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CLEOPATRA

BEING

AN ACCOUNT OF THE FALL AND VENGEANCE
OF HARMACHIS, THE ROYAL EGYPTIAN, AS SET
FORTH BY HIS OWN HAND

BY

H. RIDER HAGGARD,

AUTHOR OF "KING SOLOMON'S MINES," "SHE," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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DEDICATION.

MY DEAR MOTHER,

I have for a long while hoped to be allowed to dedicate some book of mine to you, and now I bring you this work, because whatever its shortcomings, and whatever judgment may be passed upon it by yourself and others, it is yet the one I should wish you to accept.

I trust that you will receive from my romance of "Cleopatra" some such pleasure as lightened the labour of its building up; and that it may convey to your mind a picture, however imperfect, of the old and mysterious Egypt in whose lost glories you are so deeply interested.

Your affectionate and dutiful Son,

H. RIDER HAGGARD.

January 21, 1889.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

THE history of the ruin of Antony and Cleopatra must have struck many students of the records of their age as one of the most inexplicable of tragic tales. What malign influence and secret hates were at work, continually sapping their prosperity and blinding their judgment? Why did Cleopatra fly at Actium, and why did Antony follow her, leaving his fleet and army to destruction? An attempt is made in this romance to suggest a possible answer to these and some other questions.

The reader is asked to bear in mind, however, that the story is told, not from a modern point of view, but as from the broken heart and with the lips of an Egyptian patriot of royal blood; no mere beast-worshipper, but a priest instructed

in the inmost mysteries, who believed firmly in the personal existence of the gods of Khem, in the possibility of communion with them, and in the certainty of immortal life with its rewards and punishments; to whom also the bewildering and often gross symbolism of the Osirian Faith was nothing but a veil woven to obscure secrets of the Sanctuary. Whatever proportion of truth there may have been in their spiritual claims and imaginings, if indeed there was any, such men as the Prince Harmachis have been told of in the annals of every great religion, and, as is shown by the testimony of monumental and sacred inscriptions, they were not unknown among the worshippers of the Egyptian Gods, and more especially of Isis.

Unfortunately it is scarcely possible to write a book of this nature and period without introducing a certain amount of illustrative matter, for by no other means can the long dead past be made to live again before the reader's eyes with all its accessories of faded pomp and forgotten mystery. To such students as seek a story only, and are not interested in the Faith, ceremonies, or customs of the Mother of Religion and Civilisa-

tion, ancient Egypt, it is, however, respectfully suggested that they should exercise the art of skipping, and open this tale at its Second Book.

That version of the death of Cleopatra has been preferred which attributes her end to poison. According to Plutarch its actual manner is very uncertain, though popular rumour ascribed it to the bite of an asp. She seems, however, to have carried out her design under the advice of that shadowy personage, her physician, Olympus, and it is more than doubtful if he would have resorted to such a fantastic and uncertain method of destroying life.

It may be mentioned that so late as the reign of Ptolemy Epiphanes, pretenders of native blood, one of whom was named Harmachis, are known to have advanced their claims to the throne of Egypt. Moreover, there was a book of prophecy current among the priesthood which declared that after the nations of the Greeks the God Harsefi would create the "chief who is to come." It will therefore be seen that, although it lacks historical confirmation, the story of the great plot formed to stamp out the dynasty of the Macedonian

Lagidae and place Harmachis on the throne is not in itself improbable. Indeed, it is possible that many such plots were entered into by Egyptian patriots during the long ages of their country's bondage. But ancient history tells us little of the abortive struggles of a fallen race.

The Chant of Isis and the Song of Cleopatra, which appear in these pages, are done into verse from the writer's prose by Mr. Andrew Lang, and the dirge sung by Charmion is translated by the same hand from the Greek of the Syrian Meleager.

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CLEOPATRA.

INTRODUCTION.

IN the recesses of the desolate Libyan mountains that lie behind the temple and city of Abydus, the supposed burying place of the Holy Osiris, a tomb was recently discovered, among the contents of which were the papyrus rolls whereon this history is written. The tomb itself is spacious, but otherwise remarkable only for the depth of the shaft which descends vertically from the rock-hewn cave, that once served as the mortuary chapel for the friends and relatives of the departed, to the coffin-chamber beneath. This shaft is no less than eighty-nine feet in depth. The chamber at its foot was found to contain three coffins only, though it is large

enough for many more. Two of these, which in all probability inclosed the bodies of the High Priest, Amenemhat, and of his wife, father and mother of Harmachis, the hero of this history, the shameless Arabs who discovered them there and then broke up.

The Arabs broke the bodies up. With unhallowed hands they tore the holy Amenemhat and the frame of her who had, as it is written, been filled with the spirit of the Hathors—tore them limb from limb, searching for treasure amidst their bones—perhaps, as is their custom, selling the very bones for a few piastres to the last ignorant tourist who came their way, seeking what he might destroy. For in Egypt the unhappy, the living find their bread in the tombs of the great men who were before them.

But as it chanced, some little while afterwards, one who is known to this writer, and a doctor by profession, passed up the Nile to Abydus, and became acquainted with the men who had done this thing. They revealed to him the secret of the place, telling him that one coffin yet remained entombed. It seemed to be the coffin of a poor person, they said, and therefore,

being pressed for time, they had left it unviolated. Moved by curiosity to explore the recesses of a tomb as yet unprofaned by tourists, my friend bribed the Arabs to show it to him. What ensued I will give in his own words, exactly as he wrote it to me:—

“I slept that night near the Temple of Seti, and started before daybreak on the following morning. With me were a cross-eyed rascal called Ali—Ali Baba I named him—the man from whom I got the ring which I am sending you, and a small but choice assortment of his fellow thieves. Within an hour after sunrise we reached the valley where the tomb is. It is a desolate place, into which the sun pours his scorching heat all the long day through, till the huge brown rocks which are strewn about become so hot that one can scarcely bear to touch them, and the sand scorches the feet. It was already too hot to walk, so we rode on donkeys, some way up the valley—where a vulture floating far in the blue overhead was the only other visitor—till we came to an enormous boulder polished by centuries of the action of sun and sand. Here

Cleopatra, I.

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Ali halted, saying that the tomb was under the stone. Accordingly, we dismounted, and, leaving the donkeys in charge of a fellah boy, went up to the rock. Beneath it was a small hole, barely large enough for a man to creep through. Indeed it had been dug by jackals, for the doorway and some part of the cave were entirely silted up, and it was by means of this jackal hole that the tomb had been discovered. Ali crept in on his hands and knees, and I followed, to find myself in a place cold after the hot outside air, and, in contrast with the light, filled with a dazzling darkness. We lit our candles, and, the select body of thieves having arrived, I made an examination. We were in a cave the size of a large room, and hollowed by hand, the further part of the cave being almost free from drift-dust. On the walls are religious paintings of the usual Ptolemaic character, and among them one of a majestic old man with a long white beard, who is seated in a carved chair holding a wand in his hand.* Before him passes a procession of priests bearing sacred images. In the right hand corner

* This, I take it, is a portrait of Amenemhat himself.

of the tomb is the shaft of the mummy-pit, a square-mouthed well cut in the black rock. We had brought a beam of thorn-wood, and this was now laid across the pit and a rope made fast to it. Then Ali—who, to do him justice, is a courageous thief—took hold of the rope, and, putting some candles into the breast of his robe, placed his bare feet against the smooth sides of the well and began to descend with great rapidity. Very soon he had vanished into blackness, and the agitation of the cord alone told us that anything was going on below. At last the rope ceased shaking and a faint shout came rumbling up the well, announcing Ali's safe arrival. Then, far below, a tiny star of light appeared. He had lit the candle, thereby disturbing hundreds of bats that fluttered up in an endless stream and as silently as spirits. The rope was hauled up again, and now it was my turn; but, as I declined to trust my neck to the hand-over-hand method of descent, the end of the cord was made fast round my middle and I was lowered bodily into those sacred depths. Nor was it a pleasant journey, for, if the masters of the situation above had made any mistake I should have been

dashed to pieces. Also, the bats continually flew into my face and clung to my hair, and I have a great dislike of bats. At last, after some minutes of jerking and dangling, I found myself standing in a narrow passage by the side of the worthy Ali, covered with bats and perspiration, and with the skin rubbed off my knees and knuckles. Then another man came down, hand over hand like a sailor, and as the rest were told to stop above we were ready to go on. Ali went first with his candle—of course we each had a candle—leading the way down a long passage about five feet high. At length the passage widened out, and we were in the tomb-chamber: I think the hottest and most silent place that I ever entered. It was simply stifling. This chamber is a square room cut in the rock and totally devoid of paintings or sculpture. I held up the candles and looked round. About the place were strewn the coffin lids and the mummied remains of the two bodies that the Arabs had previously violated. The paintings on the former were, I noticed, of great beauty, though, having no knowledge of hieroglyphics, I could not decipher them. Beads and spicy wrappings lay around

the remains, which, I saw, were those of a man and a woman.* The head had been broken off the body of the man. I took it up and looked at it. It had been closely shaved—after death, I should say, from the general indications—and the features were disfigured with gold leaf. But notwithstanding this, and the shrinkage of the flesh, I think the face was one of the most imposing and beautiful that I ever saw. It was that of a very old man, and his dead countenance still wore so calm and solemn, indeed, so awful a look, that I grew quite superstitious (though as you know, I am pretty well accustomed to dead people), and put the head down in a hurry. There were still some wrappings left upon the face of the second body, and I did not remove them; but she must have been a fine large woman in her day.

“‘There the other mummy,’ said Ali, pointing to a large and solid case that seemed to have been carelessly thrown down in a corner, for it was lying on its side.

“I went up to it and examined it. It was

* Doubtless Amenemhat and his wife.—ED.

well made, but of perfectly plain cedar-wood—not an inscription, not a solitary God on it.

“‘Never see one like him before,’ said Ali. ‘Bury great hurry, he no “mafish,” no “fineesh.” Throw him down there on side.’

“I looked at the plain case till at last my interest was thoroughly aroused. I was so shocked by the sight of the scattered dust of the departed that I had made up my mind not to touch the remaining coffin—but now my curiosity overcame me, and we set to work.

“Ali had brought a mallet and a cold chisel with him, and, having set the coffin straight, he began upon it with all the zeal of an experienced tomb-breaker. And then he pointed out another thing. Most mummy-cases are fastened by four little tongues of wood, two on either side, which are fixed in the upper half, and, passing into mortices cut to receive them in the thickness of the lower half, are there held fast by pegs of hard wood. But this mummy-case had eight such tongues. Evidently it had been thought well to secure it firmly. At last, with great difficulty, we raised the massive lid, which was nearly three inches thick, and there, covered

over with a deep layer of loose spices (a very unusual thing), was the body.

“Ali looked at it with open eyes—and no wonder. For this mummy was not as other mummies are. Mummies in general lie upon their backs, as stiff and calm as though they were cut from wood; but this mummy lay upon its side, and, the wrappings notwithstanding, its knees were slightly bent. More than that, indeed, the gold mask, which, after the fashion of the Ptolemaic period, had been set upon the face, had worked down, and was literally pounded up beneath the hooded head.

“It was impossible, seeing these things, to avoid the conclusion that the mummy before us had moved with violence *since it was put in the coffin.*

“‘Him very funny mummy. Him not “mafish” when him go in there,’ said Ali.

“‘Nonsense!’ I said. ‘Who ever heard of a live mummy?’

“We lifted the body out of the coffin, nearly choking ourselves with mummy dust in the process, and there beneath it half hidden among the spices, we made our first find. It was a roll of

papyrus, carelessly fastened and wrapped in a piece of mummy cloth, having to all appearance been thrown into the coffin at the moment of closing.*

“Ali eyed the papyrus greedily, but I seized it and put it in my pocket, for it was agreed that I was to have all that might be discovered. Then we began to unwrap the body. It was covered with very broad strong bandages, thickly wound and roughly tied, sometimes by means of simple knots, the whole work bearing the appearance of having been executed in great haste and with difficulty. Just over the head was a large lump. Presently, the bandages covering it were off, and there, on the face, lay a second roll of papyrus. I put down my hand to lift it, but it would not come away. It appeared to be fixed to the stout seamless shroud which was drawn over the whole body, and tied beneath the feet—as a farmer ties sacks. This shroud, which was also thickly waxed, was in one piece, being made to fit the form like a

* This roll contained the third unfinished book of the history. The other two rolls were neatly fastened in the usual fashion. All three are written by one hand in the Demotic character.—ED.

garment. I took a candle and examined the roll and then I saw why it was fast. The spices had congealed and glued it to the sack-like shroud. It was impossible to get it away without tearing the outer sheets of papyrus.*

“At last, however, I wrenched it loose and put it with the other in my pocket.

“Then we went on with our dreadful task in silence. With much care we ripped loose the sack-like garment, and at last the body of a man lay before us. Between his knees was a third roll of papyrus. I secured it, then held down the light and looked at him. One glance at his face was enough to tell a doctor how he had died.

“This body was not much dried up. Evidently it had not passed the allotted seventy days in natron, and therefore the expression and likeness were better preserved than is usual. Without entering into particulars, I will only say that I hope I shall never see such another look as that which was frozen on this dead man’s face.

* This accounts for the gaps in the last sheets of the second roll.—ED.

Even the Arabs recoiled from it in horror and began to mutter prayers.

“For the rest, the usual opening on the left side through which the embalmers did their work was absent; the finely-cut features were those of a person of middle age, although the hair was already grey, and the frame was that of a very powerful man, the shoulders being of an extraordinary width. I had not time to examine very closely, however, for within a few seconds from its uncovering, the unembalmed body began to crumble now that it was exposed to the action of the air. In five or six minutes there was literally nothing left of it but a wisp of hair, the skull, and a few of the larger bones. I noticed that one of the tibiæ—I forget if it was the right or the left—had been fractured and very badly set. It must have been quite an inch shorter than the other.

“Well, there was nothing more to find, and now that the excitement was over, what between the heat, the exertion, and the smell of mummy dust and spices, I felt more dead than alive.

“I am tired of writing, and the ship rolls. This letter, of course, goes overland, and I am

coming by 'long sea,' but I hope to be in London within ten days after you get it. Then I will tell you of my pleasing experiences in the course of the ascent from the tomb-chamber, and of how that prince of rascals, Ali Baba, and his thieves tried to frighten me into handing over the papyri, and how I worsted them. Then, too, we will get the rolls deciphered. I expect that they only contain the usual thing, copies of the 'Book of the Dead,' but there *may* be something else in them. Needless to say, I did not narrate this little adventure in Egypt, or I should have had the Boulac Museum people on my track. Good-bye, 'Mafish Fineesh,' as Ali Baba always said."

In due course, my friend, the writer of the letter from which I have quoted, arrived in London, and on the very next day we paid a visit to a learned acquaintance well versed in Hieroglyphics and Demotic writing. The anxiety with which we watched him skilfully damping and unfolding one of the rolls and peering through his gold-rimmed glasses at the mysterious characters may well be imagined.

"Hum," he said, "whatever it is, this is *not*

a copy of the 'Book of the Dead.' By George, what's this? Cle—Cleo—Cleopatra—— Why, my dear Sirs, as I am a living man, this is the history of somebody who lived in the days of Cleopatra, *the* Cleopatra, for here's Antony's name with hers! Well, there's six months' work before me here—six months, at the very least!" And in that joyful prospect he fairly lost control of himself, and skipped about the room, shaking hands with us at intervals, and saying "I'll translate—I'll translate it if it kills me, and we will publish it; and, by the living Osiris, it shall drive every Egyptologist in Europe mad with envy! Oh, what a find! what a most glorious find!"

And O you whose eyes shall fall upon these pages, see, they have been translated, and they have been printed, and here they lie before you—an undiscovered land wherein you are free to travel!

Harmachis speaks to you from his forgotten tomb. The walls of Time fall down, and, as at the lightning's leap, a picture from the past starts

upon your view, framed in the darkness of the ages.

He shows you those two Egypts which the silent pyramids looked down upon long centuries ago—the Egypt of the Greek, the Roman, and the Ptolemy, and that other outworn Egypt of the Hierophant, hoary with years, heavy with the legends of antiquity and the memory of long-lost honours.

He tells you how the smouldering loyalty of the land of Khem blazed up before it died, and how fiercely the old Time-consecrated Faith struggled against the conquering tide of Change that rose, like Nile at flood, and drowned the ancient Gods of Egypt.

Here, in his pages, you shall learn the glory of Isis the Many-shaped, the Executrix of Decrees. Here you shall make acquaintance with the shade of Cleopatra, that "Thing of Flame," whose passion-breathing beauty shaped the destiny of Empires. Here you shall read how the soul of Charmion was slain of the sword her vengeance smithied.

Here Harmachis, the doomed Egyptian, being about to die, salutes you who follow on the path

he trod. In the story of his broken years he shows to you what may in its degree be the story of your own. Crying aloud from that dim Amenti* where to-day he wears out his long atoning time, he tells, in the history of his fall, the fate of him who, however sorely tried, forgets his God, his Honour, and his Country.

* The Egyptian Hades or Purgatory.—ED.

BOOK I.

THE PREPARATION OF HARMACHIS.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE BIRTH OF HARMACHIS; THE PROPHECY OF THE HATHORS; AND THE SLAYING OF THE INNOCENT CHILD.

By Osiris who sleeps at Aboutthis, I write the truth.

I, Harmachis, Hereditary Priest of the Temple, reared by the divine Sethi, aforetime a Pharaoh of Egypt, and now justified in Osiris and ruling in Amenti. I, Harmachis, by right Divine and by true descent of blood King of the Double Crown, and Pharaoh of the Upper and Lower Land. I, Harmachis, who cast aside the opening flower of our hope, who turned from the glorious path, who forgot the voice of God in hearkening to the voice of woman. I, Harmachis, the fallen, in whom are gathered up all woes as waters are gathered in a desert well, who have tasted of

every shame, who through betrayal have betrayed, who in losing the glory that is here have lost of the glory which is to be, who am utterly undone—I write, and, by Him who sleeps at Abouthis, I write the truth.

O Egypt!—dear land of Khem, whose black soil nourished up my mortal part—land that I have betrayed—O Osiris!—Isis!—Horus!—ye Gods of Egypt whom I have betrayed!—O ye temples whose pylons strike the sky, whose faith I have betrayed!—O Royal blood of the Pharaohs of eld, that yet runs within these withered veins—whose virtue I have betrayed! O Invisible Essence of all Good! and O Fate, whose balance rested on my hand—hear me; and, to the day of utter doom, bear me witness that I write the truth.

Even while I write, beyond the fertile fields, the Nile is running red, as though with blood. Before me the sunlight beats upon the far Arabian hills, and falls upon the piles of Abouthis. Still the priests make orison within the temples at Abouthis that know me no more; still the sacrifice is offered, and the stony roofs echo back the

people's prayers. Still from this lone cell within my prison-tower, I, the Word of Shame, watch thy fluttering banners, Abouthis, flaunting from thy pylon walls, and hear the chants as the long procession winds from sanctuary to sanctuary.

Abouthis, lost Abouthis! my heart goes out toward thee! For the day comes when the desert sands shall fill thy secret places! Thy Gods are doomed, O Abouthis! New Faiths shall make a mock of all thy Holies, and Centurion shall call upon Centurion across thy fortress-walls. I weep—I weep tears of blood: for mine is the sin that brought about these evils and mine for ever is their shame.

Behold, it is written hereafter.

Here in Abouthis I was born, I, Harmachis, and my father, the justified in Osiris, was High Priest of the Temple of Sethi. And on that same day of my birth Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt, was born also. I passed my youth in yonder fields watching the baser people at their labours and going in and out at will among the great courts of the temples. Of my mother I knew naught, for she died when I yet hung at the

breast. But before she died in the reign of Ptolemy Aulêtes, who is named the Piper, so the old wife, Atoua, told me, my mother took a golden uræus, the snake symbol of our Royalty of Egypt, from a coffer of ivory and laid it on my brow. And those who saw her do this believed that she was distraught of the Divinity, and in her madness foreshadowed that the day of the Macedonian Lagidæ was ended, and that Egypt's sceptre should pass again to the hand of Egypt's true and Royal race. But when my father, the old High Priest Amenemhat, whose only child I was, she who was his wife before my mother having been, for what crime I know not, cursed with barrenness by Sekhet: I say when my father came in and saw what the dying woman had done, he lifted up his hands towards the vault of heaven and adored the Invisible, because of the sign that had been sent. And as he adored, the Hathors* filled my dying mother with the Spirit of Prophecy, and she rose in strength from the couch and prostrated herself thrice before the cradle where I lay asleep, the Royal asp upon my brow, crying aloud:

* The Egyptian *Parcæ* or *Fates*.—ED.

“Hail to thee, fruit of my womb! Hail to thee, Royal child! Hail to thee, Pharaoh that shalt be! Hail to thee, God that shalt purge the land, Divine seed of Nekt-nebf, the descended from Isis. Keep thee pure, and thou shalt rule and deliver Egypt and not be broken. But if thou dost fail in thy hour of trial, then may the curse of all the Gods of Egypt rest upon thee, and the curse of thy Royal forefathers, the justified, who ruled the land before thee from the age of Horus. Then in life mayst thou be wretched, and after death may Osiris refuse thee, and the judges of Amenti give judgment against thee, and Set and Sekhet torment thee, till such time as thy sin is purged, and the Gods of Egypt, called by strange names, are once more worshipped in the Temples of Egypt, and the staff of the Oppressor is broken, and the footsteps of the Foreigner are swept clean, and the thing is accomplished as thou in thy weakness shalt cause it to be done.”

When she had spoken thus, the Spirit of Prophecy went out of her, and she fell dead across the cradle where I slept, so that I awoke with a cry.

But my father, Amenemhat, the High Priest, trembled, and was very fearful both because of the words which had been said by the Spirit of the Hathors through the mouth of my mother, and because what had been uttered was treason against Ptolemy. For he knew that, if the matter should come to the ears of Ptolemy, Pharaoh would send his guards to destroy the life of the child concerning whom such things were prophesied. Therefore, my father shut the doors, and caused all those who stood by to swear upon the holy symbol of his office, and by the name of the Divine Three, and by the Soul of her who lay dead upon the stones beside them, that nothing of what they had seen and heard should pass their lips.

Now among the company was the old wife, Atoua, who had been been the nurse of my mother, and loved her well; and in these days, though I know not how it has been in the past nor how it shall be in the future, there is no oath that can bind a woman's tongue. And so it came about that by-and-by, when the matter had become homely in her mind, and her fear had fallen from her, she spoke of the prophecy to her

daughter, who nursed me at the breast now that my mother was dead. She did this as they walked together in the desert carrying food to the husband of the daughter, who was a sculptor, and shaped effigies of the holy Gods in the tombs that are fashioned in the rock—telling the daughter, my nurse, how great must be her care and love toward the child that should one day be Pharaoh, and drive the Ptolemies from Egypt. But the daughter, my nurse, was so filled with wonder at what she heard that she could not keep the tale locked within her breast, and in the night she awoke her husband, and, in her turn, whispered it to him, and thereby compassed her own destruction, and the destruction of her child, my foster-brother. For the man told his friend, and the friend was a spy of Ptolemy's, and thus the tale came to Pharaoh's ears.

Now, Pharaoh was much troubled thereat, for though when he was full of wine he would make a mock of the Gods of the Egyptians, and swear that the Roman Senate was the only God to whom he bowed the knee, yet in his heart he was terribly afraid, as I have learned from one who was his physician. For when he was alone at

night he would scream and cry aloud to the great Serapis, who indeed is no true God, and to other Gods, fearing lest he should be murdered and his soul handed over to the tormentors. Also, when he felt his throne tremble under him, he would send large presents to the temples, asking a message from the oracles, and more especially from the oracle that is at Philæ. Therefore, when it came to his ears that the wife of the High Priest of the great and ancient Temple of Abouthis had been filled with the Spirit of Prophecy before she died, and foretold that her son should be Pharaoh, he was much afraid, and summoning some trusty guards—who, being Greeks, did not fear to do sacrilege—he despatched them by boat up the Nile, with orders to come to Abouthis and cut off the head of the child of the High Priest and bring it to him in a basket.

But, as it chanced, the boat in which the guards came was of deep draught, and, the time of their coming being at the lowest ebb of the river, it struck and remained fast upon a bank of mud that is opposite the mouth of the road running across the plains to Abouthis, and, as the

north wind was blowing very fiercely, it was like to sink. Thereon the guards of Pharaoh called out to the common people, who laboured at lifting water along the banks of the river, to come with boats and take them off; but, seeing that they were Greeks of Alexandria, the people would not, for the Egyptians do not love the Greeks. Then the guards cried that they were on Pharaoh's business, and still the people would not, asking what was their business. Whereon a eunuch among them who had made himself drunk in his fear, told them that they came to slay the child of Amenemhat, the High Priest, of whom it was prophesied that he should be Pharaoh and sweep the Greeks from Egypt. And then the people feared to stand longer in doubt, but brought boats, not knowing what might be meant by the man's words. But there was one among them—a farmer and an overseer of canals—who was a kinsman of my mother's and had been present when she prophesied; and he turned and ran swiftly for three parts of an hour, till he came to where I lay in the house that is without the north wall of the great Temple. Now, as it chanced, my father was away in that part of the

Place of Tombs which is to the left of the large fortress, and Pharaoh's guards, mounted on asses, were hard upon us. Then the messenger cried to the old wife, Atoua, whose tongue had brought about the evil, and told how the soldiers drew near to slay me. And they looked at each other, not knowing what to do; for, had they hid me, the guards would not have stayed their search till I was found. But the man, gazing through the doorway, saw a little child at play:—

“Woman,” he said, “whose is that child?”

“It is my grandchild,” she answered, “the foster-brother of the Prince Harmachis; the child to whose mother we owe this evil case.”

“Woman,” he said, “thou knowest thy duty, do it!” and he again pointed at the child. “I command thee, by the Holy name!”

Atoua trembled exceedingly, because the child was of her own blood; but, nevertheless, she took the boy and washed him and set a robe of silk on him, and laid him on my cradle. And me she took and smeared with mud to make my fair skin darker, and, drawing my garment from me, set me to play in the dirt of the yard, which I did right gladly.

Then the man hid himself, and presently the soldiers rode up and asked of the old wife if this were the dwelling of the High Priest Amenemhat? And she told them yea, and, bidding them enter, offered them honey and milk, for they were thirsty.

When they had drunk, the eunuch who was with them asked if that were the son of Amenemhat who lay in the cradle; and she said "Yea—yea," and began to tell the guards how he would be great, for it had been prophesied of him that he should one day rule them all.

But the Greek guards laughed, and one of them, seizing the child, smote off his head with a sword; and the eunuch drew forth the signet of Pharaoh as warrant for the deed and showed it to the old wife, Atoua, bidding her tell the High Priest that his son should be a King without a head.

And as they went one of their number saw me playing in the dirt and called out that there was more breeding in yonder brat than in the Prince Harmachis; and for a moment they wavered, thinking to slay me also, but in the end they

passed on, bearing the head of my foster-brother, for they loved not to murder little children.

After a while the mother of the dead returned from the market-place, and when she found what had been done, she and her husband would have killed Atoua the old wife, her mother, and given me up to the soldiers of Pharaoh. But my father came in also and learned the truth, and he caused the man and his wife to be seized by night and hidden away in the dark places of the temple, so that none saw them more.

But I would to-day it had been the will of the Gods that I had been slain of the soldiers and not the innocent child.

Thereafter it was given out that the High Priest Amenemhat had taken me to be as a son to him in the place of that Harmachis who was slain of Pharaoh.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE DISOBEDIENCE OF HARMACHIS; OF THE SLAYING OF THE LION; AND OF THE SPEECH OF THE OLD WIFE, ATOUA.

AND after these things Ptolemy the Piper troubled us no more, nor did he again send his soldiers to Aboutthis to seek for him of whom it was prophesied that he should be Pharaoh. For the head of the child, my foster-brother, was brought to him by the eunuch as he sat in his palace of marble at Alexandria, flushed with Cyprian wine, and played upon the flute before his women. And at his bidding the eunuch lifted up the head by the hair for him to look on. Then he laughed and smote it on the cheek with his sandal, bidding one of the girls crown Pharaoh with flowers. And he bowed the knee, and mocked the head of the innocent child. But the girl, who was sharp of tongue—for all of this I heard in after years—said to him that “he did

well to bow the knee, for this child was indeed Pharaoh, the greatest of Pharaohs, and his name was the *Osiris* and his throne was *Death*."

Aulêtes was much troubled at these words, and trembled, for, being a wicked man, he greatly feared the entering into Amenti. So he caused the girl to be slain because of the evil omen of her saying; crying that he would send her to worship that Pharaoh whom she had named. And the other women he sent away, and played no more upon the flute till he was once again drunk on the morrow. But the Alexandrians made a song on the matter, which is still sung about the streets. And this is the beginning of it—

Ptolemy the Piper played
 Over dead and dying;
 Piped and played he well.
 Sure that flute of his was made
 Of the dank reed sighing
 O'er the streams of Hell.

There beneath the shadows grey
 With the sisters three,
 Shall he pipe for many a day.
 May the Frog his butler be!
 And his wine the water of that countrie—
 Ptolemy the Piper!

After this the years passed on, nor did I, being very little, know anything of the great things that came to pass in Egypt; nor is it my purpose to set them out here. For I, Harmachis, having little time left to me, will only speak of those things with which I have been concerned.

And as the time went on, my father and the teachers instructed me in the ancient learning of our people and in such matters appertaining to the Gods as it is meet that children should know. So I grew strong and comely, for my hair was black as the hair of the divine Nout, and my eyes were blue as the blue lotus, and my skin was like the alabaster within the sanctuaries. For now that these glories have passed from me I may speak of them without shame. I was strong also. There was no youth of my years in Abouthis who could stand against me to wrestle with me, nor could any throw so far with the sling or spear. And I much yearned to hunt the lion; but he whom I called my father forbade me, telling me that my life was of too great worth to be so lightly hazarded. But when I bowed before him and prayed he would make his meaning clear to me, the old man frowned and answered that the

Gods made all things clear in their own season: For my part, however, I went away wroth, for there was a youth in Abouthis who with others had slain a lion which fell upon his father's herds, and, being envious of my strength and beauty, he set it about that I was cowardly at heart, in that when I went out to hunt I only slew jackals and gazelles. Now, this was when I had reached my seventeenth year and was a man grown.

It chanced, therefore, that as I went sore at heart from the presence of the High Priest, I met this youth, who called to me and mocked me, bidding me know the country people had told him that a great lion was down among the rushes by the banks of the canal which runs past the Temple, lying at a distance of thirty stadia from Abouthis. And, still mocking me, he asked me if I would come and help him slay this lion, or would I go and sit among the old women and bid them comb my side lock? This bitter word so angered me that I was near to falling on him; but in place thereof, forgetting my father's saying, I answered that if he would come alone, I would go with him and seek this lion, and he should learn if I were indeed a coward. And at first he

would not, for, as men know, it is our custom to hunt the lion in companies; so it was my hour to mock. Then he went and fetched his bow and arrows and a sharp knife. And I brought forth my heavy spear, which had a shaft of thorn-wood, and at its end a pomegranate in silver, to hold the hand from slipping; and, in silence, we went, side by side, to where the lion lay. When we came to the place, it was near sundown; and there, upon the mud of the canal-bank, we found the lion's slot, which ran into a thick clump of reeds.

"Now, thou boaster," I said, "wilt thou lead the way into yonder reeds, or shall I?" And I made as though I would lead the way.

"Nay, nay," he answered, "be not so mad! The brute will spring upon thee and rend thee. See! I will shoot among the reeds. Perchance, if he sleeps, it will arouse him." And he drew his bow at a venture.

How it chanced I know not, but the arrow struck the sleeping lion, and, like a flash of light from the belly of a cloud, he bounded from the shelter of the reeds, and stood before us with bristling mane and yellow eyes, the arrow quiver-

ing in his flank. He roared aloud in fury, and the earth shook.

“Shoot with the bow,” I cried, “shoot swiftly ere he spring!”

But courage had left the breast of the boaster, his jaw dropped down and his fingers unloosed their hold so that the bow fell from them; then, with a loud cry he turned and fled behind me, leaving the lion in my path. But while I stood waiting my doom, for though I was sore afraid I would not fly, the lion crouched himself, and, turning not aside, with one great bound swept over me, touching me not. He lit, and again he bounded full on the boaster's back, striking him such a blow with his great paw that his head was crushed as an egg thrown against a stone. He fell down dead, and the lion stood and roared over him. Then I was mad with horror, and, scarce knowing what I did, I grasped my spear and with a shout I charged. As I charged the lion lifted himself up on his hinder legs, to greet me, so that his head stood up above me. He smote at me with his paw; but with all my strength I drove the broad spear into his throat, and, shrinking from the agony of the steel, his blow

fell short and did no more than rip my skin. Back he fell, the great spear far in his throat; then rising, he roared in pain and leapt twice the height of a man straight into the air, smiting at the spear with his fore-paws. Twice he leapt thus, horrible to see, and twice he fell upon his back. Then his strength spent itself with his rushing blood, and, groaning like a bull, he died; while I, being but a lad, stood and trembled with fear now that all cause of fear had passed.

But as I stood and gazed at the dead body of him who had taunted me, and at the carcass of the lion, a woman came running towards me, even the same old wife, Atoua, who, though I knew it not as yet, had offered up her flesh and blood that I might be saved alive. For she had been gathering simples, in which she had great skill, by the water's edge, not knowing that there was a lion near (and, indeed, the lions, for the most part, are not found in the tilled land, but rather in the desert and the Libyan mountains), and had seen from a distance that which I have set down. Now, when she was come, she knew me for Harmachis, and, bending herself, she made obeisance to me, and saluted me, calling me Royal,

and worthy of all honour, and beloved, and chosen of the Holy Three, ay, and by the name of the Pharaoh! the Deliverer!

But I, thinking that terror had made her sick of mind, asked her of what she would speak.

“Is it a great thing,” I asked, “that I should slay a lion? Is it a matter worthy of such talk as thine? There live, and have lived, men who have slain many lions. Did not the Divine Amehetep the Osirian slay with his own hand more than a hundred lions? Is it not written on the scarabæus that hangs within my father’s chamber, that he slew lions afore-time? And have not others done likewise? Why then, speakest thou thus, O foolish woman?”

All of which I said, because, having now slain the lion, I was minded, after the manner of youth, to hold it as a thing of no account. But she did not cease to make obeisance, and to call me by names that are too high to be written.

“O Royal One,” she cried, “wisely did thy mother prophesy. Surely the Holy Spirit, the Knepth, was in her, O thou conceived by a God! See the omen. The lion there—he growls within the Capitol at Rome—and the dead man, he is

the Ptolemy—the Macedonian spawn that, like a foreign weed, hath overgrown the land of Nile: with the Macedonian Lagidæ thou shalt go to smite the lion of Rome. But the Macedonian cur shall fly, and the Roman lion shall strike him down, and thou shalt strike down the lion, and the land of Khem shall once more be free! free! Keep thyself but pure, according to the commandment of the Gods, O son of the Royal House; O hope of Khemi! be but ware of Woman the Destroyer, and as I have said, so shall it be. I am poor and wretched; yea, stricken with sorrow. I have sinned in speaking of what should be hid, and for my sin I have paid in the coin of that which was born of my womb; willingly have I paid for thee. But I have still of the wisdom of our people, nor do the Gods, in whose eyes all are equal, turn their countenance from the poor; the Divine Mother Isis hath spoken to me—but last night she spake—bidding me come hither to gather herbs, and read to thee the signs that I should see. And as I have said, so it shall come to pass, if thou canst but endure the weight of the great temptation. Come hither, Royal One!” and she led me to the edge of the canal, where

the water was deep, and still and blue. "Now gaze upon that face as the water throws it back. Is not that brow fitted to bear the double crown? Do not those gentle eyes mirror the majesty of kings? Hath not the Ptah, the Creator, fashioned that form to fit the Imperial garb, and awe the glance of multitudes looking through thee to God?

"Nay, nay!" she went on in another voice—a shrill old wife's voice—"I will—be not so foolish, boy—the scratch of a lion is a venomous thing, a terrible thing; yea, as bad as the bite of an asp—it must be treated, else it will fester, and all thy days thou shalt dream of lions; ay, and snakes; and, also, it will break out in sores. But I know of it—I know. I am not crazed for nothing. For mark! everything has its balance—in madness is much wisdom, and in wisdom much madness. *La! la! la!* Pharaoh himself can't say where the one begins and the other ends. Now, don't stand gazing there, looking as silly as a cat in a crocus-coloured robe, as they say in Alexandria; but just let me stick these green things on the place, and in six days you'll heal up as white as a three-year child. Never

mind the smart of it, lad. By Him who sleeps at Philæ, or at Aboutthis, or at Abydus—as our divine masters have it now—or wherever He does sleep, which is a thing we shall all find out before we want to—by Osiris, I say, you'll live to be as clean from scars as a sacrifice to Isis at the new moon, if you'll but let me put it on.

“Is it not so, good folk?”—and she turned to address some people who, while she prophesied, had assembled unseen by me—“I've been speaking a spell over him, just to make a way for the virtue of my medicine—*la! la!* there's nothing like a spell. If you don't believe it, just you come to me next time your wives are barren; it's better than scraping every pillar in the Temple of Osiris, I warrant. I'll make 'em bear like a twenty-year-old palm. But then, you see, you must know what to say—that's the point—everything comes to a point at last. *La! la!*”


Now, when I heard all this, I, Harmachis, put my hand to my head, not knowing if I dreamed. But presently looking up, I saw a grey-haired man among those who were gathered together, who watched us sharply, and afterwards I learned that this man was the spy of Ptolemy, the very

man, indeed, who had wellnigh caused me to be slain of Pharaoh when I was in my cradle. Then I understood why Atoua spoke so foolishly.

“Thine are strange spells, old wife,” the spy said. “Thou didst speak of Pharaoh and the double crown and of a form fashioned by Ptah to bear it; is it not so?”

“Yea, yea—part of the spell, thou fool; and what can one swear by better nowadays than by the Divine Pharaoh the Piper, whom, and whose music, may the Gods preserve to charm this happy land?—what better than by the double crown he wears—grace to great Alexander of Macedonia? By the way, you know about everything: have they got back his chlamys yet, which Mithridates took to Cos? Pompey wore it last, didn’t he?—in his triumph, too—just fancy Pompey in the cloak of Alexander!—a puppy-dog in a lion’s skin! And talking of lions—look what this lad hath done—slain a lion with his own spear; and right glad you village folks should be to see it, for it was a very fierce lion—just see his teeth and his claws—his claws!—they are enough to make a poor silly old woman like me shriek to look at them! And the body there,

CLEOPATRA.



the dead body—the lion slew it. Alack! he's an Osiris* now, the body—and to think of it, but an hour ago he was an everyday mortal like you or me! Well, away with him to the enbalmers. He'll soon swell in the sun and burst, and that will save them the trouble of cutting him open. Not that they will spend a talent of silver over him anyway. Seventy days in natron—that's all he's likely to get. *La! la!* how my tongue does run, and it's getting dark. Come, aren't you going to take away the body of that poor lad, and the lion, too? There, my boy, you keep those herbs on, and you'll never feel your scratches. I know a thing or two for all I'm crazy, and you, my own grandson! Dear, dear, I'm glad his Holiness the High Priest adopted you when Pharaoh—Osiris bless his holy name—made an end of his son; you look so bonny. I warrant the real Harmachis could not have killed a lion like that. Give me the common blood, say I—it's so lusty."

"You know too much and talk too fast," grumbled the spy, now quite deceived. "Well,

* The soul when it has been absorbed in the Godhead.

he is a brave youth. Here, you men, bear this body back to Abouthis, and some of you stop and help me skin the lion. We'll send the skin to you, young man," he went on; "not that you deserve it: to attack a lion like that was the act of a fool, and a fool deserves what he gets—destruction. Never attack the strong until you are stronger."

But for my part I went home wondering.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE REBUKE OF AMENEMHAT; OF THE PRAYER OF HARMACHIS; AND OF THE SIGN GIVEN BY THE HOLY GODS.

FOR a while as I, Harmachis, went, the juice of the green herbs which the old wife, Atoua, had placed upon my wounds caused me much smart, but presently the pain ceased. And, of a truth, I believe that there was virtue in them, for within two days my flesh healed up, so that after a time no marks remained. But I bethought me that I had disobeyed the word of the old High Priest, Amenemhat, who was called my father. For till this day I knew not that he was in truth my father according to the flesh, having been taught that his own son was slain as I have written, and that he had been pleased, with the sanction of the Divine ones, to take me as an adopted son and rear me up, that I might in due season fill an office about the Temple. Therefore I was

much troubled, for I feared the old man, who was very terrible in his anger, and ever spoke with the cold voice of Wisdom. Nevertheless, I determined to go in to him and confess my fault and bear such punishment as he should be pleased to put upon me. So with the red spear in my hand, and the red wounds on my breast, I passed through the outer court of the great temple and came to the door of the place where the High Priest dwelt. It is a great chamber, sculptured round about with the images of the solemn Gods, and the sunlight comes to it in the daytime by an opening cut through the stones of the massy roof. But at night it was lit by a swinging lamp of bronze. I passed in without noise, for the door was not altogether shut, and, pushing my way through the heavy curtains that were beyond, I stood with a beating heart within the chamber.

The lamp was lit, for the darkness had fallen, and by its light I saw the old man seated in a chair of ivory and ebony at a table of stone on which were spread mystic writings of the words of Life and Death. But he read no more, for he slept, and his long white beard rested upon the

table like the beard of a dead man. The soft light from the lamp fell on him, on the papyrus and the gold ring upon his hand, where were graven the symbols of the Invisible One, but all around was shadow. It fell on the shaven head, on the white robe, on the cedar staff of priesthood at his side, and on the ivory of the lion-footed chair; it showed the mighty brow of power, the features cut in kingly mould, the white eyebrows, and the dark hollows of the deep-set eyes. I looked and trembled, for there was about him that which was more than the dignity of man. He had lived so long with the Gods, and so long kept company with them and with thoughts divine, he was so deeply versed in all those mysteries which we do but faintly discern, here in this upper air, that even now, before his time, he partook of the nature of the Osiris, and was a thing to shake humanity with fear.

I stood and gazed, and as I stood he opened his dark eyes, but looked not on me, nor turned his head; and yet he saw me and spoke.

“Why hast thou been disobedient to me, my son?” he said. “How came it that thou wentest forth against the lion when I bade thee not?”

“How knowest thou, my father, that I went forth?” I asked in fear.

“How know I? Are there, then, no other ways of knowledge than by the senses? Ah, ignorant child! was not my Spirit with thee when the lion sprang upon thy companion? Did I not pray Those set about thee to protect thee, to make sure thy thrust when thou didst drive the spear into the lion’s throat! How came it that thou wentest forth, my son?”

“The boaster taunted me,” I answered, “and I went.”

“Yes, I know it; and, because of the hot blood of youth, I forgive thee, Harmachis. But now listen to me, and let my words sink into thy heart like the waters of Sihor into the thirsty sand at the rising of Sirius.* Listen to me. The boaster was sent to thee as a temptation, he was sent as a trial of thy strength, and see! it has not been equal to the burden. Therefore thy hour is put back. Hadst thou been strong in this matter, the path had been made plain to

* The dog-star, whose appearance marked the commencement of the overflow of the Nile.—ED.

thee even now. But thou hast failed, and therefore thy hour is put back."

"I understand thee not, my father," I answered.

"What was it, then, my son, that the old wife, Atoua, said to thee down by the bank of the canal?"

Then I told him all that the old wife had said.

"And thou believest, Harmachis, my son?"

"Nay," I answered; "how should I believe such tales? Surely she is mad. All the people know her for mad."

Now for the first time he looked towards me, who was standing in the shadow.

"My son! my son!" he cried; "thou art wrong. She is not mad. The woman spoke the truth; she spoke not of herself, but of the voice within her that cannot lie. For this Atoua is a prophetess and holy. Now learn thou the destiny that the Gods of Egypt have given to thee to fulfil, and woe be unto thee if by any weakness thou dost fail therein! Listen; thou art no stranger adopted into my house and the worship of the Temple; thou art my very son, saved to me by this same

woman. But, Harmachis, thou art more than this, for in thee and me alone yet flows the Imperial blood of Egypt. Thou and I alone of men alive are descended, without break or flaw, from that Pharaoh Nekt-nebf whom Ochus the Persian drove from Egypt. The Persian came and the Persian went, and after the Persian came the Macedonian, and now for nigh upon three hundred years the Lagidæ have usurped the double crown, defiling the land of Khem and corrupting the worship of its Gods. And mark thou this: but now, two weeks since, Ptolemy Neus Dionysus, Ptolemy Aulêtes the Piper, who would have slain thee, is dead; and but now hath the Eunuch Pothinus, that very eunuch who came hither, years ago, to cut thee off, set at naught the will of his master, the dead Aulêtes, and placed the boy Ptolemy upon the throne. And therefore his sister Cleopatra, that fierce and beautiful girl, has fled into Syria; and there, if I err not, she will gather her armies and make war upon her brother Ptolemy: for by her father's will she was left joint-sovereign with him. And, meanwhile, mark thou this, my son: the Roman eagle hangs on high, waiting with ready talons

till such time as he may fall upon the fat wether Egypt and rend him. And mark again: the people of Egypt are weary of the foreign yoke, they hate the memory of the Persians, and they are sick at heart of being named 'Men of Macedonia' in the markets of Alexandria. The whole land mutters and murmurs beneath the yoke of the Greek and the shadow of the Roman.

"Have we not been oppressed? Have not our children been butchered and our gains wrung from us to fill the bottomless greed and lust of the Lagidæ? Have not the temples been forsaken?—ay, have not the majesties of the Eternal Gods been set at naught by these Grecian babblers, who have dared to meddle with the immortal truths, and name the Most High by another name—by the name of Serapis—confounding the substance of the Invisible? Doth not Egypt cry aloud for freedom?—and shall she cry in vain? Nay, nay, for thou, my son, art the appointed way of deliverance. To thee, being sunk in eld, I have decreed my rights. Already thy name is whispered in many a sanctuary, from Abu to Athu; already priests and people swear allegiance, even by the sacred symbols, unto him

who shall be declared to them. Still, the time is not yet; thou art too green a sapling to bear the weight of such a storm. But to-day thou wast tried and found wanting.

“He who would serve the Gods, Harmachis, must put aside the failings of the flesh. Taunts must not move him, nor any lusts of man. Thine is a high mission, but this thou must learn. If thou learn it not, thou shalt fail therein; and then, my curse be on thee! and the curse of Egypt, and the curse of Egypt’s broken Gods! For know thou this, that even the Gods, who are immortal, may, in the interwoven scheme of things, lean upon the man who is their instrument, as a warrior on his sword. And woe be to the sword that snaps in the hour of battle, for it shall be thrown aside to rust or perchance be melted with fire! Therefore, make thy heart pure and high and strong; for thine is no common lot, and thine no mortal meed. Triumph, Harmachis, and in glory thou shalt go—in glory here and hereafter! Fail, and woe—woe be on thee!”

He paused and bowed his head, and then went on:

“Of these matters thou shalt hear more here-

after. Meanwhile, thou hast much to learn. Tomorrow I will give thee letters, and thou shalt journey down the Nile, past white-walled Memphis to Annu. There thou shalt sojourn certain years, and learn more of our ancient wisdom beneath the shadow of those secret pyramids of which thou, too, art the Hereditary High Priest that is to be. And meanwhile, I will sit here and watch, for my hour is not yet, and, by the help of the Gods, spin the web of Death wherein thou shalt catch and hold the wasp of Macedonia.

“Come hither, my son; come hither and kiss me on the brow, for thou art my hope, and all the hope of Egypt. Be but true, soar to the eagle crest of destiny, and thou shalt be glorious here and hereafter. Be false, fail, and I will spit upon thee, and thou shalt be accursed, and thy soul shall remain in bondage till that hour when, in the slow flight of time, the evil shall once more grow to good and Egypt shall again be free.”

I drew near, trembling, and kissed him on the brow. “May all these things come upon me, and more,” I said, “if I fail thee, my father!”

“Nay!” he cried, “not me, not me; but rather those whose will I do. And now go, my son, and

ponder in thy heart, and in thy secret heart digest my words; mark what thou shalt see, and gather up the dew of wisdom, making thee ready for the battle. Fear not for thyself, thou art protected from all ill. No harm may touch thee from without; thyself alone can be thine own enemy. I have said."

Then I went forth with a full heart. The night was very still, and none were stirring in the temple courts. I hurried through them, and reached the entrance to the pylon that is at the outer gate. Then, seeking solitude, and, as it were, to draw near to heaven, I climbed the pylon's two hundred steps, until at length I reached the massive roof. Here I leaned my breast against the parapet, and looked forth. As I looked, the red edge of the full moon floated up over the Arabian hills, and her rays fell upon the pylon where I stood and the temple walls beyond, lighting the visages of the carven Gods. Then the cold light struck the stretch of well-tilled lands, now whitening to the harvest, and as the heavenly lamp of Isis passed up the sky, her rays crept slowly down to the valley, where Sihor, father of the land of Khem, rolls on toward the sea.

Now the bright beams kissed the water that smiled an answer back, and now mountain and valley, river, temple, town, and plain were flooded with white light, for Mother Isis was arisen, and threw her gleaming robe across the bosom of the earth. It was beautiful, with the beauty of a dream, and solemn as the hour after death. Mightily, indeed, the temples towered up against the face of night. Never had they seemed so grand to me as in that hour—those eternal shrines, before whose walls Time himself shall wither. And it was to be mine to rule this moonlit land; mine to preserve those sacred shrines, and cherish the honour of their Gods; mine to cast out the Ptolemy and free Egypt from the foreign yoke! In my veins ran the blood of those great Kings who await the day of Resurrection, sleeping in the tombs of the valley of Thebes. My spirit swelled within me as I dreamed upon this glorious destiny, I closed my hands, and there, upon the pylon, I prayed as I had never prayed before to the Godhead, who is called by many names, and in many forms made manifest.

“O Amen,” I prayed, “God of Gods, who hast been from the beginning; Lord of Truth,

who art, and of whom all are, who givest out thy Godhead and gatherest it up again; in the circle of whom the Divine ones move and are, who wast from all time the Self-begot, and who shalt be till time—hearken unto me.*

“O Amen—Osiris, the sacrifice by whom we are justified, Lord of the Region of the Winds, Ruler of the Ages, Dweller in the West, the Supreme in Amenti, hearken unto me.

“O Isis, great Mother Goddess, mother of the Horus—mysterious Mother, Sister, Spouse, hearken unto me. If, indeed, I am the chosen of the Gods to carry out the purpose of the Gods, let a sign be given me, even now, to seal my life to the life above. Stretch out your arms towards me, O ye Gods, and uncover the glory of your countenance. Hear! ah, hear me!” And I cast myself upon my knees and lifted up my eyes to heaven.

And as I knelt, a cloud grew upon the face of the moon covering it up, so that the night became dark, and the silence deepened all around

* For a somewhat similar definition of the Godhead see the funeral papyrus of Nesikhonsu, a Princess of the Twenty-first Dynasty.—ED.

—even the dogs far below in the city ceased to howl, while the silence grew and grew till it was heavy as death. I felt my spirit lifted up within me, and my hair rose upon my head. Then of a sudden the mighty pylon seemed to rock beneath my feet, a great wind beat about my brows and a voice spoke within my heart:

“Behold a sign! Possess thyself in patience, O Harmachis!”

And as the voice spoke, a cold hand touched my hand, and left somewhat within it. Then the cloud rolled from the face of the moon, the wind passed, the pylon ceased to tremble, and the night was as the night had been.

As the light came back, I gazed upon that which had been left within my hand. It was a bud of the holy lotus new breaking into bloom, and from it came a most sweet scent.

And while I gazed behold! the lotus passed from my grasp and was gone, leaving me astonished.

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE DEPARTURE OF HARMACHIS AND OF HIS MEETING WITH HIS UNCLE SEPA, THE HIGH PRIEST OF ANNU EL RA; OF HIS LIFE AT ANNU, AND OF THE WORDS OF SEPA.

AT the dawning of the next day I was awakened by a priest of the temple, who brought word to me to make ready for the journey of which my father had spoken, inasmuch as there was an occasion for me to pass down the river to Annu el Ra. Now this is the Heliopolis of the Greeks, whither I should go in the company of some priests of Ptah at Memphis who had come hither to Abouthis to lay the body of one of their great men in the tomb that had been prepared near the resting-place of the blessed Osiris.

So I made ready, and the same evening, having received letters and embraced my father and those about the temple who were dear to me, I passed down the banks of Sihor, and we sailed with the south wind. As the pilot stood

upon the prow and with a rod in his hand bade the sailor-men loosen the stakes by which the vessel was moored to the banks, the old wife, Atoua, hobbled up, her basket of simples in her hand, and, calling out her farewell, threw a sandal after me for good chance, which sandal I kept for many years.

So we sailed, and for six days passed down the wonderful river, making fast each night at some convenient spot. But when I lost sight of the familiar things that I had seen day by day since I had eyes to see, and found myself alone among strange faces, I felt very sore at heart, and would have wept had I not been ashamed. And of all the wonderful things I saw I will not write here, for, though they were new to me, have they not been known to men since such time as the Gods ruled in Egypt? But the priests who were with me showed me no little honour and expounded to me what were the things I saw.

On the morning of the seventh day we came to Memphis, the city of the White Wall. Here, for three days I rested from my journey and was entertained of the priests of the wonderful Temple of Ptah the Creator, and shown the beauties of

the great and marvellous city. Also I was led in secret by the High Priest and two others into the holy presence of the God Apis, the Ptah who deigns to dwell among men in the form of a bull. The God was black, and on his forehead there was a white square, on his back was a white mark shaped like an eagle, beneath his tongue was the likeness of a scarabæus, in his tail were double hairs, and a plate of pure gold hung between his horns. I entered the place of the God and worshipped, while the High Priest and those with him stood aside, watching earnestly. And when I had worshipped, saying the words which had been told me, the God knelt, and lay down before me. Then the High Priest and those with him, who, as I heard in after time, were great men of Upper Egypt, approached wondering, and, saying no word, made obeisance to me because of the omen. And many other things I saw in Memphis that are too long to write of here.

On the fourth day some priests of Annu came to lead me to Sepa, my uncle, the High Priest of Annu. So, having bidden farewell to those of Memphis, we crossed the river and rode on asses

two parts of a day's journey through many villages, which we found in great poverty because of the oppression of the tax-gatherers. Also, as we went, I saw for the first time the great pyramids that are beyond the image of the God Horemkhu, that Sphinx whom the Greeks name Harmachis, and the Temples of the Divine Mother Isis, Queen of the Memnonia, and the God Osiris, Lord of Rosatou, of which temples, together with the Temple of the worship of the Divine Menkau-ra, I, Harmachis, am by right Divine the Hereditary High Priest. I saw them and marvelled at their greatness and the white carven limestone, and red granite of Syene, that flashed the sun's rays back to heaven. But at this time I knew nothing of the treasure that was hid in *Her*, which is the third among the pyramids—would I had never known of it!

And so at last we came within sight of Annu, which after Memphis has been seen is no large town, but stands on raised ground, before which are lakes fed by a canal. Behind the town is the inclosed field of the Temple of the God Ra.

We dismounted at the pylon, and were met beneath the portico by a man not great of stature,

but of noble aspect, having his head shaven, and with dark eyes that twinkled like the further stars.

“Hold!” he cried, in a great voice which fitted his weak body but ill. “Hold! I am Sepa, who opens the mouth of the Gods!”

“And I,” I said, “am Harmachis, son of Amenemhat, Hereditary High Priest and Ruler of the Holy City Abouthis; and I bear letters to thee, O Sepa!”

“Enter,” he said. “Enter!” scanning me all the while with his twinkling eyes. “Enter, my son!” And he took me and led me to a chamber in the inner hall, closed to the door, and then, having glanced at the letters that I brought, of a sudden he fell upon my neck and embraced me.

“Welcome,” he said, “welcome, son of my own sister, and hope of Khem! Not in vain have I prayed the Gods that I might live to look upon thy face and impart to thee the wisdom which perchance I alone have mastered of those who are left alive in Egypt. There are few whom it is lawful that I should teach. But thine is the great destiny, and thine shall be the ears to hear the lessons of the Gods.”

And he embraced me once more and bade me go bathe and eat, saying that on the morrow he would speak with me further.

This of a truth he did, and at such length that I will forbear to set down all he said both then and afterwards, for if I did so there would be no papyrus left in Egypt when the task was ended. Therefore, having much to tell and but little time to tell it, I will pass over the events of the years that followed.

For this was the manner of my life. I rose early, I attended the worship of the Temple, and I gave my days to study. I learnt of the rites of religion and their meaning, and of the beginning of the Gods and the beginning of the Upper World. I learnt of the mystery of the movements of the stars, and of how the earth rolls on among them. I was instructed in that ancient knowledge which is called magic, and in the way of interpretation of dreams, and of the drawing nigh to God. I was taught the language of symbols and their outer and inner secrets. I became acquainted with the eternal laws of Good and Evil, and with the mystery of that trust which is held of man; also I learnt the secrets of

the pyramids—which I would that I had never known. Further, I read the records of the past, and of the acts and words of the ancient kings who were before me since the rule of Horus upon earth; and I was made to know all craft of state, the lore of earth, and with it the history of Greece and Rome. Also I learnt the Grecian and the Roman tongues, of which indeed I already had some knowledge—and all this while, for five long years, I kept my hands clean and my heart pure, and did no evil in the sight of God or man; but laboured heavily to acquire all things, and to prepare myself for the destiny that awaited me.

Twice every year greetings and letters came from my father Amenemhat, and twice every year I sent back my answers asking if the time had come to cease from labour. And so the days of my probation sped away till I grew faint and weary at heart, for being now a man, ay and learned, I longed to make a beginning of the life of men. And often I wondered if this talk and prophecy of the things that were to be was but a dream born of the brains of men whose wish ran before their thought. I was, indeed, of the

Royal blood, that I knew: for my uncle, Sepa the Priest, showed me a secret record of the descent, traced without break from father to son, and graven in mystic symbols on a tablet of the stone of Syene. But of what avail was it to be Royal by right when Egypt, my heritage, was a slave—a slave to do the pleasure and minister to the luxury of the Macedonian Lagidæ—ay, and when she had been so long a serf that, perchance, she had forgotten how to put off the servile smile of Bondage and once more to look across the world with Freedom's happy eyes?

Then I bethought me of my prayer upon the pylon tower of Aboutis and of the answer given to my prayer, and wondered if that, too, were a dream.

And one night, as, weary with study, I walked within the sacred grove that is in the garden of the temple, and mused thus, I met my uncle Sepa, who also was walking and thinking.

"Hold!" he cried in his great voice; "why is thy face so sad, Harmachis? Has the last problem that we studied overwhelmed thee?"

"Nay, my uncle," I answered, "I am overwhelmed indeed, but not of the problem: it was

a light one. My heart is heavy, for I am weary of life within these cloisters, and the piled-up weight of knowledge crushes me. It is of no avail to store up force within cannot be used."

"Ah, thou art impatient, Harmachis," he answered; "it is ever the way of foolish youth. Thou wouldst taste of the battle; thou dost tire of watching the breakers fall upon the beach, thou wouldst plunge into them and venture the desperate hazard of the war. And so 'thou wouldst be going, Harmachis? The bird would fly the nest as, when they are grown, the swallows fly from the eaves of the Temple. Well, it shall be as thou desirest; the hour is at hand. I have taught thee all that I have learned, and methinks that the pupil has outrun his master," and he paused and wiped his bright black eyes, for he was very sad at the thought of my departure.

"And whither shall I go, my uncle?" I asked rejoicing; "back to Abouthis to be initiated in the mysteries of the Gods?"

"Ay, back to Abouthis, and from Abouthis to Alexandria, and from Alexandria to the Throne of thy fathers, Harmachis! Listen, now; things are thus: Thou knowest how Cleopatra, the

Queen, fled into Syria when that false ennuich Pothinus set the will of her father Aulêtes at naught and raised her brother Ptolemy to the sole lordship of Egypt. Thou knowest also how she came back, like a Queen indeed, with a great army in her train, and lay at Pelusium, and how at this juncture the mighty Cæsar, that great man, that greatest of all men, sailed with a weak company hither to Alexandria from Pharsalia's bloody field in hot pursuit of Pompey. But he found Pompey already dead, having been basely murdered by Achillas, the General, and Lucius Septimius, the chief of the Roman legions in Egypt, and thou knowest how the Alexandrians were troubled at his coming and would have slain his lictors. Then, as thou hast heard, Cæsar seized Ptolemy, the young King, and his sister Arsinoë, and bade the army of Cleopatra and the army of Ptolemy, under Achillas, which lay facing each other at Pelusium, disband and go their ways. And for answer Achillas marched on Cæsar, and besieged him straitly in the Bruchium at Alexandria, and so, for a while, things were, and none knew who should reign in Egypt. But then Cleopatra took up the dice, and threw them, and this was the

throw she made—in truth, it was a bold one. For, leaving the army at Pelusium, she came at dusk to the harbour of Alexandria, and alone with the Sicilian Apollodorus entered and landed. Then Apollodorus bound her in a bale of rich rugs, such as are made in Syria, and sent the rugs as a present to Cæsar. And when the rugs were unbound in the palace, behold! within them was the fairest girl on all the earth—ay, and the most witty and the most learned. And she seduced the great Cæsar—even his weight of years did not avail to protect him from her charms—so that, as a fruit of his folly, he wellnigh lost his life, and all the glory he had gained in a hundred wars.”

“The fool!” I broke in—“the fool! Thou callest him great; but how can the man be truly great who has no strength to stand against a woman’s wiles? Cæsar, with the world hanging on his word! Cæsar, at whose breath forty legions marched and changed the fate of peoples! Cæsar the cold! the far-seeing! the hero!—Cæsar to fall like a ripe fruit into a false girl’s lap! Why, in the issue, of what common clay was this Roman Cæsar, and how poor a thing!”

But Sepa looked at me and shook his head. "Be not so rash, Harmachis, and talk not with so proud a voice. Knowest thou not that in every suit of mail there is a joint, and woe to him who wears the harness if the sword should search it out! For Woman, in her weakness, is yet the strongest force upon the earth. She is the helm of all things human; she comes in many shapes and knocks at many doors; she is quick and patient, and her passion is not ungovernable like that of man, but as a gentle steed that she can guide e'en where she will, and as occasion offers can now bit up and now give rein. She has a captain's eye, and stout must be that fortress of the heart in which she finds no place of vantage. Does thy blood beat fast in youth? She will outrun it, nor will her kisses tire. Art thou set toward ambition? She will unlock thy inner heart, and show thee roads that lead to glory. Art thou worn and weary? She has comfort in her breast. Art thou fallen? She can lift thee up, and to the illusion of thy sense gild defeat with triumph. Ay, Harmachis, she can do these things, for Nature ever fights upon her side; and while she does them she can deceive and shape

a secret end in which thou hast no part. And thus Woman rules the world. For her are wars; for her men spend their strength in gathering gains; for her they do well and ill, and seek for greatness, to find oblivion. But still she sits like yonder Sphinx, and smiles; and no man has ever read all the riddle of her smile, or known all the mystery of her heart. Mock not! mock not! Harmachis; for he must be great indeed who can defy the power of Woman, which, pressing round him like the invisible air, is often strongest when the senses least discover it."

I laughed aloud. "Thou speakest earnestly, my uncle Sepa," I said; "one might almost think that thou hadst not come unscathed through this fierce fire of temptation. Well, for myself, I fear not woman and her wiles; I know naught of them, and naught I wish to know; and I still hold that this Cæsar was a fool. Had I stood where Cæsar stood, to cool its wantonness that bale of rugs should have been rolled down the palace steps into the harbour mud."

"Nay, cease! cease!" he cried aloud. "It is evil to speak thus; may the Gods avert the omen and preserve to thee this cold strength of which

thou boastest. Oh! man, thou knowest not!—thou in thy strength and beauty that is without compare, in the power of thy learning and the sweetness of thy tongue—thou knowest not! The world where thou must mix is not a sanctuary as that of the Divine Isis. But there—it may be so! Pray that thy heart's ice may never melt, so thou shalt be great and happy and Egypt be delivered. And now let me take up my tale—thou seest, Harmachis, even in so grave a story woman claims her place. The young Ptolemy, Cleopatra's brother, being loosed of Cæsar, treacherously turned on him. Then Cæsar and Mithridates stormed the camp of Ptolemy, who took to flight across the river. But his boat was sunk by the fugitives who pressed upon it, and such was the miserable end of Ptolemy.

“Thereon, the war being ended, though she had but then borne him a son, Cæsarion, Cæsar appointed the younger Ptolemy to rule with Cleopatra, and be her husband in name, and he himself departed for Rome, bearing with him the beautiful Princess Arsinoë to follow his triumph in her chains. But the great Cæsar is no more. He died as he had lived, in blood, and right

royally. And but now Cleopatra, the Queen, if my tidings may be trusted, has slain Ptolemy, her brother and her husband, by poison, and taken the child Cæsarion to be her fellow on the throne, which she holds by the help of the Roman legions, and, as they say, of young Sextus Pompeius, who has succeeded Cæsar in her love. But, Harmachis, the whole land boils and seethes against her. In every city the children of Khem talk of the deliverer who is to come—and thou art he, Harmachis. The time is almost ripe. The hour is nigh at hand. Go thou back to Aboutthis and learn the last secrets of the Gods, and meet those who shall direct the bursting of the storm. Then act, Harmachis—act, I say, and strike home for Khem, rid the land of the Roman and the Greek, and take thy place upon the throne of thy divine fathers and be a King of men. For to this end thou wast born, O Prince!”

CHAPTER V.

OF THE RETURN OF HARMACHIS TO ABOUTHIS; OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE MYSTERIES; OF THE CHANT OF ISIS; AND OF THE WARNING OF AMENEMHAT.

ON the next day I embraced my uncle Sepa, and with an eager heart departed from Annu back to Aboutthis. To be short, I came thither in safety, having been absent five years and a month, being now no more a boy but a man full grown and having my mind well stocked with the knowledge of men and the ancient wisdom of Egypt. So once again I saw the old lands and the known faces, though of these some few were wanting, having been gathered to Osiris. Now, as, riding across the fields, I came nigh to the enclosure of the Temple, the priests and people issued forth to bid me welcome, and with them the old wife, Atoua, who, but for a few added wrinkles that Time had cut upon her fore-

head, was just as she had been when she threw the sandal after me five long years before.

“*La! la! la!*” she cried; “and there thou art, my bonny lad; more bonny even than thou wert! *La!* what a man! what shoulders! and what a face and form! Ah, it does an old woman credit to have dandled thee! But thou art overpale; those priests down there at Annu have starved thee, surely? Starve not thyself: the Gods love not a skeleton. ‘Empty stomach makes empty head,’ as they say at Alexandria. But this is a glad hour; ay, a joyous hour. Come in—come in!” and as I lighted down she embraced me.

But I thrust her aside. “My father! where is my father?” I cried; “I see him not!”

“Nay, nay, have no fear,” she answered; “his Holiness is well; he waits thee in his chamber. There, pass on. O happy day! O happy Aboutthis!”

So I went, or rather ran, and reached the chamber of which I have written, and there at the table sat my father, Amenemhat, the same as he had been, but very old. I came to him and, kneeling before him, kissed his hand, and he blessed me.

“Look up, my son,” he said, “let my old eyes gaze upon thy face, that I may read thy heart.”

So I lifted up my head, and he looked upon me long and earnestly.

“I read thee,” he said at length; “thou art pure and strong in wisdom; I have not been deceived in thee. Oh, the years have been lonely; but I did well to send thee hence. Now, tell me of thy life; for thy letters have told me little, and thou canst not know, my son, how hungry is a father’s heart.”

And so I told him; we sat far into the night and talked together. And in the end he bade me know that I must now prepare to be initiated into those last mysteries that are learned of the chosen of the Gods.

And so it came about that for a space of three months I prepared myself according to the holy customs. I ate no meat. I was constant in the sanctuaries, in the study of the secrets of the Great Sacrifice and of the woe of the Holy Mother. I watched and prayed before the altars. I lifted up my soul to God; ay, in dreams I communed with the Invisible, till at length earth and earth’s desires seemed to pass from me. I longed no

more for the glory of this world, my heart hung above it as an eagle on his outstretched wings, and the voice of the world's blame could not stir it, and the vision of its beauty brought no delight. For above me was the vast vault of heaven, where in unalterable procession the stars pass on, drawing after them the destinies of men; where the Holy Ones sit upon their burning thrones, and watch the chariot-wheels of Fate as they roll from sphere to sphere. O hours of holy contemplation! who, having once tasted of your joy could wish again to grovel on the earth? O vile flesh to drag us down! I would that thou hadst then altogether fallen from me, and left my spirit free to seek Osiris!

The months of probation passed but too swiftly, and now the holy day drew near when I was in truth to be united to the universal Mother. Never hath Night so longed for the promise of the Dawn; never hath the heart of a lover so passionately desired the sweet coming of his bride, as I longed to see Thy glorious face, O Isis! Even now that I have been faithless to Thee, and Thou art far from me, O Divine! my soul goes out to Thee, and once more I know—— But as

it is bidden that I should draw the veil, and speak of things which have not been told since the beginning of this world, let me pass on and reverently set down the history of that holy morn.

For seven days the great festival had been celebrated, the suffering of the Lord Osiris had been commemorated, the grief of the Mother Isis had been sung and glory had been done to the memory of the coming of the Divine Child Horus, the Son, the Avenger, the God-begot. All these things had been carried out according to the ancient rites. The boats had floated on the sacred lake, the priests had scourged themselves before the sanctuaries, and the images had been borne through the streets at night.

And now, as the sun sank on the seventh day, once more the great procession gathered to chant the woes of Isis and tell how the evil was avenged. We went in silence from the temple, and passed through the city ways. First came those who clear the path, then my father Amenemhat in all his priestly robes, and the wand of cedar in his hand. Then, clad in pure linen, I, the neophyte, followed alone; and after me the white-robed priests, holding aloft banners and emblems of the

Gods. Next came those who bear the sacred boat, and after them the singers and the mourners; while, stretching far as the eye could reach, all the people marched, clad in melancholy black because Osiris was no more. We went in silence through the city streets till at length we came to the wall of the temple and passed in. And as my father, the High Priest, entered beneath the gateway of the outer pylon, a sweet-voiced woman singer began to sing the Holy Chant, and thus she sang:

*“Sing we Osiris dead,
Lament the fallen head:
The light has left the world, the world is grey.
Athwart the starry skies
The web of Darkness flies,
And Isis weeps Osiris passed away.
Your tears, ye stars, ye fires, ye rivers, shed,
Weep, children of the Nile, weep for your Lord is
dead!”*

She paused in her most sweet song, and the whole multitude took up the melancholy dirge:

*“Softly we tread, our measured footsteps falling
Within the Sanctuary Sevenfold;
Soft on the Dead that liveth are we calling:
‘Return, Osiris, from thy Kingdom cold!
Return to them that worship thee of old.’”*

The chorus ceased, and once again she sang:

*“ Within the court divine
The Sevenfold sacred shrine
We pass, while echoes of the Temple walls
Repeat the long lament
The sound of sorrow sent
Far up within the imperishable halls,
Where, each in other’s arms, the Sisters weep,
Isis and Nephthys, o’er His unawaking sleep.”*

And then again rolled forth the solemn chorus of a thousand voices:

*“ Softly we tread, our measured footsteps falling
Within the Sanctuary Sevenfold;
Soft on the Dead that liveth are we calling:
‘Return, Osiris, from thy Kingdom cold!
Return to them that worship thee of old.’”*

It ceased, and sweetly she took up the song:

*“ O dweller in the West,
Lover and Lordliest,
Thy love, thy Sister Isis, calls thee home!
Come from thy chamber dun
Thou Master of the Sun,
Thy shadowy chamber far below the foam!
With weary wings and spent
Through all the firmament,
Through all the horror-haunted ways of Hell,
I seek thee near and far,
From star to wandering star,*

Free with the dead that in Amenti dwell.

I search the height, the deep, the lands, the skies,

Rise from the dead and live, our Lord Osiris, rise!"

"Softly we tread, our measured footsteps falling

Within the Sanctuary Sevenfold;

Soft on the Dead that liveth are we calling:

'Return, Osiris, from thy Kingdom cold!

Return to them that worship thee of old.'"

Now in a strain more high and glad the singer sang:

"He wakes—from forth the prison

We sing Osiris risen,

We sing the child that Nout conceived and bare.

Thine own love, Isis, waits

The Warden of the Gates,

She breathes the breath of Life on breast and hair,

And in her breast and breath

Behold! he wakeneth,

Behold! at length he riseth out of rest;

Touched with her holy hands,

The Lord of all the Lands,

He stirs, he rises from her breath, her breast!

But thou, fell Typhon, fly,

The judgment day drawn nigh,

Fleet on thy track as flame speeds Horus from the sky."

"Softly we tread, our measured footsteps falling

Within the Sanctuary Sevenfold;

Soft on the Dead that liveth are we calling:

'Return, Osiris, from thy Kingdom cold!

Return to them that worship thee of old.'"

Once more, as we bowed before the Holy, she sang, and sent the full breath of her glad music ringing up the everlasting walls till the silence quivered with her round notes of melody, and the hearts of those who hearkened stirred strangely in the breast. And thus, as we walked, she sang the song of Osiris risen, the song of Hope, the song of Victory:

"Sing we the Trinity,

Sing we the Holy Three,

Sing we, and praise we and worship the Throne,

Throne that our Lord hath set—

There peace and truth are met

There in the Halls of the Holy alone!

There in the shadowings

Faint of the folded wings,

There shall we dwell and rejoice in our rest,

We that thy servants are!

Horus drive ill afar!

Far in the folds of the dark of the West!"

Again, as her notes died away, thundered forth the chorus of all the voices:

"Softly we tread, our measured footsteps falling

Within the Sanctuary Sevenfold;

Soft on the Dead that liveth are we calling:

'Return, Osiris, from thy Kingdom cold!

Return to them that worship thee of old.'"

The chanting ceased, and as the sun sank the High Priest raised the statue of the living God and held it before the multitude that was now gathered in the court of the temple. Then, with a mighty and joyful shout of:

"Osiris our hope! Osiris! Osiris!"

the people tore their black wrappings from their dress, revealing the white robes they wore beneath, and, as one man, they bowed before the God, and the feast was ended.

But for me the ceremony was only begun, for to-night was the night of my initiation. Leaving the inner court I bathed myself, and, clad in pure linen, passed, as it is ordained, into an inner, but not the inmost, sanctuary, and laid the accustomed offerings on the altar. Then, lifting up my hands to heaven, I remained for many hours in contemplation, striving, by holy thoughts and prayer, to gather up my strength against the mighty moment of my trial.

The hours sped slowly in the silence of the

temple, till at length the door opened and my father Amenemhat, the High Priest, came in, clad in white, and leading by the hand the Priest of Isis. For, having been married, he did not himself enter into the mysteries of the Holy Mother.

I rose to my feet and stood humbly before them.

“Art thou ready?” said the priest, lifting the lamp he held so that its light fell upon my face. “O thou chosen one, art thou ready to see the glory of the Goddess face to face?”

“I am ready,” I answered.

“Bethink thee,” he said again, in solemn tones, “it is no small thing. If thou wilt carry out this thy last desire, understand, royal Harmachis, that now this very night thou must for a while die in the flesh, what time thy soul shall look on spiritual things. And if thou diest and any evil shall be found within thy heart, when thou comest at last into that awful presence, woe unto thee, Harmachis, for the breath of life shall no more enter in at the gateway of thy mouth, thy body shall utterly perish, and what shall befall thy other parts, if I know, I may not say.* Art

* According to the Egyptian religion the being Man is

thou, therefore, pure and free from the thought of sin? Art thou prepared to be taken to the breast of Her who Was and Is and Shall Be, and in all things to do Her holy will; for Her, while she shall so command, to put away the thought of earthly woman; and to labour always for Her glory till at the end thy life is gathered to Her eternal life?"

"I am," I answered; "lead on."

"It is well," said the priest. "Noble Amenemhat, we go hence alone."

"Farewell, my son," said my father; "be firm and triumph over things spiritual as thou shalt triumph over things earthly. He who would truly rule the world must first be lifted up above the world. He must be at one with God, for thus only shall he learn the secrets of the Divine. But beware! The Gods demand much of those who dare to enter the circle of their Divinity. If they go back therefrom, they shall be judged of a sharper law, and scourged with a heavier rod, for as their glory is, so shall their shame be.

composed of four parts: the body, the double or astral shape (*ka*), the soul (*bi*), and the spark of life sprung from the Godhead (*khou*).—ED.

Therefore, make thy heart strong, royal Harmachis! And when thou speedest down the ways of Night and enterest the Holies, remember that from him to whom great gifts have been given shall gifts be required again. And now—if, indeed, thy mind be fixed—go whither it is not as yet given me to follow thee. Farewell!”

For a moment as my heart weighed these heavy words, I wavered, as well I might. But I was filled with longing to be gathered to the company of the Divine ones, and I knew that I had no evil in me, and desired to do only the thing that is just. Therefore, having with so much labour drawn the bow-string to my ear, I was fain to let fly the shaft. “Lead on,” I cried, with a loud voice; “lead on, thou holy Priest! I follow thee!”

And we went forth.

CHAPTER VI.

OF THE INITIATION OF HARMACHIS; OF HIS VISIONS;
OF HIS PASSING TO THE CITY THAT IS IN THE
PLACE OF DEATH; AND OF THE DECLARATIONS
OF ISIS, THE MESSENGER.

IN silence we passed into the Shrine of Isis. It was dark and bare—only the feeble light from the lamp gleamed faintly upon the sculptured walls, where, in a hundred effigies, the Holy Mother suckled the Holy Child.

The priest closed the doors and bolted them. "Once again," he said, "art thou ready, Harmachis?"

"Once again," I answered, "I am ready."

He spoke no more; but, having lifted up his hands in prayer, led me to the centre of the Holy, and with a swift motion put out the lamp.

"Look before thee, Harmachis!" he cried; and his voice sounded hollow in the solemn place.

I gazed and saw nothing. But from the

niche that is high in the wall, where is hid that sacred symbol of the Goddess on which few may look, there came a sound as of the rattling rods of the sistrum.* And as I listened, awestruck, behold! I saw the outline of the symbol drawn as with fire upon the blackness of the air. It hung above my head, and rattled while it hung. And, as it turned, I clearly saw the face of the Mother Isis that is graven on the one side, and signifies unending Birth, and the face of her holy sister, Nephthys, that is graven on the other, and signifies the ending of all birth in Death.

Slowly it turned and swung as though some mystic dancer trod the air above me, and shook it in her hand. But at length the light went out, and the rattling ceased.

Then of a sudden the end of the chamber became luminous, and in that white light I beheld picture after picture. I saw the ancient Nile rolling through deserts to the sea. There were no men upon its banks, nor any signs of man, nor any temples to the Gods. Only wild birds moved on Sihor's lonely face, and monstrous

* A musical instrument peculiarly sacred to Isis of which the shape and rods had a mystic significance.—ED.

brutes plunged and wallowed in his waters. The sun sank in majesty behind the Libyan Desert and stained the waters red; the mountains towered up towards the silent sky; but in mountain, desert, and river there was no sign of human life. Then I knew that I saw the world as it had been before man was, and a terror of its loneliness entered my soul.

The picture passed and another rose up in its place. Once again I saw the banks of Sihor, and on them crowded wild-faced creatures, partaking of the nature of the ape more than of the nature of mankind. They fought and slew each other. The wild birds sprang up in affright as the fire leapt from reed huts given by foemen's hand to flame and pillage. They stole and rent and murdered, dashing out the brains of children with axes of stone. And, though no voice told me, I knew that I saw man as he was tens of thousands of years ago, when first he marched across the earth.

Yet another picture. Again I beheld the banks of Sihor; but on them fair cities bloomed like flowers. In and out their gates went men and women, passing to and fro from wide, well-

tilled lands. But I saw no guards or armies, and no weapons of war. All was wisdom, prosperity, and peace. And while I wondered, a glorious Figure, clad in raiment that shone as flame, came from the gates of a shrine, and the sound of music went before and followed after him. He mounted an ivory throne which was set in a market-place facing the water: and as the sun sank called all the multitudes to prayer. With one voice they prayed, bending in adoration. And I understood that herein was shown the reign of the Gods on earth, which was long before the days of Menes.

A change came over the dream. Still the same fair city, but other men—men with greed and evil on their faces—who hated the bonds of righteous doing, and set their hearts on sin. The evening came; the glorious Figure mounted the throne and called to prayer, but none bowed themselves in adoration.

“We are weary of thee!” they cried. “Make Evil King! Slay him! slay him! and loose the bonds of Evil! Make Evil King!”

The glorious Shape rose up, gazing with mild eyes upon those wicked men.

“Ye know not what ye ask,” he cried; “but as ye will, so be it! For if I die, by me, after much travail, shall ye once again find a path to the Kingdom of Good!”

Even as he spoke, a Form, foul and hideous to behold, leapt upon him, cursing, slew him, tore him limb from limb, and amidst the clamour of the people sat himself upon the throne and ruled. But a Shape whose face was veiled passed down from heaven on shadowy wings, and with lamentations gathered up the rent fragments of the Being. A moment she bent herself upon them, then lifted up her hands and wept. And as she wept, behold! from her side there sprang a warrior armed and with a face like the face of Ra at noon. He, the Avenger, hurled himself with a shout upon the Monster who had usurped the throne, and they closed in battle, and, struggling ever in a strait embrace, passed upward to the skies.

Then came picture after picture. I saw Powers and Peoples clad in various robes and speaking many tongues. I saw them pass and pass in millions—loving, hating, struggling, dying. Some few were happy and some had woe stamped upon their faces; but most bore not the seal of happi-

ness nor of woe, but rather that of patience. And ever as they passed from age to age, high above in the heavens the Avenger fought on with the Evil Thing, while the scale of victory swung now here now there. But neither conquered, nor was it given to me to know how the battle ended.

And I understood that what I had beheld was the holy vision of the struggle between the Good and the Evil Powers. I saw that man was created vile, but Those who are above took pity on him, and came down to him to make him good and happy, for the two things are one thing. But man returned to his wicked way, and then the bright Spirit of Good, who is of us called Osiris, but who has many names, offered himself up for the evil-doing of the race that had dethroned him. And from him and the Divine Mother, of whom all nature is, sprang another spirit who is the Protector of us on earth, as Osiris is our justifier in Amenti.

For this is the mystery of the Osiris.

Of a sudden, as I saw the visions, these things became clear to me. The mummy cloths of symbol and of ceremony that wrap Osiris round fell

from him, and I understood the secret of religion, which is Sacrifice.

The pictures passed, and again the priest, my guide, spoke to me.

“Hast thou understood, Harmachis, those things which it has been granted thee to see?”

“I have,” I said. “Are the rites ended?”

“Nay, they are but begun. That which follows thou must endure alone! Behold I leave thee, to return at the morning light. Once more I warn thee. That which thou shalt see, few may look upon and live. In all my days I have known but three who dared to face this dread hour, and of those three at dawn but one was found alive. Myself, I have not trod this path. It is too high for me.”

“Depart,” I said; “my soul is athirst for knowledge. I will dare it.”

He laid his hand upon my head and blessed me. He went. I heard the door shut to behind him, the echoes of his footsteps slowly died away.

Then I felt that I was alone, alone in the Holy Place with Things which are not of the earth. Silence fell—silence deep and black as

the darkness which was around me. The silence fell, it gathered as the cloud gathered on the face of the moon that night when, a lad, I prayed upon the pylon towers. It gathered denser and yet more dense till it seemed to creep into my heart and call aloud therein; for utter silence has a voice that is more terrible than any cry. I spoke; the echoes of my words came back upon me from the walls and seemed to beat me down. The stillness was lighter to endure than an echo such as this. What was I about to see? Should I die, even now, in the fulness of my youth and strength? Terrible were the warnings that had been given to me. I was fear-stricken, and be-thought me that I would fly. Fly!—fly whither? The temple door was barred; I could not fly. I was alone with the Godhead, alone with the Power that I had invoked. Nay, my heart was pure—my heart was pure. I would face the terror that was to come, ay, even though I died.

“Isis, Holy Mother,” I prayed. “Isis, Spouse of Heaven, come unto me, be with me now; I faint! be with me now.”

And then I knew that things were not as things had been. The air around me began to stir, it

rustled as the wings of eagles rustle, it took life. Bright eyes gazed upon me, strange whispers shook my soul. Upon the darkness were bars of light. They changed and interchanged, they moved to and fro and wove mystic symbols which I could not read. Swifter and swifter flew that shuttle of the light: the symbols grouped, gathered, faded, gathered yet again, faster and still more fast, till my eyes could count them no more. Now I was afloat upon a sea of glory; it surged and rolled, as the ocean rolls; it tossed me high, it brought me low. Glory was piled on glory, splendour heaped on splendour's head, and I rode above it all!

Soon the lights began to pale in the rolling sea of air. Great shadows shot across it, lines of darkness pierced it and rushed together on its breast, till, at length, I only was a Shape of Flame set like a star on the bosom of immeasurable night. Bursts of awful music gathered from far away. Miles and miles away I heard them, thrilling faintly through the gloom. On they came, nearer and more near, louder and more loud, till they swept past, above, below, around me, swept on rushing pinions, terrifying and enchanting me.

They floated by, ever growing fainter, till they died in space. Then others came, and no two were akin. Some rattled as ten thousand sistra shaken all to tune. Some rang from the brazen throats of unnumbered clarions. Some pealed with a loud, sweet chant of voices that were more than human; and some rolled along in the slow thunder of a million drums. They passed; their notes were lost in dying echoes; and the silence once more pressed in upon me and overcame me.

The strength within me began to fail. I felt my life ebbing at its springs. Death drew near to me and his shape was *Silence*. He entered at my heart, entered with a sense of numbing cold, but my brain was still alive, I could yet think. I knew that I was drawing near the confines of the Dead. Nay, I was dying fast, and oh, the horror of it! I strove to pray and could not; there was no more time for prayer. One struggle and the stillness crept into my brain. The terror passed; an unfathomable weight of sleep pressed me down. I was dying, I was dying, and then—nothingness!

I was dead!

A change—life came back to me, but between the new life and the life that had been was a gulf and difference. Once again I stood in the darkness of the shrine, but it blinded me no more. It was clear as the light of day, although it still was black. I stood; and yet it was not I who stood, but rather my spiritual part, for at my feet lay my dead Self. There it lay, rigid and still, a stamp of awful calm sealed upon its face, while I gazed on it.

And as I gazed, filled with wonder, I was caught up on the Wings of Flame and whirled away! away! faster than the lightnings flash. Down I fell, through depths of empty space set here and there with glittering crowns of stars. Down for ten million miles and ten times ten million, till at length I hovered over a place of soft unchanging light, wherein were Temples, Palaces, and Abodes, such as no man ever saw in the visions of his sleep. They were built of Flame, and they were built of Blackness. Their spires pierced up and up; their great courts stretched around. Even as I hovered they changed continually to the eye; what was Flame became Blackness, what was Blackness became

Flame. Here was the flash of crystal, and there the blaze of gems shone even through the glory that rolls around the city which is in the Place of Death. There were trees, and their voice as they rustled was the voice of music; there was air, and, as it blew, its breath was the sobbing notes of song.

Shapes, changing, mysterious, wonderful, rushed up to meet me, and bore me down till I seemed to stand upon another earth.

“Who comes?” cried a great Voice.

“Harmachis,” answered the Shapes, that changed continually. “Harmachis who hath been summoned from the earth to look upon the face of Her that Was and Is and Shall Be. Harmachis, Child of Earth!”

“Throw back the Gates and open wide the Doors!” pealed the awful Voice. “Throw back the Gates and open wide the Doors; seal up his lips in silence, lest his voice jar upon the harmonies of Heaven, take away his sight lest he see that which may not be seen, and let Harmachis, who hath been summoned, pass down the path that leads to the place of the Unchanging. Pass on, Child of Earth; but before thou goest look up

that thou mayest learn how far thou art removed from Earth."

I looked up. Beyond the glory that shone about the city was black night, and high on its bosom twinkled one tiny star.

"Behold the world that thou hast left," said the Voice, "behold and tremble."

Then my lips and eyes were touched and sealed with silence and with darkness, so that I was dumb and blind. The Gates rolled back, the Doors swung wide, and I was swept into the city that is in the Place of Death. I was swept swiftly I know not whither, till at length I stood upon my feet. Again the great Voice pealed:

"Draw the veil of blackness from his eyes, unseal the silence on his lips, that Harmachis, Child of Earth, may see, hear, and understand, and make adoration at the Shrine of Her that Was and Is and Shall Be."

And my lips and eyes were touched once more, so that my sight and speech came back.

Behold! I stood within a hall of blackest marble, so lofty that even in the rosy light scarce could my vision reach the great groins of the roof. Music wailed about its spaces, and all

adown its length stood winged Spirits fashioned in living fire, and such was the brightness of their forms that I could not look on them. In its centre was an altar, small and square, and I stood before the empty altar. Then again the Voice cried:

“O Thou that hast been, art, and shalt be; Thou who, having many names, art yet without a name; Measurer of Time; Messenger of God; Guardian of the Worlds and the Races that dwell thereon; Universal Mother born of Nothingness; Creatrix uncreated; Living Splendour without Form, Living Form without Substance; Servant of the Invisible; Child of Law; Holder of the Scales and Sword of Fate; Vessel of Life, through whom all Life flows, to whom it again is gathered; Recorder of Things Done; Executrix of Decrees —*Hear!*

“Harmachis the Egyptian, who by Thy will hath been summoned from the earth, waits before Thine Altar, with ears unstopped, with eyes unsealed, and with an open heart. Hear and descend! Descend, O Many-shaped! Descend in Flame! Descend in Sound! Descend in Spirit! Hear and descend!”

The Voice ceased and there was silence. Then through the silence came a sound like the booming of the sea. It passed and presently, moved thereto by I know not what, I raised my eyes from between my hands with which I had covered them, and saw a small dark cloud hanging over the Altar in and out of which a fiery Serpent climbed.

Then all the Spirits clad in light fell upon the marble floor, and with a loud voice adored; but what they said I could not understand. Behold! the dark cloud came down and rested on the Altar, the Serpent of fire stretched itself towards me, touched me on the forehead with its forky tongue and was gone. From within the cloud a Voice sweet and low and clear spoke in heavenly accents:

“Depart, ye Ministers, leave Me with my son whom I have summoned.”

Then like arrows rushing from a bow the flame-clad Spirits leapt from the ground and sped away.

“O Harmachis,” said the Voice, “be not afraid, I am She whom thou dost know as Isis of

the Egyptians; but what else I am strive not thou to learn, it is beyond thy strength. For I am all things, Life is my spirit, and Nature is my raiment. I am the laughter of the babe, I am the maiden's love, I am the mother's kiss. I am the Child and Servant of the Invisible that is God, that is Law, that is Fate—though myself I be not God and Fate and Law. When winds blow and oceans roar upon the face of Earth thou hearest my voice; when thou gazest on the starry firmament thou seest my countenance; when the spring blooms out in flowers, that is my smile, Harmachis. For I am Nature's self, and all her shapes are shapes of Me. I breathe in all that breathes. I wax and wane in the changeful moon: I grow and gather in the tides: I rise with the suns: I flash with the lightning and thunder in the storms. Nothing is too great for the measure of my majesty, nothing is so small that I cannot find a home therein. I am in thee and thou art in Me, O Harmachis. That which bade thee be bade Me also be. Therefore, though I am great and thou art little, have no fear. For we are bound together by the common bond of life—that life which flows through suns

and stars and spaces, through Spirits and the souls of men, welding all Nature to a whole that, changing ever, is yet eternally the same."

I bowed my head—I could not speak, for I was afraid.

"Faithfully hast thou served Me, O my son," went on the low sweet Voice; "greatly thou hast longed to be brought face to face with me here in Amenti; and greatly hast thou dared to accomplish thy desire. For it is no small thing to cast off the tabernacle of the Flesh and before the appointed time, if only for an hour, put on the raiment of the Spirit. And greatly, O my servant and my son, have I, too, desired to look on thee here where I am. For the Gods love those who love them, but with a wider and a deeper love, and under One who is as far from Me as I am from thee, mortal, I am a God of Gods. Therefore I have caused thee to be brought hither, Harmachis; and therefore I speak to thee, my son, and bid thee commune with Me now face to face, as thou didst commune that night upon the temple towers of Abouthis. For I was there with thee, Harmachis, as I was in ten thousand other worlds. It was I, O Harmachis, who laid the

lotus in thy hand, giving thee the sign which thou didst seek. For thou art of the kingly blood of my children who served Me from age to age. And if thou dost not fail thou shalt sit upon that kingly throne and restore my ancient worship in its purity, and sweep my temples from their defilements. But if thou dost fail, then shall the eternal Spirit Isis become but a memory in Egypt."

The Voice paused; and, gathering up my strength, at length I spoke aloud:

"Tell me, O Holy," I said, "shall I then fail?"

"Ask Me not," answered the Voice, "that which it is not lawful that I should answer thee. Perchance I can read that which shall befall thee, perchance it doth not please Me so to read. What can it profit the Divine, that hath all time wherein to await the issues, to be eager to look upon the blossom that is not blown, but which, lying a seed in the bosom of the earth, shall blow in its season? Know, Harmachis, that I do not shape the Future; the Future is to thee and not to Me; for it is born of Law and of the rule ordained of the Invisible. Yet thou art free to act therein; and thou shalt win or thou shalt fail according to

thy strength and the measure of thy heart's purity. Thine be the burden, Harmachis, as thine in the event shall be the glory or the shame. Little do I reckon of the issue, I who am but the Minister of what is written. Now hear me: I will always be with thee, my son, for my love once given can never be taken away, though by sin it may seem lost to thee. Remember then this: if thou dost triumph, thy guerdon shall be great; if thou dost fail, heavy indeed shall be thy punishment both in the flesh and in the land that thou callest Amenti. Yet this for thy comfort: shame and agony shall not be eternal. For however deep the fall from righteousness, if but repentance holds the heart, there is a path—a stony and a cruel path—whereby the height may be climbed again. Let it not be thy lot to follow it, Harmachis!

“And now, because thou hast loved Me, my son, and, wandering through the maze of fable, wherein men lose themselves upon the earth, mistaking the substance for the Spirit, and the Altar for the God, hast yet grasped a clue of Truth the Many-faced; and because I love thee and look on the day that, perchance, shall come when thou shalt dwell blessed in my light and in

the doing of my tasks: because of this, I say, it shall be given to thee, O Harmachis, to hear the Word whereby I may be summoned from the Uttermost, by one who hath communed with Me, and to look upon the face of Isis—even into the eyes of the Messenger, and not die the death.

“Behold!”

The sweet Voice ceased; the dark cloud upon the altar changed and changed—it grew white, it shone, and seemed at length to take the shrouded shape of woman. Then the golden Snake crept from its heart once more, and, like a living diadem, twined itself about the cloudy brows.

Now suddenly a Voice called aloud the awful Word, then the vapours burst and melted, and with my eyes I saw that Glory, at the very thought of which my spirit faints. But what I saw it is not lawful to utter. For, though I have been bidden to write what I have written of this matter, perchance that a record may remain, thereon I have been warned—ay, even now, after these many years. I saw, and what I saw cannot be imagined; for there are Glories and there are Shapes which are beyond the reach of man’s imagination. I saw—then, with the echo of that

Word, and the memory of that sight stamped for ever on my heart, my spirit failed me, and I sank down before the Glory.

And, as I fell, it seemed that the great hall burst open and crumbled into flakes of fire round me. Then a great wind blew: there was a sound of Worlds rushing down the flood of Time—and I knew no more!

CHAPTER VII.

OF THE AWAKENING OF HARMACHIS; OF THE CEREMONY OF HIS CROWNING AS PHARAOH OF THE UPPER AND THE LOWER LAND; AND OF THE OFFERINGS MADE TO PHARAOH.

ONCE again I woke—to find myself stretched at length upon the stone flooring of the Holy Place of Isis that is at Aboutthis. By me stood the old Priest of the Mysteries, and in his hand was a lamp. He bent over me, and gazed earnestly upon my face.

“It is day—the day of thy new birth, and thou hast lived to see it, Harmachis!” he said at length. “I give thanks. Arise, royal Harmachis—nay, tell me naught of that which has befallen thee. Arise, beloved of the Holy Mother. Come forth, thou who hast passed the fire and learned what lies behind the darkness—come forth, O newly-born!”

I rose and, walking faintly, went with him, and, passing out of the darkness of the Shrines

filled with thought and wonder, came once more into the pure light of the morning. And then I went to my own chamber and slept; nor did any dreams come to trouble me. But no man—not even my father—asked me aught of what I saw upon that dread night, or after what fashion I had communed with the Goddess.

After these things which have been written, I applied myself for a space to the worship of the Mother Isis, and to the further study of the outward forms of those mysteries to which I now held the key. Moreover, I was instructed in matters politic, for many great men of our following came secretly to see me from all quarters of Egypt, and told me much of the hatred of the people towards Cleopatra, the Queen, and of other things. At last the hour drew nigh; it was three months and ten days from the night when, for a while, I left the flesh, and yet living with our life, was gathered to the breast of Isis, on which it was agreed that with due and customary rites, although in utter secrecy, I should be called to the throne of the Upper and the Lower Land. So it came about that, as the solemn time drew nigh, great men of the party of Egypt gathered

to the number of thirty-seven from every nome, and each great city of their nome, meeting together at Abouthis. They came in every guise—some as priests, some as pilgrims to the Shrine, and some as beggars. Among them was my uncle, Sepa, who, though he clad himself as a travelling doctor, had much ado to keep his loud voice from betraying him. Indeed, I myself knew him by it, meeting him as I walked in thought upon the banks of the canal, although it was then dusk and the great cape, which, after the fashion of such doctors, he had thrown about his head, half hid his face.

“A pest on thee!” he cried, when I greeted him by his name. “Cannot a man cease to be himself for a single hour? Didst thou but know the pains that it has cost me to learn to play this part—and now thou readest who I am even in the dark!”

And then, still talking in his loud voice, he told me how he had travelled hither on foot, the better to escape the spies who ply to and fro upon the river. But he said he should return by the water, or take another guise; for since he had come as a doctor he had been forced to play

a doctor's part, knowing but little of the arts of medicine; and, as he greatly feared, there were many between Annu and Abouthis who had suffered from it.* And he laughed loudly and embraced me, forgetting his part. For he was too whole at heart to be an actor and other than himself, and would have entered Abouthis with me holding my hand, had I not chid him for his folly.

At length all were gathered.

It was night, and the gates of the temple were shut. None were left within them, except the thirty-seven; my father, the High Priest Amenemhat; that aged priest who had led me to the Shrine of Isis; the old wife, Atoua, who, according to ancient custom, was to prepare me for the anointing; and some five other priests, sworn to secrecy by that oath which none may break. They gathered in the second hall of the great temple; but I remained alone, clad in my white robe, in the passage where are the names of six-and-seventy ancient Kings, who were before the day of the divine Sethi. There I rested in dark-

* In Ancient Egypt an unskilful or negligent physician was liable to very heavy penalties.—ED.

ness,—till at length my father, Amenemhat, came, bearing a lamp, and, bowing low before me, led me by the hand forth into the great hall. Here and there, between its mighty pillars, lights were burning that dimly showed the sculptured images upon the walls, and dimly fell upon the long line of the seven-and-thirty Lords, Priests, and Princes, who, seated upon carven chairs, awaited my coming in silence. Before them, facing away from the seven Sanctuaries, a throne was set, around which stood the priests holding the sacred images and banners. As I came into the dim and holy place, the Dignitaries rose, and bowed before me, speaking no word; while my father led me to the steps of the throne, and in a low voice bade me stand before it.

Then he spoke: “

“Lords, Priests, and Princes of the ancient orders of the land of Khem—Nobles from the Upper and the Lower Country, here gathered in answer to my summons, hear me: I present to you, with such scant formality as the occasion can afford, the Prince Harmachis, by right and true descent of blood the descendant and heir of the ancient Pharaohs of our most unhappy land.

He is priest of the inmost circle of the Mysteries of the Divine Isis, Master of the Mysteries—Hereditary Priest of the Pyramids which are by Memphis, Instructed in the Solemn Rites of the Holy Osiris. Is there any among you who has aught to urge against the true line of his blood?"

He paused, and my uncle, Sepa, rising from his chair, spoke: "We have made examination of the records and there is none, O Amenemhat. He is of the Royal blood, his descent is true."

"Is there any among you," went on my father, "who can deny that this royal Harmachis, by sanction of the very Gods, has been gathered to Isis, been shown the way of the Osiris, been admitted to be the Hereditary High Priest of the Pyramids which are by Memphis, and of the Temples of the Pyramids?"

Then that old priest rose who had been my guide in the Sanctuary of the Mother and made answer: "There is none; O Amenemhat; I know these things of my own knowledge."

Once more my father spoke: "Is there any among you who has aught to urge against this royal Harmachis, in that by wickedness of heart or life, by uncleanness or falsity, it is not fit or

meet that we should crown him Lord of all the Lands?"

Then an aged Prince of Memphis arose and made answer:

"We have inquired of these matters: there is none, O Amenemhat."

"It is well," said my father; "then naught is wanting in the Prince Harmachis, seed of Nektnebf, the Osirian. Let the woman Atoua stand forth and tell this company those things that came to pass when, at the hour of her death, she who was my wife prophesied over this Prince, being filled with the Spirit of the Hathors."

Thereon old Atoua crept forward from the shadow of the columns, and earnestly told those things that have been written.

"Ye have heard," said my father: "do ye believe that the woman who was my wife spake with the Divine voice?"

"We do," they answered.

Now my uncle Sepa rose and spoke:

"Royal Harmachis, thou hast heard. Know now that we are gathered here to crown thee King of the Upper and the Lower Lands—thy holy father, Amenemhat, renouncing all his right

on thy behalf. We are met, not, indeed, in that pomp and ceremony which is due to the occasion—for what we do must be done in secret, lest our lives, and the cause that is more dear to us than life, should pay the forfeit—but yet with such dignity and observance of the ancient rites as our circumstance may command. Learn, now, how this matter hangs, and if, after learning, thy mind consents thereto, then mount thy throne, O Pharaoh—and swear the oath!

“Long has Khemi groaned beneath the mailed heel of the Greek, and trembled at the shadow of the Roman’s spear; long has ancient worship of its Gods been desecrated, and its people crushed with oppression. But we believe that the hour of deliverance is at hand, and with the solemn voice of Egypt and by the ancient Gods of Egypt, to whose cause thou art of all men bound, we call upon thee, Prince, to be the sword of our deliverance. Hearken! Twenty thousand good and leal men are sworn to wait upon thy word, and at thy signal to rise as one, to put the Grecian to the sword, and with their blood and substance to build thee a throne set more surely on the soil of Khem than are its

ancient pyramids—such a throne as shall even roll the Roman legions back. And for the signal, it shall be the death of that bold harlot, Cleopatra. Thou must compass her death, Harmachis, in such fashion as shall be shown to thee, and with her blood anoint the Royal throne of Egypt.

“Canst thou refuse, O our Hope? Doth not the holy love of country swell within thy heart? Canst thou dash the cup of Freedom from thy lips and bear to drink the bitter draught of slaves? The emprise is great; maybe it shall fail, and thou with thy life, as we with ours, shalt pay the price of our endeavour. But what of it, Harmachis? Is life, then, so sweet? Are we so softly cushioned on the stony bed of earth? Is bitterness and sorrow in its sum so small and scant a thing? Do we here breathe so divine an air that we should fear to face the passage of our breath? What have we here but hope and memory? What see we here but shadows? Shall we then fear to pass pure-handed where Fulfilment is and memory is lost in its own source, and shadows die in the light which cast them? O Harmachis, that man alone is truly blest who crowns his life with Fame’s most splendid wreath.

For, since to all the Brood of Earth Death hands his poppy-flowers, he indeed is happy to whom there is occasion given to weave them in a crown of glory. And how can a man die better than in a great endeavour to strike the gyves from his Country's limbs so that she again may stand in the face of Heaven and raise the shrill shout of Freedom, and, clad once more in a panoply of strength, trample under foot the fetters of her servitude, defying the tyrant nations of the earth to set their seal upon her brow?

“Khem calls thee, Harmachis. Come then, thou Deliverer; leap like Horus from the firmament, break her chains, scatter her foes, and rule a Pharaoh on Pharaoh's Throne——”

“Enough, enough!” I cried, while the long murmur of applause swept about the columns and up the massy walls. “Enough; is there any need to adjure me thus? Had I a hundred lives, would I not most gladly lay them down for Egypt?”

“Well said, well said!” answered Sepa. “Now go forth with the woman yonder, that she may make thy hands clean before they touch the

sacred emblems, and anoint thy brow before it is encircled of the diadem."

And so I went into a chamber apart with the old wife, Atoua. There, muttering prayers, she poured pure water over my hands into a ewer of gold, and having dipped a fine cloth into oil wiped my brow with it.

"O happy Egypt!" she said; "O happy Prince, that art come to rule in Egypt! O Royal youth!—too Royal to be a priest—so shall many a fair woman think; but, perchance, for thee they will relax the priestly rule, else how shall the race of Pharaoh be carried on? O happy I, who dandled thee and gave my flesh and blood to save thee! O royal and beautiful Harmachis, born for splendour, happiness, and love!"

"Cease, cease," I said, for her talk jarred upon me; "call me not happy till thou knowest my end, and speak not to me of love, for with love comes sorrow, and mine is another and a higher way."

"Ay, ay, so thou sayest—and joy, too, that comes with love! Never talk lightly of love, my King, for it brought thee here! *La! la!* but it is always the way—'The goose on the wing

laughs at crocodiles,' so goes their saying down at Alexandria; 'but when the goose is asleep on the water, it is the crocodiles that laugh.' Not but what women are pretty crocodiles. Men worship the crocodiles at Anthribis—Crocodilopolis they call it now, don't they?—but they worship women all the world over! *La!* how my tongue runs on, and thou about to be crowned Pharaoh! Did I not prophesy it to thee? Well, thou art clean, Lord of the Double Crown. Go forth!"

So I went from the chamber with the old wife's foolish talk ringing in my ears, though of a truth her folly had ever a grain of wit in it.

As I came, the Dignitaries rose once more and bowed before me. Then my father, without delay, drew near me, and placed in my hands a golden image of the divine Ma, the Goddess of Truth, and golden images of the arks of the God Amen-Ra, of the divine Mout, and the divine Khons, and spoke solemnly:

"Thou swearest by the living majesty of Ma, by the majesty of Amen-Ra, of Mout, and of Khons?"

"I swear," I said.

"Thou swearest by the holy land of Khem,

by Sihor's flood, by the Temples of the Gods and the eternal Pyramids?"

"I swear."

"Remembering thy hideous doom if thou shouldst fail therein, thou swearest that thou wilt in all things govern Egypt according to its ancient laws, that thou wilt preserve the worship of its Gods, that thou wilt do equal justice, that thou wilt not oppress, that thou wilt not betray, that thou wilt make no alliance with the Roman or the Greek, that thou wilt cast out the foreign Idols, that thou wilt devote thy life to the liberty of the land of Khem?"

"I swear."

"It is well. Mount, then, the throne, that in the presence of these thy subjects, I may name thee Pharaoh."

I mounted upon the throne, of which the footstool is a Sphinx, and the canopy the overshadowing wings of Ma. Then Amenemhat drew nigh once again and placed the Pshent upon my brow, and on my head the Double Crown, and the Royal Robe about my shoulders, and in my hands the Sceptre and the Scourge.

"Royal Harmachis," he cried, "by these out-

ward signs and tokens, I, the High Priest of the Temple of Ra-Men-Ma at Abouthis, crown thee Pharaoh of the Upper and Lower Land. Reign and prosper, O Hope of Khemi!"

"Reign and prosper, Pharaoh!" echoed the Dignitaries, bowing down before me.

Then, one by one, they swore allegiance, till all had sworn. And, having sworn, my father took me by the hand; he led me in solemn procession into each of the seven Sanctuaries that are in this Temple of Ra-Men-Ma, and in each I made offerings, swung incense, and officiated as priest. Clad in the Royal robes I made offerings in the Shrine of Horus, in the Shrine of Isis, in the Shrine of Amen-Ra, in the Shrine of Horemku, in the Shrine of Ptah, till at length I reached the Shrine of the King's Chamber.

Here they made their offering to me, as the Divine Pharaoh, and left me very weary—but a King.

[*Here the first and smallest of the papyrus rolls comes to an end.*]

BOOK II.

THE FALL OF HARMACHIS.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE FAREWELL OF AMENEMHAT TO HARMACHIS;
OF THE COMING OF HARMACHIS TO ALEXANDRIA;
OF THE EXHORTATION OF SEPA; OF THE PASSING
OF CLEOPATRA ROBED AS ISIS; AND OF THE
OVERTHROW OF THE GLADIATOR BY HARMACHIS.

Now the long days of preparation had passed, and the time was at hand. I was initiated, and I was crowned; so that although the common folk knew me not, or knew me only as Priest of Isis, there were in Egypt thousands who at heart bowed down to me as Pharaoh. The hour was at hand, and my soul went forth to meet it. For I longed to overthrow the foreigner, to set Egypt free, to mount the throne that was my heritage, and cleanse the temples of my Gods. I was fain for the struggle, and I never doubted of its end. I looked into the mirror, and saw triumph written on my brows. The future stretched a

path of glory from my feet—ay, glittering with glory like Sihor in the sun. I communed with my Mother Isis; I sat within my chamber and took counsel with my heart; I planned new temples; I revolved great laws that I would put forth for my people's weal; and in my ears rang the shouts of exultation which should greet victorious Pharaoh on his throne.

But still I tarried a little while at Abouthis, and, having been commanded to do so, let my hair, that had been shorn, grow again long and black as the raven's wing, instructing myself meanwhile in all manly exercises and feats of arms. Also, for a purpose which shall be seen, I perfected myself in the magic art of the Egyptians, and in the reading of the stars, in which things, indeed, I already had great skill.

Now, this was the plan that had been built up. My uncle Sepa had, for a while, left the Temple of Annu, giving out that his health had failed him. Thence he had moved down to a house in Alexandria, to gather strength, as he said, from the breath of the sea, and also to learn for himself the wonders of the great Museum and the glory of Cleopatra's Court.

There it was planned that I should join him, for there, at Alexandria, the egg of the plot was hatching. Accordingly, when at last the summons came, all things being prepared, I made ready for the journey, and passed into my father's chamber to receive his blessing before I went. There sat the old man, as once before he sat when he had rebuked me because I went out to slay the lion, his long white beard resting on the table of stone and sacred writings in his hand. When I came in he rose from his seat and would have knelt before me, crying "Hail, Pharaoh!" but I caught him by the hand.

"It is not meet, my father," I said.

"It is meet," he answered, "it is meet that I should bow before my King; but be it as thou wilt. And so thou goest, Harmachis; my blessing go with thee, O my son! And may Those whom I serve grant to me that my old eyes may, indeed, behold thee on the throne! I have searched long, striving, Harmachis, to read the future that shall be; but I can learn naught by all my wisdom. It is hid from me, and at times my heart fails. But hear this, there is danger in thy path, and it comes in the form of Woman. I have

known it long, and therefore thou hast been called to the worship of the heavenly Isis, who bids her votaries put away the thought of woman till such time as she shall think well to slacken the rule. Oh, my son, I would that thou wert not so strong and fair—stronger and fairer, indeed, than any man in Egypt, as a King should be—for in that strength and beauty may lie a cause of stumbling. Beware, then, of those witches of Alexandria, lest, like a worm, some one of them creep into thy heart and eat its secret out.”

“Have no fear, my father,” I answered, frowning, “my thought is set on other things than red lips and smiling eyes.”

“It is good,” he answered; “so may it befall. And now farewell. When next we meet, may it be in that happy hour when, with all the priests of the Upper Land, I move down from Abouthis to do my homage to Pharaoh on his throne.”

So I embraced him, and went. Alas! I little thought how we should meet again.

Thus it came about that once more I passed down the Nile travelling as a man of no estate.

And to such as were curious about me it was given out that I was the adopted son of the High Priest of Abouthis, having been brought up to the priesthood, and that I had at the last refused the service of the Gods, and chosen to go to Alexandria, to seek my fortune. For, be it remembered, I was still held to be the grandson of the old wife, Atoua, by all those who did not know the truth.

On the tenth night, sailing with the wind, we reached the mighty city of Alexandria, the city of a thousand lights. Above them all towered the white Pharos, that wonder of the world, from the crown of which a light like the light of the sun blazed out across the waters of the harbour to guide mariners on their way across the sea. The vessel having been cautiously made fast to the quay, for it was night, I disembarked and stood wondering at the vast mass of houses, and confused by the clamour of many tongues. For here all peoples seemed to be gathered together, each speaking after the fashion of his own land. And as I stood a young man came and touched me on the shoulder, asking me if I was from Abouthis and named Harmachis. I said "Yea."

Then, bending over me, he whispered the secret pass-word into my ear, and, beckoning to two slaves, bade them bring my baggage from the ship. This they did, fighting their way through the crowd of porters who were clamouring for hire. Then I followed him down the quay, which was bordered with drinking-places, where all sorts of men were gathered, tipping wine and watching the dancing of women, some of whom were but scantily arrayed, and some not arrayed at all.

And so we went through the lamp-lit houses till at last we reached the shore of the great harbour, and turned to the right along a wide way paved with granite and bordered by strong houses, having cloisters in front of them, the like of which I had never seen. Turning once more to the right we came to a quieter portion of the city, where, except for parties of strolling revellers, the streets were still. Presently my guide halted at a house built of white stone. We passed in, and, crossing a small courtyard, entered a chamber where there was a light. And here, at last, I found my uncle Sepa, most glad to see me safe.

When I had washed and eaten, he told me that all things went well, and that as yet there was no thought of evil at the Court. Further, he said, it having come to the ears of the Queen that the Priest of Annu was sojourning at Alexandria, she sent for him and closely questioned him—not as to any plot, for of that she never thought, but as to the rumour which had reached her, that there was treasure hid in the Great Pyramid which is by Annu. For, being ever wasteful, she was ever in want of money, and had bethought her of opening the Pyramid. But he laughed at her, telling her the Pyramid was the burying-place of the divine Khufu, and that he knew nothing of its secrets. Then she was angered, and swore that so surely as she ruled in Egypt she would tear it down, stone by stone, and discover the secret at its heart. Again he laughed, and, in the words of the proverb which they have here at Alexandria, told her that “Mountains live longer than Kings.” Thereon she smiled at his ready answer, and let him go. Also my uncle Sepa told me that on the morrow I should see this Cleopatra. For it was her birthday (as, indeed, it was also mine), and, dressed

in the robes of the Holy Isis, she would pass in state from her palace on the Lochias to the Serapeum to offer a sacrifice at the Shrine of the false God who sits in the Temple. And he said that thereafter the fashion by which I should gain entrance to the household of the Queen should be contrived.

Then, being very weary, I went to rest, but could sleep little for the strangeness of the place, the noises in the streets, and the thought of the morrow. While it was yet dark, I rose, climbed the stair to the roof of the house, and waited. Presently, the sun's rays shot out like arrows, and lit upon the white wonder of the marble Pharos, whose light instantly sank and died, as though, indeed, the sun had killed it. Now the rays fell upon the palaces of the Lochias where Cleopatra lay, and lit them up till they flamed like a jewel set on the dark, cool bosom of the sea. Away the light flew, kissing the Soma's sacred dome, beneath which Alexander sleeps, touching the high tops of a thousand palaces and temples; past the porticoes of the great museum that loomed near at hand, striking the lofty Shrine, where, carved of ivory, is the image of the false God Serapis,

and at last seeming to lose itself in the vast and gloomy Necropolis. Then, as the dawn gathered into day, the flood of brightness, overbrimming the bowl of night, flowed into the lower lands and streets, and showed Alexandria red in the sunrise as the mantle of a king, and shaped as a mantle. The Etesian wind came up from the north, and swept away the vapour from the harbours, so that I saw their blue waters rocking a thousand ships. I saw, too, that mighty mole the Heptastadium; I saw the hundreds of streets, the countless houses, the innumerable wealth and splendour of Alexandria set like a queen between lake Mareotis and the ocean, and dominating both, and I was filled with wonder. This, then, was one city in my heritage of lands and cities! Well, it was worth the grasping. And having looked my full and fed my heart, as it were, with the sight of splendour, I communed with the Holy Isis and came down from the roof.

In the chamber beneath was my uncle Sepa. I told him that I had been watching the sun rise over the city of Alexandria.

“So!” he said, looking at me from beneath

his shaggy eyebrows; "and what thinkest thou of Alexandria?"

"I think it is like some city of the Gods," I answered.

"Ay!" he replied fiercely, "a city of the infernal Gods—a sink of corruption, a bubbling well of iniquity, a home of false faith springing from false hearts. I would that not one stone of it was left upon another stone, and that its wealth lay deep beneath yonder waters! I would that the gulls were screaming across its site, and that the wind, untainted by a Grecian breath, swept through its ruins from the ocean to Mareotis! O royal Harmachis, let not the luxury and beauty of Alexandria poison thy sense; for in their deadly air, Faith perishes, and Religion cannot spread her heavenly wings. When the hour comes for thee to rule, Harmachis, cast down this accursed city and, as thy fathers did, set up thy throne in the white walls of Memphis. For I tell thee that, for Egypt, Alexandria is but a splendid gate of ruin, and, while it endures, all nations of the earth shall march through it, to the plunder of the land, and all false Faiths shall nestle in it and breed the overthrow of Egypt's Gods."

I made no answer, for there was truth in his words. And yet to me the city seemed very fair to look on. After we had eaten, my uncle told me it was now time to set out to view the march of Cleopatra, as she went in triumph to the Shrine of Serapis. For although she would not pass till within two hours of the midday, yet these people of Alexandria have so great a love of shows and idling that had we not presently set forth, by no means could we have come through the press of the multitudes who were already gathering along the highways where the Queen must ride. So we went out to take our place upon a stand, built of timber, that had been set up at the side of the great road which pierces through the city, to the Canopic Gate. For my uncle had already purchased a right to enter there, and that dearly.

We won our way with much struggle through the great crowds that were already gathered in the streets till we reached the scaffolding of timber, which was roofed in with an awning and gaily hung with scarlet cloths. Here we seated ourselves upon a bench and waited for some hours, watching the multitude press past shouting, singing, and talking loudly in many tongues. At length

soldiers came to clear the road, clad, after the Roman fashion, in breast-plates of chain-armour. After them marched heralds enjoining silence (at which the populace sung and shouted all the more loudly), and crying that Cleopatra, the Queen, was coming. Then followed a thousand Cilician skirmishers, a thousand Thracians, a thousand Macedonians, and a thousand Gauls, each armed after the fashion of their country. Then passed five hundred men of those who are called the Fenced Horsemen, for both men and horses were altogether covered with mail. Next came youths and maidens sumptuously draped and wearing golden crowns, and with them images symbolising Day and Night, Morning and Noon, the Heavens and the Earth. After these walked many fair women, pouring perfumes on the road, and others scattering blooming flowers. Now there rose a great shout of "Cleopatra! Cleopatra!" and I held my breath and bent forward to see her who dared to put on the robes of Isis.

But at that moment the multitude so gathered and thickened in front of where I was that I could no longer clearly see. So in my eagerness I leapt over the barrier of the scaffolding, and,

being very strong, pushed my way through the crowd till I reached the foremost rank. And as I did so, Nubian slaves armed with thick staves and crowned with ivy-leaves ran up, striking the people. One man I noted more especially, for he was a giant, and, being strong, was insolent beyond measure, smiting the people without cause, as, indeed, is the wont of low persons set in authority. For a woman stood near to me, an Egyptian by her face, bearing a child in her arms, whom the man, seeing that she was weak, struck on the head with his rod so that she fell prone, and the people murmured. But at the sight my blood rushed of a sudden through my veins and drowned my reason. I held in my hand a staff of olive-wood from Cyprus, and as the black brute laughed at the sight of the stricken woman and her babe rolling on the ground, I swung the staff aloft and smote. So shrewdly did I strike, that the tough rod split upon the giant's shoulders and the blood spurted forth, staining his trailing leaves of ivy.

Then, with a shriek of pain and fury—for those who smite love not that they be smitten—he turned and sprang at me! And all the people

round gave back, save only the woman who could not rise, leaving us two in a ring as it were. On he came with a rush, and as he came, being now mad, I smote him with my clenched fist between the eyes, having nothing else with which to smite, and he staggered like an ox beneath the first blow of the priest's axe. Then the people shouted, for they love to see a fight, and the man was known to them as a gladiator victorious in the games. Gathering up his strength, the knave came on with an oath, and, whirling his heavy staff on high, struck at me in such a fashion that, had I not avoided the blow by nimbleness, I had surely been slain. But, as it chanced, the staff hit upon the ground, and so heavily that it flew in fragments. Thereon the multitude shouted again, and the great man, blind with fury, rushed at me to smite me down. But with a cry I sprang straight at his throat—for he was so heavy a man that I knew I could not hope to throw him by strength—ay, and gripped it. There I clung, though his fists battered me like bludgeons, driving my thumbs into his throat. Round and round we turned, till at length he flung himself to the earth, trusting thus to shake me off. But

I held on fast as we rolled over and over on the ground, till at last he grew faint for want of breath. Then I, being uppermost, drove my knee down upon his chest, and, as I believe, should thus have slain him in my rage had not my uncle, and others there gathered, fallen upon me and dragged me from him.

And meanwhile, though I knew it not, the chariot in which the Queen sat, with elephants going before and lions led after it, had reached the spot, and had been halted because of the tumult. I looked up, and thus torn, panting, my white garments stained with the blood that had rushed from the mouth and nostrils of the mighty Nubian, I for the first time saw Cleopatra face to face. Her chariot was all of gold, and drawn by milk-white steeds. She sat in it with two fair girls, clad in Greek attire, standing one on either side, fanning her with glittering fans. On her head was the covering of Isis, the golden horns between which rested the moon's round disk and the emblem of Osiris' throne, with the uræus twined around. Beneath this covering was the vulture cap of gold, the blue enamelled wings and the vulture head with gemmy eyes, under

which her long dark tresses flowed towards her feet. About her rounded neck was a broad collar of gold studded with emeralds and coral. Round her arms and wrists were bracelets of gold studded with emeralds and coral, and in one hand she held the holy cross of Life fashioned of crystal, and in the other the golden rod of royalty. Her breast was bare, but under it was a garment that glistened like the scaly covering of a snake, everywhere sewn with gems. Beneath this robe was a skirt of golden cloth, half hidden by a scarf of the brodered silk of Cos, falling in folds to the sandals that, fastened with great pearls, adorned her white and tiny feet.

All this I discerned at a glance, as it were. Then I looked upon the face—that face which seduced Cæsar, ruined Egypt, and was doomed to give Octavian the sceptre of the world. I looked upon the flawless Grecian features, the rounded chin, the full, rich lips, the chiselled nostrils, and the ears fashioned like delicate shells. I saw the forehead, low, broad, and lovely, the crisped, dark hair falling in heavy waves that sparkled in the sun, the arched eyebrows, and the long, bent lashes. There before me was the grandeur of her Imperial

shape. There burnt the wonderful eyes, hued like the Cyprian violet—eyes that seemed to sleep and brood on secret things as night broods upon the desert, and yet as the night to shift, change, and be illumined by gleams of sudden splendour born within their starry depths. All those wonders I saw, though I have small skill in telling them. But even then I knew that it was not in these charms alone that the might of Cleopatra's beauty lay. It was rather in a glory and a radiance cast through the fleshly covering from the fierce soul within. For she was a Thing of Flame like unto which no woman has ever been nor ever will be. Even when she brooded, the fire of her quick heart shone through her. But when she woke, and the lightning leapt suddenly from her eyes, and the passion-laden music of her speech chimed upon her lips, ah! then, who can tell how Cleopatra seemed? For in her met all the splendours that have been given to woman for her glory, and all the genius which man has won from heaven. And with them dwelt every evil of that greater sort, which fearing nothing, and making a mock of laws, has taken empires for its place of play, and, smiling, watered the

growth of its desires with the rich blood of men. In her breast they gathered, together fashioning that Cleopatra whom no man may draw, and yet whom no man, having seen, ever can forget. They fashioned her grand as the Spirit of Storm, lovely as Lightning, cruel as Pestilence, yet with a heart; and what she did is known. Woe to the world when such another comes to curse it!

For a moment I met Cleopatra's eyes as she idly bent herself to find the tumult's cause. At first they were sombre and dark, as though they saw indeed, but the brain read nothing. Then they awoke, and their very colour seemed to change as the colour of the sea changes when the water is shaken. First, there was anger written in them; next an idle noting; then, when she looked upon the huge bulk of the man whom I had overcome, and knew him for the gladiator, something, perchance, that was not far from wonder. At the least they softened, though indeed, her face changed no whit. But he who would read Cleopatra's mind had need to watch her eyes, for her countenance varied but a little. Turning, she said some word to her guards.

They came forward and led me to her, while all the multitude waited silently to see me slain.

I stood before her, my arms folded on my breast. Overcome though I was by the wonder of her loveliness I hated her in my heart, this woman who dared to clothe herself in the dress of Isis, this usurper who sat upon my throne, this wanton squandering the wealth of Egypt in chariots and perfumes. When she had looked me over from the head to the feet, she spake in a low full voice and in the tongue of Khemi which she alone had learned of all the Lagidæ:

“And who and what art thou, Egyptian—for Egyptian I see thou art—who darest to smite my slave when I make progress through my city?”

“I am Harmachis,” I answered boldly. “Harmachis, the astrologer, adopted son of the High Priest and Governor of Abouthis, who am come hither to seek my fortune. I smote thy slave, O Queen, because for no fault he struck down the woman yonder. Ask of those who saw, royal Egypt.”

“Harmachis,” she said, “the name has a high sound—and thou hast a high look;” and then, speaking to a soldier who had seen all, she bade him tell her what had come to pass. This he

did truthfully, being friendly disposed towards me because I had overcome the Nubian. Thereon she turned and spoke to the girl bearing the fan who stood beside her—a woman with curling hair and shy dark eyes, very beautiful to see. The girl answered somewhat. Then Cleopatra bade them bring the slave to her. So they led forward the giant, who had found his breath again, and with him the woman whom he had smitten down.

“Thou dog!” she said, in the same low voice; “thou coward! who, being strong, didst smite down this woman, and, being a coward, wast overthrown of this young man. See, thou, I will teach thee manners. Henceforth, when thou smitest women it shall be with thy left arm. Ho, guards, seize this black slave and strike off his right hand.”

Her command given, she sank back in her golden chariot, and again the cloud gathered in her eyes. But the guards seized the giant, and, notwithstanding his cries and prayers for mercy, struck off his hand with a sword upon the wood of the scaffolding and he was carried away groaning. Then the procession moved on again. As it went the fair woman with the fan turned

her head, caught my eye, and smiled and nodded as though she rejoiced, at which I wondered somewhat.

The people cheered also and made jests, saying that I should soon practise astrology in the palace. But, as soon as we might, I and my uncle escaped, and made our way back to the house. All the while he rated me for my rashness; but when we came to the chamber of the house he embraced me and rejoiced greatly, because I had overthrown the giant with so little hurt to myself.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE COMING OF CHARMION; AND OF THE
WRATH OF SEPA.

THAT same night, while we sat at supper in the house, there came a knock upon the door. It was opened, and a woman passed in wrapped from head to foot in a large dark peplos or cloak in such fashion that her face could not be clearly seen.

My uncle rose, and as he did so the woman uttered the secret word.

“I am come, my father,” she said in a sweet clear voice, “though of a truth it was not easy to escape the revels at the palace yonder. But I told the Queen that the sun and the riot in the streets had made me sick, and she let me go.”

“It is well,” he answered. “Unveil thyself; here thou art safe.”

With a little sigh of weariness she unclasped the peplos and let it slip from her, giving to my

sight the face and form of that beauteous girl who had stood to fan Cleopatra in the chariot. For she was very fair and pleasant to look upon, and her Grecian robes clung sweetly about her supple limbs and budding form. Her wayward hair, flowing in a hundred little curls, was bound in with a golden fillet, and on her feet were sandals fastened with studs of gold. Her cheeks blushed like a flower, and her dark soft eyes were downcast, as though with modesty, but smiles and dimples trembled about her lips.

My uncle frowned when his eyes fell upon her dress.

“Why comest thou in this garb, Charmion?” he asked sternly. “Is not the dress thy mothers wore good enough for thee? This is no time or place for woman’s vanities. Thou art not here to conquer, but to obey.”

“Nay, be not wroth, my father,” she answered softly; “perchance thou knowest not that she whom I serve will have none of our Egyptian dress; it is out of fashion. To wear it would have been to court suspicion—also I came in haste.” And as she spoke I saw that all the

while she watched me covertly through the long lashes which fringed her modest eyes.

“Well, well,” he said sharply, fixing his keen glance upon her face, “doubtless thou speakest truth, Charmion. Be ever mindful of thy oath, girl, and of the cause to which thou art sworn. Be not light-minded, and I charge thee forget the beauty with which thou hast been cursed. For mark thou this, Charmion: fail us but one jot, and vengeance shall fall on thee—the vengeance of man and the vengeance of the Gods! To this service,” he continued, lashing himself to anger as he went on till his great voice rang in the narrow room, “thou hast been bred; to this end thou hast been instructed and placed where thou art to gain the ear of that wicked wanton whom thou seemest to serve. See thou forget it not; see that the luxury of yonder Court does not corrupt thy purity and divert thy aim, Charmion,” and his eyes flashed and his small form seemed to grow till it attained to dignity—nay, almost to grandeur.

“Charmion,” he went on, advancing towards her with outstretched finger, “I say that at times I do not trust thee. But two nights gone I

dreamed I saw thee standing in the desert. I saw thee laugh and lift thy hand to heaven, and from it fell a rain of blood; then the sky sank down on the land of Khem and covered it. Whence came the dream, girl, and what is its meaning? I have naught against thee as yet; but hearken! On the moment that I have, though thou art of my kin, and I have loved thee—on that moment, I say, I will doom those delicate limbs, which thou lovest so much to show, to the kite and the jackal, and the soul within thee to all the tortures of the Gods! Unburied shalt thou lie, and bodiless and accursed shalt thou wander in Amenti!—ay, for ever and ever!”

He paused, for his sudden burst of passion had spent itself. But by it, more clearly than before, I saw how deep a heart this man had beneath the cloak of his merriness and simplicity of mien, and how fiercely the mind within him was set upon his aim. As for the girl, she shrank from him terrified, and, placing her hands before her sweet face, began to weep.

“Nay, speak not so, my father,” she said, between her sobs; “for what have I done? I know nothing of the evil wandering of thy dreams. I

am no soothsayer that I should read dreams. Have I not carried out all things according to thy desire? Have I not been ever mindful of that dread oath?"—and she trembled. "Have I not played the spy and told thee all? Have I not won the heart of the Queen, so that she loves me as a sister, refusing me nothing—ay, and the hearts of those about her? Why dost thou affright me thus with thy words and threats?" and she wept afresh, looking even more beautiful in her sorrow than she was before.

"Enough, enough," he answered; "what I have said, I have said. Be warned, and affront our sight no more with this wanton dress. Thinkest thou that we would feed our eyes upon those rounded arms—we whose stake is Egypt and who are dedicated to the Gods of Egypt? Girl, behold thy cousin and thy King!"

She ceased weeping, wiping her eyes with her chiton, and I saw that they seemed but the softer for her tears.

"Methinks, most royal Harmachis and beloved Cousin," she said, as she bent before me, "that we are already made acquainted."

"Yea, Cousin," I answered, not without shame-

facedness, for I had never before spoken to so fair a maid; "thou wert in the chariot with Cleopatra this day when I struggled with the Nubian?"

"Assuredly," she said, with a smile and a sudden lighting of the eyes, "it was a gallant fight and gallantly didst thou overthrow that black brute. I saw the fray and, though I knew thee not, I greatly feared for one so brave. But I paid him for my fright, for it was I who put it into the mind of Cleopatra to bid the guards strike off his hand—now, knowing who thou art, I would I had said his head." And she looked up shooting a glance at me and then smiled.

"Enough," put in my uncle Sepa, "the time draws on. Tell thou thy mission, Charmion, and be gone."

Then her manner changed; she folded her hands meekly before her and spoke:

"Let Pharaoh hearken to his handmaiden. I am the daughter of Pharaoh's uncle, the brother of his father, who is now long dead, and therefore in my veins also flows the Royal blood of Egypt. Also I am of the ancient Faith, and hate these Greeks, and to see thee set upon the throne

has been my dearest hope now for many years. To this end I, Charmion, have put aside my rank and become serving-woman to Cleopatra, that I might cut a notch in which thou couldst set thy foot when the hour came for thee to climb the throne. And, Pharaoh, the notch is cut.

“This then is our plot, royal Cousin. Thou must gain an entrance to the Household and learn its ways and secrets, and, so far as may be, suborn the eunuchs and captains, some of whom I have already tempted. This done, and all things being prepared without, thou must slay Cleopatra, and, aided by me with those whom I control, in the confusion that shall ensue, throw wide the gates, and, admitting those of our party who are in waiting, put such of the troops as remain faithful to the sword and seize the Bruchium. Which being finished, within two days thou shalt hold this fickle Alexandria. At the same time those who are sworn to thee in every city in Egypt shall rise in arms, and in ten days from the death of Cleopatra thou shalt indeed be Pharaoh. This is the counsel which has been taken, and thou seest, royal Cousin, that, though our

uncle yonder thinks so ill of me, I have learned my part—ay, and played it.”

“I hear thee, Cousin,” I answered, marvelling that so young a woman—she had but twenty years—could weave so bold a plot, for in its origin the scheme was hers. But in those days I little knew Charmion. “Go on; how then shall I gain entrance to the palace of Cleopatra?”

“Nay, Cousin, as things are it is easy. Thus: Cleopatra loves to look upon a man, and—give me pardon—thy face and form are fair. To-day she noted them, and twice she said she would she had asked where that astrologer might be found, for she held that an astrologer who could wellnigh slay a Nubian gladiator with his bare hands, must indeed be a master of the fortunate stars. I answered her that I would cause inquiry to be made. So hearken, royal Harmachis. At midday Cleopatra sleeps in her inner hall which looks over the gardens to the harbour. At that hour to-morrow, then, I will meet thee at the gates of the palace, whither thou shalt come boldly asking for the Lady Charmion. I will make appointment for thee with Cleopatra, so that she shall see thee alone when she wakes, and the rest

shall be for thee, Harmachis. For much she loves to play with the mysteries of magic, and I have known her stand whole nights watching the stars and making a pretence to read them. And but lately she has sent away Dioscorides the physician, because, poor fool! he ventured on a prophecy from the conjunction of the stars, that Cassius would defeat Mark Antony. Thereon Cleopatra sent orders to the General Allienus, bidding him add the legions she had sent to Syria to help Antony to the army of Cassius, whose victory, forsooth, was—according to Dioscorides—written on the stars. But, as it chanced, Antony beat Cassius first and Brutus afterwards, and so Dioscorides has departed, and now he lectures on herbs in the museum for his bread, and hates the name of stars. But his place is empty, and thou shalt fill it, and then we will work in secret and in the shadow of the sceptre. Ay, we will work like the worm at the heart of a fruit, till the time of plucking comes, and at thy dagger's touch, royal Cousin, the fabric of this Grecian throne crumbles to nothingness, and the worm that rotted it bursts his servile covering, and, in the sight of empires, spreads his royal wings o'er Egypt."

I gazed at this strange girl once more astonished, and saw that her face was lit up with such a light as I had never seen in the eyes of woman.

“Ah,” broke in my uncle, who was watching her, “ah, I love to see thee so, girl; there is the Charmion that I knew and I bred up—not the Court girl whom I like not, draped in silks of Cos and fragrant with essences. Let thy heart harden in this mould—ay, stamp it with the fervid zeal of patriot faith, and thy reward shall find thee. And now cover up that shameless dress of thine and leave us, for it grows late. To-morrow Harmachis shall come, as thou hast said, and so farewell.”

Charmion bowed her head, and, turning, wrapped her dark-hued peplos round her. Then, taking my hand, she touched it with her lips and went without any further word.

“A strange woman!” said Sepa, when she had gone; “a most strange woman, and an uncertain!”

“Methought, my uncle,” I said, “that thou wast somewhat harsh with her.”

“Ay,” he answered, “but not without a cause. Look thou, Harmachis: beware of this Charmion. She is too wayward, and, I fear me, may be led away. In truth, she is a very woman; and, like a restive horse, will take the path that pleases her. She has brain and fire, and she loves our cause; but I pray that the cause come not face to face with her desires, for what her heart is set on that will she do, at any cost she will do it. Therefore I frightened her now while I may: for who can know but that she will pass beyond my power? I tell thee, that in this one girl’s hand lie all our lives: and if she play us false, what then? Alas! and alas! that we must use such tools as these! But it was needful: there was no other way; and yet I misdoubt me. I pray that it may be well; still, at times, I fear my niece Charmion—she is too fair, and the blood of youth runs too warm in those blue veins of hers.

“Ah, woe to the cause that builds its strength upon a woman’s faith; for women are faithful only where they love, and when they love their faithlessness becomes their faith. They are not fixed as men are fixed: they rise more high and

sink more low—they are strong and changeful as the sea. Harmachis, beware of this Charmion: for, like the ocean, she may float thee home; or, like the ocean, she may wreck thee, and, with thee, the hope of Egypt!”

CHAPTER III.

OF THE COMING OF HARMACHIS TO THE PALACE; OF HOW HE DREW PAULUS THROUGH THE GATES; OF CLEOPATRA SLEEPING; AND OF THE MAGIC OF HARMACHIS WHICH HE SHOWED HER.

THUS it came to pass that on the next day I arrayed myself in a long and flowing robe, after the fashion of a magician or astrologer. I placed a cap on my head, about which were broidered images of the stars, and in my belt a scribe's palette and a roll of papyrus written over with mystic spells and signs. In my hand I held a wand of ebony, tipped with ivory, such as is used by priests and masters of magic. Among these, indeed, I took high rank, filling by knowledge of their secrets which I had learned at Annu what I lacked in that skill which comes from use. And so with no small shame, for I love not such play and hold this common magic in contempt, I set forth through the Bruchium to the palace on the

Lochias, being guided on my way by my uncle Sepa. At length, passing up the avenue of sphinxes, we came to the great marble gateway and the gates of bronze, within which is the guard-house. Here my uncle left me, breathing many prayers for my safety and success. But I advanced with an easy air to the gate, where I was roughly challenged by the Gallic sentries, and asked of my name, following, and business. I gave my name, Harmachis, the astrologer, saying that my business was with the Lady Charmion, the Queen's lady. Thereon the man made as though to let me pass in, when a captain of the guard, a Roman named Paulus, came forward and forbade it. Now, this Paulus was a large limbed man, with a woman's face, and a hand that shook from wine-bibbing. Still he knew me again.

"Why," he cried, in the Latin tongue, to one who came with him, "this is the fellow who wrestled yesterday with the Nubian gladiator, that same who now howls for his lost hand underneath my window. Curses on the black brute! I had a bet upon him for the games! I have backed him against Caius, and now never he'll fight again, and I must lose my money, all through

this astrologer. What it is thou sayest?—thou hast business with the Lady Charmion? Nay, then, that settles it. I will not let thee through. Fellow, I worship the Lady Charmion—ay, we all worship her, though she gives us more slaps than sighs. And dost thou think that we will suffer an astrologer with such eyes and such a chest as thine to cut in the game?—by Bacchus, no! She must come out to keep the tryst, for in thou shalt not go.”

“Sir,” I said humbly and yet with dignity, “I pray that a message may be sent to the Lady Charmion, for my business will not brook delay.”

“Ye Gods!” answered the fool, “whom have we here that he cannot wait? A Cæsar in disguise? Nay, be off—be off! if thou wouldst not learn how a spear-prick feels behind.”

“Nay,” put in the officer, “he is an astrologer; make him prophesy—make him play tricks.”

“Ay,” cried the others who had sauntered up, “let the fellow show his art. If he is a magician he can pass the gates, Paulus or no Paulus.”

“Right willingly, good Sirs,” I answered; for I saw no other means of entering. “Wilt thou, my young and noble Lord”—and I addressed

him who was with Paulus—"suffer that I look thee in the eyes; perhaps I may read what is written there?"

"Right," answered the youth; "but I wish that the Lady Charmion was the sorceress. I would stare her out of countenance, I warrant."

I took him by the hand and gazed deep into his eyes. "I see," I said, "a field of battle at night, and about it bodies stretched—among them is *thy* body, and a hyena tears its throat. Most noble Sir, thou shalt die by sword-thrusts within a year."

"By Bacchus!" said the youth, turning white to the gills, "thou art an ill-omened sorcerer!" And he slunk off—shortly afterwards, as it chanced, to meet this very fate. For he was sent on service and slain in Cyprus.

"Now for thee, great Captain!" I said, speaking to Paulus. "I will show thee how I will pass those gates without thy leave—ay, and draw thee through them after me. Be pleased to fix thy princely gaze upon the point of this wand in my hand."

Being urged by his comrades he did this, unwillingly; and I let him gaze till I saw his

eyes grow empty as an owl's eyes in the sun. Then I suddenly withdrew the wand, and, shifting my countenance into the place of it, I seized him with my will and stare, and, beginning to turn round and round, drew him after me, his fierce drawn face fixed, as it were, almost to my own. Then I moved slowly backwards till I had passed the gates, still drawing him after me, and suddenly jerked my head away. He fell to the ground, to rise wiping his brow and looking very foolish.

“Art thou content, most noble Captain?” I said. “Thou seest we have passed the gates. Would any other noble Sir wish that I should show more of my skill?”

“By Taranis, Lord of Thunder, and all the Gods of Olympus thrown in, no!” growled an old Centurion, a Gaul named Brennus, “I like thee not, I say. The man who could drag our Paulus through those gates by the eye, as it were, is not a man to play with. Paulus, too, who always goes the way you don't want him—backwards, like an ass—Paulus! Why, sirrah, thou needst must have a woman in one eye and a wine-cup in the other to draw our Paulus thus.”

At this moment the talk was broken, for Charmion herself came down the marble path, followed by an armed slave. She walked calm and carelessly, her hands folded behind her, and her eyes gazing at nothingness, as it were. But it was when Charmion thus looked upon nothing that she saw most. And as she came the officers and men of the guard made way for her bowing, for, as I learned afterwards, this girl, next to Cleopatra's self, wielded more power than anyone about the palace.

"What is this tumult, Brennus?" she said, speaking to the Centurion, and making as if she saw me not; "knowest thou not that the Queen sleeps at this hour, and if she be awakened it is thou who must answer for it, and that dearly?"

"Nay, Lady," said the Centurion, humbly; "but it is thus. We have here"—and he jerked his thumb towards me—"a magician of the most pestilent—um, I crave his pardon—of the very best sort, for he hath but just now, only by placing his eyes close to the nose of the worthy Captain Paulus, dragged him, the said Paulus, through the gates that Paulus swore the magician should not pass. By the same token, Lady,

the magician says that he has business with you—which grieves me for your sake.”

Charmion turned and looked at me carelessly. “Ay, I remember,” she said; “and so he has—at least, the Queen would see his tricks; but if he can do none better than cause a sot”—here she cast a glance of scorn at the wondering Paulus—“to follow his nose through the gates he guards, he had better go whence he came. Follow me, Sir Magician; and for thee, Brennus, I say, keep thy riotous crew more quiet. For thee, most honourable Paulus, get thee sober, and next time I am asked for at the gates give him who asks a hearing.” And, with a queenly nod of her small head, she turned and led the way, followed at a distance by myself and the armed slave.

We passed up the marble walk which runs through the garden grounds, and is set on either side with marble statues, for the most part of heathen Gods and Goddesses, with which these Lagidæ were not ashamed to defile their royal dwellings. At length we came to a beautiful portico with fluted columns of the Grecian style of art, where we found more guards, who made way for the Lady Charmion. Crossing the portico

we reached a marble vestibule where a fountain splashed softly, and thence by a low doorway a second chamber, known as the Alabaster Hall, most beautiful to see. Its roof was upheld by light columns of black marble, but all its walls were panelled with alabaster, on which Grecian legends were engraved. Its floor was of rich and many-hued mosaic that told the tale of the passion of Psyche for the Grecian God of Love, and about it were set chairs of ivory and gold. Charmion bade the armed slave stay at the doorway of this chamber, so that we passed in alone, for the place was empty except for two eunuchs who stood with drawn swords before the curtain at the further end.

“I am vexed, my Lord,” she said, speaking very low and shyly, “that thou shouldst have met with such affronts at the gate; but the guard there served a double watch, and I had given my commands to the officer of the company that should have relieved it. Those Roman officers are ever insolent, who, though they seem to serve, know well that Egypt is their plaything. But it is not amiss, for these rough soldiers are superstitious, and will fear thee. Now bide thou here

while I go into Cleopatra's chamber, where she sleeps. I have but just sung her to sleep, and if she be awake I will call thee, for she waits thy coming." And without more words she glided from my side.

In a little time she returned, and coming to me spoke:

"Wouldst see the fairest woman in all the world, asleep?" she whispered; "if so, follow me. Nay, fear not; when she awakes she will but laugh, for she bade me be sure to bring thee instantly, whether she slept or woke. See, I have her signet."

So we passed up the beautiful chamber till we came to where the eunuchs stood with drawn swords, and these would have barred my entry. But Charmion frowned, and drawing the signet from her bosom held it before their eyes. Having examined the writing that was on the ring, they bowed, dropping their sword points and we passed through the heavy curtains brodered with gold into the resting-place of Cleopatra. It was beautiful beyond imagining — beautiful with many coloured marbles, with gold and ivory, gems and

flowers—all art can furnish and all luxury can dream of were here. Here were pictures so real that birds might have pecked the painted fruits; here were statues of woman's loveliness frozen into stone; here were draperies fine as softest silk, but woven of a web of gold; here were couches and carpets such as I never saw. The air, too, was sweet with perfume, while through the open window places came the far murmur of the sea. And at the further end of the chamber, on a couch of gleaming silk and sheltered by a net of finest gauze, Cleopatra lay asleep. There she lay—the fairest thing that man ever saw—fairer than a dream, and the web of her dark hair flowed all about her. One white, rounded arm made a pillow for her head, and one hung down towards the ground. Her rich lips were parted in a smile, showing the ivory lines of teeth; and her rosy limbs were draped in so thin a robe of the silk of Cos, held about her by a jewelled girdle, that the white gleam of flesh shone through it. I stood astonished, and though my thoughts had little bent that way, the sight of her beauty struck me like a blow, so that for a moment I lost myself as it were in the vision of

its power, and was grieved at heart because I must slay so fair a thing.

Turning suddenly from the sight, I found Charmion watching me with her quick eyes—watching as though she would search my heart. And, indeed, something of my thought must have been written on my face in a language that she could read, for she whispered in my ear:

“Ay, it is pity, is it not? Harmachis, being but a man, methinks that thou wilt need all thy ghostly strength to nerve thee to the deed!”

I frowned, but before I could frame an answer she touched me lightly on the arm and pointed to the Queen. A change had come upon her; her hands were clenched, and about her face, all rosy with the hue of sleep, gathered a cloud of fear. Her breath came quick, she raised her arms as though to ward away a blow, then with a stifled moan sat up and opened the windows of her eyes. They were dark, dark as night; but when the light found them they grew blue as the sky grows blue before the blushing of the dawn.

“Cæsarion?” she said; “where is my son Cæsarion?—Was it then a dream? I dreamed

that Julius—Julius who is dead—came to me, a bloody toga wrapped about his face, and having thrown his arms about his child led him away. Then I dreamed I died—died in blood and agony; and one I might not see mocked me as I died! *Ah!*—who is that man?”

“Peace, Madam! peace!” said Charmion. “It is but the magician Harmachis, whom thou didst bid me bring to thee at this hour.”

“Ah! the magician—that Harmachis who overthrew the giant? I remember now. He is welcome. Tell me, Sir Magician, can thy magic mirror forth an answer to this dream? Nay, how strange a thing is Sleep, that wrapping the mind in a web of darkness, straightly compels it to its will! Whence, then, come those images of fear rising on the horizon of the soul like some untimely moon upon a midday sky? Who grants them power to stalk so lifelike from Memory’s halls, and, pointing to their wounds, thus confront the Present with the Past? Are they, then, messengers? Does the half-death of sleep give them foothold in our brains, and thus upknit the cut thread of human kinship? That was Cæsar’s self, I tell thee, who but now stood at my side and mur-

mured through his muffled robe warning words of which the memory is lost to me. Read me this riddle, thou Egyptian Sphinx,* and I'll show thee a rosier path to fortune than all thy stars can point. Thou hast brought the omen, solve thou its problem."

"I come in a good hour, most mighty Queen," I answered, "for I have some skill in the mysteries of Sleep, that is, as thou hast rightly guessed, a stair by which those who are gathered to Osiris may from time to time enter at the gateways of our living sense, and, by signs and words that can be read of instructed mortals, repeat the echoes of that Hall of Truth which is their habitation. Yes, Sleep is a stair by which the messengers of the guardian Gods may descend in many shapes upon the spirit of their choice. For, O Queen, to those who hold the key, the madness of our dreams can show a clearer purpose and speak more certainly than all the acted wisdom of our waking life, which is a dream indeed. Thou didst see great Cæsar in his bloody

* Alluding to his name. Harmachis was the Grecian title of the divinity of the Sphinx, as Horemkhu was the Egyptian.—ED.

robe, and he threw his arms about the Prince Cæsarion and led him hence. Harken now to the secret of thy vision. It was Cæsar's self thou sawest coming to thy side from Amenti in such a guise as might not be mistaken. When he embraced the child Cæsarion he did it for a sign that to him, and him alone, had passed his greatness and his love. When he seemed to lead him hence he led him forth from Egypt to be crowned in the Capitol, crowned the Emperor of Rome and Lord of all the Lands. For the rest, I know it not. It is hid from me."

Thus, then, I read the vision, though to my sense it had a darker meaning. But it is not well to prophesy evil unto Kings.

Meanwhile Cleopatra had risen, and, having thrown back the gnat gauze, was seated upon the edge of her couch, her eyes fixed upon my face, while her fingers played with her girdle's jewelled ends.

"Of a truth," she cried, "thou art the best of all magicians, for thou readest my heart, and drawest a hidden sweet out of the rough shell of evil omen!"

"Ay, O Queen," said Charmion, who stood

by with downcast eyes, and I thought there was bitter meaning in her soft tones; "may no rougher words ever affront thy ears, and no evil presage tread less closely upon its happy sense."

Cleopatra placed her hands behind her head and, leaning back, looked at me with half-shut eyes.

"Come, show us of thy magic, Egyptian," she said. "It is yet hot abroad, and I am weary of those Hebrew Ambassadors and their talk of Herod and Jerusalem. I hate that Herod, as he shall find—and will have none of the Ambassadors to-day, though I yearn a little to try my Hebrew on them. What canst thou do? Hast thou no new trick? By Serapis! if thou canst conjure as well as thou canst prophesy, thou shalt have a place at Court, with pay and perquisites to boot, if thy lofty soul does not scorn perquisites."

"Nay," I answered, "all tricks are old; but there are some forms of magic to be rarely used, and with discretion, that may be new to thee, O Queen! Art thou afraid to venture on the charm?"

"I fear nothing; go on and do thy worst. Come, Charmion, and sit by me. But, stay, where are all the girls?—Iras and Merira?—they, too, love magic."

"Not so," I said; "the charms work ill before so many. Now behold!" and, gazing at the twain, I cast my wand upon the marble and murmured a spell. For a moment it was still, and then, as I muttered, the rod slowly began to writhe. It bent itself, it stood on end, and moved of its own motion. Next it put on scales, and behold it was a serpent that crawled and fiercely hissed.

"Fie on thee!" cried Cleopatra, clapping her hands; "callest thou that magic? Why, it is an old trick that any wayside conjurer can do. I have seen it a score of times."

"Wait, O Queen," I answered, "thou hast not seen all." And, as I spoke, the serpent seemed to break in fragments, and from each fragment grew a new serpent. And these, too, broke in fragments and bred others, till in a little while the place, to their glaucous sight, was a seething sea of snakes, that crawled, hissed, and knotted themselves in knots. Then I made a

sign, and the serpents gathered themselves round me, and seemed slowly to twine themselves about my body and my limbs, till, save my face, I was wreathed thick with hissing snakes.

“Oh, horrible! horrible!” cried Charmion, hiding her countenance in the skirt of the Queen’s garment.

“Nay, enough, Magician, enough!” said the Queen: “thy magic overwhelms us.”

I waved my snake-wrapped arms, and all was gone. There at my feet lay the black wand tipped with ivory, and naught beside.

The two women looked upon each other and gasped with wonder. But I took up the wand and stood with folded arms before them.

“Is the Queen content with my poor art?” I asked most humbly.

“Ay, that am I, Egyptian; never did I see its like! Thou art Court astronomer from this day forward, with right of access to the Queen’s presence. Hast thou more of such magic at thy call?”

“Yea, royal Egypt; suffer that the chamber be a little darkened, and I will show thee one more thing.”

“Half am I afraid,” she answered; “nevertheless do thou as this Harmachis says, Charmion.”

So the curtains were drawn and the chamber made as though the twilight were at hand. I came forward, and stood beside Cleopatra. “Gaze thou there!” I said sternly, pointing with my wand to the empty space where I had been, “and thou shalt behold that which is in thy mind.”

Then for a little space was silence, while the two women gazed fixedly and half fearful at the spot.

And as they gazed a cloud gathered before them. Very slowly it took shape and form, and the form it took was the form of a man, though as yet he was but vaguely mapped upon the twilight, and seemed now to grow and now to melt away.

Then I cried with a loud voice:

“Shade, I conjure thee, *appear!*”

And as I cried the Thing, perfect in every part, leapt into form before us, suddenly as the flash of day. His shape was the shape of royal Cæsar, the toga thrown about his face, and on

his form a vestment bloody from a hundred wounds. An instant so he stood, then I waved my wand and he was gone.

I turned to the two women on the couch, and saw Cleopatra's lovely face all clothed in terror. Her lips were ashy white, her eyes stared wide, and the flesh was shaking on her bones.

"Man!" she gasped; "man! who and what art thou who canst bring the dead before our eyes?"

"I am the Queen's astronomer, magician, servant—what the Queen wills," I answered laughing. "Was this the form that was on the Queen's mind?"

She made no answer, but, rising, left the chamber by another door.

Then Charmion rose also and took her hands from her face, for she, too, had been stricken with dread.

"How dost thou these things, royal Harmachis?" she said. "Tell me; for of a truth I fear thee."

"Be not afraid," I answered. "Perchance thou didst see nothing but what was in my mind.

All things are shadows. How canst thou, then, know their nature, or what is and what only seems to be? But how goes it? Remember, Charmion, this sport is played to an end."

"It goes well," she said. "By to-morrow's dawn these tales will have gone round, and thou wilt be more feared than any man in Alexandria. Follow me, I pray thee."

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE WAYS OF CHARMION; AND OF THE CROWN-
ING OF HARMACHIS AS THE KING OF LOVE.

ON the following day I received the writing of my appointment as Astrologer and Magician-in-Chief to the Queen, with the pay and perquisites of that office, which were not small. Rooms were given me in the palace, also, through which I passed at night to the high watch-tower, whence I looked on the stars and drew their auguries. For at this time Cleopatra was much troubled about matters political, and not knowing how the great struggle among the Roman factions would end, but being very desirous to side with the strongest, she took constant counsel with me as to the warnings of the stars. These I read to her in such manner as best seemed to fit the high interest of my ends. For Antony, the Roman Triumvir, was now in Asia Minor, and, rumour ran, very wroth because it had been told him

that Cleopatra was hostile to the Triumvirate, in that her General, Serapion, had aided Cassius. But Cleopatra protested loudly to me and others that Serapion had acted against her will. Yet Charmion told me that, as with Allienus, it was because of a prophecy of Dioscorides the unlucky that the Queen herself had secretly ordered Serapion so to do. Still, this did not save Serapion, for to prove to Antony that she was innocent she dragged the General from the sanctuary and slew him. Woe be to those who carry out the will of tyrants if the scale should rise against them! And so Serapion perished.

Meanwhile all things went well with us, for the minds of Cleopatra and those about her were so set upon affairs abroad that neither she nor they thought of revolt at home. But day by day our party gathered strength in the cities of Egypt, and even in Alexandria, which is to Egypt as another land, all things being foreign there. Day by day, those who doubted were won over and sworn to the cause by that oath which cannot be broken, and our plans of action more firmly laid. And every other day I went forth from the palace to take counsel with my uncle Sepa,

and there at his house met the Nobles and the great priests who were for the party of Khem.

I saw much of Cleopatra, the Queen, and I was ever more astonished at the wealth and splendour of her mind, that for richness and variety was as a woven cloth of gold throwing back all lights from its changing face. She feared me somewhat, and therefore wished to make a friend of me, asking me of many matters that seemed to be beyond the province of my office. I saw much of the Lady Charmion also—indeed, she was ever at my side, so that I scarce knew when she came and when she went. For she would draw nigh with that soft step of hers, and I would turn to find her at hand and watching me beneath the long lashes of her downcast eyes. There was no service that was too hard for her, and no task too long; for day and night she laboured for me and for our cause.

But when I thanked her for her loyalty, and said it should be had in mind in that time which was at hand, she stamped her foot, and pouted with her lips, like an angry child, saying that, among all the things which I had learned, this had I not learned—that Love's service asked no

payment, and was its own guerdon. And I, being innocent in such matters, and, foolish that I was, holding the ways of women as of small account, read her sayings in the sense that her services to the cause of Khem, which she loved, brought with them their own reward. But when I praised so fine a spirit, she burst into angry tears and left me wondering. For I knew nothing of the trouble at her heart. I knew not then that, unsought, this woman had given me her love, and that she was rent and torn by pangs of passion fixed like arrows in her breast. I did not know—how should I know it, who never looked upon her otherwise than as an instrument of our joint and holy cause? Her beauty never stirred me—no, not even when she leaned over me and breathed upon my hair, I never thought of it otherwise than as a man thinks of the beauty of a statue. What had I to do with such delights, I who was sworn to Isis and dedicate to the cause of Egypt? O ye Gods, bear me witness that I am innocent of this thing which was the source of all my woe and the woe of Khem!

How strange a thing is this love of woman, that is so small in its beginning and in its ends

so great! See, at the first it is as the little spring of water welling from a mountain's heart. And at the last what is it? It is a mighty river that floats argosies of joy and makes wide lands to smile. Or, perchance, it is a torrent to wash in a flood of ruin across the fields of Hope, bursting in the barriers of design, and bringing to tumbled nothingness the tenement of man's purity and the temples of his faith. For when the Invisible conceived the order of the universe He set this seed of woman's love within its plan, that by its most unequal growth is doomed to bring about equality of law. For now it lifts the low to heights untold, and now it brings the noble to the level of the dust. And thus, while Woman, that great surprise of Nature, is, Good and Evil can never grow apart. For still She stands, and, blind with love, shoots the shuttle of our fate, and pours sweet water into the cup of bitterness, and poisons the wholesome breath of life with the doom of her desire. Turn this way and turn that, She is at hand to meet thee. Her weakness is thy strength, her might is thy undoing. Of her thou art, to her thou goest. She is thy slave, yet holds thee captive; at her touch honour

withers, locks open, and barriers fall. She is infinite as ocean, she is variable as heaven, and her name is the Unforeseen. Man, strive not to escape from Woman and the love of woman; for, fly where thou wilt, She is yet thy fate, and whate'er thou buildest thou buildest it for her!

And thus it came to pass that I, Harmachis, who had put such matters far from me, was yet doomed to fall by the thing I held of no account. For, see, this Charmion: she loved me—why, I know not. Of her own thought she learned to love me, and of her love came what shall be told. But I, knowing naught, treated her like a sister, walking as it were hand in hand with her towards our common end.

And so the time passed on, till, at length, all things were made ready.

It was the night before the night when the blow should fall, and there were revellings in the palace. That very day I had seen Sepa, and with him the captains of a band of five hundred men, who should burst into the palace at midnight on the morrow, when I had slain Cleopatra the Queen, and put the Roman and the Gallic legionaries to the sword. That very day I had

suborned the Captain Paulus, who, since I drew him through the gates, was my will's slave. Half by fear and half by promises of great reward I had prevailed upon him, for the watch was his, to unbar that small gate which faces to the East at the signal on the morrow night.

All was made ready—the flower of Freedom that had been five-and-twenty years in growth was on the point of bloom. Armed companies were gathered in every city from Abu to Athu, and spies looked out from their walls, awaiting the coming of the messenger who should bring tidings that Cleopatra was no more and that Harmachis, the royal Egyptian, had seized the throne.

All was prepared, triumph hung to my hand as a ripe fruit to the hand of the plucker. Yet as I sat at the royal feast my heart was heavy, and a shadow of coming woe lay cold within my mind. I sat there in a place of honour, near the majesty of Cleopatra, and looked down the lines of guests, bright with gems and garlanded with flowers, marking those whom I had doomed to die. There before me lay Cleopatra in all her beauty, which thrilled the beholder as he is thrilled

by the rushing of the midnight gale, or by the sight of stormy waters. I gazed on her as she touched her lips with wine and toyed with the chaplet of roses on her brow, thinking of the dagger beneath my robe that I had sworn to bury in her breast. Again, and yet again, I gazed and strove to hate her, strove to rejoice that she must die—and could not. There, too, behind her—watching me now, as ever, with her deep-fringed eyes—was the lovely Lady Charmion. Who, to look at her innocent face, would believe that she was the setter of that snare in which the Queen who loved her should miserably perish? Who would dream that the secret of so much death was locked in her girlish breast? I gazed, and grew sick at heart because I must anoint my throne with blood, and by evil sweep away the evil of the land. At that hour I wished, indeed, that I was nothing but some humble husbandman, who in its season sows and in its season garners the golden grain! Alas! the seed that I had been doomed to sow was the seed of Death, and now I must reap the red fruit of the harvest!

“Why, Harmachis, what ails thee?” said Cleo-

patra, smiling her slow smile. "Has the golden skein of stars got tangled, my astronomer? or dost thou plan some new feat of magic? Say what is it that thou dost so poorly grace our feast? Nay, now, did I not know, having made inquiry, that things so low as we poor women are far beneath thy gaze, why, I should swear that Eros had found thee out, Harmachis!"

"Nay, that I am spared, O Queen," I answered. "The servant of the stars marks not the smaller light of woman's eyes, and therein is he happy!"

Cleopatra leaned herself towards me, looking on me long and steadily in such fashion that, despite my will, the blood fluttered at my heart.

"Boast not, thou proud Egyptian," she said in a low voice which none but I and Charmion could hear, "lest perchance thou dost tempt me to match my magic against thine. What woman can forgive that a man should push us by as things of no account? It is an insult to our sex which Nature's self abhors," and she leaned back again and laughed most musically. But, glancing up, I saw Charmion, her teeth on her lip and an angry frown upon her brow.

"Pardon, royal Egypt," I answered coldly, but with such wit as I could summon, "before the Queen of Heaven even stars grow pale!" This I said of the moon, which is the sign of the Holy Mother whom Cleopatra dared to rival, naming herself Isis come to earth.

"Happily said," she answered, clapping her white hands. "Why, here's an astronomer who has wit and can shape a compliment! Nay, such a wonder must not pass unnoted, lest the Gods resent it. Charmion, take this rose-chaplet from my hair and set it upon the learned brow of our Harmachis. He shall be crowned *King of Love*, whether he will it or will it not."

Charmion lifted the chaplet from Cleopatra's brows and, bearing it to where I was, with a smile set it upon my head yet warm and fragrant from the Queen's hair, but so roughly that she pained me somewhat. She did this because she was wroth, although she smiled with her lips and whispered, "An omen, royal Harmachis." For though she was so very much a woman, yet, when she was angered or suffered jealousy, Charmion had a childish way.

Having thus fixed the chaplet, she curtsied

low before me, and with the softest tone of mockery named me, in the Greek tongue, "Harmachis, King of Love." Then Cleopatra laughed and pledged me as "King of Love," and so did all the company, finding the jest a merry one. For in Alexandria they love not those who live straitly and turn aside from women.

But I sat there, a smile upon my lips and black wrath in my heart. For, knowing who and what I was, it irked me to think myself a jest for the frivolous nobles and light beauties of Cleopatra's Court. But I was chiefly angered against Charmion, because she laughed the loudest, and I did not then know that laughter and bitterness are often the veils with which a sore heart wraps its weakness from the world. "An omen" she said it was—that crown of flowers—and so it proved indeed. For I was fated to barter the Double Diadem of the Upper and the Lower Land for a wreath of passion's roses that fade before they fully bloom, and Pharaoh's ivory bed of state for the pillow of a faithless woman's breast.

"*King of Love!*" they crowned me in their mockery; ay, and King of Shame! And I, with

the perfumed roses on my brow—I, by descent and ordination the Pharaoh of Egypt—thought of the imperishable halls of Abouthis and of that other crowning which on the morrow should be consummate.

But still smiling, I pledged them back, and answered with a jest. For rising, I bowed before Cleopatra and craved leave to go. “Venus,” I said, speaking of the planet that we know as Donaou in the morning and Bonou in the evening, “was in the ascendant. Therefore, as new-crowned King of Love, I must now pass to do my homage to its Queen.” For these barbarians name Venus Queen of Love.

And so amidst their laughter I withdrew to my watch-tower, and, dashing that shameful chaplet down amidst the instruments of my craft, made pretence to note the rolling of the stars. There I waited, thinking on many things that were to be, until Charmion should come with the last lists of the doomed and the messages of my uncle Sepa, whom she had seen that evening.

At length the door opened softly, and she came jewelled and clad in her white robes, as she had left the feast.

CHAPTER V.

OF THE COMING OF CLEOPATRA TO THE CHAMBER OF HARMACHIS; OF THE THROWING FORTH OF THE KERCHIEF OF CHARMION; OF THE STARS; AND OF THE GIFT BY CLEOPATRA OF HER FRIENDSHIP TO HER SERVANT HARMACHIS.

"At length thou art come, Charmion," I said. "It is over-late."

"Yea, my Lord; but by no means could I escape Cleopatra. Her mood is strangely crossed to-night. I know not what it may portend. Strange whims and fancies blow across it like light and contrary airs upon a summer sea, and I cannot read her purpose."

"Well, well; enough of Cleopatra. Hast thou seen our uncle?"

"Yes, royal Harmachis."

"And hast thou the last lists?"

"Yes; here they are," and she drew them from her bosom. "Here is the list of those who, after the Queen, must certainly be put to the

sword. Among them thou wilt note is the name of that old Gaul Brennus. I grieve for him, for we are friends; but it must be. It is a heavy list."

"It is so," I answered conning it; "when men write out their count they forget no item, and our count is long. What must be must be. Now for the next."

"Here is the list of those to be spared, as friendly or uncertain; and here that of the towns which will certainly rise as soon as the messenger reaches their gates with tidings of the death of Cleopatra."

"Good. And now"—and I paused—"and now as to the manner of Cleopatra's death. How hast thou settled it? Must it be by my own hand?"

"Yea, my Lord," she answered, and again I caught that note of bitterness in her voice. "Doubtless Pharaoh will rejoice that his should be the hand to rid the land of this false Queen and wanton woman, and at one blow break the chains which gall the neck of Egypt."

"Talk not thus, girl," I said; "thou knowest well that I do not rejoice, being but driven to

the act by deep necessity and the pressure of my vows. Can she not, then, be poisoned? Or can no one of the eunuchs be suborned to slay her? My soul turns from this bloody work! Indeed, I marvel, however heavy be her crimes, that thou canst speak so lightly of the death by treachery of one who loves thee!"

"Surely Pharaoh is over-tender, forgetting the greatness of the moment and all that hangs upon this dagger-stroke that shall cut the thread of Cleopatra's life. Listen, Harmachis. *Thou* must do the deed, and *thou* alone! Myself I would do it, had my arm the strength; but it has not. It cannot be done by poison, for every drop she drinks and every morsel that shall touch her lips is strictly tasted by three separate tasters, who cannot be suborned. Nor may the eunuchs of the guard be trusted. Two, indeed, are sworn to us; but the third cannot be come at. He must be cut down afterwards; and, indeed, when so many men must fall, what matters a eunuch more or less? Thus it shall be, then. To-morrow night, at three hours before midnight thou dost cast the final augury of the issue of the war. And then thou wilt, as is agreed, descend alone

with me, having the signet, to the outer chamber of the Queen's apartment. For the vessel bearing orders to the Legions sails from Alexandria at the following dawn; and alone with Cleopatra, since she wills that the thing be kept secret as the sea, thou wilt read the message of the stars. And as she pores over the papyrus, then must thou stab her in the back, so that she dies; and see thou that thy will and arm fail thee not! The deed being done—and indeed it will be easy—thou wilt take the signet and pass out to where the eunuch is—for the others will be wanting. If by any chance there is trouble with him—but there will be no trouble, for he dare not enter the private rooms, and the sounds of death cannot reach so far—thou must cut him down. Then I will meet thee; and passing on, we will come to Paulus, and it shall be my care to see that he is neither drunk nor backward, for I know how to hold him to the task. And he and those with him shall throw open the side gate, when Sepa and the five hundred chosen men who are in waiting shall pour in and cast themselves upon the sleeping legionaries, putting them to the sword. Why, the thing is easy so thou rest true

to thyself, and let no womanish fears creep into thy heart. What is this dagger's thrust? It is nothing, and yet upon it hang the destinies of Egypt and the world."

"Hush!" I said. "What is that?—I hear a sound."

Charmion ran to the door, and, gazing down the long, dark passage, listened. In a moment she came back, her finger on her lips. "It is the Queen," she whispered hurriedly; "the Queen who mounts the stair alone. I heard her bid Iras leave her. I may not be found alone with thee at this hour; it has a strange look, and she may suspect. What wants she here? Where can I hide?"

I glanced round. At the further end of the chamber was a heavy curtain that hid a little place built in the thickness of the wall which I used for the storage of rolls and instruments.

"Haste thee—there!" I said, and she glided behind the curtain, which swung back and covered her. Then I thrust the fatal scroll of death into the bosom of my robe and bent over the mystic chart. Presently I heard the sweep

of woman's robes and there came a low knock upon the door.

"Enter, whoever thou art," I said.

The latch lifted, and Cleopatra swept in, royally arrayed, her dark hair hanging about her and the sacred snake of royalty glistening on her brow.

"Of a truth, Harmachis," she said with a sigh, as she sank into a seat, "the path to heaven is hard to climb! Ah! I am weary, for those stairs are many. But I was minded, my astronomer, to see thee in thy haunts."

"I am honoured overmuch, O Queen!" I said bowing low before her.

"Art thou now? And yet that dark face of thine has a somewhat angry look—thou art too young and handsome for this dry trade, Harmachis. Why, I vow thou hast cast my wreath of roses down amidst thy rusty tools! Kings would have cherished that wreath along with their choicest diadems, Harmachis! and thou dost throw it away as a thing of no account! Why, what a man art thou! But stay; what is this? A lady's kerchief, by Isis! Nay, now, my Harmachis, how came *this* here? Are our poor ker-

chiefs also instruments of thy high art? Oh, fie, fie!—have I caught thee, then? Art thou indeed a fox?”

“Nay, most royal Cleopatra, nay!” I said, turning: for the kerchief which had fallen from Charmion’s neck had an awkward look. “I know not, indeed, how the frippery came here. Perhaps, some one of the women who keep the chamber may have let it fall.”

“Ah! so—so!” she said drily, and still laughing like a rippling brook. “Yes, surely, the slave-women who keep chambers own such toys as this, of the very finest silk, worth twice its weight in gold, and broidered, too, in many colours. Why, myself I should not shame to wear it! Of a truth it seems familiar to my sight.” And she threw it round her neck and smoothed the ends with her white hand. “But there; doubtless, it is a thing unholy in thine eyes that the scarf of thy beloved should rest upon my poor breast. Take it, Harmachis; take it, and hide it in thy bosom—nigh thy heart indeed!”

I took the accursed thing, and, muttering what I may not write, stepped on to the giddy platform

whence I watched the stars. Then, crushing it into a ball, I threw it to the winds of heaven.

At this the lovely Queen laughed once more.

“Nay, think now,” she cried; “what would the lady say could she see her love-gauge thus cast to all the world? Mayhap, Harmachis, thou wouldst deal thus with my wreath also? See, the roses fade; cast it forth,” and, stooping, she took up the wreath and gave it to me.

For a moment, so vexed was I, I had a mind to take her at her word and send the wreath to join the kerchief. But I thought better of it.

“Nay,” I said more softly, “it is a Queen’s gift, and I will keep it,” and, as I spoke, I saw the curtain shake. Often since that night I have sorrowed over those simple words.

“Gracious thanks be to the King of Love for this small mercy,” she answered, looking at me strangely. “Now, enough of wit; come forth upon this balcony—tell me of the mystery of those stars of thine. For I always loved the stars, that are so pure and bright and cold, and so far away from our fevered troubling. There I would wish to dwell, rocked on the dark bosom of the night, and losing the little sense of self as I gazed for

ever on the countenance of yon sweet-eyed space. Nay—who can tell, Harmachis?—perhaps those stars partake of our very substance, and, linked to us by Nature's invisible chain, do, indeed, draw our destiny with them as they roll. What says the Greek fable of him who became a star? Perchance it has truth, for yonder tiny sparks may be the souls of men, but grown more purely bright and placed in happy rest to illumine the turmoil of their mother-earth. Or are they lamps hung high in the heavenly vault that night by night some Godhead, whose wings are Darkness, touches with his immortal fire so that they leap out in answering flame? Give me of thy wisdom and open these wonders to me, my servant, for I have little knowledge. Yet my heart is large, and I would fill it, for I have the wit, could I but find the teacher."

Thereon, being glad to find footing on a safer shore, and marvelling somewhat to learn that Cleopatra had a place for lofty thoughts, I spoke and willingly told her such things as are lawful. I told her how the sky is a liquid mass pressing round the earth and resting on the elastic pillars of the air, and how above is the heavenly ocean

Nout, in which the planets float like ships as they rush upon their radiant way. I told her many things, and amongst them how, through the certain never-ceasing movement of the orbs of light, the planet Venus, that was called Donaou when she showed as the Morning Star, became the planet Bonou when she came as the sweet Star of Eve. And while I stood and spoke watching the stars, she sat, her hands clasped upon her knee, and watched my face.

“Ah!” she broke in at length, “and so Venus is to be seen both in the morning and the evening sky. Well, of a truth, she is everywhere, though she best loves the night. But thou lovest not that I should use these Latin names to thee. Come, we will talk in the ancient tongue of Khem, which I know well; I am the first, mark thou, of all the Lagidæ who know it. And now,” she went on, speaking in my own tongue, but with a little foreign accent that did but make her talk more sweet, “enough of stars, for, when all is said, they are but fickle things, and perhaps may even now be storing up an evil hour for thee or me, or for us both together. Not but what I love to hear thee speak of them, for then thy face loses that

gloomy cloud of thought which mars it and grows quick and human. Harmachis, thou art too young for such a solemn trade; methinks that I must find thee a better. Youth comes but once; why waste it in these musings? It is time to think when we can no longer act. Tell me how old art thou, Harmachis?"

"I have six-and-twenty years, O Queen," I answered, "for I was born in the first month of Shomou, in the summer season, and on the third day of the month."

"Why, then, we are of an age even to a day," she cried, "for I too have six-and-twenty years, and I too was born on the third day of the first month of Shomou. Well, this may we say: those who begot us need have no shame. For if I be the fairest woman in Egypt, methinks, Harmachis, that there is in Egypt no more fair and strong than thou, ay, or more learned. Born of the same day, why, 'tis manifest that we were destined to stand together, I, as the Queen, and thou, perchance, Harmachis, as one of the chief pillars of my throne, and thus to work each other's weal."

"Or maybe each other's woe," I answered,

looking up; for her speeches stung my ears and brought more colour to my face than I loved that she should see there.

“Nay, never talk of woe. Be seated here by me, Harmachis, and let us talk, not as Queen and subject, but as friend to friend. Thou wast angered with me at the feast to-night because I mocked thee with yonder wreath—was it not so? Nay, it was but a jest. Didst thou know how heavy is the task of monarchs and how wearisome are their hours, thou wouldst not be wroth because I lit my dulness with a jest. Oh, they weary me, those princes and those nobles, and those stiff-necked pompous Romans. To my face they vow themselves my slaves, and behind my back they mock me and proclaim me the servant of their Triumvirate, or their Empire, or their Republic, as the wheel of Fortune turns, and each rises on its round! There is never a man among them—nothing but fools, parasites, and puppets—never a man since with their coward daggers they slew that Cæsar whom all the world in arms was not strong enough to tame. And I must play off one against the other, if maybe, by so doing, I can keep Egypt from their grip. And for

reward, what? Why, this is my reward—that all men speak ill of me—and, I know it, my subjects hate me! Yes, I believe that, woman though I am, they would murder me could they find a means!”

She paused, covering her eyes with her hand, and it was well, for her words pierced me so that I shrank upon the seat beside her.

“They think ill of me, I know it; and call me wanton, who have never stepped aside save once, when I loved the greatest man of all the world, and at the touch of love my passion flamed indeed, but burnt a hallowed flame. These ribald Alexandrians swear that I poisoned Ptolemy, my brother—whom the Roman Senate would, most unnaturally, have forced on me, his sister, as a husband! But it is false: he sickened and died of fever. And even so they say that I would slay Arsinoë, my sister—who, indeed, would slay me!—but that, too, is false! Though she will have none of me, I love my sister. Yes, they all think ill of me without a cause; even thou dost think ill of me, Harmachis.

“O Harmachis, before thou judgest, remember what a thing is envy!—that foul sickness of the

mind which makes the jaundiced eye of pettiness to see all things distraught—to read Evil written on the open face of Good, and find impurity in the whitest virgin's soul! Think what a thing it is, Harmachis, to be set on high above the gaping crowd of knaves who hate thee for thy fortune and thy wit; who gnash their teeth and shoot the arrows of their lies from the cover of their own obscurity, whence they have no wings to soar; and whose hearts' quest it is to drag down thy nobility to the level of the groundling and the fool!

“Be not, then, swift to think evil of the Great, whose every word and act is searched for error by a million angry eyes, and whose most tiny fault is trumpeted by a thousand throats, till the world shakes with echoes of their sin! Say not: ‘It is thus, ’tis certainly thus’—say, rather: ‘May it not be otherwise? Have we heard aright? Did she this thing of her own will?’ Judge gently, Harmachis, as wert thou I thou wouldst be judged. Remember that a Queen is never free. She is, indeed, but the point and instrument of those forces politic with which the iron books of history are graven. O Harmachis! be thou my

friend—my friend and counsellor!—my friend whom I can trust indeed!—for here, in this crowded Court, I am more utterly alone than any soul that breathes about its corridors. But *thee* I trust; there is faith written in those quiet eyes, and I am minded to lift thee high, Harmachis. I can no longer bear my solitude of mind—I must find one with whom I may commune and speak that which lies within my heart. I have faults, I know it; but I am not all unworthy of thy faith, for there is good grain among the evil seed. Say, Harmachis, wilt thou take pity on my loneliness and befriend me, who have lovers, courtiers, slaves, dependents, more thick than I can count, but never one single *friend?*” and she leant towards me, touching me lightly, and gazed on me with her wonderful blue eyes.

I was overcome; thinking of the morrow night, shame and sorrow smote me. *I*, her friend!—*I*, whose assassin dagger lay against my breast! I bent my head, and a sob or a groan, I know not which, burst from the agony of my heart.

But Cleopatra, thinking only that I was moved beyond myself by the surprise of her graciousness, smiled sweetly, and said: O

“It grows late; to-morrow night when thou bringest the auguries we will speak again, O my friend Harmachis, and thou shalt answer me.” And she gave me her hand to kiss. Scarce knowing what I did, I kissed it, and another moment she was gone.

But I stood in the chamber, gazing after her like one asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

OF THE WORDS AND JEALOUSY OF CHARMION; OF THE LAUGHTER OF HARMACHIS; OF THE MAKING READY FOR THE DEED OF BLOOD; AND OF THE MESSAGE OF THE OLD WIFE, ATOUA.

I STOOD still, plunged in thought. Then by hazard as it were I took up the wreath of roses and looked on it. How long I stood so I know not, but when next I lifted up my eyes they fell upon the form of Charmion, whom, indeed, I had altogether forgotten. And though at the moment I thought but little of it, I noted vaguely that she was flushed as though with anger, and beat her foot upon the floor.

“Oh, it is thou, Charmion!” I said. “What ails thee? Art thou cramped with standing so long in thy hiding-place? Why didst not thou slip hence when Cleopatra led me to the balcony?”

“Where is my kerchief?” she asked, shooting

an angry glance at me. "I let fall my broidered kerchief."

"Thy kerchief!—why, didst thou not see? Cleopatra twitted me about it, and I flung it from the balcony."

"Yes, I saw," answered the girl, "I saw but too well. Thou didst fling away my kerchief, but the wreath of roses—that thou wouldst not fling away. It was 'a Queen's gift,' forsooth, and therefore the royal Harmachis, the Priest of Isis, the chosen of the Gods, the crowned Pharaoh wed to the weal of Khem, cherished it and saved it. But my kerchief, stung by the laughter of that light Queen, he cast away!"

"What meanest thou?" I asked, astonished at her bitter tone. "I cannot read thy riddles."

"What mean I?" she answered, tossing up her head and showing the white curves of her throat. "Nay, I mean naught, or all; take it as thou wilt. Wouldst know what I mean, Harmachis, my cousin and my Lord?" she went on in a hard, low voice. "Then I will tell thee—thou art in danger of the great offence. This Cleopatra has cast her fatal wiles about thee, and thou goest near to loving her, Harmachis—to lov-

ing her whom to-morrow thou must slay! Ay, stand and stare at that wreath in thy hand—the wreath thou couldst not send to join my kerchief—sure Cleopatra wore it but to-night! The perfume of the hair of Cæsar's mistress—Cæsar's and others'—yet mingles with the odour of its roses! Now, prithee, Harmachis, how far didst thou carry the matter on yonder balcony? for in that hole where I lay hid I could not hear or see. 'Tis a sweet spot for lovers, is it not?—ay, and a sweet hour, too? Venus surely rules the stars to-night?"

All of this she said so quietly and in so soft and modest a way, though her words were not modest, and yet so bitterly, that every syllable cut me to the heart, and angered me till I could find no speech.

"Of a truth thou hast a wise economy," she went on, seeing her advantage: "to-night thou dost kiss the lips that to-morrow thou shalt still for ever! It is frugal dealing with the occasion of the moment; ay, worthy and honourable dealing!"

Then at last I broke forth. "Girl," I cried, "how darest thou speak thus to me? Mindest

thou who and what I am that thou loosest thy peevish gibes upon me?"

"I mind what it behoves thee to be," she answered quick. "What thou art, that I mind not now. Surely thou knowest alone—thou and Cleopatra!"

"What meanest thou?" I said. "Am I to blame if the Queen——"

"The Queen! What have we here? Pharaoh owns a Queen!"

"If Cleopatra wills to come hither of a night and talk——"

"Of stars, Harmachis—surely of stars and roses, and naught beside!"

After that I know not what I said; for, troubled as I was, the girl's bitter tongue and quiet way drove me wellnigh to madness. But this I know: I spoke so fiercely that she cowered before me as she had cowered before my uncle Sepa when he rated her because of her Grecian garb. And as she wept then, so she wept now, only more passionately and with great sobs.

At length I ceased, half-shamed but still angry and smarting sorely. For even while she

wept she could find a tongue to answer with—and a woman's shafts are sharp.

"Thou shouldst not speak to me thus!" she sobbed; "it is cruel—it is unmanly! But I forget thou art but a priest, not a man—except, mayhap, for Cleopatra!"

"What right hast thou?" I said. "What canst thou mean?"

"What right have I?" she asked, looking up, her dark eyes all afloat with tears that ran down her sweet face like the dew of morning down a lily's heart. "What right have I? O Harmachis! art thou blind? Dost thou not know by what right I speak thus to thee? Then I must tell thee. Well, it is the fashion in Alexandria! By that first and holy right of woman—by the right of the great love I bear thee, and which, it seems, thou hast no eyes to see—by the right of my glory and my shame. Oh, be not wroth with me, Harmachis, nor set me down as light, because the truth at last has burst from me; for I am not so. I am what thou wilt make me. I am the wax within the moulder's hands, and as thou dost fashion me so I shall be. There breathes within me now a breath of glory, blowing across

the waters of my soul, that can waft me to ends more noble than ever I have dreamed afore, if thou wilt be my pilot and my guide. But if I lose thee, then I lose all that holds me from my worse self—and let shipwreck come! Thou knowest me not, Harmachis! thou canst not see how big a spirit struggles in this frail form of mine! To thee I am a girl, clever, wayward, shallow. But I am more! Show me thy loftiest thought and I will match it, the deepest puzzle of thy mind and I will make it clear. Of one blood we are, and love can ravel up our little difference and make us grow one indeed. One end we have, one land we love, one vow binds us both. Take me to thy heart, Harmachis, set me by thee on the Double Throne, and I swear that I will lift thee higher than ever man has climbed. Reject me, and beware lest I pull thee down! And now, putting aside the cold delicacy of custom, stung to it by what I saw of the arts of that lovely living falsehood, Cleopatra, which for pastime she practises on thy folly, I have spoken out my heart, and answer thou!" And she clasped her hands and, drawing one pace nearer, gazed, all white and trembling, on my face.

For a moment I stood struck dumb, for the magic of her voice and the power of her speech, despite myself, stirred me like the rush of music. Had I loved the woman, doubtless she might have fired me with her flame; but I loved her not, and I could not play at passion. And so thought came, and with thought that laughing mood, which is ever apt to fasten upon nerves strained to the point of breaking. In a flash, as it were, I bethought me of the way in which she had that very night forced the wreath of roses on my head. I thought of the kerchief and how I had flung it forth. I thought of Charmion in the little chamber watching what she held to be the arts of Cleopatra, and of her bitter speeches. Lastly, I thought of what my uncle Sepa would say of her could he see her now, and of the strange and tangled skein in which I was immeshed. And I laughed aloud—the fool's laughter that was my knell of ruin!

She turned whiter yet—white as the dead—and a look grew upon her face that checked my foolish mirth. “Thou findest, then, Harmachis,” she said in a low, choked voice, and dropping

the level of her eyes, "thou findest cause of merriment in what I have said?"

"Nay," I answered; "nay, Charmion; forgive me if I laughed. It was rather a laugh of despair; for what am I to say to thee? Thou hast spoken high words of all thou mightest be: is it left for me to tell thee what thou art?"

She shrank, and I paused.

"Speak," she said.

"Thou knowest—none so well!—who I am and what my mission is: thou knowest—none so well!—that I am sworn to Isis, and may, by law Divine, have naught to do with thee."

"Ay," she broke in, in her low voice, and with her eyes still fixed upon the ground—"ay, and I know that thy vows are broken in spirit, if not in form—broken like wreaths of cloud; for, Harmachis—*thou lovest Cleopatra!*"

"It is a lie!" I cried. "Thou wanton girl, who wouldst seduce me from my duty and put me to an open shame!—who, led by passion or ambition, or the love of evil, hast not shamed to break the barriers of thy sex and speak as thou hast spoken—beware lest thou go too far! And if thou wilt have an answer, here it is, put

straightly, as thy question. Charmion, outside the matter of my duty and my vows, thou art *naught* to me!—nor for all thy tender glances will my heart beat one pulse more fast! Hardly art thou now my friend—for, of a truth, I scarce can trust thee. But, once more: beware! To me thou mayest do thy worst; but if thou dost dare to lift a finger against our cause, that day thou diest! And now, is this play done?”

And as, wild with anger, I spoke thus, she shrank back, and yet further back, till at length she rested against the wall, her eyes covered with her hand. But when I ceased she dropped her hand, glancing up, and her face was as the face of a statue, in which the great eyes glowed like embers, and round them was a ring of purple shadow.

“Not altogether done,” she answered gently; “the arena must yet be sanded!” This she said having reference to the covering up of the blood-stains at the gladiatorial shows with fine sand. “Well,” she went on, “waste not thine anger on a thing so vile. I have thrown my throw and I have lost. *Væ victis!*—ah! *Væ victis!* Wilt thou not lend me the dagger in thy robe, that here

and now I may end my shame? No? Then one word more, most royal Harmachis: if thou canst, forget my folly; but, at the least, have no fear from me. I am now, as ever, thy servant and the servant of our cause. Farewell!"

And she went, leaning her hand against the wall. But I, passing to my chamber, flung myself upon my couch, and groaned in bitterness of spirit. Alas! we shape our plans, and by slow degrees build up our house of Hope, never counting on the guests that time shall bring to lodge therein. For who can guard against—the Unforeseen?

At length I slept, and my dreams were evil. When I woke the light of that day which should see the red fulfilment of the plot was streaming through the casement, and the birds sang merrily among the garden palms. I woke, and as I woke the sense of trouble pressed in upon me, for I remembered that before this day was gathered to the past I must dip my hands in blood—yes, in the blood of Cleopatra, who trusted me! Why could I not hate her as I should? There had been a time when I looked on to this act of vengeance with somewhat of a righteous glow of

zeal. And now—and now—why, I would frankly give my royal birthright to be free from its necessity! But, alas! I knew that there was no escape. I must drain this cup or be for ever cast away. I felt the eyes of Egypt watching me, and the eyes of Egypt's Gods. I prayed to my Mother Isis to give me strength to do this deed, and prayed as I had never prayed before; and oh, wonder! no answer came. Nay, how was this? What, then, had loosed the link between us that, for the first time, the Goddess deigned no reply to her son and chosen servant? Could it be that I had sinned in heart against her? What had Charmion said—that I loved Cleopatra? Was this sickness love? Nay! a thousand times nay!—it was but the revolt of Nature against an act of treachery and blood. The Goddess did but try my strength, or perchance she also turned her holy countenance from murder?

I rose filled with terror and despair, and went about my task like a man without a soul. I conned the fatal lists and noted all the plans—ay, in my brain I gathered up the very words of that proclamation of my Royalty which, on the morrow, I should issue to the startled world.

“Citizens of Alexandria and dwellers in the land of Egypt,” it began, “Cleopatra the Macedonian hath, by the command of the Gods, suffered justice for her crimes——”

All these and other things I did, but I did them as a man without a soul—as a man moved by a force from without and not from within. And so the minutes wore away. In the third hour of the afternoon I went as by appointment fixed to the house where my uncle Sepa lodged, that same house to which I had been brought some three months gone when I entered Alexandria for the first time. And here I found the leaders of the revolt in the city assembled in secret conclave to the number of seven. When I had entered, and the doors were barred, they prostrated themselves, and cried, “Hail, Pharaoh!” but I bade them rise, saying that I was not yet Pharaoh, for the chicken was still in the egg.

“Yea, Prince,” said my uncle, “but his beak shows through. Not in vain hath Egypt brooded all these years, if thou fail not with that dagger-stroke of thine to-night; and how canst thou fail? Nothing can now stop our course to victory!”

“It is on the knees of the Gods,” I answered.

“Nay,” he said, “the Gods have placed the issue in the hands of a mortal—in thy hands, Harmachis!—and there it is safe. See: here are the last lists. Thirty-one thousand men who bear arms are sworn to rise when the tidings come to them. Within five days every citadel in Egypt will be in our hands, and then what have we to fear? From Rome but little, for her hands are full; and, besides, we will make alliance with the Triumvirate, and, if need be, buy them off. For of money there is plenty in the land, and if more be wanted thou, Harmachis, knowest where it is stored against the need of Khem, and outside the Roman’s reach of arm. Who is there to harm us? There is none. Perchance, in this turbulent city, there may be struggle, and a counterplot to bring Arsinoë to Egypt and set her on the throne. Therefore Alexandria must be severely dealt with—ay, even to destruction, if need be. As for Arsinoë, those go forth to-morrow on the news of the Queen’s death who shall slay her secretly.”

“There remains the lad Cæsarion,” I said. “Rome might claim through Cæsar’s son, and the child of Cleopatra inherits Cleopatra’s rights. Here is a double danger.”

“Fear not,” said my uncle; “to-morrow Cæsarion joins those who begat him in Amenti. I have made provision. The Ptolemies must be stamped out, so that no shoot shall ever spring from that root blasted by Heaven’s vengeance.”

“Is there no other means?” I asked sadly. “My heart is sick at the promise of this red rain of blood. I know the child well; he has Cleopatra’s fire and beauty and great Cæsar’s wit. It were shame to murder him.”

“Nay, be not so chicken-hearted, Harmachis,” said my uncle, sternly. “What ails thee, then? If the lad is thus, the more reason that he should die. Wouldst thou nurse up a young lion to tear thee from the throne?”

“Be it so,” I answered, sighing. “At least he is spared much, and will go hence innocent of evil. Now for the plans.”

We sat long taking counsel, till at length, in face of the great emergency and our high emprise, I felt something of the spirit of former days flow back into my heart. At the last all was ordered, and so ordered that it could scarce miscarry, for it was fixed that if by any chance I could not come to slay Cleopatra on this night, then the plot should

hang in the scale till the morrow, when the deed must be done upon occasion. For the death of Cleopatra was the signal. These matters being finished, once more we stood and, our hands upon the sacred symbol, swore the oath that may not be written. And then my uncle kissed me with tears of hope and joy standing in his keen black eyes. He blessed me, saying that he would gladly give his life, ay, and a hundred lives, if they were his, if he might but live to see Egypt once more a nation, and me, Harmachis, the descendant of its royal and ancient blood, seated on the throne. For he was a patriot indeed, asking nothing for himself, and giving all things to his cause. And I kissed him in turn, and thus we parted. Nor did I ever see him more in the flesh who has earned the rest that as yet is denied to me.

So I went, and, there being yet time, walked swiftly from place to place in the great city, taking note of the positions of the gates and of the places where our forces must be gathered. At length I came to that quay where I had landed, and saw a vessel sailing for the open sea. I looked, and in my heaviness of heart longed that

I were aboard of her, to be borne by her white wings to some far shore where I might live obscure and die forgotten. Also I saw another vessel that had dropped down the Nile, from whose deck the passengers were streaming. For a moment I stood watching them, idly wondering if they were from Abouthis, when suddenly I heard a familiar voice beside me.

“*La! La!*” said the voice. “Why, what a city is this for an old woman to seek her fortune in! And how shall I find those to whom I am known? As well look for the rush in the papyrus-roll.* Begone! thou knave! and let my basket of simples lie; or, by the Gods, I’ll doctor thee with them!”

I turned, wondering, and found myself face to face with my foster-nurse, Atoua. She knew me instantly, for I saw her start, but in the presence of the people she checked her surprise.

“Good Sir,” she whined, lifting her withered countenance towards me, and at the same time making the secret sign. “By thy dress thou shouldst be an astronomer, and I was specially

* Papyrus was manufactured from the pith of rushes. Hence Atoua’s saying.—ED.

told to avoid astronomers as a pack of lying tricksters who worship their own star only; and, therefore, I speak to thee, acting on the principle of contraries, which is law to us women. For surely in this Alexandria, where all things are upside down, the astronomers may be the honest men, since the rest are clearly knaves." And then, being by now out of earshot of the press, "royal Harmachis, I am come charged with a message to thee from thy father Amenemhat."

"Is he well?" I asked.

"Yes, he is well, though waiting for the moment tries him sorely."

"And his message?"

"It is this. He sends greeting to thee and with it warning that a great danger threatens thee, though he cannot read it. These are his words: 'Be steadfast and prosper.'"

I bowed my head and the words struck a new chill of fear into my soul.

"When is the time?" she asked.

"This very night. Where goest thou?"

"To the house of the honourable Sepa, Priest of Annu. Canst thou guide me thither?"

"Nay, I may not stay; nor is it wise that I

should be seen with thee. Hold!" and I called a porter who was idling on the quay, and, giving him a piece of money, bade him guide the old wife to the house.

"Farewell," she whispered; "farewell till to-morrow. Be steadfast and prosper."

Then I turned and went my way through the crowded streets, where the people made place for me, the astronomer of Cleopatra, for my fame had spread abroad.

And even as I went my footsteps seemed to beat *Be steadfast, Be steadfast, Be steadfast*, till at last it was as though the very ground cried out its warning to me.

CHAPTER VII.

OF THE VEILED WORDS OF CHARMION; OF THE PASSING OF HARMACHIS INTO THE PRESENCE OF CLEOPATRA; AND OF THE OVERTHROW OF HARMACHIS.

It was night, and I sat alone in my chamber, waiting the moment when, as it was agreed, Charmion should summon me to pass down to Cleopatra. I sat alone, and there before me lay the dagger that was to pierce her. It was long and keen, and the handle was formed of a sphinx of solid gold. I sat alone, questioning the future, but no answer came. At length I looked up, and Charmion stood before me—Charmion, no longer gay and bright, but pale of face and hollow-eyed.

“Royal Harmachis,” she said, “Cleopatra summons thee, presently to declare to her the voices of the stars.”

So the hour had fallen!

“It is well, Charmion,” I answered. “Are all things in order?”

“Yea, my Lord; all things are in order: well primed with wine, Paulus guards the gates, the eunuchs are withdrawn save one, the legionaries sleep, and already Sepa and his force lie hid without. Nothing has been neglected, and no lamb skipping at the shamble doors can be more innocent of its doom than is Queen Cleopatra.”

“It is well,” I said again; “let us be going,” and rising, I placed the dagger in the bosom of my robe. Taking a cup of wine that stood near, I drank deep of it, for I had scarce tasted food all that day.

“One word,” Charmion said hurriedly, “for it is not yet time: last night—ah, last night—” and her bosom heaved, “I dreamed a dream that haunts me strangely, and perchance thou also didst dream a dream. It was all a dream and ’tis forgotten: is it not so, my Lord?”

“Yes, yes,” I said; “why troublest thou me thus at such an hour?”

“Nay, I know not; but to-night, Harmachis, Fate is in labour of a great event, and in her painful throes mayhap she’ll crush me in her

grip—me or thee, or the twain of us, Harmachis. And if that be so—well, I would hear from thee, before it is done, that 'twas naught but a dream, and that dream forgot——”

“Yes, it is all a dream,” I said idly; “thou and I, and the solid earth, and this heavy night of terror, ay, and this keen knife—what are these but dreams, and with what face shall the waking come?”

“So now, thou fallest in my humour, royal Harmachis. As thou sayest, we dream; and while we dream yet can the vision change. For the phantasies of dreams are wonderful, seeing that they have no stability, but vary like the vaporous edge of sunset clouds, building now this thing, and now that; being now dark and heavy, and now alight with splendour. Therefore, before we wake to-morrow tell me one word. Is that vision of last night, wherein I *seemed* to be quite shamed, and thou didst *seem* to laugh upon my shame, a fixed phantasy, or can it, perchance, yet change its countenance? For remember, when that waking comes, the vagaries of our sleep will be more unalterable and more enduring than are the pyramids. Then they will be gathered into

that changeless region of the past where all things, great and small—ay, even dreams, Harmachis—are, each in its own semblance, frozen to stone and built into the Tomb of Time immortal.”

“Nay, Charmion,” I replied, “I grieve if I did pain thee; but over that vision comes no change. I said what was in my heart and there’s an end. Thou art my cousin and my friend, I can never be more to thee.”

“It is well—’tis very well,” she said; “let it be forgotten. And now on from dream—to dream,” and she smiled with such a smile as I had never seen her wear before; it was sadder and more fateful than any stamp that grief can set upon the brow.

For, though being blinded by my own folly and the trouble at my heart I knew it not, with that smile, the happiness of youth died for Charmion the Egyptian; the hope of love fled; and the holy links of duty burst asunder. With that smile she consecrated herself to Evil, she renounced her Country and her Gods, and trampled on her oath. Ay, that smile marks the moment when the stream of history changed its course. For had I never seen it on her face

Octavianus had not bestridden the world, and Egypt had once more been free and great.

And yet it was but a woman's smile!

"Why lookest thou thus strangely, girl?" I asked.

"In dreams we smile," she answered. "And now it is time; follow thou me. Be firm and prosper, royal Harmachis!" and bending forward she took my hand and kissed it. Then, with one strange last look, she turned and led the way down the stair and through the empty halls.

In the chamber that is called the Alabaster Hall, the roof of which is upborne by columns of black marble, we stayed. For beyond was the private chamber of Cleopatra, the same in which I had seen her sleeping.

"Abide thou here," she said, "while I tell Cleopatra of thy coming," and she glided from my side.

I stood for long, mayhap in all the half of an hour, counting my own heart-beats, and, as in a dream, striving to gather up my strength to that which lay before me.

At length Charmion came back, her head held low and walking heavily.

"Cleopatra waits thee," she said: "pass on, there is no guard."

"Where do I meet thee when what must be done is done?" I asked hoarsely.

"Thou meetest me here, and then to Paulus. Be firm and prosper. Harmachis, fare thee well!"

And so I went; but at the curtain I turned suddenly, and there in the midst of that lonely lamplit hall I saw a strange sight. Far away, in such a fashion that the light struck full upon her, stood Charmion, her head thrown back, her white arms outstretched as though to clasp, and on her girlish face a stamp of anguished passion so terrible to see that, indeed, I cannot tell it! For she believed that I, whom she loved, was passing to my death, and this was her last farewell to me.

But I knew naught of this matter; so with another passing pang of wonder I drew aside the curtains, gained the doorway, and stood in Cleopatra's chamber. And there, upon a silken couch

at the far end of the perfumed chamber, clad in wonderful white attire, rested Cleopatra. In her hand was a jewelled fan of ostrich plumes, with which she gently fanned herself, and by her side was her harp of ivory, and a little table whereon were figs and goblets and a flask of ruby-coloured wine. I drew near slowly through the soft dim light to where the Wonder of the World lay in all her glowing beauty. And, indeed, I have never seen her look so fair as she did upon that fatal night. Couched in her amber cushions, she seemed to shine as a star on the twilight's glow. Perfume came from her hair and robes, music fell from her lips, and in her heavenly eyes all lights changed and gathered as in the ominous opal's disc.

And this was the woman whom, presently, I must slay!

Slowly I drew near, bowing as I came; but she took no heed. She lay there, and the jewelled fan floated to and fro like the bright wing of some hovering bird.

At length I stood before her, and she glanced up, the ostrich-plumes pressed against her breast as though to hide its beauty.

“What! friend; art thou come?” she said, “It is well; for I grew lonely here. Nay; ’tis a weary world! We know so many faces, and there are so few whom we love to see again. Well, stand not there so mute, but be seated.” And she pointed with her fan to a carven chair that was placed near her feet.

Once more I bowed and took the seat.

“I have obeyed the Queen’s desire,” I said, “and with much care and skill worked out the lessons of the stars; and here is the record of my labour. If the Queen permits, I will expound it to her.” And I rose, in order that I might pass round the couch and, as she read, stab her in the back.

“Nay, Harmachis,” she said quietly, and with a slow and lovely smile. “Bide thou where thou art, and give me the writing. By Serapis! thy face is too comely for me to wish to lose the sight of it!”

Checked in this design, I could do nothing but hand her the papyrus, thinking to myself that while she read I would arise suddenly and plunge the dagger to her heart. She took it, and as she did so touched my hand. Then she made

pretence to read. But she read no word, for I saw that her eyes were fixed upon me over the edge of the scroll.

“Why placest thou thy hand within thy robe?” she asked presently; for, indeed, I clutched the dagger’s hilt. “Is thy heart stirred?”

“Yea, O Queen,” I said; “it beats high.”

She gave no answer, but once more made pretence to read, and the while she watched me.

I took counsel with myself. How should I do the hateful deed? If I flung myself upon her now she would see me and scream and struggle. Nay, I must wait a chance.

“The auguries are favourable, then, Harmachis?” she said at length, though this she must have guessed.

“Yes, O Queen,” I answered.

“It is well,” and she cast the writing on the marble. “The ships shall sail. For, good or bad, I am weary of weighing chances.”

“This is a heavy matter, O Queen,” I said. “I had wished to show upon what circumstance I base my forecast.”

“Nay, not so, Harmachis; I have wearied of

the ways of stars. Thou hast prophesied; that is enough for me; for, doubtless, being honest, thou hast written honestly. Therefore, save thou thy reasons and we'll be merry. What shall we do? I could dance to thee—there are none who can dance so well!—but it would scarce be queenly. Nay, I have it, I will sing." And, leaning forward, she raised herself, and, bending the harp towards her, struck some wandering chords. Then her low voice broke out in perfect and most sweet song.

And thus she sang:

*"Night on the sea, and night upon the sky,
And music in our hearts, we floated there,
Lulled by the low sea voices, thou and I,
And the wind's kisses in my cloudy hair:
And thou didst gaze on me and call me fair—
Enfolded by the starry robe of night—
And then thy singing thrilled upon the air,
Voice of the heart's desire and Love's delight."*

*"Adrift, with starlit skies above,
With starlit seas below,
We move with all the suns that move,
With all the seas that flow;
For bond or free, Earth, Sky, and Sea,
Wheel with one circling will,*

*And thy heart drifteth on to me,
And only time stands still.*

*Between two shores of Death we drift,
Behind are things forgot:
Before the tide is driving swift
To lands beholden not.
Above, the sky is far and cold;
Below, the moaning sea
Sweeps o'er the loves that were of old,
But, oh, Love! kiss thou me.*

*Ah, lonely are the ocean ways,
And dangerous the deep,
And frail the fairy barque that strays
Above the seas asleep!
Ah, toil no more at sail nor oar,
We drift, or bond or free;
On yon far shore the breakers roar,
But, oh, Love! kiss thou me."*

*"And ever as thou sangest I drew near,
Then sudden silence heard our hearts that beat,
For now there was an end of doubt and fear,
Now passion filled my soul and led my feet;
Then silent didst thou rise thy love to meet,
Who, sinking on thy breast, knew naught but thee,
And in the happy night I kissed thee, Sweet;
Ah, Sweet! between the starlight and the sea."*

The last echoes of her rich notes floated

down the chamber, and slowly died away; but in my heart they rolled on and on. I have heard among the women-singers at Abouthis voices more perfect than the voice of Cleopatra, but never have I heard one so thrilling or so sweet with passion's honey-notes. And indeed it was not the voice alone, it was the perfumed chamber in which was set all that could move the sense; it was the passion of the thought and words, and the surpassing grace and loveliness of that most royal woman who sang them. For, as she sang, I seemed to think that we twain were indeed floating alone with the night, upon the starlit summer sea. And when she ceased to touch the harp, and, rising, suddenly stretched out her arms towards me, and with the last low notes of song yet quivering upon her lips, let fall the wonder of her eyes upon my eyes, she almost drew me to her. But I remembered, and would not.

“Hast thou, then, no word of thanks for my poor singing, Harmachis?” she said at length.

“Yea, O Queen,” I answered, speaking very low, for my voice was choked; “but thy songs are not good for the sons of men to hear—of a truth they overwhelm me!”

“Nay, Harmachis; there is no fear for thee,” she said laughing softly, “seeing that I know how far thy thoughts are set from woman’s beauty and the common weakness of thy sex. With cold iron we may safely toy.”

I thought within myself that coldest iron can be brought to whitest heat if but the fire be fierce enough. But I said nothing, and, though my hand trembled, I once more grasped the dagger’s hilt, and, wild with fear at my own weakness, set myself to find a means to slay her while yet my sense remained.

“Come hither, Harmachis,” she went on, in her softest voice. “Come, sit by me, and we will talk together; for I have much to tell thee,” and she made place for me at her side upon the silken seat.

And I, thinking that I might so more swiftly strike, rose and seated myself some little way from her on the couch, while, flinging back her head, she gazed on me with her slumbrous eyes.

Now was my occasion, for her throat and breast were bare, and, with a mighty effort, once again I lifted my hand to clutch the dagger-hilt.

But, more quick than thought, she caught my fingers with her own and gently held them.

“Why lookest thou so wildly, Harmachis?” she said. “Art sick?”

“Ay, sick indeed!” I gasped.

“Then lean thou on the cushions and rest thee,” she answered, still holding my hand, from which the strength had fled. “The fit will surely pass. Too long hast thou laboured with thy stars. How soft is the night air that flows from yonder casement heavy with the breath of lilies! Hark to the whisper of the sea lapping against the rocks, that, though it is faint, yet, being so strong, doth almost drown the quick cool fall of yonder fountain. List to Philomel; how sweet from a full heart of love she sings her message to her dear! Indeed it is a lovely night, and most beautiful is Nature’s music, sung with a hundred voices from wind and trees and birds and ocean’s wrinkled lips, and yet sung all to tune. Listen, Harmachis: I have guessed something concerning thee. Thou, too, art of a royal race; no humble blood pours in those veins of thine. Surely such a shoot could spring but from the stock of Princes? What! gazest thou at the leaf-mark on

my breast? It was pricked there in honour of great Osiris, whom with thee I worship. See!"

"Let me hence," I groaned, striving to rise; but all my strength had gone.

"Nay, not yet awhile. Thou wouldst not leave me yet? thou *canst* not leave me yet. Harmachis, hast thou never loved?"

"Nay, nay, O Queen! What have I to do with love? Let me hence!—I am faint—I am fordone!"

"Never to have loved—'tis strange! Never to have known some woman-heart beat all in tune to thine—never to have seen the eyes of thy adored aswim with passion's tears, as she sighed her vows upon thy breast!—Never to have loved!—never to have lost thyself in the mystery of another's soul; nor to have learned how Nature can overcome our naked loneliness, and with the golden web of love of twain weave one identity! Why, it is never to have lived, Harmachis!"

And ever as she murmured she drew nearer to me, till at last, with a long, sweet sigh, she flung one arm about my neck, and gazed upon me with blue, unfathomable eyes, and smiled her dark, slow smile, that, like an opening flower,

revealed beauty within beauty hidden. Nearer she bent her queenly form, and still more near—now her perfumed breath played upon my hair, and now her lips met mine.

And woe is me! In that kiss, more deadly and more strong than the embrace of Death, were forgotten Isis, my heavenly Hope, Oaths, Honour, Country, Friends, all things—all things save that Cleopatra clasped me in her arms, and called me Love and Lord.

“Now pledge me,” she sighed; “pledge me one cup of wine in token of thy love.”

I took the draught, and I drank deep; then too late I knew that it was drugged.

I fell upon the couch, and, though my senses still were with me, I could neither speak nor rise.

But Cleopatra, bending over me, drew the dagger from my robe.

“*I've won!*” she cried, shaking back her long hair. “I've won, and for the stake of Egypt, why, 'twas a game worth playing! With this dagger, then, thou wouldst have slain me, O my royal Rival, whose myrmidons even now are gathered at my palace gate? Art still awake?”

Now what hinders me that I should not plunge it to *thy* heart?"

I heard and feebly pointed to my breast, for I was fain to die. She drew herself to the full of her imperial height, and the great knife glittered in her hand. Down it came till its edge pricked my flesh.

"Nay," she cried again, and cast it from her, "too well I like thee. It were pity to slay such a man! I give thee thy life. Live on, lost Pharaoh! Live on, poor fallen Prince, blasted by a woman's wit! Live on, Harmachis—to adorn my triumph!"

Then sight left me; and in my ears I only heard the song of the nightingale, the murmur of the sea, and the music of Cleopatra's laugh of victory. And as I sank away, the sound of that low laugh still followed me into the land of sleep, and still it follows me through life to death.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE AWAKING OF HARMACHIS; OF THE SIGHT OF DEATH; OF THE COMING OF CLEOPATRA; AND OF HER COMFORTABLE WORDS.

ONCE more I woke; it was to find myself in my own chamber. I started up. Surely, I, too, had dreamed a dream? It could be nothing but a dream? It could not be that I woke to know myself a *traitor*! That the opportunity had gone for ever! That I had betrayed the cause, and that last night those brave men, headed by my uncle, had waited in vain at the outer gate! That Egypt from Abu to Athu was even now waiting—waiting in vain! Nay, whatever else might be, this could not be! Oh, it was an awful dream which I had dreamed! a second such would slay a man. It were better to die than face such another vision sent from hell. But, though the thing was naught but a hateful phantasy of a mind o'erstrained, where was I now? Where was

I now? I should be in the Alabaster Hall, waiting till Charmion came forth.

Where was I? and O ye Gods! what was that dreadful thing, whose shape was the shape of a man?—that thing draped in bloodstained white and huddled in a hideous heap at the foot of the couch on which I seemed to lie?

I sprang at it with a shriek, as a lion springs, and struck with all my strength. The blow fell heavily, and beneath its weight the thing rolled over upon its side. Half mad with terror, I rent away the white covering; and there, his knees bound beneath his hanging jaw, was the naked body of a man—and that man the Roman Captain Paulus! There he lay, through his heart a dagger—my dagger, handled with the sphinx of gold!—and pinned by its blade to his broad breast a scroll, and on the scroll, writing in the Roman character. I drew near and read, and this was the writing:

*HARMACHIDI · SALVERE · EGO · SUM · QUEM ·
SUBDERE · NORAS · PAULUS · ROMANUS · DISCE ·
HINC · QUID · PRODERE · PROSIT.*

“Greeting, Harmachis! I was that Roman Paulus whom thou didst suborn. Learn now how blessed are traitors!”

Sick and faint I staggered back from the sight of that white corpse stained with its own blood. Sick and faint I staggered back, till the wall stayed me, while without the birds sang a merry greeting to the day. So it was no dream, and I was lost! lost!

I thought of my aged father, Amenemhat. Yes, the vision of him flashed into my mind, as he would be, when they came to tell him his son's shame and the ruin of his hopes. I thought of that patriot priest, my uncle Sepa, waiting the long night through for the signal which never came. Ah, and another thought followed swift! How would it go with them? I was not the only traitor. I, too, had been betrayed. By whom? By yonder Paulus, perchance. If it were Paulus, he knew but little of those who conspired with me. But the secret lists had been in my robe. O Osiris! they were gone! and the fate of Paulus would be the fate of all the patriots in Egypt. And at this thought my mind gave way. I sank and swooned even where I stood.

My sense came back to me, and the lengthening shadows told me that it was afternoon. I staggered to my feet; the corpse of Paulus was still there, keeping its awful watch above me. I ran desperately to the door. It was barred, and without I heard the tramp of sentinels. As I stood they challenged and grounded their spears. Then the bolts were shot back, the door opened, and radiant, clad in royal attire, came the conquering Cleopatra. She came alone, and the door was shut behind her. I stood like one distraught; but she swept on till she was face to face with me.

“Greeting, Harmachis,” she said, smiling sweetly. “So, my messenger has found thee!” and she pointed to the corpse of Paulus. “Pah! he has an ugly look. Ho! guards!”

The door was opened, and two armed Gauls stepped across the threshold.

“Take away this carrion,” said Cleopatra, “and fling it to the kites. Stay, draw that dagger from his traitor breast.” The men bowed low, and the knife, rusted red with blood, was dragged from the heart of Paulus and laid upon the table. Then they seized him by the head and body and stag-

gered thence, and I heard their heavy footfalls as they bore him down the stairs.

“Methinks, Harmachis, thou art in an evil case,” she said, when the sound of the footfalls had died away. “How strangely the wheel of Fortune turns! But for that traitor,” and she nodded towards the door through which the corpse of Paulus had been carried, “I should now be as ill a thing to look on as he is, and the red rust on yonder knife would have been gathered from *my* heart.”

So it was Paulus who had betrayed me.

“Ay,” she went on, “and when thou camest to me last night, I *knew* that thou camest to slay. When, time upon time, thou didst place thy hand within thy robe, I knew that it grasped a dagger hilt, and that thou wast gathering thy courage to the deed which thou didst little love to do. Oh! it was a strange wild hour, well worth the living, and I wondered greatly, from moment to moment, which of us twain would conquer, as we matched guile with guile and force to force!

“Yea, Harmachis, the guards tramp before thy door, but be not deceived. Did I not know that I hold thee to me by bonds more strong than

prison chains—did I not know that I am hedged from ill at thy hands by a fence of honour harder for thee to pass than all the spears of all my legions, thou hadst been dead ere now, Harmachis. See, here is thy knife,” and she handed me the dagger; “now slay me if thou canst,” and she drew near, tore open the bosom of her robe, and stood waiting with calm eyes.

“Thou canst not slay me,” she went on; “for there are things, as I know well, that no man—no such man as thou art—may do and live: and this is the chief of them—to slay the woman who is all his own. Nay, stay thy hand! Turn not that dagger against thy breast, for if thou mayst not slay me, by how much the more mayst thou not slay thyself, O thou forsworn Priest of Isis! Art thou, then, so eager to face that outraged Majesty in Amenti? With what eyes, thinkest thou, will the Heavenly Mother look upon Her son, who, shamed in all things and false to his most sacred vow, comes to greet Her, his life-blood on his hands? Where, then, will be the space for thy atonement?—if, indeed, thou mayst atone!”

Then I could bear no more, for my heart was

broken. Alas! it was too true—I dared not die! I was come to such a pass that I did not even dare to die! I flung myself upon the couch and wept—wept tears of blood and anguish.

But Cleopatra came to me, and, seating herself beside me, she strove to comfort me, throwing her arms about my neck.

“Nay, love, look up,” she said; “all is not lost for thee, nor am I angered against thee. We did play a mighty game; but, as I warned thee, I matched my woman’s magic against thine, and I have conquered. But I will be open with thee. Both as Queen and woman thou hast my pity—ay, and more; nor do I love to see thee plunged in sorrow. It was well and right that thou shouldst strive to win back that throne my fathers seized, and the ancient liberty of Egypt. Myself as lawful Queen had done the same, nor shrunk from the deed of darkness to which I was sworn. Therein, then, thou hast my sympathy, that goes ever out to what is great and bold. It is well also that thou shouldst grieve over the greatness of thy fall. Therein, then, as woman—as loving woman—thou hast my sympathy. Nor is all lost. Thy plan was

foolish—for, as I hold, Egypt could never have stood alone—for though thou hadst won the crown and country—as without a doubt thou must have done—yet there was the Roman to be reckoned with. And for thy hope learn this: I am little known. There is no heart in this wide land that beats with a truer love for ancient Khem than does this heart of mine—nay, not thine own, Harmachis. Yet I have been heavily shackled heretofore—for wars, rebellions, envies, plots, have hemmed me in on every side, so that I might not serve my people as I would. But thou, Harmachis, shalt show me how. Thou shalt be my counsellor and my love. Is it a little thing, Harmachis, to have won the heart of Cleopatra; that heart—fie on thee!—that thou wouldst have stilled? Yes, *thou* shalt unite me to my people and we will reign together, thus linking in one the new kingdom and the old and the new thought and the old. So do all things work for good—ay, for the very best: and thus, by another and a gentler road, thou shalt climb to Pharaoh's throne.

“See thou this, Harmachis: thy treachery shall be cloaked about as much as may be. Was it,

then, thy fault that a Roman knave betrayed thy plans? that, thereon, thou wast drugged, thy secret papers stolen and their key guessed? Will it, then, be a blame to thee, the great plot being broken and those who built it scattered, that thou, still faithful to thy trust, didst serve thee of such means as Nature gave thee, and win the heart of Egypt's Queen, that, through her gentle love, thou mightest yet attain thy ends and spread thy wings of power across the land of Nile? Am I an ill-counsellor, thinkest thou, Harmachis?"

I lifted my head, and a ray of hope crept into the darkness of my heart; for when men fall they grasp at feathers. Then, I spoke for the first time:

"And those with me—those who trusted me—what of them?"

"Ay," she answered, "Amenemhat, thy father, the aged Priest of Abydus; and Sepa, thy uncle, that fiery patriot, whose great heart is hid beneath so common a shell of form; and——"

I thought she would have said Charmion, but she named her not.

"And many others—oh, I know them all!"

"Ay?" I said, "what of them?"

“Hear now, Harmachis,” she answered, rising and placing her hand upon my arm, “for thy sake I will show mercy to them. I will do no more than must be done. I swear by my throne and by all the Gods of Egypt that not one hair of thy aged father’s head shall be harmed by me; and, if it be not too late, I will also spare thy uncle Sepa, ay, and the others. I will not do as did my forefather Epiphanes, who, when the Egyptians rose against him, dragged Athinis, Pausiras, Chesuphus, and Irobashtus, bound to his chariot—not as Achilles dragged Hector, but yet living—round the city walls. I will spare them all, save the Hebrews, if there be any Hebrews; for the Jews I hate.”

“There are no Hebrews,” I said.

“It is well,” she said, “for no Hebrew will I ever spare. Am I then, indeed, so cruel a woman as they say? In thy list, Harmachis, were many doomed to die; and I have but taken the life of one Roman knave, a double traitor, for he betrayed both me and thee. Art thou not overwhelmed, Harmachis, with the weight of mercy which I give thee, because—such are a woman’s reasons—thou pleasest me, Harmachis? Nay, by

Serapis!" she added with a little laugh, "I'll change my mind; I will not give thee so much for nothing. Thou shalt buy it from me, and the price shall be a heavy one—it shall be a kiss, Harmachis."

"Nay," I said, turning from that fair temptress, "the price is too heavy; I kiss no more."

"Bethink thee," she answered, with a heavy frown. "Bethink thee and choose. I am but a woman, Harmachis, and one who is not wont to sue to men. Do as thou wilt; but this I say to thee—if thou dost put me away, I will gather up the mercy I have meted out. Therefore, most virtuous priest, choose thou between the heavy burden of my love and the swift death of thy aged father and of all those who plotted with him."

I glanced at her and saw that she was angered, for her eyes shone and her bosom heaved. So, I sighed and kissed her, thereby setting the seal upon my shame and bondage. Then, smiling like the triumphant Aphrodité of the Greeks, she went thence, bearing the dagger with her.

I knew not yet how deeply I was betrayed;

or why I was still left to draw the breath of life; or why Cleopatra, the tiger-hearted, had grown merciful. I did not know that she feared to slay me, lest, so strong was the plot and so feeble her hold upon the Double Crown, the tumult that might tread hard upon the tidings of my murder should shake her from the throne—even when I was no more. I did not know that because of fear and the weight of policy only she showed scant mercy to those whom I had betrayed, or that because of cunning and not for the holy sake of woman's love—though, in truth, she liked me well enough—she chose rather to bind me to her by the fibres of my heart. And yet I will say this in her behalf: even when the danger-cloud had melted from her sky she kept her faith, nor, save Paulus and one other, did any suffer the utmost penalty of death for their part in the great plot against Cleopatra's crown and dynasty. But they suffered many other things.

And so she went, leaving the vision of her glory to strive with the shame and sorrow in my heart. Oh, bitter were the hours that could not now be made light with prayer. For the link between me and the Divine was snapped, and

Isis communed with Her Priest no more. Bitter were the hours and dark, but ever through their darkness shone the starry eyes of Cleopatra, and came the echo of her whispered love. For not yet was the cup of sorrow full. Hope still lingered in my heart, and I could almost think that I had failed to some higher end, and that in the depths of ruin I should find another and more flowery path to triumph.

For thus those who sin deceive themselves, striving to lay the burden of their evil deeds upon the back of Fate, striving to believe their wickedness may compass good, and to murder Conscience with the sharp plea of Necessity. But it can avail nothing, for hand in hand down the path of sin rush Remorse and Ruin, and woe to him they follow! Ay, and woe to me who of all sinners am the chief!

CHAPTER IX.

OF THE IMPRISONMENT OF HARMACHIS; OF THE SCORN OF CHARMION; OF THE SETTING FREE OF HARMACHIS; AND OF THE COMING OF QUINTUS DELLIUS.

FOR a space of eleven days I was thus kept prisoned in my chamber; nor did I see anyone except the sentries at my doors, the slaves who in silence brought me food and drink, and Cleopatra's self, who came continually. But, though her words of love were many, she would tell me nothing of how things went without. She came in many moods—now gay and laughing, now full of wise thoughts and speech, and now passionate only, and to every mood she gave some new-found charm. She was full of talk as to how I should help her make Egypt great, and lessen the burdens on the people, and fright the Roman eagles back. And, though at first I listened heavily when she spoke thus, by slow advance as she wrapped me closer and yet more close in her magic web, from which there was no escape,

my mind fell in time with hers. Then I, too, opened something of my heart, and somewhat also of the plans that I had formed for Egypt. She seemed to listen gladly, weighing them all, and spoke of means and methods, telling me how she would purify the Faith and repair the ancient temples—ay, and build new ones to the Gods. And ever she crept deeper into my heart, till at length, now that every other thing had gone from me, I learned to love her with all the unspent passion of my aching soul. I had naught left to me but Cleopatra's love, and I twined my life about it, and brooded on it as a widow over her only babe. And thus the very author of my shame became my all, my dearest dear, and I loved her with a strong love that grew and grew, till it seemed to swallow up the past and make the present as a dream. For she had conquered me, she had robbed me of my honour, and steeped me to the lips in shame, and I, poor fallen, blinded wretch, I kissed the rod that smote me, and was her very slave.

Ay, even now, in those dreams which will come when Sleep unlocks the secret heart, and sets its terrors free to roam through the opened

halls of Thought, I seem to see her royal form, as erst I saw it, come with arms outstretched and Love's own light shining in her eyes, with lips apart and flowing locks, and stamped upon her face the look of utter tenderness that she alone could wear. Ay, still, after all the years, I seem to see her come as erst she came, and still I wake to know her an unutterable lie!

And thus one day she came. She had fled in haste, she said, from some great council summoned concerning the wars of Antony in Syria, and she came, as she had left the council, in all her robes of state, the sceptre in her hand, and on her brow the uræus diadem of gold. There she sat before me, laughing; for, wearying of them, she had told the envoys to whom she gave audience in the council that she was called from their presence by a sudden message come from Rome; and the jest seemed merry to her. Suddenly she rose, took the diadem from her brow, and set it on my hair, and on my shoulders her royal mantle, and in my hand the sceptre, and bowed the knee before me. Then, laughing again, she kissed me on the lips, and said I was indeed her King. But, remembering how I had

been crowned in the halls of Abouthis, and remembering also that wreath of roses of which the odour haunts me yet, I rose, pale with wrath, and cast the trinkets from me, asking how she dared to mock me—her caged bird. And I think there was that about me which startled her, for she fell back.

“Nay, Harmachis,” she said, “be not wroth! How knowest thou that I mock thee? How knowest thou that thou shalt not be Pharaoh in fact and deed?”

“What meanest thou?” I said. “Wilt thou, then, wed me before Egypt? How else can I be Pharaoh now?”

She cast down her eyes. “Perchance, love, it is in my mind to wed thee,” she said gently. “Listen,” she went on: “Thou growest pale, here, in this prison, and thou dost eat little. Gainsay me not! I know it from the slaves. I have kept thee here, Harmachis, for thy own sake, that is so dear to me; and for thy own sake, and thy honour’s sake, thou must still seem to be my prisoner. Else wouldst thou be shamed and slain—ay, murdered secretly. But I can meet thee here no more! therefore to-morrow I will

free thee in all, save in the name, and thou shalt once more be seen at Court as my astronomer. And I will give this reason—that thou hast cleared thyself; and, moreover, that thy auguries as regards the war have been auguries of truth—as, indeed, they have, though for this I have no cause to thank thee, seeing that thou didst suit thy prophecies to fit thy cause. Now, farewell; for I must return to those heavy-browed ambassadors; and grow not so sudden wroth, Harmachis, for who knows what may come to pass betwixt thee and me?”

And, with a little nod, she went, leaving it on my mind that she had it in her heart to wed me openly. And of a truth, I believe that, at this hour, such was her thought. For, if she loved me not, still she held me dear, and as yet she had not wearied of me.

On the morrow Cleopatra came not, but Charmion came—Charmion, whom I had not seen since that fatal night of ruin. She entered and stood before me, with pale face and downcast eyes, and her first words were words of bitterness.

“Pardon me,” she said, in her gentle voice, “in that I dare to come to thee in Cleopatra’s

place. Thy joy is not delayed for long, for thou shalt see her presently."

I shrank at her words, as well I might, and, seeing her vantage, she seized it.

"I come, Harmachis—royal no more!—I come to say that thou art free! Thou art free to face thine own infamy, and see it thrown back from every eye which trusted thee, as shadows are from water. I come to tell thee that the great plot—the plot of twenty years and more—is at its utter end. None have been slain, indeed, unless it is Sepa, who has vanished. But all the leaders have been seized and put in chains, or driven from the land, and their party is broken and scattered. The storm has melted before it burst. Egypt is lost, and lost for ever, for her last hope is gone! No longer may she struggle—now for all time she must bow her neck to the yoke, and bare her back to the rod of the oppressor!"

I groaned aloud. "Alas, I was betrayed!" I said, "Paulus betrayed us."

"Thou wast betrayed? Nay, thou thyself wast the betrayer! How came it that thou didst not

slay Cleopatra when thou wast alone with her? Speak, thou forsworn!"

"She drugged me," I said again.

"O Harmachis!" answered the pitiless girl, "how low art thou fallen from that Prince whom once I knew!—thou who dost not scorn to be a liar! Yea, thou wast drugged—drugged with a love-philtre! Yea, thou didst sell Egypt and thy cause for the price of a wanton's kiss! Thou Sorrow and thou Shame!" she went on, pointing her finger at me and lifting her eyes to my face, "thou Scorn!—thou Outcast!—and thou Contempt! Deny it if thou canst. Ay, shrink from me—knowing what thou art, well mayst thou shrink! Crawl to Cleopatra's feet, and kiss her sandals till such time as it pleases her to trample thee in thy kindred dirt; but from all honest folk *shrink!*—*shrink!*"

My soul quivered beneath the lash of her bitter scorn and hate, but I had no words to answer.

"How comes it," I said at last in a heavy voice, "that thou, too, art not betrayed, but art still here to taunt me, thou who once didst swear that thou didst love me? Being a woman, hast thou no pity for the frailty of man?"

“My name was not on the lists,” she said, dropping her dark eyes. “Here is an opportunity: betray me also, Harmachis! Ay, it is because I once loved thee—dost thou, indeed, remember it?—that I feel thy fall the more. The shame of one whom we have loved must in some sort become our shame, and must ever cling to us, because we blindly held a thing so base close to our inmost heart. Art thou also, then, a fool? Wouldst thou, fresh from thy royal wanton’s arms, come to me for comfort—to *me* of all the world?”

“How know I,” I said, “that it was not thou who, in thy jealous anger, didst betray our plans? Charmion, long ago Sepa warned me against thee, and of a truth now that I recall——”

“It is like a traitor,” she broke in, reddening to her brow, “to think that all are of his family, and hold a common mind! Nay, I betrayed thee not; it was that poor knave, Paulus, whose heart failed him at the last, and who is rightly served. Nor will I stay to hear thoughts so base. Harmachis—royal no more!—Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, bids me say that thou art free, and that she waits thee in the Alabaster Hall.”

And shooting one swift glance through her long lashes she curtsied and was gone.

So once more I came and went about the Court, though but sparingly, for my heart was full of shame and terror, and on every face I feared to see the scorn of those who knew me for what I was. But I saw nothing, for all those who had knowledge of the plot had fled, and Charmion had spoken no word, for her own sake. Also, Cleopatra had put it about that I was innocent. But my guilt lay heavy on me, and made me thin and wore away the beauty of my countenance. And though I was free in name, yet I was ever watched; nor might I stir beyond the palace grounds.

And at length came the day which brought with it Quintus Dellius, that false Roman knight who ever served the rising star. He bore letters to Cleopatra from Marcus Antonius, the Triumvir, who, fresh from the victory of Philippi, was now in Asia wringing gold from the subject kings with which to satisfy the greed of his legionaries.

Well I mind me of the day. Cleopatra, clad in her robes of state, attended by the officers of

her Court, among whom I stood, sat in the great hall on her throne of gold, and bade the heralds admit the Ambassador of Antony, the Triumvir. The great doors were thrown wide, and amidst the blare of trumpets and salutes of the Gallic guards the Roman came in, clad in glittering golden armour and a scarlet cloak of silk, and followed by his suite of officers. He was smooth-faced and fair to look upon, and with a supple form; but his mouth was cold, and false were his shifting eyes. And while the heralds called out his name, titles, and offices, he fixed his gaze on Cleopatra—who sat idly on her throne all radiant with beauty—as a man who is amazed. Then when the heralds had made an end, and he still stood thus, not stirring, Cleopatra spoke in the Latin tongue:

“Greeting to thee, noble Dellius, envoy of the most mighty Antony, whose shadow lies across the world as though Mars himself now towered up above us petty Princes—greeting and welcome to our poor city of Alexandria. Unfold, we pray thee, the purpose of thy coming.”

Still the crafty Dellius made no answer, but stood as a man amazed.

“What ails thee, noble Dellius, that thou dost not speak?” asked Cleopatra. “Hast thou, then, wandered so long in Asia that the doors of Roman speech are shut to thee? What tongue hast thou? Name it, and We will speak in it—for all tongues are known to Us.”

Then at last he spoke in a soft full voice: “Oh, pardon me, most lovely Egypt, if I have thus been stricken dumb before thee: but too great beauty, like Death himself, doth paralyse the tongue and steal our sense away. The eyes of him who looks upon the fires of the mid-day sun are blind to all beside, and thus this sudden vision of thy glory, royal Egypt, overwhelmed my mind, and left me helpless and unwitting of all things else.”

“Of a truth, noble Dellius,” answered Cleopatra, “they teach a pretty school of flattery yonder in Cilicia.”

“How goes the saying here in Alexandria?” replied the courtly Roman: ‘The breath of flattery cannot waft a cloud,’* does it not? But to my task. Here, royal Egypt, are letters under

* In other words, what is Divine is beyond the reach of human praise.—ED.

the hand and seal of the noble Antony treating of certain matters of the State. Is it thy pleasure that I should read them openly?"

"Break the seals and read," she answered.

Then bowing, he broke the seals and read:

"The *Triumviri Reipublicæ Constituendæ*, by the mouth of Marcus Antonius, the Triumvir, to Cleopatra, by grace of the Roman People Queen of Upper and Lower Egypt, send greeting. Whereas it has come to our knowledge that thou, Cleopatra, hast, contrary to thy promise and thy duty, both by thy servant Allienus and by thy servant Serapion, the Governor of Cyprus, aided the rebel murderer Cassius against the arms of the most noble Triumvirate. And, whereas it has come to our knowledge that thou thyself wast but lately making ready a great fleet to this end. We summon thee that thou dost without delay journey to Cilicia, there to meet the noble Antony, and in person make answer concerning these charges which are laid against thee. And we warn thee that if thou dost disobey this our summons it is at thy peril. Farewell."

The eyes of Cleopatra flashed as she hearkened

to these high words, and I saw her hands tighten on the golden lions' heads whereon they rested.

"We have had the flattery," she said; "and now, lest we be cloyed with sweets, we have its antidote! Listen thou, Dellius: the charges in that letter, or, rather, in that writ of summons, are false, as all folk can bear us witness. But it is not now, and it is not to thee, that We will make defence of our acts of war and policy. Nor will We leave our kingdom to journey into far Cilicia, and there, like some poor suppliant at law, plead our cause before the Court of the noble Antony. If Antony will have speech with us, and inquire concerning these high matters, the sea is open and his welcome shall be royal. Let him come hither. That is our answer to thee and to the Triumvirate, O Dellius!"

But Dellius smiled as one who would put away the weight of wrath, and once more spoke:

"Royal Egypt, thou knowest not the noble Antony. He is stern on paper, and ever he sets down his thoughts as though his stylus were a spear dipped in the blood of men. But face to face with him, thou, of all the world, shalt find

him the gentlest warrior that ever won a battle. Be advised, O Egypt! and come. Send me not hence with such angry words, for if thou dost draw Antony to Alexandria, then woe to Alexandria, to the people of the Nile, and to thee, great Egypt! For then he will come armed and breathing war, and it shall go hard with thee, who dost defy the gathered might of Rome. I pray thee, then, obey this summons. Come to Cilicia; come with peaceful gifts and not in arms. Come in thy beauty, and tricked in thy best attire, and thou hast naught to fear from the noble Antony." He paused and looked at her meaningly; while I, taking his drift, felt the angry blood surge into my face.

Cleopatra, too, understood, for I saw her rest her chin upon her hand and the cloud of thought gathered in her eyes. For a time she sat thus, while the crafty Dellius watched her curiously. And Charmion, standing with the other ladies by the throne, she also read his meaning, for her face lit up, as a summer cloud lights in the evening when the broad lightning flares behind it. Then once more it grew pale and quiet.

At length Cleopatra spoke. "This is a heavy

matter," she said, "and therefore, noble Dellius, we must have time to let our judgment ripen. Rest thou here, and make thee as merry as our poor circumstance allows. Thou shalt have thy answer within ten days."

The envoy thought awhile, then replied smiling: "It is well, O Egypt; on the tenth day from now I will attend for my answer, and on the eleventh I sail hence to join Antony my Lord."

Once more, at a sign from Cleopatra, the trumpets blared, and he withdrew bowing.



END OF VOL. I.



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