely the beginning. For when the barge of the youthful sovereign sailed out on the Nile there came to meet him such a mass of boats, great and small, rich and poor, that they almost hid the water. Sitting in those barges were naked families of earth-tillers and artisans, well-dressed merchants, Phœnicians in bright garments, adroit Greek sailors, and even Assyrians and Hittites.

The people of this throng did not shout, they howled; they were not delighted, they were frantic. Every moment some deputation broke its way to the pharaoh's barge to kiss the deck which his feet had touched, and to lay gifts before him: a handful of wheat, a bit of cloth, a simple earthen pitcher, a pair of birds, but, above all, a bunch of flowers. So that before the pharaoh had passed Memphis, his attendants were forced repeatedly to clear the barge of gifts and thus save it from sinking.

The younger priests said to one another that except Rameses the Great no pharaoh had ever been greeted with such boundless enthusiasm.

The whole journey from Memphis to Thebes was conducted in a similar manner and the enthusiasm of people rose instead of decreasing. Earth-tillers left the fields and artisans the shops to delight themselves with looking at the new sovereign of whose intentions legends were already created. They expected great changes, though no one knew what these changes might be. This alone was undoubted, that the severity of officials had decreased, that Phœnicians collected rent in a less absolute manner, and the Egyptian people, always so submissive, had begun to raise their heads when priests met them.

“Only let the pharaoh permit,” said people in inns, fields and markets, “and we will introduce order among the holy fathers. Because of them we pay immense taxes, and the wounds on our backs are always open.”

Among the Libyan hills, about thirty-five miles south of Memphis, lay the country of Piom or Fayum, wonderful through this, that human hands had made it.

There was formerly in this province a sunken desert surrounded by naked hills. The pharaoh Amenhemat first conceived the daring plan of changing this place into a fruitful region, three thousand five hundred years before the Christian era.

With this object he divided the eastern part of the depression from the rest and put a mighty dam around it. This dam was about eight metres high, one hundred yards thick at the base, and its length more than four hundred kilometres.

In this way was created a reservoir which held three milliards of cubic metres of water, the surface of which occupied about three hundred square kilometres. This reservoir served to irrigate two hundred thousand hectares of land, and besides, in time of overflow, it took in the excess of water and guaranteed a considerable part of Egypt from sudden inundation.

This immense collection of water was called Lake Moeris, and was considered one of the wonders of the world. Thanks to it a desert valley was changed into the fertile land of Piom, where about two hundred thousand people lived in comfort. In this province, besides palms and wheat, were produced the most beautiful roses; oil made from these went to all Egypt, and beyond its boundaries.

The existence of Lake Moeris was connected with another wonder among works of Egyptian engineers, Joseph's canal. This canal, two hundred yards wide, extended about three hundred and fifty kilometres along the western side of the Nile. It was situated fifteen kilometres from the river, served to irrigate lands near the Libyan mountains, and conveyed water to Lake Moeris.

Around the country of Piom rose a number of ancient pyramids and a multitude of smaller tombs. On its eastern boundary was the celebrated Labyrinth (Lope-rohunt). This was built also by Amenhemat and had the form of an immense horseshoe. It occupied an area one thousand yards long and six hundred wide.

This edifice was the great treasure-house of Egypt. In it reposed the mummies of several famous pharaohs, renowned priests, generals, and architects. Here lay the remains of revered animals,—above all, those of crocodiles. And here was kept the property of the Egyptian state, brought together in the course of ages. Of this structure it is difficult to gain an idea at present.

The labyrinth was neither inaccessible from the outside, nor watched over-carefully; it was guarded by a small division of troops attached to the priests, and some priests of tried honesty. The safety of the treasury lay specially in this: that with the exception of those few persons, no one knew where to look for it in the labyrinth, which was divided into two stories, one above ground, the other subterranean, and in each of these there were fifteen hundred chambers.

Each pharaoh, each high priest, finally each treasurer and supreme judge was bound to examine with his own eyes the property of the state immediately after entering on his office. Still, no one of the dignitaries could find it, or even learn where the treasure lay, whether in the main body of the building or in some of its wings, above the earth or beneath it.

There were some to whom it seemed that the treasure was really underground, far away from the labyrinth proper. There were even some who thought that the treasure was beneath the lake, so that it might be submerged should the need come. Finally no dignitary of the state cared to occupy himself with the question, knowing that an attack on the property of the gods drew after it ruin to the sacrilegious. The uninitiated might have discovered the road, perhaps, if fear had not paralyzed intruders. Death in this world and the next threatened him and his family who should dare with godless plans to discover such secrets.

Arriving in those parts Rameses XIII. visited first of all the province of Fayum. In his eyes it seemed like the interior of some immense bowl, the bottom of which was a lake and hills the edges. Whithersoever he turned he found green juicy grass varied with flowers, groups of palms, groves of fig-trees and tamarinds, amid which from sunrise to sunset were heard the singing of birds and the voices of gladsome people.

That was perhaps the happiest corner of Egypt.

The people received the pharaoh with boundless delight. They covered him and his retinue with flowers, they presented him with a number of vessels of the costliest perfumes as well as gold and precious stones to the amount of ten talents.

Rameses spent two days in that pleasant region where joy seemed to blossom on the trees, flow in the air, and look over the waters of Lake Moeris. But men reminded him that he should see the labyrinth also.

He left Fayum with a sigh and gazed around as he travelled. Soon his attention was fixed by a majestic pile of gray buildings which stood on an eminence.

At the gate of the famous labyrinth Rameses was greeted by a company of priests of ascetic exterior, and a small division of troops, every man in which was completely shaven.

"These men look like priests," said Rameses.

"They do, because every one in the ranks has received the inferior ordination, and centurions the superior," answered the high priest of the edifice.

When he looked more carefully at the faces of those strange warriors, who ate no meat and were celibates, the pharaoh noted in them calm energy and quickness; he noted also that his sacred person made no impression whatever in that place.

"I am very curious to learn how Samentu's secret plan will succeed," thought he. The pharaoh understood that it was impossible either to frighten those men or to bribe them. They were as self-confident in looks as if each one commanded countless regiments of spirits.

"We shall see," thought Rameses, "if they can frighten my Greeks and Asiatics, who, fortunately, are so wild that they do not know pompous faces."

At the request of the priests, the pharaoh's suite remained at the gate, as if under guard of the shaven soldiers.

"Must I leave my sword too?" asked Rameses.

"It will not harm us," answered the chief overseer.

The young pharaoh had the wish at least to slap the pious man with the side of his sword for such an answer, but he restrained himself.

Rameses and the priests entered the main building by an immense court and passed between two rows of sphinxes. Here in a very spacious, but somewhat dark, antechamber were eight doors, and the overseer inquired,—

“Through which door dost thou wish to go to the treasure, holiness?”

“Through that by which we can go the most quickly.”

Each of five priests took two bundles of torches, but only one ignited a torch.

At his side stood the chief overseer holding in his hands a large string of beads on which were written certain characters. Behind them walked Rameses surrounded by three priests.

The high priest who held the beads turned to the right and entered a great hall, the walls and columns of which were covered with inscriptions and figures. From that they entered a narrow corridor, which led upward, and found themselves in a hall distinguished by a great number of doors. Here a tablet was pushed aside in the floor, discovering an opening through which they descended, and again advanced through a narrow corridor to a chamber which had no doors. But the guide touched one hieroglyph of many, and the wall moved aside before them.

Rameses tried to remember the direction in which they were going, but soon his attention was bewildered. He noted, however, that they passed hurriedly through great halls, small chambers, narrow corridors, that they climbed up or descended, that some halls had a multitude of doors and others none whatever. He observed at once that the guide at each new entrance dropped one bead from his long rosary, and sometimes, by the light of the torch, he compared the indications on the beads with those on the walls.

“Where are we now?” asked the pharaoh on a sudden, “beneath the earth, or above it?”

“We are in the power of the gods!” replied his neighbor.

After a number of turns and passages the pharaoh again said,—

“But I think that we are here for the second time.”

The priests were silent, but he who carried the torch held his light to the walls in one and another place, and Rameses, while looking, confessed in spirit that they had not been there before.

In a small chamber without doors they lowered the light, and the pharaoh saw on the pavement dried, black remains, covered with decayed clothing.

“That,” said the overseer of the building, “is the body of a Phœnician who, during the sixteenth dynasty, tried to break into the labyrinth; he got thus far.”

“Did they kill him?” inquired Rameses.

“He died of hunger.”

The party had advanced again about half an hour, when the priest who bore the torch lighted a niche in the corridor where also dried remains were lying.

“This,” said the overseer, “is the body of a Nubian priest, who in the time of thy grandfather, holiness, tried to enter the labyrinth.”

The pharaoh made no inquiry as to what happened to this man. He had the impression of being in some depth and the feeling that the edifice would crush him.

Of taking bearings amid those hundreds of corridors, halls, and chambers, he had no thought any longer. He did not even wish to explain to himself by what miracle those stone walls opened, or why pavements sank before him.

“Samentu will do nothing,” said he in spirit. “He will perish like these two, whom I must even mention to him.”

Such a crushing, such a feeling of helplessness and nothingness he had never experienced. At moments it seemed to him that the priests would leave him in one of those narrow doorless chambers. Then despair seized the young pharaoh; he touched his sword and was ready to cut them down. But he remembered directly that without their assistance he could not go hence, and he dropped his head.

“Oh to see the light of day, even for a moment! How terrible must death be among three thousand rooms filled with gloom or utter darkness!”

Heroic souls have moments of deep depression which the common man cannot even imagine.

The advance had lasted an hour almost when at last they entered a low hall resting on octagonal pillars. The three priests surrounding the pharaoh, separated—then Rameses noticed that one of them nestled up to a column and vanished, as it were, in the interior of it.

After a while a narrow opening appeared in one of the walls, the priests returned to their places, and the guide commanded to light four torches. All turned toward that opening and pushed through it cautiously.

“Here are the chambers,” said the overseer.

The priests lighted quickly torches which were fixed to the walls and columns. Rameses saw a series of immense chambers filled with most varied products of priceless value. In this collection every dynasty, if not every pharaoh, had placed from what he or it possessed, that which was most peculiar, or which had the most value.

There were chariots, boats, beds, tables, caskets, and thrones gold or covered with gold plate, also inlaid with ivory, mother-of-pearl and colored wood so ornamentally that artists must have worked tens of years at them. There were weapons, shields and quivers glittering with jewels. There were pitchers, plates, and spoons of pure gold, costly robes, and baldachins.

All this treasure, thanks to dry and pure air, was preserved without change during ages.

Among rare objects the pharaoh saw the silver model of the Assyrian palace brought to Rameses XII. by Sargon. The high priest, while explaining to the pharaoh whence each gift came, looked at his face diligently. But in place of admiration for the treasures, he noticed dissatisfaction.

“Tell me, worthiness,” inquired Rameses on a sudden, “what good comes of these treasures shut up in darkness?”

“Should Egypt be in danger there would be great power in them,” replied the overseer. “For a few of these helmets, chariots and swords we might buy the goodwill of all the Assyrian satraps. And maybe even King Assar himself would not resist if we gave him furniture for his throne hall, or his arsenal.”

"I think that they would rather take all from us by the sword than a few through good-will," said the pharaoh.

"Let them try!" replied the priest.

"I understand. Ye have then means of destroying the treasures. But in that case no one could make use of them."

"That is not a question for my mind," replied the overseer. "We guard what is given to us, and do what is ordered."

"Would it not be better to use a portion of these treasures to fill the coffers of the state and raise Egypt from the misery in which it is at present?" asked the pharaoh.

"That does not depend on us."

Rameses frowned. He examined things for some time without very great interest; at last he inquired,—

"Yes, these products of art might be useful in gaining the good-will of Assyrian dignitaries; but if war were to break out with Assyria how could we get wheat, men, and arms from nations which have no knowledge of rare objects?"

"Open the treasury," said the high priest.

At this time the priests hurried in different directions: two vanished as if in the interior of columns, while a third went up along the wall on steps and did something near a carved figure.

Again a hidden door slipped aside and Rameses entered the real hall of treasure.

That was a spacious room filled with priceless objects. In it were earthen jars containing gold dust, lumps of gold piled up like bricks, and ingots of gold in packages. Blocks of silver stored at one side formed, as it were, a wall two ells thick and as high as the ceiling. In niches and on stone tables lay precious stones of every color: rubies, topazes, emeralds, sapphires, diamonds, pearls as large as nuts and even as birds' eggs. There were single jewels which equalled a town in value.

"This is our property in case of misfortune," said the overseer.

"For what misfortune are ye waiting?" inquired the pharaoh. "The people are poor, the nobility and the court are in debt, the army decreased one half, the pharaoh without money. Has Egypt ever been in a worse position?"

"It was in a worse position when the Hyksos conquered it."

"In a few years," replied Rameses, "even the Israelites will conquer this country unless the Libyans and Ethiopians precede them. And then these beautiful stones, broken into pieces, will go to ornament the sandals of black men and Hebrews."

"Be at rest, holiness. In case of need not only the treasure itself, but the labyrinth would vanish without a trace, together with its guardians."

Rameses understood thoroughly that he had before him fanatics who thought only of this: not to let any one possess that treasure. He sat down on a pile of gold bricks, and continued,—

"Then ye are preserving this property for evil days in Egypt?"

"Thou speakest truth, holiness."

“But who will convince you, its guardians, that those days have come when they are really present?”

“To do that it would be necessary to call an extraordinary assembly of Egyptians, an assembly made up of the pharaoh, thirteen priests of the highest degree, thirteen nomarchs, thirteen nobles, thirteen officers, and thirteen of each of the following: merchants, artisans, and earth-tillers.”

“Then ye would give to such an assembly the treasures?” asked the pharaoh.

“We would give the necessary sum if the whole assembly, as one man, decided that Egypt was in danger, and—”

“And what?”

“If the statue of Amon in Thebes confirmed that decision.”

Rameses dropped his head as if to hide his great satisfaction.

He had a plan ready.

“I shall be able to collect such an assembly and incline it to unanimity,” thought the pharaoh. “Also it seems to me the divine statue of Amon will confirm the decision if I put my Asiatics around it.”

“I thank you, pious men,” said he aloud, “for showing me these precious things, the great value of which does not prevent me from being one among the poorest of sovereigns. And now I beg you to lead me hence by the shortest way possible and the most convenient.”

“We wish thee, holiness, to double the wealth of the labyrinth. As to the road, there is only one, we must return as we came.”

One of the priests gave Rameses dates, another a flask of wine mixed with some invigorating substance. Then the pharaoh recovered strength and went forward cheerfully.

“I would give much,” said he, laughing, “to know all the turns of this wonderful passage.”

The guiding priest stopped,—

“I assure thee, holiness, that we ourselves do not understand or remember this road, though each one of us has entered a number of times by it.”

“Then how do ye manage?”

“We have certain indications, but if one of these were to fail us, even at this moment we should die here of hunger.”

They reached the antechamber at last and through it the courtyard. Rameses looked around and drew one breath of relief after another.

“For all the treasures of the labyrinth I would not guard them!” cried he. “Terror falls on my breast when I think that it is possible to die in those stone prisons.”

“But it is possible to grow attached to them,” replied the priest smiling.

The pharaoh thanked each of his guides, and concluded,—

“I should be glad to show you some favor; ask for one.”

The priests listened with indifference, and their chief answered,—

“Pardon me, holiness, but what could we wish for? Our figs and dates are as sweet as those in thy garden, our water is as good as that from thy well. If wealth attracted us have we not more of it than all the kings put together?”

“I cannot win these men by anything,” thought the pharaoh, “but I will give them a decision of the assembly, and a decision of Amon.”

Chapter LVII

WHEN he left Fayum the pharaoh and his retinue advanced southward a number of days up the Nile, surrounded by a throng of boats, greeted by shouts, and covered with flowers.

On both banks of the river, on a background of green fields, extended an unbroken series of huts of the people, groves of fig trees, groups of palms. Every hour appeared the white houses of some village, or a larger place with colored buildings, and the immense pylons of temples.

On the west the wall of the Libyan hills was outlined not very distinctly; but on the east the Arabian line approached ever nearer to the river. It was possible to see clearly the steep, jagged cliffs, dark, yellow or rose colored, recalling by their forms the ruins of fortresses or of temples built by giants.

In the middle of the Nile they met islands which had risen from the water as it were yesterday, but were covered with rich vegetation to-day and were occupied by birds in countless numbers. When the noisy retinue of the pharaoh sailed near, the frightened birds flew up and, circling above the boats, joined their cries with the mighty sound of people. Above this all hung a transparent sky and light so full of life that in the flood of it the black earth assumed a brightness, and the stones rainbow colors.

Time passed, therefore, pleasantly for the pharaoh. At first the incessant cries irritated him somewhat, but later he grew so accustomed that he turned no attention to them. He was able to read documents, take counsel, and even sleep.

From a hundred and fifty to two hundred miles above Fayum on the left bank of the Nile is Siut, where Rameses XIII. took a rest of two days. He was even obliged to halt there, for the mummy of the late pharaoh was still in Abydos, where they were making solemn prayers at the grave of Osiris.

Siut was one of the richest parts of Upper Egypt. At that place were made the famous vessels of white and black clay, and there they wove linen. It was also the chief market-place to which people brought goods from the oases scattered throughout the desert. There besides was the famous temple of the jackal-headed god, Anubis.

On the second day of his stay in that place the priest Pentuer appeared before Rameses. He was the chief of that commission sent to investigate the condition of the people.

"Hast thou news?" inquired the sovereign.

"I have this, O holiness, that all the country blesses thee. All with whom I speak are full of hope, and say, 'His reign will be a new life for Egypt.'"

"I wish," replied Rameses, "my subjects to be happy; I wish the toiling man to rest; I wish that Egypt might have eight millions of people as aforetime and win back that land seized from it by the desert; I wish the laborer to rest one day in seven and each man who digs the earth to have some little part of it."

Pentuer fell on his face before the kindly sovereign.

“Rise,” said Rameses. “But I have had hours of grievous sadness: I see the suffering of my people; I wish to raise them, but the treasury is empty. Thou thyself knowest best that without some tens of thousands of talents I cannot venture on such changes. But now I am at rest; I can get the needed treasure from the labyrinth.”

Pentuer looked at his sovereign with amazement.

“The overseer of the treasure explained to me what I am to do,” said the pharaoh. “I must call a general council of all orders, thirteen of each order. And if they declare that Egypt is in need the labyrinth will furnish me with treasure.”

“O gods!” added he, “for a couple—for one of the jewels which lie there it would be possible to give the people fifty rest days in a year! Never will they be used to better purpose.” Pentuer shook his head.

“Lord,” said he, “the six million Egyptians, with me and my friends before others, will agree that thou take from that treasure. But, O holiness, be not deceived; one hundred of the highest dignitaries of the state will oppose, and then the labyrinth will give nothing.”

“They wish me, then, to beg before some temple!” burst out the pharaoh.

“No,” replied the priest. “They fear lest that treasure house be emptied once thou touch it. They will suspect thy most faithful servants, holiness, of sharing in the profits flowing from the labyrinth. And then envy will whisper to each of them: ‘Why shouldst thou not profit also?’ Not hatred of thee, holiness, but mutual distrust, greed, will urge them to resistance.”

When he heard this the pharaoh was calm, he smiled even.

“If it be as thou sayst, be at rest, beloved Pentuer. At this moment I understand exactly why Amon established the authority of the pharaoh and gave him superhuman power. For the purpose, seest thou, that a hundred, even of the most distinguished rascals, should not wreck the state.”

Rameses rose from his armchair and added,—

“Say to my people: Work and be patient. Say to the priests who are loyal: Serve the gods and cultivate wisdom, which is the sun of the universe. But those stubborn and suspicious dignitaries leave to my management. Woe to them if they anger me.”

“Lord,” said the priest, “I am thy faithful servant.”

But when he had taken farewell and gone out care was evident on his face.

About seventy-five miles from Siut, higher up the Nile, the wild Arabian rocks almost touch the river, but the Libyan hills have pushed away so far from it that the valley at that point is perhaps the widest part of Egypt. Just there, side by side, stood Tanis and Abydos, two holy cities. There was born the first Egyptian pharaoh, Menes, there, a hundred thousand years before, were laid in the grave the holy relics of the god Osiris slain by Set (his brother Typhon) treacherously.

There, finally, in memory of those great events, the famous pharaoh Seti built a temple to which pilgrims came from every part of Egypt. Each believer was bound even once during life to bring his forehead to the blessed earth of Abydos. Truly happy was he whose mummy could make a journey to that place and halt even at a distance from the temple.

The mummy of Rameses XII. spent two days there; for he had been a ruler noted for devotion. There is nothing wonderful in this, therefore, that Rameses XIII. began his reign by rendering homage to the grave of Osiris.

Seti's temple was not among the oldest or most splendid in Egypt, but it was distinguished for pure Egyptian style. His holiness Rameses XIII., accompanied by Sem the high priest, visited the temple and made offerings in it.

The ground belonging to the edifice occupied a space of seventy-five hectares, on which were fish ponds, flower beds, orchards and vegetable gardens, besides the houses or rather villas of the temple priesthood. Everywhere grew poplars and acacias, as well as palm, fig, and orange trees which formed alleys directed toward the cardinal points of the world, or groups of trees of almost the same height and set out in order.

Under the watchful eyes of priests even the plant world did not develop according to its own impulses into irregular but picturesque groups; it was arranged in straight lines according to direction, or straight lines according to height, or in geometrical figures.

Palms, tamarinds, cypresses, and myrtles were arranged like warriors in ranks or columns. The grass was a divan shorn and ornamented with pictures made of flowers, not of any chance color, but of that color which was demanded. People looking from above saw pictures of gods or sacred beasts blooming on the turf near the temple; a sage found there aphorisms written out in hieroglyphs.

The central part of the gardens occupied a rectangular space nine hundred yards long and three hundred wide. This space was enclosed by a wall of no great height which had one visible gate and a number of secret entrances. Through the gate pious people entered the space which surrounded the dwelling of Osiris; this space was covered with a stone pavement. In the middle of the space stood the temple, a rectangular pile four hundred and fifty yards long and in width one hundred and fifty.

From the public gate to the temple was an avenue of sphinxes with human heads and lion bodies. They were in two lines, ten in each, and were gazing into each others' eyes. Only the highest dignitaries might pass between these sphinxes.

At the head of this avenue, and opposite the public gate, rose two obelisks or slender and lofty granite columns of four sides, on which was inscribed the history of the pharaoh Seti.

Beyond the obelisks rose the gate of the temple having at both sides of it gigantic piles in the form of truncated pyramids called pylons. These were like two strong towers, on the walls of which were paintings representing the visits of Seti, or the offerings which he made to divinities.

Earth-tillers were not permitted to pass this gate which was free only to wealthy citizens and the privileged classes. Through it was the entrance to the peristyle or court, surrounded by a corridor which had a multitude of columns. From this court, where there was room for ten thousand people, persons of the noble order might go still farther to the first hall, the hypostyle; this had a ceiling which rested on two rows of lofty columns, and there was space in it for two thousand worshippers. This hall was the last to which lay people were admitted. The highest dignitaries who had not received ordination had the right to pray there, and look thence at the veiled image of the god which rose in the hall of "divine apparition."

Beyond the hall of “divine apparition” was the chamber of “tables of offering,” where priests placed before the gods gifts brought by the faithful. Next was the chamber of “repose,” where the god rested when returning from or going to a procession, and last was the chapel or sanctuary where the god had his residence.

Usually the chapel was very small, dark, sometimes cut out of one block of stone. It was surrounded on all sides by chapels equally small, filled with garments, furniture, vessels and jewels of the god which in its inaccessible seclusion slept, bathed, was anointed with perfumes, ate, drank, and as it seems even received visits from young and beautiful women.

This sanctuary was entered only by the high priest, and the ruling pharaoh if he had received ordination. If an ordinary mortal entered he might lose his life there.

The walls and columns of each hall were covered with inscriptions and explanatory paintings. In the corridor surrounding the peristyle were the names and portraits of all the pharaohs from Menes the first ruler of Egypt to Rameses XII. In the hypostyle, or hall for nobles, the geography and statistics of Egypt were presented pictorially, also the subject nations. In the hall of “apparition” were the calendar and the results of astronomical observation; in the chamber of “tables of offering,” and in that of “repose” figured pictures relating to religious ceremonial, and in the sanctuary rules for summoning beings beyond the earth and controlling the phenomena of nature.

This last kind of knowledge was contained in statements so involved that even priests in the time of Rameses XII. did not understand them. The Chaldean Beroes was to revive this expiring wisdom.

Rameses XIII., after he had rested two days in the official palace at Abydos, betook himself to the temple. He wore a white tunic, a gold breastplate, an apron with orange and blue stripes, a steel sword at his side and on his head a golden helmet. The pharaoh sat in a chariot drawn by horses adorned with ostrich plumes, and was conducted by nomarchs as he moved slowly toward the house of Osiris, surrounded by his officers.

Whithersoever he looked: toward the field, the river, the roofs of houses, or even the limbs of tamarind and fig-trees there was a throng of people, and an unceasing shout which was like the roar of a tempest.

When he arrived at the temple the pharaoh stopped his horses and descended before the public gate. This act pleased the common people and delighted the priesthood. He passed on foot along the avenue of sphinxes and, greeted by the holy men, burned incense before the statues of Seti which occupied both sides of the main entrance.

In the peristyle the high priest turned the attention of his holiness to the splendid portraits of the pharaohs, and pointed out the place selected for that of Rameses. In the hypostyle he indicated to him the meaning of the geographical maps and statistical tables.

In the chamber of “divine apparition” Rameses offered incense to the gigantic statue of Osiris, and the high priest showed him the columns dedicated to the separate planets: Mercury, Venus, the moon, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. The planets stood around statues of the sun god to the number of seven.

“Thou hast told me,” said Rameses, “that there are six planets; meanwhile I see seven columns.”

“The seventh represents the earth, which is also a planet.”

The astonished pharaoh asked for explanation, but the sage was silent, indicating by signs that his lips were sealed on that subject.

In the chamber of the “tables of offering” was heard low but beautiful music, during which a solemn dance was given by a chorus of priestesses.

The pharaoh removed his golden helmet; next, his breastplate of great value, and gave both to Osiris, desiring that these gifts should remain in the treasury of the god, and not be transferred to the labyrinth.

In return for his bounty the high priest bestowed on the sovereign a most beautiful dancer fifteen years of age, who seemed greatly delighted with her fortune.

When the pharaoh found himself in the hall of “repose” he sat on the throne, and his substitute in religion, Sem, to the sound of music and amid the smoke of censers, entered the sanctuary to bring forth the divinity.

Half an hour later, to the deafening sound of bells, appeared in the gloom of the chamber a golden boat hidden by curtains which moved at times as if some living being were sitting behind them.

The priests prostrated themselves, and Rameses looked intently at the transparent curtains. One of these was turned aside and the pharaoh saw a child of rare beauty which looked at him with such wise eyes that the ruler of Egypt was almost afraid of it.

“This is Horus,” whispered the priest. “Horus the rising sun. He is the son of Osiris and also his father, and the husband of his own mother, who is his sister.”

The procession began, but only through the interior of the temple. In advance went harpers and female dancers, next a white bull with a golden shield between his horns,—then two choruses of priests and high priests bearing the god, then choruses, and finally the pharaoh in a litter borne by eight priests of the temple.

When the procession had passed through all the corridors and halls of the temple, and the god and Rameses had returned to the chamber of repose, the curtain concealing the sacred boat slipped apart and the beautiful child smiled at the pharaoh.

After that Sem bore away the boat and the god to the chapel.

“One might become a high priest,” said the pharaoh, who was so pleased with the child that he would have been glad to see it as often as possible.

But when he had gone forth from the temple and seen the sun and the throng of delighted people, he confessed in his soul that he understood nothing. He knew not whence they had brought that child, unlike any other child in Egypt, whence that superhuman wisdom in its eyes, nor what the meaning was of all that he himself had seen.

Suddenly he remembered his murdered son, who might have been as beautiful, and the ruler of Egypt wept in presence of a hundred thousand subjects.

“Converted! The pharaoh is converted!” said the priests. “Barely has he entered the dwelling of Osiris, and his heart is touched.”

That same day one blind man and two paralytics, who were praying outside the walls of the temple, recovered health. The council of priests decided, therefore, to reckon

that day in the list of those which were miraculous, and to paint a picture on the external wall of the edifice representing the weeping pharaoh and the cured people.

Rameses returned rather late in the afternoon to his palace to hear reports. When all the dignitaries had left the cabinet Tutmosis came in and said,—

“Holiness, the priest Samentu wishes to pay thee homage.”

“Well, let him come.”

“He implores thee, lord, to receive him in a tent in the military camp; he asserts that the walls of the palace are fond of listening.”

Before sunset, the pharaoh went with Tutmosis to his faithful troops and found among them the royal tent, at which Asiatics were on guard by command of Tutmosis.

In the evening came Samentu dressed in the garb of a pilgrim, and when he had greeted his holiness with honor, he whispered,—

“It seems to me that I was followed the whole way by some man who has stopped not far from this tent, O holiness. Perhaps he was sent by the high priests.”

At the pharaoh’s command Tutmosis ran out, and found, in fact, a strange officer.

“Who art thou?” asked he.

“I am Eunana, a centurion in the regiment of Isis. The unfortunate Eunana. Dost thou not remember me, worthiness? More than a year ago at the manœuvres near Pi-Bailos I discovered the sacred scarabs—”

“Ah, that is thou!” interrupted Tutmosis. “But thy regiment is not in Abydos?”

“The water of truth flows from thy lips. We are quartered at a wretched place near Mena where the priests have commanded us to clear a canal, as if we were Hebrews or earth-diggers.”

“How hast thou appeared here?”

“I implored my superiors for a rest of some days, and like a deer thirsting for a spring I, thanks to the swiftness of my feet, have hurried hither—”

“What dost thou wish, then?”

“I wish to beg favor of his holiness against the shaven heads who give me no promotion because I am sensitive to the sufferings of warriors.”

Tutmosis returned to the tent, ill-humored, and repeated the conversation to the pharaoh.

“Eunana?” repeated the sovereign. “Yes, I remember him. He caused us trouble with his beetles, but got fifty blows of a stick through Herhor. And thou sayst that he complains of the priests? Bring him hither.”

The pharaoh told Samentu to go into the second division of the tent.

The unfortunate officer soon showed himself. He fell with his face to the earth, and then kneeling, and sighing, continued,—

“I pray every day at his rising and setting to Re Harmachis, and to Amon, and Re, and Ptah, and to other gods and goddesses, for thy health, O sovereign of Egypt! That

thou live! That thou have success, and that I might see even the splendor of thy heel.”³⁹

“What does he wish?” asked the pharaoh of Tutmosis, observing etiquette for the first time.

“His holiness is pleased to inquire what thy wish is?” repeated Tutmosis.

The deceitful Eunana, remaining on his knees, turned toward the favorite, and said,—

“Thou art the ear and eye of the land; thou givest delight and life, hence I will answer thee as at the judgment of Osiris: I have served in the priests’ regiment of the divine Isis ten years; I have fought six years on the eastern boundary. Men of my age are commanders of thousands, but I am only a centurion. I receive blows of sticks at command of the god-fearing priests. And why is such injustice done me? In the daytime I think of books, and at night I read them, since the fool who leaves books as quickly as a gazelle takes to flight is of low mind; he is like the ass which receives lashes, like the deaf man who does not hear, and with whom one must speak with his fingers. In spite of my love for science I am not puffed up with my own knowledge, but I take counsel with all, for from each man it is possible to learn something, and I surround with my esteem worthy sages—”

The pharaoh moved impatiently, but listened on, knowing that an Egyptian considered garrulousness as his duty and the highest honor to superiors.

“This is what I am,” said Eunana. “In a strange house I look not at women. I give my attendants to eat what is proper, but when my turn comes I dispute not about the division. I have a face which is satisfied at all times, and in presence of superiors I act respectfully. I never sit in the presence of an older man standing; I am not forward, and without invitation I go not into other men’s houses. I am silent touching that which my eyes see, for I know that we are deaf to men who use many words.

“Wisdom teaches that the body of a man is like a granary full of various objects. Therefore, I choose at all times the good that is in me and express it. I keep the bad shut up in my person. The deceits of other men I repeat not, and as to that which is committed to me I always accomplish it in the best manner possible.

“And what is my reward?” finished Eunana, raising his voice; “I suffer cold, I go in rags, I am not able to lie on my back, it is so beaten. I read in books that the priestly order rewards valor and prudence. Indeed! that must have been at some other time, and very long ago. For the priests of to-day turn from men of ability and drive strength and valor out of the bones of officers.”

“I shall fall asleep in presence of this man,” said the pharaoh.

“Eunana,” said Tutmosis, “his holiness is convinced that thou art expert in books, but tell now in as few words as possible what thy wish is.”

“An arrow does not go so quickly to its mark as my request will fly to the divine feet of his holiness,” replied Eunana. “The service of the shaven heads has so disgusted me, the priests have filled my heart with such bitterness, that if I am not transferred to the army of the pharaoh, I shall pierce myself with my own sword, before which the enemies of Egypt have trembled more than one time and more than a hundred times. I would rather be a decurion, nay a simple warrior of his holiness than a

³⁹ Authentic.

centurion in priestly regiments; a pig or a dog may serve them, but not a believing Egyptian!"

Eunana uttered the last words with such mad anger that the pharaoh said in Greek to Tutmosis,—

"Take him to the guard. An officer who does not like the priests may be of use to us."

"His holiness, the lord of both worlds has given command to receive thee into his guard," repeated Tutmosis.

"My health and life belong to our lord. May he live through eternity!" exclaimed Eunana, and he kissed the footstool beneath the feet of the pharaoh.

Eunana, now made happy, moved backward, falling on his face after every couple of steps, and left the tent, blessing his sovereign.

"His garrulousness irritated me," said Rameses. "I must teach Egyptian soldiers and officers to speak briefly, not like learned scribes."

"May the gods grant that to be his only failing," whispered Tutmosis, on whom Eunana had made a bad impression.

Rameses summoned Samentu.

"Be at rest," said he to the priest. "That officer who came after thee was not following. He is too stupid for commissions of that sort. But a heavy hand may be used in case of necessity. Well, now, tell me what inclined thee to such cautiousness?"

"I know, almost, the road to the treasure chambers in the labyrinth," said Samentu.

The pharaoh shook his head.

"That is a difficult task," said he in a low voice. "I ran an hour through various halls and corridors, like a mouse chased by a cat. And I confess that, not merely did I not understand that road, but I could not have even escaped from the place unattended. Death in the sunlight may be pleasant, but death in those dens, where a mole would lose its way! Brr!"

"Still we must find that road and master it," said Samentu.

"But if the overseers themselves give the necessary part of the treasure," inquired the pharaoh.

"They will not do that while Mefres, Herhor, and their confederates are living. Believe me, sovereign, the question for those dignitaries is to roll thee in swaddling clothes, like an infant."

Rameses grew pale from anger.

"Unless I wind them in chains! How wilt thou discover the way?"

"Here in Abydos, in the grave of Osiris, I found the whole plan of the road to the treasure," said Samentu.

"But how didst thou learn that it was here?"

"Inscriptions in my temple of Set explained that to me."

"When didst thou find the plan?"

"When the mummy of thy eternally living father, O holiness, was in the temple of Osiris. I accompanied the revered relics and while on night service in the hall of 'repose' I entered the sanctuary."

"Thou shouldst be a general, not a high priest!" cried Rameses, laughing. "And now thou understandest the way of the labyrinth?"

"I have understood it this long time, now I have taken indications for guidance."

"Canst thou explain it to me?"

"Of course, at the right time, I will even show thee a plan, holiness. That way," continued Samentu, "passes in zigzags four times through the whole labyrinth; it begins on the upper story and ends in the lowest place underground, and has a number of other twists. That is why it is so long."

"And how couldst thou go from one hall to another when there is such a multitude of doors in them?"

"On every door leading to the object there is a portion of this sentence: 'Woe to the traitor who tries to penetrate the supreme secret of the state and to stretch forth a sacrilegious hand toward the treasure of the gods. His remains will be like offal, and his soul, torn by its sins, will wander without rest, through dark places.'"

"And that inscription does not terrify thee?"

"But, holiness, does the sight of a Libyan spear terrify thee? Threats are good against common people, but not against me, who am able myself to write curses still more dreadful."

The pharaoh fell to thinking.

"Thou art right," said he. "A spear will not harm him who knows how to ward it off, and a deceitful road will not lead astray the sage who knows the word of truth. But how wilt thou manage to make stones in the wall move apart before thee, and columns change into doors of entrance?"

Samentu shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"In my temple," replied he, "there are imperceptible entrances even more difficult to open than those in the labyrinth. Whoso knows the key to a mystery can go everywhere, as thou hast said justly, O holiness."

Rameses rested his head on his hand and continued thinking.

"I should be sorry," said he, "if misfortune were to meet thee on the way."

"In the worst event I shall meet death, and does not death threaten even a pharaoh. Besides, didst thou not march to the Soda Lakes boldly, though thou wert not sure of returning? And, lord, think not," continued the priest, "that I must pass over the same distance as other men who visit the labyrinth. I shall find nearer points, and in the course of one prayer to Osiris I can reach a place which thou wouldst only reach after thirty prayers."

"But are there other entrances?"

"There are, most assuredly, and I must find them. I shall not enter as thou didst, by the main gate or in the daytime."

"How then?"

“There are external doors which I know and which the wise overseers of the labyrinth leave unguarded. In the court the watches are not numerous and they trust so much to the care of the gods, or to the fear of the people that they sleep in the night time most frequently. Besides, the priests go to pray in the temple three times between sunset and sunrise, but the guards perform their devotions in the open air. Before one prayer is finished I shall be in the edifice.”

“And if thou go astray?”

“I have a plan.”

“But if the plan is imperfect?” asked the pharaoh, unable to hide his anxiety.

“But, holiness, if thou obtain not the treasures of the labyrinth? If the Phoenicians change their minds and refuse the promised loan? If the army be hungry, and the hopes of the common people be deceived? Be pleased to believe me, lord,” continued the priest, “that I amid the corridors of the labyrinth shall be safer than thou in thy kingdom of Egypt.”

“But the darkness—the darkness! And the walls which one cannot break through, and the depth, and those hundreds of ways in which he who enters must lose himself. Believe me, Samentu, a battle with men is amusement, but a conflict with darkness and doubt—that is dreadful.”

“Holiness,” answered Samentu, smiling, “thou dost not know my life. At the age of twenty-five I was a priest of Osiris.”

“Thou?” asked Rameses, with astonishment.

“I, and I will tell at once why I passed to the service of Set. They sent me to the peninsula of Sinai to build a small chapel for miners. The labor of building continued six years. I had much free time and wandered among mountains, examining the caves in them.

“What have I not seen in those places! Corridors so long that it took hours to pass through them, narrow entrances through which if a man passes he must crawl on his stomach; chambers so immense that in each a whole temple might find room sufficient. I saw underground rivers, lakes, crystal chambers, dens totally dark in which no man could see his own hand, again others in which there was as much light as if a second sun had been shining there.

“How often have I been lost in countless passages, how often has my torch gone out, how often was I approaching an unseen precipice? I have passed many days in subterranean places, living on parched barley, licking the moisture from wet rocks, not knowing whether I should ever see this upper world again.

“But I gained experience. My vision grew sharp and I even came to love those underground regions. And to-day when I think of the childish recesses of the labyrinth I am ready for laughter. Edifices built by men are like mole-hills when compared with the immense structures reared by those silent and invisible earth spirits.

“But once I met a dreadful thing which brought me to change my position. West from the quarries of Sinai is a group of ravines and mountains among which subterranean thunders are heard frequently, the earth trembles, and flames are seen sometimes. I was made curious, so I went there for a longer visit. I sought, and, thanks to an

inconsiderable opening, I discovered a whole chain of immense caves under the arches of which it would be possible to place the largest pyramid.

“When I wandered into those places I was met by a smell of putrefaction, a smell so strong that I wished to flee from it. But, conquering myself, I entered the cave whence it came, and beheld— Imagine, lord, a man with legs and arms shorter by one half than ours, but thick, awkward, and with claws at their extremities. Add to this figure a broad tail, flattened at the side, indented like the comb of a cock, a very long neck, and on it a dog’s head. Finally, dress this monster in armor covered on the back with carved spikes. Now imagine that figure standing on its feet with arms and breast resting against a cliff—”

“That was something very ugly,” put in Rameses; “I should have killed it immediately.”

“It was not ugly,” answered Samentu, shaking himself. “For think, lord, that monster was as tall as an obelisk.”

Rameses made a movement of displeasure.

“Samentu,” said he, “it seems to me that thou didst visit thy caves in a dream.”

“I swear to thee, holiness, by the life of my children!” exclaimed the priest, “that I speak truth. Yes; that monster in the skin of a reptile covered with a scaly armor, if lying on the ground, would with its tail be fifty paces long. In spite of fear and repulsion I returned a number of times to that cave and examined the creature most carefully.”

“Then it was alive?”

“No, it was dead. Dead a very long time, but preserved like our mummies. The great dryness of the air preserved it, and perhaps some salt of the earth unknown to me.

“That was my last discovery,” continued Samentu. “I went no more into caves, for I meditated greatly. ‘Osiris,’ said I, ‘creates lions, elephants, horses, and Set gives birth to serpents, bats, crocodiles; the monster which I met is surely a creation of Set, and since it exceeds everything known by us under the sun, Set is a mightier god than Osiris.’

“So I turned to Set, and on returning to Egypt fixed myself in his temple. When I told the priests of my discovery they explained to me that they knew a great many monsters of that sort.”

Samentu drew breath, then continued,—

“Shouldst thou desire to visit our temple at any time, holiness, I will show thee wondrous and terrible beings in coffins: geese with lizards’ heads and bats’ wings. Lizards like swans, but larger than ostriches, crocodiles three times as long as those which live now in the Nile, frogs as bulky as mastiffs. Those are mummies, or skeletons found in caves and preserved in our coffins. People think that we adore them, but we merely save them from decay and examine their structure.”

“I shall believe thee when I see them myself,” replied the pharaoh. “But tell me, whence could such creatures come?”

“The world in which we live, holiness, has suffered great changes. In Egypt itself we find ruins of cities and temples hidden in the earth deeply. There was a time when that which is now Lower Egypt was an arm of the sea, and the Nile flowed through the whole width of our valley. Still earlier the sea was here, where this kingdom is

now. Our ancestors inhabited the region which the western desert has taken. Still earlier tens of thousands of years ago the people were not as we are, they rather resembled monkeys, but they knew how to build huts, they had fire, and they used stones and clubs in fighting. There were no horses in those days, nor bulls; while elephants, rhinoceroses and lions were three or even four times as large as those beasts are in our time.

“But enormous elephants were not the first creatures. Before them lived immense reptiles: flying, swimming, and walking. Earlier than the reptiles in this world there were only snails and fish, and before them only plants, but plants such as exist not at present.”

“And still earlier?” inquired Rameses.

“Still earlier the earth was empty and void, and the spirit of God moved over the waters.”

“I have heard something of this,” said Rameses, “but I shall not believe it till thou show me mummies of monsters which, as thou sayst, are in thy temple.”

“With permission, holiness, I will finish what I have begun,” said Samentu. “When I saw that immense body in the cave at Sinai fear seized me, and for two years or more I entered no cave of any kind. But when priests of Set explained to me the origin of such wonderful creatures my alarm vanished and curiosity rose up in place of it. I have no pleasanter amusement to-day than to wander in subterranean places and search for ways amid darkness. For this reason the labyrinth will not cause me more trouble than a walk through the pharaoh’s garden.”

“Samentu,” said the sovereign, “I esteem thy marvellous daring and thy wisdom; thou hast told me so many curious things that indeed I myself have conceived a wish to examine caves, and some time I will even go with thee to Sinai. Still I have fears as to thy conquest of the labyrinth, and in every event I will summon an assembly of Egyptians to empower me to use its treasures.”

“That will do no harm,” replied the priest. “But none the less will my labor be needed, since Mefres and Herhor will never consent to yield the treasure.”

“And art thou sure of success?” inquired Rameses persistently.

“Since Egypt is Egypt,” said Samentu, “there has not been a man who had such means to win victory as I have. This encounter is for me not even a struggle, but an amusement. Darkness terrifies some men; I love darkness and can even see in the midst of it. Others are unable to guide themselves among the numerous chambers and corridors; I shall do that very easily. Besides, the secrets of opening hidden doors are unknown to other men, while I know them thoroughly.

“Had I nothing beyond what I have recounted I should discover the ways of the labyrinth in one month or in two, but I have besides a detailed plan of those passages and I know the expressions which will lead me from hall to hall. What then can hinder me?”

“Still doubt is concealed at the bottom of thy heart; thou didst fear that officer who seemed to pursue thee.”

The priest shrugged his shoulders.

“I fear nothing and no man,” replied he with calmness, “but I am cautious. I provide against everything, and I am prepared even for this, that they may seize me.”

“Dreadful tortures would await thee in that case!” whispered Rameses.

“No tortures. I shall open a door directly from the subterranean chamber of the labyrinth to the land of endless light.”

“And wilt thou not be sorry for me?”

“Why should I? I aim at a great object; I wish to occupy Herhor’s place.”

“I swear that thou shalt have it.”

“Unless I perish,” added Samentu. “But if I go along precipices to mountain summits, and in that wandering my foot slips and I fall, what does it signify? Thou, lord, wilt care for the future of my children?”

“Go forward,” said Rameses. “Thou art worthy to be my foremost assistant.”

Chapter LVIII

AFTER leaving Abydos, Rameses XIII. sailed up the Nile to the city of Tan-ta-ren (Dendera) and Keneh, which stood nearly opposite each other: one on the western, the other on the eastern bank of the river. At Tan-ta-ren were two famous places: the pond in which crocodiles were reared, and the temple of Hator, where there was a school at which were taught medicine, sacred hymns, the methods of celebrating divine ceremonies, finally astronomy.

The pharaoh visited both places. He was irritated when they directed him to burn incense before the sacred crocodiles, which he considered as foul and stupid reptiles. And when one of these in time of offering pushed out too far and seized the sovereign's garment with its teeth, Rameses struck it on the head with a bronze ladle so violently that the reptile closed its eyes for a time, and spread its legs, then withdrew and crept into the water, as if understanding that the youthful sovereign did not wish to be familiar even with divinities.

"But have I committed sacrilege?" inquired Rameses of the high priest.

The dignitary looked around stealthily to see if any one were listening, and answered,—

"If I had known, holiness, that thou wouldst make it an offering in that way, I should have given thee a club, not a censer. That crocodile is the most unendurable brute in the whole temple. Once it seized a child—"

"And ate it?"

"The parents were satisfied!" said the priest.

"Tell me," said the pharaoh, after thinking, "how can ye sages render homage to beasts which, moreover, when there are no witnesses, ye beat with sticks?"

The high priest looked around again, and seeing no one near by, he answered,—

"Of course thou canst not suspect, sovereign, that worshippers of one god believe in the divinity of beasts. What is done is done for the people."

In the temple of Hator the pharaoh passed quickly through the school of medicine, and listened without great interest to predictions given by astrologers concerning him. When the astrologer high priest showed him a tablet on which was engraved a map of heaven, he asked,—

"How often do these predictions come true which ye read in the stars?"

"They come true sometimes."

"But if ye predict from trees, stones, or running water, do those predictions come true also?"

The high priest was troubled.

"Holiness, do not consider us untruthful. We predict the future for people because it concerns them, and we tell them, indeed, what they can understand of astronomy."

"And what do ye understand?"

“We understand,” said the priest, “the structure of the heavenly dome and the movement of the stars.”

“What good is that to any one?”

“We have rendered no small service to Egypt. We indicate the main directions according to which edifices are built and canals are dug. Without the aid of our science vessels sailing on the sea could not go far from land. Finally we compose calendars and calculate future heavenly phenomena. For instance, the sun will be eclipsed within a short period.”

Rameses was not listening; he had turned and gone out.

“How is it possible,” thought the pharaoh, “to build a temple for such childish amusements, and besides to engrave the results on golden tablets? These holy men do not know what to snatch at from idleness.”

After he had remained a short time in Tan-ta-ren, the sovereign crossed over to Keneh.

In that place were no celebrated temples, incensed crocodiles, or golden tablets with stars. But commerce and pottery flourished. From that city went two roads to ports on the Red Sea: Koseir and Berenice, also a road to the porphyry mountains, whence they brought statues and great sticks of timber.

Kenah was swarming with Phœnicians who received the sovereign with great enthusiasm, and presented him with valuables to the amount of ten talents.

In spite of this, the pharaoh remained barely one day there, since they informed him from Thebes that the revered body of Rameses XII. was already in the palace of Luxor awaiting its burial.

At that epoch Thebes was an immense city occupying about twelve square kilometres of area. It possessed the greatest temple in Egypt: that of Amon, also a multitude of edifices, private and public. The main streets were broad, straight, and paved with stone slabs, the banks of the Nile had their boulevards, the houses were four or five stories high.

Since every temple and palace had a great gateway with pylons Thebes was called “the city of a hundred gates.” It was a city on the one hand greatly given to commerce and trade, and on the other, the threshold, as it were, of eternity. On the western bank of the Nile, in the hills and among them, was an incalculable number of tombs of pharaohs, priests, and magnates.

Thebes was indebted for its splendor to two pharaohs: Amenophis III. or Memnon, who found it a “city of mud and left it a city of stone,” and Rameses II., who finished, and perfected the edifices begun by Amenophis.

On the eastern bank of the Nile, in the southern part of the city, was an entire quarter of immense regal edifices: palaces, villas, temples, on the ruins of which the small town of Luxor stands at present. In that quarter the remains of Rameses XII. were placed for the last ceremonies.

When Rameses XIII. arrived all Thebes went forth to greet him, only old men and cripples remained in the houses, and thieves in the alleys. Here, for the first time, the people took the horses from the pharaoh’s chariot and drew it themselves. Here for the first time the pharaoh heard shouts against the abuses of priests. This comforted him; also cries that every seventh day should be for rest. He desired to make that gift

to toiling Egypt, but he knew not that his plans had become known, and that the people were waiting to see them accomplished.

His journey of five miles lasted a couple of hours amid dense crowds of people. The pharaoh's chariot was stopped very often in the midst of a throng, and did not move till the guard of his holiness had raised those who lay prostrate before it.

When at last he reached the palace gardens where he was to occupy one of the smaller villas, the pharaoh was so wearied that he did not occupy himself with affairs of state on his arrival. Next day, however, he burnt incense before the mummy of his father, which was in the main royal chamber, and informed Herhor that they might conduct the remains to the tomb prepared for them.

But this ceremony was not performed immediately.

They conveyed the late pharaoh to the temple of Rameses, where it remained a day and a night. Then they bore the mummy with boundless magnificence to the temple of Amon-Ra.

The details of the funeral ceremony were the same as in Memphis, though incomparably grander.

The royal palaces on the right bank of the Nile were on the southern end of the city, while the temple of Amon-Ra was in the northern part of it. These were connected by a road unique in character. This was an avenue two kilometres long, very broad, lined not only with immense trees, but with two rows of sphinxes. Some of these with lions' bodies had human heads, others had rams' heads. There were several hundreds of these statues on the avenue, at both sides of which countless throngs of people had assembled from Thebes and the surrounding region. Along the middle of the avenue moved the funeral procession. Advancing to the music of various regiments were detachments of female wailers, choruses of singers, all the guilds of artisans and merchants, deputations from some tens of provinces with their gods and banners, deputations from more than ten nations which kept up relations with Egypt. And again wailers' music and priestly choruses.

This time the mummy of the pharaoh advanced in a golden boat also, but incomparably richer than that in Memphis. The car which bore it was drawn by eight pair of white bulls; this car, two stories high, was almost concealed under garlands, bouquets, ostrich plumes, and precious woven stuffs. It was surrounded by a dense cloud of smoke from censers, which produced the impression that Rameses XII. was appearing to his people in clouds like a divinity.

From the pylons of all Theban temples came thunder-like outbursts and with them loud and rapid sounds from the clashing of bronze disks.

Though the avenue of sphinxes was free and wide; though the procession took place under the direction of Egyptian generals, and therefore with the greatest order, the procession spent three hours in passing those two kilometres between the palace and the edifices of Amon.

Only when the mummy of Rameses XII. was borne into the temple did Rameses XIII. drive forth from the palace in a golden chariot drawn by a pair of splendid horses. The people standing along the avenue, who during the time of the procession had held themselves quietly, burst out at sight of the beloved sovereign into a shout so immense that the thunders and sounds from the summits of all the temples were lost in it.

There was a moment when that mighty throng, borne away by excitement, would have rushed to the middle of the avenue and surrounded their sovereign. But Rameses, with one motion of his hand, restrained the living deluge and prevented the sacrilege.

In the course of some minutes the pharaoh passed over the road and halted before the immense pylons of the noblest temple in Egypt.

As Luxor was the quarter of palaces in the south, so Karnak was the quarter of divinities on the northern side of the city. The temple of Amon-Ra formed the main centre of Karnak.

This building alone occupied two hectares of space, and the gardens and ponds around it about twenty. Before the temple stood two pylons forty metres high. The forecourt, surrounded by a corridor resting on columns, occupied nearly one hectare, the hall of columns in which were assembled the privileged classes was half a hectare in extent. This was not the edifice yet, but the approach to it.

That hall, or hypostyle, was more than a hundred and fifty yards long and seventy-five yards in width, its ceiling rested on one hundred and thirty-four columns. Among these the twelve central ones were fifteen yards in circumference and from twenty to twenty-four metres high.

The statues disposed in the temple near the pylons, and at the sacred lakes accorded in size with all other parts of Karnak.

In the immense gate the worthy Herhor, the high priest of that temple, was waiting for Rameses. Surrounded by a whole staff of priests Herhor greeted the pharaoh almost haughtily, and while burning a censer before the sovereign he did not look at him. Then he conducted Rameses to the hypostyle and gave the order to admit deputations within the wall of the temple.

In the midst of the hypostyle stood the boat with the mummy of the departed sovereign, and on both sides of it, two thrones of equal height stood opposed to each other. On one of these Rameses took his place surrounded by nomarchs and generals, on the other sat Herhor surrounded by the priesthood. Then the high priest Mefres gave Herhor the mitre of Amenhotep and the young pharaoh for the second time beheld on the head of the high priest the golden serpent, the symbol of regal authority.

Rameses grew pale from rage, and thought: "Shall I need to remove the ureus and thy head at the same time?"

But he was silent, knowing that in that greatest of Egyptian temples Herhor was lord, the equal of the gods, and a potentate perhaps greater than the pharaoh.

During this time when the people filled the court, behind the purple curtain dividing the rest of the temple from mortals were heard harps and low singing. Rameses looked at the hall. A whole forest of mighty columns covered from above to the bases with paintings, the mysterious lighting, the ceiling far up near the sky somewhere, produced on him an effect that was crushing.

"What does it signify," thought he, "to win a battle at the Soda Lakes? To build an edifice like this is an exploit!—But those priests built it."

At that moment he felt the power of the priestly order. Could he, his army, or even the whole people overturn that temple? And if it would be difficult to deal with the

edifice would it be easier to struggle with its builders? The voice of the high priest Mefres roused him from disagreeable meditations.

“Holiness,” said the old man; “thou most worthy confidant of the gods” (here he bowed to Herhor); “ye nomarchs, scribes, warriors, and common people,—the most worthy high priest of this temple, Herhor, invites you to judge, according to ancient custom, the earthly acts of the late pharaoh, and to acknowledge or deny to him burial.”

Anger rushed to the head of Rameses. “It was not enough that they insulted him in that place, but in addition they dare to discuss the deeds of his father, to decide as to his burial.”

But he calmed himself; that was only a formality, as ancient, in fact, as the Egyptian dynasties. It related not to judgment, but to praise of the departed.

At a sign given by Herhor the high priests took their seats on stools. But neither the nomarchs nor the generals surrounding the throne of Rameses were seated; there were not even stools for them.

The pharaoh fixed in his memory that insult also; but he had so mastered himself now that it was impossible to learn whether he noticed the disregard shown those near him.

Meanwhile the holy Mefres dwelt on the life of the deceased pharaoh.

“Rameses XII.,” said he, “did not commit any of the forty-two sins, hence the court of the gods pronounces a gracious verdict regarding him. And since, moreover, the royal mummy, thanks to the exceptional care of the priests, is provided with every amulet, prayer, direction, and spell, there is no doubt that the late pharaoh is now in the dwelling of the gods, sitting at the side of Osiris, and is himself Osiris.

“During his earthly life the divine nature of Rameses XII. was made manifest. He reigned more than thirty years. He gave the people profound peace and erected or finished many temples. Besides, he was himself a high priest and surpassed in piety the most pious. During his reign honor to the gods and elevation of the sacred priestly order held the chief position. Therefore he was beloved of the heavenly powers, and one of the Theban gods, Khonsu, at the prayer of the pharaoh, was pleased to go to the country of Buchten, and expel an evil spirit from the king’s daughter.”

Mefres drew breath and continued,—

“When I have shown your worthinesses that Rameses XII. was a god, will ye inquire with what object that higher being came down to the Egyptian land and spent some tens of years here?

“He did so to reform the world, which, through decay of faith, is much corrupted. For who is occupied in devotion to-day, who thinks of obeying the will of the gods in our time?

“In the distant north we see the great Assyrian people who believe only in the power of the sword, and who, instead of giving themselves to devotion and wisdom, are subjecting other nations. Nearer to us are Phœnicians, whose god is gold, and whose worship is mere fraud and usury. There are others also: the Hittites on the East, the Libyans on the west, the Ethiopians on the south, and the Greeks of the

Mediterranean,—those are barbarians and robbers. Instead of toiling they rob, instead of working wisdom they drink, play dice, or sleep like tired animals.

“In the world there is only one really wise and pious people, the Egyptians; but see what is happening among us. Because of the influx of infidel foreigners, religion has fallen here also. Nobles and officials at their wine cups revile eternal life and the gods, while the people throw mud at sacred statues and make no offerings to temples.

“Excess has taken the place of devotion, riot the place of wisdom. Each man wants to wear immense wigs, and anoint himself with rare perfumes; he would have tunics and aprons woven with gold, wear chains and bracelets set with jewels. A barley cake suffices him no longer: he wants wheaten bread with milk and honey; he washes his feet in beer and quenches his thirst with wine from foreign countries.

“Because of this all nobles are in debt, the people are beaten and overloaded with labor; here and there rebellions break out. What do I say! here and there? During a certain time through the length and the breadth of Egypt, thanks to secret disturbances, we hear the shout: ‘Give us rest after every six days of labor! Do not beat us without judgment! Give each man of us a plot of land as his property!’

“This is a declaration of ruin for Egypt, against which we must find rescue. The rescue is only in religion, which teaches that the people should labor. Holy men, as persons knowing the will of the gods, should indicate the labor, and it is the duty of the pharaoh and his officials to see that this labor is carried out actually.

“Religion teaches all this; according to these principles Rameses XII., who was equal to the gods, governed Egypt. We high priests, knowing his devotion, will cut out the following inscription on his tomb and on the temples:

“The bull Horus, the mighty Apis who united the crowns of the kingdom, the golden falcon wielding the sabre, the conqueror of nine nations, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the ruler of two worlds, the son of the sun, Amen-Mer-Rameses, beloved of Amon-Ra, the lord and ruler of the Theban region, the son of Amon-Ra received as son by Horus, and begotten by Hormach, King of Egypt, ruler of Phœnicia, lord of nine nations.”⁴⁰

When this proposal was confirmed by a shout of those assembled, dancers ran out from behind the curtain and performed a sacred dance before the sarcophagus, and the priests burned incense. Then they took the mummy from the boat and bore it to the sanctuary of Amon into which Rameses XIII. had not the right to enter.

The service ended soon after and the assembly left the temple.

While returning to the palace of Luxor the young pharaoh was so sunk in thought that he hardly saw the immense throng of people and did not hear the shouts which rose from it.

“I cannot deceive my own heart,” thought Rameses. “The high priests insult me; this has not happened to any pharaoh till my time; more, they point out to me the way in which I can gain their favor. They wish to manage the state, and I am to see that their commands are accomplished.

“But it will be otherwise: I shall command and ye must accomplish. Either my royal foot will be planted on your necks or I shall perish.”

⁴⁰ Authentic tomb inscription.

For two days the revered mummy of Rameses XII. remained in the temple of Amon, in a place so sacred that even high priests might not enter, save only Herhor and Mefres. Before the deceased only one lamp was burning, the flame of which, nourished in a miraculous manner, was never extinguished. Over the deceased hung the symbol of the spirit, a man-headed falcon. Whether it was a machine, or really a living being, was known to no one. This is certain, that priests who had the courage to look behind the curtain stealthily saw that this being kept one place in the air unsupported while its lips and eyes continued moving.

The continuation of the funeral began, and the golden boat carried the deceased to the other side of the river. But first it passed through the main street of Thebes surrounded by an immense retinue of priests, wailers, warriors, and people, amid incense, music, wailing and chanting. This was perhaps the most beautiful street in all Egypt. It was broad, smooth, lined with trees. Its houses, four and even five stories high, were covered from roof to foundation with mosaic or with bas-reliefs in colors. It looked as if those buildings had been hung with immense colored tapestry or hidden by colossal pictures representing the work and occupations of merchants, artisans, mariners, also distant lands and their people. In one word that was not a street, but a colossal gallery of pictures, barbarous as to the drawing, but brilliant in colors.

The funeral procession advanced about two kilometres from the north to the south, keeping more or less the centre of the city, then it turned westward toward the river.

In the middle of the river opposite this point was a large island connected by a bridge of boats with the city. To avoid accidents the generals in command reformed the procession; they put four people in a rank, ordered them to move very slowly and forbade them to keep step. With this object the different bands of music at the head of the multitude each played different music.

After a couple of hours the procession passed the first bridge, next the island, then the second bridge, and was on the western bank of the river.

If we might call the eastern part of Thebes the city of gods and kings, the western quarter was that of tombs and mortuary temples.

The procession advanced from the Nile toward the Libyan hills by the middle road. South of this road, on an eminence, stood a temple, commemorating the victories of Rameses III., the walls of which are covered with pictures of conquered nations: Hittites, Amorites, Philistines, Ethiopians, Arabs, Libyans. A little lower down rose two colossal statues of Amenhotep II., the height of which, notwithstanding their sitting posture, was twenty metres. One of these statues was distinguished by the miraculous property that when struck by the rays of the rising sun it gave out sounds like those of a harp whenever chords snap in it.

Still nearer the road, but always on the left, stood the Ramesseum, a beautiful though not very large temple which was built by Rameses II. The entrance to this edifice was guarded by statues with the royal insignia in their hands. In the forecourt towered the statue of Rameses II. to the height of sixteen metres.

The road rose gradually, and a very steep eminence became more and more visible; this was as full of holes as a sponge: those holes were the tombs of Egyptian officials. At the entrance to them, among steep cliffs stood the very strange temple of Queen Hatasu. This temple was four hundred and fifty yards long. From the forecourt, surrounded by a wall, there was an entrance by steps to the second court surrounded

by columns; under this was a subterranean temple. From the court of columns the passage rose by steps again to a temple cut out in the cliff under which was another subterranean temple. In this way the temple was of two stories, each of which was divided into an upper and a lower part. The stairs were immense, without railing, but furnished with two rows of sphinxes; the entrance to each stairway was guarded by two sitting statues.

At the temple of Hatasu began the gloomy ravine which led from the tombs of high dignitaries to those of the pharaohs. Between these two quarters was the tomb of the high priest Retemenof, the corridors and chambers of which occupied about one hectare of subterranean area.

The road to the ravine was so steep that men had to help the draught bulls, and push the funeral boat forward. The procession moved, as it were, along a cornice cut into the cliff side; at last they halted on a broad platform some hundreds of feet above the ravine counting from the lower bed of it.

Here was the door leading to the underground tomb which during his thirty years' reign the pharaoh had made for himself. This tomb was a whole palace with chambers for the pharaoh, for his family and servants, with a dining-room, bedchamber and bath, with chapels consecrated to various gods, and finally with a well at the bottom of which was a small chamber where the mummy of the sovereign would rest for the ages.

By the light of brilliant torches the walls of all the rooms appeared covered with prayers, and also with pictures which represented every occupation and amusement of the departed: hunting, the building of temples, the cutting of canals, triumphal entries, solemnities in honor of the gods, battles of troops with their enemies, the labors of people.

And those were not sufficient: the chambers were not only fitted with furniture, vessels, chariots, weapons, flowers, meat, bread, and wine, but they were furnished also with a multitude of statues. There were various portraits of Rameses XII., his priests, ministers, women, warriors, and slaves; for the sovereign could not dispense in the other world any more than in this with costly vessels, exquisite food and faithful servants.

When the funeral car halted at the entrance the priests drew forth from its sarcophagus the mummy of the pharaoh, and placed it on the earth resting against the cliff with its shoulder. Then Rameses XIII. burned incense before the remains of his father, while Queen Nikotris embraced the mummy by the neck, and said with weeping,—

“I am thy sister, Nikotris, thy wife; do not desert me, thou great one! Dost thou desire really, my good father, that I should go? But if I go thou wilt be alone, and will any one be with thee?”

Now the high priest Herhor burned incense before the mummy, and Mefres poured out wine, saying,—

“To thy second self we offer this, O Osiris-Mer-Amen-Rameses, sovereign of Upper and Lower Egypt, whose voice in the presence of the great god is truthful.”

Then the wailers and the chorus of priests were heard:

Chorus I. “Complain, complain, weep, weep, weep, without ceasing, as loudly as ever ye are able.”

Wailers. “O worthy traveller, who turnest thy steps to the land of eternity, how quickly they are tearing thee from us.”

Chorus II. “How beautiful is that which is happening to him! Since Khonsu of Thebes was loved by him greatly, the god has permitted the sovereign to reach that west, the world of the generations of his servants.”

Wailers. “O thou who hast been attended by so many servitors, thou art now in the land ruled by loneliness. Thou who hadst splendid robes and didst love spotless linen art lying now in the garments of yesterday!”

Chorus I. “In peace, in peace, to the West, O our lord, go thou in peace. We shall see thee again when the day of eternity comes, for thou art going to the land which brings all men together.”⁴¹

The final ceremony began.

They brought a bull and an antelope which it was the duty of Rameses XIII. to slay, but they were slain by his substitute before the gods, Sem, the high priest. The inferior priests dressed the beasts quickly, after which Herhor and Mefres, taking the hind legs, placed them in turn at the mouth of the mummy. But the mummy had no wish to eat, for it was not brought to life yet, and its lips were closed.

To remove that obstacle Mefres washed it with holy water and incensed it with perfumes and alum, saying,—

“Here stands thy father; here stands Osiris-Mer-Amen-Rameses. I am thy son; I am Horus; I come to purify thee and make thee alive. I put thy bones again in order; I join that which was severed, for I am Horus, the avenger of my father. Thou wilt sit on the throne of Ra who proceeds from Nut, who gives birth to Re every morning, who gives birth to Mer-Amen-Rameses daily, just as Re.”

Thus speaking, the high priest touched with amulets the mouth, the breasts, the hands, and the feet of the mummy.

Now the choruses were heard again,—

Chorus I. “Henceforth Osiris-Mer-Amen-Rameses will eat and drink all things which the gods eat and drink. He will sit in their place, like them; he is healthy and powerful.”

Chorus II. “He has power in every limb; it is hateful to him to be hungry and unable to eat, thirsty and unable to drink.”

Chorus I. “O gods, give to Osiris-Mer-Amen-Rameses thousands of thousands of pitchers of wine, thousands of garments, thousands of loaves and of bullocks!”

Chorus II. “O ye who are living on the earth, when ye pass this way, if life be dear to you and death be repulsive, if ye desire that your dignities pass to your descendants, repeat this prayer for the heaven-dweller who is placed here.”

Mefres. “O ye great ones, ye prophets, ye princes, scribes, and pharaohs, O ye other people who are to come a million years after me, if any of you put his name on the place of my name the god will punish him by destroying his person on earth!”⁴²

⁴¹ Authentic.

⁴² Authentic.

After this curse the priests lighted the torches, took the royal mummy, placed it again in its casket, and the casket in the stone sarcophagus which had the human form in its general outlines. Then, in spite of the shrieks, the despair, and the resistance of wailers, they bore that immense weight toward the tomb chamber.

After they had passed by the light of torches through a number of corridors and chambers they halted in that one where the well was. They lowered the sarcophagus in that opening, went down themselves, and put away the sarcophagus in a lower subterranean space, then walled up the passage to this space quickly and in such a manner that the most trained eye could not have discovered it; then they went up and closed the entrance to the well with equal effectiveness.

The priests did all this without witnesses; and they did the work so accurately that the mummy of Rameses XII. remains to this day in its secret abode, as safe from thieves as from modern curiosity. During twenty-nine centuries many tombs of pharaohs have been ravaged, but that one is inviolate.

While some priests were hiding the remains of the pious pharaoh, others illuminated the underground chambers and invited the living to a feast in that dwelling.

Rameses XIII., Queen Nikotris, and Sem, with some civil and military dignitaries entered the dining-hall. In the middle of the chamber stood a table covered with food, wine, and flowers, and at the wall sat a statue of the late sovereign carved out of porphyry. He seemed to gaze at those present, smile pensively, and beg them to eat in his presence.

The feast began with a sacred dance, which was accompanied by a hymn sung by one of the highest priestesses.

“Enjoy days of happiness, for life lasts but one instant. Enjoy happiness, for when ye enter the tomb ye will rest there the whole length of each day during ages.”

After the priestess came a prophet, and to the accompaniment of harps he chanted,—

“The world is endless change and endless renewal. That arrangement of fate is wise; the decision of Osiris deserves admiration; for as a body which belongs to past time decays and perishes, other bodies rise behind it.

“The pharaohs, those gods who were before us, rest in their pyramids; their mummies and their second selves remain, though the palaces which they built are no longer on their sites, and no longer in existence.

“Despair not, but give thyself to thy desires and thy happiness, and wear not thy heart out till for thee the day comes when thou wilt implore, while Osiris, the god whose heart beats no longer, will not hear thy petitions.

“The mourning of a world will not restore happiness to a man who is lying in the tomb; use, then, thy days of happiness and in delight be no laggard. There is no man, indeed, who can take his goods to the other world with him; there is none who can go to that world and come back to this one.”⁴³

The feast ended; the worthy assembly incensed the statue of the deceased once again and made ready to return to Thebes. In the mortuary temple only priests remained to make regular offerings to the deceased and a guard watching the tomb against sacrilegious attempts of robbers.

⁴³ Authentic.

Thenceforth Rameses XII. was alone in that mysterious chamber. Through a small secret opening in the rock a gloomy light barely broke in to him; instead of the rustle of ostrich plumes was the rustle of enormous bat wings; instead of music was heard, during night hours, complaining howls of hyenas, and at times the mighty voice of a lion, which greeted from the desert the pharaoh in his resting-place.

Chapter LIX

AFTER the funeral of the pharaoh, Egypt returned to its usual life, and Rameses XIII. to affairs of state.

The new ruler in the month Epifi visited the cities of the Nile above Thebes. Hence he went to Sni, a city greatly devoted to trade and commerce. In Sni was the temple of Keph, or the "Soul of the World." He visited Edfu, whose temple had pylons a hundred and fifty feet high, and which possessed an immense library of papyruses, and on the walls of which were written and depicted, as it were, an encyclopedia of the geography, astronomy, and theology of that period. He visited the quarries in Chennu, in Nubia, or Kom-Ombo; he made offerings to Horus, the god of light, and to Sebak, the spirit of darkness. He was on the island Ab, which among dark cliffs seemed an emerald, produced the best dates, and was called the Capital of Elephants, Elephantina, for on that island the ivory trade was concentrated. He visited finally the city of Sunnu, situated at the first cataract of the Nile, and visited the immense quarries, granite and sienite, where rocks were split off with wooden wedges on which the quarrymen poured water which swelled them, and thus obelisks one hundred and thirty feet high were detached from the face of the quarry.

Wherever the new lord of Egypt appeared his subjects greeted him wildly. Even criminals, toiling in the quarries—men whose bodies were covered with never-healing wounds—experienced happiness since the pharaoh commanded to release them for the space of three days from their labor.

Rameses XIII. might feel proud and well satisfied, for no pharaoh in time of triumph was received as he on his peaceful journey. So, nomarchs, scribes, and high priests, seeing this boundless attachment of the people, bent before the pharaoh and whispered,—

"The people are like a herd of bulls, and we like prudent ants. Hence we will honor our new lord so that he may enjoy health and protect us from ruin."

In this way the opposition of dignitaries, very strong some months earlier, had grown silent and yielded to boundless obedience. The whole aristocracy, all the priests, fell on their faces before Rameses XIII.; Mefres and Herhor alone were unshaken.

Hence when the pharaoh returned from Sunnu to Thebes the chief treasurer brought unfavorable news the first day to him.

"All the temples," said he, "refuse credit, and beg most obediently that thou, holiness, command to pay in the course of two years all sums which they have lent the treasury."

"I understand," said the pharaoh; "this is the work of holy Mefres. How much do we owe them?"

"About fifty thousand talents."

"We have to pay fifty thousand talents in two years," repeated the pharaoh. "Well, what more?"

“The taxes come in very slowly. During three months we have received barely one-fourth of what is due us.”

“What has happened?”

The treasurer was anxious.

“I have heard,” said he, “that some people have explained to earth-tillers that during thy reign they are not to pay taxes.”

“Oh! ho!” cried Rameses, laughing. “Those ‘some people’ seem to me very like the worthy Herhor. Well, what is this; does he want to kill me with hunger? How can we meet current expenses?”

“At Hiram’s command the Phœnicians lend us,” answered the treasurer. “We have received from them eight thousand talents already.”

“But do ye give them notes?”

“Notes and mortgages,” sighed the treasurer. “They say that this is a simple formality. Still they settle on thy lands, and take what they can from the people.”

Delighted with the reception given him by the people and the obedience of magnates, the pharaoh was not even angry at Herhor and Mefres. The time of anger had passed, the moment of action had come, and Rameses formed his plan that very day. He summoned for the morrow those in whom he had most reliance: the high priest Sem, the prophet Pentuer, his favorite Tutmosis, and the Phœnician Hiram. When they had assembled he said,—

“Ye know, of course, the temples request me to return to them the funds borrowed by my father. Every debt is sacred, that which belongs to the gods I should like to pay first of all. But my treasury is empty, since even the taxes come in only fitfully.

“For this reason I look on the state as in danger, and I am forced to turn for funds to treasures preserved in the labyrinth.”

The two priests moved uneasily.

“I know,” continued the pharaoh, “that according to our sacred laws my decree is not sufficient to open to us the vaults of the labyrinth. But the priests there have explained what is needful. I must summon representatives of all orders in Egypt, thirteen men from each order, and obtain a confirmation of my will from them.”

The pharaoh smiled at this point, and finished,—

“To-day I have called you to help me to summon that assembly of the orders, and this is my command to you:

“Thou, worthy Sem, wilt select for me thirteen priests and thirteen nomarchs. Thou, pious Pentuer, will bring to me from various provinces thirteen land-tillers and thirteen artisans. Tutmosis will bring thirteen officers and thirteen nobles; and Prince Hiram will occupy himself in bringing thirteen merchants. I wish that this assembly should meet at the very earliest in my palace in Memphis and, without losing time in vain talk, recognize that the labyrinth is to furnish means to my treasury.”

“I make bold to remind thee, holiness,” said Sem, “that at that assembly the worthy Herhor and the worthy Mefres must be present, and that, according to law, and even duty, they are to oppose touching the treasure in the labyrinth.”

“Of course I agree to that,” replied the pharaoh promptly. “They will give their reasons, I mine; the assembly will judge whether a state can exist without money, and whether it is wise to waste treasure in darkness while the state is threatened with indigence.”

“A few sapphires of those which are in the labyrinth would suffice to pay all debts to Phœnicians,” said Hiram. “I will go at once among the merchants and find not thirteen but thirteen thousand who will vote at thy command, O holiness.”

Then the prince fell on his face and took farewell of the sovereign.

When Hiram went out, the high priest said,—

“I know not whether it was well to have a foreigner at this consultation.”

“I needed him here; for not only has he great influence over our merchants, but, what is more important, he is obtaining money for us at present. I wish to convince the man that I remember what is due to him, and have means to pay it.”

Silence followed, which Pentuer made use of, and said,—

“If thou permit, O holiness, I will go at once to occupy myself with assembling land-tillers and artisans. They will all vote with our lord, but from the multitude we must select the wisest.”

He took leave of the pharaoh and went out.

“But thou, Tutmosis,” inquired Rameses.

“My lord,” said the favorite, “I am so certain of thy nobility and army that I make bold to turn to thee with a request for myself.”

“Thou wishest money?”

“Not at all. I wish to marry.”

“Thou!” exclaimed the pharaoh. “What woman has earned from the gods such a happiness?”

“She is the beautiful Hebron, the daughter of Antefa, the most worthy nomarch of Thebes,” replied Tutmosis, laughing. “If thou wilt be pleased to speak on my behalf to that revered family—I had thought to say that my love for thee would be increased, but I will not say so, for I should tell untruth.”

“Well, well,” said the pharaoh, slapping him on the shoulder, “do not persuade me of that which I know. I will go to Antefa to-morrow and it seems to me that in the course of a few days I shall arrange a wedding. But now thou mayst go to thy Hebron.”

Left with Sem alone, his holiness said,—

“Thy face is gloomy. Dost thou doubt that we may find thirteen priests to carry out my orders?”

“I am certain,” replied Sem, “that almost all the priests and nomarchs will do what may be needed for the happiness of Egypt and thy satisfaction, holiness. But be pleased not to forget that when it is a question of the treasure of the labyrinth the final decision will be given to Amon.”

“Is that the statue of Amon in Thebes?”

“It is.”

The pharaoh waved his hand contemptuously,—

“Amon is Herhor and Mefres. That they will not agree I know; but I have no intention of sacrificing Egypt to the stubbornness of two persons.”

“Thou art mistaken, holiness,” answered Sem with dignity. “It is true that very often statues of gods do what high priests wish, but not always. In our temples mysterious and uncommon things happen sometimes. At moments the statues of the gods say and do what they themselves wish.”

“In that case I am at rest,” interrupted the pharaoh. “The gods know the condition of the state, and they read my heart. I wish Egypt to be happy. And as I am striving to that end alone no wise and good god can hinder me.”

“May thy words, holiness, be verified,” whispered the high priest.

“Dost thou wish to tell me anything more?” asked Rameses, noticing that his substitute in religion was delaying his departure.

“Yes, lord. It is my duty to remind thee that every pharaoh after reaching power and burying his predecessor must think of two buildings: a tomb for himself and a temple for the gods.”

“Just so! I have thought more than once of this, but not having money I do not issue orders. For thou must understand,” added he with animation, “that if I build it will be something great, something which will command Egypt not to forget me quickly.”

“Then dost thou wish to have a pyramid?”

“No. I could not, of course, build a greater pyramid than that of Cheops, nor a greater temple than that of Amon in Thebes. My kingdom is too weak to accomplish great works. I must make something entirely new, therefore, for I tell thee that our buildings weary me. They are all alike, just as men are, and differ from one another only in proportions, as a man is bigger than a child.”

“Then what?” asked the high priest, opening his eyes widely.

“I have spoken with the Greek Dion, who is the most famous architect among us, and he praised my plan. For my own tomb I wish to build a round tower with internal stairs, like that in Babylon. I shall build a temple, not to Osiris or Isis, but to the One God in whom all believe: the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, the Phœnicians, and the Jews. I wish that temple to be like the palace of King Assar, the model of which Sargon brought to my father.”

“Those are great plans,” said the high priest, shaking his head, “but it is impossible to execute them. The Babylonian towers are not lasting because of their form, they overturn easily, while our edifices must endure for ages. A temple to the One God we may not raise, for he needs no food, drink, or raiment. The whole world is his dwelling-place. Where, then, is the temple which could hold him? Where is the priest who would dare to make offerings before him?”

“Well, let us build a residence for Amon-Ra,” said the pharaoh.

“Yes, if it is not like the palace of King Assar, for that is an Assyrian building, and it is not proper for us Egyptians to imitate barbarians.”

“I do not understand thee,” interrupted Rameses, with irritation.

“Listen to me, lord,” answered Sem. “Look at snails, each one of them has a different shell: one is winding, but blunt; another is winding, but pointed; a third is like a box.

In the same way precisely each people build edifices according to their blood and disposition. Be pleased also to remember that Egyptian edifices differ as much from those of Assyria as the Egyptian people differ from Assyrians. Among us the fundamental form of every building is a pointless pyramid,—the most enduring form, as Egypt is the most enduring among kingdoms. With Assyrians the fundamental form is a cube, which is injured easily and is subject to destruction.

“The proud and frivolous Assyrian puts his cubes one upon another, and rears a many-storied structure under which foundations yield. The obedient and prudent Egyptian puts his truncated pyramids one behind the other. In that way nothing hangs in the air, but every part of the structure is resting on the ground. From this it comes that our buildings are broad and endure forever, while those of the Assyrians are tall and weak, like their state, which at first rises quickly, but in a couple of generations there is nothing left of it but ruins.

“The Assyrian is a noisy self-praiser, so in his buildings everything is put on the outside: columns, sculpture, pictures. While the modest Egyptian hides the most beautiful columns and carving inside the temples—like a sage who conceals in his heart lofty thoughts, desires, and feelings—he does not ornament his shoulders and breast with them. Among us everything beautiful is hidden; among them, everything is made to show. The Assyrian, if he could, would cut open his stomach to exhibit to the world what peculiar foods he is digesting.”

“Speak—speak on!” said Rameses.

“Not much remains for me to say,” continued Sem. “I only wish, lord, to turn thy attention to the general form of our edifices, and those of the Assyrians. When I was in Nineveh a few years ago, I observed the Assyrian buildings towering above the earth haughtily; it seemed to me that they were raging horses which had broken from the bit and reared on their haunches, but would soon fall and perhaps break their legs in addition.

“Now try, holiness, to look from a lofty point on some Egyptian temple. What does it recall to thee? This—a man prostrate on the earth and praying. The two pylons are his arms. The hall ‘of columns,’ or ‘the heavenly chamber,’ is his head, the chamber of ‘divine apparition’ and ‘the tables of offering’ are his breasts, and the secret retreat of the god is the heart of the pious Egyptian. Our temple teaches us what we should be. ‘Have a hand as strong as a pylon,’ it says to us, ‘and arms as powerful as walls. Have in thy head reason as broad and rich as the forecourt of the temple, a soul as pure as the chamber of “apparition” and of “offering,” and in thy heart have God, O Egyptian!’ But the Assyrian buildings say to that people: ‘Tower above nations, O Assyrian; rear thy head beyond every other! Thou wilt do nothing great here on earth, but at least thou wilt leave many ruins.’

“Wouldst thou, then, O sovereign, venture to rear in our land Assyrian edifices and imitate a people which Egypt contemns and despises?”

In spite of Sem’s explanation, even now Rameses judged that the Assyrian palaces surpassed those of Egypt in beauty. But he so hated the Assyrians that his heart began to hesitate.

“In that case,” said he, “I will defer the building of my tomb and the temple. But do ye sages who are kindly disposed toward me, think over plans of edifices which would give my name to the remotest generations.”

“A superhuman pride fills the soul of this young man!” thought the high priest, and he took farewell of the pharaoh in sadness.

Chapter LX

MEANWHILE Pentuer made ready to revisit Lower Egypt and find on the one hand thirteen delegates from among land-tillers and artisans for the pharaoh, and on the other to encourage the working population to demand the relief which the new sovereign had promised, for according to his conviction the greatest question for Egypt was to abolish the injustice and the abuses to which the toiling people were subject.

Still, Pentuer was a priest, and not only did he not desire the fall of his order, but he did not even wish to break the bonds which connected him with it. Hence to emphasize his loyalty he went to take farewell of Herhor.

The once mighty dignitary received him with a smile.

“A rare guest—a rare guest!” exclaimed he. “Since thou hadst the desire to become the counsellor of his holiness thou dost not show thyself before me. True, thou art not the only one! But whatever happens, I shall not forget thy services, wert thou even to avoid me still more than at present.”

“Worthiness, I am not a counsellor of our lord, nor do I avoid thee to whose favor I am indebted for what I am to-day.”

“I know, I know!” answered Herhor. “Thou hast refused the high dignity so as not to work to the destruction of the temples. I know, I know! though perhaps it is to be regretted that thou hast not become the adviser of that giddy milksop, who, as it were, governs us. To a certainty thou wouldst not have suffered him to surround himself with those traitors who are ruining him.”

Pentuer, not wishing to speak of such ticklish subjects, told Herhor why he was going to Lower Egypt.

“Very well,” answered Herhor, “let Rameses XIII. call an assembly of all the orders. He has a right to call it.”

“But,” he added suddenly, “I am sorry that thou art involved in such labor. Great changes have taken place in thee. Thou rememberest thy words to my adjutant during those manœuvres in Pi-Bailos? I will remind thee: thou didst tell him that it was necessary to limit the abuses and license of the pharaohs. But to-day thou art supporting the childish pretensions of the greatest profligate ever known to Egypt—”

“Rameses XIII.,” said Pentuer, interrupting, “wishes to improve the lot of common people. I should be stupid and mean, therefore, were I, the son of earth-tillers, not to serve him in this question.”

“But thou dost not ask whether that would not injure us, the priesthood.”

Pentuer was astonished.

“But thou thyself givest great relief to common men belonging to the temple,” said he. “I have, besides, thy permission.”

“What? Which?” inquired Herhor.

“Recall, worthiness, that night when we greeted Beroes. Mefres declared at that time that Egypt had fallen because the priestly order was lowered, while I asserted that the misery of the people was the cause of the suffering of the State, to which thou, so far as I remember, didst answer: ‘Let Mefres occupy himself with bettering the priesthood, Pentuer in improving the lot of common people, while I will avoid destructive war between Egypt and Assyria—’”

“Well, dost thou see,” interrupted the high priest, “it is thy duty to act with us, not with Rameses.”

“Does he wish war with Assyria,” replied Pentuer, energetically, “or does he hinder priests from acquiring wisdom? He wishes to give the people every seventh day for rest, and later to give each family of earth-workers a small bit of land for subsistence. Do not tell me, worthiness, that the pharaoh wishes evil, for it has been verified on temple ground that a free man who has his own patch of earth labors incomparably better than one without freedom.”

“I am not opposed to relieving common people,” said Herhor, “but I am convinced that Rameses will do nothing for them.”

“Surely not if you refuse him money.”

“Even were we to give him a pyramid of gold and silver, and another of precious stones, he would do nothing—that is a mad stripling whom the Assyrian ambassador, Sargon, never mentioned otherwise than as a frivolous youngster.”

“The pharaoh has great capabilities.”

“But he has no knowledge, and no skill,” replied Herhor. “He barely visited the high school a little and left it at the earliest. Hence, to-day, in affairs of state he is like a blind person; he is like a child which puts out pieces boldly on a board, but has no idea how to play at draughts.”

“Still he governs—”

“Oh, Pentuer, what is his government?” interrupted the high priest, with laughter.

“He has opened new military schools, he has increased the number of regiments, he is arming the whole people, he has promised holidays to working men. But how will he carry out his projects? Thou keepest far from him, hence knowest nothing; but I assure thee that he, when issuing orders, never stops to ask: Who will carry out this? What are the means? What will follow? It seems to thee that he governs. It is I who govern, I govern all the time, I, whom he dismissed. I am the cause that to-day fewer taxes come to the treasury, but I also prevent the rebellion of laborers; because of me they do not leave work on the canals, dams, and roadways. To sum up, I have twice restrained Assyria from declaring war on us, war which that madman was calling out by his military dispositions.

“Rameses govern! He merely rouses disorder. Thou hadst trial of his management in Lower Egypt: he drank, frolicked, brought in woman after woman, and pretended to occupy himself with administration of the province, but he understood nothing, absolutely nothing. What is worst of all, he became intimate with Phœnicians, with bankrupt nobles, and traitors of various kinds, who are urging him to ruin.”

“But the victory of the Soda Lakes?” inquired Pentuer.

“I recognize energy in him, and a knowledge of military art,” added Herhor. “That is the one thing that he knows. But say thyself would he have won the battle at the Soda

Lakes were it not for aid from thee and others of the priestly order? I know that ye informed him of every movement of the Libyan band. And now think, could Rameses, even with help from you, win a battle against Nitager, for example? Nitager is a master, Rameses is a mere apprentice."

"Then what will be the end of this hatred between him and you?" inquired Pentuer.

"Hatred!" repeated Herhor. "Could I hate a frivolous fellow, who, moreover, is surrounded, like a deer in a ravine by hunters! But I must confess that his rule is so full of danger that if Rameses had a brother, or if Nitager were younger, we should set aside the present pharaoh."

"And thou, worthiness, would become his heir!" burst out Pentuer.

Herhor was by no means offended.

"Pentuer, thou hast grown marvellously dull since thy entry into politics on thy own account," replied he, shrugging his shoulders. "Of course, if the country were without a pharaoh, it would be my duty to become one by virtue of my office of high priest of Amon, and chief of the supreme council. But what is the office to me? Have I not had more power for a number of years than the pharaoh? Or do I not to-day, though I am a minister of war in disgrace, carry out in this state whatever I think needful?"

"Those same high priests, treasurers, judges, nomarchs, and even generals who avoid me at present, must carry out every secret order of the council furnished with my seal. Is there a man in Egypt who would dare refuse obedience to those orders? Wouldst thou, for instance, dare oppose them?"

Pentuer hung his head.

If in spite of the death of Rameses XII. the supreme privy council of priests had maintained itself, Rameses XIII. must either yield or fight a life-and-death battle.

The pharaoh had on his side all the people, all the army, many priests, and the majority of the civil dignitaries. The council could reckon on hardly two thousand adherents, on its treasures and on its incomparably wise organization. The forces were utterly unequal, but the issue of the battle was very doubtful.

"Then ye have determined to destroy the pharaoh?" asked Pentuer.

"Not at all. We only wish to save the state."

"In that case what should Rameses XIII. do?"

"What he will do I know not. But I know what his father did," answered Herhor.

"Rameses XII. began to govern in the same impetuous and tyrannical fashion, but when money failed him, and his most zealous adherents began to despise him, he turned to the gods. He surrounded himself with priests, he learned from them, nay, he even married a daughter of the high priest Amenhôtep. And, after a few years, he went so far that he became himself not only a pious, but a very learned high priest."

"But if the pharaoh will not follow that example?"

"Then we shall dispense with him," said Herhor.

"Listen to me Pentuer," continued he, after a while. "I know not only the acts, but even the thoughts of that pharaoh of thine, who, moreover, has not been solemnly crowned yet, hence for us he is nothing. I know that he wants to make the priests his servants, and himself sole lord of Egypt."

“But such a plan is stupid, it is even treasonable. Not the pharaohs, as thou knowest well, but the gods and the priests created Egypt. It is not the pharaohs who mark the rise and fall of the Nile and regulate its overflows; it is not the pharaohs who teach the people to sow, to gather fruits and rear cattle. It is not the pharaohs who cure diseases and watch over the safety of the state against foreign enemies.

“What would happen, tell me that, were our order to yield Egypt to the mercy of the pharaohs? The wisest pharaohs have behind them the experience of a few years at the longest, but the priestly order has investigated and taught during tens of thousands of years. The mightiest ruler has two eyes and two hands, while we possess thousands of eyes and thousands of hands in all provinces at home, and in all foreign countries.

“Can the activity of a pharaoh equal ours; and when opinions differ who should yield, we or the pharaoh?”

“Well, what am I to do now?” inquired Pentuer.

“Do what that stripling commands if thou betray not holy secrets. And leave the rest—to time. I wish most sincerely that the youth called Rameses XIII. might come to his senses, and I suppose that he would were it not that he has attached himself to disgusting traitors over whom the hands of the gods are now suspended.”

Pentuer took farewell of the high priest. He was filled with dark forebodings, but he did not fail in spirit, since he knew that whatever he might gain in improving the condition of the common man would remain, even were the pharaoh to bend before the power of the priestly order.

“In the worst case,” thought he, “we must do what we can, and what pertains to us. When conditions improve, what is sown to-day will give fruit hereafter.”

But still he determined to renounce agitation among the people. He was even ready to calm the impatient, so as not to increase trouble for the pharaoh.

A couple of weeks later Pentuer entered the boundaries of Lower Egypt, looking about on the way for the wisest of common men and artisans from whom it would be possible to select delegates to the assembly summoned by the pharaoh.

Everywhere on the way he found signs of the greatest excitement. Earth-tillers, as well as artisans, were trying to have the seventh day for rest and receive pay for all public works, as was the case in former ages. And it was only through remonstrances from priests of various temples, that a general uprising was averted, or at least that work was continued.

At the same time Pentuer was struck by certain new phenomena which he had not observed a month earlier: first of all the people had divided into two parties. Some were partisans of the pharaoh and enemies of the priests; others were active against Phœnicians. Some proved that the priests ought to give the treasures of the labyrinth to the pharaoh; others whispered that the pharaoh afforded foreigners too much protection.

But strangest of all was a report of unknown origin that Rameses XIII. showed signs of insanity, like his elder brother, who for this cause had been excluded from succession. Priests, scribes, even common men discussed this report of insanity.

“Who told thee such a lie?” inquired Pentuer of an engineer.

“It is no lie,” replied the engineer, “it is sad reality. In the Theban palaces they saw the pharaoh running naked through the gardens. One night he climbed a tree under the window of his mother’s chamber, and spoke to her.”

Pentuer assured the man that no longer than two weeks before he had seen Rameses in the best of health. He observed at once, however, that the engineer did not believe him.

“This is Herhor’s work!” thought he. “Priests alone could have news from Thebes so promptly.”

For the moment he lost desire to busy himself in finding delegates, but he regained energy at the thought that what the people received to-day they would not lose to-morrow, unless something uncommon should happen.

Beyond Memphis to the north of the pyramids and the sphinx, on the boundary of the desert, was a small temple of the goddess Nut. An old priest Menes lived in that temple. This sage had more knowledge of the stars than any man in Egypt; he was an engineer in addition.

When a great public edifice was to be built or a new canal made, Menes went to the place and gave directions. Apart from such tasks he lived in solitude and poverty in his temple; at night he investigated the stars, in the daytime he worked over curious instruments.

For some years Pentuer had not been in that place; hence he was struck by neglect in it, and poverty. The brick wall was falling, in the garden the trees were withering, in the yard a lean goat moved around and a few hens were scratching.

There was no one near the temple. Only after Pentuer had called out did an old man come down from a pylon. His feet were bare, on his head was a soiled cap like that of a laborer, around his waist was a ragged girdle, and on his shoulder a panther skin from which the hair had fallen. Still, his bearing was dignified, and his face full of wisdom. He looked quickly at the guest and said,—

“Either I am mistaken, or thou art Pentuer?”

“I am he,” answered the newly arrived, and he embraced the old man with heartiness.

“Ho! ho!” exclaimed Menes, for it was he; “I see that thou hast changed for official reasons. Thou hast a smoother face, whiter hands, and a gold chain on thy neck. Mother Nut of the heavenly ocean would have to wait long for such ornaments.”

Pentuer wished to remove the chain, but Menes stopped him with a smile.

“Do not. If thou knew what jewels we have in the heavens thou wouldst not hasten with an offering of gold. Well, hast thou come to stay with us?”

Pentuer shook his head.

“No,” replied he, “I have come only to bow down before thee, divine teacher.”

“And again to court?” laughed the old man. “Oh ye, ye courtiers! If ye knew what ye lose by deserting wisdom for palaces ye would be the saddest of mankind.”

“Art thou alone, O my teacher?”

“As a palm in a desert, especially to-day when my deaf and dumb servant has gone with a basket to Memphis to beg something for the mother of Ra and her chaplain.”

“And is it not disagreeable here?”

“For me!” exclaimed Menes. “Since I saw thee last I have snatched from the gods some secrets which I would not give for the two crowns of Egypt.”

“Are they secrets between thee and me?” inquired Pentuer.

“How, secrets? A year ago I completed all measures and calculations touching the size of the earth.”

“What does that mean?”

Menes looked around and lowered his voice,—

“Of course it is known to thee that the earth is not flat like a table, but is an immense ball on the surface of which seas, countries, and cities are situated?”

“That is known,” said Pentuer.

“Not to all,” answered Menes. “And it was not known to any one how great that globe might be.”

“But dost thou know?” inquired Pentuer, almost frightened.

“I know. Our infantry marches about thirteen Egyptian miles⁴⁴ daily. The globe of the earth is so great that our armies would require five whole years to march around it.”

“O gods!” exclaimed Pentuer. “Does it not frighten thee, father, to think of such subjects?”

Menes shrugged his shoulders.

“To measure size, what is there terrible in that? To measure the size of a pyramid, or the earth is the same kind of problem. I did a more difficult thing. I measured the distance of our temple from the palace of the pharaoh without crossing the river.”

“Terror!” exclaimed Pentuer.

“What terror? I have discovered a thing which beyond doubt ye will all fear. But tell this to no one: in the month Paoni (June, July) there will be an eclipse of the sun; night will come in the daytime. And may I die a hunger death, if I have failed even three minutes in the reckoning.”

Pentuer touched the amulet which he wore on his breast, and uttered a prayer.

“I have read,” said he, “in sacred books that more than once to the suffering of people it became night at midday. But what is that? I do not understand.”

“Dost thou see the pyramid?” asked Menes on a sudden, pointing toward the desert.

“I see it.”

“Now put thy hand before thy eyes. Dost thou see the pyramid? Thou dost not. Well, the eclipse of the sun is the same kind of thing; the moon passes between the sun and us, hides the father of light and makes night in the daytime.”

“And will that happen here?” inquired Pentuer.

“In the month Paoni. I have written about this to the pharaoh, thinking that in return he would make some offering to the temple. But on reading the letter he laughed at me, and commanded my messenger to take the news to Herhor.”

⁴⁴ Three geographical miles.

“Well, what did Herhor do?”

“Herhor gave us thirty measures of barley. He is the only man in Egypt who reveres science, but the young pharaoh is frivolous.”

“Do not be severe on him, father,” interrupted Pentuer. “Rameses XIII. wishes to improve the lot of laborers and artisans, and give them every seventh day to rest; he forbids to beat them without trial, and perhaps he will find land for them.”

“But I tell thee that he is light-minded,” said the irritated Menes. “Two months ago I sent him a great plan for lessening the toil of laborers, and he laughed at me. He is conceited and ignorant!”

“Thou art prejudiced, father. But tell me thy plan and perhaps I may assist in applying it.”

“Plan?” repeated the old man. “It is not a plan, it is a great fact.”

He rose from the bench and went then with Pentuer to a pond in the garden, at which was an arbor concealed altogether by plant growth. In this structure was a large wheel in perpendicular position with a number of buckets on the outer rim of it. Menes went into the centre and began to move his feet; the wheel turned and the buckets took water from the pond and poured it into a trough which stood somewhat higher.

“A curious instrument!” said Pentuer.

“But dost thou divine what it may do for the people of Egypt?”

“No.”

“Then imagine this wheel to be five or ten times greater than it is, and that instead of a man a pair of bullocks are moving it.”

“Something—something appears to me,” said Pentuer, “but still I do not understand clearly.”

“It is very simple,” said Menes. “By means of this wheel oxen and horses might raise water from the Nile and pour it into higher channels. In that way half a million of men might have rest instead of working at buckets. Now thou seest that wisdom does more for the welfare of mankind than pharaohs.”

Pentuer shook his head.

“How much timber would be needed for that change! How many oxen, how much pasture. It seems to me, father, that thy wheel would not take the place of the seventh day for rest.”

“I see that office has not benefited thee,” replied Menes, shrugging his shoulders.

“But though thou hast lost that alertness which I admired in thee, I will show still another thing. Perhaps when thou hast returned to wisdom, and I am dead, thou wilt work at improving and spreading my inventions.”

They went back to the pylon, and Menes put some fuel under a brass kettle. He blew the flame and soon the water was boiling. On the kettle was a perpendicular spout covered with a heavy stone. When the kettle began to hiss, Menes said,—

“Stand in this niche and look.”

He touched a crank fastened to the spout; in one moment the heavy stone flew through the air and hot steam filled the chamber.

“Wonderful!” cried Pentuer. But soon he calmed himself and asked,—

“Well, but how will that stone improve the condition of people in Egypt?”

“The stone in no way. But,” said the sage, now impatient, “I will say this to thee, and do thou remember it: the time will come when horses and oxen will take the place of people in labor, and also when boiling water will take the place of horses and oxen.”

“But what good will that do the people?” insisted Pentuer.

“Woe is me!” exclaimed Menes, seizing his head. “I know not whether it is because thou hast grown old, or dull; ‘the people’ have hidden the whole world from thee and darkened thy mind. If sages had only the people in mind they would be forced to throw away their books and calculations and become shepherds.”

“But everything must be of some use,” said Pentuer, now grown timid.

“Ye court people,” replied Menes with vexation, “use two measures frequently. When a Phœnician brings a ruby or a sapphire ye do not inquire what its use is; ye buy the jewel and shut it up in a casket. But if a sage comes to you with an invention which might change the face of the world, ye ask straightway: ‘What is the use of this?’ It is clear that ye are frightened lest the investigator might ask a handful of barley for a thing the sense of which your mind does not fathom.”

“Art thou angry, father? Have I wished to offend thee?”

“I am not angry, but I am pained. Twenty years ago there were five men in this temple working over the discovery of new secrets. To-day I am alone. And, by the gods, I am unable to find not merely a successor, but even a man who is able to understand me.”

“Beyond doubt I would remain here till death so as to learn thy godlike thoughts,” said Pentuer. “But tell me, can I shut myself up to-day in a temple when the fate of the kingdom and the future of the people are wavering in the balance, and when my assistance—”

“May influence the fate of the kingdom and of some millions of people!” interrupted Menes, jeeringly. “O ye grown-up children in the mitres and chains of office. Because ye are free to draw water from the Nile it seems to you that ye may stop the rise or the fall of the river. Not otherwise, surely, thinks the sheep, which following the herd imagines that she is directing it.”

“But think, the young pharaoh has a heart full of nobleness; he wishes to give the seventh day for rest, just courts, and even land.”

“All those things are vanishing,” said Menes, shaking his head. “The young pharaoh will grow old, while the people,—well, the people have had the seventh day for rest more than one time, and they have had land—but afterward they lost both! Ah, if that were all that changed! During three thousand years how many dynasties have passed over Egypt, and priests, how many cities and temples have fallen into ruins; nay more! how many new strata of earth have overlaid the country. Everything has changed except this, that two and two are four, that a triangle is half a quadrangle, that the moon may hide the sun, and boiling water hurl a stone through the air.

“In this transitory world wisdom alone is enduring and permanent. And woe to him who deserts the eternal for things as fleeting as clouds are. His heart will never know peace, and his mind will dance like a boat in a whirlwind.”

“The gods speak through thy lips,” replied Pentuer, after some thought, “but barely one man in millions may serve them directly. And well that it is so, for what would happen if laborers gazed for whole nights at the firmament, if warriors made reckonings, and officials and the pharaoh, instead of ruling the people, hurled stones by means of boiling water? Before the moon could go once round the earth all would die of hunger. No wheel or cattle would defend the land from barbarians, or give justice to those who were injured by wrong-doers.

“Hence,” ended Pentuer, “though wisdom is like the sun, blood and breath, we cannot all be sages.”

To these words Menes made no answer.

Pentuer passed some days in the temple of the divine Nut; he admired at one time the view of the sandy ocean, at another the fertile valley of the Nile. In company with Menes he looked at the stars, examined the wheel for raising water, and walked at times toward the pyramids. He admired the poverty and the genius of his teacher, but said in spirit,—

“Menes is a god in human form, surely, and hence he has no care for common matters. His wheel to raise water will not be accepted in Egypt, for first we lack timber, and second to move such wheels one hundred thousand oxen would be needed. Where is there pasture for them even in Upper Egypt?”

Chapter LXI

WHILE Pentuer was going around the country and choosing out delegates, Rameses XIII. tarried in Thebes, arranging the marriage of his favorite, Tutmosis.

First of all, the ruler of two worlds, surrounded by a grand retinue, drove in a golden chariot to the palace of the most worthy Antefa.

This magnate hurried forth to meet his sovereign before the gate, and, taking the costly sandals from his feet he knelt and assisted Rameses to alight from the chariot.

In return for this homage the pharaoh gave him his hand to kiss, and declared that thenceforth Antefa was his friend, and might enter even the throne hall in sandals.

When they were in an immense chamber of Antefa's palace the sovereign said before the whole retinue,—

“I know, worthy Antefa, that as thy revered ancestors occupy the most beautiful of tombs, thou, their descendant, art foremost among nomarchs in Egypt. To thee it is known surely that in my court and army, as in my heart, the first place is held by Tutmosis, chief of the guard, and my favorite.

“According to the opinion of sages the rich man does ill who does not put his most precious jewel into the most beautiful setting. And, since thy family is most precious to me, and Tutmosis is most dear, I have conceived the idea of connecting thee with myself, as thou wilt be, if thy daughter, the wise and beautiful Hebron, accepts Tutmosis as husband.”

To this the worthy Antefa replied,—

“Holiness, sovereign of the western world, and of living men! As Egypt, and all that is in it belongs to thee, so this house and all its inhabitants are thy possession. Since it is thy desire that my daughter should be the wife of thy favorite, let it be so.”

Now the pharaoh declared to Antefa that Tutmosis had twenty talents of yearly salary, and considerable estates in various provinces. Thereupon the worthy Antefa declared that his daughter Hebron would have fifty talents a year, also the right to make use of the estates of her father in those provinces in which the pharaoh's court sojourned for a season. And since he had no son, his immense property, which was free of debt, would pass to Tutmosis some time, together with the office of nomarch of Thebes, in so far as that transfer might coincide with the will of the pharaoh.

After concluding the conditions Tutmosis entered the court, thanked Antefa first for giving his daughter to one so unworthy, and second, because he had reared her so beautifully. It was arranged then that the ceremony of marriage would take place in a few days, since Tutmosis, as leader of the guard, had no time for protracted preliminaries.

“I wish thee happiness, my son,” said Antefa, smiling, “and also great patience, because my beloved daughter, now twenty years old, is the first exquisite in Thebes, and has had her will always. By the gods, I tell thee that my command over Thebes always ends at the gate of her garden. And I fear that thy military command will go no farther.”

Next the noble Antefa invited his guests to a splendid banquet, in the course of which the beautiful Hebron showed herself with a great retinue of damsels.

In the dining-hall were numbers of small tables for two or four persons, also a larger table, on a loftier place, for the pharaoh. To show honor to Antefa and his favorite, Tutmosis, Rameses approached Hebron and invited her to his table.

The young lady was really beautiful, and as it seemed had experience, a thing not exceptional in Egypt. Rameses soon noticed that the betrothed turned no attention whatever toward Tutmosis, but to make up for this she turned eloquent glances toward him, the pharaoh.

That also was no wonder in Egypt.

When the guests had taken their places, when music sounded and female dancers began to bring fruit and wine to the tables, Rameses said to Hebron,—

“The longer I look at thee, the more I am astonished. Were some stranger to enter he might consider thee a high priestess or a goddess, but never a woman at the time of happy betrothal.”

“I am happy,” said she, “at this moment, though not because of betrothal.”

“How is that?” interrupted the pharaoh.

“Marriage does not entice me, and surely I should rather be the high priestess of Isis than be married.”

“Then why marry?”

“I marry because it is the absolute wish of my father to have an heir to his glory, but mainly because it is thy wish, my sovereign.”

“Can it be that Tutmosis does not please thee?”

“I will not say that he does not please me. Tutmosis is fine-looking; he is the first exquisite in Egypt, he plays well, and takes prizes at games. His position, as commander of thy guard, is one of the highest. Still, were it not for the prayers of my father, and thy command I should not marry Tutmosis. Even as it is, I shall not be his wife. My property will suffice Tutmosis and the titles after my father; the rest he can find among dancing girls.”

“But does he know of his misfortune?”

Hebron smiled.

“He knows this long time that even were I not the daughter of Antefa, but of the lowest dissector, I would not give myself to a man unless I loved him. I could love only a man who is above me.”

“Art thou speaking seriously?” asked Rameses in wonder.

“I am twenty years old. Since I was six years of age adorers have surrounded me; but I measured them quickly. And to-day I would rather hear learned priests than songs and declarations from youthful exquisites.”

“In that case I ought not to sit near thee, Hebron, for I am not even an exquisite, and I have no priestly wisdom whatever.”

“Thou art something higher,” replied she, blushing deeply. “Thou art a chief who has won victory. Thou art as impetuous as a lion, as swift as a vulture. Millions fall on

their faces before thee, and kingdoms tremble. Do I not know what fear is roused by thy name in Tyre and Nineveh? Gods might be jealous of thy influence."

Rameses was confused.

"O Hebron, Hebron," said he. "If thou knew what alarm thou art sowing in my heart."

"For this very reason," continued Hebron, "I marry Tutmosis. I shall be nearer thee, and shall see thee, though for a few days only."

She rose and left the hall.

Antefa noted her action and hastened in alarm to Rameses.

"O lord!" cried he, "has my daughter said anything improper? She is an untamable lioness!"

"Be at rest," said Rameses. "Thy daughter is full of wisdom and dignity. She went out because she saw that thy wine was gladdening the guests rather powerfully."

In fact a great uproar had risen in the hall, all the more since Tutmosis, abandoning the rôle of assistant host, had become a most animated talker.

"I will say to thee in confidence, holiness, that poor Tutmosis must guard himself greatly in presence of my daughter," remarked Antefa.

That first feast continued till morning. The pharaoh, it is true, departed immediately, but others remained, first in their chairs and then on the floor. Finally Antefa had to send them home as if they had been lifeless objects.

The marriage ceremony took place some days later.

To Antefa's palace went the high priests Herhor and Mefres, the nomarchs of the neighboring provinces, and the chief officials of Thebes. Later appeared Tutmosis on a two-wheeled chariot, attended by officers of the guard, and finally his holiness, the pharaoh.

Rameses was attended by the chief scribe, the commander of the archers, the commander of the cavalry, the chief judge, the chief treasurer, Sem the high priest, and the adjutant-generals.

When that splendid assembly was in the hall of the ancestors of the most worthy Antefa, Hebron appeared in white robes with a numerous retinue of damsels and maids in attendance. Her father, after he had burned incense before Amon and the statue of his own father, and Rameses XIII., who was sitting on a raised platform, declared that he freed his daughter Hebron from guardianship and provided her with a dowry. Then he gave her, in a gold tube, a document securing her dowry, and written before the court on papyrus.

After a short lunch the bride took her seat in a costly litter borne by eight officials of the province. Before her went music and singers; around the litter were dignitaries, and behind them an immense crowd of people. All this procession moved toward the temple of Amon, through the most beautiful streets of the city, amid a throng of people almost as numerous as that which had attended the funeral of the pharaoh.

At the temple the people remained outside the walls while the bride and groom, the pharaoh and dignitaries, entered the hall of columns. There Hebron burned incense before the veiled statue of Amon, priestesses performed a sacred dance, and Tutmosis read the following act from a papyrus:

“I, Tutmosis, commander of the guard of his holiness Rameses XIII., take thee, Hebron, daughter of Antefa the nomarch of Thebes, as wife. I give thee now the sum of ten talents because thou hast consented to marry me. For thy robes I designate to thee three talents yearly, and for household expenses one talent a month. Of the children which we may have the eldest son will be heir to the property which I possess now and which I may acquire hereafter. If I should not live with thee, but divorce myself and take another wife, I shall be obliged to pay thee forty talents, which sum I secure with my property. Our son, on receiving his estate, is to pay thee fifteen talents yearly. Children of another wife are to have no right to the property of our first-born son.”⁴⁵

The chief judge appeared now and read an act in which the bride promised to give good food and raiment to her husband, to care for his house, family, servants, slaves, and cattle, and to entrust to that husband the management of the property which she had received or would receive from her father.

After the acts were read Herhor gave Tutmosis a goblet of wine. The bridegroom drank half, the bride moistened her lips with it, and then both burned incense before the purple curtain.

Leaving the temple of Amon the young couple and their splendid retinue passed through the avenue of sphinxes to the pharaoh's palace. Crowds of people and warriors greeted them with shouts, scattering flowers on their pathway.

Tutmosis had dwelt up to that time in the chambers of the pharaoh, but on the day of his marriage Rameses presented him with a beautiful little villa in the depth of the gardens, surrounded by a forest of fig trees, myrtles and baobabs, where the bridegroom and bride might pass days of happiness hidden from human eye, and cut off, as it were, from the world about them.

In that quiet corner people showed themselves so rarely that even birds did not flee before them. When the young couple and the guests found themselves in this new dwelling the final ceremony of marriage followed:

Tutmosis took Hebron by the hand and led her to a fire burning before a statue of Isis; then Mefres poured a spoonful of holy water on the lady's head; Hebron touched the fire with her hand, while Tutmosis divided a morsel of bread with her and placed his own ring on her finger in sign that from that time forth she was mistress of his land, his servants, his slaves and cattle.

Meanwhile the priests sang wedding hymns and bore the statue of the divine Isis through the whole house; and priestesses performed sacred dances.

The day ended with spectacles and a great feast, during which all noticed that Hebron accompanied the pharaoh continually, and that Tutmosis kept at a distance from her, and simply entertained guests at the wedding.

When the stars had risen the holy Herhor left the feast, and soon after some of the highest dignitaries slipped out also. About midnight the following worthy persons met in a subterranean chamber of the temple of Amon: the high priests Herhor, Mefres, and Mentezufis, the chief judge of Thebes, also the chiefs of the provinces of Abs, Horti, and Emsuch.

⁴⁵ Authentic.

Mentezufis looked around among the great columns, closed the door, quenched the torches, and in that lower chamber there remained only one light, that which burned before a statue of Horus. The dignitaries sat down on three stone benches.

"If I were commanded to describe the character of Rameses XIII.," said the nomarch of Abs, "I should be unable to do so."

"He is a maniac!" said Mefres.

"I do not know that he is a maniac," answered Herhor, "but he is very dangerous in every case. Already Assyria has reminded us twice of the last treaty, and is beginning, I hear, to be alarmed at the arming of Egypt."

"That is of less importance," said Mefres; "there is something worse, for this godless man is thinking to violate the treasure of the labyrinth."

"But I should consider," said the nomarch of Emsuch, "that his promises to the people are the worst. Our income and that of the state will be shattered if the common people are idle one day in seven. But if the pharaoh gives them land in addition?"

"He is ready to do that," said the chief judge in a whisper.

"Is he ready?" asked the nomarch of Horti. "It seems to me that he merely wants money. If we should give him something from the labyrinth—"

"Impossible," interrupted Herhor. "The state is not threatened by danger, but the pharaoh is, and that is not the same question. I repeat that as a dam is strong only while it is not penetrated by the tiniest stream of water, so the labyrinth is full till we touch the first block of gold in it. After that, all will go. Finally, whom do we strengthen by the treasures of the gods and of Egypt? This young man who despises religion, belittles priests, and disturbs the people. Is he not worse than Assar? Assar is a barbarian, but he does not harm us."

"It is improper for the pharaoh to pay court to his favorite's wife so openly on the very day of the marriage," said the judge, thoughtfully.

"Hebron herself entices him," said the nomarch of Horti.

"All women entice men," answered the nomarch of Emsuch. "Sense, however, is given a man to avoid sin."

"But is not the pharaoh husband to all the women of Egypt?" whispered the nomarch of Abs. "Moreover, sin is under the judgment of the gods, while we are occupied only with Egypt."

"He is dangerous! he is dangerous!" said the nomarch of Emsuch, while his hands and head trembled. "There is no doubt that the common people have become insolent and may rise any moment. In that case no high priest or nomarch would be sure of his life, not to mention his office and property."

"Against an uprising we have means," replied Herhor.

"What means?"

"First of all," answered Mefres, "we can avoid an uprising if we explain to the wisest among common people that he who makes them promises is a maniac."

"He is one of the soundest men under the sun," whispered the nomarch of Horti. "All that we need is to learn what he wishes."

“He is a maniac! a maniac!” repeated Mefres. “His own brother imagines himself a monkey, and drinks with dissectors. Rameses may act in the same fashion any day.”

“It is awkward and evil to declare a man of sound mind a maniac,” said the nomarch of Horti. “For if people see the falsehood they will cease to believe in us, and nothing will restrain an uprising.”

“If I say that Rameses is a maniac it must be that I have proof,” replied Mefres. “And now listen.”

The dignitaries moved on their benches.

“Tell me,” continued Mefres, “would a man of sound mind, heir to the throne of Egypt, dare to fight in public against a bull in presence of so many thousands of Asiatics? Would a prince of sound judgment, an Egyptian, wander into a Phœnician temple during night hours? Would he, without cause, reduce to the rank of slaves his first woman, an act which caused her death and the death of her infant?”

Those present murmured in fear.

“All this we have seen in Pi-Bast. Mentezufis and I were witnesses of drinking feasts, at which the half-demented heir blasphemed against the gods and insulted the priesthood.”

“That is true,” said Mentezufis.

“And what do ye think,” continued Mefres, with greater heat, “would a man of sound mind, the leader of an army, leave his troops to chase after a few Libyan bandits? I pass over a number of smaller things, even the idea of giving the people land and a holiday; could I say that a man was of sound mind who committed so many criminal absurdities without cause, just at random?”

Those present were silent; the nomarch of Horti was troubled.

“It is necessary to think over this,” added the chief judge, “lest injustice be done him.” Here Herhor spoke.

“Holy Mefres has done him a kindness,” said he, in low decisive tones, “by considering him a maniac. Unless he is a maniac we must call him a traitor.”

Those present moved with fear.

“Yes, the man called Rameses XIII. is a traitor, for not only does he select spies and robbers to discover the way to the treasures of the labyrinth, not only does he reject the treaty with Assyria, which Egypt needs absolutely—”

“Grievous accusations,” said the judge.

“But listen to me further: he is negotiating with villainous Phœnicians to cut a canal between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. This canal is the greatest danger for Egypt, since our country might be inundated by water in one moment. It is not a question here of the treasures of the labyrinth, but of our temples, houses, fields, six millions of people, foolish, it is true, but innocent, and finally of our own lives and the lives of our children.”

“If that is the case—” sighed the nomarch of Horti.

“I and the worthy Mefres pledge ourselves that it is the case, and that this one man has gathered into his hands more dangers than have ever yet threatened Egypt. Hence we have brought you here to provide means of rescue. But we must act

quickly, for the plans of this man advance like a storm in a desert and may overwhelm every one of us."

For a moment there was silence in the dark chamber.

"What is to be done at present?" asked the nomarch of Emsuch. "We live in our provinces far from the court, and not only do we not know the plans of this madman, but we cannot even divine them, we can hardly believe that they exist. I think it is best therefore to leave this affair with thee, worthy Herhor, and with Mefres. Ye have discovered the disease, provide the remedy and act. But if the greatness of responsibility alarms you, associate with yourselves the supreme judge as assistant."

"Yes! yes! he speaks truth," confirmed the indignant officials.

Mentezufis lighted a torch and placed on a table before the statue of the god a papyrus on which was written an act of the following contents: In view of dangers threatening the state, the power of the secret council passes into the hands of Herhor with whom are associated as assistants the supreme judge and Mefres.

This act, confirmed by the signatures of the dignitaries present, was enclosed in a tube and concealed in a secret place beneath the altar.

In addition, each one of the seven associates bound himself under oath to attract to the conspiracy ten dignitaries. Herhor promised to bring proof that Assyria was insisting on the treaty, and that the pharaoh did not wish to sign it, that he was negotiating with Phœnicians to dig the canal, and that he intended to enter the labyrinth treacherously.

"My life and honor are in your hands," concluded Herhor. "If what I have said is untrue condemn me to death, and have my body burned afterward."

No one doubted now that the high priest spoke the pure truth; for no Egyptian would expose his body to burning and his soul to destruction.

Tutmosis spent a few days after the wedding in company with Hebron, in the palace given him by his holiness. But every evening he went to the barracks of the guard, where with officers and dancers he passed the nights very pleasantly.

From this conduct his comrades divined that he had married Hebron only for her dowry; this, however, did not astonish any one.

After five days Tutmosis announced to the pharaoh that he was ready to resume his duties. Thenceforth he visited his wife only in the daytime, the nights he passed near his lord's chamber.

One evening the pharaoh said to him,—

"This palace has so many corners for watching and listening that every act of mine is noted. My revered mother is addressed again by those mysterious voices which ceased in Memphis after I dismissed the priesthood. I cannot receive therefore any one in my own chamber, but must leave the palace and take counsel with my servants in a safe place."

"Am I to follow thee, holiness?" inquired Tutmosis, seeing that the pharaoh was looking around for his mantle.

"No; thou must stay here and see that no one enters my chamber. Admit no person, not even my mother, not even the shade of my ever-living father. Thou wilt say that I am asleep and will see no one."

"It will be as thou hast said," replied Tutmosis, putting on his lord a hooded mantle. Then he quenched the light in the bedchamber and Rameses went out through side passages.

When he was in the garden Rameses stopped and looked on all sides with attention. Then, taking bearings, he started quickly toward the villa which he had given Tutmosis. After he had walked some minutes in a shady alley a man stood before him and inquired,—

"Who goes?"

"Nubia," answered the pharaoh.

"Libya," said the inquirer, and pushed back suddenly, as if frightened.

The man was an officer of the guard. The pharaoh looked at him, and said,—

"Ah, this is Eunana! What art thou doing in this place?"

"I am going around the gardens; I do so a couple of times nightly, for thieves steal in sometimes."

"Thou dost wisely. But remember the first duty of an officer of the guard is silence. Drive the thief out, but if thou meet a man in office seize him not, be silent, be silent always. Even if the high priest Herhor were in question."

"Oh lord!" exclaimed Eunana, "but command me not to do homage in the night to Herhor, or to Mefres. I am not sure that my sword at sight of them would not spring of itself from the scabbard."

Rameses smiled.

"Thy sword is mine," replied he, "and it may leave the scabbard only when I give the order." He nodded to Eunana and passed on.

After wandering a quarter of an hour by paths intended to mislead, the pharaoh found himself near a secret gate in a thicket. It seemed to him that he heard a rustle, and he said in a low voice,—

"Hebron!"

A figure, also in a dark mantle, ran out, rushed at Rameses and clung to his neck, whispering,—

"Is it thou? is it thou? Oh, how long I have waited!"

The pharaoh felt that she was slipping from his embrace, so he took her in his arms and carried her to an arbor. At that moment the mantle fell from his shoulders; he dragged it for a while, but at last dropped it.

Next day the revered lady Nikotris summoned Tutmosis. The favorite of the pharaoh was frightened when he looked at her. The queen was terribly pale, her eyes were sunken and she was almost demented.

"Sit down!" said she, indicating a stool near her armchair.

Tutmosis hesitated.

"Sit down! And—and swear that thou wilt repeat to no one what I tell thee."

"By the shade of my father, I will not."

"Hear me," said the queen in a low voice; "I have been almost a mother to thee. Wert thou to betray this secret the gods would punish thee. No—they would only cast on thy head a part of those misfortunes which are hanging over my family."

Tutmosis listened with astonishment.

"Is she mad?" thought he with fear.

"Look at that window," continued the queen; "look at that tree. Dost thou know whom I saw last night on that tree outside the window?"

"Could the brother of his holiness have come to Thebes?"

"It was not he," whispered she, sobbing. "It was my Rameses himself."

"On the tree? Last night?"

"Yes. The light of the lamp fell on his face and figure perfectly. He had a coat in white and blue stripes, his eyes were wandering—he laughed wildly, like his unfortunate brother, and said, 'Look at me, mother, I am able to fly now, a thing that neither Seti, nor Rameses the Great, nor Cheops could do. See what wings are growing out on me!' He stretched his hands toward me, and I, unconscious from sorrow, touched his hands through the window and his face, covered with cold perspiration. At last he slipped down the tree and vanished."

Tutmosis listened in terror. All at once he struck his forehead.

"That was not Rameses," said he with decision. "That was a man very like him, that villain, the Greek Lykon, who killed Sarah's son, and who is now under control of the high priests. That was not Rameses. This is a crime of Herhor and Mefres, those wretches."

Hope gleamed on the queen's face, but only for a moment.

"How could I fail to recognize my son?"

"Lykon is very like him," answered Tutmosis. "This is a trick of the priests. They are infamous! For them death is too slight a punishment."

"Did the pharaoh sleep at home last night?" inquired the lady.

Tutmosis was confused and dropped his eyes.

"So he did not sleep at home?"

"He did," answered the favorite with an uncertain voice.

"That is not true. But tell me, at least, did he not wear a coat with white and blue stripes?"

"I do not remember," whispered Tutmosis.

"Thou art telling untruth again. And this mantle, tell me if this is not my son's mantle? My slave found it on that same tree, in the branches."

The queen sprang up and brought from a case a brown, hooded mantle. Tutmosis remembered that the pharaoh had returned after midnight without his mantle and even explained to him that he had lost it somewhere in the garden. He hesitated, meditated, but at last answered with decision,—

"No, queen, that was not the pharaoh. That was Lykon, and this is a crime of the priests which I must report to his holiness straightway."

“But if that were Rameses?” inquired the lady again, though in her eyes a spark of hope was now evident.

Tutmosis was troubled. His conclusion that it was Lykon was wise and might be true, but indications were not lacking that the queen had seen Rameses. It was certain that he had returned to his chamber after midnight; he wore a tunic with white and blue stripes, he had lost his mantle. It was true that his brother was demented, and, moreover, could a mother’s heart deceive her?

And doubts rose in the soul of Tutmosis, intricate and involved as a nest of poisonous reptiles. Luckily in proportion as his doubts increased hope entered the heart of Nikotris.

“It is well that thou hast reminded me of that Lykon,” said she. “I remember. Through him Mefres accused Rameses of child murder, and to-day he may use the wretch to defame his sovereign. In this case not a word to any one of what I have told thee. If Rameses—if in truth he is subject to such a misfortune, it may be temporary. We must not humiliate him by mentioning such reports, we must not inform him. If this is a plot of the priests we must also be cautious. Though people who use such deceit cannot be powerful.”

“I will investigate this,” interrupted Tutmosis, “but if I convince myself—”

“Do not inform Rameses—I implore thee by the shade of thy father!” exclaimed the queen, clasping her hands. “The pharaoh would not forgive them, he would deliver them to judgment, and then one of two misfortunes would happen. Either the supreme priests of the state would be condemned to death, or the court would free them. And then what? But pursue Lykon and slay him without mercy, like a wild beast—like a reptile.”

Tutmosis took farewell of the queen. She was pacified, though his fears had grown greater.

“If that villainous Greek, Lykon, is living yet, despite imprisonment by the priests,” thought he, “he would prefer flight to climbing trees and showing himself to the queen. I myself would facilitate his escape, and cover him with wealth if he would tell the truth and seek protection against those wretches. But whence came the mantle? How deceive the mother?”

From that time Tutmosis avoided the pharaoh, and dared not look him in the eyes, while Rameses himself acted strangely, so their heartfelt relations seemed to grow cold somewhat.

But one evening the pharaoh summoned his favorite a second time.

“I must speak with Hiram,” said he, “on questions of importance. I am going out. Watch here at my chamber, and if any man wishes to see me do not admit him.”

When the pharaoh vanished in the secret corridors Tutmosis was seized by alarm.

“Maybe,” thought he, “the priests have poisoned him to produce insanity; and he, feeling that an attack is coming, flees from his own palace? Ha! we shall see!”

In fact he did see. The pharaoh returned well after midnight to his chambers, and had a mantle; it was not his own, however, but a soldier’s.

Tutmosis was alarmed and did not sleep till morning, thinking that the queen would summon him again on a sudden. The queen did not summon him, however. But

during the morning review of the guard, the officer Eunana begged to speak with his chief for a moment.

When they were alone in a chamber Eunana fell at the feet of Tutmosis and implored the chief not to repeat what he was going to tell him.

“What has happened?” inquired the adjutant, feeling cold in his heart.

“Chief,” said Eunana, “yesterday I saw a man running in the garden naked, and crying in an unearthly voice. He was brought in to me, and, chief—slay me!”

Eunana fell again at the feet of Tutmosis.

“That naked man—that— I cannot tell.”

“Who was he?” inquired the terrified Tutmosis.

“I will not tell!” groaned Eunana. “I took off my mantle and covered sacred nakedness. I wanted to take him to the palace—but—I—the lord commanded me to stay where I was, and be silent—be silent!”

“Whither did he go?”

“I know not. I did not look, and I did not let the warriors look. He vanished somewhere among the bushes of the garden. I told my men not to see anything, not to hear anything; that if any man saw or heard anything he would be strangled that instant.”

Tutmosis had succeeded in mastering himself.

“I know nothing,” said he, coldly, “and understand nothing of what thou hast said to me. But remember one thing: I myself ran naked once when I had drunk too much wine, and I gave a good reward to those who failed to see me. Common people, Eunana, and laborers always go naked; great persons only when it may please them. And if the wish should come to me or any of the officials to stand head downward, a wise and pious officer should not wonder at my action.”

“I understand,” replied Eunana, looking into the eyes of his chief quickly. “And not only will I repeat that to my warriors, but I will even go naked this night through the garden to let them know that superiors have the right to do whatever pleases them.”

Still, notwithstanding the small number of men who had seen the pharaoh or his counterfeit in a state of insanity, the reports of these strange happenings circulated everywhere very quickly. In a few days all the inhabitants of Thebes, from dissectors and water-carriers to scribes and merchants, whispered that Rameses XIII. was affected with the disease which had deprived his older brothers of succession.

Dread of the pharaoh and honor for him were so great that people feared to speak openly, especially before strangers. Still, all heard of it—all save Rameses.

But most peculiar was this, that the report went around the whole kingdom very speedily; a proof that it circulated by means of the temples. For priests alone possessed the power of communicating in a few hours from one end of Egypt to the other.

No one mentioned these disagreeable tidings to Tutmosis directly, but the chief of the pharaoh’s guard felt their existence everywhere. From the bearing of people with whom circumstances brought him in contact he divined that the servants, the slaves, the warriors, the purveyors of the court were discussing the insanity of the pharaoh, and were silent only when some superior might overhear them.

At last Tutmosis, impatient and alarmed, decided on a conversation with the Theban nomarch.

On arriving at the palace of his father-in-law he found Antefa lying on a sofa in a room, one half of which was filled with rare plants like a garden. In the centre played a fountain of water perfumed with roses; in the corners of the room were statues of gods; on the walls were depicted the deeds of the renowned nomarch. Standing near his head was a black slave who cooled his master with an ostrich feather fan; on the pavement sat the scribe of the province reading a report to him.

Tutmosis had such an anxious face that the nomarch dismissed the scribe and the slave straightway; then rising from the couch he looked toward every corner of the chamber to be sure that no one overheard them.

“Worthy father of Lady Hebron, my revered wife,” said Tutmosis, “from thy bearing I see that thou divinest the subject of which I wish to speak.”

“The nomarch of Thebes must always look ahead,” replied Antefa. “I divine also that the commander of the guard of his holiness would not honor me by a visit for a frivolous reason.”

For a moment they looked each other in the eyes. Then Tutmosis took a seat at the side of his father-in-law, and whispered,—

“Hast thou heard vile reports about our sovereign, which the enemies of the state are spreading?”

“If it be a question of my daughter Hebron,” replied the nomarch quickly, “I declare that thou art her lord to-day, and canst have no question with me.”

Tutmosis waved his hand with indifference.

“Some vile persons are reporting that the pharaoh is insane. Hast heard of this, my father?”

Antefa nodded and turned his head—motions which meant equally that he had, or that he had not. At last he said,—

“Stupidity is as great as the ocean; everything finds a place in it.”

“This is not stupidity,” replied Tutmosis, “but a crime of the priests, who have in their possession a man who resembles his holiness, and they make use of him for evil purposes.” And he told the nomarch the story of the Greek Lykon, and his crime in Pi-Bast.

“I have heard of this Lykon who killed the son of the heir,” said Antefa. “But hast thou proof that Mefres imprisoned Lykon in Pi-Bast, that he brought him to Thebes, and that he lets him enter the gardens of the pharaoh to counterfeit the sovereign as insane?”

“Just because I have not proof of this do I ask thee, worthiness, what to do. I am the commander of the guard and I must watch over the honor and safety of our sovereign.”

“What thou must do?” repeated Antefa. “Well, first of all take care that these vile reports do not reach the ears of the pharaoh.”

“Why?”

“Because a great misfortune would happen. If our lord hears that Lykon feigns insanity and pretends to be the pharaoh, he will fall into terrible anger. Naturally he will direct that anger against Herhor and Mefres. Maybe he will only abuse them in words, maybe he will imprison them, maybe he will kill them. Whatever he does, he will do it without proof, and what then? Egypt at present does not care to give offerings to the gods, but it will take the part of priests injured without reason. And what then? Well,” added he, approaching his lips to Tutmosis’ ear, “I think it would be the end of the dynasty.”

“What am I to do?”

“One thing!” exclaimed Antefa. “Find Lykon, prove that Mefres and Herhor secreted him, and ordered him to counterfeit the pharaoh as insane. Thou must do this, if thou wish to keep the favor of thy sovereign. Proofs—as many proofs as possible! Egypt is not Assyria; thou canst not act against high priests without the court, and no court will condemn them without tangible evidence. Where hast thou the certainty that some one did not give the pharaoh an intoxicating potion? That would be simpler than to send out a man at night who knows neither the watchword, nor the palace, nor the garden. I have heard of Lykon from an authentic source, for I heard from Hiram. Still, I do not understand how Lykon could perform such miracles in Thebes.”

“But—but—” interrupted Tutmosis, “where is Hiram?”

“Immediately after the wedding he went to Memphis, and in these last days he was in Hiten.”

Tutmosis again was in trouble: “That night,” thought he, “when they took a naked man to Eunana, the pharaoh said that he was going to see Hiram. But as Hiram was not in Thebes, then what? Well, his holiness knew not at the moment that of which he himself was talking.”

Tutmosis returned home dazed. Not only did he fail to understand what he was to do in that unheard-of position, but even he knew not what to think of the position itself. His conviction while conversing with Nikotris, that Lykon, the emissary of high priests, had appeared in the garden, was equalled now by his doubts as to whether the Greek had been there at all.

And if this was the case with Tutmosis the favorite, who saw Rameses at all times, what must it be in the hearts of strangers. The most devoted adherents of the pharaoh and his measures might hesitate on hearing from all sides that their sovereign was demented.

This was the first blow which the priests gave Rameses XIII. Slight in itself, it involved results which were beyond reckoning.

Not only did Tutmosis hesitate, he suffered. Under a frivolous exterior he had a character at once energetic and noble. So that day, when men struck at the honor and power of his sovereign, inactivity was devouring Tutmosis. He seemed to himself the commander of a fortress which the enemy was undermining, while he himself was looking on in helplessness. This thought so tortured him that under its influence he fell upon a daring plan. Meeting the high priest Sem, he said to him,—

“Worthiness, hast thou heard the reports about our sovereign?”

“The pharaoh is young, hence various scandals may circulate concerning him,” replied Sem, looking strangely at Tutmosis. “But such affairs pertain not to me; I take

the place of his holiness in the service of the gods; I fulfil that office as I know best, and have no care for other questions.”

“I know, worthiness, that thou art a faithful servant of the pharaoh,” said Tutmosis, “and I have no thought of interfering with priestly secrets; I must turn thy attention, however, to one trifle. I have learned that holy Mefres holds a certain Lykon, a Greek, on whom two crimes are weighing: he murdered the pharaoh’s son, and besides he looks like his holiness. Let the worthy Mefres not bring disgrace on the revered priestly order; let him yield the murderer to justice at the earliest; for if we find Lykon, I swear that Mefres will lose not his office alone, but his head also. In our kingdom it is not permitted to patronize murderers and secrete men who resemble the sovereign.”

Sem, in whose presence Mefres had taken Lykon from the police, was confused out of fear perhaps that he might be suspected of co-operation, still he answered,—

“I will try to forewarn holy Mefres of these suspicions. But thou knowest, worthiness, how people answer who attribute crimes to others.”

“I know and assume responsibility. I am so certain of my case that I have no concern as to the result of my suspicions. Alarm I leave to holy Mefres; I trust that he will not force me to pass from warning to energetic action.”

The conversation had its result: from that day forth no man ever saw the counterfeit of the pharaoh. But reports did not cease; Rameses XIII., however, knew nothing of them; Tutmosis feared violent action of the pharaoh against the priests, hence gave him no information.

Chapter LXII

IN the beginning of the month Paofi (July, August) the pharaoh, Queen Nikotris, and the court returned from Thebes to the palace at Memphis. Toward the end of the journey, which took place on the Nile this time also, Rameses fell into meditation often, and said once to Tutmosis,—

“I notice a strange thing. The people assemble on both banks as numerous, and perhaps even more so than they did when we sailed up the river, but their shouts are far weaker, boats follow us in smaller numbers, and flowers are thrown from them stingily.”

“Divine truth flows from thy lips, lord,” replied Tutmosis. “Indeed the people look wearied, but great heat is the cause of that.”

“Thou speakest wisely,” said the pharaoh in praise, and his face brightened.

But Tutmosis did not believe his own words. He felt, and what was worse the whole retinue felt, that the masses of men had grown somewhat cool in their love for the pharaoh. Whether this came from tales of the unfortunate illness of the sovereign, or from new intrigues, Tutmosis knew not; he felt certain, however, that the priests had had influence in producing that coolness.

“That is a stupid rabble,” thought he, not restraining the contempt in his heart. “A short time ago they were drowning just to look at the face of his holiness, and to-day they are sparing their voices. Have they forgotten the seventh day for rest, or the land as property?”

Immediately after his arrival at the palace the pharaoh issued an order to assemble delegates. At the same time he commanded officials devoted to him, and also the police, to begin an agitation against the priests and in favor of rest on the seventh day from labor.

Soon there was a buzzing in Lower Egypt as in a beehive. The common people claimed not only a day for repose, but payment for public labor. Artisans in inns and on the streets abused the priests for wishing to limit the sacred power of the pharaoh. The number of offenders increased, but criminals would not appear before any court. Scribes grew timid, and no one dared strike a common man, knowing that he would avenge himself. No one brought offerings to a temple. Stones and mud were hurled more and more frequently at the gods guarding boundaries, and at times these gods were thrown down even. Fear fell on priests and nomarchs as well as their adherents. In vain did judges announce on the highroads and squares that, according to ancient laws, laborers, artisans, and even merchants were not to busy themselves with politics which withdrew them from bread-giving labor. The crowd, amid shouts and laughter, hurled rotten vegetables and date skins at heralds.

Meanwhile the most powerful gathered at the palace, and, prostrate before the pharaoh, begged for deliverance.

“We are,” cried they, “as if the ground were opening under us, and as if the world were nearing its end! The elements are in confusion, men’s minds are vexed, and if thou, lord, wilt not rescue us, our days are numbered.”

“My treasury is empty, the army not numerous, the police have seen no salary this long time,” replied the pharaoh. “If ye wish enduring peace and safety ye must find funds for me. But since my heart is troubled by your fear I will do what I can, and I hope to restore order.”

In fact his holiness gave command to concentrate troops and dispose them at the most important points in the kingdom. At the same time he ordered Nitager to leave the eastern boundary to his assistant, and come himself with five chosen regiments to Memphis. This he did not so much to protect aristocrats from common people as to have at hand strong forces in case the high priests incited to rebellion Upper Egypt and the troops attached to temples.

On Paofi 10 there was a great movement in the palace and about it. The delegates who were to recognize the pharaoh’s right to the treasures in the labyrinth had assembled, also a multitude of men who wished at least to look at the place of a solemnity rare in Egypt.

The procession of delegates began in the morning. In front went naked earth-tillers wearing white caps and girdles; each held in his hand a piece of coarse cloth to cover his back in presence of the pharaoh. Next advanced artisans dressed like the earth-tillers, from whom they differed in wearing finer cloth and narrow aprons covered with parti-colored embroidery. Third came merchants, some in wigs, all in long tunics and pelerines. Among them were some who had rich bracelets on their arms and legs, and rings on their fingers.

Next appeared officers in caps and wearing coats with girdles which were black and yellow, blue and white, blue and red. Two instead of coats had bronze breastplates. After a long interval appeared thirteen nobles, wearing immense wigs and white robes which reached the pavement. After them advanced nomarchs in robes bordered with a purple stripe, and on their heads were coronets. The procession was closed by priests with shaven heads, and wearing panther skins over their shoulders.

The delegates entered the great hall of the pharaoh’s palace where there were seven benches, one behind another, the highest for priests, the lowest for earth-tillers.

Soon appeared in a litter his holiness, Rameses XIII., before whom the delegates fell on their faces. When the lord of both worlds had taken his seat on a lofty throne, he permitted his faithful subjects to rise and occupy their places. Now Herhor, Mefres, and the overseer of the labyrinth, the latter carrying a box, entered and took their seats on lower thrones. A brilliant suite of generals surrounded the pharaoh, behind whom stood two high officials with fans of peacock feathers.

“Truth-believing Egyptians,” said the ruler of both worlds, “it is known to you that my court, my army, and my officials are in such need that the impoverished treasury cannot overcome it. Of expenses concerning my sacred person I speak not, since my food and dress are like those of a warrior; any general or chief scribe has more servants and women than I have.”

Among those assembled a murmur of assent was heard.

“Hitherto the custom has been,” continued the pharaoh, “that when the treasury needs funds, greater taxes are imposed on working people. I, who know my people and their needs, not only do not wish to add burdens, but would gladly lessen those which they now bear.”

“Our lord, may thou live through eternity!” said some from the lowest benches.

“Happily for Egypt,” said the pharaoh, “our kingdom has treasures through which we may improve the army, pay officials, help the people, and even pay all debts which we owe either to the temples or Phœnicians. These treasures, collected by my glorious ancestors, are lying in the vaults of the labyrinth. But they can be taken only if all you right believers recognize as one man that Egypt is in need, and I, your lord, have the right to dispose of the treasures of my ancestors.”

“We recognize! We entreat thee to take what is needed!” was the answer from all benches.

“Worthy Herhor,” said the ruler, turning to him, “has the sacred priestly order aught to say in this question?”

“Very little,” answered the high priest rising. “According to ancient laws the treasure of the labyrinth may be touched only when the state has no other means; such is not the position at present, however, for should the government wipe away the Phœnician debts, which have risen from dishonest usury, not only would they fill thy treasury, holiness, but men working to-day for Phœnicians would have respite from grievous labor.”

On the benches of the delegates approbation was heard now a second time.

“Thy advice is keen, O holy man,” replied the pharaoh, “but full of danger. Were my treasurer, the worthy nomarchs, and the nobles, to erase what the state owes to creditors, they might omit one day to pay Phœnicians, the next day they might forget to pay sums due the temples and the pharaoh. Who will assure me, that common men, encouraged by examples from the great, would not think that they, too, have the right to forget their duties toward the sovereign?”

The blow was so weighty that the most worthy Herhor bent and was silent.

“And thou, chief overseer of the labyrinth, what hast thou to say?” asked Rameses.

“I have a box here,” replied the overseer, “with white and black pebbles. Every delegate will receive two and will put one of them into a pitcher; whoso wishes thee, holiness, to break the treasure in the labyrinth will put in a black pebble; whoso wishes that the property of the gods be untouched will put in a white one.”

“Agree not, O lord, to that,” whispered the treasurer to the sovereign. “Let each delegate tell openly what he has on his soul.”

“Let us respect ancient customs,” interrupted Mefres.

“Yes, let them put pebbles into the pitcher,” decided the pharaoh. “My heart is pure and my plans are unbending.”

Holy Mefres and Herhor exchanged glances. The overseer of the labyrinth and two generals went around the benches and gave a white pebble and a black one to each delegate. The poor men from the common crowd were confused much at seeing before them such great dignitaries. Some fell on the floor, did not dare to take the pebbles, and understood with great difficulty that they were to put only one pebble into the pitcher, a black or a white one.

“I wish to agree with the gods and his holiness,” whispered an old shepherd.

At last the officials succeeded in explaining, and the common men in understanding what was needed. The voting began. Each delegate went to the pitcher and dropped in his pebble in such fashion that others did not see its color.

Meanwhile the chief treasurer knelt behind the throne, and whispered,—

“All is lost! If they had voted openly we should have unanimity; but now may my hand wither if there will not be twenty white pebbles in the pitcher.”

“Be at rest, faithful servant,” replied Rameses with a smile. “I have more regiments at hand than there will be voices against us.”

“But to what purpose? to what purpose?” sighed the treasurer; “without unanimity they will not open the labyrinth.”

Rameses smiled all the time.

The procession of delegates had finished. The overseer of the labyrinth raised the pitcher and poured out its contents on a golden tray.

Of ninety-one pebbles eighty-three were black and only eight white.

The generals and officials lost courage, the high priests looked at the assembly in triumph, but soon alarm seized them, for the face of Rameses had a gladsome expression.

No one dared to declare openly that the plan of his holiness had been defeated.

“Right-believing Egyptians, my good servants,” said the pharaoh with perfect freedom. “Ye have carried out my command, and my favor is with you; for two days ye will be guests in my house. Ye will receive presents and return to your houses and labors. Peace and blessings be with you.”

When he had said this he left the hall with his suite. The high priests Herhor and Mefres gazed with a look of alarm at each other.

“He is not troubled in any way,” whispered Herhor.

“Ah, I said that he is a raging wild beast,” replied Mefres. “He will not hesitate at violence, and if we do not anticipate—”

“The gods will defend us and our dwellings.”

In the evening the most faithful servants of Rameses XIII. assembled in his chamber: the chief treasurer, the chief scribe, Tutmosis, and Kalippos, the commander-in-chief of the Greek forces.

“O lord,” groaned the treasurer, “why not act like thy eternally living ancestors. If the delegates had spoken openly we should now have a right to the treasure in the labyrinth.”

“His worthiness speaks the truth,” put in the chief scribe.

The pharaoh shook his head.

“Ye are mistaken. If all Egypt cried, ‘give the funds in the labyrinth,’ the priests would not give them.”

“Then why disturb the priests by summoning delegates? This royal act has stirred them greatly, and given insolence to common men, who to-day are like a rising deluge.”

“I have no fear of this deluge,” said the pharaoh. “My regiments will be dams against it. The advantage of this delegation is evident, since it shows the weakness of my opponents: eighty-three for us, eight against us. It proves that if they can count on one corps I can rely on ten. Yield not to illusions; between me and the high priests

war has begun already. They are the fortress which we have summoned to surrender. They have refused; we must storm the fortress."

"Live forever!" cried Tutmosis and Kalippos.

"Command us," said the chief scribe.

"This is my will," said Rameses. "Thou, O treasurer, wilt distribute one hundred talents among the police, the overseers of the laborers, and the mayors in the provinces of Seft, Neha-Chent, Neha-Pechu, Sebt-Het, Aa, Ament, and Ka. In those same places you will give the innkeepers and the keepers of dramshops barley, wheat, and wine, whatever is at hand, so that common men may have meat and drink free of charge. Ye will do this immediately, so that there be supplies wherever needed till the 23d of Paofi."

The treasurer inclined to the pavement.

"Thou, scribe, wilt write and command to-morrow to herald forth in the streets of provincial capitals that barbarians of the western desert are advancing in great force to attack the province of Fayum. Thou, Kalippos, wilt despatch four Greek regiments southward. Two of these will halt at the labyrinth, two will push on to Hanes. If troops of the priests go from Thebes ye will drive them back and not let them approach Fayum. If people are indignant at the priests and threaten the labyrinth, thy Greeks will occupy the edifice."

"But if the overseers of the labyrinth refuse?" inquired Kalippos.

"That would be rebellion," answered the pharaoh, and continued,—

"Thou, Tutmosis, wilt send three regiments to Memphis and post them near the temples of Ptah, Isis, and Horus. If the enraged people wish to storm the temples the commanders of the regiments will open the gates to themselves, will not admit common men to the holy places, and will guarantee the persons of the high priests from insult. There will be priests in the labyrinth and in the temples of Memphis, who will come forth to the army with green branches. The commanders of regiments will ask those men for the password and will counsel with them."

"But if they resist?" inquired Tutmosis.

"Only rebels would refuse to obey commanders of the pharaoh," answered Rameses. "The temples and the labyrinth must be occupied by troops on the 23d of Paofi," continued the pharaoh, turning to the chief scribe. "The people both in Memphis and Fayum may begin to assemble on the 18th, at first in small groups, then in increasing numbers. But if slight disturbances begin about the 20th, they are not to be prevented. The people are to storm the temples not earlier than the 22d and 23d. And when troops occupy those points all must be quieted."

"Would it not be better to imprison Herhor and Mefres at once?" inquired Tutmosis.

"What for? I am not concerned about them, but the labyrinth and the temples, for the occupation of which troops are not ready yet. Besides, Hiram, who intercepted Herhor's letters to the Assyrians will return no sooner than the 20th. So only on the 21st of Paofi shall we have proofs in our hands that the high priests are traitors, and we shall announce their treason in public."

"Then am I to go to Fayum?" inquired Kalippos.

"Oh, no! Thou and Tutmosis will remain near me with chosen regiments. We must have reserves in case the priests draw away a part of the people."

“Art thou not afraid of treason, lord?” asked Tutmosis.

The pharaoh waved his hand with indifference. “Treason is always leaking out like water from a swollen barrel. It will be difficult for the high priests to divine my plans, while I know what they wish. But as I have anticipated them in collecting forces they will be weaker. Regiments are not formed in a few days.”

“But enchantments?” inquired Tutmosis.

“There are no enchantments which an axe will not shatter,” said Rameses, laughing.

Tutmosis wished at that moment to mention the tricks of the high priests with Lykon, but he was restrained by the thought that his lord would be very angry and lose calmness, through which he was powerful on that day. A chief before battle can think of nothing but action, and there would be time enough for Lykon’s case when the priests were in prison.

At a sign from his holiness Tutmosis remained in the chamber, but the three other dignitaries made low obeisances and vanished.

“At last!” sighed the chief scribe, when he found himself with the treasurer in the antechamber, “at last the power of the shaven heads is ending.”

“Indeed it is time,” said the treasurer. “During the last ten years any prophet had more power than the nomarch of Thebes or of Memphis.”

“I think that Herhor is preparing in secret a boat in which to flee before the 23d of Paofi,” put in Kalippos.

“What will be done to Herhor?” said the scribe. “His holiness, who is terrible to-day, will forgive him when he is obedient.”

“And even leave him his property at the intercession of Queen Nikotris,” said the treasurer. “At all events there will be order in the state, which for some time has been lacking.”

“But it seems to me that his holiness is making too great preparations,” said the scribe. “I should finish all with the Greek regiments, and not employ the people.”

“He is young; he likes noise and uproar,” added the treasurer.

“How clear it is that ye are not warriors,” said Kalippos. “When it comes to battle we must concentrate all the forces, for surprises are sure to happen.”

“They would happen if we had not the people behind us,” said the scribe. “But what unexpected thing can happen? The gods will not come down to defend the labyrinth.”

“Such is thy speech, worthiness, for thou art at rest,” answered Kalippos; “thou knowest that the supreme chief is watching and is trying to foresee everything; if that were not the case thy skin might creep.”

“I see no surprises,” contended the scribe, “unless the high priests are spreading reports again that the pharaoh is demented.”

“They will try various tricks,” added the treasurer, yawning; “but in fact they have not strength enough. In every case I thank the gods who put me in the pharaoh’s camp. Well, let us go to sleep.”

After the dignitaries had left the chamber of the pharaoh, Tutmosis opened a secret door in one of the walls, and led in Samentu. Rameses received the high priest of Set with great pleasure; he gave him his hand to kiss, and pressed his head.

"Peace be with thee, good servant," said the sovereign. "What dost thou bring me?"

"I have been twice in the labyrinth," replied the priest.

"And dost thou know the way now?"

"I knew it before, but this time I have made a new discovery: the treasure chamber may sink, people may be lost, and jewels be destroyed which are of the greatest value."

The pharaoh frowned.

"Therefore," continued Samentu, "be pleased, holiness, to have ready some tens of reliable men. With them I will enter the labyrinth on the night before the storm, and seize the chambers adjoining the treasury, especially the upper ones."

"Canst thou lead in men?"

"Yes. Though I will go alone again to the labyrinth, and see absolutely whether we may not avert destruction unaided. Even the most faithful men are uncertain, and to introduce them at night might rouse the attention of those watchdogs."

"Are they not following thee now?" asked the pharaoh.

"Believe me, lord," answered the priest, placing his hand on his breast, "a miracle would be needed to follow me. Their blindness is almost childlike. They feel that some one wants to invade the labyrinth, but the fools have doubled the guard at the ordinary gateways. Meanwhile, in the course of a month I have discovered three hidden entrances, these they have forgotten, or perhaps they know nothing about them. Only some spirit could warn those guardians that I traverse the labyrinth, or indicate the room in which I may find myself. Among three thousand chambers and corridors this is impossible."

"The worthy Samentu speaks truth," said Tutmosis. "And perhaps we employ too much keenness against these priestly reptiles."

"Do not say that," replied the priest. "Their strength, as compared with that of his holiness, is as a handful of sand in comparison with a temple, but Herhor and Mefres are very wise, and they may use weapons against us and means before which we shall be dumb with amazement. Our temples are full of secrets which will arrest even sages, and bring down to the dust the courage of the multitude."

"Wilt thou tell us something of that?" inquired the pharaoh.

"I will say first that the warriors of your holiness will meet with wonders in the temples. In one chamber torches will quench in their hands, in another, flames and disgusting monsters will surround them. In one place a wall will stop the way, or a gulf will open before their feet. In some corridors water will cover them, in others invisible hands will throw stones at them. And such thunders, such voices will be heard round about."

"In every temple I have partisans among the younger priests, and thou wilt be in the labyrinth—" said the pharaoh.

"But our axes?" said Tutmosis. "He is a poor soldier who draws back before flames or frightful pictures, or who loses time listening to mysterious voices."

"Thou speakest well, chief," cried Samentu. "If ye go ahead valiantly, terrors will vanish, voices cease, and flames burn no longer. Now my last word, lord," said the priest, turning to Rameses. "If I perish—"

“Do not speak thus,” interrupted the pharaoh quickly.

“A young priest of Set will come to thee, holiness, with my ring. Let the army occupy the labyrinth and expel the overseers, and let them not leave the building, for that young priest in the course of a month, perhaps, or even earlier, will find the way to the treasures with the indications which I will leave him. But, lord,” continued Samentu kneeling down, “I implore thee for one thing: when thou shalt conquer, avenge me, and above all, pardon not Mefres and Herhor. Thou knowest not what enemies they are. If they win, thou wilt perish, not only thou, but the dynasty.”

“But does not magnanimity become a victor?” inquired the pharaoh gloomily.

“No magnanimity! No favor!” cried Samentu. “As long as they live we are threatened, thou and I, with death, with shame, even with insult to our corpses. It is possible to fondle a lion, to buy a Phœnician, to win the attachment of a Libyan and an Ethiopian. It is possible to win favor from a Chaldean priest, for he, like an eagle, soars above heights and is safe from missiles. But an Egyptian prophet who has tried power and luxury thou wilt win with nothing, only his death or thine can end the conflict.”

“Samentu speaks truth,” said Tutmosis. “Happily not his holiness, but we, the warriors, will decide the ancient struggle between the priests and the pharaoh.”

Chapter LXIII

ON Paofi 12 alarming news went forth from various Egyptian temples. During a few preceding days an altar was overturned in the temple of Horus; in the temple of Isis a statue of the goddess shed tears. In the temple of Amon at Thebes, and from the tomb of Osiris in Dendera, omens of much evil were given. The priests inferred from infallible signs that some dreadful misfortune would threaten Egypt before the month had ended. Hence Herhor and Mefres, the high priests, commanded processions around the temples and sacrifice in houses.

On Paofi 13 there was a great procession in Memphis: the god Ptah issued from his temple, and the goddess Isis from hers. Both divinities moved toward the centre of the city with a very small assembly of believers, mainly women. But they were forced to withdraw, for Egyptians reviled them and foreigners went so far as to hurl stones at the sacred boats of the divinities.

In presence of these abuses the police bore themselves with indifference, some of them even took part in unseemly jests. During the afternoon unknown persons told the crowd that the priests would not permit relief to be given the people and desired a rebellion against the pharaoh.

Toward evening laborers gathered in crowds at the temples, where they hissed the priests and abused them. Meanwhile stones were hurled at the gate, and some criminals openly beat off the nose of Horus who was on guard at his own entrance.

A couple of hours after sunset the high priests and their most faithful adherents assembled in the temple of Ptah. The worthy Herhor was there; so were Mefres, Mentezufis, three nomarchs, and the highest judge.

"Terrible times!" said the judge. "I know to a certainty that the pharaoh wishes to rouse a rabble to attack temples."

"I have heard," said the nomarch of Sebes, "that an order has been sent to Nitager to hurry at the earliest with new troops, as if those here were insufficient."

"Communication between Upper and Lower Egypt is interrupted since yesterday," added the nomarch of Aa. "On the roads are posted troops, and the galleys of his holiness examine every barge sailing on the river."

"Rameses XIII. is not 'holiness,'" said Mefres, dryly, "for he has not received a crown from the gods yet."

"All this would be a trifle," said the judge. "Treason is worse. We have indications that many of the younger priests are favorable to the pharaoh and inform him of everything."

"There are some even who have undertaken to facilitate the occupation of the temples by troops," added Herhor.

"Are troops to enter the temples?" exclaimed the nomarch of Sebes.

"They have such an order at least for the 23d," replied Herhor.

"And dost thou speak of this, worthiness, quietly?" inquired the nomarch of Ament.

Herhor shrugged his shoulders, while the nomarchs exchanged glances.

"I do not understand this," said the nomarch of Aa, almost in anger. "There are barely a few hundred warriors at the temples, some priests are traitors, the pharaoh cuts us off from Thebes and is rousing the people, while the worthy Herhor speaks as though we were invited to a banquet. Either let us defend ourselves, if that be still possible, or—"

"Shall we yield to 'his holiness?'" inquired Mefres, with irony.

"We shall have time for that always!"

"But we should like to learn about means of defence," said the nomarch of Sebes.

"The gods will save those who are faithful to them," answered Herhor.

The nomarch of Aa wrung his hands.

"If I am to open my heart, I must say that I too am astonished at thy indifference," said the judge. "Almost all the people are against us."

"The common people are like barley in the field, they incline with the wind."

"But the army?"

"What army will not fall before Osiris?"

"I know," replied the nomarch of Aa, with impatience, "but I see neither Osiris nor that wind which is to turn the people toward us. Meanwhile, the pharaoh has attached them by promises, and he will appear with gifts to-morrow."

"Fear is stronger than promises and gifts," replied Herhor.

"What have they to fear? Those three hundred soldiers of ours?"

"They will fear Osiris."

"But where is he?" asked the indignant nomarch of Aa.

"Ye will see him. But happy the man who will be blind on that day."

Herhor spoke with such calm solemnity that silence settled on the assembly.

"But what shall we do?" asked the judge after a while.

"The pharaoh," said Herhor, "wishes the people to attack the temple on the 23d. We must make them attack us on the 20th of Paofi."

"The gods live through eternity!" cried the nomarch of Aa, raising his hands. "But why should we bring misfortune on our heads, and besides two days earlier?"

"Listen to Herhor," said Mefres with a voice of decision; "try by all means that the attack be made on the morning of the 20th."

"But if they beat us in fact?" inquired the judge in confusion.

"If Herhor's spells fail I will call the gods to assist us," replied Mefres, and in his eyes was an ominous glitter.

"Ah, ye high priests have secrets which ye may not explain to us. We will do what ye command; we will cause the attack on the 20th. But remember, on your heads be our blood and the blood of our children."

"So be it! So be it!" cried both high priests together.

Then Herhor added: "For ten years we have governed the state, and during that time no wrong has happened to any of you, and we have kept every promise; so be patient and faithful for a few days. Ye will see the might of the gods and receive your reward."

The nomarchs took farewell of the high priests, not trying even to hide their own grief and alarm. Only Herhor and Mefres remained. After a long silence Herhor said,—

"Yes, that Lykon was good as long as he counterfeited the maniac. But that it should be possible to show him instead of Rameses—"

"If the mother did not detect him," answered Mefres, "the man must resemble Rameses remarkably. As to sitting on the throne and saying a few words to those present, he will do that. Moreover, we shall be there."

"A terribly stupid comedian!" sighed Herhor, rubbing his forehead.

"He is wiser than millions of other men, for he has second sight and he may render the state immense service."

"Thou art speaking continually, worthiness, of that second sight. Let me convince myself of it certainly."

"Dost thou wish to do so?" inquired Mefres. "Well, come with me. But by the gods, Herhor, mention not, even before thy own heart, what thou shalt witness."

They went beneath the temple of Ptah and entered a large vault where a lamp was then gleaming. By the feeble light Herhor saw a man sitting at a table; he was eating. The man wore a coat of the pharaoh's guardsmen.

"Lykon," said Mefres, "the highest dignitary of the state wishes evidence of those powers with which the gods have gifted thee."

"Cursed be the day in which the soles of my feet touched your land!" muttered Lykon, pushing away a plate with food on it. "I should rather labor in the quarries, and be beaten—"

"There will be time for that always," interrupted Herhor, severely.

The Greek was silent, and trembled suddenly when he saw a dark crystal globe in the hand of Mefres. He grew pale, his sight became dim, large drops of sweat came out on his face. His eyes were fixed on one point, as if fastened to that ball of crystal.

"He is sleeping," said Mefres. "Is this not wonderful?"

"If he is not feigning."

"Punch him, stick him, burn him even," said Mefres.

Herhor drew from under his white robe a dagger and pointed it as if to strike Lykon between the eyes, but the Greek did not move, even his eyelids did not quiver.

"Look!" said Mefres, holding the crystal up to Lykon. "Dost thou see the man who carried off Kama?"

The Greek sprang from his chair, his fists were clenched, and there was saliva on his lips.

"Let me go!" cried he with a hoarse voice. "Let me go and drink his blood."

"Where is he now?" inquired Mefres.

"In the villa at the side of the garden next the river. A beautiful woman is with him."

"Her name is Hebron, and she is the wife of Tutmosis," added Herhor. "Confess, Mefres, that second sight is not needed to know that."

Mefres closed his thin lips tightly.

"If this does not convince thee, worthiness, I will show something better," said he at length. "Lykon, find now the traitor who is seeking the way to the treasure of the labyrinth."

The sleeping Greek looked for a while at the crystal intently, and answered,—

"I see him—he is dressed in the rags of a beggar."

"Where is he?"

"In the court of the last inn before the labyrinth. He will be there in the morning."

"How does he look?"

"He has red hair and beard," answered Lykon.

"Well?" inquired Mefres of Herhor.

"Thou hast good police, worthiness," replied Herhor.

"But the overseers of the labyrinth guard it poorly!" said Mefres in anger. "I will go there to-night with Lykon to warn the local priests. But if I succeed in saving the treasure of the gods, thou wilt permit me to become its overseer, worthiness?"

"As thou wishest," answered Herhor with indifference. But in his heart he added: "The pious Mefres begins at last to show his claws and teeth. He desires to become only overseer of the labyrinth, and his ward, Lykon, he would make only—pharaoh! Indeed, to satisfy the greed of my assistants the gods would have to make ten Egypts."

When both dignitaries had left the vault, Herhor, in the night, returned on foot to the temple of Isis where he had a dwelling, but Mefres commanded to make ready a couple of litters on horses. In one of these the younger priests placed the sleeping Lykon with a bag on his head; in the other the high priest himself took his place and, surrounded by a party of horsemen went at a sharp trot in the direction of Fayum.

On the night between the 14th and 15th Paofi the high priest Samentu, according to the promise given Rameses, entered the labyrinth by a corridor known to himself only. He had in his hand a bundle of torches, one of which was burning, and on his back he carried tools in a small basket.

Samentu passed very easily from hall to hall, from corridor to corridor, pushing back with a touch stone slabs in columns and in walls where there were secret doors. Sometimes he hesitated, but then he read mysterious signs on the walls and compared them with signs on the beads which he bore on his neck.

After a journey of half an hour he found himself in the treasure room,—whence by pushing aside a slab in the pavement he reached a hall in the lower story. The hall was spacious and its ceiling rested on a number of short thick columns.

Samentu put down his basket and, lighting two torches, began by the light of them to read inscriptions on the walls.

“Despite my wretched figure,” declared one inscription, “I am a real son of the gods, for my anger is terrible.

“In the open air I turn to a column of fire, and I am lightning. Confined I am thunder and destruction, and no building can resist me.

“Nothing can weaken me but sacred water which takes my force away. But my anger is roused as well by the smallest spark as by a flame.

“In my presence everything is twisted and broken. I am like Typhon, who overturns the highest trees and lifts rocks from their places.”

“In one word, every temple has its secret which others do not know,” thought Samentu.

He opened one column and took a large pot from it. The pot had a cover sealed with wax, also an opening through which passed a long slender cord; it was unknown where this cord ended inside the column. Samentu cut off a piece, touched the torch with it and saw that the cord gave out a hiss and burned quickly. Then with a knife he removed the cover very carefully and saw inside the pot as it were sand and pebbles of an ashen color. He took out a couple of the pebbles and going aside touched them with the torch. In one moment a flame burst forth and the pebbles vanished leaving thick smoke behind and a disagreeable odor. Samentu took some of the ash-colored sand, poured it on the pavement, put in the middle of it a piece of the cord which he had found at the pot, covered all with a heavy stone. Then he touched the cord with his torch, the cord burned and after a while the stone sprang up in a flame.

“I have that son of the gods now!” said Samentu smiling. “The treasure will not be lost.”

He went from column to column to open slabs and take out hidden pots. In each pot was a cord which Samentu cut, the pots he left at one side.

“Well,” said the priest, “his holiness might give me half these treasures and make my son a nomarch—and surely he will do so, for he is a magnanimous sovereign.”

When he had rendered the lower hall safe in this way Samentu returned to the treasure chamber, and hence went to the upper hall. There also were various inscriptions on the walls, numerous columns and in them pots provided with cords and filled with kernels which burst when fire touched them. Samentu cut the cords, removed the pots from the interior of the columns, and tied up in a rag one pinch of the sand. Then being wearied he sat down to rest. Six of his torches were burnt now. The night must have been nearing its end.

“I never should have supposed,” said he to himself, “that those priests had such a wonderful agent. Why, with it they could overturn Assyrian fortresses! Well, we will not tell our own pupils everything either.”

The wearied man fell to thinking. Now he was certain that he would hold the highest position in Egypt, a position higher than that held by Herhor. What would he do? Very much. He would secure wealth and wisdom to his posterity. He would try to gain their secrets from all the temples and this would increase his power immensely; he would secure to Egypt preëminence above Assyria.

The young pharaoh jeered at the gods, that would facilitate to Samentu the establishment of the worship of one god, Osiris, for example; and the union of Phœnicians, Jews, Greeks, and Libyans in one state with Egypt.

Together they would make the canal to join the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. Along that canal they would build fortresses and concentrate a numerous army—all the trade with unknown nations of the Orient and the West would fall into the hands of Egyptians.

They would require an Egyptian fleet and Egyptian sailors. But above all was the need to crush Assyria, which was growing each year more dangerous. It was imperative to stop priestly greed and excesses. Let priests be sages, let them have a sufficiency, but let them serve the state instead of using it for their own profit as at present.

“In the month Hator,” thought Samentu, “I shall be ruler of Egypt! The young lord loves women and warriors too well to labor at governing. And if he has no son, then my son, my son—”

He came to himself. One more torch had burnt out; it was high time to leave those underground chambers.

He rose, took his basket and left the hall above the treasure.

“I need no assistance,” thought he, laughing. “I have secured everything—I alone—I, the despised priest of Set!”

He had passed a number of tens of chambers and corridors when he halted on a sudden. It seemed to him that on the pavement of the hall to which he was going he saw a small streak of light.

In one moment such dreadful fear seized the man that he put out his torch. But the streak of light on the pavement had vanished. Samentu strained his hearing, but he heard only the throbbing of his own temples.

“That only seemed to me!” said he.

With a trembling hand he took out of the basket a small vessel in which punk was burning slowly, and he lighted the torch again.

“I am very drowsy,” thought he. Looking around the chamber he went to a wall in which a door was hidden. He pushed a nail; the door did not slip back. A second, a third pressure—no effect.

“What does this mean?” thought Samentu in amazement.

He forgot now the streak of light. It seemed to him that a new thing, unheard of, had met him. He had opened in his life so many hundreds of secret doors, he had opened so many in the labyrinth, that he could not understand simply the present resistance. Terror seized him a second time. He ran from wall to wall and tried secret doors everywhere. At last one opened. He found himself in an immense hall, filled as usual with columns. His torch lighted barely a part of the space, the remainder of it was lost in thick darkness.

The darkness, the forest of columns, and above all the strangeness of the hall gave the priest confidence. At the bottom of his fear a spark of naive hope was roused then. It seemed to him that since he did not know the place himself no one else knew it, and that no man would meet him in that labyrinth.

He was pacified somewhat and felt that his legs were bending under him; so he sat down. But again he sprang up and looked around, as if to learn whether danger was really threatening, and whence. From which of those dark corners would it come out to rush at him?

Samentu was acquainted as no other man in Egypt with subterranean places, with going astray, and with darkness. He had passed also through many alarms in his life. But that which he experienced then was something perfectly new and so terrible that the priest feared to give its own name to it.

At last, with great effort, he collected his thoughts, and said,—

“If indeed I have seen a light—if indeed some one has closed the doors, I am betrayed. In that case what?”

“Death!” whispered a voice hidden in the bottom of his soul somewhere.

“Death?”

Sweat came out on his face, his breath stopped. All at once the madness of fear mastered him. He ran through the chamber and struck his fist against the wall, seeking an exit. He forgot where he was and how he had got there; he lost his direction, and even the power of taking bearings with the bead-string.

All at once he felt that in him were two persons, so to speak: one really bewildered, the other wise and self-possessed. This wise man explained to himself that all might be imagination, that no one had discovered him, that no one was searching, and that he could escape if he would recover somewhat. But the first, the bewildered man, would not listen to the voice of wisdom; on the contrary, he gained on his internal antagonist every moment.

Oh, if he could only hide in some column! Let them seek then— Though surely no one would seek, and no one would find him, while self-command would come again to him.

“What can happen to me here?” said he, shrugging his shoulders. “If I calm myself they can chase me through the whole labyrinth. To cut off all the roads there would have to be many thousand persons, and to indicate what cell I am in a miracle would be needed! But let us suppose that they seize me. Then what? I will take this little vial here, put it to my lips, and in one moment I shall flee away so that no one could catch me—not even a divinity.”

But in spite of reasoning, such terrible fear seized the man again that he put out the torch a second time, and trembling, his teeth chattering, he pushed up to one of the columns.

“How was it possible—how could I decide to come in here?” thought Samentu. “Had I not food to eat, a place on which to lay my head? It is a simple thing, I am discovered! The labyrinth has a multitude of overseers as watchful as dogs, and only a child, or an idiot, would think of deceiving them. Property—power! Where is the treasure for which it would be worth while for a man to give one day of his life? And here, I, a man in the bloom of existence, have exposed myself.”

It seemed to him that he heard heavy knocking. He sprang up and in the depth of the chamber he saw a gleam of light.

Yes!—a real gleam of light, not an illusion. At a distant wall, somewhere at the end, stood an open door through which at that moment armed men were coming in carefully with torches.

At sight of this the priest felt a chill in his feet, in his heart, in his head. He doubted no longer that he was not merely discovered, but hunted and surrounded.

Who could have betrayed him? Of course only one man: the young priest of Set, whom he had acquainted minutely enough with his purposes. The traitor, if alone, would have had to look almost a month for the way to the treasure, but if he had agreed with the overseers they might in one day track out Samentu.

At that moment the high priest felt the impressions known only to men who are looking at death face to face. He ceased to fear since his imagined alarms had now vanished before real torches. Not only did he regain self-command, but he felt immensely above everything living. In a short time he would be threatened no longer by danger of any sort.

The thoughts flew through his head with lightning clearness and speed. He took in the whole of his existence: his toils, his perils, his hopes, his ambitions, and all of those seemed to him a trifle. For what would it serve him to be at that moment the pharaoh, or to own every treasure in all kingdoms? They were vanity, dust, and even worse—an illusion. Death alone was all-mighty and genuine.

Meanwhile the torch-bearers were examining columns most carefully, and also every corner; they had passed through half the immense hall. Samentu saw even the points of their lances, and noted that the men hesitated and advanced with alarm and repulsion. A few steps behind them was another group of persons to whom one torch gave light. Samentu did not even feel aversion toward them, he was only curious as to who could have betrayed him. But even that point did not concern him over-much, for incomparably more important then seemed the question: Why must he die, and why had he been brought into existence? For with death present as a fact a whole lifetime is shortened into one painful minute even though that life were the longest of all and the richest in experience.

“Why was he alive? For what purpose?”

He was sobered by the voice of one of the armed men,—

“There is no one here, and cannot be.”

They halted. Samentu felt that he loved those men, and his heart thumped within him.

The second group of persons came up; among them there was a discussion,—

“How can even thou, worthiness, suppose that some one has entered?” asked a voice quivering with anger. “All the entrances are guarded, especially now. And even if any one stole in it would be only to die here of hunger.”

“But, worthiness, see how this Lykon bears himself,” answered another voice. “The sleeping man looks all the time as if he felt an enemy near him.”

“Lykon?” thought Samentu. “Ah, that Greek who is like the pharaoh. What do I see? Mefres has brought him!”

At this moment the sleeping Greek rushed forward and stopped at the column behind which Samentu was hidden. The armed men ran after him, and the gleam of their torches threw light on the dark figure of Samentu.

“Who is here?” cried, with a hoarse voice, the leader.

Samentu stood forth. The sight of him made such a powerful impression that the torch-bearers withdrew. He might have passed out between them, so terrified were they, and no one would have detained him; but the priest thought no longer of rescue.

“Well, has my man with second sight been mistaken?” said Mefres, pointing at his victim. “There is the traitor!”

Samentu approached him with a smile, and said,—

“I recognize thee by that cry, Mefres. When thou canst not be a cheat, thou art merely an idiot.”

Those present were astounded. Samentu spoke with calm irony.

“Though it is true that at this moment thou art both cheat and fool. A cheat, for thou art trying to persuade the overseers of the labyrinth that this villain has the gift of second sight; and a fool, for thou thinkest that they believe thee. Better tell them that in the temple of Ptah there are detailed plans of the labyrinth.”

“That is a lie!” cried Mefres.

“Ask those men whom they believe: thee, or me? I am here because I found plans in the temple of Set; thou hast come by the grace of the immortal Ptah,” concluded Samentu, laughing.

“Bind that traitor and liar!” cried Mefres.

Samentu moved back a couple of steps, drew forth quickly from under his garment a vial, and said, while raising it to his lips,—

“Mefres, thou wilt be an idiot till death. Thou hast wit only when it is a question of money.”

He placed the vial between his lips and fell to the pavement.

The armed men rushed to the priest and raised him, but he had slipped through their fingers already.

“Let him stay here, like others,” said the overseer of the labyrinth.

The whole retinue left the hall and closed the open doors carefully. Soon they issued forth from the edifice.

When the worthy Mefres found himself in the court he commanded the priests to make ready the mounted litters, and rode away with the sleeping Lykon to Memphis.

The overseers of the labyrinth, dazed by the uncommon events, looked now at one another, and now at the escort of Mefres, which was disappearing in a yellow dust cloud.

“I cannot believe,” said the chief overseer, “that in our days there was a man who could break into the labyrinth.”

“Your worthiness forgets that this day there were three such,” interrupted one of the younger priests looking askance at him.

“A—a—true!” answered the high priest. “Have the gods disturbed my reason?” said he, rubbing his forehead and pressing the amulet on his breast.

“And two have fled,” added the younger priest.

“Why didst thou not turn my attention to that in the labyrinth?” burst out the superior.

“I did not know that things would turn out as they have.”

“Woe is on my head!” cried the high priest. “Not chief should I be at this edifice, but gatekeeper. We were warned that some one was stealing in, but now we have let out two of the most dangerous, who will bring now whomever it may please them—O woe!”

“Thou hast no need, worthiness, to despair,” said another priest. “Our law is explicit. Send four or six of our men to Memphis, and provide them with sentences. The rest will be their work.”

“I have lost my reason,” complained the high priest.

“What has happened is over,” interrupted the young priest, with irony. “One thing is certain: that men who not only reach the vaults, but even walk through them as through their own houses, may not live.”

“Then select six from our militia.”

“Of course! It is necessary to end this,” confirmed the overseers.

“Who knows if Mefres did not act in concert with the most worthy Herhor?” whispered some one.

“Enough!” exclaimed the high priest. “If we find Herhor in the labyrinth we will act as the law directs. But to make guesses, or suspect, any one is not permitted. Let the secretaries prepare sentences for Mefres and Lykon. Let those chosen hurry after them, and let the militia strengthen the watch. We must also examine the interior of the edifice and discover how Samentu got into it, though I am sure that he will have no followers in the near future.”

A couple of hours later six men had set out for Memphis.

Chapter LXIV

ON the eighteenth day of Paofi chaos had begun. Communication was interrupted between Lower and Upper Egypt; commerce had ceased; on the Nile moved only boats on guard, the roads were occupied by troops marching toward those cities which contained the most famous temples.

Only the laborers of the priests were at work in the fields. On the estates of nobles and nomarchs, but especially of the pharaoh, flax was unpulled, clover uncut; there was no one to gather in grapes. The common people did nothing but prowling about in bands; they sang, ate, drank, and threatened either priests or Phœnicians. In the cities all shops were closed, and the artisans who had lost their occupation counselled whole days over the reconstruction of Egypt. This offensive spectacle was no novelty, but it appeared in such threatening proportions that the tax-gatherers, and even the judges began to hide, especially as the police treated all offences of common men very mildly.

One thing more deserved attention: the abundance of food and wine. In dramshops and cook houses, especially of the Phœnicians, as well in Memphis as in the provinces, whoso wished might eat and drink what he pleased at a very low price, or for nothing. It was said that his holiness was giving his people a feast which would continue a whole month in every case.

Because of difficult and even interrupted communication the cities were not aware of what was happening in neighboring places. Only the pharaoh, or still better the priests, knew the general condition of the country.

The position was distinguished, first of all, by a break between Upper, or Theban, and Lower, or Memphian Egypt. In Thebes partisans of the priesthood were stronger, in Memphis adherents of the pharaoh. In Thebes people said that Rameses XIII. had gone mad, and wished to sell Egypt to Phœnicians; in Memphis they explained that the priests wished to poison the pharaoh and bring in Assyrians. The common people, as well in the north as the south, felt an instinctive attraction toward the pharaoh. But the force of the people was passive and tottering. When an agitator of the government spoke, the people were ready to attack a temple and beat priests, but when a procession appeared they fell on their faces and were timid while listening to accounts of disasters which threatened Egypt in that very month of Paofi.

The terrified nobles and nomarchs had assembled at Memphis to implore the pharaoh for rescue from the rebelling multitude. But since Rameses enjoined on them patience, and did not attack the rabble, the magnates began to take counsel with the adherents of the priesthood.

It is true that Herhor was silent, or enjoined patience also; but other high priests proved to the nobles that Rameses was a maniac, and hinted at the need of deposing him.

In Memphis itself two parties were facing each other. The godless who drank, made an uproar, threw mud at temples and even at statues, and the pious, mainly old men and women who prayed on the streets, prophesied misfortune aloud and implored all the divinities for rescue. The godless committed outrages daily; each day among the

pious health returned to some sick man or cripple. But for a wonder neither party, in spite of roused passions, worked harm on the other, and still greater wonder neither party resorted to violence, which came from this, that each was disturbed by direction, and according to plans framed in higher circles.

The pharaoh, not having collected all his troops and all his proofs against the priests, did not give the order yet for a final attack on the temples; the priests seemed waiting for something. It was evident, however, that they did not feel so weak as in the first moments after the voting by delegates. Rameses himself became thoughtful when men reported from every side that people on the lands of the priests did not mix in disturbances at all, but were working.

“What does this mean?” asked the pharaoh of himself. “Do the shaven heads think that I dare not touch temples, or have they means of defence quite unknown to me?”

On the 19th of Paofi a police official informed Rameses that the night before people had begun to break the walls inclosing the temple of Horus.

“Did ye command them to do that?” inquired the pharaoh.

“No. They began of their own accord.”

“Restrain them mildly—restrain them,” said Rameses. “In a few days they may do what they like. But now let them not act with great violence.”

Rameses, as a leader and victor at the Soda Lakes, knew that once men attack in a multitude nothing has power to restrain them; they must break or be broken. Unless the temples defend themselves the multitude will take them; but if they defend themselves? In that case the people will flee and there will be need to send warriors, of whom there were many it is true, but not so many as would be needed, according to the pharaoh’s own reckoning. Moreover, Hiram had not returned from Pi-Bast yet with letters proving the treason of Mefres and Herhor. And what was more important, the priests who sided with the pharaoh were to assist the troops only on Paofi 23d. By what means then could he forewarn them in temples which were so numerous and so distant from one another? And did not caution itself command him to avoid relations which might betray them?

For these reasons Rameses did not wish an earlier attack on the temples.

Meanwhile the disturbance increased in spite of the pharaoh. Near the temple of Isis a number of pious persons were slain who predicted misfortune to Egypt, or who had recovered their health by a miracle. Near the temple of Ptah the multitude rushed on a procession, struck down the priests, and broke the holy boat in which the god was advancing. Almost at the same time messengers flew in from the cities of Sochem and Anu with news that people were breaking into the temples, and that in Cherau they had even broken in and desecrated the most holy places.

Toward evening a deputation of priests came, almost by stealth, to the palace of his holiness; the revered prophets fell at his feet, weeping, crying out to him to defend the gods and their sanctuaries.

This altogether unexpected event filled the heart of Rameses with great delight and still greater pride. He commanded the delegates to rise, and answered graciously that his regiments would be always ready to defend the temples when conducted into them.

"I have no doubt," said he, "that the rioters themselves will withdraw when they see the dwellings of the gods occupied by the army."

The delegates hesitated.

"It is known to thee, holiness," answered the chief, "that the army may not enter the inclosure of a temple. We must ask, therefore, what the high priests have to say."

"Very well, take counsel," answered the sovereign. "I cannot perform miracles, and I cannot defend temples from a distance."

The saddened delegates left the pharaoh, who after their departure summoned a confidential council. He was convinced that the priests would yield to his will, and it did not even occur to him that the delegation itself was a trick arranged by Herhor to lead him into error.

When the civil and military officials had assembled in the pharaoh's chamber Rameses began,—

"I thought," said he, proudly, "to occupy the temples of Memphis only on the 23d, but I consider it better to do so to-morrow."

"Our troops have not assembled yet," objected Tutmosis.

"And we have not Herhor's letters to Assyria," added the chief scribe.

"Never mind!" answered the pharaoh. "Proclaim to-morrow that Herhor and Mefres are traitors, and we will show the nomarchs and priests the proofs three days later when Hiram returns from Pi-Bast to us."

"Thy new command, holiness, will change the first one greatly," said Tutmosis. "We shall not occupy the labyrinth to-morrow. If the temples in Memphis make bold to resist, we have not even rams to break down the gates."

"Tutmosis," answered the pharaoh, "I might not explain my commands, but I wish to convince thee that my heart estimates the course of events more profoundly. If people attack the temples to-day they will wish to break into them to-morrow. Unless we support them they will be repulsed, and will be discouraged in every case from deeds of daring. The priests send a delegation to-day, hence they are weak. Meanwhile the number of their adherents among the common people may be greater some days hence. Enthusiasm and fear are like wine in a pitcher; it decreases in proportion as it is poured out, and only he can drink who puts his goblet under in season. If the people are ready to attack to-day and the enemy is frightened, let us make use of the situation, for, as I say, luck may leave us in a few days, or may turn against us."

"And provisions will be exhausted," added the treasurer. "In three days the people must return to work, for we shall not have the wherewithal to feed them."

"Oh, seest thou," continued the pharaoh to Tutmosis. "I myself have commanded the chief of police to restrain the people. But it is impossible to restrain them, we must make a movement. An experienced sailor struggles neither with wind nor current, but he lets them bear him in the direction which they have taken."

At this moment a courier came in with news that the people had fallen upon foreigners. They had assaulted Greeks, Assyrians, but especially Phœnicians. They had plundered many shops and slain a number of persons.

“Here is proof,” cried the excited pharaoh, “that we should not turn a crowd from the road it has taken. Let the troops be near the temples to-morrow, and let them march in if the people begin to burst into them, or—or if they begin to withdraw under pressure.

“It is true that grapes should be gathered in the month Paofi; but is there a gardener, who if his fruit were ripe a month earlier, would leave it on the vines to wither?

“I repeat this: I wished to delay the movement of the people till we had finished preparations. But if it is impossible to delay, let us raise our sails and use the wind which is blowing. Ye must arrest Herhor and Mefres to-morrow and bring them to the palace. In a few days we will finish with the labyrinth.”

The members of the council recognized that the decision of the pharaoh was proper, and they departed admiring his promptness and wisdom. Even generals declared that it was better to use the occasion at hand than to have forces ready when the time had passed in which to use them.

It was night. Another courier rushed in from Memphis with information that the police had been able to protect foreigners, but that the people were excited and it was unknown what they might attempt on the morrow.

Thenceforth courier arrived after courier. Some brought news that a great mass of men armed with clubs and axes were moving toward Memphis from every direction. From somewhere else information came that people in the region of Peme, Sochem, and On, were fleeing to the fields and crying that the end of the world would come the day following. Another courier brought a letter from Hiram that he would arrive very soon. Another announced the stealthy advance of temple regiments to Memphis, and, what was more important, that from Upper Egypt were moving strong divisions of people and troops hostile to the Phœnicians, and even to his holiness.

“Before they arrive,” thought the pharaoh, “I shall have the high priests in my hands and even the regiments of Nitager—now some days late in arriving.”

Finally information was brought that troops had seized here and there on the highways, disguised priests who were trying to reach the palace of his holiness, no doubt with evil purpose.

“Bring them here,” answered Rameses, laughing. “I wish to see men who dare to form evil plans against the pharaoh.”

About midnight the revered queen, Nikotris, desired an audience of his holiness.

The worthy lady was pale and trembling. She commanded the officers to leave the pharaoh’s chamber, and when alone with her son she said, weeping,—

“My son, I bring thee very bad omens.”

“I should prefer, queen, to hear accurate information of the strength and intention of my enemies.”

“This evening the statue of the divine Isis in my chapel turned its face to the wall, and water became blood-red in the sacred cistern.”

“That proves,” replied the pharaoh, “that there are traitors in the palace. But they are not very dangerous if they are able only to defile water and turn statues back forward.”

"All our servants," continued the queen, "all the people are convinced that if thy army enters the temples, great misfortune will fall upon Egypt."

"A greater misfortune," said the pharaoh, "is the insolence of the priesthood. Admitted by my ever-living father to the palace, they think to-day that they have become its owners. But by the gods, what shall I become at last in presence of their all-mightiness? And shall I not be free to claim my rights as a sovereign?"

"At least—at least," said the lady after a while, "be gracious. Yes, thou must claim thy rights, but do not permit thy soldiers to violate holy places and do injustice to the priesthood. Remember that the gracious gods send down delight on Egypt, and the priests in spite of their errors (who is without them) have rendered incomparable services to this country. Only think, if thou shouldst impoverish and dismiss them, thou wouldst destroy wisdom which has raised our kingdom above all others."

The pharaoh took his mother by both hands, kissed her, and replied, smiling,—

"Women must always exaggerate. Thou art speaking to me, mother, as if I were the chief of wild Hyksos, and not a pharaoh. Do I wish injustice to the priests? Do I hate their wisdom, even such barren wisdom as that of investigating the course of the stars which move in the heavens without our aid, and do not enrich us one uten? Neither their wisdom nor their piety troubles me, but the wretchedness of Egypt, which within is growing weak from hunger, and without is afraid of any threat from Assyria. Meanwhile the priests, in spite of their wisdom, not merely do not wish to help me in my measures, but they present resistance in the most dangerous manner.

"Let me, mother, convince them that not they, but I am the master of my own heritage. I should not be able to take revenge on the submissive, but I will trample on the necks of the insolent.

"They know this, but still do not trust, and—with a lack of real power—they wish to frighten me by declaring some misfortune. That is their last resource and weapon. When they understand that I do not fear their terrors they will submit. And then not a stone will fall from their temples, or one ring be lost from their treasures.

"I know those men! To-day they put on a great front, for I am far from them. But when I stretch out a bronze fist they will fall on their faces, and all this confusion will end in general prosperity and contentment."

The queen embraced his feet and went out comforted, imploring him, however, to respect the gods and spare their servants.

After the departure of his mother he summoned Tutmosis.

"To-morrow," said the pharaoh, "my troops will occupy the temples. But tell the commanders of regiments, let them know that it is my will, that the holy places must be inviolate, and that no one is to raise a hand on any priest in Egypt."

"Even on Mefres and Herhor?" inquired Tutmosis.

"Even on them. They will be punished enough when they are put out of their present positions; they will live in learned temples to pray and investigate wisdom without hindrance."

"It will be as thou commandest, holiness—though—"

Rameses raised his finger in sign that he did not wish to hear arguments. And then, to change the conversation, he said, with a smile,—

“Dost thou remember, Tutmosis, the manœuvres at Pi-Bailos? Two years have passed. When I was angry then at the insolence and greed of the priests, couldst thou think that I should reckon with them so early? But poor Sarah—and my little son. How beautiful he was!”

Two tears rolled down the pharaoh’s cheeks.

“Indeed, if I were not a son of the gods, who are magnanimous and merciful, my enemies would pass through grievous hours to-morrow. How many humiliations have they put on me! How often have my eyes grown dark from weeping!”

Chapter LXV

ON the 20th of Paofi Memphis looked as it might during a great solemn festival. All occupations had ceased; even carriers were not bearing burdens. The whole population had come out on the streets, or had collected around the temples,—mainly around the temple of Ptah, which was the best defended, and where the spiritual dignitaries had come together, also those lay officials who were under the direction of Herhor and Mefres.

Near the temples troops were posted in loose rank, so that the warriors might come to an understanding with the populace.

Among the common people and the army circulated many hucksters, with baskets of bread and with pitchers and skin bags in which there was wine. They entertained free of charge. When any one asked them why they took no pay, some answered that his holiness was entertaining his subjects, while others said,—

“Eat and drink, right-believing Egyptians, for it is unknown whether we shall see tomorrow!”

These were hucksters in the service of the priesthood.

A multitude of agents were circling about. Some proved to listeners that the priests were rebelling against their lord, and even wanted to poison him, because he had promised the seventh day for rest. Others whispered that the pharaoh had gone mad, and had conspired with foreigners to destroy the temples and Egypt. The first encouraged the people to attack the temples where the priests and nomarchs were arranging to oppress laborers and artisans; the others expressed fear that if the people attacked the temples some great misfortune might fall on them.

Under the walls of Ptah were a number of strong beams, and piles of stones brought, it was unknown from what quarter.

The serious merchants of Memphis, passing among the crowds, had no doubt that the popular disturbance was called forth artificially. Inferior scribes, policemen, overseers of laborers, and disguised decurions denied neither their official positions, nor this, that they were urging the people to occupy the temples. On the other side dissectors, beggars, temple servants and inferior priests, though they wished to conceal their identity, were unable to do so, and each one who was endowed with perception saw that they were urging the people to violence. The thinking citizens of Memphis were astonished at this action of partisans of the priesthood, and the people began to fall away from their zeal of yesterday. Genuine Egyptians could not understand what the question was, or who was really calling forth disturbance. The chaos was increased by half-frenzied zealots, who, running about the streets naked, wounded themselves till the blood flowed, and cried,—

“Woe to Egypt! Impiety has passed its measure and the hour of judgment is coming! O gods show your power over the insolence of injustice.”

The troops bore themselves calmly, waiting till the people should break into the temples. For an order to that effect had come from the palace; and on the other the

officers foresaw ambushes in the temples, and preferred that men of the crowd should perish rather than warriors, who would be sufficiently occupied in every case.

But in spite of the shouts of agitators, and wine given for nothing, the crowd hesitated. Laborers looked at the artisans; the artisans and all were waiting for something.

Suddenly, about one in the afternoon, from side streets a drunken band poured forth toward the temple of Ptah; it was armed with poles and axes and was made up of fishermen, Greek sailors, shepherds, and Libyan vagrants, even convicts from the quarries in Turra. At the head of this band went a laborer of gigantic stature, with a torch in his hand. He stood before the gate of the temple and cried with an immense voice to the people,—

“Do ye know, right believers, what the high priests and the nomarchs are preparing here? They wish to force his holiness, Rameses XIII., to deprive laborers of a barley cake a day, and to impose new taxes on the people, a drachma each man. I say, then, that ye are committing a low and stupid deed by standing here with your arms crossed. We must catch these temple rats at last and give them into the hands of our lord, the pharaoh, against whom these godless wretches are conspiring. If our lord yields to priests, who will take the part of honest people?”

“He speaks truth!” called out voices from the multitude.

“Our lord will command to give us the seventh day for rest.”

“And will give us land.”

“He had compassion always for the common people. Remember how he freed those who, two years ago, were under judgment for attacking the house of the Jewess.”

“I myself saw him beat a scribe, when the man was dragging an unjust tax from laborers.”

“May he live through eternity, our lord, Rameses XIII., the guardian of oppressed laborers!”

“But look!” called out some voice from afar, “the cattle are coming from pasture, as if evening were near.”

“What cattle! Go on against the priests!”

“Hei, ye!” cried the giant at the temple gate. “Open to us of your own will, so that we may know what the high priests and the nomarchs are counselling!”

“Open, or we will break the gate!”

“A wonderful thing,” said people from afar; “the birds are going to sleep. But it is only midday.”

“Something evil has happened in the air!”

“O gods, night is coming, and I haven’t pulled salad for dinner,” said some girl.

But these remarks were drowned by the uproar of the drunken band, and the noise of beams striking the bronze gate of the temple. If the crowd had been less occupied with the violent deeds of the attackers, they would have seen that something unusual was happening in nature. The sun was shining, there was not one cloud in the sky, and still the brightness of the day had begun to decrease and there was a breath of coolness.

“Give us another beam!” cried the attackers of the temple. “The gate is giving way!”

“Powerfully! Once more!”

The crowd looking on roared like a tempest. Here and there men began to separate from the throng and join the attackers. At last a whole mass of people pushed slowly toward the temple.

Though but just past midday, gloom increased. In the gardens of the temple the cocks began to crow. But the rage of the throng was so great now that few noticed the change.

“Look ye!” cried some beggar. “Behold the day of judgment is coming—O gods—”

He wished to speak on, but struck on the head by a club he fell prostrate.

On the walls of the temple naked but armed figures began to climb up. Officers called the warriors to arms, certain that soon they would have to support the attack of the multitude.

“What does this mean?” whispered warriors, looking at the sky. “There is not a cloud, still the world looks as it does in the time of a tempest.”

“Strike! break!” shouted men near the temple.

The sound of beams was more and more frequent.

At that moment on the terrace above the gate appeared Herhor. He was surrounded by a retinue of priests and civil dignitaries. The most worthy high priest was in a golden robe, and wore the cap of Amenhôtep with its regal serpent.

Herhor looked at the enormous masses of people who surrounded the temple, and bending toward the band of stormers, he said to them,—

“Whoever ye are, right believers or unbelievers, leave this temple in peace, in the name of the gods I summon you.”

The uproar of the people ceased suddenly, and only the pounding of the beams against the bronze gate was audible. But soon even that ceased.

“Open the gate!” cried the giant from below. “We wish to see if ye are forging treason against the pharaoh.”

“My son,” replied Herhor, “fall on thy face and implore the gods to forgive thee thy sacrilege.”

“Ask thou the gods to shield thee!” cried the leader of the band, and taking a stone he threw it toward the high priest.

At the same time, from a window of the pylon shot out a small stream which seemed to be water, and which struck the giant’s face. The bandit tottered, threw up his hands, and fell.

Those nearest him gave out a cry of fear, whereupon the farther ranks, not seeing what had happened, answered with laughter and curses.

“Break down the gate!” was heard from the end of the crowd, and a volley of stones flew in the direction of Herhor and his retinue.

Herhor raised both hands, and when the crowd had grown silent again the high priest shouted,—

“O gods! into your protection I give these sacred retreats, against which blasphemers and traitors are advancing!”

A moment later, somewhere above the temple, an unearthly voice was heard,—

“I turn my face from the accursed people and may darkness fall on the earth.”

Then a dreadful thing happened: as the voice rose the sun decreased, and with the last word there was darkness as at night. Stars began to shine in the heavens; instead of the sun was a black disk surrounded with a thin hoop of flame.

An immense cry was rent from a hundred thousand breasts. Those who were storming the gate threw down their beams; common people fell to the earth.

“Oh, the day of punishment and death has come!” cried a shrill voice at the end of the street.

“O gods of mercy! O holy men, ward off this terror!” cried the crowd.

“Woe to armies which carry out the orders of godless commanders!” cried a great voice from the temple.

In answer all the people fell on their faces, and confusion rose in the two regiments standing before the temple. The ranks broke, warriors threw down their weapons and ran toward the river insensate. Some, rushing like blind men, knocked against the walls of houses in the darkness; others fell to the ground and were trampled to death by their comrades. In the course of a few minutes, instead of close columns of warriors, on the square, spears and axes lay scattered about, and at the entrance of the streets were piles of dead and wounded.

“O gods! O gods!” groaned and cried the people, “take pity on the innocent.”

“Osiris!” cried Herhor from the terrace, “have compassion and show thy face to the unfortunate people.”

“At last I hear the prayers of my priests, for I am compassionate,” answered the supernatural voice from the temple.

At that moment the darkness began to disappear, and the sun to regain its brightness.

A new shout, new weeping, and new prayers were heard in the throng. The people, drunk with delight, greeted the sun which had risen from the dead. Men unknown to one another embraced, some persons died, and all crawled on their knees to kiss the sacred walls of the temple.

Above the gate stood the most worthy Herhor, his eyes fixed on the sky, and two priests supporting his holy hands with which he had dissipated darkness, and saved his people from destruction.

Scenes of the same kind with certain changes took place throughout all Lower Egypt. In each city on the 20th of Paofi people had collected from early morning. In each city about midday some band was storming a sacred gate. About one the high priest of the temple, with a retinue, cursed the faithless attackers and produced darkness. But when the throng fled in panic, or fell on the ground, the high priest prayed to Osiris to show his face, and then the light of day returned to the earth again.

In this way, thanks to the eclipse of the sun, the party of the priests, full of wisdom, had shaken the importance of Rameses XIII. in Lower Egypt.

In the course of a few minutes the government of the pharaoh had come, even without knowing it, to the brink of a precipice. Only great wisdom could save it, and an accurate knowledge of the situation. But that was lacking in the pharaoh's palace, where the all-powerful reign of chance had set in at that critical moment.

On the 20th of Paofi his holiness rose exactly at sunrise, and, to be nearer the scene of action, he transferred himself from the main palace to a villa which was hardly an hour's distance from Memphis. On one side of this villa were the barracks of the Asiatic troops, on the other the villa of Tutmosis and his wife, the beautiful Hebron. With their lord came the dignitaries faithful to Rameses, and the first regiment of the guard in which the pharaoh felt unbounded reliance.

Rameses was in perfect humor. He bathed, ate with appetite, and began to hear the reports of couriers who flew in from Memphis every fifteen minutes.

Their reports were monotonous to weariness: The high priests and some of the nomarchs, under the leadership of Herhor and Mefres, had shut themselves up in the temple of Ptah. The army was full of hope, and the people excited. All were blessing the pharaoh, and waiting the order to move on the temple.

When the fourth courier came about nine, and repeated the same words, the pharaoh was frowning.

"What are they waiting for?" asked he. "Let them attack immediately."

The courier answered that the chief band which was to attack and batter down the bronze gate had not arrived yet.

This explanation displeased the pharaoh. He shook his head, and sent an officer to Memphis to hasten the attack.

"What does this delay mean?" asked he. "I thought that my army would waken me with news of the capture of the temple. In such cases prompt action is the condition of success."

The officer rode away, but nothing had changed at the temple of Ptah. The people were waiting for something, but the chief band was not in its place yet. Some other will seemed to delay the execution of the order.

About ten the litter of Queen Nikotris came to the villa occupied by the pharaoh. The revered lady broke into her son's chamber almost with violence, and fell at his feet, weeping.

"What dost thou wish of me, mother?" asked Rameses, hardly hiding his impatience. "Hast thou forgotten that the camp is no place for women?"

"I will not leave thee to-day, I will not leave thee for an instant!" exclaimed the queen. "Thou art the son of Isis, it is true, and she surrounds thee with care. But I should die from fright."

"What threatens me?" inquired the pharaoh, shrugging his shoulders.

"The priest who investigates the stars," said she, tearfully, "declared to a serving woman that thou wilt live and reign a hundred years if this day favors thee."

"Ah! Where is that man who is skilled in my fate?"

"He fled to Memphis," replied the lady.

Rameses thought a while, then he said, smiling,—

“As the Libyans at the Soda Lakes hurled missiles at us, the priests hurl threats to-day. Be calm, mother! Talk is less dangerous than stones and arrows.”

From Memphis a new courier rushed in with a report that all was well, but still the main band was not ready.

On the comely face of the pharaoh appeared signs of anger. Wishing to calm the sovereign, Tutmosis said to him,—

“The people are not an army. They know not how to assemble at a given hour; while marching they stretch out like a swamp, and obey no commands. If the occupation of the temples were committed to regiments they would be in possession at present.”

“What art thou saying, Tutmosis?” cried the queen. “Where has any one heard of Egyptian troops—”

“Thou hast forgotten,” interrupted Rameses, “that according to my commands the troops were not to attack, but defend the temples from attacks of the people.”

“Action is delayed through this also,” answered Tutmosis, impatiently.

“O counsellors of the pharaoh!” burst out the queen. “Your lord acts wisely, appearing as a defender of the gods, and ye, instead of making him milder, urge him to violence.”

The blood rushed to Tutmosis’ head. Fortunately an adjutant called him from the chamber with information that at the gate was an old man who wished to speak with his holiness.

“To-day each man is struggling to get at the pharaoh, as he might at the keeper of a dramshop,” muttered the adjutant.

Tutmosis thought that in the time of Rameses XII. no one would have dared to speak of the ruler in that way. But he feigned not to hear.

The old man whom the watch had detained was Prince Hiram. He wore a soldier’s mantle covered with dust; he was irritated and wearied.

Tutmosis commanded to admit him, and when both were in the garden, he said to him,—

“I judge that thou wilt bathe, worthiness, and change thy dress before I obtain an audience with his holiness?”

Hiram raised his iron-gray brows, and his bloodshot eyes became bloodier.

“From what I have seen,” said he firmly, “I may even not ask for an audience.”

“Hast thou the letters of the high priest to Assyria?”

“What good are those letters, since ye have agreed with the priests?”

“What dost thou say, worthiness?” inquired Tutmosis, starting.

“I know what I say!” replied Hiram. “Ye have obtained tens of thousands of talents from the Phœnicians, as it were for the liberation of Egypt from the power of the priesthood, and to-day in return for that ye are robbing and slaying us. See what is happening from the sea to the First Cataract: your common people are hunting the Phœnicians like dogs, for such is the command of the priesthood.”

“Thou art mad, Phœnician! Our people are taking the temple of Ptah in Memphis.”

Hiram waved his hand.

“They will not take it! Ye are deceiving us, or ye are deceiving yourselves. Ye were to seize, first of all, the labyrinth and its treasure, and that only on the 23d. Meanwhile ye are wasting power on the temple of Ptah, and the labyrinth is lost. What is happening here? Where is mind to be found in this place?” continued the indignant Phœnician. “Why storm an empty building? Ye are attacking it so that the priests may take more care of the labyrinth!”

“We will seize the labyrinth, too,” said Tutmosis.

“Ye will seize nothing, nothing! Only one man could take the labyrinth, and he will be stopped by to-day’s action in Memphis.”

Tutmosis halted on the path.

“About what art thou troubled?” asked he, abruptly.

“About the disorder which reigns here. About this, that ye are no longer a government, but a group of officers and officials whom the priests send whithersoever they wish and whensoever it pleases them. For three days, there is such terrible confusion in Lower Egypt that the people are killing us, your only friends, the Phœnicians. And why is this? Because government has dropped from your hands, and the priests have seized it.”

“Thou speakest thus for thou knowest not the position,” replied Tutmosis. “It is true that the priests thwart us and organize attacks on Phœnicians. But power is in the hands of the pharaoh; events move in general according to his orders.”

“And the attack on the temple of Ptah?” inquired Hiram.

“Was ordered by the pharaoh. I was present at the confidential council, during which the pharaoh gave command to take possession of the temples to-day instead of the 23d.”

“Well, I declare to thee, commander of the guard, that ye are lost, for I know to a certainty that the attack of to-day was decided on at a council of high priests and nomarchs in the temple of Ptah, which was held on Paofi 13.”

“Why should they arrange an attack on themselves?” asked Tutmosis in a jeering voice.

“They must have had some reason for it. And I have convinced myself that they manage their affairs better than ye manage yours.”

Further conversation was interrupted by an adjutant summoning Tutmosis to his holiness.

“But—but,” added Hiram, “your soldiers have stopped on the path the priest Pentuer, who has something important to convey to the pharaoh.”

Tutmosis seized his own head, and sent officers immediately to find Pentuer. Then he ran to the pharaoh, and after a while returned and commanded the Phœnician to follow him.

When Hiram entered the chamber of Rameses he saw Queen Nikotris, the chief treasurer, the chief scribe, and a number of generals. Rameses XIII. was irritated, and walked up and down quickly through the chamber.

“Here we have the misfortune of the pharaoh, and of Egypt!” exclaimed the queen, pointing to the Phœnician.

“Worthy lady,” answered Hiram, without confusion, bowing to her, “time will show who was the faithful and who the evil servant of his holiness.”

Rameses stopped suddenly before Hiram.

“Hast thou the letters of Herhor to Assyria?” inquired he.

The Phœnician drew from under his robe a package, and in silence handed it to the pharaoh.

“This is what I needed!” exclaimed the pharaoh in triumph. “We must declare at once to the people that the high priests are guilty of treason—”

“My son,” interrupted the queen in an imploring voice, “by the shade of thy father I adjure thee; delay this announcement a couple of days. There is need of great caution with gifts from Phœnicia.”

“Holiness,” put in Hiram, “thou mayst even burn these letters. I am in no way concerned with them.”

The pharaoh thought a while, then hid the package in his bosom.

“What hast thou heard in Lower Egypt?” inquired the sovereign.

“They are beating Phœnicians at all points,” replied Hiram. “Our houses are wrecked, our effects stolen, and a number of tens of Phœnicians are slain.”

“I have heard. This is the work of the priests,” said the pharaoh.

“Say, rather, my son, that it comes of the godlessness and extortion of Phœnicians,” interrupted Queen Nikotris.

“For three days the chief of police from Pi-Bast is in Memphis with two assistants, and they are on the trail of the murderer and deceiver Lykon—”

“Who was hidden in Phœnician temples!” cried Nikotris.

“Lykon,” continued Hiram, “whom the high priest Mefres stole from the police and the courts—Lykon, who in Thebes ran naked through the garden as a maniac, counterfeiting thee, holiness.”

“What dost thou tell me?” cried the pharaoh.

“Holiness, ask the most revered queen if she saw him,” answered Hiram.

Rameses looked in confusion at his mother.

“Yes,” said she. “I saw that wretch, but I said nothing so as to spare thee pain. I must explain, however, that no one has proof that Lykon was put there by the priests, for the Phœnicians might have done that as well.”

Hiram laughed sneeringly.

“O mother, mother!” cried Rameses, with sorrow. “Is it possible that the priests are dearer to thy heart than I am?”

“Thou art my son and most precious sovereign,” said the queen with enthusiasm, “but I cannot suffer a stranger, an infidel, to cast calumny on the holy order of the priests from which we are both descended. O Rameses,” exclaimed she, falling on her knees, “expel these wicked counsellors who urge thee to insult temples, and raise thy

hand against the successor of thy grandsire, Amenhôtep. There is still time for agreement, still time to save Egypt."

All at once, Pentuer, in torn garments, entered the chamber.

"Well, and what hast thou to say?" inquired the pharaoh, with wonderful calmness.

"To-day, perhaps immediately, there will be an eclipse of the sun."

The pharaoh started back in astonishment.

"How does an eclipse of the sun concern me, especially at this moment?"

"Lord," said Pentuer, "I thought the same till I read in old chronicles of eclipses. An eclipse is such a terrifying spectacle that it was necessary to forewarn the whole people of it—"

"That is the truth!" interrupted Hiram.

"Why didst thou not inform earlier?" inquired Tutmosis.

"The warriors kept me in prison two days. We cannot forewarn the people now, but at least inform the troops at the palace, so that they, too, should not give way to panic."

Rameses clapped his hands.

"Ah, it is too bad!" whispered he, and added aloud. "When will it be, and what will take place?"

"Day will become night," said Pentuer. "This will last as much time, perhaps, as is needed in walking five hundred yards. It will begin at midday, so Menes told me."

"Menes," repeated the pharaoh, "I know that name."

"He wrote thee a letter concerning it, holiness. But let the army know."

Straightway they sounded the trumpets; the guard and the Asiatics were drawn out under arms, and the pharaoh, surrounded by his staff, informed the troops of the eclipse, telling them not to be alarmed, that it would pass soon, and that he would be with them.

"Live through eternity!" answered the armed ranks.

At the same time a number of the best riders were sent to Memphis.

The generals took their places at the head of the columns, the pharaoh walked through the court thoughtfully, the civilians whispered with Hiram; Queen Nikotris, left alone in the chamber, fell on her face before the statue of Osiris.

It was after one. The light of the sun began to lessen.

"Will night come in fact?" asked the pharaoh of Pentuer.

"It will come, but during a very short interval."

"Where will the sun be?"

"It will hide behind the moon."

"I must restore to my favor the sages who investigate stars," said the pharaoh to himself.

The darkness increased quickly. The horses of the Asiatics grew restive, flocks of birds flew into the garden, and occupied all the trees, with noisy twitter.

“Rouse up!” cried Kalippos to the Greeks.

The drums beat, the flutes sounded, and to this accompaniment the Greek soldiers sang a dancing song of the priest’s daughter who was so timid that she could sleep only in the barracks.

Meanwhile an ominous shade fell on the tawny Libyan hills, and covered Memphis, the Nile, and the palace gardens with lightning swiftness. Night embraced the earth, and in the heavens appeared a ball as black as coal surrounded by a rim of brightness.

An immense uproar drowned the song of the Greek regiment. This was caused by the Asiatics, who raised a military shout as they sent a cloud of arrows toward the sky to frighten the evil spirit which was gulping the sun down.

“Dost say that that black ball is the moon?” inquired the pharaoh of Pentuer.

“That is what Menes asserts.”

“He is a great sage! And will the darkness end soon?”

“To a certainty.”

“And if this moon should tear itself away and fall to the earth?”

“That cannot be. Here is the sun!” cried Pentuer, with delight.

The assembled regiments raised a shout in honor of Rameses XIII.

The pharaoh embraced Pentuer. “Indeed,” said he, “we have seen a most wonderful event. But I should not like to see it a second time. I feel that if I had not been a warrior fear would have mastered me.”

Hiram approached Tutmosis, and whispered,—

“Send couriers, worthiness, to Memphis immediately, for I fear that the high priests have done something evil.”

“Dost thou think so?”

Hiram nodded.

“They would not have managed the kingdom so long,” said he, “they would not have buried eighteen dynasties if they had not known how to use events like the present.”

When Rameses had thanked the troops for good bearing in presence of the strange phenomenon, he returned to his villa. He continued thoughtful, he spoke calmly, even mildly, but on his shapely face doubt was evident.

In the pharaoh’s soul there was indeed a grievous struggle. He had begun to understand that the priests possessed powers which he not only had not weighed, but had not noted; he had not even wished to hear of them. In a few moments the priests who followed the movements of stars rose in his eyes immensely, and he said to himself that in every case he should learn this wonderful wisdom which confuses people’s plans so terribly.

Courier after courier flew from the palace to Memphis to learn what had happened during the eclipse. But the couriers did not return, and uncertainty spread its black wings above the retinue of the pharaoh. No one doubted that something evil had happened at the temple of Ptah. More than that, no man dared to draw his own conclusions. It seemed as though the pharaoh and his intimate counsellors were glad

when a minute passed without tidings. Meanwhile Queen Nikotris sat down at the pharaoh's side, and whispered,—

“Let me act, Rameses. Women have served this state more than once. Only remember Queen Nikotris in the sixth dynasty, or Makara who created a fleet on the Red Sea. In our sex there is no lack of mind or of energy, so let me act. If the temple of Ptah is not taken, and the priests are not wronged I will reconcile thee with Herhor. Thou wilt take his daughter as wife, and thy reign will be full of glory. Remember that thy grandfather, the holy Amenhôtep, was also a high priest and a viceroy of the pharaoh, and thou thyself, who knows if thou wouldst be reigning to-day, had the holy order of the priests not desired to have its own blood on the throne. Art thou, too, not obliged to them for dominion?”

The pharaoh as he listened to her, thought all the time that the wisdom of the priests was an immense power, and the struggle with them difficult.

Only about three in the afternoon did the first courier arrive from Memphis, an adjutant of the regiment which had been stationed at the temple. He informed the sovereign that the temple had not been taken because of the anger of the gods; that the people had fled, that the priests were triumphant, and that even in the army disorder had arisen during that brief but terrible darkness.

Then, taking Tutmosis aside, the adjutant declared to him directly that the troops were demoralized; that, because they had fled in a panic, as many were wounded and killed as in a battle.

“What is happening now with the troops?” inquired Tutmosis in consternation.

“Of course,” replied the adjutant, “we were able to rally the men and bring them to order. But we cannot even speak of using them against the temples, especially now when they are occupied with caring for the wounded. At present a warrior is ready to fall to the earth before a shaven head and a panther skin; a long time will pass before any one will dare to cross a sacred gateway.”

“But what are the priests doing?”

“Blessing the warriors, giving food and drink to them, and pretending that the troops are not guilty of attacking the temple; that that was the work of Phœnicians.”

“But do ye permit this demoralization of troops?” exclaimed Tutmosis.

“Well, his holiness commanded us to defend the priests against the multitude. Had we been permitted to occupy the temple we should have done so at ten in the morning, and the high priests now would be sitting in a dungeon.”

At this moment the officer in attendance informed Tutmosis that again some priest had arrived from Memphis, and desired to speak with his holiness.

Tutmosis looked at the guest. He was a man rather young, with a face as if carved out of wood. He said that he had come to the pharaoh from Samentu.

Rameses received the priest, who prostrated himself and gave the pharaoh a ring, at sight of which his holiness grew pallid.

“What does this mean?” asked he.

“Samentu is no longer alive,” replied the priest.

Rameses could not recover his voice for a time. At last he asked,—

“How has this happened?”

“It appears,” replied the priest, “that Samentu was discovered in one of the halls of the labyrinth, and that he poisoned himself to escape torture. It seems that Mefres discovered him through the aid of a certain Greek, who, as they tell us, resembles thee, holiness.”

“Again Mefres and Lykon!” exclaimed Tutmosis in anger. “O lord,” said he, turning to Rameses, “wilt thou never free thyself from those traitors?”

The pharaoh summoned a confidential council again. He called in Hiram, also the priest who had brought the ring from Samentu. Pentuer did not wish to take part in the council, but the worthy queen went herself to it.

“I see,” whispered Hiram to Tutmosis, “that after the expulsion of priests women are to govern Egypt.”

When the dignitaries had assembled, the pharaoh let Samentu’s messenger speak.

The young priest would not talk of the labyrinth, but he explained sufficiently that the temple of Ptah was undefended, and that a few tens of men would suffice to arrest all who were hiding there.

“This man is a traitor!” screamed the queen. “A priest himself, he persuades thee to violence against the priesthood.”

In the face of the messenger no muscle quivered. “Worthy lady,” replied he, “if Mefres destroyed my guardian and master, Samentu, I should be a dog if I sought not revenge. Death for death!”

“This young man pleases me,” whispered Hiram.

Indeed a fresher air seemed to move in the assembly. Generals straightened themselves; civilians looked at the priest with curiosity; even the pharaoh’s face became livelier.

“Listen not to him, my son,” implored Queen Nikotris.

“What dost thou think,” asked the pharaoh on a sudden; “what would the holy Samentu do now were he living?”

“I am sure,” answered the priest, energetically, “that Samentu would go to the temple of Ptah and burn incense to the gods; but he would punish murderers and traitors.”

“And I repeat that thou art the worst of traitors!” cried the queen.

“I only fulfil my duty,” said the priest, unmoved by her language.

“This man is a pupil of Samentu indeed,” said Hiram. “He alone sees what is left us to do, and sees clearly.”

The military and civil dignitaries recognized the correctness of Hiram’s opinion.

“Since we have begun a struggle with the priests,” said the chief scribe, “we should finish it, and finish it to-day when we have letters proving that Herhor was negotiating with the Assyrians, an act which is high treason against Egypt.”

“He is carrying out the policy of Rameses XII.,” said the queen.

“But I am Rameses XIII.,” said the pharaoh impatiently.

Tutmosis rose from his chair.

“My lord,” said he, “let me act. It is very dangerous to continue uncertainty in the government, and it would be folly and crime not to use this occasion. Since this priest says that the temple is not defended, let me go to it with a handful of men whom I will select.”

“I am with thee!” said Kalippos. “According to my experience, an enemy while triumphant is the weakest. If we attack the temple of Ptah immediately—”

“Ye do not need to attack, but go in there as executives of the pharaoh who commands you to imprison traitors,” said the chief scribe. “Even force is not needed. How often does one policeman rush at a crowd of offenders and seize as many as he wishes.”

“My son,” said the queen, “yields to the pressure of your counsels. But he does not wish force; he forbids you to use it.”

“Ha! if that be the case,” said the young priest of Set, “I will tell his holiness one other thing.” He breathed a couple of times deeply, but still he finished in a stifled voice and with effort. “On the streets of Memphis the party of the priests is announcing, that—”

“That what? Speak boldly,” said the pharaoh.

“That thou, holiness, art insane, that thou hast not the ordination of high priest, that thou art not even made pharaoh, and that—it is possible to exclude thee from the throne.”

“That is just what I feared,” whispered Nikotris.

The pharaoh sprang up from his seat.

“Tutmosis!” cried he, in a voice in which his recovered energy was heard. “Take as many troops as thou wishest; go to the temple of Ptah and bring me Herhor and Mefres, accused of high treason. If they are justified I will return my favor; in the opposite case—”

“Hast thou finished?” interrupted the queen.

This time the indignant pharaoh did not answer her, and the officials cried,—

“Death to traitors! When has it begun that in Egypt a pharaoh must sacrifice faithful servants to beg for himself the favor of scoundrels?”

Rameses XIII. confided to Tutmosis the package of letters of Herhor to Assyria, and said in a solemn voice,—

“Till the rebellion of the priests is suppressed, I place my power in the person of Tutmosis, commander of the guards. And do ye listen to him, and do thou, worthy mother, go with thy judgments to him?”

“Wisely and justly has the sovereign acted!” exclaimed the chief scribe. “It does not become a pharaoh to struggle with sedition, and a lack of firm rule might destroy us.”

All the dignitaries inclined before Tutmosis. Queen Nikotris fell at her son’s feet.

Tutmosis, in company with the generals, went out to the court. He commanded the first regiment of the guard to form, and said,—

“I need a few tens of men who are ready to die for the glory of our lord.”

More presented themselves, both men and officers, than were needed, and at the head of them Eunana.

“Are ye prepared for death?” inquired Tutmosis.

“We will die with thee, lord, for his holiness!” exclaimed Eunana.

“Ye will not die, but ye will overcome vile criminals,” replied Tutmosis. “Soldiers belonging to this expedition will become officers, and officers will be advanced two degrees. I say this to you, I, Tutmosis, supreme chief by the will of the pharaoh.”

“Live thou forever!”

Tutmosis commanded to prepare twenty-five two-wheeled chariots of the heavy cavalry, and ordered the volunteers to enter. Then he with Kalippos mounted their horses, and soon the whole retinue turned toward Memphis and vanished in a dust cloud.

When Hiram saw this from the window of a villa, he bowed before the pharaoh and whispered,—

“Now for the first time I believe that thou art not in conspiracy with the high priests.”

“Wert thou mad?” burst out the pharaoh.

“Pardon, sovereign, but the attack on the temple to-day was planned by the priests. How they drew thee into it, holiness, I do not understand to this moment.”

It was five in the afternoon.

Chapter LXVI

AT that same hour to a minute, the priest, watching on the pylon of the temple of Ptah in Memphis, informed the high priests and nomarchs counselling in the hall, that the palace of the pharaoh was giving some signals.

“It seems that his holiness will beg us for peace,” said one of the nomarchs, smiling.

“I doubt that!” answered Mefres.

Herhor ascended the pylon, for they were signalling to him from the palace. Soon he returned and said to those assembled:

“Our young priest has managed very well. At this moment Tutmosis is advancing with some tens of volunteers to imprison or slay us.”

“And wilt thou dare still to defend Rameses?” cried Mefres.

“I must and will defend him, for I swore solemnly to the queen that I would. Were it not for the worthy daughter of the holy Amenhôtep, our position to-day would not be what it is.”

“Well, but I have not sworn,” replied Mefres, and he left the hall.

“What does he wish?” asked one of the nomarchs.

“He is an old man grown childish,” replied Herhor, shrugging his shoulders.

Before six o’clock in the evening a division of the guard approached the temple of Ptah unhindered, and the leader of it knocked at the gate, which was opened immediately. This was Tutmosis with his volunteers.

When the chief entered the temple court he was astonished to see Herhor in the mitre of Amenhôtep, and surrounded only by priests come out to meet him.

“What dost thou wish, my son?” asked the high priest of the chief, who was somewhat confused by the meeting.

Tutmosis mastered himself quickly, and said,—

“Herhor, high priest of Amon in Thebes, because of letters which thou hast written to Sargon, the Assyrian satrap, which letters I have with me, thou art accused of high treason to the state, and must justify thyself before the pharaoh.”

“If the young lord,” answered Herhor calmly, “wishes to learn the object of the policy of the eternally living Rameses XII., let him apply to our Supreme Council and he will receive explanations.”

“I summon thee to follow me at once, unless thou wish that I should force thee,” continued Tutmosis.

“My son, I implore the gods to preserve thee from violence, and from the punishment which thou deservest.”

“Wilt thou go?” asked Tutmosis.

“I wait here for Rameses,” answered Herhor.

“Well, then, remain here, trickster!” cried Tutmosis.

He drew his sword and rushed at Herhor.

At that instant Eunana, who was standing behind the chief, raised an axe and struck Tutmosis with all his might between the neck and the right shoulder blade, so that the blood spurted in every direction. The favorite of the pharaoh fell to the earth almost cut in two.

Some of the warriors with levelled spears rushed at Eunana, but they fell after a brief struggle with their own comrades. Of the volunteers, three-fourths were in the pay of the priesthood.

“May he live, his holiness Herhor, our lord!” cried Eunana, waving his bloody axe.

“May he live through eternity!” repeated the warriors and priests, and all fell on their faces.

The most worthy Herhor raised his hands and blessed them.

On leaving the court of the temple, Mefres went to the underground chamber to Lykon. The high priest at the very threshold drew from his bosom a crystal ball, at the sight of which the Greek fell into anger.

“Would that the earth swallowed you! Would that your corpses might know no rest!” said Lykon, abusing him in a voice which grew lower and lower.

At last he was silent and fell into a trance.

“Take this dagger,” said Mefres, giving the Greek a slender steel blade. “Take this dagger and go to the palace garden. Halt there at the clump of fig trees and wait for him who deprived thee of Kama, and took her away.”

Lykon gritted his teeth in helpless rage.

“And when thou seest him, wake,” concluded Mefres.

He threw over the Greek an officer’s mantle with a cowl, whispered the password into his ear and led him forth to the empty streets of Memphis through a secret door of the temple.

Then Mefres ran with the celerity of youth to the summit of the pylon, and taking in his hand some banners, made signals toward the palace. They saw and understood him, that was evident, for a bitter smile came to the parchment-like face of the high priest.

Mefres put down the banners, left the summit of the pylon and descended slowly. When he reached the pavement he was surrounded by some men in light brown tunics, which were covered by coats in white and black stripes.

“Here is the most worthy Mefres,” said one of them. And all three knelt before the high priest, who raised his hand mechanically, as if to bless them. But he dropped it suddenly, inquiring, “Who are ye?”

“Overseers of the labyrinth.”

“Why have ye barred the way to me?” asked he, and his hand and thin lips began to tremble.

“We need not remind thee, holy man,” said one of the overseers still kneeling, “that some days ago thou wert in the labyrinth, to which thou knowest the way as well as

we, though thou art uninitiated. Thou art too great a sage not to know what our law is in such a case.”

“What does this mean?” exclaimed Mefres in a raised voice. “Ye are murderers sent by Her—”

He did not finish. One of the men seized him by the arms, another passed a kerchief over his head, and a third threw a transparent liquid over his face. Mefres struggled a number of times, and fell. They sprinkled him again. When he was dead they placed him in a niche, pushed into his dead hand a papyrus, and vanished.

Three men dressed similarly chased after Lykon almost the instant that he was pushed out of the temple by Mefres and found himself on the empty street. The men had hidden not far from the door through which the Greek issued, and at first let him pass freely. But soon one of them noted something suspicious in his hand, so they followed.

A wonderful thing! Lykon though in a trance felt, as it were, the pursuit; he turned quickly into a street full of movement, then to a square where a multitude of people were circling about, and then ran to the Nile by Fisher Street. There, at the end of some alley, he found a small boat, sprang into it and began to cross the river with a speed which was remarkable.

He was a couple of hundred yards from the shore when a boat pushed out after him with one rower and three passengers. Barely had these left land when a second boat appeared with two rowers and three passengers also.

Both boats pursued Lykon with stubbornness. In that which had only one rower sat the overseers of the labyrinth, looking diligently at their rivals, as far as was permitted by the darkness, which came soon after sundown.

“Who are those three?” whispered they among themselves. “Since the day before yesterday they have been lurking around the temple, and to-day they are pursuing Lykon. Do they wish to protect him from us?”

Lykon’s small boat reached the other shore. The Greek sprang from it and went swiftly toward the palace garden. Sometimes he staggered, stopped, and seized his head, but after an instant he went forward again, as if drawn by some incomprehensible attraction.

The overseers of the labyrinth landed also, but they were preceded by their rivals.

And a race began which was unique in its kind: Lykon was hurrying toward the palace, like a swift runner; after him were the three unknown men, and the three overseers of the labyrinth.

A few hundred steps from the garden the pursuing groups came together. It was night then, but clear.

“Who are ye?” asked one of the labyrinth men of the others.

“I am the chief of police in Pi-Bast, and, with my centurions, am pursuing a great criminal,” answered one of them.

“We are overseers of the labyrinth and are following the same person.”

The groups looked at each other with hands on their swords or knives.

“What will ye do with him?” asked the chief of police.

“We have a sentence against the man.”

“But will ye leave the body?”

“With all that is on it,” replied the elder overseer.

The police whispered among themselves.

“If ye tell the truth,” said the chief at last, “we shall not hinder you. On the contrary, we will lend him to you for a while, as he will fall into our hands later.”

“Do ye swear?”

“We swear.”

“Then we may go together.”

So they joined forces, but the Greek had vanished.

“Curses on him!” cried the chief of police. “He has escaped again!”

“He will be found,” answered the overseer of the labyrinth, “or perhaps even he will return.”

“Why should he go to the pharaoh’s garden?” asked the chief of police.

“The high priests are using him for some purpose of their own, but he will return to the temple.”

They decided to wait and act in common.

“We are spending the third night for nothing,” said one of the policemen, yawning.

They wrapped themselves in their cloaks and lay on the grass.

Immediately after the departure of Tutmosis, the worthy lady Nikotris, in silence, with lips tightly closed from anger, left the chamber of her son, and when Rameses wished to calm her, she interrupted him sharply,—

“I take leave of the pharaoh, and pray the gods to permit me to see him to-morrow as pharaoh.”

“Dost thou doubt that, mother?”

“It is possible to doubt everything in presence of one who listens to madmen and traitors.”

They parted in anger.

Soon his holiness recovered good-humor and conversed joyously with the officials. But about six o’clock alarm began to torment him.

“Tutmosis ought to send us a courier,” said he. “For I am certain that the affair is already settled in one or another way.”

“I do not know that,” said the chief treasurer. “They may not have found boats at the crossing. There may have been resistance at the temple.”

“But where is that young priest?” asked Hiram on a sudden.

“The priest? The messenger of the late Samentu?” repeated the officials in concern.

“That is true—where can he be?”

Men were sent to search the garden. They searched every path, but there was no priest.

This circumstance made a bad impression on the dignitaries. Each one sat in silence, sunk in alarming thoughts.

About sundown the pharaoh's chamber servant entered and whispered that the lady Hebron was very ill, and implored his holiness to visit her.

The officials, knowing the relations between their lord and the beautiful Hebron, looked at one another. But when the pharaoh announced his purpose of going into the garden they made no protest. The garden, thanks to numerous guards, was as safe as the palace. No one considered it proper to watch over the pharaoh even from a distance, knowing that Rameses did not wish any one to be occupied with him at certain moments.

When he disappeared, the chief scribe said to the treasurer,—

"Time drags on like a chariot in the desert. Perhaps Hebron has some news from Tutmosis."

"At this moment," answered the treasurer, "his expedition with a few tens of men to the temple of Ptah seems to me inconceivable madness!"

"But did the pharaoh act more wisely at the Soda Lakes when he chased all night after Tehenna?" put in Hiram. "Daring means more than numbers."

"But that young priest?" asked the treasurer.

"He came without our knowledge and went without leave," added Hiram. "Each one of us acts like a conspirator."

The treasurer shook his head.

Rameses passed the space between his villa and that of Tutmosis quickly. When he entered her chamber Hebron threw herself on his neck with weeping.

"I am dying of fear!" cried she.

"Art thou alarmed for Tutmosis?"

"What is Tutmosis to me?" answered Hebron, with a contemptuous grimace. "I care for thee only! Of thee only am I thinking,—I am alarmed for thee!"

"Blessed be thy alarm which freed me even for a moment from tedium," said the pharaoh, laughing. "O gods! what a day! If thou hadst heard our discussions, if thou hadst seen the faces of our counsellors! And in addition to all, it pleased the worthy queen to honor our assembly with her presence. Never had I supposed that the dignity of pharaoh could be so annoying."

"Do not say this audibly," cautioned Hebron. "What wilt thou do if Tutmosis does not succeed in seizing the temple?"

"I will take the leadership from him, hide my crown in a box, and put on an officer's helmet," answered Rameses. "I am certain that when I appear at the head of the troops myself the sedition will vanish."

"Which one?" inquired Hebron.

"Ah, true, we have two," laughed Rameses. "That of the people against the priests, that of the priests against me."

He seized Hebron in his arms and went toward the couch whispering,—

"How beautiful thou art to-day! Each time I see thee thou art different,—each time more beautiful than ever."

"Let me go," whispered Hebron. "At times I am afraid that thou wilt bite me."

"Bite?—No! But I might kiss thee to death. Thou dost not even suspect thy own beauty."

"I am beautiful in comparison with ministers and generals. But free me."

"In thy presence I should wish to be like a pomegranate. I should wish to have as many arms as the tree has branches, so as to embrace thee with all of them,—as many hands as it has leaves, and as many lips as it has flowers, so as to kiss thy lips, eyes, and bosom at once with them."

"Thou hast a mind marvellously free of care for a sovereign whose throne is in peril."

"On the couch, I do not care for a throne. While I have a sword I shall have power."

"Thy troops are scattered," said Hebron, defending herself.

"To-morrow fresh troops will come, and after to-morrow I shall gather the scattered ones. I repeat to thee be not occupied with trifles. One moment of fondling is worth more than a year of dominion."

One hour after sunset the pharaoh left Hebron's villa and returned slowly to his palace. He was full of imaginings, he was dreamy, and he thought the high priests were great fools to resist him. Since Egypt became Egypt there had not been a kindlier pharaoh.

All at once, from out a clump of fig trees sprang a man in a dark mantle, and barred the road to Rameses. The pharaoh, to see the man better, approached his face to the face of the stranger and cried suddenly,—

"O wretch, is it thou? Go to the guard house!"

It was Lykon. Rameses seized him by the neck; the Greek hissed and knelt on the ground. At the same moment the pharaoh felt a sharp pain in the left side of his stomach.

"Dost thou bite too?" cried Rameses. He seized the Greek with both hands, and when he heard the cracking of his broken spine he hurled him off in disgust.

Lykon fell quivering in the convulsions of death.

The pharaoh moved back a couple of steps. He examined his body and discovered the handle of a dagger.

"He has wounded me!"

He drew the slender steel from his side and pressed the wound.

"I wonder," thought he, "if any of my counsellors has a plaster?" He felt weak and hurried forward. Right at the palace one of the officers stood before him and said, "Tutmosis is dead; the traitor Eunana slew him."

"Eunana?" repeated the pharaoh. "But what of the others?"

"Almost all the volunteers who went with Tutmosis were sold to the priests."

"Well, I must finish this!" said Rameses. "Sound the trumpets for the Asiatic regiments."

The trumpets sounded, and the Asiatics hurried from the barracks, leading their horses.

“Give me my steed!” said the pharaoh. But he felt a sudden dizziness and added, “No, give me a litter, I should tire myself.”

All at once he tottered into the arms of the officers.

“Oh, I almost forgot,” said Rameses in a dying voice. “Bring my helmet and sword—that steel sword—from the Soda—. Let us go to Memphis—”

Officials and servants ran out of the villa with torches. The pharaoh was supported by officers, his face was pale and his eyes were mist-covered. He stretched forth his hand as if seeking his breastplate, his lips moved, and amid general silence the lord of two worlds, the temporal and the western, breathed his life out.

The dove-eyed goddess Astaroth had avenged the wrong done her priestess.

Chapter LXVII

FROM the death of Rameses XIII. till the day of his burial the state was governed by the most worthy San-Amen-Herhor as high priest of the Theban Amon, and viceroy of the late pharaoh.

The government of the viceroy, lasting some months, was very prosperous for Egypt. Herhor pacified the outbreaks of the people, and, in accordance with former times, he gave the seventh day for rest to the working man. He introduced stern discipline among the priests; he extended protection to foreigners, especially Phœnicians, and concluded a treaty with Assyria, not yielding Phœnicia, however, which remained tributary to Egypt.

In the course of this short government, justice was meted out quickly, but without cruelty, and this or that man did not dare to beat an Egyptian laborer, who had the right to appeal to a court if he had time sufficient and witnesses.

Herhor occupied himself too in paying the debts which weighed on the lands of the state and the pharaoh. With this object he persuaded the Phœnicians to resign a certain part of the sums due them from the treasury, and to cover the rest he drew from the labyrinth the enormous sum of thirty thousand talents.

Thanks to these measures, in the course of three months peace and prosperity were established in Egypt.

“May the rule of the viceroy, San-Amen-Herhor be blessed!” said the people. “Indeed the gods predestined him to power so as to free Egypt from misfortunes brought on by Rameses XIII., who was a woman-hunter and frivolous.”

A few days sufficed the people to forget that all Herhor’s acts were merely the accomplishment of plans made by the young and lofty-minded pharaoh.

In the month Tobi, when the mummy of Rameses XIII. was placed in its tomb, a great assembly of the most important personages met in the temple of Amon. There were present almost all the high priests, nomarchs, and generals of troops, and among them, covered with glory, was the gray-haired chief of the eastern army, Nitager.

In this same gigantic hall of columns, where half a year earlier the priests had judged Rameses XII., and shown dislike for Rameses XIII., those dignitaries assembled to settle the most important question of state, under the presidency of Herhor. On the 25th of Tobi, exactly at noon, Herhor, in the mitre of Amenhôtep, sat on the throne; others sat in armchairs, and the council took place.

It was of wonderfully short duration, just as if the result had been arranged previously.

“High priests, nomarchs, and leaders,” began Herhor. “We have assembled here on sad and important business. With the death of the eternally living Rameses XIII., whose short and stormy reign ended in a manner so unfortunate—” Here Herhor sighed.

“With Rameses XIII. perished not only a pharaoh, but the twentieth dynasty, which was full of glory.”

Among those present rose a murmur.

“The dynasty has not ended,” interrupted the powerful nomarch of Memphis, almost harshly. “The worthy Queen Nikotris is still living, therefore the throne belongs to her.”

After a time Herhor answered: “My most worthy consort, Queen Nikotris—”

Now in the assembly was heard, not a murmur, but a cry, and it lasted a number of minutes. When it ceased Herhor continued calmly and with emphasis:—

“My most worthy consort, Queen Nikotris, inconsolable through sorrow for her son, has abdicated the throne—”

“Permit!” exclaimed the nomarch of Memphis. “The most worthy viceroy has called the queen his consort. This intelligence is entirely new, and, first of all it must be verified.”

At a sign from Herhor the judge of Thebes drew out an act concluded two days before between the most worthy high priest of Amon, San-Amen-Herhor, and Queen Nikotris, widow of Rameses XII., and mother of Rameses XIII.

After this explanation came a grave-like silence. Herhor began again,—

“Since my consort, who is the only heir to the throne, has abdicated, the reign of the twentieth dynasty is ended; we must choose a new sovereign.

“This sovereign,” continued Herhor, “should be a man of ripe years, energetic, and skilled in government. For this reason I advise you to choose for the highest position—”

“Herhor!” cried some one.

“The most famous Nitager, the leader of the eastern army,” finished Herhor.

Nitager sat a long time with closed eyes, smiling. At last he rose, and said,—

“Never will there be a lack of men eager for the title of pharaoh. We have more of them perhaps than are needed. Luckily, the gods themselves, in setting aside useless rivals, have indicated a man most worthy of power, and it seems to me that I shall act wisely if, instead of receiving the crown offered me graciously, I answer,—

“May he live through eternity, his holiness, San-Amen-Herhor, the first pharaoh of a new dynasty!”

Those present, with few exceptions, repeated the shout, and at the same time the supreme judge brought on a golden tray two caps: the white one of Upper, and the red one of Lower Egypt. One of these was taken by the high priest of Osiris, the other by the high priest of Horns, and they delivered them to Herhor, who, when he had kissed the golden serpent, put them both on his head.

Then those present began the ceremony of offering homage, which lasted a couple of hours. After that a proper act was written; those who took part in the election placed their seals on it, and from that moment San-Amen-Herhor was the real pharaoh, the lord of both worlds, also of the life and death of his subjects.

Toward evening his holiness returned wearied to his chambers of a high priest, where he found Pentuer, who had grown thin, and on whose emaciated face weariness and sadness were evident.

When Pentuer prostrated himself the pharaoh raised him and said with a smile,—

“Thou didst not sign my election, thou didst not give me homage, and I fear that I shall have to arrest thee some time in the temple of Ptah. Well, hast thou been thinking to leave me? Dost prefer Menes?”

“Forgive, holiness,” answered the priest, “but court life has so wearied me that my only desire is to learn wisdom.”

“Thou canst not forget Rameses?” inquired Herhor. “And yet thou knewest him only a very short time, while thou hast labored with me during years.”

“Blame me not, holiness, but—Rameses XIII. was the first pharaoh to commiserate the Egyptian people.”

Herhor smiled.

“O ye learned men,” said he, shaking his head. “But it was thou who didst turn the attention of Rameses to the people, and now thou bearest mourning for him in thy heart, though he did nothing whatever for the people. It was thou who commiserated, not he. Ye are strange men, in spite of your powerful minds,” continued Herhor. “It is the same thing with Menes. That priest considers that he is the most peaceful man in Egypt, though it was he who overturned the dynasty and smoothed the road to power for me. Were it not for his letter about the eclipse of the sun on the 20th of Paofi, perhaps I and the late Mefres would be splitting stones now in the quarries.

“Well, go; go and greet Menes for me. Remember also that I know how to be thankful, which is the great secret of ruling. Tell Menes that I shall carry out every wish of his, unless he asks me, for example, to abdicate. Return to me when thou hast rested, I will keep an important place for thee.”

And he touched Pentuer’s head, which was inclined submissively.

THE END

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