

An Egyptian Princess — Volume 02 eBook

An Egyptian Princess — Volume 02 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER III.

The guests were all gone. Their departing mirth and joy had been smitten down by the drunkard's abusive words, like fresh young corn beneath a hail storm. Rhodopis was left standing alone in the empty, brightly decorated (supper-room). Knakias extinguished the colored lamps on the walls, and a dull, mysterious half-light took the place of their brilliant rays, falling scantily and gloomily on the piled-up plates and dishes, the remnants of the meal, and the seats and cushions, pushed out of their places by the retiring guests. A cold breeze came through the open door, for the dawn was at hand, and just before sunrise, the air is generally unpleasantly cool in Egypt. A cold chill struck the limbs of the aged woman through her light garments. She stood gazing tearlessly and fixedly into the desolate room, whose walls but a few minutes before had been echoing with joy and gladness, and it seemed to her that the deserted guest-chamber must be like her own heart. She felt as if a worm were gnawing there, and the warm blood congealing into ice.

Lost in these thoughts, she remained standing till at last her old female slave appeared to light her to her sleeping apartment.

Silently Rhodopis allowed herself to be undressed, and then, as silently, lifted the curtain which separated a second sleeping apartment from her own. In the middle of this second room stood a bedstead of maplewood, and there, on white sheets spread over a mattress of fine sheep's wool, and protected from the cold by bright blue coverlets's, lay a graceful, lovely girl asleep; this was Rhodopis' granddaughter, Sappho. The rounded form and delicate figure seemed to denote one already in opening maidenhood, but the peaceful, blissful smile could only belong to a harmless, happy child.

One hand lay under her head, hidden among the thick dark brown hair, the other clasped unconsciously a little amulet of green stone, which hung round her neck. Over her closed eyes the long lashes trembled almost imperceptibly, and a delicate pink flush came and went on the cheek of the slumberer. The finely-cut nostrils rose and fell with her regular breathing, and she lay there, a picture of innocence, of peace, smiling in dreams, and of the slumber that the gods bestow on early youth, when care has not yet come.

Softly and carefully, crossing the thick carpets on tiptoe, the grey-haired woman approached, looked with unutterable tenderness into the smiling, childish face, and, kneeling down silently by the side of the bed, buried her face in its soft coverings, so that the girl's hand just came in contact with her hair. Then she wept, and without intermission; as though she hoped with this flood of tears to wash away not only her recent humiliation, but with it all other sorrow from her mind.



At length she rose, breathed a light kiss on the sleeping girl's forehead, raised her hands in prayer towards heaven, and returned to her own room, gently and carefully as she had come.



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At her own bedside she found the old slave-woman, still waiting for her.

“What do you want so late, Melitta?” said Rhodopis, kindly, under her breath. “Go to bed; at your age it is not good to remain up late, and you know that I do not require you any longer. Good night! and do not come to-morrow until I send for you. I shall not be able to sleep much to-night, and shall be thankful if the morning brings me a short repose.”

The woman hesitated; it seemed that she had some thing on her mind which she feared to utter.

“There is something you want to ask me?” said Rhodopis.

Still the old slave hesitated.

“Speak!” said Rhodopis, “speak at once, and quickly.”

“I saw you weeping,” said the slave-woman, “you seem ill or sad; let me watch this night by your bedside. Will you not tell me what ails you? You have often found that to tell a sorrow lightens the heart and lessens the pain. Then tell me your grief to-day too; it will do you good, it will bring back peace to your mind.”

“No,” answered the other, “I cannot utter it.” And then she continued, smiling bitterly: “I have once more experienced that no one, not even a god, has power to cancel the past of any human being, and that, in this world, misfortune and disgrace are one and the same. Good night, leave me; Melitta!”

At noon on the following day, the same boat, which, the evening before, had carried the Athenian and the Spartan, stopped once more before Rhodopis’ garden.

The sun was shining so brightly, so warmly and genially in the dark blue Egyptian sky, the air was so pure and light, the beetles were humming so merrily, the boatmen singing so lustily and happily, the shores of the Nile bloomed in such gay, variegated beauty, and were so thickly peopled, the palm-trees, sycamores, bananas and acacias were so luxuriant in foliage and blossom, and over the whole landscape the rarest and most glorious gifts seemed to have been poured out with such divine munificence, that a passer-by must have pronounced it the very home of joy and gladness, a place from which sadness and sorrow had been forever banished.

How often we fancy, in passing a quiet village hidden among its orchards, that this at least must be the abode of peace, and unambitious contentment! But alas! when we enter the cottages, what do we find? there, as everywhere else, distress and need, passion and unsatisfied longing, fear and remorse, pain and misery; and by the side of these, Ah! how few joys! Who would have imagined on coming to Egypt, that this luxuriant, laughing sunny land, whose sky is always unclouded, could possibly produce



and nourish men given to bitterness and severity? that within the charming, hospitable house of the fortunate Rhodopis, covered and surrounded, as it was, with sweet flowers, a heart could have been beating in the deepest sadness? And, still more, who among all the guests of that honored, admired Thracian woman, would have believed that this sad heart belonged to her? to the gracious, smiling matron, Rhodopis herself?



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She was sitting with Phanes in a shady arbor near the cooling spray of a fountain. One could see that she had been weeping again, but her face was beautiful and kind as ever. The Athenian was holding her hand and trying to comfort her.

Rhodopis listened patiently, and smiled the while; at times her smile was bitter, at others it gave assent to his words. At last however she interrupted her well-intentioned friend, by saying:

“Phanes, I thank you. Sooner or later this last disgrace must be forgotten too. Time is clever in the healing art. If I were weak I should leave Naukratis and live in retirement for my grandchild alone; a whole world, believe me, lies slumbering in that young creature. Many and many a time already I have longed to leave Egypt, and as often have conquered the wish. Not because I cannot live without the homage of your sex; of that I have already had more than enough in my life, but because I feel that I, the slave-girl and the despised woman once, am now useful, necessary, almost indispensable indeed, to many free and noble men. Accustomed as I am, to an extended sphere of work, in its nature resembling a man's, I could not content myself in living for one being alone, however dear. I should dry up like a plant removed from a rich soil into the desert, and should leave my grandchild desolate indeed, three times orphaned, and alone in the world. No! I shall remain in Egypt.

“Now that you are leaving, I shall be really indispensable to our friends here. Amasis is old; when Psamtik comes to the throne we shall have infinitely greater difficulties to contend with than heretofore. I must remain and fight on in the fore-front of our battle for the freedom and welfare of the Hellenic race. Let them call my efforts unwomanly if they will. This is, and shall be, the purpose of my life, a purpose to which I will remain all the more faithful, because it is one of those to which a woman rarely dares devote her life. During this last night of tears I have felt that much, very much of that womanly weakness still lingers in me which forms at once the happiness and misery of our sex. To preserve this feminine weakness in my granddaughter, united with perfect womanly delicacy, has been my first duty; my second to free myself entirely from it. But a war against one's own nature cannot be carried on without occasional defeat, even if ultimately successful. When grief and pain are gaining the upperhand and I am well nigh in despair, my only help lies in remembering my friend Pythagoras, that noblest among men, and his words: 'Observe a due proportion in all things, avoid excessive joy as well as complaining grief, and seek to keep thy soul in tune and harmony like a well-toned harp.'”



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[There is no question that Pythagoras visited Egypt during the reign of Amasis, probably towards the middle of the 6th century (according to our reckoning, about 536 B. C.) Herod. II. 81-123. Diod. I. 98. Rich information about Pythagoras is to be found in the works of the very learned scholar Roeth, who is however occasionally much too bold in his conjectures. Pythagoras was the first among Greek thinkers (speculators). He would not take the name of a wise man or "sage," but called himself "Philosophos," or a "friend of wisdom."]

"This Pythagorean inward peace, this deep, untroubled calm, I see daily before me in my Sappho; and struggle to attain it myself, though many a stroke of fate untunes the chords of my poor heart. I am calm now! You would hardly believe what power the mere thought of that first of all thinkers, that calm, deliberate man, whose life acted on mine like sweet, soft music, has over me. You knew him, you can understand what I mean. Now, mention your wish; my heart is as calmly quiet as the Nile waters which are flowing by so quietly, and I am ready to hear it, be it good or evil."

"I am glad to see you thus," said the Athenian. "If you had remembered the noble friend of wisdom, as Pythagoras was wont to call himself a little sooner, your soul would have regained its balance yesterday. The master enjoins us to look back every evening on the events, feelings and actions of the day just past.

"Now had you done this, you would have felt that the unfeigned admiration of all your guests, among whom were men of distinguished merit, outweighed a thousandfold the injurious words of a drunken libertine; you would have felt too that you were a friend of the gods, for was it not in your house that the immortals gave that noble old man at last, after his long years of misfortune, the greatest joy that can fall to the lot of any human being? and did they not take from you one friend only in order to replace him in the same moment, by another and a better? Come, I will hear no contradiction. Now for my request.

"You know that people sometimes call me an Athenian, sometimes a Halikarnassian. Now, as the Ionian, AEolian and Dorian mercenaries have never been on good terms with the Karians, my almost triple descent (if I may call it so) has proved very useful to me as commander of both these divisions. Well qualified as Aristomachus may be for the command, yet in this one point Amasis will miss me; for I found it an easy matter to settle the differences among the troops and keep them at peace, while he, as a Spartan, will find it very difficult to keep right with the Karian soldiers.

"This double nationality of mine arises from the fact that my father married a Halikarnassian wife out of a noble Dorian family, and, at the time of my birth, was staying with her in Halikarnassus, having come thither in order to take possession of her parental inheritance. So, though I was taken back to Athens before I was three months old, I must still be called a Karian, as a man's native land is decided by his birthplace.



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“In Athens, as a young nobleman, belonging to that most aristocratic and ancient family, the Philaidae, I was reared and educated in all the pride of an Attic noble. Pisistratus, brave and clever, and though of equal, yet by no means of higher birth, than ourselves, for there exists no family more aristocratic than my father’s, gained possession of the supreme authority. Twice, the nobles, by uniting all their strength, succeeded in overthrowing him, and when, the third time, assisted by Lygdamis of Naxos, the Argives and Eretrians, he attempted to return, we opposed him again. We had encamped by the temple of Minerva at Pallene, and were engaged in sacrificing to the goddess, early, before our first meal, when we were suddenly surprised by the clever tyrant, who gained an easy, bloodless victory over our unarmed troops. As half of the entire army opposed to the tyrant was under my command, I determined rather to die than yield, fought with my whole strength, implored the soldiers to remain steadfast, resisted without yielding a point, but fell at last with a spear in my shoulder.

“The Pisistratidae became lords of Athens. I fled to Halikarnassus, my second home, accompanied by my wife and children. There, my name being known through some daring military exploits, and, through my having once conquered in the Pythian games, I was appointed to a command in the mercenary troops of the King of Egypt; accompanied the expedition to Cyprus, shared with Aristomachus the renown of having conquered the birthplace of Aphrodite for Amasis, and finally was named commander-in-chief of all the mercenaries in Egypt.

“Last summer my wife died; our children, a boy of eleven and a girl of ten years, remained with an aunt in Halikarnassus. But she too has followed to the inexorable Hades, and so, only a few days ago I sent for the little ones here. They cannot, however, possibly reach Naukratis in less than three weeks, and yet they will already have set out on their journey before a letter to countermand my first order could reach them.

“I must leave Egypt in fourteen days, and cannot therefore receive them myself.

“My own intentions are to go to the Thracian Chersonese, where my uncle, as you know, has been called to fill a high office among the Dolonki. The children shall follow me thither; my faithful old slave Korax will remain in Naukratis on purpose to bring them to me.

“Now, if you will show to me that you are in deed and truth my friend, will you receive the little ones and take care of them till the next ship sails for Thrace? But above all, will you carefully conceal them from the eyes of the crown-prince’s spies? You know that Psamtik hates me mortally, and he could easily revenge himself on the father through the children. I ask you for this great favor, first, because I know your kindness by experience; and secondly, because your house has been made secure by the king’s letter of guarantee, and they will therefore be safe here from the inquiries of the police;

notwithstanding that, by the laws of this most formal country, all strangers, children not excepted, must give up their names to the officer of the district.



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“You can now judge of the depth of my esteem, Rhodopis; I am committing into your hands all that makes life precious to me; for even my native land has ceased to be dear while she submits so ignominiously to her tyrants. Will you then restore tranquillity to an anxious father’s heart, will you—?”

“I will, Phanes, I will!” cried the aged woman in undisguised delight. “You are not asking me for any thing, you are presenting me with a gift. Oh, how I look forward already to their arrival! And how glad Sappho will be, when the little creatures come and enliven her solitude! But this I can assure you, Phanes, I shall not let my little guests depart with the first Thracian ship. You can surely afford to be separated from them one short half-year longer, and I promise you they shall receive the best lessons, and be guided to all that is good and beautiful.”

“On that head I have no fear,” answered Phanes, with a thankful smile. “But still you must send off the two little plagues by the first ship; my anxiety as to Psamtik’s revenge is only too well grounded. Take my most heartfelt thanks beforehand for all the love and kindness which you will show to my children. I too hope and believe, that the merry little creatures will be an amusement and pleasure to Sappho in her lonely life.”

“And more,” interrupted Rhodopis looking down; “this proof of confidence repays a thousand-fold the disgrace inflicted on me last night in a moment of intoxication.—But here comes Sappho!”

CHAPTER IV.

Five days after the evening we have just described at Rhodopis’ house, an immense multitude was to be seen assembled at the harbor of Sais.

Egyptians of both sexes, and of every age and class were thronging to the water’s edge.

Soldiers and merchants, whose various ranks in society were betokened by the length of their white garments, bordered with colored fringes, were interspersed among the crowd of half-naked, sinewy men, whose only clothing consisted of an apron, the costume of the lower classes. Naked children crowded, pushed and fought to get the best places. Mothers in short cloaks were holding their little ones up to see the sight, which by this means they entirely lost themselves; and a troop of dogs and cats were playing and fighting at the feet of these eager sight-seers, who took the greatest pains not to tread on, or in any way injure the sacred animals.

[According to various pictures on the Egyptian monuments. The mothers are from Wilkinson III. 363. Isis and Hathor, with the child Horus in her lap or at her breast, are found in a thousand representations, dating both from more modern times and in the

Greek style. The latter seem to have served as a model for the earliest pictures of the Madonna holding the infant Christ.]

The police kept order among this huge crowd with long staves, on the metal heads of which the king's name was inscribed. Their care was especially needed to prevent any of the people from being pushed into the swollen Nile, an arm of which, in the season of the inundations, washes the walls of Sais.

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On the broad flight of steps which led between two rows of sphinxes down to the landing-place of the royal boats, was a very different kind of assembly.

The priests of the highest rank were seated there on stone benches. Many wore long, white robes, others were clad in aprons, broad jewelled collars, and garments of panther skins. Some had fillets adorned with plumes that waved around brows, temples, and the stiff structures of false curls that floated over their shoulders; others displayed the glistening bareness of their smoothly-shaven skulls. The supreme judge was distinguished by the possession of the longest and handsomest plume in his head-dress, and a costly sapphire amulet, which, suspended by a gold chain, hung on his breast.

The highest officers of the Egyptian army wore uniforms of gay colors,⁹⁷ and carried short swords in their girdles. On the right side of the steps a division of the body-guard was stationed, armed with battleaxes, daggers, bows, and large shields; on the left, were the Greek mercenaries, armed in Ionian fashion. Their new leader, our friend Aristomachus, stood with a few of his own officers apart from the Egyptians, by the colossal statues of Psamtik I., which had been erected on the space above the steps, their faces towards the river.

In front of these statues, on a silver chair, sat Psamtik, the heir to the throne: He wore a close-fitting garment of many colors, interwoven with gold, and was surrounded by the most distinguished among the king's courtiers, chamberlains, counsellors, and friends, all bearing staves with ostrich feathers and lotus-flowers.

The multitude gave vent to their impatience by shouting, singing, and quarrelling; but the priests and magnates on the steps preserved a dignified and solemn silence. Each, with his steady, unmoved gaze, his stiffly-curved false wig and beard, and his solemn, deliberate manner, resembled the two huge statues, which, the one precisely similar to the other, stood also motionless in their respective places, gazing calmly into the stream.

At last silken sails, chequered with purple and blue, appeared in sight.

The crowd shouted with delight. Cries of, "They are coming! Here they are!" "Take care, or you'll tread on that kitten," "Nurse, hold the child higher that she may see something of the sight." "You are pushing me into the water, Sebak!" "Have a care Phoenician, the boys are throwing burs into your long beard." "Now, now, you Greek fellow, don't fancy that all Egypt belongs to you, because Amasis allows you to live on the shores of the sacred river!" "Shameless set, these Greeks, down with them!" shouted a priest, and the cry was at once echoed from many mouths. "Down with the eaters of swine's flesh and despisers of the gods!"



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[The Egyptians, like the Jews, were forbidden to eat swine's flesh. This prohibition is mentioned in the Ritual of the Dead, found in a grave in Abd-el-Qurnah, and also in other places. Porphyr. de Abstin. IV. The swine was considered an especially unclean animal pertaining to Typhon (Egyptian, Set) as the boar to Ares, and swineherds were an especially despised race. Animals with bristles were only sacrificed at the feasts of Osiris and Eileithya. Herod. I. 2. 47. It is probable that Moses borrowed his prohibition of swine's flesh from the Egyptian laws with regard to unclean animals.]

From words they were proceeding to deeds, but the police were not to be trifled with, and by a vigorous use of their staves, the tumult was soon stilled. The large, gay sails, easily to be distinguished among the brown, white and blue ones of the smaller Nile-boats which swarmed around them, came nearer and nearer to the expectant throng. Then at last the crown-prince and the dignitaries arose from their seats. The royal band of trumpeters blew a shrill and piercing blast of welcome, and the first of the expected boats stopped at the landing-place.

It was a rather long, richly-gilded vessel, and bore a silver sparrow-hawk as figure-head. In its midst rose a golden canopy with a purple covering, beneath which cushions were conveniently arranged. On each deck in the forepart of the ship sat twelve rowers, their aprons attached by costly fastenings.

[Splendid Nile-boats were possessed, in greater or less numbers, by all the men of high rank. Even in the tomb of Ti at Sakkara, which dates from the time of the Pyramids, we meet with a chief overseer of the vessels belonging to a wealthy Egyptian.]

Beneath the canopy lay six fine-looking men in glorious apparel; and before the ship had touched the shore the youngest of these, a beautiful fair-haired youth, sprang on to the steps.

Many an Egyptian girl's mouth uttered a lengthened "Ah" at this glorious sight, and even the grave faces of some of the dignitaries brightened into a friendly smile.

The name of this much-admired youth was Bartja.

[This Bartja is better known under the name of Smerdis, but on what account the Greeks gave him this name is not clear. In the cuneiform inscriptions of Bisitun or Behistun, he is called Bartja, or, according to Spiegel, Bardiya. We have chosen, for the sake of the easy pronunciation, the former, which is Rawlinson's simplified reading of the name.]

He was the son of the late, and brother of the reigning king of Persia, and had been endowed by nature with every gift that a youth of twenty years could desire for himself.



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Around his tiara was wound a blue and white turban, beneath which hung fair, golden curls of beautiful, abundant hair; his blue eyes sparkled with life and joy, kindness and high spirits, almost with sauciness; his noble features, around which the down of a manly beard was already visible, were worthy of a Grecian sculptor's chisel, and his slender but muscular figure told of strength and activity. The splendor of his apparel was proportioned to his personal beauty. A brilliant star of diamonds and turquoises glittered in the front of his tiara. An upper garment of rich white and gold brocade reaching just below the knees, was fastened round the waist with a girdle of blue and white, the royal colors of Persia. In this girdle gleamed a short, golden sword, its hilt and scabbard thickly studded with opals and sky-blue turquoises. The trousers were of the same rich material as the robe, fitting closely at the ankle, and ending within a pair of short boots of light-blue leather.

The long, wide sleeves of his robe displayed a pair of vigorous arms, adorned with many costly bracelets of gold and jewels; round his slender neck and on his broad chest lay a golden chain.

Such was the youth who first sprang on shore. He was followed by Darius, the son of Hystaspes, a young Persian of the blood royal, similar in person to Bartja, and scarcely less gorgeously apparelled than he. The third to disembark was an aged man with snow-white hair, in whose face the gentle and kind expression of childhood was united, with the intellect of a man, and the experience of old age. His dress consisted of a long purple robe with sleeves, and the yellow boots worn by the Lydians;—his whole appearance produced an impression of the greatest modesty and a total absence of pretension.

[On account of these boots, which are constantly mentioned, Croesus was named by the oracle "soft-footed."]

Yet this simple old man had been, but a few years before, the most envied of his race and age; and even in our day at two thousand years' interval, his name is used as a synonyme for the highest point of worldly riches attainable by mankind. The old man to whom we are now introduced is no other than Croesus, the dethroned king of Lydia, who was then living at the court of Cambyses, as his friend and counsellor, and had accompanied the young Bartja to Egypt, in the capacity of Mentor.

Croesus was followed by Prexaspes, the king's Ambassador, Zopyrus, the son of Megabyzus, a Persian noble, the friend of Bartja and Darius; and, lastly, by his own son, the slender, pale Gyges, who after having become dumb in his fourth year through the fearful anguish he had suffered on his father's account at the taking of Sardis, had now recovered the power of speech.



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Psamtik descended the steps to welcome the strangers. His austere, sallow face endeavored to assume a smile. The high officials in his train bowed down nearly to the ground, allowing their arms to hang loosely at their sides. The Persians, crossing their hands on their breasts, cast themselves on the earth before the heir to the Egyptian throne. When the first formalities were over, Bartja, according to the custom of his native country, but greatly to the astonishment of the populace, who were totally unaccustomed to such a sight, kissed the sallow cheek of the Egyptian prince; who shuddered at the touch of a stranger's unclean lips, then took his way to the litters waiting to convey him and his escort to the dwelling designed for them by the king, in the palace at Sais.

A portion of the crowd streamed after the strangers, but the larger number remained at their places, knowing that many a new and wonderful sight yet awaited them.

"Are you going to run after those dressed-up monkeys and children of Typhon, too?" asked an angry priest of his neighbor, a respectable tailor of Sais. "I tell you, Puhor, and the high-priest says so too, that these strangers can bring no good to the black land! I am for the good old times, when no one who cared for his life dared set foot on Egyptian soil. Now our streets are literally swarming with cheating Hebrews, and above all with those insolent Greeks whom may the gods destroy!

[The Jews were called Hebrews (Apuriu) by the Egyptians; as brought to light by Chabas. See Ebers, Aegypten I. p. 316. H. Brugsch opposes this opinion.]

"Only look, there is the third boat full of strangers! And do you know what kind of people these Persians are? The high-priest says that in the whole of their kingdom, which is as large as half the world, there is not a single temple to the gods; and that instead of giving decent burial to the dead, they leave them to be torn in pieces by dogs and vultures."

[These statements are correct, as the Persians, at the time of the dynasty of the Achaemenidae, had no temples, but used fire-altars and exposed their dead to the dogs and vultures. An impure corpse was not permitted to defile the pure earth by its decay; nor might it be committed to the fire or water for destruction, as their purity would be equally polluted by such an act. But as it was impossible to cause the dead bodies to vanish, Dakhmas or burying-places were laid out, which had to be covered with pavement and cement not less than four inches thick, and surrounded by cords to denote that the whole structure was as it were suspended in the air, and did not come in contact with the pure earth. Spiegel, Avesta II.]

"The tailor's indignation at hearing this was even greater than his astonishment, and pointing to the landing-steps, he cried:

“It is really too bad; see, there is the sixth boat full of these foreigners!”

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“Yes, it is hard indeed!” sighed the priest, “one might fancy a whole army arriving. Amasis will go on in this manner until the strangers drive him from his throne and country, and plunder and make slaves of us poor creatures, as the evil Hyksos, those scourges of Egypt, and the black Ethiopians did, in the days of old.”

“The seventh boat!” shouted the tailor.

“May my protectress Neith, the great goddess of Sais, destroy me, if I can understand the king,” complained the priest. “He sent three barks to Naukratis, that poisonous nest hated of the gods, to fetch the servants and baggage of these Persians; but instead of three, eight had to be procured, for these despisers of the gods and profaners of dead bodies have not only brought kitchen utensils, dogs, horses, carriages, chests, baskets and bales, but have dragged with them, thousands of miles, a whole host of servants. They tell me that some of them have no other work than twining of garlands and preparing ointments. Their priests too, whom they call Magi, are here with them. I should like to know what they are for? of what use is a priest where there is no temple?”

The old King Amasis received the Persian embassy shortly after their arrival with all the amiability and kindness peculiar to him.

Four days later, after having attended to the affairs of state, a duty punctually fulfilled by him every morning without exception, he went forth to walk with Croesus in the royal gardens. The remaining members of the embassy, accompanied by the crown-prince, were engaged in an excursion up the Nile to the city of Memphis.

The palace-gardens, of a royal magnificence, yet similar in their arrangement to those of Rhodopis, lay in the north-west part of Sais, near the royal citadel.

Here, under the shadow of a spreading plane-tree, and near a gigantic basin of red granite, into which an abundance of clear water flowed perpetually through the jaws of black basalt crocodiles, the two old men seated themselves.

The dethroned king, though in reality some years the elder of the two, looked far fresher and more vigorous than the powerful monarch at his side. Amasis was tall, but his neck was bent; his corpulent body was supported by weak and slender legs: and his face, though well-formed, was lined and furrowed. But a vigorous spirit sparkled in the small, flashing eyes, and an expression of raillery, sly banter, and at times, even of irony, played around his remarkably full lips. The low, broad brow, the large and beautifully-arched head bespoke great mental power, and in the changing color of his eyes one seemed to read that neither wit nor passion were wanting in the man, who, from his simple place as soldier in the ranks, had worked his way up to the throne of the Pharaohs. His voice was sharp and hard, and his movements, in comparison with the deliberation of the other members of the Egyptian court, appeared almost morbidly active.

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The attitude and bearing of his neighbor Croesus were graceful, and in every way worthy of a king. His whole manner showed that he had lived in frequent intercourse with the highest and noblest minds of Greece. Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes of Miletus, Bias of Priene, Solon of Athens, Pittakus of Lesbos, the most celebrated Hellenic philosophers, had in former and happier days been guests at the court of Croesus in Sardis. His full clear voice sounded like pure song when compared with the shrill tones of Amasis.

[Bias, a philosopher of Ionian origin, flourished about 560 B. C. and was especially celebrated for his wise maxims on morals and law. After his death, which took place during his defence of a friend in the public court, a temple was erected to him by his countrymen. Laert. Diog. I. 88.]

“Now tell me openly,” began king Pharaoh—[In English “great house,” the high gate or “sublime porte.”]—in tolerably fluent Greek, “what opinion hast thou formed of Egypt? Thy judgment possesses for me more worth than that of any other man, for three reasons: thou art better acquainted with most of the countries and nations of this earth; the gods have not only allowed thee to ascend the ladder of fortune to its utmost summit, but also to descend it, and thirdly, thou hast long been the first counsellor to the mightiest of kings. Would that my kingdom might please thee so well that thou wouldst remain here and become to me a brother. Verily, Croesus, my friend hast thou long been, though my eyes beheld thee yesterday for the first time!”

“And thou mine,” interrupted the Lydian. “I admire the courage with which thou hast accomplished that which seemed right and good in thine eyes, in spite of opposition near and around thee. I am thankful for the favor shown to the Hellenes, my friends, and I regard thee as related to me by fortune, for hast thou not also passed through all the extremes of good and evil that this life can offer?”

“With this difference,” said Amasis smiling, “that we started from opposite points; in thy lot the good came first, the evil later; whereas in my own this order has been reversed. In saying this, however,” he added, “I am supposing that my present fortune is a good for me, and that I enjoy it.”

“And I, in that case,” answered Croesus, “must be assuming that I am unhappy in what men call my present ill-fortune.”

“How can it possibly be otherwise after the loss of such enormous possessions?”

“Does happiness consist then in possession?” asked Croesus. “Is happiness itself a thing to be possessed? Nay, by no means! It is nothing but a feeling, a sensation, which the envious gods vouchsafe more often to the needy than to the mighty. The clear sight of the latter becomes dazzled by the glittering treasure, and they cannot but



suffer continual humiliation, because, conscious of possessing power to obtain much, they wage an eager war for all, and therein are continually defeated.”



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Amasis sighed, and answered: "I would I could prove thee in the wrong; but in looking back on my past life I am fain to confess that its cares began with that very hour which brought me what men call my good fortune."—"And I," interrupted Croesus, "can assure thee that I am thankful thou delayedst to come to my help, inasmuch as the hour of my overthrow was the beginning of true, unsullied happiness. When I beheld the first Persians scale the walls of Sardis, I execrated myself and the gods, life appeared odious to me, existence a curse. Fighting on, but in heart despairing, I and my people were forced to yield. A Persian raised his sword to cleave my skull—in an instant my poor dumb son had thrown himself between his father and the murderer, and for the first time after long years of silence, I heard him speak. Terror had loosened his tongue; in that dreadful hour Gyges learnt once more to speak, and I, who but the moment before had been cursing the gods, bowed down before their power. I had commanded a slave to kill me the moment I should be taken prisoner by the Persians, but now I deprived him of his sword. I was a changed man, and by degrees learnt ever more and more to subdue the rage and indignation which yet from time to time would boil up again within my soul, rebellious against my fate and my noble enemies. Thou knowest that at last I became the friend of Cyrus, and that my son grew up at his court, a free man at my side, having entirely regained the use of his speech. Everything beautiful and good that I had heard, seen or thought during my long life I treasured up now for him; he was my kingdom, my crown, my treasure. Cyrus's days of care, his nights so reft of sleep, reminded me with horror of my own former greatness, and from day to day it became more evident to me that happiness has nothing to do with our outward circumstances. Each man possesses the hidden germ in his own heart. A contented, patient mind, rejoicing much in all that is great and beautiful and yet despising not the day of small things; bearing sorrow without a murmur and sweetening it by calling to remembrance former joy; moderation in all things; a firm trust in the favor of the gods and a conviction that, all things being subject to change, so with us too the worst must pass in due season; all this helps to mature the germ of happiness, and gives us power to smile, where the man undisciplined by fate might yield to despair and fear."

Amasis listened attentively, drawing figures the while in the sand with the golden flower on his staff. At last he spoke:

"Verily, Croesus, I the great god, the 'sun of righteousness,' 'the son of Neith,' 'the lord of warlike glory,' as the Egyptians call me, am tempted to envy thee, dethroned and plundered as thou art. I have been as happy as thou art now. Once I was known through all Egypt, though only the poor son of a captain, for my light heart, happy temper, fun and high spirits. The common



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soldiers would do anything for me, my superior officers could have found much fault, but in the mad Amasis, as they called me, all was overlooked, and among my equals, (the other under-officers) there could be no fun or merry-making unless I took a share in it. My predecessor king Hophra sent us against Cyrene. Seized with thirst in the desert, we refused to go on; and a suspicion that the king intended to sacrifice us to the Greek mercenaries drove the army to open mutiny. In my usual joking manner I called out to my friends: 'You can never get on without a king, take me for your ruler; a merrier you will never find!' The soldiers caught the words. 'Amasis will be our king,' ran through the ranks from man to man, and, in a few hours more, they came to me with shouts, and acclamations of 'The good, jovial Amasis for our King!' One of my boon companions set a field-marshal's helmet on my head: I made the joke earnest, and we defeated Hophra at Momemphiis. The people joined in the conspiracy, I ascended the throne, and men pronounced me fortunate. Up to that time I had been every Egyptian's friend, and now I was the enemy of the best men in the nation.

"The priests swore allegiance to me, and accepted me as a member of their caste, but only in the hope of guiding me at their will. My former superiors in command either envied me, or wished to remain on the same terms of intercourse as formerly. But this would have been inconsistent with my new position, and have undermined my authority. One day, therefore, when the officers of the host were at one of my banquets and attempting, as usual, to maintain their old convivial footing, I showed them the golden basin in which their feet had been washed before sitting down to meat; five days later, as they were again drinking at one of my revels, I caused a golden image of the great god Ra be placed upon the richly-ornamented banqueting-table.

[Ra, with the masculine article Phra, must be regarded as the central point of the sun-worship of the Egyptians, which we consider to have been the foundation of their entire religion. He was more especially worshipped at Heliopolis. Plato, Eudoxus, and probably Pythagoras also, profited by the teaching of his priests. The obelisks, serving also as memorial monuments on which the names and deeds of great kings were recorded, were sacred to him, and Pliny remarks of them that they represented the rays of the sun. He was regarded as the god of light, the director of the entire visible creation, over which he reigned, as Osiris over the world of spirits.]

"On perceiving it, they fell down to worship. As they rose from their knees, I took the sceptre, and holding it up on high with much solemnity, exclaimed: 'In five days an artificer has transformed the despised vessel into which ye spat and in which men washed your feet, into this divine image. Such a vessel was I, but the Deity, which can fashion better and more quickly than a goldsmith, has made me your king. Bow down then before me and worship. He who henceforth refuses to obey, or is unmindful of the reverence due to the king, is guilty of death!'



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“They fell down before me, every one, and I saved my authority, but lost my friends. As I now stood in need of some other prop, I fixed on the Hellenes, knowing that in all military qualifications one Greek is worth more than five Egyptians, and that with this assistance I should be able to carry out those measures which I thought beneficial.

“I kept the Greek mercenaries always round me, I learnt their language, and it was they who brought to me the noblest human being I ever met, Pythagoras. I endeavored to introduce Greek art and manners among ourselves, seeing what folly lay in a self-willed adherence to that which has been handed down to us, when it is in itself bad and unworthy, while the good seed lay on our Egyptian soil, only waiting to be sown.

“I portioned out the whole land to suit my purposes, appointed the best police in the world, and accomplished much; but my highest aim, namely: to infuse into this country, at once so gay and so gloomy, the spirit and intellect of the Greeks, their sense of beauty in form, their love of life and joy in it, this all was shivered on the same rock which threatens me with overthrow and ruin whenever I attempt to accomplish anything new. The priests are my opponents, my masters, they hang like a dead weight upon me. Clinging with superstitious awe to all that is old and traditionary, abominating everything foreign, and regarding every stranger as the natural enemy of their authority and their teaching, they can lead the most devout and religious of all nations with a power that has scarcely any limits. For this I am forced to sacrifice all my plans, for this I see my life passing away in bondage to their severe ordinances, this will rob my death-bed of peace, and I cannot be secure that this host of proud mediators between god and man will allow me to rest even in my grave!”

“By Zeus our saviour, with all thy good fortune, thou art to be pitied!” interrupted Croesus sympathetically, “I understand thy misery; for though I have met with many an individual who passed through life darkly and gloomily, I could not have believed that an entire race of human beings existed, to whom a gloomy, sullen heart was as natural as a poisonous tooth to the serpent. Yet it is true, that on my journey hither and during my residence at this court I have seen none but morose and gloomy countenances among the priesthood. Even the youths, thy immediate attendants, are never seen to smile; though cheerfulness, that sweet gift of the gods, usually belongs to the young, as flowers to spring.”

“Thou errest,” answered Amasis, “in believing this gloom to be a universal characteristic of the Egyptians. It is true that our religion requires much serious thought. There are few nations, however, who have so largely the gift of bantering fun and joke: or who on the occasion of a festival, can so entirely forget themselves and everything else but the enjoyments of the moment;



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but the very sight of a stranger is odious to the priests, and the moroseness which thou observest is intended as retaliation on me for my alliance with the strangers. Those very boys, of whom thou spakest, are the greatest torment of my life. They perform for me the service of slaves, and obey my slightest nod. One might imagine that the parents who devote their children to this service, and who are the highest in rank among the priesthood, would be the most obedient and reverential servants of the king whom they profess to honor as divine; but believe me, Croesus, just in this very act of devotion, which no ruler can refuse to accept without giving offence, lies the most crafty, scandalous calculation. Each of these youths is my keeper, my spy. They watch my smallest actions and report them at once to the priests.”

“But how canst thou endure such an existence? Why not banish these spies and select servants from the military caste, for instance? They would be quite as useful as the priests.”

“Ah! if I only could, if I dared!” exclaimed Amasis loudly. And then, as if frightened at his own rashness, he continued in a low voice, “I believe that even here I am being watched. To-morrow I will have that grove of fig-trees yonder uprooted. The young priest there, who seems so fond of gardening, has other fruit in his mind besides the half-ripe figs that he is so slowly dropping into his basket. While his hand is plucking the figs, his ear gathers the words that fall from the mouth of his king.”

“But, by our father Zeus, and by Apollo—”

“Yes, I understand thy indignation and I share it; but every position has its duties, and as a king of a people who venerate tradition as the highest divinity, I must submit, at least in the main, to the ceremonies handed down through thousands of years. Were I to burst these fetters, I know positively that at my death my body would remain unburied; for, know that the priests sit in judgment over every corpse, and deprive the condemned of rest, even in the grave.”

[This well-known custom among the ancient Egyptians is confirmed, not only by many Greek narrators, but by the laboriously erased inscriptions discovered in the chambers of some tombs.]

“Why care about the grave?” cried Croesus, becoming angry. “We live for life, not for death!”

“Say rather,” answered Amasis rising from his seat, “we, with our Greek minds, believe a beautiful life to be the highest good. But Croesus, I was begotten and nursed by Egyptian parents, nourished on Egyptian food, and though I have accepted much that is Greek, am still, in my innermost being, an Egyptian. What has been sung to us in our

childhood, and praised as sacred in our youth, lingers on in the heart until the day which sees us embalmed as mummies. I am an old man and have but a short span yet to run, before I reach the landmark which separates us from that farther country. For the sake of life's few remaining days, shall I willingly mar Death's thousands of years? No, my friend, in this point at least I have remained an Egyptian, in believing, like the rest of my countrymen, that the happiness of a future life in the kingdom of Osiris, depends on the preservation of my body, the habitation of the soul.



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[Each human soul was considered as a part of the world-soul Osiris, was united to him after the death of the body, and thenceforth took the name of Osiris. The Egyptian Cosmos consisted of the three great realms, the Heavens, the Earth and the Depths. Over the vast ocean which girdles the vault of heaven, the sun moves in a boat or car drawn by the planets and fixed stars. On this ocean too the great constellations circle in their ships, and there is the kingdom of the blissful gods, who sit enthroned above this heavenly ocean under a canopy of stars. The mouth of this great stream is in the East, where the sun-god rises from the mists and is born again as a child every morning. The surface of the earth is inhabited by human beings having a share in the three great cosmic kingdoms. They receive their soul from the heights of heaven, the seat and source of light; their material body is of the earth; and the appearance or outward form by which one human being is distinguished from another at sight—his phantom or shadow—belongs to the depths. At death, soul, body, and shadow separate from one another. The soul to return to the place from whence it came, to Heaven, for it is a part of God (of Osiris); the body, to be committed to the earth from which it was formed in the image of its creator; the phantom or shadow, to descend into the depths, the kingdom of shadows. The gate to this kingdom was placed in the West among the sunset hills, where the sun goes down daily,—where he dies. Thence arise the changeful and corresponding conceptions connected with rising and setting, arriving and departing, being born and dying. The careful preservation of the body after death from destruction, not only through the process of inward decay, but also through violence or accident, was in the religion of ancient Egypt a principal condition (perhaps introduced by the priests on sanitary grounds) on which depended the speedy deliverance of the soul, and with this her early, appointed union with the source of Light and Good, which two properties were, in idea, one and indivisible. In the Egyptian conceptions the soul was supposed to remain, in a certain sense, connected with the body during a long cycle of solar years. She could, however, quit the body from time to time at will, and could appear to mortals in various forms and places; these appearances differed according to the hour, and were prescribed in exact words and delineations.]

“But enough of these matters; thou wilt find it difficult to enter into such thoughts. Tell me rather what thou thinkest of our temples and pyramids.”



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Croesus, after reflecting a moment, answered with a smile: "Those huge pyramidal masses of stone seem to me creations of the boundless desert, the gaily painted temple colonnades to be the children of the Spring; but though the sphinxes lead up to your temple gates, and seem to point the way into the very shrines themselves, the sloping fortress-like walls of the Pylons, those huge isolated portals, appear as if placed there to repel entrance. Your many-colored hieroglyphics likewise attract the gaze, but baffle the inquiring spirit by the mystery that lies within their characters. The images of your manifold gods are everywhere to be seen; they crowd on our gaze, and yet who knows not that their real is not their apparent significance? that they are mere outward images of thoughts accessible only to the few, and, as I have heard, almost incomprehensible in their depth? My curiosity is excited everywhere, and my interest awakened, but my warm love of the beautiful feels itself in no way attracted. My intellect might strain to penetrate the secrets of your sages, but my heart and mind can never be at home in a creed which views life as a short pilgrimage to the grave, and death as the only true life!"

"And yet," said Amasis, "Death has for us too his terrors, and we do all in our power to evade his grasp. Our physicians would not be celebrated and esteemed as they are, if we did not believe that their skill could prolong our earthly existence. This reminds me of the oculist Nebenchari whom I sent to Susa, to the king. Does he maintain his reputation? is the king content with him?"

"Very much so," answered Croesus. "He has been of use to many of the blind; but the king's mother is alas! still sightless. It was Nebenchari who first spoke to Cambyses of the charms of thy daughter Tachot. But we deplore that he understands diseases of the eye alone. When the Princess Atossa lay ill of fever, he was not to be induced to bestow a word of counsel."

"That is very natural; our physicians are only permitted to treat one part of the body. We have aurists, dentists and oculists, surgeons for fractures of the bone, and others for internal diseases. By the ancient priestly law a dentist is not allowed to treat a deaf man, nor a surgeon for broken bones a patient who is suffering from a disease of the bowels, even though he should have a first rate knowledge of internal complaints. This law aims at securing a great degree of real and thorough knowledge; an aim indeed, pursued by the priests (to whose caste the physicians belong) with a most praiseworthy earnestness in all branches of science. Yonder lies the house of the high-priest Neithotep, whose knowledge of astronomy and geometry was so highly praised, even by Pythagoras. It lies next to the porch leading into the temple of the goddess Neith, the protectress of Sais. Would I could show thee the sacred grove with its magnificent trees, the splendid pillars of the temple



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with capitals modelled from the lotus-flower, and the colossal chapel which I caused to be wrought from a single piece of granite, as an offering to the goddess; but alas! entrance is strictly refused to strangers by the priests. Come, let us seek my wife and daughter; they have conceived an affection for thee, and indeed it is my wish that thou shouldst gain a friendly feeling towards this poor maiden before she goes forth with thee to the strange land, and to the strange nation whose princess she is to become. Wilt thou not adopt and take her under thy care?"

"On that thou may'st with fullest confidence rely," replied Croesus with warmth, returning the pressure of Amasis' hand. "I will protect thy Nitetis as if I were her father; and she will need my help, for the apartments of the women in the Persian palaces are dangerous ground. But she will meet with great consideration. Cambyses may be contented with his choice, and will be highly gratified that thou hast entrusted him with thy fairest child. Nebenchari had only spoken of Tachot, thy second daughter."

"Nevertheless I will send my beautiful Nitetis. Tachot is so tender, that she could scarcely endure the fatigues of the journey and the pain of separation. Indeed were I to follow the dictates of my own heart, Nitetis should never leave us for Persia. But Egypt stands in need of peace, and I was a king before I became a father!"

CHAPTER V.

The other members of the Persian embassy had returned to Sais from their excursion up the Nile to the pyramids. Prexaspes alone, the ambassador from Cambyses, had already set out for Persia, in order to inform the king of the successful issue of his suit.

The palace of Amasis was full of life and stir. The huge building was filled in all parts by the followers of the embassy, nearly three hundred in number, and by the high guests themselves, to whom every possible attention was paid. The courts of the palace swarmed with guards and officials, with young priests and slaves, all in splendid festal raiment.

On this day it was the king's intention to make an especial display of the wealth and splendor of his court, at a festival arranged in honor of his daughter's betrothal.

The lofty reception-hall opening on to the gardens, with its ceiling sown with thousands of golden stars and supported by gaily-painted columns, presented a magic appearance. Lamps of colored papyrus hung against the walls and threw a strange light on the scene, something like that when the sun's rays strike through colored glass. The space between the columns and the walls was filled with choice plants, palms, oleanders, pomegranates, oranges and roses, behind which an invisible band of harp



and flute-players was stationed, who received the guests with strains of monotonous, solemn music.

The floor of this hall was paved in black and white, and in the middle stood elegant tables covered with dishes of all kinds, cold roast meats, sweets, well-arranged baskets of fruit and cake, golden jugs of wine, glass drinking-cups and artistic flower-vases.



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A multitude of richly-dressed slaves under direction of the high-steward, busied themselves in handing these dishes to the guests, who, either standing around, or reclining on sumptuous seats, entertained themselves in conversation with their friends.

Both sexes and all ages were to be found in this assembly. As the women entered, they received charming little nosegays from the young priests in the personal service of the king, and many a youth of high degree appeared in the hall with flowers, which he not only offered to her he loved best, but held up for her to smell.

The Egyptian men, who were dressed as we have already seen them at the reception of the Persian embassy, behaved towards the women with a politeness that might almost be termed submissive. Among the latter few could pretend to remarkable beauty, though there were many bewitching almond-shaped eyes, whose loveliness was heightened by having their lids dyed with the eye-paint called "mestem." The majority wore their hair arranged in the same manner; the wealth of waving brown locks floated back over the shoulders and was brushed behind the ears, one braid being left on each side to hang over the temples to the breast. A broad diadem confined these locks, which as the maids knew, were quite as often the wig-maker's work as Nature's. Many ladies of the court wore above their foreheads a lotus-flower, whose stem drooped on the hair at the back.

They carried fans of bright feathers in their delicate hands. These were loaded with rings; the finger-nails were stained red, according to Egyptian custom, and gold or silver bands were worn above the elbow, and at the wrists and ankles.

[This custom (of staining finger-nails) is still prevalent in the East; the plant Shenna, *Laosonia spinosa*, called by Pliny XIII. Cyprus, being used for the purpose. The Egyptian government has prohibited the dye, but it will be difficult to uproot the ancient custom. The pigment for coloring the eyelids, mentioned in the text, is also still employed. The Papyrus Ebers alludes to the Arabian kohl or antimony, which is frequently mentioned under the name of "mestem" on monuments belonging to the time of the Pharaohs.]

Their robes were beautiful and costly, and in many cases so cut as to leave the right breast uncovered. Bartja, the young Persian prince, among the men, and Nitetis, the Pharaoh's daughter, among the women, were equally conspicuous for their superior beauty, grace and charms. The royal maiden wore a transparent rose-colored robe, in her black hair were fresh roses, she walked by the side of her sister, the two robed alike, but Nitetis pale as the lotus-flower in her mother's hair.

Ladice, the queen, by birth a Greek, and daughter of Battus of Cyrene, walked by the side of Amasis and presented the young Persians to her children. A light lace robe was thrown over her garment of purple, embroidered with gold; and on her beautiful Grecian head she wore the Urmus serpent, the ornament peculiar to Egyptian queens.

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Her countenance was noble yet charming, and every movement betrayed the grace only to be imparted by a Greek education.

Amasis, in making choice of this queen, after the death of his second wife, (the Egyptian Tentcheta, mother of Psamtik the heir to the throne,) had followed his prepossession in favor of the Greek nation and defied the wrath of the priests.

The two girls at Ladice's side, Tachot and Nitetis, were called twin-sisters, but showed no signs of that resemblance usually to be found in twins.

Tachot was a fair, blue-eyed girl, small, and delicately built; Nitetis, on the other hand, tall and majestic, with black hair and eyes, evinced in every action that she was of royal blood.

"How pale thou look'st, my child!" said Ladice, kissing Nitetis' cheek. "Be of good courage, and meet thy future bravely. Here is the noble Bartja, the brother of thy future husband."

Nitetis raised her dark, thoughtful eyes and fixed them long and enquiringly on the beautiful youth. He bowed low before the blushing maiden, kissed her garment, and said:

"I salute thee, as my future queen and sister! I can believe that thy heart is sore at parting from thy home, thy parents, brethren and sisters; but be of good courage; thy husband is a great hero, and a powerful king; our mother is the noblest of women, and among the Persians the beauty and virtue of woman is as much revered as the life-giving light of the sun. Of thee, thou sister of the lily Nitetis, whom, by her side I might venture to call the rose, I beg forgiveness, for robbing thee of thy dearest friend."

As he said these words he looked eagerly into Tachot's beautiful blue eyes; she bent low, pressing her hand upon her heart, and gazed on him long after Amasis had drawn him away to a seat immediately opposite the dancing-girls, who were just about to display their skill for the entertainment of the guests. A thin petticoat was the only clothing of these girls, who threw and wound their flexible limbs to a measure played on harp and tambourine. After the dance appeared Egyptian singers and buffoons for the further amusement of the company.

At length some of the courtiers forsook the hall, their grave demeanor being somewhat overcome by intoxication.

[Unfortunately women, as well as men, are to be seen depicted on the monuments in an intoxicated condition. One man is being carried home, like a log of wood, on the heads of his servants. Wilkinson II. 168. Another is standing on his head II. 169. and several ladies are in the act of returning the excessive quantity which they have drunk.



Wilkinson II. 167. At the great Techu-festival at Dendera intoxication seems to have been as much commanded as at the festivals of Dionysus under the Ptolemies, one of whom (Ptolemy Dionysus) threatened those who remained sober with the punishment of death. But intoxication was in general looked upon by the Egyptians as



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a forbidden and despicable vice. In the Papyrus Anastasi IV., for instance, we read these words on a drunkard: "Thou art as a sanctuary without a divinity, as a house without bread," and further: "How carefully should men avoid beer (hek)." A number of passages in the Papyrus denounce drunkards.]

The women were carried home in gay litters by slaves with torches; and only the highest military commanders, the Persian ambassadors and a few officials, especial friends of Amasis, remained behind. These were retained by the master of the ceremonies, and conducted to a richly-ornamented saloon, where a gigantic wine-bowl standing on a table adorned in the Greek fashion, invited to a drinking-bout.

Amasis was seated on a high arm-chair at the head of the table; at his left the youthful Bartja, at his right the aged Croesus. Besides these and the other Persians, Theodorus and Ibykus, the friends of Polykrates, already known to us, and Aristomachus, now commander of the Greek body-guard, were among the king's guests.

Amasis, whom we have just heard in such grave discourse with Croesus, now indulged in jest and satire. He seemed once more the wild officer, the bold reveller of the olden days.

His sparkling, clever jokes, at times playful, at times scornful, flew round among the revellers. The guests responded in loud, perhaps often artificial laughter, to their king's jokes, goblet after goblet was emptied, and the rejoicings had reached their highest point, when suddenly the master of the ceremonies appeared, bearing a small gilded mummy; and displaying it to the gaze of the assembly, exclaimed. "Drink, jest, and be merry, for all too soon ye shall become like unto this!"

[Wilkinson gives drawings of these mummies (II. 410.) hundreds of which were placed in the tombs, and have been preserved to us. Lucian was present at a banquet, when they were handed round. The Greeks seem to have adopted this custom, but with their usual talent for beautifying all they touched, substituted a winged figure of death for the mummy. Maxims similar to the following one are by no means rare. "Cast off all care; be mindful only of pleasure until the day cometh when then must depart on the journey, whose goal is the realm of silence!" Copied from the tomb of Neferhotep to Abd-el-Qurnah.]

"Is it your custom thus to introduce death at all your banquets?" said Bartja, becoming serious, "or is this only a jest devised for to-day by your master of the ceremonies?"

"Since the earliest ages," answered Amasis, "it has been our custom to display these mummies at banquets, in order to increase the mirth of the revellers, by reminding them that one must enjoy the time while it is here. Thou, young butterfly, hast still many a

long and joyful year before thee; but we, Croesus, we old men, must hold by this firmly.
Fill the goblets, cup-bearer, let not one moment

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of our lives be wasted! Thou canst drink well, thou golden-haired Persian! Truly the great gods have endowed thee not only with beautiful eyes, and blooming beauty, but with a good throat! Let me embrace thee, thou glorious youth, thou rogue! What thinkest thou Croesus? my daughter Tachot can speak of nothing else than of this beardless youth, who seems to have quite turned her little head with his sweet looks and words. Thou needest not to blush, young madcap! A man such as thou art, may well look at king's daughters; but wert thou thy father Cyrus himself, I could not allow my Tachot to leave me for Persia!"

"Father!" whispered the crown-prince Psamtik, interrupting this conversation. "Father, take care what you say, and remember Phanes." The king turned a frowning glance on his son; but following his advice, took much less part in the conversation, which now became more general.

The seat at the banquet-table, occupied by Aristomachus, placed him nearly opposite to Croesus, on whom, in total silence and without once indulging in a smile at the king's jests, his eyes had been fixed from the beginning of the revel. When the Pharaoh ceased to speak, he accosted Croesus suddenly with the following question: "I would know, Lydian, whether the snow still covered the mountains, when ye left Persia."

Smiling, and a little surprised at this strange speech, Croesus answered: "Most of the Persian mountains were green when we started for Egypt four months ago; but there are heights in the land of Cambyses on which, even in the hottest seasons, the snow never melts, and the glimmer of their white crests we could still perceive, as we descended into the plains."

The Spartan's face brightened visibly, and Croesus, attracted by this serious, earnest man, asked his name. "My name is Aristomachus."

"That name seems known to me."

"You were acquainted with many Hellenes, and my name is common among them."

"Your dialect would bespeak you my opinion a Spartan."

"I was one once."

"And now no more?"

"He who forsakes his native land without permission, is worthy of death."

"Have you forsaken it with your own free-will?"



“Yes.”

“For what reason?”

“To escape dishonor.”

“What was your crime?”

“I had committed none.”

“You were accused unjustly?”

“Yes.”

“Who was the author of your ill-fortune?”

“Yourself.”

Croesus started from his seat. The serious tone and gloomy face of the Spartan proved that this was no jest, and those who sat near the speakers, and had been following this strange dialogue, were alarmed and begged Aristomachus to explain his words.

He hesitated and seemed unwilling to speak; at last, however, at the king’s summons, he began thus:



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“In obedience to the oracle, you, Croesus, had chosen us Lacedaemonians, as the most powerful among the Hellenes, to be your allies against the might of Persia; and you gave us gold for the statue of Apollo on Mount Thornax. The ephori, on this, resolved to present you with a gigantic bronze wine-bowl, richly wrought. I was chosen as bearer of this gift. Before reaching Sardis our ship was wrecked in a storm. The wine-cup sank with it, and we reached Samos with nothing but our lives. On returning home I was accused by enemies, and those who grudged my good fortune, of having sold both ship and wine-vessel to the Samians. As they could not convict me of the crime, and had yet determined on my ruin, I was sentenced to two days’ and nights’ exposure on the pillory. My foot was chained to it during the night; but before the morning of disgrace dawned, my brother brought me secretly a sword, that my honor might be saved, though at the expense of my life. But I could not die before revenging myself on the men who had worked my ruin; and therefore, cutting the manacled foot from my leg, I escaped, and hid in the rushes on the banks of the Furotas. My brother brought me food and drink in secret; and after two months I was able to walk on the wooden leg you now see. Apollo undertook my revenge; he never misses his mark, and my two worst opponents died of the plague. Still I durst not return home, and at length took ship from Gythium to fight against the Persians under you, Croesus. On landing at Teos, I heard that you were king no longer, that the mighty Cyrus, the father of yonder beautiful youth, had conquered the powerful province of Lydia in a few weeks, and reduced the richest of kings to beggary.”

Every guest gazed at Aristomachus in admiration. Croesus shook his hard hand; and Bartja exclaimed: “Spartan, I would I could take you back with me to Susa, that my friends there might see what I have seen myself, the most courageous, the most honorable of men!”

“Believe me, boy,” returned Aristomachus smiling, every Spartan would have done the same. In our country it needs more courage to be a coward than a brave man.”

“And you, Bartja,” cried Darius, the Persian king’s cousin, “could you have borne to stand at the pillory?” Bartja reddened, but it was easy to see that he too preferred death to disgrace.

“Zopyrus, what say you?” asked Darius of the third young Persian.

“I could mutilate my own limbs for love of you two,” answered he, grasping unobserved the hands of his two friends.

With an ironical smile Psantik sat watching this scene—the pleased faces of Amasis, Croesus and Gyges, the meaning glances of the Egyptians, and the contented looks with which Aristomachus gazed on the young heroes.



Ibykus now told of the oracle which had promised Aristomachus a return to his native land, on the approach of the men from the snowy mountains, and at the same time, mentioned the hospitable house of Rhodopis.



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On hearing this name Psamtik grew restless; Croesus expressed a wish to form the acquaintance of the Thracian matron, of whom AEsop had related so much that was praiseworthy; and, as the other guests, many of whom had lost consciousness through excessive drinking, were leaving the hall, the dethroned monarch, the poet, the sculptor and the Spartan hero made an agreement to go to Naukratis the next day, and there enjoy the conversation of Rhodopis.

CHAPTER VI.

On the night following the banquet just described, Amasis allowed himself only three hours' rest. On this, as on every other morning, the young priests wakened him at the first cock-crow, conducted him as usual to the bath, arrayed him in the royal vestments and led him to the altar in the court of the palace, where in presence of the populace he offered sacrifice. During the offering the priests sang prayers in a loud voice, enumerated the virtues of their king, and, that blame might in no case light on the head of their ruler, made his bad advisers responsible for every deadly sin committed in ignorance.

They exhorted him to the performance of good deeds, while extolling his virtues; read aloud profitable portions of the holy writings, containing the deeds and sayings of great men, and then conducted him to his apartments, where letters and information from all parts of the kingdom awaited him.

Amasis was in the habit of observing most faithfully these daily-repeated ceremonies and hours of work; the remaining portion of the day he spent as it pleased him, and generally in cheerful society.

The priests reproached him with this, alleging that such a life was not suited to a monarch; and on one occasion he had thus replied to the indignant high-priest: "Look at this bow! if always bent it must lose its power, but, if used for half of each day and then allowed to rest, it will remain strong and useful till the string breaks."

Amasis had just signed his name to the last letter, granting the petition of a Nornarch—[Administrator of a Province]—for money to carry on different embankments rendered necessary by the last inundation, when a servant entered, bringing a request from the crown-prince Psamtik for an audience of a few minutes.

Amasis, who till this moment had been smiling cheerfully at the cheering reports from all parts of the country, now became suddenly serious and thoughtful. After long delay he answered: "Go and inform the prince that he may appear."

Psamtik appeared, pale and gloomy as ever; he bowed low and reverentially, on entering his father's presence.



Amasis nodded silently in return, and then asked abruptly and sternly: "What is thy desire? my time is limited."

"For your son, more than for others," replied the prince with quivering lips. "Seven times have I petitioned for the great favor, which thou grantest for the first time to-day."



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“No reproaches! I suspect the reason of thy visit. Thou desirest an answer to thy doubts as to the birth of thy sister Nitetis.”

“I have no curiosity; I come rather to warn thee, and to remind thee that I am not the only one who is acquainted with this mystery.”

“Speakest thou of Phanes?”

“Of whom else should I speak? He is banished from Egypt and from his own country, and must leave Naukratis in a few days. What guarantee hast thou, that he will not betray us to the Persians?”

“The friendship and kindness which I have always shown him.”

“Dost thou believe in the gratitude of men?”

“No! but I rely on my own discernment of character. Phanes will not betray us! he is my friend, I repeat it!”

“Thy friend perhaps, but my mortal enemy!”

“Then stand on thy guard! I have nothing to fear from him.”

“For thyself perhaps nought, but for our country! O father, reflect that though as thy son I may be hateful in thine eyes, yet as Egypt’s future I ought to be near thy heart. Remember, that at thy death, which may the gods long avert, I shall represent the existence of this glorious land as thou dost now; my fall will be the ruin of thine house, of Egypt!”

Amasis became more and more serious, and Psamtik went on eagerly: “Thou knowest that I am right! Phanes can betray our land to any foreign enemy; he is as intimately acquainted with it as we are; and beside this, he possesses a secret, the knowledge of which would convert our most powerful ally into a most formidable enemy.”

“There thou art in error. Though not mine, Nitetis is a king’s daughter and will know how to win the love of her husband.”

“Were she the daughter of a god, she could not save thee from Cambyses’ wrath, if he discovers the treachery; lying is to a Persian the worst of crimes, to be deceived the greatest disgrace; thou hast deceived the highest and proudest of the nation, and what can one inexperienced girl avail, when hundreds of women, deeply versed in intrigue and artifice, are striving for the favor of their lord?”

“Hatred and revenge are good masters in the art of rhetoric,” said Amasis in a cutting tone. “And think’st thou then, oh, foolish son, that I should have undertaken such a



dangerous game without due consideration? Phanes may tell the Persians what he likes, he can never prove his point. I, the father, Ladice the mother must know best whether Nitetis is our child or not. We call her so, who dare aver the contrary? If it please Phanes to betray our land to any other enemy beside the Persians, let him; I fear nothing! Thou wouldst have me ruin a man who has been my friend, to whom I owe much gratitude, who has served me long and faithfully; and this without offence from his side. Rather will I shelter him from thy revenge, knowing as I do the impure source from which it springs.”



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“My father!”

“Thou desirest the ruin of this man, because he hindered thee from taking forcible possession of the granddaughter of Rhodopis, and because thine own incapacity moved me to place him in thy room as commander of the troops. Ah! thou growest pale! Verily, I owe Phanes thanks for confiding to me your vile intentions, and so enabling me to bind my friends and supporters, to whom Rhodopis is precious, more firmly to my throne.”

“And is it thus thou speakest of these strangers, my father? dost thou thus forget the ancient glory of Egypt? Despise me, if thou wilt; I know thou lovest me not; but say not that to be great we need the help of strangers! Look back on our history! Were we not greatest when our gates were closed to the stranger, when we depended on ourselves and our own strength, and lived according to the ancient laws of our ancestors and our gods? Those days beheld the most distant lands subjugated by Rameses, and heard Egypt celebrated in the whole world as its first and greatest nation. What are we now? The king himself calls beggars and foreigners the supporters of his throne, and devises a petty stratagem to secure the friendship of a power over whom we were victorious before the Nile was infested by these strangers. Egypt was then a mighty Queen in glorious apparel; she is now a painted woman decked out in tinsel!”

[Rameses the Great, son of Sethos, reigned over Egypt 1394-1328 B. C. He was called Sesostrius by the Greeks; see Lepsius (Chron. d. Aegypten, p. 538.) on the manner in which this confusion of names arose. Egypt attained the zenith of her power under this king, whose army, according to Diodorus (I. 53-58). consisted of 600,000 foot and 24,000 horsemen, 27,000 chariots and 400 ships of war. With these hosts he subdued many of the Asiatic and African nations, carving his name and likeness, as trophies of victory, on the rocks of the conquered countries. Herodotus speaks of having seen two of these inscriptions himself (II. 102-106.) and two are still to be found not far from Bairut. His conquests brought vast sums of tribute into Egypt. Tacitus annal. II. 60. and these enabled him to erect magnificent buildings in the whole length of his land from Nubia to Tanis, but more especially in Thebes, the city in which he resided. One of the obelisks erected by Rameses at Heliopolis is now standing in the Place de la Concorde at Paris, and has been lately translated by E. Chabas. On the walls of the yet remaining palaces and temples, built under this mighty king, we find, even to this day, thousands of pictures representing himself, his armed hosts, the many nations subdued by the power of his arms, and the divinities to whose favor he believed these victories were owing. Among the latter Ammon and Bast seem to have received his especial veneration, and, on the other hand, we read in these inscriptions that the gods were very willing to grant the wishes of their favorite.

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A poetical description of the wars he waged with the Cheta is to be found in long lines of hieroglyphics on the south wall of the hall of columns of Rameses II. at Karnal, also at Luxor and in the Sallier Papyrus, and an epic poem referring to his mighty deeds in no less than six different places.]

“Have a care what thou sayest!” shouted Amasis stamping on the floor. “Egypt was never so great, so flourishing as now! Rameses carried our arms into distant lands and earned blood; through my labors the products of our industry have been carried to all parts of the world and instead of blood, have brought us treasure and blessing. Rameses caused the blood and sweat of his subjects to flow in streams for the honor of his own great name; under my rule their blood flows rarely, and the sweat of their brow only in works of usefulness. Every citizen can now end his days in prosperity and comfort. Ten thousand populous cities rise on the shores of the Nile, not a foot of the soil lies untilled, every child enjoys the protection of law and justice, and every ill-doer shuns the watchful eye of the authorities.

“In case of attack from without, have we not, as defenders of those god-given bulwarks, our cataracts, our sea and our deserts, the finest army that ever bore arms? Thirty thousand Hellenes beside our entire Egyptian military caste? such is the present condition of Egypt! Rameses purchased the bright tinsel of empty fame with the blood and tears of his people. To me they are indebted for the pure gold of a peaceful welfare as citizens—to me and to my predecessors, the Saitic kings!”

[The science of fortification was very fairly understood by the ancient Egyptians. Walled and battlemented forts are to be seen depicted on their monuments. We have already endeavored to show (see our work on Egypt. I. 78 and following) that, on the northeast, Egypt defended from Asiatic invasion by a line of forts extending from Pelusium to the Red Sea.]

“And yet I tell thee,” cried the prince, “that a worm is gnawing at the root of Egypt’s greatness and her life. This struggle for riches and splendor corrupts the hearts of the people, foreign luxury has given a deadly blow to the simple manners of our citizens, and many an Egyptian has been taught by the Greeks to scoff at the gods of his fathers. Every day brings news of bloody strife between the Greek mercenaries and our native soldiery, between our own people and the strangers. The shepherd and his flock are at variance; the wheels of the state machinery are grinding one another and thus the state itself, into total ruin. This once, father, though never again, I must speak out clearly what is weighing on my heart. While engaged in contending with the priests, thou hast seen with calmness the young might of Persia roll on from the East, consuming the nations on its way, and, like a devouring monster, growing more and more formidable from every fresh



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prey. Thine aid was not, as thou hadst intended, given to the Lydians and Babylonians against the enemy, but to the Greeks in the building of temples to their false gods. At last resistance seemed hopeless; a whole hemisphere with its rulers lay in submission at the feet of Persia; but even then the gods willed Egypt a chance of deliverance. Cambyses desired thy daughter in marriage. Thou, however, too weak to sacrifice thine own flesh and blood for the good of all, hast substituted another maiden, not thine own child, as an offering to the mighty monarch; and at the same time, in thy soft-heartedness, wilt spare the life of a stranger in whose hand he the fortunes of this realm, and who will assuredly work its ruin; unless indeed, worn out by internal dissension, it perish even sooner from its own weakness!"

Thus far Amasis had listened to these revilings of all he held dearest in silence, though pale, and trembling with rage; but now he broke forth in a voice, the trumpet-like sound of which pealed through the wide hall: "Know'st thou not then, thou boasting and revengeful son of evil, thou future destroyer of this ancient and glorious kingdom, know'st thou not whose life must be the sacrifice, were not my children, and the dynasty which I have founded, dearer to me than the welfare of the whole realm? Thou, Psamtik, thou art the man, branded by the gods, feared by men—the man to whose heart love and friendship are strangers, whose face is never seen to smile, nor his soul known to feel compassion! It is not, however, through thine own sin that thy nature is thus unblessed, that all thine undertakings end unhappily. Give heed, for now I am forced to relate what I had hoped long to keep secret from thine ears. After dethroning my predecessor, I forced him to give me his sister Tentcheta in marriage. She loved me; a year after marriage there was promise of a child. During the night preceding thy birth I fell asleep at the bedside of my wife. I dreamed that she was lying on the shores of the Nile, and complained to me of pain in the breast. Bending down, I beheld a cypress-tree springing from her heart. It grew larger and larger, black and spreading, twined its roots around thy mother and strangled her. A cold shiver seized me, and I was on the point of flying from the spot, when a fierce hurricane came from the East, struck the tree and overthrew it, so that its spreading branches were cast into the Nile. Then the waters ceased to flow; they congealed, and, in place of the river, a gigantic mummy lay before me. The towns on its banks dwindled into huge funereal urns, surrounding the vast corpse of the Nile as in a tomb. At this I awoke and caused the interpreters of dreams to be summoned. None could explain the vision, till at last the priests of the Libyan Ammon gave me the following interpretation 'Tentcheta will die in giving birth to a son. The cypress, which strangled its mother, is this gloomy, unhappy man. In his days a people shall come from the East and shall make of the Nile, that is of the Egyptians, dead bodies, and of their cities ruinous heaps; these are the urns for the dead, which thou sawest.'



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Psamtik listened as if turned into stone; his father continued; "Thy mother died in giving birth to thee; fiery-red hair, the mark of the sons of Typhon, grew around thy brow; thou becam'st a gloomy man. Misfortune pursued thee and robbed thee of a beloved wife and four of thy children. The astrologers computed that even as I had been born under the fortunate sign of Amman, so thy birth had been watched over by the rise of the awful planet Seb. Thou . . ." But here Amasis broke off, for Psamtik, in the anguish produced by these fearful disclosures had given way, and with sobs and groans, cried:

"Cease, cruel father! spare me at least the bitter words, that I am the only son in Egypt who is hated by his father without cause!"

Amasis looked down on the wretched man who had sunk to the earth before him, his face hidden in the folds of his robe, and the father's wrath was changed to compassion. He thought of Psamtik's mother, dead forty years before, and felt he had been cruel in inflicting this poisonous wound on her son's soul. It was the first time for years, that he had been able to feel towards this cold strange man, as a father and a comforter. For the first time he saw tears in the cold eyes of his son, and could feel the joy of wiping them away. He seized the opportunity at once, and bending clown over the groaning form, kissed his forehead, raised him from the ground and said gently:

"Forgive my anger, my son! the words that have grieved thee came not from my heart, but were spoken in the haste of wrath. Many years hast thou angered me by thy coldness, hardness and obstinacy; to-day thou hast wounded me again in my most sacred feelings; this hurried me into an excess of wrath. But now all is right between us. Our natures are so diverse that our innermost feelings will never be one, but at least we can act in concert for the future, and show forbearance one towards the other."

In silence Psamtik bowed down and kissed his father's robe "Not so," exclaimed the latter; "rather let my lips receive thy kiss, as is meet and fitting between father and son! Thou needest not to think again of the evil dream I have related. Dreams are phantoms, and even if sent by the gods, the interpreters thereof are human and erring. Thy hand trembles still, thy cheeks are white as thy robe. I was hard towards thee, harder than a father. . . ."

"Harder than a stranger to strangers," interrupted his son. "Thou hast crushed and broken me, and if till now my face has seldom worn a smile, from this day forward it can be naught but a mirror of my inward misery."

"Not so," said Amasis, laying his hand on his son's shoulder. "If I wound, I can also heal. Tell me the dearest wish of thy heart, it shall be granted thee!"

Psamtik's eyes flashed, his sallow cheeks glowed for a moment, and he answered without consideration, though in a voice still trembling from the shock he had just received: "Deliver Phanes, my enemy, into my power!"



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The king remained a few moments in deep thought, then answered: "I knew what thou wouldst ask, and will fulfil thy desire: but I would rather thou hadst asked the half of my treasures. A thousand voices within warn me that I am about to do an unworthy deed and a ruinous—ruinous for myself, for thee, the kingdom and our house. Reflect before acting, and remember, whatever thou mayst meditate against Phanes, not a hair of Rhodopis' head shall be touched. Also, that the persecution of my poor friend is to remain a secret from the Greeks. Where shall I find his equal as a commander, an adviser and a companion? He is not yet in thy power, however, and I advise thee to remember, that though thou mayst be clever for an Egyptian, Phanes is a clever Greek. I will remind thee too of thy solemn oath to renounce the grandchild of Rhodopis. Methinks vengeance is dearer to thee than love, and the amends I offer will therefore be acceptable! As to Egypt, I repeat once again, she was never more flourishing than now; a fact which none dream of disputing, except the priests, and those who retail their foolish words. And now give ear, if thou wouldst know the origin of Nitetis. Self-interest will enjoin secrecy."

Psamtik listened eagerly to his father's communication, indicating his gratitude at the conclusion by a warm pressure of the hand.

"Now farewell," said Amasis. "Forget not my words, and above all shed no blood! I will know nothing of what happens to Phanes, for I hate cruelty and would not be forced to stand in horror of my own son. But thou, thou rejoicest! My poor Athenian, better were it for thee, hadst thou never entered Egypt!"

Long after Psamtik had left, his father continued to pace the hall in deep thought. He was sorry he had yielded; it already seemed as if he saw the bleeding Phanes lying massacred by the side of the dethroned Hophra. "It is true, he could have worked our ruin," was the plea he offered to the accuser within his own breast, and with these words, he raised his head, called his servants and left the apartment with a smiling countenance.

Had this sanguine man, this favorite of fortune, thus speedily quieted the warning voice within, or was he strong enough to cloak his torture with a smile?

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Avoid excessive joy as well as complaining grief
Cast off all care; be mindful only of pleasure
Creed which views life as a short pilgrimage to the grave
Does happiness consist then in possession
Happiness has nothing to do with our outward circumstances
In our country it needs more courage to be a coward
Observe a due proportion in all things



One must enjoy the time while it is here
Pilgrimage to the grave, and death as the only true life
Robes cut as to leave the right breast uncovered
The priests are my opponents, my masters
Time is clever in the healing art
We live for life, not for death

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