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Uarda : a Romance of Ancient Egypt -- Volume 06

CHAPTER XXIV.

This eventful day had brought much that was unexpected to our friends in Thebes, as well as to those who lived in the Necropolis.

The Lady Katuti had risen early after a sleepless night. Nefert had come in late, had excused her delay by shortly explaining to her mother that she had been detained by Bent-Anat, and had then affectionately offered her brow for a kiss of "good-night."

When the widow was about to withdraw to her sleeping-room, and Nemu had lighted her lamp, she remembered the secret which was to deliver Paaker into Ani's hands. She ordered the dwarf to impart to her what he knew, and the little man told her at last, after sincere efforts at resistance ---for he feared for his mother's safety---that Paaker had administered half of a love-philter to Nefert, and that the remainder was still in his hands.

A few hours since this information would have filled Katuti with indignation and disgust; now, though she blamed the Mohar, she asked eagerly whether such a drink could be proved to have any actual effect.

"Not a doubt of it," said the dwarf, "if the whole were taken, but Nefert only had half of it."

At a late hour Katuti was still pacing her bedroom, thinking of Paaker's insane devotion, of Mena's faithlessness, and of Nefert's altered demeanor; and when she went to bed, a thousand conjectures, fears, and anxieties tormented her, while she was distressed at the change which had come over Nefert's love to her mother, a sentiment which of all others should be the most sacred, and the most secure against all shock.

Soon after sunrise she went into the little temple attached to the house, and made an offering to the statue, which, under the form of Osiris, represented her lost husband; then she went to the temple of Anion, where she also prayed a while, and nevertheless, on her return home, found that her daughter had not yet made her appearance in the hall where they usually breakfasted together.

Katuti preferred to be undisturbed during the early morning hours, and therefore did not interfere with her daughter's disposition to sleep far into the day in her carefully-darkened room.

When the widow went to the temple Nefert was accustomed to take a cup of milk in bed, then she would let herself be dressed, and when her mother returned, she would find her in the veranda or hall, which is so well known to the reader.

To-day however Katuti had to breakfast alone; but when she had eaten a few mouthfuls she prepared Nefert's breakfast---a white cake and a little wine in a small silver beaker, carefully guarded from dust and insects by a napkin thrown over it---and went into her daughter's room.

She was startled at finding it empty, but she was informed that Nefert had gone earlier than was her wont to the temple, in her litter.

With a heavy sigh she returned to the veranda, and there received her nephew Paaker, who had come to enquire after the health of his relatives, followed by a slave, who carried two magnificent bunches of flowers, and by the great dog which had formerly belonged to his father. One bouquet he said had been cut for Nefert, and the other for her mother.

[Pictures on the monuments show that in ancient Egypt, as at the present time, bouquets of flowers were bestowed as tokens of friendly feeling.]

Katuti had taken quite a new interest in Paaker since she had heard of his procuring the philter.

No other young man of the rank to which they belonged, would have allowed himself to be so mastered by his passion for a woman as this Paaker was, who went straight to his aim with stubborn determination, and shunned no means that might lead to it. The pioneer, who had grown up under her eyes, whose weaknesses she knew, and whom she was accustomed to look down upon, suddenly appeared to her as a different man---almost a stranger---as the deliverer of his friends, and the merciless antagonist of his enemies.

These reflections had passed rapidly through her mind. Now her eyes rested on the sturdy, strongly-knit figure of her nephew, and it struck her that he bore no resemblance to his tall, handsome father. Often had she admired her brother-in-law's slender hand, that nevertheless could so effectually wield a sword, but that of his son was broad and ignoble in form.

While Paaker was telling her that he must shortly leave for Syria, she involuntarily observed the action of this hand, which often went cautiously to his girdle as if he had something concealed there; this was the oval phial with the rest of the philter. Katuti observed it, and her cheeks flushed when it occurred to her to guess what he had there.

The pioneer could not but observe Katuti's agitation, and he said in a tone of sympathy:

"I perceive that you are in pain, or in trouble. The master of Mena's stud at Hermonthis has no doubt been with you---No? He came to me yesterday, and asked me to allow him to join my troops. He is very angry with you, because he has been obliged to sell some of Mena's gold-bays. I have bought the finest of them. They are splendid creatures! Now he wants to go to his master 'to open his eyes,' as he says. Lie down a little while, aunt, you are very pale."

Katuti did not follow this prescription; on the contrary she smiled, and said in a voice half of anger and half of pity:

"The old fool firmly believes that the weal or woe of the family depends on the gold-bays. He would like to go with you? To open Mena's eyes? No one has yet tried to bind them!"

Katuti spoke the last words in a low tone, and her glance fell. Paaker also looked down, and was silent; but he soon recovered his presence of mind, and said:

"If Nefert is to be long absent, I will go."

"No---no, stay," cried the widow. "She wished to see you, and must soon come in. There are her cake and her wine waiting for her."

With these words she took the napkin off the breakfast-table, held up the beaker in her hand, and then said, with the cloth still in her hand:

"I will leave you a moment, and see if Nefert is not yet come home."

Hardly had she left the veranda when Paaker, having convinced himself that no one could see him, snatched the flask from his girdle, and, with a short invocation to his father in Osiris, poured its whole contents into the beaker, which thus

was filled to the very brim. A few minutes later Nefert and her mother entered the hall.

Paaker took up the nosegay, which his slave had laid down on a seat, and timidly approached the young woman, who walked in with such an aspect of decision and self-confidence, that her mother looked at her in astonishment, while Paaker felt as if she had never before appeared so beautiful and brilliant. Was it possible that she should love her husband, when his breach of faith troubled her so little? Did her heart still belong to another? Or had the love-philter set him in the place of Mena? Yes! yes! for how warmly she greeted him. She put out her hand to him while he was still quite far off, let it rest in his, thanked him with feeling, and praised his fidelity and generosity.

Then she went up to the table, begged Paaker to sit down with her, broke her cake, and enquired for her aunt Setchern, Paaker's mother.

Katuti and Paaker watched all her movements with beating hearts.

Now she took up the beaker, and lifted it to her lips, but set it down again to answer Paaker's remark that she was breakfasting late.

"I have hitherto been a real lazy-bones," she said with a blush. But this morning I got up early, to go and pray in the temple in the fresh dawn. You know what has happened to the sacred ram of Amion. It is a frightful occurrence. The priests were all in the greatest agitation, but the venerable Bek el Chunsu received me himself, and interpreted my dream, and now my spirit is light and contented."

"And you did all this without me?" said Katuti in gentle reproof.

"I would not disturb you," replied Nefert. "Besides," she added coloring, "you never take me to the city and the temple in the morning."

Again she took up the wine-cup and looked into it, but without drinking any, went on:

"Would you like to hear what I dreamed, Paaker? It was a strange vision."

The pioneer could hardly breathe for expectation, still he begged her to tell her dream.

"Only think," said Nefert, pushing the beaker on the smooth table, which was wet with a few drops which she had spilt, "I dreamed of the Neha-tree, down there in the great tub, which your father brought me from Punt, when I was a little child, and which since then has grown quite a tall tree. There is no tree in the garden I love so much, for it always reminds me of your father, who was so kind to me, and whom I can never forget!"

Paaker bowed assent.

Nefert looked at him, and interrupted her story when she observed his crimson cheeks.

"It is very hot! Would you like some wine to drink---or some water?"

With these words she raised the wine-cup, and drank about half of the contents; then she shuddered, and while her pretty face took a comical expression, she turned to her mother, who was seated behind her and held the beaker towards her.

"The wine is quite sour to-day!" she said. "Taste it, mother."

Katuti took the little silver-cup in her hand, and gravely put it to her lips, but without wetting them. A smile passed over her face, and her eyes met those of the pioneer, who stared at her in horror. The picture flashed before her mind of herself languishing for the pioneer, and of his terror at her affection for him! Her selfish and intriguing spirit was free from coarseness, and yet she could have laughed with all her heart even while engaged in the most shameful deed of her whole life. She gave the wine back to her daughter, saying good-humoredly:

"I have tasted sweeter, but acid is refreshing in this heat."

"That is true," said the wife of Mena; she emptied the cup to the bottom, and then went on, as if refreshed, "But I will tell you the rest of my dream. I saw the Neha-tree, which your father gave me, quite plainly; nay I could have declared that I smelt its perfume, but the interpreter assured me that we never smell in our dreams. I went up to the beautiful tree in admiration. Then suddenly a hundred axes appeared in the air, wielded by unseen hands, and struck the poor tree with such violence that the branches one by one fell to the ground, and at last the trunk itself was felled. If you think it grieved me you are mistaken. On the contrary, I was delighted with the flashing hatchets and the flying splinters. When at last nothing was left but the roots in the tub of earth, I perceived that the tree was rising to new life. Suddenly my arms became strong, my feet active, and I fetched quantities of water from the tank, poured it over the roots, and when, at last, I could exert myself no longer, a tender green shoot showed itself on the wounded root, a bud appeared, a green leaf unfolded itself, a juicy stem sprouted quickly, it became a firm trunk, sent out branches and twigs, and these became covered with leaves and flowers, white, red and blue; then various birds came and settled on the top of the tree, and sang. Ah! my heart sang louder than the birds at that moment, and I said to myself that without me the tree would have been dead, and that it owed its life to me."

"A beautiful dream," said Katuti; "that reminds me of your girlhood, when you would be awake half the night inventing all sorts of tales. What interpretation did the priest give you?"

"He promised me many things," said Nefert, "and he gave me the assurance that the happiness to which I am predestined shall revive in fresh beauty after many interruptions."

"And Paaker's father gave you the Neha-tree?" asked Katuti, leaving the veranda as she spoke and walking out into the garden.

"My father brought it to Thebes from the far east," said Paaker, in confirmation of the widow's parting words.

"And that is exactly what makes me so happy," said Nefert. "For your father was as kind, and as dear to me as if he had been my own. Do you remember when we were sailing round the pond, and the boat upset, and you pulled me senseless out of the water? Never shall I forget the expression with which the great man looked at me when I woke up in its arms; such wise true eyes no one ever had but he."

"He was good, and he loved you very much," said Paaker, recalling, for his part, the moment when he had dared to press a kiss on the lips of the sweet unconscious child.

"And I am so glad," Nefert went on, "that the day has come at last when we can talk of him together again, and when the old grudge that lay so heavy in my heart is all forgotten. How good you are to us, I have already learned; my heart overflows with gratitude to you, when I remember my childhood, and I can never forget that I was indebted to you for all that was bright and happy in it. Only look at the big dog---poor Descher!--!--how he rubs against me, and shows that he has not forgotten me! Whatever comes from your house fills my mind with pleasant memories."

"We all love you dearly," said Paaker looking at her tenderly.

"And how sweet it was in your garden!" cried Nefert. "The nosegay here that you have brought me shall be placed in water, and preserved a long time, as greeting from the place in which once I could play carelessly, and dream so happily."

With these words she pressed the flowers to her lips; Paaker sprang forward, seized her hand, and covered it with burning kisses.

Nefert started and drew away her hand, but he put out his arm to clasp her to him. He had touched her with his trembling hand, when loud voices were heard in the garden, and Nemu hurried in to announce the arrival of the princess Bent-Anat.

At the same moment Katuti appeared, and in a few minutes the princess herself.

Paaker retreated, and quitted the room before Nefert had time to express her indignation. He staggered to his chariot like a drunken man. He supposed himself beloved by Mena's wife, his heart was full of triumph, he proposed rewarding Hekt with gold, and went to the palace without delay to crave of Ani a mission to Syria. There it should be brought to the test---he or Mena.

CHAPTER XXV.

While Nefert, frozen with horror, could not find a word of greeting for her royal friend, Bent-Anat with native dignity laid before the widow her choice of Nefert to fill the place of her lost companion, and desired that Mena's wife should go to the palace that very day.

She had never before spoken thus to Katuti, and Katuti could not overlook the fact that Bent-Anat had intentionally given up her old confidential tone.

"Nefert has complained of me to her," thought she to herself, "and she considers me no longer worthy of her former friendly kindness."

She was vexed and hurt, and though she understood the danger which threatened her, now her daughter's eyes were opened, still the thought of losing her child inflicted a painful wound. It was this which filled her eyes with tears, and sincere sorrow trembled in her voice as she replied:

"Thou hast required the better half of my life at my hand; but thou hast but to command, and I to obey." Bent-Anat waved her hand proudly, as if to confirm the widow's statement; but Nefert went up to her mother, threw her arms round her neck, and wept upon her shoulder.

Tears glistened even in the princess's eyes when Katuti at last led her daughter towards her, and pressed yet one more kiss on her forehead.

Bent-Anat took Nefert's hand, and did not release it, while she requested the widow to give her daughter's dresses and ornaments into the charge of the slaves and waiting-women whom she would send for them.

"And do not forget the case with the dried flowers, and my amulets, and the images of the Gods," said Nefert. "And I should like to have the Neha tree which my uncle gave me."

Her white cat was playing at her feet with Paaker's flowers, which she had dropped on the floor, and when she saw her she took her up and kissed her.

"Bring the little creature with you," said Bent-Anat. "It was your favorite plaything."

"No," replied Nefert coloring.

The princess understood her, pressed her hand, and said while she pointed to Nemu:

"The dwarf is your own too: shall he come with you?"

"I will give him to my mother," said Nefert. She let the little man kiss her robe and her feet, once more embraced Katuti, and quitted the garden with her royal friend.

As soon as Katuti was alone, she hastened into the little chapel in which the figures of her ancestors stood, apart from those of Mena. She threw herself down before the statue of her husband, half weeping, half thankful.

This parting had indeed fallen heavily on her soul, but at the same time it released her from a mountain of anxiety that had oppressed her breast. Since yesterday she had felt like one who walks along the edge of a precipice, and whose enemy is close at his heels; and the sense of freedom from the ever threatening danger, soon got the upperhand of her maternal grief. The abyss in front of her had suddenly closed; the road to the goal of her efforts lay before her smooth and firm beneath her feet.

The widow, usually so dignified, hastily and eagerly walked down the garden path, and for the first time since that luckless letter from the camp had reached her, she could look calmly and clearly at the position of affairs, and reflect on the measures which Ani must take in the immediate future. She told herself that all was well, and that the time for prompt and rapid action was now come.

When the messengers came from the princess she superintended the packing of the various objects which Nefert wished to have, with calm deliberation, and then sent her dwarf to Ani, to beg that he would visit her. But before Nemu had left Mena's grounds he saw the out-runners of the Regent, his chariot, and the troop of guards following him.

Very soon Katuti and her noble friend were walking up and down in the garden, while she related to him how Bent-Anat had taken Nefert from her, and repeated to him all that she had planned and considered during the last hour.

"You have the genius of a man," said Ani; "and this time you do not urge me in vain. Ameni is ready to act, Paaker is to-day collecting his troops, to-morrow he will assist at the feast of the Valley, and the next day he goes to Syria."

"He has been with you?" Katuti asked.

"He came to the palace on leaving your house," replied Ani, "with glowing cheeks, and resolved to the utmost; though he does not dream that I hold him in my hand."

Thus speaking they entered the veranda, in which Nemu had remained, and he now hid himself as usual behind the ornamental shrubs to overhear them. They sat down near each other, by Nefert's breakfast table, and Ani asked Katuti whether the dwarf had told her his mother's secret. Katuti feigned ignorance, listened to the story of the love-philter, and played the part of the alarmed mother very cleverly. The Regent was of opinion, while he tried to soothe her, that there was no real love-potion in the case; but the widow exclaimed:

"Now I understand, now for the first time I comprehend my daughter. Paaker must have poured the drink into her wine, for she had no sooner drunk it this morning than she was quite altered her words to Paaker had quite a tender ring in

them; and if he placed himself so cheerfully at your disposal it is because he believes himself certainly to be beloved by my daughter. The old witch's potion was effectual."

"There certainly are such drinks---" said Ani thoughtfully. "But will they only win hearts to young men! If that is the case, the old woman's trade is a bad one, for youth is in itself a charm to attract love. If I were only as young as Paaker! You laugh at the sighs of a man---say at once of an old man! Well, yes, I am old, for the prime of life lies behind me. And yet Katuti, my friend, wisest of women---explain to me one thing. When I was young I was loved by many and admired many women, but not one of them---not even my wife, who died young, was more to me than a toy, a plaything; and now when I stretch out my hand for a girl, whose father I might very well be---not for her own sake, but simply to serve my purpose---and she refuses me, I feel as much disturbed, as much a fool as-as that dealer in love-philters, Paaker."

"Have you spoken to Bent-Anat?" asked Katuti.

"And heard again from her own lips the refusal she had sent me through you. You see my spirit has suffered!"

"And on what pretext did she reject your suit?" asked the widow.

"Pretext!" cried Ani. "Bent-Anat and pretext! It must be owned that she has kingly pride, and not Ma---[The Goddess of Truth]---herself is more truthful than she. That I should have to confess it! When I think of her, our plots seem to me unutterably pitiful. My veins contain, indeed, many drops of the blood of Thotmes, and though the experience of life has taught me to stoop low, still the stooping hurts me. I have never known the happy feeling of satisfaction with my lot and my work; for I have always had a greater position than I could fill, and constantly done less than I ought to have done. In order not to look always resentful, I always wear a smile. I have nothing left of the face I was born with but the mere skin, and always wear a mask. I serve him whose master I believe I ought to be by birth; I hate Rameses, who, sincerely or no, calls me his brother; and while I stand as if I were the bulwark of his authority I am diligently undermining it. My whole existence is a lie."

"But it will be truth," cried Katuti, "as soon as the Gods allow you to be---as you are---the real king of this country."

"Strange!" said Ani smiling, Ameni, this very day, used almost exactly the same words. The wisdom of priests, and that of women, have much in common, and they fight with the same weapons. You use words instead of swords, traps instead of lances, and you cast not our bodies, but our souls, into irons."

"Do you blame or praise us for it?" said the widow. "We are in any case not impotent allies, and therefore, it seems to me, desirable ones."

Indeed you are," said Ani smiling. "Not a tear is shed in the land, whether it is shed for joy or for sorrow, for which in the first instance a priest or a woman is not responsible. Seriously, Katuti---in nine great events out of ten you women have a hand in the game. You gave the first impulse to all that is plotting here, and I will confess to you that, regardless of all consequences, I should in a few hours have given up my pretensions to the throne, if that woman Bent-Anat had said 'yes' instead of 'no.'"

"You make me believe," said Katuti, "that the weaker sex are gifted with stronger wills than the nobler. In marrying you style us, 'the mistress of the house,' and if the elders of the citizens grow infirm, in this country it is not the sons but the daughters that must be their mainstay. But we women have our weaknesses, and chief of these is curiosity.---May I ask on what ground Bent-Anat dismissed you?"

"You know so much that you may know all," replied Ani. "She admitted me to speak to her alone. It was yet early, and she had come from the temple, where the weak old prophet had absolved her from uncleanness; she met me, bright, beautiful and proud, strong and radiant as a Goddess, and a princess. My heart throbbed as if I were a boy, and while she was showing me her flowers I said to myself: 'You are come to obtain through her another claim to the throne.' And yet I felt that, if she consented to be mine, I would remain the true brother, the faithful Regent of Rameses, and enjoy happiness and peace by her side before it was too late. If she refused me then I resolved that fate must take its way, and, instead of peace and love, it must be war for the crown snatched from my fathers. I tried to woo her, but she cut my words short, said I was a noble man, and a worthy suitor but---"

"There came the but."

"Yes---in the form of a very frank 'no.' I asked her reasons. She begged me to be content with the 'no;' then I pressed her harder, till she interrupted me, and owned with proud decision that she preferred some one else. I wished to learn the name of the happy man---that she refused. Then my blood began to boil, and my desire to win her increased; but I had to leave her, rejected, and with a fresh, burning, poisoned wound in my heart."

"You are jealous!" said Katuti, "and do you know of whom?"

"No," replied Ani. "But I hope to find out through you. What I feel it is impossible for me to express. But one thing I know, and that is this, that I entered the palace a vacillating man---that I left it firmly resolved. I now rush straight onwards, never again to turn back. From this time forward you will no longer have to drive me onward, but rather to hold me back; and, as if the Gods had meant to show that they would stand by me, I found the high-priest Ameni, and the chief pioneer Paaker waiting for me in my house. Ameni will act for me in Egypt, Paaker in Syria. My victorious troops from Ethiopia will enter Thebes to-morrow morning, on their return home in triumph, as if the king were at their head, and will then take part in the Feast of the Valley. Later we will send them into the north, and post them in the fortresses which protect Egypt against enemies coming from the east Tanis, Daphne, Pelusium, Migdol. Rameses, as you know, requires that we should drill the serfs of the temples, and send them to him as auxiliaries. I will send him half of the body-guard, the other half shall serve my own purposes. The garrison of Memphis, which is devoted to Rameses, shall be sent to Nubia, and shall be relieved by troops that are faithful to me. The people of Thebes are led by the priests, and tomorrow Ameni will point out to them who is their legitimate king, who will put an end to the war and release them from taxes. The children of Rameses will be excluded from the solemnities, for Ameni, in spite of the chief-priest of Anion, still pronounces Bent-Anat unclean. Young Rameri has been doing wrong and Ameni, who has some other great scheme in his mind, has forbidden him the temple of Seti; that will work on the crowd! You know how things are going on in Syria: Rameses has suffered much at the hands of the Cheta and their allies; whole legions are weary of eternally lying in the field, and if things came to extremities would join us; but, perhaps, especially if Paaker acquits himself well, we may be victorious without fighting. Above all things now we must act rapidly."

"I no longer recognize the timid, cautious lover of delay!" exclaimed Katuti.

"Because now prudent hesitation would be want of prudence," said Ani.

"And if the king should get timely information as to what is happening here?" said Katuti.

"I said so!" exclaimed Ani; "we are exchanging parts."

"You are mistaken," said Katuti. "I also am for pressing forwards; but I would remind you of a necessary precaution. No letters but yours must reach the camp for the next few weeks."

"Once more you and the priests are of one mind," said Ani laughing; 'for Ameni gave me the same counsel. Whatever letters are sent across the frontier between Pelusium and the Red Sea will be detained. Only my letters---in which I complain of the piratical sons of the desert who fall upon the messengers---will reach the king."

"That is wise," said the widow; "let the seaports of the Red Sea be watched too, and the public writers. When you are king, you can distinguish those who are affected for or against you."

Ani shook his head and replied:

"That would put me in a difficult position; for it I were to punish those who are now faithful to their king, and exalt the others, I should have to govern with unfaithful servants, and turn away the faithful ones. You need not color, my kind friend, for we are kin, and my concerns are yours."

Katuti took the hand he offered her and said:

"It is so. And I ask no further reward than to see my father's house once more in the enjoyment of its rights."

"Perhaps we shall achieve it," said Ani; "but in a short time if---if--- Reflect, Katuti; try to find out, ask your daughter to help you to the utmost. Who is it that she---you know whom I mean---Who is it that Bent-Anat loves?"

The widow started, for Ani had spoken the last words with a vehemence very foreign to his usual courtliness, but soon she smiled and repeated to the Regent the names of the few young nobles who had not followed the king, and remained in Thebes. "Can it be Chamus?" at last she said, "he is at the camp, it is true, but nevertheless---"

At this instant Nemu, who had not lost a word of the conversation, came in as if straight from the garden and said:

"Pardon me, my lady; but I have heard a strange thing."

"Speak," said Katuti.

The high and mighty princess Bent-Anat, the daughter of Rameses, is said to have an open love-affair with a young priest of the House of Seti."

"You barefaced scoundrel!" exclaimed Ani, and his eyes sparkled with rage. "Prove what you say, or you lose your tongue."

"I am willing to lose it as a slanderer and traitor according to the law," said the little man abjectly, and yet with a malicious laugh; "but this time I shall keep it, for I can vouch for what I say. You both know that Bent-Anat was pronounced unclean because she stayed for an hour and more in the house of a paraschites. She had an assignation there with the priest. At a second, in the temple of Hatasu, they were surprised by Septah, the chief of the haruspices of the House of Seti."

"Who is the priest?" asked Ani with apparent calmness.

"A low-born man," replied Nemu, "to whom a free education was given at the House of Seti, and who is well known as a verse-maker and interpreter of dreams. His name is Pentaur, and it certainly must be admitted that he is handsome and dignified. He is line for line the image of the pioneer Paaker's late father. Didst thou ever see him, my lord?"

The Regent looked gloomily at the floor and nodded that he had. But Katuti cried out; "Fool that I am! the dwarf is right! I saw how she blushed when her brother told her how the boys had rebelled on his account against Ameni. It is Pentaur and none other!"

"Good!" said Ani, "we will see."

With these words he took leave of Katuti, who, as he disappeared in the garden, muttered to herself: "He was wonderfully clear and decided to-day; but jealousy is already blinding him and will soon make him feel that he cannot get on without my sharp eyes."

Nemu had slipped out after the Regent.

He called to him from behind a fig-tree, and hastily whispered, while he bowed with deep respect:

"My mother knows a great deal, most noble highness! The sacred Ibis

[Ibis religiosa. It has disappeared from Egypt There were two varieties of this bird, which was sacred to Toth, and mummies of both have been found in various places. Elian states that an immortal Ibis was shown at Hermopolis. Plutarch says, the ibis destroys poisonous reptiles, and that priests draw the water for their purifications where the Ibis has drunk, as it will never touch unwholesome water.]

wades through the fen when it goes in search of prey, and why shouldst thou not stoop to pick up gold out of the dust? I know how thou couldst speak with the old woman without being seen."

"Speak," said Ani.

"Throw her into prison for a day, hear what she has to say, and then release her---with gifts if she is of service to you---if not, with blows. But thou wilt learn something important from her that she obstinately refused to tell me even."

"We will see!" replied the Regent. He threw a ring of gold to the dwarf and got into his chariot.

So large a crowd had collected in the vicinity of the palace, that Ani apprehended mischief, and ordered his charioteer to check the pace of the horses, and sent a few police-soldiers to the support of the out-runners; but good news seemed to await him, for at the gate of the castle he heard the unmistakable acclamations of the crowd, and in the palace court he found a messenger from the temple of Seti, commissioned by Ameni to communicate to him and to the people, the occurrence of a great miracle, in that the heart of the ram of Anion, that had been torn by wolves, had been found again within the breast of the dead prophet Rui.

Ani at once descended from his chariot, knelt down before all the people, who followed his example, lifted his arms to heaven, and praised the Gods in a loud voice. When, after some minutes, he rose and entered the palace, slaves came out and distributed bread to the crowd in Ameni's name.

"The Regent has an open hand," said a joiner to his neighbor; "only look how white the bread is. I will put it in my pocket and take it to the children."

"Give me a bit!" cried a naked little scamp, snatching the cake of bread from the joiner's hand and running away, slipping between the legs of the people as lithe as a snake.

"You crocodile's brat!" cried his victim. "The insolence of boys gets worse and worse every day."

"They are hungry," said the woman apologetically. "Their fathers are gone to the war, and the mothers have nothing for their children but papyrus-pith and lotus-seeds."

"I hope they enjoy it," laughed the joiner. "Let us push to the left; there is a man with some more bread."

"The Regent must rejoice greatly over the miracle," said a shoemaker. "It is costing him something."

"Nothing like it has happened for a long time," said a basket-maker. "And he is particularly glad it should be precisely Rui's body, which the sacred heart should have blessed. You ask why?---Hatasu is Ani's ancestress, blockhead!"

"And Rui was prophet of the temple of Hatasu," added the joiner.

"The priests over there are all hangers-on of the old royal house, that I know," asserted a baker.

"That's no secret!" cried the cobbler. "The old times were better than these too. The war upsets everything, and quite respectable people go barefoot because they cannot pay for shoe-leather. Rameses is a great warrior, and the son of Ra, but what can he do without the Gods; and they don't seem to like to stay in Thebes any longer; else why should the heart of the sacred ram seek a new dwelling in the Necropolis, and in the breast of an adherent of the old---"

"Hold your tongue," warned the basket-maker. "Here comes one of the watch."

"I must go back to work," said the baker. "I have my hands quite full for the feast to-morrow."

"And I too," said the shoemaker with a sigh, "for who would follow the king of the Gods through the Necropolis barefoot."

"You must earn a good deal," cried the basket-maker. "We should do better if we had better workmen," replied the shoemaker, "but all the good hands are gone to the war. One has to put up with stupid youngsters. And as for the women! My wife must needs have a new gown for the procession, and bought necklets for the children. Of course we must honor the dead, and they repay it often by standing by us when we want it---but what I pay for sacrifices no one can tell. More than half of what I earn goes in them---"

"In the first grief of losing my poor wife," said the baker, "I promised a small offering every new moon, and a greater one every year. The priests will not release us from our vows, and times get harder and harder. And my dead wife owes me a grudge, and is as thankless as she was in her lifetime; for when she appears to me in a dream she does not give me a good word, and often torments me."

"She is now a glorified all-seeing spirit," said the basket-maker's wife, "and no doubt you were faithless to her. The glorified souls know all that happens, and that has happened on earth."

The baker cleared his throat, having no answer ready; but the shoemaker exclaimed:

"By Anubis, the lord of the under-world, I hope I may die before my old woman! for if she finds out down there all I have done in this world, and if she may be changed into any shape she pleases, she will come to me every night, and nip me like a crab, and sit on me like a mountain."

"And if you die first," said the woman, "she will follow you afterwards to the under-world, and see through you there."

"That will be less dangerous," said the shoemaker laughing, "for then I shall be glorified too, and shall know all about her past life. That will not all be white paper either, and if she throws a shoe at me I will fling the last at her."

"Come home," said the basket-maker's wife, pulling her husband away. "You are getting no good by hearing this talk."

The bystanders laughed, and the baker exclaimed:

"It is high time I should be in the Necropolis before it gets dark, and see to the tables being laid for to-morrow's festival. My trucks are close to the narrow entrance to the valley. Send your little ones to me, and I will give them something nice. Are you coming over with me?"

"My younger brother is gone over with the goods," replied the shoemaker. "We have plenty to do still for the customers in Thebes, and here am I standing gossiping. Will the wonderful heart of the sacred ram be exhibited to-morrow do you know?"

"Of course---no doubt," said the baker, "good-bye, there go my cases!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

Notwithstanding the advanced hour, hundreds of people were crossing over to the Necropolis at the same time as the baker. They were permitted to linger late on into the evening, under the inspection of the watch, because it was the eve of the great feast, and they had to set out their counters and awnings, to pitch their tents, and to spread out their wares; for as soon as the sun rose next day all business traffic would be stopped, none but festal barges might cross from Thebes, or such boats as ferried over pilgrims---men, women, and children whether natives or foreigners, who were to take part in the great procession.

In the halls and work-rooms of the House of Seti there was unusual stir. The great miracle of the wonderful heart had left but a short time for the preparations for the festival. Here a chorus was being practised, there on the sacred lake a scenic representation was being rehearsed; here the statues of the Gods were being cleaned and dressed,

[The dressing and undressing of the holy images was conducted in strict accordance with a prescribed ritual. The inscriptions in the seven sanctuaries of Abydos, published by Alariette, are full of instruction as to these ordinances, which were significant in every detail.]

and the colors of the sacred emblems were being revived, there the panther-skins and other parts of the ceremonial vestments of the priests were being aired and set out; here sceptres, censers and other metal-vessels were being cleaned, and there the sacred bark which was to be carried in the procession was being decorated. In the sacred groves of the temple the school-boys, under the direction of the gardeners, wove garlands and wreaths to decorate the landing-places, the sphinxes, the temple, and the statues of the Gods. Flags were hoisted on the brass-tipped masts in front of the pylon, and purple sails were spread to give shadow to the court.

The inspector of sacrifices was already receiving at a side-door the cattle, corn and fruit, offerings which were brought as tribute to the House of Seti, by citizens from all parts of the country, on the occasion of the festival of the Valley, and he was assisted by scribes, who kept an account of all that was brought in by the able-bodied temple-servants and laboring serfs.

Ameni was everywhere: now with the singers, now with the magicians, who were to effect wonderful transformations before the astonished multitude; now with the workmen, who were erecting thrones for the Regent, the emissaries from other collegiate foundations---even from so far as the Delta---and the prophets from Thebes; now with the priests, who were preparing the incense, now with the servants, who were trimming the thousand lamps for the illumination at night---in short everywhere; here inciting, there praising. When he had convinced himself that all was going on well he desired one of the priests to call Pentaur.

After the departure of the exiled prince Rameri, the young priest had gone to the work-room of his friend Nebsecht.

The leech went uneasily from his phials to his cages, and from his cages back to his flasks. While he told Pentaur of the state he had found his room in on his return home, he wandered about in feverish excitement, unable to keep still, now kicking over a bundle of plants, now thumping down his fist on the table; his favorite birds were starved to death, his snakes had escaped, and his ape had followed their example, apparently in his fear of them.

"The brute, the monster!" cried Nebsecht in a rage. He has thrown over the jars with the beetles in them, opened the chest of meal that I feed the birds and insects upon, and rolled about in it; he has thrown my knives, prickers, and forceps, my pins, compasses, and reed pens all out of window; and when I came in he was sitting on the cupboard up there, looking just like a black slave that works night and day in a corn-mill; he had got hold of the roll which contained all my observations on the structure of animals---the result of years of study---and was looking at it gravely with his head on one side. I wanted to take the book from him, but he fled with the roll, sprang out of window, let himself down to the edge of the well, and tore and rubbed the manuscript to pieces in a rage. I leaped out after him, but he jumped into the bucket, took hold of the chain, and let himself down, grinning at me in mockery, and when I drew him up again he jumped into the water with the remains of the book."

"And the poor wretch is drowned?" asked Pentaur.

"I fished him up with the bucket, and laid him to dry in the sun; but he had been tasting all sorts of medicines, and he died at noon. My observations are gone! Some of them certainly are still left; however, I must begin again at the beginning. You see apes object as much to my labors as sages; there lies the beast on the shelf."

Pentaur had laughed at his friend's story, and then lamented his loss; but now he said anxiously:

"He is lying there on the shelf? But you forget that he ought to have been kept in the little oratory of Toth near the library. He belongs to the sacred dogfaced apes,

[The dog faced baboon, Kynokephalos, was sacred to Toth as the Moongod. Mummies of these apes have been found at Thebes and Hermopolis, and they are often represented as reading with much gravity. Statues of them have been found to great quantities, and there is a particularly life-like picture of a Kynokephalos in relief on the left wall of the library of the temple of Isis at Philoe.]

and all the sacred marks were found upon him. The librarian gave him into your charge to have his bad eye cured."

"That was quite well," answered Nebsecht carelessly.

"But they will require the uninjured corpse of you, to embalm it," said Pentaur.

"Will they?" muttered Nebsecht; and he looked at his friend like a boy who is asked for an apple that has long been eaten.

"And you have already been doing something with it," said Pentaur, in a tone of friendly vexation.

The leech nodded. "I have opened him, and examined his heart.'

"You are as much set on hearts as a coquette!" said Pentaur. "What is become of the human heart that the old paraschites was to get for you?"

Nebsecht related without reserve what the old man had done for him, and said that he had investigated the human heart, and had found nothing in it different from what he had discovered in the heart of beasts.

"But I must see it in connection with the other organs of the human body," cried he; "and my decision is made. I shall leave the House of Seti, and ask the kolchytes to take me into their guild. If it is necessary I will first perform the duties of the lowest paraschites."

Pentaur pointed out to the leech what a bad exchange he would be making, and at last exclaimed, when Nebsecht eagerly contradicted him, "This dissecting of the heart does not please me. You say yourself that you learned nothing by it. Do you still think it a right thing, a fine thing---or even useful?"

"I do not trouble myself about it," replied Nebsecht. "Whether my observations seem good or evil, right or heinous, useful or useless, I want to know how things are, nothing more."

"And so for mere curiosity," cried Pentaur, "you would endanger the blissful future of thousands of your fellow-men, take upon yourself the most abject duties, and leave this noble scene of your labors, where we all strive for enlightenment, for inward knowledge and truth."

The naturalist laughed scornfully; the veins swelled angrily in Pentaur's forehead, and his voice took a threatening tone as he asked:

"And do you believe that your finger and your eyes have lighted on the truth, when the noblest souls have striven in vain for thousands of years to find it out? You descend beneath the level of human understanding by madly wallowing in the mire; and the more clearly you are convinced that you have seized the truth, the more utterly you are involved in the toils of a miserable delusion."

"If I believed I knew the truth should I so eagerly seek it?" asked Nebsecht. "The more I observe and learn, the more deeply I feel my want of knowledge and power."

"That sounds modest enough," said the poet, "but I know the arrogance to which your labors are leading you. Everything that you see with your own eyes and touch with your own hand, you think infallible, and everything that escapes your observation you secretly regard as untrue, and pass by with a smile of superiority. But you cannot carry your experiments beyond the external world, and you forget that there are things which lie in a different realm."

"I know nothing of those things," answered Nebsecht quietly.

"But we---the Initiated," cried Pentaur, "turn our attention to them also. Thoughts---traditions---as to their conditions and agency have existed among us for a thousand years; hundreds of generations of men have examined these traditions, have approved them, and have handed them down to us. All our knowledge, it is true, is defective, and yet prophets have been favored with the gift of looking into the future, magic powers have been vouchsafed to mortals. All this is contrary to the laws of the external world, which are all that you recognize, and yet it can easily be explained if we accept the idea

of a higher order of things. The spirit of the Divinity dwells in each of us, as in nature. The natural man can only attain to such knowledge as is common to all; but it is the divine capacity for serene discernment---which is omniscience---that works in the seer; it is the divine and unlimited power---which is omnipotence ---that from time to time enables the magician to produce supernatural effects!"

"Away with prophets and marvels!" cried Nebsecht.

"I should have thought," said Pentaur, "that even the laws of nature which you recognize presented the greatest marvels daily to your eyes; nay the Supreme One does not disdain sometimes to break through the common order of things, in order to reveal to that portion of Himself which we call our soul, the sublime Whole of which we form part---Himself. Only today you have seen how the heart of the sacred ram---"

"Man, man!" Nebsecht interrupted, "the sacred heart is the heart of a hapless sheep that a sot of a soldier sold for a trifle to a haggling grazier, and that was slaughtered in a common herd. A proscribed paraschites put it into the body of Rui, and---and---" he opened the cupboard, threw the carcass of the ape and some clothes on to the floor, and took out an alabaster bowl which he held before the poet---"the muscles you see here in brine, this machine, once beat in the breast of the prophet Rui. My sheep's heart wilt be carried to-morrow in the procession! I would have told you all about it if I had not promised the old man to hold my tongue, and then---But what ails you, man?" Pentaur had turned away from his friend, and covered his face with his hands, and he groaned as if he were suffering some frightful physical pain. Nebsecht divined what was passing in the mind of his friend. Like a child that has to ask forgiveness of its mother for some misdeed, he went close up to Pentaur, but stood trembling behind him not daring to speak to him.

Several minutes passed. Suddenly Pentaur raised his head, lifted his hands to heaven, and cried:

"O Thou! the One!---though stars may fall from the heavens in summer nights, still Thy eternal and immutable laws guide the never-resting planets in their paths. Thou pure and all-prevading Spirit, that dwellest in me, as I know by my horror of a lie, manifest Thyself in me--- as light when I think, as mercy when I act, and when I speak, as truth--- always as truth!"

The poet spoke these words with absorbed fervor, and Nebsecht heard them as if they were speech from some distant and beautiful world. He went affectionately up to his friend, and eagerly held out his hand. Pentaur grasped it, pressed it warmly, and said:

"That was a fearful moment! You do not know what Ameni has been to me, and now, now!"

He hardly had ceased speaking when steps were heard approaching the physician's room, and a young priest requested the friends to appear at once in the meeting-room of the Initiated. In a few moments they both entered the great hall, which was brilliantly lighted.

Not one of the chiefs of the House of Seti was absent.

Ameni sat on a raised seat at a long table; on his right hand was old Gagabu, on his left the third Prophet of the temple. The principals of the different orders of priests had also found places at the table, and among them the chief of the haruspices, while the rest of the priests, all in snow-white linen robes, sat, with much dignity, in a large semicircle, two rows deep. In the midst stood a statue of the Goddess of truth and justice.

Behind Ameni's throne was the many-colored image of the ibis-headed Toth, who presided over the measure and method of things, who counselled the Gods as well as men, and presided over learning and the arts. In a niche at the farther end

of the hall were painted the divine Triad of Thebes, with Rameses I. and his son Seti, who approached them with offerings. The priests were placed with strict regard to their rank, and the order of initiation. Pentaur's was the lowest place of all.

No discussion of any importance had as yet taken place, for Ameni was making enquiries, receiving information, and giving orders with reference to the next day's festival. All seemed to be well arranged, and promised a magnificent solemnity; although the scribes complained of the scarce influx of beasts from the peasants, who were so heavily taxed for the war, and although that feature would be wanting in the procession which was wont to give it the greatest splendor---the presence of the king and the royal family.

This circumstance aroused the disapprobation of some of the priests, who were of opinion that it would be hazardous to exclude the two children of Rameses, who remained in Thebes, from any share in the solemnities of the feast.

Ameni then rose.

"We have sent the boy Rameri," he said, "away from this house. Bent-Anat must be purged of her uncleanness, and if the weak superior of the temple of Anion absolves her, she may pass for purified over there, where they live for this world only, but not here, where it is our duty to prepare the soul for death. The Regent, a descendant of the great deposed race of kings, will appear in the procession with all the splendor of his rank. I see you are surprised, my friends. Only he! Aye! Great things are stirring, and it may happen that soon the mild sun of peace may rise upon our war-ridden people."

"Miracles are happening," he continued, "and in a dream I saw a gentle and pious man on the throne of the earthly vicar of Ra. He listened to our counsel, he gave us our due, and led back to our fields our serfs that had been sent to the war; he overthrew the altars of the strange gods, and drove the unclean stranger out from this holy land."

"The Regent Ani!" exclaimed Septah.

An eager movement stirred the assembly, but Ameni went on:

"Perhaps it was not unlike him, but he certainly was the One; he had the features of the true and legitimate descendants of Ra, to whom Rui was faithful, in whose breast the heart of the sacred ram found a refuge. To-morrow this pledge of the divine grace shall be shown to the people, and another mercy will also be announced to them. Hear and praise the dispensations of the Most High! An hour ago I received the news that a new Apis, with all the sacred marks upon him, has been found in the herds of Ani at Hermonthis."

Fresh excitement was shown by the listening conclave. Ameni let their astonishment express itself freely, but at last he exclaimed:

"And now to settle the last question. The priest Pentaur, who is now present, has been appointed speaker at the festival to-morrow. He has erred greatly, yet I think we need not judge him till after the holy day, and, in consideration of his former innocence, need not deprive him of the honorable office. Do you share my wishes? Is there no dissentient voice? Then come forward, you, the youngest of us all, who are so highly trusted by this holy assembly."

Pentaur rose and placed himself opposite to Ameni, in order to give, as he was required to do, a broad outline of the speech he proposed to deliver next day to the nobles and the people.

The whole assembly, even his opponents, listened to him with approbation. Ameni, too, praised him, but added:

"I miss only one thing on which you must dwell at greater length, and treat with warmer feeling---I mean the miracle which has stirred our souls to-day. We must show that the Gods brought the sacred heart---"

"Allow me," said Pentaur, interrupting the high-priest, and looking earnestly into those eyes which long since he had sung of---"Allow me to entreat you not to select me to declare this new marvel to the people."

Astonishment was stamped on the face of every member of the assembly. Each looked at his neighbor, then at Pentaur, and at last enquiringly at Ameni. The superior knew Pentaur, and saw that no mere whimsical fancy, but some serious motive had given rise to this refusal. Horror, almost aversion, had rung in his tone as he said the words 'new marvel.' He doubted the genuineness of this divine manifestation!

Ameni gazed long and enquiringly into Pentaur's eyes, and then said: "You are right, my friend. Before judgment has been passed on you, before you are reinstated in your old position, your lips are not worthy to announce this divine wonder to the multitude. Look into your own soul, and teach the devout a horror of sin, and show them the way, which you must now tread, of purification of the heart. I myself will announce the miracle."

The white-robed audience hailed this decision of their master with satisfaction. Ameni enjoined this thing on one, on another, that; and on all, perfect silence as to the dream which he had related to them, and then he dissolved the meeting. He begged only Gagabu and Pentaur to remain.

As soon as they were alone Ameni asked the poet "Why did you refuse to announce to the people the miracle, which has filled all the priests of the Necropolis with joy?"

"Because thou hast taught me," replied Pentaur, "that truth is the highest aim we can have, and that there is nothing higher."

"I tell you so again now," said Ameni. "And as you recognize this doctrine, I ask you, in the name of the fair daughter of Ra. Do you doubt the genuineness of the miracle that took place under our very eyes?"

"I doubt it," replied Pentaur.

"Remain on the high stand-point of veracity," continued Ameni, "and tell us further, that we may learn, what are the scruples that shake thy faith?"

"I know," replied the poet with a dark expression, "that the heart which the crowd will approach and bow to, before which even the Initiated prostrate themselves as if it had been the incarnation of Ra, was torn from the bleeding carcass of a common sheep, and smuggled into the kanopus which contained the entrails of Rui."

Ameni drew back a step, and Gagabu cried out "Who says so? Who can prove it? As I grow older I hear more and more frightful things!"

"I know it," said Pentaur decidedly. "But I can, not reveal the name of him from whom I learned it."

"Then we may believe that you are mistaken, and that some impostor is fooling you. We will enquire who has devised such a trick, and he shall be punished! To scorn the voice of the Divinity is a sin, and he who lends his ear to a lie is far from the truth. Sacred and thrice sacred is the heart, blind fool, that I purpose to-morrow to show to the people, and before which you yourself---if not with good will, then by compulsion ---shall fall, prostrate in the dust.

"Go now, and reflect on the words with which you will stir the souls of the people to-morrow morning; but know one thing---Truth has many forms, and her aspects are as manifold as those of the Godhead. As the sun does not travel over a level plain or by a straight path---as the stars follow a circuitous course, which we compare with the windings of the snake Mehen,---so the elect, who look out over time and space, and on whom the conduct of human life devolves, are not only permitted, but commanded, to follow indirect ways in order to reach the highest aims, ways that you do not understand, and which you may fancy deviate widely from the path of truth. You look only at to-day, we look forward to the morrow, and what we announce as truth you must needs believe. And mark my words: A lie stains the soul, but doubt eats into it."

Ameni had spoken with strong excitement; when Pentaur had left the room, and he was alone with Gagabu, he exclaimed:

"What things are these? Who is ruining the innocent child-like spirit of this highly favored youth?"

"He is ruining it himself," replied Gagabu. "He is putting aside the old law, for he feels a new one growing up in his own breast."

"But the laws," exclaimed Ameni, "grow and spread like shadowy woods; they are made by no one. I loved the poet, yet I must restrain him, else he will break down all barriers, like the Nile when it swells too high. And what he says of the miracle---"

"Did you devise it?"

"By the Holy One---no!" cried Ameni.

And yet Pentaur is sincere, and inclined to faith," said the old man doubtfully.

"I know it," returned Ameni. "It happened as he said. But who did it, and who told him of the shameful deed?"

Both the priests stood thoughtfully gazing at the floor.

Ameni first broke the silence.

"Pentaur came in with Nebsecht," he exclaimed, "and they are intimate friends. Where was the leech while I was staying in Thebes?"

"He was taking care of the child hurt by Bent-Anat---the child of the paraschites Pinem, and he stayed there three days," replied Gagabu.

"And it was Pinem," said Ameni, "that opened the body of Rui! Now I know who has dimmed Pentaur's faith. It was that inquisitive stutterer, and he shall be made to repent of it. For the present let us think of to-morrow's feast, but the day after I will examine that nice couple, and will act with iron severity."

"First let us examine the naturalist in private," said Gagabu. "He is an ornament to the temple, for he has investigated many matters, and his dexterity is wonderful."

"All that may be considered Ameni said, interrupting the old enough to think of at present."

"And even more to consider later," retorted Gagabu. "We have entered on a dangerous path. You know very well I am still hot-headed, though I am old in years, and alas! timidity was never my weakness; but Rameses is a powerful man, and duty compels me to ask you: Is it mere hatred for the king that has led you to take these hasty and imprudent steps?"

"I have no hatred for Rameses," answered Ameni gravely. "If he did not wear the crown I could love him; I know him too, as well as if I were his brother, and value all that is great in him; nay I will admit that he is disfigured by no littleness. If I did not know how strong the enemy is, we might try to overthrow him with smaller means. You know as well as I do that he is our enemy. Not yours, nor mine, nor the enemy of the Gods; but the enemy of the old and reverend ordinances by which this people and this country must be governed, and above all of those who are required to protect the wisdom of the fathers, and to point out the right way to the sovereign---I mean the priesthood, whom it is my duty to lead, and for whose rights I will fight with every weapon of the spirit. In this contest, as you know, all that otherwise would be falsehood, treachery, and cunning, puts on the bright aspect of light and truth. As the physician needs the knife and fire to heal the sick, we must do fearful things to save the community when it is in danger. Now you will see me fight with every weapon, for if we remain idle, we shall soon cease to be the leaders of the state, and become the slaves of the king."

Gagabu nodded assent, but Ameni went on with increasing warmth, and in that rhythmical accent in which, when he came out of the holy of holies, he was accustomed to declare the will of the Divinity, "You were my teacher, and I value you, and so you now shall be told everything that stirred my soul, and made me first resolve upon this fearful struggle. I was, as you know, brought up in this temple with Rameses---and it was very wise of Seti to let his son grow up here with other boys. At work and at play the heir to the throne and I won every prize. He was quite my superior in swift apprehension---in keen perception---but I had greater caution, and deeper purpose. Often he laughed at my laborious efforts, but his brilliant powers appeared to me a vain delusion. I became one of the initiated, he ruled the state in partnership with his father, and, when Seti died, by himself. We both grew older, but the foundation of our characters remained the same. He rushed to splendid victories, overthrew nations, and raised the glory of the Egyptian name to a giddy height, though stained with the blood of his people; I passed my life in industry and labor, in teaching the young, and in guarding the laws which regulate the intercourse of men and bind the people to the Divinity. I compared the present with the past: What were the priests? How had they come to be what they are? What would Egypt be without them? There is not an art, not a science, not a faculty that is not thought out, constructed, and practised by us. We crown the kings, we named the Gods, and taught the people to honor them as divine---for the crowd needs a hand to lead it, and under which it shall tremble as under the mighty hand of Fate. We are the willing ministers of the divine representative of Ra on the throne, so long as he rules in accordance with our institutions---as the One God reigns, subject to eternal laws. He used to choose his counsellors from among us; we told him what would benefit the country, he heard us willingly, and executed our plans. The old kings were the hands, but we, the priests, were the head. And now, my father, what has become of us? We are made use of to keep the people in the faith, for if they cease to honor the Gods how will they submit to kings? Seti ventured much, his son risks still more, and therefore both have required much succor from the Immortals. Rameses is pious, he sacrifices frequently, and loves prayer: we are necessary to him, to waft incense, to slaughter hecatombs, to offer prayers, and to interpret dreams---but we are no longer his advisers. My father, now in Osiris, a worthier high-priest than I, was charged by the Prophets to entreat his father to give up the guilty project of connecting the north sea by a navigable channel with the unclean waters of the Red Sea.

[The harbors of the Red Sea were in the hands of the Phoenicians, who sailed from thence southwards to enrich themselves with the produce of Arabia and Ophir. Pharaoh Necho also projected a Suez canal, but does not appear to have carried it out, as the oracle declared that the utility of the undertaking would be greatest to foreigners.]

"Such things can only benefit the Asiatics. But Seti would not listen to our counsel. We desired to preserve the old division of the land, but Rameses introduced the new to the disadvantage of the priests; we warned him against fresh

wars, and the king again and again has taken the field; we had the ancient sacred documents which exempted our peasantry from military service, and, as you know, he outrageously defies them. From the most ancient times no one has been permitted to raise temples in this land to strange Gods, and Rameses favors the son of the stranger, and, not only in the north country, but in the reverend city of Memphis and here in Thebes, he has raised altars and magnificent sanctuaries, in the strangers' quarter, to the sanguinary false Gods of the East."

[Human sacrifices, which had been introduced into Egypt by the Phoenicians, were very early abolished.]

"You speak like a Seer," cried old Gagabu, "and what you say is perfectly true. We are still called priests, but alas! our counsel is little asked. 'You have to prepare men for a happy lot in the other world,' Rameses once said; 'I alone can guide their destinies in this.'"

"He did say so," answered Ameni, "and if he had said no more than that he would have been doomed. He and his house are the enemies of our rights and of our noble country. Need I tell you from whom the race of the Pharaoh is descended? Formerly the hosts who came from the east, and fell on our land like swarms of locusts, robbing and destroying it, were spoken of as 'a curse' and a 'pest.' Rameses' father was of that race. When Ani's ancestors expelled the Hyksos, the bold chief, whose children now govern Egypt, obtained the favor of being allowed to remain on the banks of the Nile; they served in the armies, they distinguished themselves, and, at last, the first Rameses succeeded in gaining the troops over to himself, and in pushing the old race of the legitimate sons of Ra, weakened as they were by heresy, from the throne. I must confess, however unwillingly, that some priests of the true faith---among them your grandfather, and mine---supported the daring usurper who clung faithfully to the old traditions. Not less than a hundred generations of my ancestors, and of yours, and of many other priestly families, have lived and died here by the banks of the Nile---of Rameses race we have seen ten, and only know of them that they descend from strangers, from the caste of Amu! He is like all the Semitic race; they love to wander, they call us ploughmen,---[The word Fellah (pl. Fellahin) means ploughman] ---and laugh to scorn the sober regularity with which we, tilling the dark soil, live through our lives to a tardy death, in honest labor both of mind and body. They sweep round on foraging excursions, ride the salt waves in ships, and know no loved and fixed home; they settle down wherever they are tempted by rapine, and when there is nothing more to be got they build a house in another spot. Such was Seti, such is Rameses! For a year he will stop in Thebes, then he must set out for wars in strange lands. He does not know how to yield piously, or to take advice of wise counsellors, and he will not learn. And such as the father is, so are the children! Think of the criminal behavior of Bent-Anat!"

"I said the kings liked foreigners. Have you duly considered the importance of that to us? We strive for high and noble aims, and have wrenched off the shackles of the flesh in order to guard our souls. The poorest man lives secure under the shelter of the law, and through us participates in the gifts of the spirit; to the rich are offered the priceless treasures of art and learning. Now look abroad: east and west wandering tribes roam over the desert with wretched tents; in the south a debased populace prays to feathers, and to abject idols, who are beaten if the worshipper is not satisfied. In the north certainly there are well regulated states, but the best part of the arts and sciences which they possess they owe to us, and their altars still reek with the loathsome sacrifice of human blood. Only backsliding from the right is possible under the stranger, and therefore it is prudent to withdraw from him; therefore he is hateful to our Gods. And Rameses, the king, is a stranger, by blood and by nature, in his affections, and in his appearance; his thoughts are always abroad---this country is too small for him---and he will never perceive what is really best for him, clear as his intellect is. He will listen to no guidance, he does mischief to Egypt, and therefore I say: Down with him from the throne!"

"Down with him!"---Gagabu eagerly echoed the words. Ameni gave the old man his hand, which trembled with excitement, and went on more calmly.

"The Regent Ani is a legitimate child of the soil, by his father and mother both. I know him well, and I am sure that though he is cunning indeed, he is full of true veneration, and will righteously establish us in the rights which we have inherited. The choice is easy: I have chosen, and I always carry through what I have once begun! Now you know all, and you will second me."

"With body and soul!" cried Gagabu.

"Strengthen the hearts of the brethren," said Ameni, preparing to go. "The initiated may all guess what is going on, but it must never be spoken of."

CHAPTER XXVII.

The sun was up on the twenty-ninth morning of the second month of the over-flow of the Nile,

[The 29th Phaophi. The Egyptians divided the year into three seasons of four months each. Flood-time, seed-time and Harvest. (Scha, per and schemu.) The 29th Phaophi corresponds to the 8th November.]

and citizens and their wives, old men and children, freemen and slaves, led by priests, did homage to the rising day-star before the door of the temple to which the quarter of the town belonged where each one dwelt.

The Thebans stood together like Huge families before the pylons, waiting for the processions of priests, which they intended to join in order to march in their train round the great temple of the city, and thence to cross with the festal barks to the Necropolis.

To-day was the Feast of the Valley, and Anion, the great God of Thebes, was carried over in solemn pomp to the City of the Dead, in order that he---as the priests said---might sacrifice to his fathers in the other world. The train marched westward; for there, where the earthly remains of man also found rest, the millions of suns had disappeared, each of which was succeeded daily by a new one, born of the night. The young luminary, the priests said, did not forget those that had been extinguished, and from whom he was descended; and Anion paid them this mark of respect to warn the devout not to forget those who were passed away, and to whom they owed their existence.

"Bring offerings," says a pious text, "to thy father and thy mother who rest in the valley of the tombs; for such gifts are pleasing to the Gods, who will receive them as if brought to themselves. Often visit thy dead, so that what thou dost for them, thy son may do for thee."

The Feast of the Valley was a feast of the dead; but it was not a melancholy solemnity, observed with lamentation and wailing; on the contrary, it was a cheerful festival, devoted to pious and sentimental memories of those whom we cease not to love after death, whom we esteem happy and blest, and of whom we think with affection; to whom too the throng from Thebes brought offerings, forming groups in the chapel-like tombs, or in front of the graves, to eat and drink.

Father, mother and children clung together; the house-slaves followed with provisions, and with torches, which would light up the darkness of the tomb and show the way home at night.

Even the poorest had taken care to secure beforehand a place in one of the large boats which conveyed the people across the stream; the barges of the rich, dressed in the gayest colors, awaited their owners with their households, and the children had dreamed all night of the sacred bark of Anion, whose splendor, as their mothers told them, was hardly less than that of the golden boat in which the Sun-God and his companions make their daily voyage across the ocean of

heaven. The broad landing place of the temple of Anion was already crowded with priests, the shore with citizens, and the river with boats; already loud music drowned the din of the crowds, who thronged and pushed, enveloped in clouds of dust, to reach the boats; the houses and hovels of Thebes were all empty, and the advent of the God through the temple-gates was eagerly expected; but still the members of the royal family had not appeared, who were wont on this solemn day to go on foot to the great temple of Anion; and, in the crowd, many a one asked his neighbor why Bent-Anat, the fair daughter of Rameses, lingered so long, and delayed the starting of the procession.

The priests had begun their chant within the walls, which debarred the outer world from any glimpse into the bright precincts of the temple; the Regent with his brilliant train had entered the sanctuary; the gates were thrown open; the youths in their short-aprons, who threw flowers in the path of the God, had come out; clouds of incense announced the approach of Anion---and still the daughter of Rameses appeared not.

Many rumors were afloat, most of them contradictory; but one was accurate, and confirmed by the temple servants, to the great regret of the crowd---Bent-Anat was excluded from the Feast of the Valley.

She stood on her balcony with her brother Rameri and her friend Nefert, and looked down on the river, and on the approaching God.

Early in the previous morning Bek-en-Chunsu, the old high-priest of the temple of Anion had pronounced her clean, but in the evening he had come to communicate to her the intelligence that Ameni prohibited her entering the Necropolis before she had obtained the forgiveness of the Gods of the West for her offence.

While still under the ban of uncleanness she had visited the temple of Hathor, and had defiled it by her presence; and the stern Superior of the City of the Dead was in the right---that Bek-en-Chunsu himself admitted--- in closing the western shore against her. Bent-Anat then had recourse to Ani; but, though he promised to mediate for her, he came late in the evening to tell her that Ameni was inexorable. The Regent at the same time, with every appearance of regret, advised her to avoid an open quarrel, and not to defy Ameni's lofty severity, but to remain absent from the festival.

Katuti at the same time sent the dwarf to Nefert, to desire her to join her mother, in taking part in the procession, and in sacrificing in her father's tomb; but Nefert replied that she neither could nor would leave her royal friend and mistress.

Bent-Anat had given leave of absence to the highest members of her household, and had prayed them to think of her at the splendid solemnity.

When, from her balcony, she saw the mob of people and the crowd of boats, she went back into her room, called Rameri, who was angrily declaiming at what he called Ameni's insolence, took his hands in hers, and said:

"We have both done wrong, brother; let us patiently submit to the consequences of our faults, and conduct ourselves as if our father were with us."

"He would tear the panther-skin from the haughty priest's shoulders," cried Rameri, "if he dared to humiliate you so in his presence;" and tears of rage ran down his smooth cheeks as he spoke.

"Put anger aside," said Bent-Anat. "You were still quite little the last time my father took part in this festival."

"Oh! I remember that morning well," exclaimed Rameri, "and shall never forget it."

"So I should think," said the princess. "Do not leave us, Nefert---you are now my sister. It was a glorious morning; we children were collected in the great hall of the King, all in festival dresses; he had us called into this room, which had been inhabited by my mother, who then had been dead only a few months. He took each of us by the hand, and said he forgave us everything we might have done wrong if only we were sincerely penitent, and gave us each a kiss on our forehead. Then he beckoned us all to him, and said, as humbly as if he were one of us instead of the great king, 'Perhaps I may have done one of you some injustice, or have kept you out of some right; I am not conscious of such a thing, but if it has occurred I am very sorry'---we all rushed upon him, and wanted to kiss him, but he put us aside smiling, and said, 'Each of you has enjoyed an equal share of one thing, that you may be sure---I mean your father's love; and I see now that you return what I have given you.' Then he spoke of our mother, and said that even the tenderest father could not fill the place of a mother. He drew a lovely picture of the unselfish devotion of the dead mother, and desired us to pray and to sacrifice with him at her resting-place, and to resolve to be worthy of her; not only in great things but in trifles too, for they make up the sum of life, as hours make the days, and the years. We elder ones clasped each other's hands, and I never felt happier than in that moment, and afterwards by my mother's grave." Nefert raised her eyes that were wet with tears.

"With such a father it must be easy to be good," she said.

"Did your mother never speak good words that went to your heart on the morning of this festival?" asked Bent-Anat.

Nefert colored, and answered: "We were always late in dressing, and then had to hurry to be at the temple in time."

"Then let me be your mother to-day," cried the princess, "and yours too, Rameri. Do you not remember how my father offered forgiveness to the officers of the court, and to all the servants, and how he enjoined us to root out every grudge from our hearts on this day? 'Only stainless garments,' he said, 'befit this feast; only hearts without spot.' So, brother, I will not hear an evil word about Ameni, who is most likely forced to be severe by the law; my father will enquire into it all and decide. My heart is so full, it must overflow. Come, Nefert, give me a kiss, and you too, Rameri. Now I will go into my little temple, in which the images of our ancestors stand, and think of my mother and the blessed spirits of those loved ones to whom I may not sacrifice to-day."

"I will go with you," said Rameri.

"You, Nefert---stay here," said Bent-Anat, "and cut as many flowers as you like; take the best and finest, and make a wreath, and when it is ready we will send a messenger across to lay it, with other gifts, on the grave of your Mena's mother."

When, half-an-hour later, the brother and sister returned to the young wife, two graceful garlands hung in Nefert's bands, one for the grave of the dead queen, and one for Mena's mother.

"I will carry over the wreaths, and lay them in the tombs," cried the prince.

"Ani thought it would be better that we should not show ourselves to the people," said his sister. "They will scarcely notice that you are not among the school-boys, but---"

"But I will not go over as the king's son, but as a gardener's boy---" interrupted the prince. "Listen to the flourish of trumpets! the God has now passed through the gates."

Rameri stepped out into the balcony, and the two women followed him, and looked down on the scene of the embarkation which they could easily see with their sharp young eyes.

"It will be a thinner and poorer procession without either my father or us, that is one comfort," said Rameri. "The chorus is magnificent; here come the plume-bearers and singers; there is the chief prophet at the great temple, old Bek-en-Chunsu. How dignified he looks, but he will not like going. Now the God is coming, for I, smell the incense."

With these words the prince fell on his knees, and the women followed his example---when they saw first a noble bull in whose shining skin the sun was reflected, and who bore between his horns a golden disk, above which stood white ostrich-feathers; and then, divided from the bull only by a few fan-bearers, the God himself, sometimes visible, but more often hidden from sight by great semi-circular screens of black and white ostrich-feathers, which were fixed on long poles, and with which the priests shaded the God.

His mode of progress was as mysterious as his name, for he seemed to float slowly on his gorgeous throne from the temple-gates towards the stream. His seat was placed on a platform, magnificently decorated with bunches and garlands of flowers, and covered with hangings of purple and gold brocade, which concealed the priests who bore it along with a slow and even pace.

As soon as the God had been placed on board his barge, Bent-Anat and her companions rose from their knees.

Then came some priests, who carried a box with the sacred evergreen tree of Amon; and when a fresh outburst of music fell on her ear, and a cloud of incense was wafted up to her, Bent-Anat said: "Now my father should be coming."

"And you," cried Rameri, "and close behind, Nefert's husband, Mena, with the guards. Uncle Ani comes on foot. How strangely he has dressed himself like a sphinx hind-part before!"

"How so?" asked Nefert.

"A sphinx," said Rameri laughing, it has the body of a lion, and the head of a man,

[There were no female sphinxes in Egypt. The sphinx was called Neb, i. e., the lord. The lion-couchant had either a man's or a rams head.]

and my uncle has a peaceful priest's robe, and on his head the helmet of a warrior."

"If the king were here, the distributor of life," said Nefert, "you would not be missing from among his supporters."

"No indeed!" replied the prince, "and the whole thing is altogether different when my father is here. His heroic form is splendid on his golden throne; the statues of Truth and justice spread their wings behind him as if to protect him; his mighty representative in fight, the lion, lies peacefully before him, and over him spreads the canopy with the Urmus snake at the top. There is hardly any end to the haruspices, the pastophori with the standards, the images of the Gods, and the flocks and herds for sacrifice. Only think, even the North has sent representatives to the feast, as if my father were here. I know all the different signs on the standards. Do you recognize the images of the king's ancestors, Nefert? No? no more do I; but it seemed to me that Ahmes I., who expelled the Hyksos---from whom our grandmother was descended---headed the procession, and not my grandfather Seti, as he should have done. Here come the soldiers; they are the legions which Ani equipped, and who returned victorious from Ethiopia only last night. How the people cheer them! and indeed they have behaved valiantly. Only think, Bent-Anat and Nefert, what it will be when my father comes home, with a hundred captive princes, who will humbly follow his chariot, which your Mena will drive, with our brothers and all the nobles of the land, and the guards in their splendid chariots."

"They do not think of returning yet!" sighed Nefert. While more and more troops of the Regent's soldiers, more companies of musicians, and rare animals, followed in procession, the festal bark of Amon started from the shore.

It was a large and gorgeous barge of wood, polished all over and overlaid with gold, and its edge was decorated with glittering glass-beads, which imitated rubies and emeralds; the masts and yards were gilt, and purple sails floated from them. The seats for the priests were of ivory, and garlands of lilies and roses hung round the vessel, from its masts and ropes.

The Regent's Nile-boat was not less splendid; the wood-work shone with gilding, the cabin was furnished with gay Babylonian carpets; a lion's-head formed the prow, as formerly in Hatasu's sea-going vessels, and two large rubies shone in it, for eyes. After the priests had embarked, and the sacred barge had reached the opposite shore, the people pressed into the boats, which, filled almost to sinking, soon so covered the whole breadth of the river that there was hardly a spot where the sun was mirrored in the yellow waters.

"Now I will put on the dress of a gardener," cried Rameri, "and cross over with the wreaths."

"You will leave us alone?" asked Bent-Anat.

"Do not make me anxious," said Rameri.

"Go then," said the princess. "If my father were here how willingly I would go too."

"Come with me," cried the boy. "We can easily find a disguise for you too."

"Folly!" said Bent-Anat; but she looked enquiringly at Nefert, who shrugged her shoulders, as much as to say: "Your will is my law."

Rameri was too sharp for the glances of the friends to have escaped him, and he exclaimed eagerly:

"You will come with me, I see you will! Every beggar to-day flings his flower into the common grave, which contains the black mummy of his father---and shall the daughter of Rameses, and the wife of the chief charioteer, be excluded from bringing garlands to their dead?"

"I shall defile the tomb by my presence," said Bent-Anat coloring.

"You---you!" exclaimed Rameri, throwing his arms round his sister's neck, and kissing her. "You, a noble generous creature, who live only to ease sorrow and to wipe away tears; you, the very image of my father---unclean! sooner would I believe that the swans down there are as black as crows, and the rose-wreaths on the balcony rank hemlock branches. Bek-en-Chunsu pronounced you clean, and if Ameni---"

"Ameni only exercises his rights," said Bent-Anat gently, "and you know what we have resolved. I will not hear one hard word about him to-day."

"Very well! he has graciously and mercifully kept us from the feast," said Rameri ironically, and he bowed low in the direction of the Necropolis, "and you are unclean. Do not enter the tombs and the temples on my account; let us stay outside among the people. The roads over there are not so very sensitive; paraschites and other unclean folks pass over them every day. Be sensible, Bent-Anat, and come. We will disguise ourselves; I will conduct you; I will lay the garlands in the tombs, we will pray together outside, we will see the sacred procession and the feats of the magicians, and

hear the festive discourse. Only think! Pentaur, in spite of all they have said against him, is to deliver it. The temple of Seti wants to do its best to-day, and Ameni knows very well that Pentaur, when he opens his mouth, stirs the hearts of the people more than all the sages together if they were to sing in chorus! Come with me, sister."

"So be it then," said Bent-Anat with sudden decision.

Rameri was surprised at this quick resolve, at which however he was delighted; but Nefert looked anxiously at her friend. In a moment her eyes fell; she knew now who it was that her friend loved, and the fearful thought--"How will it end?" flashed through her mind.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

An hour later a tall, plainly dressed woman crossed the Nile, with a dark-skinned boy and a slender youth by her side. The wrinkles on her brow and cheeks agreed little with her youthful features; but it would have been difficult to recognize in these three the proud princess, the fair young prince, and the graceful Nefert, who looked as charming as ever in the long white robe of a temple-student.

They were followed by two faithful and sturdy head-servants from among the litter-bearers of the princess, who were however commanded to appear as though they were not in any way connected with their mistress and her companions.

The passage across the Nile had been accomplished but slowly, and thus the royal personages had experienced for the first time some of the many difficulties and delays which ordinary mortals must conquer to attain objects which almost fly to meet their rulers. No one preceded them to clear the river, no other vessel made way for them; on the contrary, all tried to take place ahead of them, and to reach the opposite shore before them.

When at last they reached the landing-place, the procession had already passed on to the temple of Seti; Ameni had met it with his chorus of singers, and had received the God on the shore of the Nile; the prophets of the Necropolis had with their own hands placed him in the sacred Sam-bark of the House of Seti, which was artistically constructed of cedar wood and electrum set with jewels; thirty pastophori took the precious burden on their shoulders, and bore it up the avenue of Sphinxes--which led from the river to the temple--into the sanctuary of Seti, where Amon remained while the emissaries from the different provinces deposited their offerings in the forecourt. On his road from the shore kolchytes had run before him, in accordance with ancient custom, strewing sand in his path.

In the course of an hour the procession once more emerged into the open air, and turning to the south, rested first in the enormous temple of Anienophis III., in front of which the two giant statues stood as sentinels--they still remain, the colossi of the Nile valley. Farther to the south it reached the temple of Thotmes the Great, then, turning round, it clung to the eastern face of the Libyan hills--pierced with tombs and catacombs; it mounted the terraces of the temple of Hatasu, and paused by the tombs of the oldest kings which are in the immediate neighborhood; thus by sunset it had reached the scene of the festival itself, at the entrance of the valley in which the tomb of Setitt had been made, and in whose westernmost recesses were some of the graves of the Pharaohs of the deposed race.

This part of the Necropolis was usually visited by lamp-light, and under the flare of torches, before the return of the God to his own temple and the mystery-play on the sacred lake, which did not begin till midnight.

Behind the God, in a vase of transparent crystal, and borne high on a pole that all the multitude might see it, was the heart of the sacred ram.

Our friends, after they had laid their wreaths on the magnificent altars of their royal ancestors without being recognized, late in the afternoon joined the throng who followed the procession. They mounted the eastern cliff of the hills close by the tomb of Mena's forefathers, which a prophet of Amon, named Neferhotep---Mena's great-grandfather---had constructed. Its narrow doorway was besieged by a crowd, for within the first of the rock-chambers of which it consisted, a harper was singing a dirge for the long-since buried prophet, his wife and his sister. The song had been composed by the poet attached to his house; it was graven in the stone of the second rock-room of the tomb, and Neferhotep had left a plot of ground in trust to the Necropolis, with the charge of administering its revenues for the payment of a minstrel, who every-year at the feast of the dead should sing the monody to the accompaniment of his lute.

[The tomb of Neferhotep is well preserved, and in it the inscription from which the monody is translated.]

The charioteer well knew this dirge for his ancestor, and had often sung it to Nefert, who had accompanied him on her lute; for in their hours of joy also---nay especially---the Egyptians were wont to remember their dead.

Now the three companions listened to the minstrel as he sang:

"Now the great man is at rest,
Gone to practise sweeter duties.
Those that die are the elect
Since the Gods have left the earth.
Old men pass and young men come;
Yea, a new Sun rises daily
When the old sun has found rest
In the bosom of the night.

"Hail, O Prophet! on this feast day
Odorous balsams, fragrant resins
Here we bring---and offer garlands,
Throwing flowers down before thee,
And before thy much-loved sister,
Who has found her rest beside thee.

"Songs we sing, and strike the lyre
To thy memory, and thine honor.
All our cares are now forgotten,
Joy and hope our breasts are filling;
For the day of our departure
Now draws near, and in the silence
Of the farther shore is rest."

When the song ceased, several people pressed into the little oratory to express their gratitude to the deceased prophet by laying a few flowers on his altar. Nefert and Rameri also went in, and when Nefert had offered a long and silent prayer to the glorified spirits of her dead, that they might watch over Mena, she laid her garland beside the grave in which her husband's mother rested.

Many members of the court circle passed close to the royal party without recognizing them; they made every effort to reach the scene of the festival, but the crowd was so great that the ladies had several times to get into a tomb to avoid it.

In each they found the altar loaded with offerings, and, in most, family-parties, who here remembered their dead, with meat and fruits, beer and wine, as though they were departed travellers who had found some far off rest, and whom they hoped sooner or later to see again.

The sun was near setting when at last the princess and her companions reached the spot where the feast was being held. Here stood numbers of stalls and booths, with eatables of every sort, particularly sweet cakes for the children, dates, figs, pomegranates, and other fruits. Under light awnings, which kept off the sun, were sold sandals and kerchiefs of every material and hue, ornaments, amulets, fans, and sun-shades, sweet essences of every kind, and other gifts for offerings or for the toilet. The baskets of the gardeners and flower-girls were already empty, but the money-changers were full of business, and the tavern and gambling booths were driving a brisk trade.

Friends and acquaintances greeted each other kindly, while the children showed each other their new sandals, the cakes they had won at the games, or the little copper rings they had had given to them, and which must now be laid out. The largest crowd was gathered to see the magicians from the House of Seti, round which the mob squatted on the ground in a compact circle, and the children were good-naturedly placed in the front row.

When Bent-Anat reached the place all the religious solemnity was ended.

There stood the canopy under which the king and his family were used to listen to the festal discourse, and under its shade sat to-day the Regent Ani. They could see too the seats of the grandees, and the barriers which kept the people at a distance from the Regent, the priests, and the nobles.

Here Ameni himself had announced to the multitude the miracle of the sacred heart, and had proclaimed that a new Apis had been found among the herds of the Regent Ani.

His announcement of these divine tokens had been repeated from mouth to mouth; they were omens of peace and happiness for the country through the means of a favorite of the Gods; and though no one said it, the dullest could not fail to see that this favorite was none other than Ani, the descendant of the great Hatasu, whose prophet had been graced by the transfer to him of the heart of the sacred rain. All eyes were fixed on Ani, who had sacrificed before all the people to the sacred heart, and received the high-priest's blessing.

Pentaur, too, had ended his discourse when Bent-Anat reached the scene of the festival. She heard an old man say to his son:

"Life is hard. It often seems to me like a heavy burden laid on our poor backs by the cruel Gods; but when I heard the young priest from the House of Seti, I felt that, after all, the Immortals are good, and we have much to thank them for."

In another place a priest's wife said to her son:

"Could you see Pentaur well, Hor-Uza? He is of humble birth, but he stands above the greatest in genius and gifts, and will rise to high things."

Two girls were speaking together, and one said to the other:

"The speaker is the handsomest man I ever saw, and his voice sounds like soft music."

"And how his eyes shone when he spoke of truth as the highest of all virtues!" replied the other. "All the Gods, I believe, must dwell in him."

Bent-Anat colored as these words fell on her ear. It was growing dark, and she wished to return home but Rameri wished to follow the procession as it marched through the western valley by torch-light, so that the grave of his grandfather Seti should also be visited. The princess unwillingly yielded, but it would in any case have been difficult to reach the river while every one was rushing in the opposite direction; so the two ladies, and Rameri, let themselves be carried along by the crowd, and by the time the daylight was gone, they found themselves in the western valley, where to-night no beasts of prey dared show themselves; jackals and hyenas had fled before the glare of the torches, and the lanterns made of colored papyrus.

The smoke of the torches mingled with the dust stirred by a thousand feet, and the procession moved along, as it were, in a cloud, which also shrouded the multitude that followed.

The three companions had labored on as far as the hovel of the paraschites Pinem, but here they were forced to pause, for guards drove back the crowd to the right and left with long staves, to clear a passage for the procession as it approached.

"See, Rameri," said Bent-Anat, pointing out the little yard of the hut which stood only a few paces from them. "That is where the fair, white girl lives, whom I ran over. But she is much better. Turn round; there, behind the thorn-hedge, by the little fire which shines full in your (her? D.W.) face---there she sits, with her grandfather."

The prince stood on tip-toe, looked into the humble plot of ground, and then said in a subdued voice "What a lovely creature! But what is she doing with the old man? He seems to be praying, and she first holds a handkerchief before his mouth, and then rubs his temples. And how unhappy she looks!"

"The paraschites must be ill," replied Bent-Anat. "He must have had too much wine down at the feast," said Rameri laughing. "No doubt of it! Only look how his lips tremble, and his eyes roll. It is hideous---he looks like one possessed."

[It was thought that the insane were possessed by demons. A stele admirably treated by F. de Rouge exists at Paris, which relates that the sister-in law of Rameses III., who was possessed by devils, had them driven out by the statue of Chunsu, which was sent to her in Asia.]

"He is unclean too!" said Nefert.

"But he is a good, kind man, with a tender heart," exclaimed the princess eagerly. "I have enquired about him. He is honest and sober, and I am sure he is ill and not drunk."

"Now she is standing up," said Rameri, and he dropped the paper-lantern which he had bought at a booth. "Step back, Bent-Anat, she must be expecting some one. Did you ever see any one so very fair, and with such a pretty little head. Even her red hair becomes her wonderfully; but she staggers as she stands---she must be very weak. Now she has sat down again by the old man, and is rubbing his forehead. Poor souls! look how she is sobbing. I will throw my purse over to them."

"No, no!" exclaimed Bent-Anat. "I gave them plenty of money, and the tears which are shed there cannot be staunched with gold. I will send old Asnath over to-morrow to ask how we can help them. Look, here comes the procession, Nefert. How rudely the people press! As soon as the God is gone by we will go home."

"Pray do," said Nefert. "I am so frightened!" and she pressed trembling to the side of the princess.

"I wish we were at home, too," replied Bent-Anat.

"Only look!" said Rameri. "There they are. Is it not splendid? And how the heart shines, as if it were a star!"

All the crowd, and with them our three friends, fell on their knees.

The procession paused opposite to them, as it did at every thousand paces; a herald came forward, and glorified, in a loud voice, the great miracle, to which now another was added---the sacred heart since the night had come on had begun to give out light.

Since his return home from the embalming house, the paraschites had taken no nourishment, and had not answered a word to the anxious questions of the two frightened women. He stared blindly, muttered a few unintelligible words, and often clasped his forehead in his hand. A few hours before he had laughed loud and suddenly, and his wife, greatly alarmed, had gone at once to fetch the physician Nebsecht.

During her absence Uarda was to rub her grandfather's temples with the leaves which the witch Hekt had laid on her bruises, for as they had once proved efficacious they might perhaps a second time scare away the demon of sickness.

When the procession, with its thousand lamps and torches, paused before the hovel, which was almost invisible in the dusk, and one citizen said to another: "Here comes the sacred heart!" the old man started, and stood up. His eyes stared fixedly at the gleaming relic in its crystal case; slowly, trembling in every limb, and with outstretched neck he stood up.

The herald began his eulogy of the miracle.

Then, while all the people were prostrate in adoration, listening motionless to the loud voice of the speaker, the paraschites rushed out of his gate, striking his forehead with his fists, and opposite the sacred heart, he broke out into a mad, loud fit of scornful laughter, which re-echoed from the bare cliffs that closed in the valley.

Horror full on the crowd, who rose timidly from their knees.

Ameni, who too, was close behind the heart, started too and looked round on the author of this hideous laugh. He had never seen the paraschites, but he perceived the glimmer of his little fire through the dust and gloom, and he knew that he lived in this place. The whole case struck him at once; he whispered a few significant words to one of the officers who marched with the troops on each side of the procession; then he gave the signal, and the procession moved on as if nothing had happened.

The old man tried with still more loud and crazy laughter to reach and seize the heart, but the crowd kept him back; and while the last groups passed on after the priests, he contrived to slip back as far as the door of his hovel, though much damaged and hurt.

There he fell, and Uarda rushed out and threw herself over the old man, who lay on the earth, scarcely recognizable in the dust and darkness.

"Crush the scoffer!"

"Tear him in pieces!"

"Burn down the foul den!"

"Throw him and the wench into the fire!" shouted the people who had been disturbed in their devotions, with wild fury.

Two old women snatched the lanterns from the posts, and flung them at the unfortunate creatures, while an Ethiopian soldier seized Uarda by the hair, and tore her away from her grandfather.

At this moment Pinem's wife appeared, and with her Pentaur. She had found not Nebsecht, but Pentaur, who had returned to the temple after his speech. She had told him of the demon who had fallen upon her husband, and implored him to come with her. Pentaur immediately followed her in his working dress, just as he was, without putting on the white priest's robe, which he did not wish to wear on this expedition.

When they drew near to the paraschites' hovel, he perceived the tumult among the people, and, loud above all the noise, heard Uarda's shrill cry of terror. He hurried forward, and in the dull light of the scattered fire-brands and colored lanterns, he saw the black hand of the soldier clutching the hair of the helpless child; quick as thought he gripped the soldier's throat with his iron fingers, seized him round the body, swung him in the air, and flung him like a block of stone right into the little yard of the hut.

The people threw themselves on the champion in a frenzy of rage, but he felt a sudden warlike impulse surging up in him, which he had never felt before. With one wrench he pulled out the heavy wooden pole, which supported the awning which the old paraschites had put up for his sick grandchild; he swung it round his head, as if it were a reed, driving back the crowd, while he called to Uarda to keep close to him.

"He who touches the child is a dead man!" he cried. "Shame on you!-- falling on a feeble old man and a helpless child in the middle of a holy festival!"

For a moment the crowd was silent, but immediately after rushed forward with fresh impetus, and wilder than ever rose the shouts of:

"Tear him to pieces! burn his house down!"

A few artisans from Thebes closed round the poet, who was not recognizable as a priest. He, however, wielding his tent-pole, felled them before they could reach him with their fists or cudgels, and down went every man on whom it fell. But the struggle could not last long, for some of his assailants sprang over the fence, and attacked him in the rear. And now Pentaur was distinctly visible against a background of flaring light, for some fire-brands had fallen on the dry palm-thatch of the hovel behind him, and roaring flames rose up to the dark heavens.

The poet heard the threatening blaze behind him. He put his left hand round the head of the trembling girl, who crouched beside him, and feeling that now they both were lost, but that to his latest breath he must protect the innocence and life of this frail creature, with his right hand he once more desperately swung the heavy stake.

But it was for the last time; for two men succeeded in clutching the weapon, others came to their support, and wrenched it from his hand, while the mob closed upon him, furious but unarmed, and not without great fear of the enormous strength of their opponent.

Uarda clung to her protector with shortened breath, and trembling like a hunted antelope. Pentaur groaned when he felt himself disarmed, but at that instant a youth stood by his side, as if he had sprung from the earth, who put into his hand the sword of the fallen soldier--who lay near his feet--and who then, leaning his back against Pentaur's, faced the foe on the other side. Pentaur pulled himself together, sent out a battle-cry like some fighting hero who is defending his last stronghold, and brandished his new weapon. He stood with flaming eyes, like a lion at bay, and for a moment the enemy gave way, for his young ally Rameri, had taken a hatchet, and held it up in a threatening manner.

"The cowardly murderers are flinging fire-brands," cried the prince. "Come here, girl, and I will put out the pitch on your dress."

He seized Uarda's hand, drew her to him, and hastily put out the flame, while Pentaur protected them with his sword.

The prince and the poet stood thus back to back for a few moments, when a stone struck Pentaur's head; he staggered, and the crowd were rushing upon him, when the little fence was torn away by a determined hand, a tall womanly form appeared on the scene of combat, and cried to the astonished mob:

"Have done with this! I command you! I am Bent-Anat, the daughter of Rameses."

The angry crowd gave way in sheer astonishment. Pentaur had recovered from the stunning blow, but he thought he must be under some illusion. He felt as if he must throw himself on his knees before Bent-Anat, but his mind had been trained under Ameni to rapid reflection; he realized, in a flash of thought, the princess's position, and instead of bowing before her he exclaimed:

"Whoever this woman may be, good folks, she is not Bent-Anat the princess, but I, though I have no white robe on, am a priest of Seti, named Pentaur, and the Cherheb of to-day's festival. Leave this spot, woman, I command you, in right of my sacred office."

And Bent-Anat obeyed.

Pentaur was saved; for just as the people began to recover from their astonishment just as those whom he had hurt were once more inciting the mob to fight just as a boy, whose hand he had crushed, was crying out: "He is not a priest, he is a sword's-man. Down with the liar!"

A voice from the crowd exclaimed:

"Make way for my white robe, and leave the preacher Pentaur alone, he is my friend. You most of you know me."

"You are Nebsecht the leech, who set my broken leg," cried a sailor.

"And cured my bad eye," said a weaver.

"That tall handsome man is Pentaur, I know him well," cried the girl, whose opinion had been overheard by Bent-Anat.

"Preacher this, preacher that!" shouted the boy, and he would have rushed forward, but the people held him back, and divided respectfully at Nebsecht's command to make way for him to get at those who had been hurt.

First he stooped over the old paraschites.

"Shame upon you!" he exclaimed.---You have killed the old man."

"And I," said Pentaur, "Have dipped my peaceful hand in blood to save his innocent and suffering grandchild from a like fate."

"Scorpions, vipers, venomous reptiles, scum of men!" shrieked Nebsecht, and he sprang wildly forward, seeking Uarda. When he saw her sitting safe at the feet of old Hekt, who had made her way into the courtyard, he drew a deep breath of

relief, and turned his attention to the wounded.

"Did you knock down all that are lying here?" he whispered to his friend.

Pentaur nodded assent and smiled; but not in triumph, rather in shame; like a boy, who has unintentionally squeezed to death in his hand a bird he has caught.

Nebsecht looked round astonished and anxious. "Why did you not say who you were?" he asked. "Because the spirit of the God Mentu possessed me," answered Pentaur. "When I saw that accursed villain there with his hand in the girl's hair, I heard and saw nothing, I---"

"You did right," interrupted Nebsecht. "But where will all this end?"

At this moment a flourish of trumpets rang through the little valley. The officer sent by Ameni to apprehend the paraschites came up with his soldiers.

Before he entered the court-yard he ordered the crowd to disperse; the refractory were driven away by force, and in a few minutes the valley was cleared of the howling and shouting mob, and the burning house was surrounded by soldiers. Bent-Anat, Rameri, and Nefert were obliged to quit their places by the fence; Rameri, so soon as he saw that Uarda was safe, had rejoined his sister.

Nefert was almost fainting with fear and excitement. The two servants, who had kept near them, knit their hands together, and thus carried her in advance of the princess. Not one of them spoke a word, not even Rameri, who could not forget Uarda, and the look of gratitude she bid sent after him. Once only Bent-Anat said:

"The hovel is burnt down. Where will the poor souls sleep to-night?"

When the valley was clear, the officer entered the yard, and found there, besides Uarda and the witch Hekt, the poet, and Nebsecht, who was engaged in tending the wounded.

Pentaur shortly narrated the affair to the captain, and named himself to him.

The soldier offered him his hand.

"If there were many men in Rameses' army," said he, who could strike such a blow as you, the war with the Cheta would soon be at an end. But you have struck down, not Asiatics, but citizens of Thebes, and, much as I regret it, I must take you as a prisoner to Ameni."

"You only do your duty," replied Pentaur, bowing to the captain, who ordered his men to take up the body of the paraschites, and to bear it to the temple of Seti.

"I ought to take the girl in charge too," he added, turning to Pentaur.

"She is ill," replied the poet.

And if she does not get some rest," added Nebsecht, "she will be dead. Leave her alone; she is under the particular protection of the princess Bent-Anat, who ran over her not long ago."

"I will take her into my house," said Hekt, "and will take care of her. Her grandmother is lying there; she was half choked by the flames, but she will soon come to herself---and I have room for both."

"Till to-morrow," replied the surgeon. "Then I will provide another shelter for her."

The old woman laughed and muttered: "There are plenty of folks to take care of her, it seems."

The soldiers obeyed the command of their leader, took up the wounded, and went away with Pentaur, and the body of Pinem.

Meanwhile, Bent-Anat and her party had with much difficulty reached the river-bank. One of the bearers was sent to find the boat which was waiting for them, and he was enjoined to make haste, for already they could see the approach of the procession, which escorted the God on his return journey. If they could not succeed in finding their boat without delay, they must wait at least an hour, for, at night, not a boat that did not belong to the train of Amon---not even the barge of a noble---might venture from shore till the whole procession was safe across.

They awaited the messenger's signal in the greatest anxiety, for Nefert was perfectly exhausted, and Bent-Anat, on whom she leaned, felt her trembling in every limb.

At last the bearer gave the signal; the swift, almost invisible bark, which was generally used for wild fowl shooting, shot by---Rameri seized one end of an oar that the rower held out to him, and drew the little boat up to the landing-place.

The captain of the watch passed at the same moment, and shouting out, "This is the last boat that can put off before the passage of the God!"

Bent-Anat descended the steps as quickly as Nefert's exhausted state permitted. The landing-place was now only dimly lighted by dull lanterns, though, when the God embarked, it would be as light as day with cressets and torches. Before she could reach the bottom step, with Nefert still clinging heavily to her arm, a hard hand was laid on her shoulder, and the rough voice of Paaker exclaimed:

"Stand back, you rabble! We are going first." The captain of the watch did not stop him, for he knew the chief pioneer and his overbearing ways. Paaker put his finger to his lips, and gave a shrill whistle that sounded like a yell in the silence.

The stroke of oars responded to the call, and Paaker called out to his boatmen:

"Bring the boat up here! these people can wait!" The pioneer's boat was larger and better manned than that of the princess.

"Jump into the boat!" cried Rameri.

Bent-Anat went forward without speaking, for she did not wish to make herself known again for the sake of the people, and for Nefert's; but Paaker put himself in her way.

"Did I not tell you that you common people must wait till we are gone. Push these people's boat out into the stream, you men."

Bent-Anat felt her blood chill, for a loud squabble at once began on the landing-steps.

Rameri's voice sounded louder than all the rest; but the pioneer exclaimed:

"The low brutes dare to resist? I will teach them manners! Here, Descher, look after the woman and these boys!"

At his call his great red hound barked and sprang forward, which, as it had belonged to his father, always accompanied him when he went with his mother to visit the ancestral tomb. Nefert shrieked with fright, but the dog at once knew her, and crouched against her with whines of recognition.

Paaker, who had gone down to his boat, turned round in astonishment, and saw his dog fawning at the feet of a boy whom he could not possibly recognize as Nefert; he sprang back, and cried out:

"I will teach you, you young scoundrel, to spoil my dog with spells---or poison!"

He raised his whip, and struck it across the shoulders of Nefert, who, with one scream of terror and anguish, fell to the ground.

The lash of the whip only whistled close by the cheek of the poor fainting woman, for Bent-Anat had seized Paaker's arm with all her might.

Rage, disgust, and scorn stopped her utterance; but Rameri had heard Nefert's shriek, and in two steps stood by the women.

"Cowardly scoundrel!" he cried, and lifted the oar in his hand. Paaker evaded the blow, and called to the dog with a peculiar hiss:

"Pull him down, Descher."

The hound flew at the prince; but Rameri, who from his childhood, had been his father's companion in many hunts and field sports, gave the furious brute such a mighty blow on the muzzle that he rolled over with a snort.

Paaker believed that he possessed in the whole world no more faithful friend than this dog, his companion on all his marches across desert tracts or through the enemy's country, and when he saw him writhing on the ground his rage knew no bounds, and he flew at the youngster with his whip; but Rameri---madly excited by all the events of the night, full of the warlike spirit of his fathers, worked up to the highest pitch by the insults to the two ladies, and seeing that he was their only protector--- suddenly felt himself endowed with the strength of a man; he dealt the pioneer such a heavy blow on the left hand, that he dropped his whip, and now seized the dagger in his girdle with his right.

Bent-Anat threw herself between the man and the stripling, who was hardly more than a boy, once more declared her name, and this time her brother's also, and commanded Paaker to make peace among the boatmen. Then she led Nefert, who remained unrecognized, into the boat, entered it herself with her companions, and shortly after landed at the palace, while Paaker's mother, for whom he had called his boat, had yet a long time to wait before it could start. Setchem had seen the struggle from her litter at the top of the landing steps, but without understanding its origin, and without recognizing the chief actors.

The dog was dead. Paaker's hand was very painful, and fresh rage was seething in his soul.

"That brood of Rameses!" he muttered. "Adventurers! They shall learn to know me. Mena and Rameses are closely connected---I will sacrifice them both."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Her white cat was playing at her feet
Human sacrifices, which had been introduced into Egypt by the Phoenicians
The dressing and undressing of the holy images
Thought that the insane were possessed by demons
Use words instead of swords, traps instead of lances

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