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[NOTE: There is a short list of bookmarks, or pointers, at the end of the file for those who may wish to sample the author's ideas before making an entire meal of them. D.W.]

AN EGYPTIAN PRINCESS, Part 2.

By Georg Ebers

Volume 7.

CHAPTER V.

Before the sun had reached his mid-day height, the news of what had happened and of what was still to happen had filled all Babylon. The streets swarmed with people, waiting impatiently to see the strange spectacle which the punishment of one of the king's wives, who had proved false and faithless, promised to afford. The whip-bearers were forced to use all their authority to keep this gaping crowd in order. Later on in the day the news that Bartja and his friends were soon to be executed arrived among the crowd; they were under the influence of the palm-wine, which was liberally distributed on the king's birthday and the following days, and could not control their excited feelings; but these now took quite another form.

Bands of drunken men paraded the streets, crying: "Bartja, the good son of Cyrus, is to be executed!" The women heard these words in their quiet apartments, eluded their keepers, forgot their veils, and rushing forth into the streets, followed the excited and indignant men with cries and yells. Their pleasure in the thought of seeing a more fortunate sister humbled, vanished at the painful news that their beloved prince was condemned to death. Men, women and children raged, stormed and cursed, exciting one another to louder and louder bursts of indignation. The workshops were emptied, the merchants closed their warehouses, and the school-boys and servants, who had a week's holiday on occasion of the king's birthday, used their freedom to scream louder than any one else, and often to groan and yell without in the least knowing why.

At last the tumult was so great that the whip-bearers were insufficient to cope with it, and a detachment of the body-guard was sent to patrol the streets. At the sight of their shining armor and

long lances, the crowd retired into the side streets, only, however, to reassemble in fresh numbers when the troops were out of sight.

At the gate, called the Bel gate, which led to the great western high-road, the throng was thicker than at any other point, for it was said that through this gate, the one by which she had entered Babylon, the Egyptian Princess was to be led out of the city in shame and disgrace. For this reason a larger number of whipbearers were stationed here, in order to make way for travellers entering the city. Very few people indeed left the city at all on this day, for curiosity was stronger than either business or pleasure; those, on the other hand, who arrived from the country, took up their stations near the gate on hearing what had drawn the crowd thither.

It was nearly mid-day, and only wanted a few hours to the time fixed for Nitetis' disgrace, when a caravan approached the gate with great speed. The first carriage was a so-called harmamaxa, drawn by four horses decked out with bells and tassels; a two-wheeled cart followed, and last in the train was a baggage-wagon drawn by mules. A fine, handsome man of about fifty, dressed as a Persian courtier, and another, much older, in long white robes, occupied the first carriage. The cart was filled by a number of slaves in simple blouses, and broad-brimmed felt hats, wearing the hair cut close to the head. An old man, dressed as a Persian servant, rode by the side of the cart. The driver of the first carriage had great difficulty in making way for his gaily-ornamented horses through the crowd; he was obliged to come to a halt before the gate and call some whip-bearers to his assistance. "Make way for us!" he cried to the captain of the police who came up with some of his men; "the royal post has no time to lose, and I am driving some one, who will make you repent every minute's delay."

"Softly, my son," answered the official. "Don't you see that it's easier to-day to get out of Babylon, than to come in? Whom are you driving?"

"A nobleman, with a passport from the king. Come, be quick and make way for us."

"I don't know about that; your caravan does not look much like royalty."

"What have you to do with that? The pass...." "I must see it, before I let you into the city." These words were halfmeant for the traveller, whom he was scrutinizing very suspiciously.

While the man in the Persian dress was feeling in his sleeve for the passport, the whip-bearer turned to some comrades who had just come up, and pointed out the scanty retinue of the travellers, saying: "Did you ever see such a queer cavalcade? There's something odd about these strangers, as sure as my name's Giv. Why, the lowest of the king's carpet-bearers travels with four times as many people, and yet this man has a royal pass and is dressed like one of those who sit at the royal table."

At this moment the suspected traveller handed him a little silken roll scented with musk, sealed with the royal seal, and containing the king's own handwriting.

The whip-bearer took it and examined the seal. "It is all in order," he murmured, and then began to study the characters. But no sooner had he deciphered the first letters than he looked even more sharply than before at the traveller, and seized the horses' bridles, crying out: "Here, men, form a guard round the carriage! this is an impostor."

When he had convinced himself that escape was impossible, he went up to the stranger again and said: "You are using a pass which does not belong to you. Gyges, the son of Croesus, the man you give yourself out for, is in prison and is to be executed to-day. You are not in the least like him, and you will have reason to repent leaving tried to pass for him. Get out of your carriage and follow me."

The traveller, however, instead of obeying, began to speak in broken Persian, and begged the officer rather to take a seat by him in the carriage, for that he had very important news to communicate. The man hesitated a moment; but on seeing a fresh band of whip-bearers come up, he nodded to them to stand before the impatient, chafing horses, and got into the carriage.

The stranger looked at him with a smile and said: "Now, do I look like an impostor?"

"No; your language proves that you are not a Persian, but yet you look like a nobleman."

"I am a Greek, and have come hither to render Cambyses an important service. Gyges is my friend, and lent me his passport when he was in Egypt, in case I should ever come to Persia. I am prepared to vindicate my conduct before the king, and have no reason for fear. On the contrary, the news I bring gives me reason to expect much from his favor. Let me be taken to Croesus, if this is your duty; he will be surety for me, and will send back your men, of whom you seem to stand in great need to-day. Distribute these gold pieces among them, and tell me without further delay what my poor friend Gyges has done to deserve death, and what is the reason of all this crowd and confusion."

The stranger said this in bad Persian, but there lay so much dignity and confidence in his tone, and his gifts were on such a large scale, that the cringing and creeping servant of despotism felt sure he must be sitting opposite to a prince, crossed his arms reverentially, and, excusing himself from his many pressing affairs, began to relate rapidly. He had been on duty in the great hall during the examination of the prisoners the night before, and could therefore tell all that had happened with tolerable accuracy. The Greek followed his tale eagerly, with many an incredulous shake of his handsome head, however, when the daughter of Amasis and the son of Cyrus were spoken of as having been disloyal and false, that sentence of death had been pronounced, especially on Croesus, distressed him visibly, but the sadness soon vanished from his quickly-changing features, and gave place to thought; this in its turn was quickly followed by a joyful look, which could only betoken that the thinker had arrived at a satisfactory result. His dignified gravity vanished in a moment; he laughed aloud, struck his forehead merrily, seized the hand of the astonished captain, and said:

"Should you be glad, if Bartja could be saved?"

"More than I can say."

"Very well, then I will vouch for it, that you shall receive at least two talents, if you can procure me an interview with the king before the first execution has taken place."

"How can you ask such a thing of me, a poor captain? . . ."

"Yes, you must, you must!"

"I cannot."

"I know well that it is very difficult, almost impossible, for a stranger to obtain an audience of your king; but my errand brooks no delay, for I can prove that Bartja and his friends are not guilty. Do you hear? I can prove it. Do you think now, you can procure me admittance?"

"How is it possible?"

"Don't ask, but act. Didn't you say Darius was one of the condemned?"

"Yes."

"I have heard, that his father is a man of very high rank."

"He is the first in the kingdom, after the sons of Cyrus."

"Then take me to him at once. He will welcome me when he hears I am able to save his son."

"Stranger, you are a wonderful being. You speak with so much confidence that . . ."

"That you feel you may believe me. Make haste then, and call some of your men to make way for us, and escort us to the palace."

There is nothing, except a doubt, which runs more quickly from mind to mind, than a hope that some cherished wish may be fulfilled, especially when this hope has been suggested to us by some one we can trust.

The officer believed this strange traveller, jumped out of the carriage, flourishing his scourge and calling to his men: "This nobleman has come on purpose to prove Bartja's innocence, and must be taken to the king at once. Follow me, my friends, and make way for him!"

Just at that moment a troop of the guards appeared in sight. The captain of the whip-bearers went up to their commander, and, seconded by the shouts of the crowd, begged him to escort the stranger to the palace.

During this colloquy the traveller had mounted his servant's horse, and now followed in the wake of the Persians.

The good news flew like wind through the huge city. As the riders proceeded, the crowd fell back more willingly, and louder and fuller grew the shouts of joy until at last their march was like a triumphal procession.

In a few minutes they drew up before the palace; but before the brazen gates had opened to admit them, another train came slowly into sight. At the head rode a grey-headed old man; his robes were brown, and rent, in token of mourning, the mane and tail of his horse had been shorn off and the creature colored blue.—It was Hystaspes, coming to entreat mercy for his son.

The whip-bearer, delighted at this sight, threw himself down before the old man with a cry of joy, and with crossed arms told him what confidence the traveller had inspired him with.

Hystaspes beckoned to the stranger; he rode up, bowed gracefully and courteously to the old man, without dismounting, and confirmed the words of the whip bearer. Hystaspes seemed to feel fresh confidence too after hearing the stranger, for he begged him to follow him into the palace and to wait outside the door of the royal apartment, while he himself, conducted by the head chamberlain, went in to the king.

When his old kinsman entered, Cambyses was lying on his purple couch, pale as death. A cup-bearer was kneeling on the ground at his feet, trying to collect the broken fragments of a costly Egyptian drinking-cup which the king had thrown down impatiently because its contents had not pleased his taste. At some distance stood a circle of court-officials, in whose faces it was easy to read that they were afraid of their ruler's wrath, and preferred keeping as far from him as possible. The dazzling light and oppressive heat of a Babylonian May day came in through the open windows, and not a sound was to be heard in the great room, except the whining of a large dog of the Epirote breed, which had just received a tremendous kick from Cambyses for venturing to fawn on his master, and was the only being that ventured to disturb the solemn stillness. Just before Hystaspes was led in by the chamberlain, Cambyses had sprung up from his couch. This idle repose had become unendurable, he felt suffocated with pain and anger. The dog's howl suggested a new idea to his poor tortured brain, thirsting for forgetfulness.

"We will go out hunting!" he shouted to the poor startled courtiers. The master of the hounds, the equerries, and huntsmen hastened to obey his orders. He called after them, "I shall ride the unbroken horse Reksch; get the falcons ready, let all the dogs out and order every one to come, who can throw a spear. We'll clear the preserves!"

He then threw himself down on his divan again, as if these words had quite exhausted his powerful frame, and did not see that Hystaspes had entered, for his sullen gaze was fixed on the motes playing in the sunbeams that glanced through the window.

Hystaspes did not dare to address him; but he stationed himself in the window so as to break the stream of motes and thus draw attention to himself.

At first Cambyses looked angrily at him and his rent garments, and then asked with a bitter smile; "What do you want?"

"Victory to the king! Your poor servant and uncle has come to entreat his ruler's mercy."

"Then rise and go! You know that I have no mercy for perjurers and false swearers. 'Tis better to have a dead son than a dishonorable one."

"But if Bartja should not be guilty, and Darius . . ."

"You dare to question the justice of my sentence?"

"That be far from me. Whatever the king does is good, and cannot be gainsaid; but still . . ."

"Be silent! I will not hear the subject mentioned again. You are to be pitied as a father; but have these last few hours brought me any joy? Old man, I grieve for you, but I have as little power to rescind his punishment as you to recall his crime."

"But if Bartja really should not be guilty—if the gods . . ."

"Do you think the gods will come to the help of perjurers and deceivers?"

"No, my King; but a fresh witness has appeared."

"A fresh witness? Verily, I would gladly give half my kingdom, to be convinced of the innocence of men so nearly related to me."

"Victory to my lord, the eye of the realm! A Greek is waiting outside, who seems, to judge by his figure and bearing, one of the noblest of his race."

The king laughed bitterly: "A Greek! Ah, ha! perhaps some relation to Bartja's faithful fair one! What can this stranger know of my family affairs? I know these beggarly Ionians well. They are impudent enough to meddle in everything, and think they can cheat us with their sly tricks. How much have you had to pay for this new witness, uncle? A Greek is as ready with a lie as a Magian with his spells, and I know they'll do anything for gold. I'm really curious to see your witness. Call him in. But if he wants to

deceive me, he had better remember that where the head of a son of Cyrus is about to fall, a Greek head has but very little chance." And the king's eyes flashed with anger as he said these words. Hystaspes, however, sent for the Greek.

Before he entered, the chamberlains fastened the usual cloth before his mouth, and commanded him to cast himself on the ground before the king. The Greek's bearing, as he approached, under the king's penetrating glance, was calm and noble; he fell on his face, and, according to the Persian custom, kissed the ground.

His agreeable and handsome appearance, and the calm and modest manner in which he bore the king's gaze, seemed to make a favorable impression on the latter; he did not allow him to remain long on the earth, and asked him in a by no means unfriendly tone: "Who are you?"

"I am a Greek nobleman. My name is Phanes, and Athens is my home. I have served ten years as commander of the Greek mercenaries in Egypt, and not ingloriously."

"Are you the man, to whose clever generalship the Egyptians were indebted for their victories in Cyprus?"

"I am."

"What has brought you to Persia?"

"The glory of your name, Cambyses, and the wish to devote my arms and experience to your service."

"Nothing else? Be sincere, and remember that one single lie may cost your life. We Persians have different ideas of truth from the Greeks."

"Lying is hateful to me too, if only, because, as a distortion and corruption of what is noblest, it seems unsightly in my eyes."

"Then speak."

"There was certainly a third reason for my coming hither, which I should like to tell you later. It has reference to matters of the greatest importance, which it will require a longer time to discuss; but to-day—"

"Just to-day I should like to hear something new. Accompany me to the chase. You come exactly at the right time, for I never had more need of diversion than now."

"I will accompany you with pleasure, if . . ."

"No conditions to the king! Have you had much practice in hunting?"

"In the Libyan desert I have killed many a lion."

"Then come, follow me."

In the thought of the chase the king seemed to have thrown off all his weakness and roused himself to action; he was just leaving the hall, when Hystaspes once more threw himself at his feet, crying with up-raised hands: "Is my son—is your brother, to die innocent? By the soul of your father, who used to call me his truest friend, I conjure you to listen to this noble stranger."

Cambyses stood still. The frown gathered on his brow again, his voice sounded like a menace and his eyes flashed as he raised his hand and said to the Greek: "Tell me what you know; but remember that in every untrue word, you utter your own sentence of death."

Phanes heard this threat with the greatest calmness, and answered, bowing gracefully as he spoke: "From the sun and from my lord the king, nothing can be hid. What power has a poor mortal to conceal the truth from one so mighty? The noble Hystaspes has said, that I am able to prove your brother innocent. I will only say, that I wish and hope I may succeed in accomplishing anything so great and beautiful. The gods have at least allowed me to discover a trace which seems calculated to throw light on the events of yesterday; but you yourself must decide whether my hopes have been presumptuous and my suspicions too easily aroused. Remember, however, that throughout, my wish to serve you has been sincere, and that if I have been deceived, my error is pardonable; that nothing is perfectly certain in this world, and every man believes that to be infallible which seems to him the most probable."

"You speak well, and remind me of . . . curse her! there, speak and have done with it! I hear the dogs already in the court."

"I was still in Egypt when your embassy came to fetch Nitetis. At the house of Rhodopis, my delightful, clever and celebrated countrywoman, I made the acquaintance of Croesus and his son; I only saw your brother and his friends once or twice, casually; still I remembered the young prince's handsome face so well, that some time later, when I was in the workshop of the great sculptor Theodorus at Samos, I recognized his features at once."

"Did you meet him at Samos?"

"No, but his features had made such a deep and faithful impression on Theodorus' memory, that he used them to beautify the head of an Apollo, which the Achaemenidae had ordered for the new temple of Delphi."

"Your tale begins, at least, incredibly enough. How is it possible to copy features so exactly, when you have not got them before you?"

"I can only answer that Theodorus has really completed this master-piece, and if you wish for a proof of his skill would gladly send you a second likeness of . . ."

"I have no desire for it. Go on with your story."

"On my journey hither, which, thanks to your father's excellent arrangements, I performed in an incredibly short time, changing horses every sixteen or seventeen miles . . ."

"Who allowed you, a foreigner, to use the posthorses?"

"The pass drawn out for the son of Croesus, which came by chance into my hands, when once, in order to save my life, he forced me to change clothes with him."

"A Lydian can outwit a fox, and a Syrian a Lydian, but an Ionian is a match for both," muttered the king, smiling for the first time; "Croesus told me this story—poor Croesus!" and then the old gloomy expression came over his face and he passed his hand across his forehead, as if trying to smooth the lines of care away. The Athenian went on: "I met with no hindrances on my journey till this morning at the first hour after midnight, when I was detained by a strange occurrence."

The king began to listen more attentively, and reminded the Athenian, who spoke Persian with difficulty, that there was no time to lose.

"We had reached the last station but one," continued he, "and hoped to be in Babylon by sunrise. I was thinking over my past stirring life, and was so haunted by the remembrance of evil deeds unrevenged that I could not sleep; the old Egyptian at my side, however, slept and dreamt peacefully enough, lulled by the monotonous tones of the harness bells, the sound of the horses' hoofs and the murmur of the Euphrates. It was a wonderfully still, beautiful night; the moon and stars were so brilliant, that our road and the landscape were lighted up almost with the brightness of day. For the last hour we had not seen a single vehicle, foot-passenger, or horseman; we had heard that all the neighboring population had assembled in Babylon to celebrate your birthday, gaze with wonder at the splendor of your court, and enjoy your liberality. At last the irregular beat of horses' hoofs, and the sound of bells struck my ear, and a few minutes later I distinctly heard cries of distress. My resolve was taken at once; I made my Persian servant dismount, sprang into his saddle, told the driver of the cart in which my slaves were sitting not to spare his mules, loosened my dagger and sword in their scabbards, and spurred my horse towards the place from whence the cries came. They grew louder and louder. I had not ridden a minute, when I came on a fearful scene. Three wild-looking fellows had just pulled a youth, dressed in the white robes of a Magian, from his horse, stunned him with heavy blows, and, just as I reached them, were on the point of throwing him into the Euphrates, which at that place washes the roots of the palms and fig-trees bordering the high-road. I uttered my Greek war-cry, which has made many an enemy tremble before now, and rushed on the murderers. Such fellows are always cowards; the moment they saw one of their accomplices mortally wounded, they fled. I did not pursue them, but stooped down to examine the poor boy, who was severely wounded. How can I describe my horror at seeing, as I believed, your brother Bartja? Yes, they were the very same features that I had seen, first at Naukratis and then in Theodorus' workshop, they were . . ."

"Marvellous!" interrupted Hystaspes.

"Perhaps a little too much so to be credible," added the king. "Take care, Hellene! remember my arm reaches far. I shall have the truth of your story put to the proof."

"I am accustomed," answered Phanes bowing low, "to follow the advice of our wise philosopher Pythagoras, whose fame may perhaps have reached your ears, and always, before speaking, to consider whether what I am going to say may not cause me sorrow in the future."

"That sounds well; but, by Mithras, I knew some one who often spoke of that great teacher, and yet in her deeds turned out to be a most faithful disciple of Angramainjus. You know the traitress, whom we are going to extirpate from the earth like a poisonous viper to-day."

"Will you forgive me," answered Phanes, seeing the anguish expressed in the king's features, "if I quote another of the great master's maxims?"

"Speak."

"Blessings go as quickly as they come. Therefore bear thy lot patiently. Murmur not, and remember that the gods never lay a heavier weight on any man than he can bear. Hast thou a wounded heart? touch it as seldom as thou wouldst a sore eye. There are only two remedies for heart-sickness:—hope and patience."

Cambyses listened to this sentence, borrowed from the golden maxims of Pythagoras, and smiled bitterly at the word "patience." Still the Athenian's way of speaking pleased him, and he told him to go on with his story.

Phanes made another deep obeisance, and continued: "We carried the unconscious youth to my carriage, and brought him to the nearest station. There he opened his eyes, looked anxiously at me, and asked who I was and what had happened to him? The master of the station was standing by, so I was obliged to give the name of Gyges in order not to excite his suspicions by belying my pass, as it was only through this that I could obtain fresh horses.

"This wounded young man seemed to know Gyges, for he shook his head and murmured: 'You are not the man you give yourself out for.' Then he closed his eyes again, and a violent attack of fever came on.

"We undressed, bled him and bound up his wounds. My Persian servant, who had served as overlooker in Amasis' stables and had seen Bartja there, assisted by the old Egyptian who accompanied me, was very helpful, and asserted untiringly that the wounded man could be no other than your brother. When we had cleansed the blood from his face, the master of the station too swore that there could be no doubt of his being the younger son of your great father Cyrus. Meanwhile my Egyptian companion had fetched a potion from the travelling medicine-chest, without which an Egyptian does not care to leave his native country.

[A similar travelling medicine-chest is to be seen in the Egyptian Museum at Berlin. It is prettily and compendiously fitted up, and must be very ancient, for the inscription on the chest, which contained it stated that it was made in the 11th dynasty (end of the third century B. C.) in the reign of King Mentuhotep.]

The drops worked wonders; in a few hours the fever was quieted, and at sunrise the patient opened his eyes once more. We bowed down before him, believing him to be your brother, and asked if he would like to be taken to the palace in Babylon. This he refused vehemently, and asseverated that he was not the man we took him for, but, . . ."

"Who can be so like Bartja? tell me quickly," interrupted the king, "I am very curious to know this."

"He declared that he was the brother of your high-priest, that his name was Gaumata, and that this would be proved by the pass which we should find in the sleeve of his Magian's robe. The landlord found this document and, being able to read, confirmed the statement of the sick youth; he was, however, soon seized by a fresh attack of fever, and began to speak incoherently."

"Could you understand him?"

"Yes, for his talk always ran on the same subject. The hanging-gardens seemed to fill his thoughts. He must have just escaped some great danger, and probably had had a lover's meeting there with a woman called Mandane."

"Mandane, Mandane," said Cambyses in a low voice; "if I do not mistake, that is the name of the highest attendant on Amasis' daughter."

These words did not escape the sharp ears of the Greek. He thought a moment and then exclaimed with a smile; "Set the prisoners free, my King; I will answer for it with my own head, that Bartja was not in the hanging-gardens."

The king was surprised at this speech but not angry. The free, unrestrained, graceful manner of this Athenian towards himself produced the same impression, that a fresh sea-breeze makes when felt for the first time. The nobles of his own court, even his nearest relations, approached him bowing and

cringing, but this Greek stood erect in his presence; the Persians never ventured to address their ruler without a thousand flowery and flattering phrases, but the Athenian was simple, open and straightforward. Yet his words were accompanied by such a charm of action and expression, that the king could understand them, notwithstanding the defective Persian in which they were clothed, better than the allegorical speeches of his own subjects. Nitetis and Phanes were the only human beings, who had ever made him forget that he was a king. With them he was a man speaking to his fellow-man, instead of a despot speaking with creatures whose very existence was the plaything of his own caprice. Such is the effect produced by real manly dignity, superior culture and the consciousness of a right to freedom, on the mind even of a tyrant. But there was something beside all this, that had helped to win Cambyses' favor for the Athenian. This man's coming seemed as if it might possibly give him back the treasure he had believed was lost and more than lost. But how could the life of such a foreign adventurer be accepted as surety for the sons of the highest Persians in the realm? The proposal, however, did not make him angry. On the contrary, he could not help smiling at the boldness of this Greek, who in his eagerness had freed himself from the cloth which hung over his mouth and beard, and exclaimed: "By Mithras, Greek, it really seems as if you were to prove a messenger of good for us! I accept your offer. If the prisoners, notwithstanding your supposition, should still prove guilty you are bound to pass your whole life at my court and in my service, but if, on the contrary, you are able to prove what I so ardently long for, I will make you richer than any of your countrymen."

Phanes answered by a smile which seemed to decline this munificent offer, and asked: "Is it permitted me to put a few questions to yourself and to the officers of your court?"

"You are allowed to say and ask whatever you wish."

At this moment the master of the huntsmen, one of those who daily ate at the king's table, entered, out of breath from his endeavors to hasten the preparations, and announced that all was ready.

"They must wait," was the king's imperious answer. "I am not sure, that we shall hunt at all to-day. Where is Bischen, the captain of police?"

Datis, the so-called "eye of the king," who held the office filled in modern days by a minister of police, hurried from the room, returning in a few minutes with the desired officer. These moments Phanes made use of for putting various questions on important points to the nobles who were present.

"What news can you bring of the prisoners?" asked the king, as the man lay prostrate before him. "Victory to the king! They await death with calmness, for it is sweet to die by thy will."

"Have you heard anything of their conversation?"

"Yes, my Ruler."

"Do they acknowledge their guilt, when speaking to each other?"

"Mithras alone knows the heart; but you, my prince, if you could hear them speak, would believe in their innocence, even as I the humblest of your servants."

The captain looked up timidly at the king, fearing lest these words should have excited his anger; Cambyses, however, smiled kindly instead of rebuking him. But a sudden thought darkened his brow again directly, and in a low voice he asked: "When was Croesus executed?"

The man trembled at this question; the perspiration stood on his forehead, and he could scarcely stammer the words: "He is.... he has.... we thought...."

"What did you think?" interrupted Cambyses, and a new light of hope seemed to dawn in his mind. "Is it possible, that you did not carry out my orders at once? Can Croesus still be alive? Speak at once, I must know the whole truth."

The captain writhed like a worm at his lord's feet, and at last stammered out, raising his hands imploringly towards the king: "Have mercy, have mercy, my Lord the king! I am a poor man, and have thirty children, fifteen of whom . . ."

"I wish to know if Croesus is living or dead."

"He is alive! He has done so much for me, and I did not think I was doing wrong in allowing him to live a few hours longer, that he might..."

"That is enough," said the king breathing freely. "This once your disobedience shall go unpunished, and the treasurer may give you two talents, as you have so many children.—Now go to the prisoners,—tell Croesus to come hither, and the others to be of good courage, if they are innocent."

"My King is the light of the world, and an ocean of mercy."

"Bartja and his friends need not remain any longer in confinement; they can walk in the court of the palace, and you will keep guard over them. You, Datis, go at once to the hanging-gardens and order Boges to defer the execution of the sentence on the Egyptian Princess; and further, I wish messengers sent to the post-station mentioned by the Athenian, and the wounded man brought hither under safe escort."

The "king's eye" was on the point of departure, but Phanes detained him, saying: "Does my King allow me to make one remark?"

"Speak."

"It appears to me, that the chief of the eunuchs could give the most accurate information. During his delirium the youth often mentioned his name in connection with that of the girl he seemed to be in love with."

"Go at once, Datis, and bring him quickly."

"The high-priest Oropastes, Gaumata's brother, ought to appear too; and Mandane, whom I have just been assured on the most positive authority, is the principal attendant of the Egyptian Princess."

"Fetch her, Datis."

"If Nitetis herself could . . ."

At this the king turned pale and a cold shiver ran through his limbs. How he longed to see his darling again! But the strong man was afraid of this woman's reproachful looks; he knew the captivating power that lay in her eyes. So he pointed to the door, saying "Fetch Boges and Mandane; the Egyptian Princess is to remain in the hanging-gardens, under strict custody."

The Athenian bowed deferentially; as if he would say: "Here no one has a right to command but the king."

Cambyses looked well pleased, seated himself again on the purple divan, and resting his forehead on his hand, bent his eyes on the ground and sank into deep thought. The picture of the woman he loved so dearly refused to be banished; it came again and again, more and more vividly, and the thought that these features could not have deceived him—that Nitetis must be innocent—took a firmer root in his mind; he had already begun to hope. If Bartja could be cleared, there was no error that might not be conceivable; in that case he would go to the hanging-gardens, take her hand and listen to her defence. When love has once taken firm hold of a man in riper years, it runs and winds through his whole nature like one of his veins, and can only be destroyed with his life.

The entrance of Croesus roused Cambyses from his dream; he raised the old man kindly from the prostrate position at his feet, into which he had thrown himself on entering, and said: "You offended me, but I will be merciful; I have not forgotten that my father, on his dying bed, told me to make you my friend and adviser. Take your life back as a gift from me, and forget my anger as I wish to forget your want of reverence. This man says he knows you; I should like to hear your opinion of his conjectures."

Croesus turned away much affected, and after having heartily welcomed the Athenian, asked him to relate his suppositions and the grounds on which they were founded.

The old man grew more and more attentive as the Greek went on, and when he had finished raised his hands to heaven, crying: "Pardon me, oh ye eternal gods, if I have ever questioned the justice of your decrees. Is not this marvellous, Cambyses? My son once placed himself in great danger to save the life of this noble Athenian, whom the gods have brought hither to repay the deed tenfold. Had Phanes been murdered in Egypt, this hour might have seen our sons executed."

And as he said this he embraced Hystaspes; both shared one feeling; their sons had been as dead and were now alive.

The king, Phanes, and all the Persian dignitaries watched the old men with deep sympathy, and though the proofs of Bartja's innocence were as yet only founded on conjecture, not one of those present doubted it one moment longer. Wherever the belief in a man's guilt is but slight, his defender finds willing listeners.

CHAPTER VI.

THE sharp-witted Athenian saw clearly how matters lay in this sad story; nor did it escape him that malice had had a hand in the affair. How could Bartja's dagger have come into the hanging-gardens except through treachery?

While he was telling the king his suspicions, Oropastes was led into the hall.

The king looked angrily at him and without one preliminary word, asked: "Have you a brother?"

"Yes, my King. He and I are the only two left out of a family of six. My parents . . ."

"Is your brother younger or older than yourself?"

"I was the eldest of the family; my brother, the youngest, was the joy of my father's old age."

"Did you ever notice a remarkable likeness between him and one of my relations?"

"Yes, my King. Gaumata is so like your brother Bartja, that in the school for priests at Rhagae, where he still is, he was always called "the prince."

"Has he been at Babylon very lately?"

"He was here for the last time at the New Year's festival."

"Are you speaking the truth?"

"The sin of lying would be doubly punishable in one who wears my robes, and holds my office."

The king's face flushed with anger at this answer and he exclaimed: "Nevertheless you are lying; Gaumata was here yesterday evening. You may well tremble."

"My life belongs to the king, whose are all things; nevertheless I swear —the high-priest-by the most high God, whom I have served faithfully for thirty years, that I know nothing of my brother's presence in Babylon yesterday."

"Your face looks as if you were speaking the truth."

"You know that I was not absent from your side the whole of that high holiday."

"I know it."

Again the doors opened; this time they admitted the trembling Mandane. The high-priest cast such a look of astonishment and enquiry on her, that the king saw she must be in some way connected with him, and therefore, taking no notice of the trembling girl who lay at his feet, he asked: "Do you know this woman?"

"Yes, my King. I obtained for her the situation of upper attendant to the—may Auramazda forgive her! —King of Egypt's daughter."

"What led you,—a priest,—to do a favor to this girl?"

"Her parents died of the same pestilence, which carried off my brothers. Her father was a priest, respected, and a friend of our family; so we adopted the little girl, remembering the words: 'If thou withhold help from the man who is pure in heart and from his widow and orphans, then shall the pure, subject earth cast thee out unto the stinging-nettles, to painful sufferings and to the most fearful regions!' Thus I became her foster-father, and had her brought up with my youngest brother until he was obliged to enter the school for priests."

The king exchanged a look of intelligence with Phanes, and asked: "Why did not you keep the girl longer with you?"

"When she had received the ear-rings I, as priest, thought it more suitable to send such a young girl away from my house, and to put her in a position to earn her own living."

"Has she seen your brother since she has been grown up?"

"Yes, my King. Whenever Gaumata came to see me I allowed him to be with her as with a sister; but on discovering later that the passionate love of youth had begun to mingle with the childish friendship of former days, I felt strengthened in my resolution to send her away."

"Now we know enough," said the king, commanding the high-priest by a nod to retire. He then looked down on the prostrate girl, and said imperiously: "Rise!"

Mandane rose, trembling with fear. Her fresh young face was pale as death, and her red lips were blue from terror.

"Tell all you know about yesterday evening; but remember, a lie and your death are one and the same."

The girl's knees trembled so violently that she could hardly stand, and her fear entirely took away the power of speaking.

"I have not much patience," exclaimed Cambyses. Mandane started, grew paler still, but could not speak. Then Phanes came forward and asked the angry king to allow him to examine the girl, as he felt sure that fear alone had closed her lips and that a kind word would open them.

Cambyses allowed this, and the Athenian's words proved true; no sooner had he assured Mandane of the good-will of all present, laid his hand on her head and spoken kindly to her, than the source of her tears was unlocked, she wept freely, the spell which had seemed to chain her tongue, vanished, and she began to tell her story, interrupted only by low sobs. She hid nothing, confessed that Boges had given her his sanction and assistance to the meeting with Gaumata, and ended by saying: "I know that I have forfeited my life, and am the worst and most ungrateful creature in the world; but none of all this would have happened, if Oropastes had allowed his brother to marry me."

The serious audience, even the king himself, could not resist a smile at the longing tone in which these words were spoken and the fresh burst of sobs which succeeded them.

And this smile saved her life. But Cambyses would not have smiled, after hearing such a story, if Mandane, with that instinct which always seems to stand at a woman's command in the hour of her greatest danger, had not known how to seize his weak side, and use it for her own interests, by dwelling much longer than was necessary, on the delight which Nitetis had manifested at the king's gifts.

"A thousand times" cried she, "did my mistress kiss the presents which were brought from you, O King; but oftenest of all did she press her lips to the nosegay which you plucked with your own hands for her, some days ago. And when it began to fade, she took every flower separately, spread out the petals with care, laid them between woollen cloths, and, with her own hands, placed her heavy, golden ointment-box upon them, that they might dry and so she might keep them always as a remembrance of your kindness."

Seeing Cambyses' awful features grow a little milder at these words, the girl took fresh courage, and at last began to put loving words into her mistress's mouth which the latter had never uttered; professing that she herself had heard Nitetis a hundred times murmur the word "Cambyses" in her sleep with indescribable tenderness. She ended her confession by sobbing and praying for mercy.

The king looked down at her with infinite contempt, though without anger, and pushing her away with his foot said: "Out of my sight, you dog of a woman! Blood like yours would soil the executioner's axe. Out of my sight!"

Mandane needed no second command to depart. The words "out of my sight" sounded like sweet music in her ears. She rushed through the courts of the palace, and out into the streets, crying like a mad woman "I am free! I am free!"

She, had scarcely left the hall, when Datis, the "king's eye" reappeared with the news that the chief of the eunuchs was nowhere to be found. He had vanished from the hanging-gardens in an unaccountable manner; but he, Datis, had left word with his subordinates that he was to be searched for and brought, dead or alive.

The king went off into another violent fit of passion at this news, and threatened the officer of police, who prudently concealed the excitement of the crowd from his lord, with a severe punishment, if Boges were not in their hands by the next morning.

As he finished speaking, a eunuch was brought into the hall, sent by the king's mother to ask an interview for herself with her son.

Cambyses prepared at once to comply with his mother's wish, at the same time giving Phanes his hand to kiss, a rare honor, only shown to those that ate at the king's table, and saying: "All the prisoners are to be set at liberty. Go to your sons, you anxious, troubled fathers, and assure them of my mercy and favor. I think we shall be able to find a satrapy a-piece for them, as compensation for tonight's undeserved imprisonment. To you, my Greek friend, I am deeply indebted. In discharge of this debt, and as a means of retaining you at my court, I beg you to accept one hundred talents from my treasury."

"I shall scarcely be able to use so large a sum," said Phanes, bowing low.

"Then abuse it," said the king with a friendly smile, and calling out to him, "We shall meet again at supper," he left the hall accompanied by his court.

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In the meantime there had been sadness and mourning in the apartments of the queen-mother. Judging from the contents of the letter to Bartja, Kassandane had made up her mind that Nitetis was faithless, and her own beloved son innocent. But in whom could she ever place confidence again, now that this girl, whom she had looked upon as the very embodiment of every womanly virtue, had proved reprobate and faithless—now that the noblest youths in the realm had proved perjurers?

Nitetis was more than dead for her; Bartja, Croesus, Darius, Gyges, Araspes, all so closely allied to her by relationship and friendship, as good as dead. And yet she durst not indulge her sorrow; she had to restrain the despairing outbursts of grief of her impetuous child.

Atossa behaved like one deprived of her senses when she heard of the sentences of death. The self-control which she had learnt from Nitetis gave way, and her old impetuosity burst forth again with double vehemence.

Nitetis, her only friend,—Bartja, the brother whom she loved with her whole heart,—Darius, whom she felt now she not only looked up to as her deliverer, but loved with all the warmth of a first affection—Croesus to whom she clung like a father,—she was to lose every one she loved in one day.

She tore her dress and her hair, called Cambyses a monster, and every one who could possibly believe in the guilt of such people, infatuated or insane. Then her tears would burst out afresh, she would utter imploring supplications to the gods for mercy, and a few minutes later, begin conjuring her mother to take her to the hanging-gardens, that they might hear Nitetis' defence of her own conduct.

Kassandane tried to soothe the violent girl, and assured her every attempt to visit the hanging-gardens would be in vain. Then Atossa began to rage again, until at last her mother was forced to command silence, and as morning had already begun to dawn, sent her to her sleeping-room.

The girl obeyed, but instead of going to bed, seated herself at a tall window looking towards the hanging-gardens. Her eyes filled with tears again, as she thought of her friend—her sister—sitting in that palace alone, forsaken, banished, and looking forward to an ignominious death. Suddenly her tearful, weary eyes lighted up as if from some strong purpose, and instead of gazing into the distance, she fixed them on a black speck which flew towards her in a straight line from Nitetis' house, becoming larger and more distinct every moment; and finally settling on a cypress before her window. The sorrow vanished at once from her lovely face and with a deep sigh of relief she sprang up, exclaiming:

"Oh, there is the Homai, the bird of good fortune! Now everything will turn out well."

It was the same bird of paradise which had brought so much comfort to Nitetis that now gave poor Atossa fresh confidence.

She bent forward to see whether any one was in the garden; and finding that she would be seen by no one but the old gardener, she jumped out, trembling like a fawn, plucked a few roses and cypress twigs and took them to the old man, who had been watching her performances with a doubtful shake of the head.

She stroked his cheeks coaxingly, put her flowers in his brown hand, and said: "Do you love me, Sabaces?"

"O, my mistress!" was the only answer the old man could utter, as he pressed the hem of her robe to his lips.

"I believe you, my old friend, and I will show you how I trust my faithful, old Sabaces. Hide these flowers carefully and go quickly to the king's palace. Say that you had to bring fruit for the table. My poor brother Bartja, and Darius, the son of the noble Hystaspes, are in prison, near the guard-house of

the Immortals. You must manage that these flowers reach them, with a warm greeting from me, but mind, the message must be given with the flowers."

"But the guards will not allow me to see the prisoners."

"Take these rings, and slip them into their hands."

"I will do my best."

"I knew you loved me, my good Sabaces. Now make haste, and come back soon."

The old man went off as fast as he could. Atossa looked thoughtfully after him, murmuring to herself: "Now they will both know, that I loved them to the last. The rose means, 'I love you,' and the evergreen cypress, 'true and steadfast.'" The old man came back in an hour; bringing her Bartja's favorite ring, and from Darius an Indian handkerchief dipped in blood.

Atossa ran to meet him; her eyes filled with tears as she took the tokens, and seating herself under a spreading plane-tree, she pressed them by turns to her lips, murmuring: "Bartja's ring means that he thinks of me; the blood-stained handkerchief that Darius is ready to shed his heart's blood for me."

Atossa smiled as she said this, and her tears, when she thought of her friends and their sad fate, were quieter, if not less bitter, than before.

A few hours later a messenger arrived from Croesus with news that the innocence of Bartja and his friends had been proved, and that Nitetis was, to all intents and purposes, cleared also.

Kassandane sent at once to the hanging-gardens, with a request that Nitetis would come to her apartments. Atossa, as unbridled in her joy as in her grief, ran to meet her friend's litter and flew from one of her attendants to the other crying: "They are all innocent; we shall not lose one of them—not one!"

When at last the litter appeared and her loved one, pale as death, within it, she burst into loud sobs, threw her arms round Nitetis as she descended, and covered her with kisses and caresses till she perceived that her friend's strength was failing, that her knees gave way, and she required a stronger support than Atossa's girlish strength could give.

The Egyptian girl was carried insensible into the queen-mother's apartments. When she opened her eyes, her head—more like a marble piece of sculpture than a living head—was resting on the blind queen's lap, she felt Atossa's warm kisses on her forehead, and Cambyses, who had obeyed his mother's call, was standing at her side.

She gazed on this circle, including all she loved best, with anxious, perplexed looks, and at last, recognizing them one by one, passed her hand across her pale forehead as if to remove a veil, smiled at each, and closed her eyes once more. She fancied Isis had sent her a beautiful vision, and wished to hold it fast with all the powers of her mind.

Then Atossa called her by her name, impetuously and lovingly. She opened her eyes again, and again she saw those loving looks that she fancied had only been sent her in a dream. Yes, that was her own Atossa—this her motherly friend, and there stood, not the angry king, but the man she loved. And now his lips opened too, his stern, severe eyes rested on her so beseechingly, and he said: "O Nitetis, awake! you must not—you cannot possibly be guilty!" She moved her head gently with a look of cheerful denial and a happy smile stole across her features, like a breeze of early spring over fresh young roses.

"She is innocent! by Mithras, it is impossible that she can be guilty," cried the king again, and forgetful of the presence of others, he sank on his knees.

A Persian physician came up and rubbed her forehead with a sweet-scented oil, and Nebenchari approached, muttering spells, felt her pulse, shook his head, and administered a potion from his portable medicine-chest. This restored her to perfect consciousness; she raised herself with difficulty into a sitting posture, returned the loving caresses of her two friends, and then turning to Cambyses, asked: "How could you believe such a thing of me, my King?" There was no reproach in her tone, but deep sadness, and Cambyses answered softly, "Forgive me."

Kassandane's blind eyes expressed her gratitude for this self-renunciation on the part of her son, and she said: "My daughter, I need your forgiveness too."

"But I never once doubted you," cried Atossa, proudly and joyfully kissing her friend's lips.

"Your letter to Bartja shook my faith in your innocence," added Kassandane.

"And yet it was all so simple and natural," answered Nitetis. "Here, my mother, take this letter from Egypt. Croesus will translate it for you. It will explain all. Perhaps I was imprudent. Ask your mother to tell you what you would wish to know, my King. Pray do not scorn my poor, ill sister. When an Egyptian girl once loves, she cannot forget. But I feel so frightened. The end must be near. The last hours have been so very, very terrible. That horrible man, Boges, read me the fearful sentence of death, and it was that which forced the poison into my hand. Ah, my heart!"

And with these words she fell back into the arms of Kassandane.

Nebenchari rushed forward, and gave her some more drops, exclaiming: "I thought so! She has taken poison and her life cannot be saved, though this antidote may possibly prolong it for a few days." Cambyses stood by, pale and rigid, following the physician's slightest movements, and Atossa bathed her friend's forehead with her tears.

"Let some milk be brought," cried Nebenchari, "and my large medicine-chest; and let attendants be called to carry her away, for quiet is necessary, above all things."

Atossa hastened into the adjoining room; and Cambyses said to the physician, but without looking into his face: "Is there no hope?"

"The poison which she has taken results in certain death."

On hearing this the king pushed Nebenchari away from the sick girl, exclaiming: "She shall live. It is my will. Here, eunuch! summon all the physicians in Babylon—assemble the priests and Alobeds! She is not to die; do you hear? she must live, I am the king, and I command it."

Nitetis opened her eyes as if endeavoring to obey her lord. Her face was turned towards the window, and the bird of paradise with the gold chain on its foot, was still there, perched on the cypress-tree. Her eyes fell first on her lover, who had sunk down at her side and was pressing his burning lips to her right hand. She murmured with a smile: "O, this great happiness!" Then she saw the bird, and pointed to it with tier left hand, crying: "Look, look, there is the Phoenix, the bird of Ra!"

After saying this she closed her eyes and was soon seized by a violent attack of fever.

CHAPTER VII.

Prexaspes, the king's messenger, and one of the highest officials at court, had brought Gaumata, Mandane's lover, whose likeness to Bartja was really most wonderful, to Babylon, sick and wounded as he was. He was now awaiting his sentence in a dungeon, while Boges, the man who had led him into crime, was nowhere to be found, notwithstanding all the efforts of the police. His escape had been rendered possible by the trap-door in the hanging-gardens, and greatly assisted by the enormous crowds assembled in the streets.

Immense treasures were found in his house. Chests of gold and jewels, which his position had enabled him to obtain with great ease, were restored to the royal treasury. Cambyses, however, would gladly have given ten times as much treasure to secure possession of the traitor.

To Phaedime's despair the king ordered all the inhabitants of the harem, except his mother, Atossa and the dying Nitetis, to be removed to Susa, two days after the accused had been declared innocent. Several eunuchs of rank were deposed from their offices. The entire caste was to suffer for the sins of him who had escaped punishment.

Oropastes, who had already entered on his duties as regent of the kingdom, and had clearly proved his non-participation in the crime of which his brother had been proved guilty, bestowed the vacant places exclusively on the Magi. The demonstration made by the people in favor of Bartja did not come to the king's ears until the crowd had long dispersed. Still, occupied as he was, almost entirely, by his anxiety for Nitetis, he caused exact information of this illegal manifestation to be furnished him, and ordered the ringleaders to be severely punished. He fancied it was a proof that Bartja had been trying to gain favor with the people, and Cambyses would perhaps have shown his displeasure by some open act, if a better impulse had not told him that he, not Bartja, was the brother who stood in need of

forgiveness. In spite of this, however, he could not get rid of the feeling that Bartja, had been, though innocent, the cause of the sad events which had just happened, nor of his wish to get him out of the way as far as might be; and he therefore gave a ready consent to his brother's wish to start at once for Naukratis.

Bartja took a tender farewell of his mother and sister, and started two days after his liberation. He was accompanied by Gyges, Zopyrus, and a numerous retinue charged with splendid presents from Cambyses for Sappho. Darius remained behind, kept back by his love for Atossa. The day too was not far distant, when, by his father's wish, he was to marry Artystone, the daughter of Gobryas.

Bartja parted from his friend with a heavy heart, advising him to be very prudent with regard to Atossa. The secret had been confided to Kassandane, and she had promised to take Darius' part with the king.

If any one might venture to raise his eyes to the daughter of Cyrus, assuredly it was the son of Hystaspes; he was closely connected by marriage with the royal family, belonged like Cambyses to the Pasargadae, and his family was a younger branch of the reigning dynasty. His father called himself the highest noble in the realm, and as such, governed the province of Persia proper, the mother-country, to which this enormous world-empire and its ruler owed their origin. Should the family of Cyrus become extinct, the descendants of Hystaspes would have a well-grounded right to the Persian throne. Darius therefore, apart from his personal advantages, was a fitting claimant for Atossa's hand. And yet no one dared to ask the king's consent. In the gloomy state of mind into which he had been brought by the late events, it was likely that he might refuse it, and such an answer would have to be regarded as irrevocable. So Bartja was obliged to leave Persia in anxiety about the future of these two who were very dear to him.

Croesus promised to act as mediator in this case also, and before Bartja left, made him acquainted with Phanes.

The youth had heard such a pleasant account of the Athenian from Sappho, that he met him with great cordiality, and soon won the fancy of the older and more experienced man, who gave him many a useful hint, and a letter to Theopompus, the Milesian, at Naukratis. Phanes concluded by asking for a private interview.

Bartja returned to his friends looking grave and thoughtful; soon, however, he forgot his cause of anxiety and joked merrily with them over a farewell cup. Before he mounted his horse the next morning, Nebenchari asked to be allowed an audience. He was admitted, and begged Bartja to take the charge of a large written roll for king Amasis. It contained a detailed account of Nitetis' sufferings, ending with these words: "Thus the unhappy victim of your ambitious plans will end her life in a few hours by poison, to the use of which she was driven by despair. The arbitrary caprices of the mighty can efface all happiness from the life of a human creature, just as we wipe a picture from the tablet with a sponge. Your servant Nebenchari is pining in a foreign land, deprived of home and property, and the wretched daughter of a king of Egypt dies a miserable and lingering death by her own hand. Her body will be torn to pieces by dogs and vultures, after the manner of the Persians. Woe unto them who rob the innocent of happiness here and of rest beyond the grave!"

Bartja had not been told the contents of this letter, but promised to take it with him; he then, amid the joyful shouts of the people, set up outside the city-gate the stones which, according to a Persian superstition, were to secure him a prosperous journey, and left Babylon.

Nebenchari, meanwhile, prepared to return to his post by Nitetis' dying-bed.

Just as he reached the brazen gates between the harem-gardens and the courts of the large palace, an old man in white robes came up to him. The sight seemed to fill Nebenchari with terror; he started as if the gaunt old man had been a ghost. Seeing, however, a friendly and familiar smile on the face of the other, he quickened his steps, and, holding out his hand with a heartiness for which none of his Persian acquaintances would have given him credit, exclaimed in Egyptian: "Can I believe my eyes? You in Persia, old Hib? I should as soon have expected the sky to fall as to have the pleasure of seeing you on the Euphrates. But now, in the name of Osiris, tell me what can have induced you, you old ibis, to leave your warm nest on the Nile and set out on such a long journey eastward."

While Nebenchari was speaking, the old man listened in a bowing posture, with his arms hanging down by his side, and when he had finished, looked up into his face with indescribable joy, touched his breast with trembling fingers, and then, falling on the right knee, laying one hand on his heart and raising the other to heaven, cried: "Thanks be unto thee, great Isis, for protecting the wanderer and permitting him to see his master once more in health and safety. Ah, child, how anxious I have been! I expected to find you as wasted and thin as a convict from the quarries; I thought you would have been

grieving and unhappy, and here you are as well, and handsome and portly as ever. If poor old Hib had been in your place he would have been dead long ago."

"Yes, I don't doubt that, old fellow. I did not leave home of my own will either, nor without many a heartache. These foreigners are all the children of Seth. The good and gracious gods are only to be found in Egypt on the shores of the sacred, blessed Nile."

"I don't know much about its being so blessed," muttered the old man.

"You frighten me, father Hib. What has happened then?"

"Happened! Things have come to a pretty pass there, and you'll hear of it soon enough. Do you think I should have left house and grandchildren at my age,—going on for eighty,—like any Greek or Phoenician vagabond, and come out among these godless foreigners (the gods blast and destroy them!), if I could possibly have staid on in Egypt?"

"But tell me what it's all about."

"Some other time, some other time. Now you must take me to your own house, and I won't stir out of it as long as we are in this land of Typhon."

The old man said this with so much emphasis, that Nebenchiri could not help smiling and saying: "Have they treated you so very badly then, old man?"

"Pestilence and Khamsin!" blustered the old man.

[The south-west wind, which does so much injury to the crops in the Nile valley. It is known to us as the Simoom, the wind so perilous to travellers in the desert.]

"There's not a more good-for-nothing Typhon's brood on the face of the earth than these Persians. I only wonder they're not all red-haired and leprous. Ah, child, two whole days I have been in this hell already, and all that time I was obliged to live among these blasphemers. They said no one could see you; you were never allowed to leave Nitetis' sick-bed. Poor child! I always said this marriage with a foreigner would come to no good, and it serves Amasis right if his children give him trouble. His conduct to you alone deserves that."

"For shame, old man!"

"Nonsense, one must speak one's mind sometimes. I hate a king, who comes from nobody knows where. Why, when he was a poor boy he used to steal your father's nuts, and wrench the name-plates off the house-doors. I saw he was a good-for-nothing fellow then. It's a shame that such people should be allowed to..."

"Gently, gently, old man. We are not all made of the same stuff, and if there was such a little difference between you and Amasis as boys, it, is your own fault that, now you are old men, he has outstripped you so far.

"My father and grandfather were both servants in the temple, and of course I followed in their footsteps."

"Quite right; it is the law of caste, and by that rule, Amasis ought never to have become anything higher than a poor army-captain at most."

"It is not every one who's got such an easy conscience as this upstart fellow."

"There you are again! For shame, Hib! As long as I can remember, and that is nearly half a century, every other word with you has been an abusive one. When I was a child your ill-temper was vented on me, and now the king has the benefit of it."

"Serves him right! All, if you only knew all! It's now seven months since . . ."

"I can't stop to listen to you now. At the rising of the seven stars I will send a slave to take you to my rooms. Till then you must stay in your present lodging, for I must go to my patient."

"You must?—Very well,—then go and leave poor old Hib here to die. I can't possibly live another hour among these creatures."

"What would you have me do then?"

"Let me live with you as long as we are in Persia."

"Have they treated you so very roughly?"

"I should think they had indeed. It is loathsome to think of. They forced me to eat out of the same pot with them and cut my bread with the same knife. An infamous Persian, who had lived many years in Egypt, and travelled here with us, had given them a list of all the things and actions, which we consider unclean. They took away my knife when I was going to shave myself. A good-for-nothing wench kissed me on the forehead, before I could prevent it. There, you needn't laugh; it will be a month at least before I can get purified from all these pollutions. I took an emetic, and when that at last began to take effect, they all mocked and sneered at me. But that was not all. A cursed cook-boy nearly beat a sacred kitten to death before my very eyes. Then an ointment-mixer, who had heard that I was your servant, made that godless Bubares ask me whether I could cure diseases of the eye too. I said yes, because you know in sixty years it's rather hard if one can't pick up something from one's master. Bubares was interpreter between us, and the shameful fellow told him to say that he was very much disturbed about a dreadful disease in his eyes. I asked what it was, and received for answer that he could not tell one thing from another in the dark!"

"You should have told him that the best remedy for that was to light a candle."

"Oh, I hate the rascals! Another hour among them will be the death of me!"

"I am sure you behaved oddly enough among these foreigners," said Nebenchari smiling, "you must have made them laugh at you, for the Persians are generally very polite, well-behaved people. Try them again, only once. I shall be very glad to take you in this evening, but I can't possibly do it before."

"It is as I thought! He's altered too, like everybody else! Osiris is dead and Seth rules the world again."

"Farewell! When the seven stars rise, our old Ethiopian slave, Nebununf, will wait for you here."

"Nebununf, that old rogue? I never want to see him again."

"Yes, the very same."

"Him—well it's a good thing, when people stay as they were. To be sure I know some people who can't say so much of themselves, and who instead of minding their own business, pretend to heal inward diseases, and when a faithful old servant . . ."

"Hold your tongue, and wait patiently till evening." These last words were spoken seriously, and produced the desired impression. The old man made another obeisance, and before his master left him, said: "I came here under the protection of Phanes, the former commander of the Greek mercenaries. He wishes very much to speak with you."

"That is his concern. He can come to me."

"You never leave that sick girl, whose eyes are as sound as . . ."

"Hib!"

"For all I care she may have a cataract in both. May Phanes come to you this evening?"

"I wished to be alone with you."

"So did I; but the Greek seems to be in a great hurry, and he knows nearly everything that I have to tell you."

"Have you been gossiping then?"

"No—not exactly—but . . ."

"I always thought you were a man to be trusted."

"So I was. But this Greek knows already a great deal of what I know, and the rest . . ."

"Well?"

"The rest he got out of me, I hardly know how myself. If I did not wear this amulet against an evil eye, I should have been obliged . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know the Athenian—I can forgive you. I should like him to come with you this evening. But I see the sun is already high in the heavens. I have no time to lose. Tell me in a few words what has happened."

"I thought this evening . . ."

"No, I must have at least a general idea of what has happened before I see the Athenian. Be brief."

"You have been robbed!"

"Is that all?"

"Is not that enough?"

"Answer me. Is that all?"

"Yes!"

"Then farewell."

"But Nebenchari!"

The physician did not even hear this exclamation; the gates of the harem had already closed behind him.

When the Pleiades had risen, Nebenchari was to be found seated alone in one of the magnificent rooms assigned to his use on the eastern side of the palace, near to Kassandane's apartments. The friendly manner in which he had welcomed his old servant had given place to the serious expression which his face usually wore, and which had led the cheerful Persians to call him a morose and gloomy man.

Nebenchari was an Egyptian priest through and through; a member of that caste which never indulged in a jest, and never for a moment forgot to be dignified and solemn before the public; but when among their relations and their colleagues completely threw off this self-imposed restraint, and gave way at times even to exuberant mirth.

Though he had known Phanes in Sais, he received him with cold politeness, and, after the first greeting was ended, told Hib to leave them alone.

"I have come to you," said the Athenian, "to speak about some very important affairs."

"With which I am already acquainted," was the Egyptian's curt reply.

"I am inclined to doubt that," said Phanes with an incredulous smile.

"You have been driven out of Egypt, persecuted and insulted by Psamtik, and you have come to Persia to enlist Cambyses as an instrument of revenge against my country."

"You are mistaken. I have nothing against your country, but all the more against Amasis and his house. In Egypt the state and the king are one, as you very well know."

"On the contrary, my own observations have led me to think that the priests considered themselves one with the state."

"In that case you are better informed than I, who have always looked on the kings of Egypt as absolute. So they are; but only in proportion as they know how to emancipate themselves from the influence of your caste. —Amasis himself submits to the priests now."

"Strange intelligence!"

"With which, however, you have already long been made acquainted."

"Is that your opinion?"

"Certainly it is. And I know with still greater certainty that once—you hear me—once, he succeeded in bending the will of these rulers of his to his own."

"I very seldom hear news from home, and do not understand what you are speaking of."

"There I believe you, for if you knew what I meant and could stand there quietly without clenching your fist, you would be no better than a dog who only whimpers when he's kicked and licks the hand that torments him."

The physician turned pale. "I know that Amasis has injured and insulted me," he said, "but at the same time I must tell you that revenge is far too sweet a morsel to be shared with a stranger."

"Well said! As to my own revenge, however, I can only compare it to a vineyard where the grapes are so plentiful, that I am not able to gather them all myself."

"And you have come hither to hire good laborers."

"Quite right, and I do not even yet give up the hope of securing you to take a share in my vintage."

"You are mistaken. My work is already done. The gods themselves have taken it in hand. Amasis has been severely enough punished for banishing me from country, friends and pupils into this unclean land."

"You mean by his blindness perhaps?"

"Possibly."

"Then you have not heard that Petammon, one of your colleagues, has succeeded in cutting the skin, which covered the pupil of the eye and so restoring Amasis' sight?"

The Egyptian started and ground his teeth; recovered his presence of mind, however, in a moment, and answered: "Then the gods have punished the father through the children."

"In what way? Psamtik suits his father's present mood very well. It is true that Tachot is ill, but she prays and sacrifices with her father all the more for that; and as to Nitetis, you and I both know that her death will not touch him very closely."

"I really do not understand you."

"Of course not, so long as you fancy that I believe your beautiful patient to be Amasis' daughter."

The Egyptian started again, but Phanes went on without appearing to notice his emotion: "I know more than you suppose. Nitetis is the daughter of Hophra, Amasis' dethroned predecessor. Amasis brought her up as his own child—first, in order to make the Egyptians believe that Hophra had died childless; secondly, in order to deprive her of her rights to the throne; for you know women are allowed to govern on the Nile."

"These are mere suppositions."

"For which, however, I can bring irrefragable proofs. Among the papers which your old servant Hib brought with him in a small box, there must be some letters from a certain Sonnophre, a celebrated accoucheur, your own father, which . . ."

[To judge from the pictures on the monuments and from the 1st Chap. of Exodus, it would seem that in ancient, as in modern Egypt, midwives were usually called in to assist at the birth of children; but it is also certain, that in difficult cases physicians were employed also. In the hieratic medical papyrus in Berlin, women are often spoken of as assisting at such times. In the medical Papyrus Ebers certain portions are devoted to diseases peculiar to women. "There were special rooms set aside in private houses for the birth of children, as symbolical ones were reserved in the temples. These chambers were called meschen, and from them was derived the name given to midwives, to meschennu.]

"If that be the case, those letters are my property, and I have not the slightest intention of giving them up; besides which you might search Persia from one end to the other without finding any one who could decipher my father's writing."

"Pardon me, if I point out one or two errors into which you have fallen. First, this box is at present in my hands, and though I am generally accustomed to respect the rights of property, I must assure you that, in the present instance, I shall not return the box until its contents have served my purpose. Secondly, the gods have so ordained, that just at this moment there is a man in Babylon who can read every kind of writing known to the Egyptian priests. Do you perhaps happen to know the name of Onuphis?"

For the third time the Egyptian turned pale. "Are you certain," he said, "that this man is still among the living?"

"I spoke to him myself yesterday. He was formerly, you know, high-priest at Heliopolis, and was initiated into all your mysteries there. My wise countryman, Pythagoras of Samos, came to Egypt, and after submitting to some of your ceremonies, was allowed to attend the lessons given in the schools for priests. His remarkable talents won the love of the great Onuphis and he taught him all the Egyptian mysteries, which Pythagoras afterwards turned to account for the benefit of mankind. My delightful

friend Rhodopis and I are proud of having been his pupils. When the rest of your caste heard that Onuphis had betrayed the sacred mysteries, the ecclesiastical judges determined on his death. This was to be caused by a poison extracted from peach-kernels. The condemned man, however, heard of their machinations, and fled to Naukratis, where he found a safe asylum in the house of Rhodopis, whom he had heard highly praised by Pythagoras, and whose dwelling was rendered inviolable by the king's letter. Here he met Antimenidas the brother of the poet Alcarus of Lesbos, who, having been banished by Pittakus, the wise ruler of Mitylene, had gone to Babylon, and there taken service in the army of Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Assyria. Antimenidas gave him letters to the Chaldeans. Onuphis travelled to the Euphrates, settled there, and was obliged to seek for some means of earning his daily bread, as he had left Egypt a poor man. He is now supporting himself in his old age, by the assistance which his superior knowledge enables him to render the Chaldeans in their astronomical observations from the tower of Bel. Onuphis is nearly eighty, but his mind is as clear as ever, and when I saw him yesterday and asked him to help me, his eyes brightened as he promised to do so. Your father was one of his judges, but he bears you no malice and sends you a greeting."

Nebenchari's eyes were fixed thoughtfully on the ground during this tale. When Phanes had finished, he gave him a penetrating look and said: "Where are my papers?"

They are in Onuphis' hands. He is looking among them for the document I want."

"I expected to hear that. Be so good as to tell me what the box is like, which Hib thought proper to bring over to Persia?"

"It is a small ebony trunk, with an exquisitely-carved lid. In the centre is a winged beetle, and on the four corners . . ."

"That contains nothing but a few of my father's notices and memorandums," said Nebenchari, drawing a deep breath of relief.

"They will very likely be sufficient for my purpose. I do not know whether you have heard, that I stand as high as possible in Cambyses' favor."

"So much the better for you. I can assure you, however, that the papers, which would have been most useful to you have all been left behind in Egypt."

"They were in a large chest made of sycamore-wood and painted in colors."

"How do you know that?"

"Because—now listen well to what I am going to say, Nebenchari—because I can tell you (I do not swear, for our great master Pythagoras forbade oaths), that this very chest, with all it contained, was burnt in the grove of the temple of Neith, in Sais, by order of the king "

Phanes spoke slowly, emphasizing every syllable, and the words seemed to strike the Egyptian like so many flashes of lightning. His quiet coolness and deliberation gave way to violent emotion; his cheeks glowed and his eyes flashed. But only for one single minute; then the strong emotion seemed to freeze, his burning cheeks grew pale. "You are trying to make me hate my friends, in order to gain me as your ally," he said, coldly and calmly. "I know you Greeks very well. You are so intriguing and artful, that there is no lie, no fraud, too base, if it will only help to gain your purpose."

"You judge me and my countrymen in true Egyptian fashion; that is, they are foreigners, and therefore must be bad men. But this time your suspicions happen to be misplaced. Send for old Hib; he will tell you whether I am right or not."

Nebenchari's face darkened, as Hib came into the room.

"Come nearer," said he in a commanding tone to the old man.

Hib obeyed with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Tell me, have you taken a bribe from this man? Yes or no? I must know the truth; it can influence my future for good or evil. You are an old and faithful servant, to whom I owe a great deal, and so I will forgive you if you were taken in by his artifices, but I must know the truth. I conjure you to tell me by the souls of your fathers gone to Osiris!"

The old man's sallow face turned ashy pale as he heard these words. He gulped and wheezed some time before he could find an answer, and at last, after choking down the tears which had forced their way to his eyes, said, in a half-angry, half-whining tone: "Didn't I say so? they've bewitched him, they've ruined him in this wicked land. Whatever a man would do himself, he thinks others are capable of. Aye,

you may look as angry as you like; it matters but little to me. What can it matter indeed to an old man, who has served the same family faithfully and honestly for sixty years, if they call him at last a rogue, a knave, a traitor, nay even a murderer, if it should take their fancy."

And the scalding tears flowed down over the old man's cheeks, sorely against his will.

The easily-moved Phanes clapped him on the shoulder and said, turning to Nebenchari: "Hib is a faithful fellow. I give you leave to call me a rascal, if he has taken one single obolus from me."

The physician did not need Phanes' assurance; he had known his old servant too well and too long not to be able to read his simple, open features, on which his innocence was written as clearly as in the pages of an open book. "I did not mean to reproach you, old Hib," he said kindly, coming up to him. "How can any one be so angry at a simple question?"

"Perhaps you expect me to be pleased at such a shameful suspicion?"

"No, not that; but at all events now you can tell me what has happened at our house since I left."

"A pretty story that is! Why only to think of it makes my mouth as bitter, as if I were chewing wormwood."

"You said I had been robbed."

"Yes indeed: no one was ever so robbed before. There would have been some comfort if the knaves had belonged to the thieves' caste, for then we should have got the best part of our property back again, and should not after all have been worse off than many another; but when . . ."

[The cunning son of the architect, who robbed the treasure-house of Rhampsinitus was, according to Herodotus, (II. 120), severely punished; but in Diod. I. 80. we see that when thieves acknowledged themselves to the authorities to be such, they were not punished, though a strict watch was set over them. According to Diodorus, there was a president of the thieves' caste, from whom the stolen goods could be reclaimed on relinquishment of a fourth part of the same. This strange rule possibly owed its rise to the law, which compelled every Egyptian to appear once in each year before the authorities of his district and give an account of his means of subsistence. Those who made false statements were punished with death. Diod. I. 77. Thus no one who valued his life could escape the watchful eye of the police, and the thief sacrificed the best part of his gains in order to save his life.]

"Keep to the point, for my time is limited."

"You need not tell me that; I see old Hib can't do anything right here in Persia. Well, be it so, you're master; you must give orders; I am only the servant, I must obey. I won't forget it. Well, as I was saying, it was just at the time when the great Persian embassy came over to Sais to fetch Nitetis, and made everybody stare at them as if they were monsters or prodigies, that this shameful thing happened. I was sitting on the mosquito-tower just as the sun was setting, playing with my little grandson, my Baner's eldest boy—he's a fine strapping little lad now, wonderfully sharp and strong for his age. The rogue was just telling me how his father, the Egyptians do that when their wives leave the children too much alone—had hidden his mother's shoes, and I was laughing heartily, because my Baner won't let any of the little ones live with me, she always says I spoil them, and so I was glad she should have the trick played her—when all of a sudden there was such a loud knocking at the house-door, that I thought there must be a fire and let the child drop off my lap. Down the stairs I ran, three steps at a time, as fast as my long legs would carry me, and unbarred the door. Before I had time to ask them what they wanted, a whole crowd of temple-servants and policemen—there must have been at least fifteen of them—forced their way into the house. Pichi,—you know, that impudent fellow from the temple of Neith,—pushed me back, barred the door inside and told the police to put me in fetters if I refused to obey him. Of course I got angry and did not use very civil words to them—you know that's my way when I'm put out—and what does that bit of a fellow do—by our god Thoth, the protector of knowledge who must know all, I'm speaking the truth—but order them to bind my hands, forbid me—me, old Hib—to speak, and then tell me that he had been told by the high-priest to order me five-and-twenty strokes, if I refused to do his bidding. He showed me the high-priest's ring, and so I knew there was nothing for it but to obey the villain, whether I would or no. And what was his modest demand? Why, nothing less than to give him all the written papers you had left behind. But old Hib is not quite so stupid as to let himself be caught in that way, though some people, who ought to know better, do fancy he can be bribed and is no better than the son of an ass. What did I do then? I pretended to be quite crushed into submission by the sight of the signet-ring, begged Pichi as politely as I could to unfasten my hands, and told him I would fetch the keys. They loosened the cords, I flew up the stairs five steps at a time, burst open the door of your sleeping-room, pushed my little grandson, who was standing by it, into the room

and barred it within. Thanks to my long legs, the others were so far behind that I had time to get hold of the black box which you had told me to take so much care of, put it into the child's arms, lift him through the window on to the balcony which runs round the house towards the inner court, and tell him to put it at once into the pigeon-house. Then I opened the door as if nothing had happened, told Pichi the child had had a knife in his mouth, and that that was the reason I had run upstairs in such a hurry, and had put him out on the balcony to punish him. That brother of a hippopotamus was easily taken in, and then he made me show him over the house. First they found the great sycamore-chest which you had told me to take great care of too, then the papyrus-rolls on your writing-table, and so by degrees every written paper in the house. They made no distinction, but put all together into the great chest and carried it downstairs; the little black box, however, lay safe enough in the pigeon-house. My grandchild is the sharpest boy in all Sais!

"When I saw them really carrying the chest downstairs, all the anger I'd been trying so hard to keep down burst out again. I told the impudent fellows I would accuse them before the magistrates, nay, even before the king if necessary, and if those confounded Persians, who were having the city shown them, had not come up just then and made everybody stare at them, I could have roused the crowd to take my side. The same evening I went to my son-in-law—he is employed in the temple of Neith too, you know,—and begged him to make every effort to find out what had become of the papers. The good fellow has never forgotten the handsome dowry you gave my Baner when he married her, and in three days he came and told me he had seen your beautiful chest and all the rolls it contained burnt to ashes. I was so angry that I fell ill of the jaundice, but that did not hinder me from sending in a written accusation to the magistrates. The wretches,—I suppose only because they were priests too,—refused to take any notice of me or my complaint. Then I sent in a petition to the king, and was turned away there too with the shameful threat, that I should be considered guilty of high treason if I mentioned the papers again. I valued my tongue too much to take any further steps, but the ground burnt under my feet; I could not stay in Egypt, I wanted to see you, tell you what they had done to you, and call on you, who are more powerful than your poor servant, to revenge yourself. And besides, I wanted to see the black box safe in your hands, lest they should take that from me too. And so, old man as I am, with a sad heart I left my home and my grandchildren to go forth into this foreign Typhon's land. Ah, the little lad was too sharp! As I was kissing him, he said: 'Stay with us, grandfather. If the foreigners make you unclean, they won't let me kiss you any more.' Baner sends you a hearty greeting, and my son-in-law told me to say he had found out that Psantik, the crown-prince, and your rival, Petammon, had been the sole causes of this execrable deed. I could not make up my mind to trust myself on that Typhon's sea, so I travelled with an Arabian trading caravan as far as Tadmor,—[Palmyra]—the Phoenician palm-tree station in the wilderness," and then on to Carchemish, on the Euphrates, with merchants from Sidon. The roads from Sardis and from Phoenicia meet there, and, as I was sitting very weary in the little wood before the station, a traveller arrived with the royal post-horses, and I saw at once that it was the former commander of the Greek mercenaries."

"And I," interrupted Phanes, "recognized just as soon in you, the longest and most quarrelsome old fellow that had ever come across my path. Oh, how often I've laughed to see you scolding the children, as they ran after you in the street whenever you appeared behind your master with the medicine-chest. The minute I saw you too I remembered a joke which the king once made in his own way, as you were both passing by. 'The old man,' he said, reminds me of a fierce old owl followed by a flight of small teasing birds, and Nebenchari looks as if he had a scolding wife, who will some day or other reward him for healing other people's eyes by scratching out his own!'"

"Shameful!" said the old man, and burst into a flood of execrations.

Nebenchari had been listening to his servant's tale in silence and thought. He had changed color from time to time and on hearing that the papers which had cost him so many nights of hard work had been burnt, his fists clenched and he shivered as if seized by biting frost. Not one of his movements escaped the Athenian. He understood human nature; he knew that a jest is often much harder to bear than a grave affront, and therefore seized this opportunity to repeat the inconsiderate joke which Amasis had, it is true, allowed himself to make in one of his merry moods. Phanes had calculated rightly, and had the pleasure of seeing, that as he uttered the last words Nebenchari pressed his hand on a rose which lay on the table before him, and crushed it to pieces. The Greek suppressed a smile of satisfaction, and did not even raise his eyes from the ground, but continued speaking: "Well, now we must bring the travelling adventures of good old Hib to a close. I invited him to share my carriage. At first he refused to sit on the same cushion with such a godless foreigner, as I am, gave in, however, at last, had a good opportunity at the last station of showing the world how many clever processes of manipulation he had learnt from you and your father, in his treatment of Oropastes' wounded brother; he reached Babylon at last safe and sound, and there, as we could not get sight of you, owing to the melancholy poisoning of your country-woman, I succeeded in obtaining him a lodging in the royal palace itself. The rest you knew already."

Nebenchari bowed assent and gave Hib a sign to leave the room, which the old man obeyed, grumbling and scolding in a low tone as he departed. When the door had closed on him, Nebenchari, the man whose calling was to heal, drew nearer to the soldier Phanes, and said: "I am afraid we cannot be allies after all, Greek."

"Why not?"

"Because I fear, that your revenge will prove far too mild when compared with that which I feel bound to inflict."

"On that head there is no need for solicitude," answered the Athenian.

"May I call you my ally then?"

"Yes," answered the other; "but only on one condition."

"And that is—?"

"That you will procure me an opportunity of seeing our vengeance with my own eyes."

"That is as much as to say you are willing to accompany Cambyses' army to Egypt?"

"Certainly I am; and when I see my enemies pining in disgrace and misery I will cry unto them, 'Ah ha, ye cowards, the poor despised and exiled physician, Nebenchari, has brought this wretchedness upon you!' Oh, my books, my books! They made up to me for my lost wife and child. Hundreds were to have learnt from them how to deliver the blind from the dark night in which he lives, and to preserve to the seeing the sweetest gift of the gods, the greatest beauty of the human countenance, the receptacle of light, the seeing eye. Now that my books are burnt I have lived in vain; the wretches have burnt me in burning my works. O my books, my books!" And he sobbed aloud in his agony. Phanes came up and took his hand, saying: "The Egyptians have struck you, my friend, but me they have maltreated and abused—thieves have broken into your granaries, but my hearth and home have been burnt to ashes by incendiaries. Do you know, man, what I have had to suffer at their hands? In persecuting me, and driving me out of Egypt, they only did what they had a right to do; by their law I was a condemned man; and I could have forgiven all they did to me personally, for I loved Amasis, as a man loves his friend. The wretch knew that, and yet he suffered them to commit a monstrous, an incredible act—an act that a man's brain refuses to take in. They stole like wolves by night into a helpless woman's house—they seized my children, a girl and boy, the pride, the joy and comfort of my homeless, wandering life. And how think you, did they treat them? The girl they kept in confinement, on the pretext that by so doing they should prevent me from betraying Egypt to Cambyses. But the boy—my beautiful, gentle boy—my only son—has been murdered by Psamtik's orders, and possibly with the knowledge of Amasis. My heart was withered and shrunk with exile and sorrow, but I feel that it expands—it beats more joyfully now that there is a hope of vengeance."

Nebenchari's sullen but burning glance met the flashing eye of the Athenian as he finished his tale; he gave him his hand and said: "We are allies."

The Greek clasped the offered hand and answered: "Our first point now is to make sure of the king's favor."

"I will restore Kassandane's sight."

"Is that in your power?"

"The operation which removed Amasis' blindness was my own discovery. Petammon stole it from my burnt papers."

"Why did you not exert your skill earlier?"

"Because I am not accustomed to bestow presents on my enemies."

Phanes shuddered slightly at these words, recovered himself, however, in a moment, and said: "And I am certain of the king's favor too. The Massagetan envoys have gone home to-day; peace has been granted them and..."

While he was speaking the door was burst open and one of Kassandane's eunuchs rushed into the room crying: "The Princess Nitetis is dying! Follow me at once, there is not a moment to lose."

The physician made a parting sign to his confederate, and followed the eunuch to the dying-bed of the royal bride.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Blessings go as quickly as they come
Hast thou a wounded heart? touch it seldom
Nothing is perfectly certain in this world
Only two remedies for heart-sickness:—hope and patience
Remember, a lie and your death are one and the same
Scarcely be able to use so large a sum—Then abuse it
Whatever a man would do himself, he thinks others are capable of
When love has once taken firm hold of a man in riper years

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AN EGYPTIAN PRINCESS — VOLUME 07 ***

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