

GEORG EBERS

UARDA : A ROMANCE OF
ANCIENT EGYPT.

VOLUME 09

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Ancient Egypt. Volume 09

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CHAPTER XXXVII

Once or twice Pentaur and his companions had had to defend themselves against hostile mountaineers, who rushed suddenly upon them out of the woods. When they were about two days' journey still from the end of their march, they had a bloody skirmish with a roving band of men that seemed to belong to a larger detachment of troops.

The nearer they got to Kadesh, the more familiar Kaschta showed himself with every stock and stone, and he went forward to obtain information; he returned somewhat anxious, for he had perceived the main body of the Cheta army on the road which they must cross. How came the enemy here in the rear of the Egyptian army? Could Rameses have sustained a defeat?

Only the day before they had met some Egyptian soldiers, who had told them that the king was staying in the camp, and a great battle was impending. This however could not have by this time been decided, and they had met no flying Egyptians.

"If we can only get two miles farther without having to fight,"

said Uarda's father. "I know what to do. Down below, there is a ravine, and from it a path leads over hill and vale to the plain of Kadesh. No one ever knew it but the Mohar and his most confidential servants. About half-way there is a hidden cave, in which we have often stayed the whole day long. The Cheta used to believe that the Mohar possessed magic powers, and could make himself invisible, for when they lay in wait for us on the way we used suddenly to vanish; but certainly not into the clouds, only into the cave, which the Mohar used to call his Tuat. If you are not afraid of a climb, and will lead your horse behind you for a mile or two, I can show you the way, and to-morrow evening we will be at the camp."

Pentaur let his guide lead the way; they came, without having occasion to fight, as far as the gorge between the hills, through which a full and foaming mountain torrent rushed to the valley. Kaschta dropped from his horse, and the others did the same. After the horses had passed through the water, he carefully effaced their tracks as far as the road, then for about half a mile he ascended the valley against the stream. At last he stopped in front of a thick oleander-bush, looked carefully about, and lightly pushed it aside; when he had found an entrance, his companions and their weary scrambling beasts followed him without difficulty, and they presently found themselves in a grove of lofty cedars. Now they had to squeeze themselves between masses of rock, now they labored up and down over smooth pebbles, which offered scarcely any footing to the horses' hoofs;

now they had to push their way through thick brushwood, and now to cross little brooks swelled by the winter-rains.

The road became more difficult at every step, then it began to grow dark, and heavy drops of rain fell from the clouded sky.

"Make haste, and keep close to me," cried Kaschta. "Half an hour more, and we shall be under shelter, if I do not lose my way."

Then a horse broke down, and with great difficulty was got up again; the rain fell with increased violence, the night grew darker, and the soldier often found himself brought to a standstill, feeling for the path with his hands; twice he thought he had lost it, but he would not give in till he had recovered the track. At last he stood still, and called Pentaur to come to him.

"Hereabouts," said he, "the cave must be; keep close to me—it is possible that we may come upon some of the pioneer's people. Provisions and fuel were always kept here in his father's time. Can you see me? Hold on to my girdle, and bend your head low till I tell you you may stand upright again. Keep your axe ready, we may find some of the Cheta or bandits roosting there. You people must wait, we will soon call you to come under shelter."

Pentaur closely followed his guide, pushing his way through the dripping brushwood, crawling through a low passage in the rock, and at last emerging on a small rocky plateau.

"Take care where you are going!" cried Kaschta. "Keep to the left, to the right there is a deep abyss. I smell smoke! Keep your hand on your axe, there must be some one in the cave. Wait! I will fetch the men as far as this."

The soldier went back, and Pentaur listened for any sounds that might come from the same direction as the smoke. He fancied he could perceive a small gleam of light, and he certainly heard quite plainly, first a tone of complaint, then an angry voice; he went towards the light, feeling his way by the wall on his left, the light shone broader and brighter, and seemed to issue from a crack in a door.

By this time the soldier had rejoined Pentaur, and both listened for a few minutes; then the poet whispered to his guide:

"They are speaking Egyptian, I caught a few words."

"All the better," said Kashta. "Paaker or some of his people are in there; the door is there still, and shut. If we give four hard and three gentle knocks, it will be opened. Can you understand what they are saying?"

"Some one is begging to be set free," replied Pentaur, "and speaks of some traitor. The other has a rough voice, and says he must follow his master's orders. Now the one who spoke before is crying; do you hear? He is entreating him by the soul of his father to take his fetters off. How despairing his voice is! Knock, Kashta—it strikes me we are come at the right moment—knock, I say."

The soldier knocked first four times, then three times. A shriek rang through the cave, and they could hear a heavy, rusty bolt drawn back, the roughly hewn door was opened, and a hoarse voice asked:

"Is that Paaker?"

"No," answered the soldier, "I am Kaschta. Do not you know me again, Nubi?"

The man thus addressed, who was Paaker's Ethiopian slave, drew back in surprise.

"Are you still alive?" he exclaimed. "What brings you here?"

"My lord here will tell you," answered Kaschta as he made way for Pentaur to enter the cave. The poet went up to the black man, and the light of the fire which burned in the cave fell full on his face.

The old slave stared at him, and drew back in astonishment and terror. He threw himself on the earth, howled like a dog that fawns at the feet of his angry master, and cried out:

"He ordered it—Spirit of my master! he ordered it." Pentaur stood still, astounded and incapable of speech, till he perceived a young man, who crept up to him on his hands and feet, which were bound with thongs, and who cried to him in a tone, in which terror was mingled with a tenderness which touched Pentaur's very soul.

"Save me—Spirit of the Mohar! save me, father!" Then the poet spoke.

"I am no spirit of the dead," said he. "I am the priest Pentaur; and I know you, boy; you are Horus, Paaker's brother, who was brought up with me in the temple of Seti."

The prisoner approached him trembling, looked at him enquiringly and exclaimed:

"Be you who you may, you are exactly like my father in person

and in voice. Loosen my bonds, and listen to me, for the most hideous, atrocious, and accursed treachery threatens us the king and all."

Pentaur drew his sword, and cut the leather thongs which bound the young man's hands and feet. He stretched his released limbs, uttering thanks to the Gods, then he cried:

"If you love Egypt and the king follow me; perhaps there is yet time to hinder the hideous deed, and to frustrate this treachery."

"The night is dark," said Kaschita, "and the road to the valley is dangerous."

"You must follow me if it is to your death!" cried the youth, and, seizing Pentaur's hand, he dragged him with him out of the cave.

As soon as the black slave had satisfied himself that Pentaur was the priest whom he had seen fighting in front of the paraschites' hovel, and not the ghost of his dead master, he endeavored to slip past Paaker's brother, but Horus observed the manoeuvre, and seized him by his woolly hair. The slave cried out loudly, and whimpered out:

"If thou dost escape, Paaker will kill me; he swore he would."

"Wait!" said the youth. He dragged the slave back, flung him into the cave, and blocked up the door with a huge log which lay near it for that purpose.

When the three men had crept back through the low passage in the rocks, and found themselves once more in the open air, they found a high wind was blowing.

"The storm will soon be over," said Horus. "See how the clouds are driving! Let us have horses, Pentaur, for there is not a minute to be lost."

The poet ordered Kaschta to summon the people to start but the soldier advised differently.

"Men and horses are exhausted," he said, "and we shall get on very slowly in the dark. Let the beasts feed for an hour, and the men get rested and warm; by that time the moon will be up, and we shall make up for the delay by having fresh horses, and light enough to see the road."

"The man is right," said Horus; and he led Kaschta to a cave in the rocks, where barley and dates for the horses, and a few jars of wine, had been preserved. They soon had lighted a fire, and while some of the men took care of the horses, and others cooked a warm mess of victuals, Horus and Pentaur walked up and down impatiently.

"Had you been long bound in those thongs when we came?" asked Pentaur.

"Yesterday my brother fell upon me," replied Horus. "He is by this time a long way ahead of us, and if he joins the Cheta, and we do not reach the Egyptian camp before daybreak, all is lost."

"Paaker, then, is plotting treason?"

"Treason, the foulest, blackest treason!" exclaimed the young man. "Oh, my lost father!—"

"Confide in me," said Pentaur going up to the unhappy youth who had hidden his face in his hands. "What is Paaker plotting?"

How is it that your brother is your enemy?"

"He is the elder of us two," said Horus with a trembling voice. "When my father died I had only a short time before left the school of Seti, and with his last words my father enjoined me to respect Paaker as the head of our family. He is domineering and violent, and will allow no one's will to cross his; but I bore everything, and always obeyed him, often against my better judgment. I remained with him two years, then I went to Thebes, and there I married, and my wife and child are now living there with my mother. About sixteen months afterwards I came back to Syria, and we travelled through the country together; but by this time I did not choose to be the mere tool of my brother's will, for I had grown prouder, and it seemed to me that the father of my child ought not to be subservient, even to his own brother. We often quarrelled, and had a bad time together, and life became quite unendurable, when—about eight weeks since—Paaker came back from Thebes, and the king gave him to understand that he approved more of my reports than of his. From my childhood I have always been softhearted and patient; every one says I am like my mother; but what Paaker made me suffer by words and deeds, that is—I could not—" His voice broke, and Pentaur felt how cruelly he had suffered; then he went on again:

"What happened to my brother in Egypt, I do not know, for he is very reserved, and asks for no sympathy, either in joy or in sorrow; but from words he has dropped now and then I

gather that he not only bitterly hates Mena, the charioteer—who certainly did him an injury—but has some grudge against the king too. I spoke to him of it at once, but only once, for his rage is unbounded when he is provoked, and after all he is my elder brother.

"For some days they have been preparing in the camp for a decisive battle, and it was our duty to ascertain the position and strength of the enemy; the king gave me, and not Paaker, the commission to prepare the report. Early yesterday morning I drew it out and wrote it; then my brother said he would carry it to the camp, and I was to wait here. I positively refused, as Rameses had required the report at my hands, and not at his. Well, he raved like a madman, declared that I had taken advantage of his absence to insinuate myself into the king's favor, and commanded me to obey him as the head of the house, in the name of my father.

"I was sitting irresolute, when he went out of the cavern to call his horses; then my eyes fell on the things which the old black slave was tying together to load on a pack-horse—among them was a roll of writing. I fancied it was my own, and took it up to look at it, when—what should I find? At the risk of my life I had gone among the Cheta, and had found that the main body of their army is collected in a cross-valley of the Orontes, quite hidden in the mountains to the north-east of Kadesh; and in the roll it was stated, in Paaker's own hand-writing, that that valley is clear, and the way through it open, and well suited for the passage of

the Egyptian war-chariots; various other false details were given, and when I looked further among his things, I found between the arrows in his quiver, on which he had written 'death to Mena,' another little roll of writing. I tore it open, and my blood ran cold when I saw to whom it was addressed."

"To the king of the Cheta?" cried Pentaur in excitement.

"To his chief officer, Titure," continued Horus. "I was holding both the rolls in my hand, when Paaker came back into the cave. 'Traitor!' I cried out to him; but he flung the lasso, with which he had been catching the stray horses, threw it round my neck, and as I fell choking on the ground, he and the black man, who obeys him like a dog, bound me hand and foot; he left the old negro to keep guard over me, took the rolls and rode away. Look, there are the stars, and the moon will soon be up."

"Make haste, men!" cried Pentaur. "The three best horses for me, Horus, and Kaschta; the rest remain here."

As the red-bearded soldier led the horses forward, the moon shone forth, and within an hour the travellers had reached the plain; they sprang on to the beasts and rode madly on towards the lake, which, when the sun rose, gleamed before them in silvery green. As they drew near to it they could discern, on its treeless western shore, black masses moving hither and thither; clouds of dust rose up from the plain, pierced by flashes of light, like the rays of the sun reflected from a moving mirror.

"The battle is begun!" cried Horus; and he fell sobbing on his horse's neck.

"But all is not lost yet!" exclaimed the poet, spurring his horse to a final effort of strength. His companions did the same, but first Kaschta's horse fell under him, then Horus's broke down.

"Help may be given by the left wing!" cried Horus. "I will run as fast as I can on foot, I know where to find them. You will easily find the king if you follow the stream to the stone bridge. In the cross-valley about a thousand paces farther north—to the northwest of our stronghold—the surprise is to be effected. Try to get through, and warn Rameses; the Egyptian pass-word is 'Bent-Anat,' the name of the king's favorite daughter. But even if you had wings, and could fly straight to him, they would overpower him if I cannot succeed in turning the left wing on the rear of the enemy."

Pentaur galloped onwards; but it was not long before his horse too gave way, and he ran forward like a man who runs a race, and shouted the pass-word "Bent-Anat"—for the ring of her name seemed to give him vigor. Presently he came upon a mounted messenger of the enemy; he struck him down from his horse, flung himself into the saddle, and rushed on towards the camp; as if he were riding to his wedding.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

During the night which had proved so eventful to our friends, much had occurred in the king's camp, for the troops were to advance to the long- anticipated battle before sunrise.

Paaker had given his false report of the enemy's movements to the Pharaoh with his own hand; a council of war had been held, and each division had received instructions as to where it was to take up its position. The corps, which bore the name of the Sungod Ra, advanced from the south towards Schabatun,

[Kadesh was the chief city of the Cheta, i. e. Aramaans, round which the united forces of all the peoples of western Asia had collected. There were several cities called Kadesh. That which frequently checked the forces of Thotmes III. may have been situated farther to the south; but the Cheta city of Kadesh, where Rameses II. fought so hard a battle, was undoubtedly on the Orontes, for the river which is depicted on the pylon of the Ramesseum as parting into two streams which wash the walls of the fortress, is called Aruntha, and in the Epos of Pentaur it is stated that this battle took place at Kadesh by the Orontes. The name of the city survives, at a spot just three miles north of the lake of Riblah. The battle itself I have described from the Epos of Pentaur, the national epic of Egypt. It ends with these words: "This was written and made by the scribe Pentaur." It was so highly esteemed that it is engraved in stone twice

at Luq̄sor, and once at Karnak. Copies of it on papyrus are frequent; for instance, papyrus Sallier III. and papyrus Raifet—unfortunately much injured—in the Louvre. The principal incident, the rescue of the king from the enemy, is repeated at the Ramessetun at Thebes, and at Abu Simbel. It was translated into French by Vicomte E. de Rouge. The camp of Rameses is depicted on the pylons of Luq̄sor and the Ramesseum.]

so as to surround the lake on the east, and fall on the enemy's flank; the corps of Seth, composed of men from lower Egypt, was sent on to Arnam to form the centre; the king himself, with the flower of the chariot-guard, proposed to follow the road through the valley, which Paaker's report represented as a safe and open passage to the plain of the Orontes. Thus, while the other divisions occupied the enemy, he could cross the Orontes by a ford, and fall on the rear of the fortress of Kadesh from the north-west. The corps of Amon, with the Ethiopian mercenaries, were to support him, joining him by another route, which the pioneer's false indications represented as connecting the line of operations. The corps of Ptah remained as a reserve behind the left wing.

The soldiers had not gone to rest as usual; heavily, armed troops, who bore in one hand a shield of half a man's height, and in the other a scimitar, or a short, pointed sword, guarded the camp,

[Representations of Rameses' camp are preserved on the

pylons of the temple of Luxor and the Ramesseum.]

where numerous fires burned, round which crowded the resting warriors. Here a wine-skin was passed from hand to hand, there a joint was roasting on a wooden spit; farther on a party were throwing dice for the booty they had won, or playing at morra. All was in eager activity, and many a scuffle occurred among the excited soldiers, and had to be settled by the camp-watch.

Near the enclosed plots, where the horses were tethered, the smiths were busily engaged in shoeing the beasts which needed it, and in sharpening the points of the lances; the servants of the chariot-guard were also fully occupied, as the chariots had for the most part been brought over the mountains in detached pieces on the backs of pack-horses and asses, and now had to be put together again, and to have their wheels greased. On the eastern side of the camp stood a canopy, under which the standards were kept, and there numbers of priests were occupied in their office of blessing the warriors, offering sacrifices, and singing hymns and litanies. But these pious sounds were frequently overpowered by the loud voices of the gamblers and revellers, by the blows of the hammers, the hoarse braying of the asses, and the neighing of the horses. From time to time also the deep roar of the king's war-lions

[See Diodorus, 1. 47. Also the pictures of the king rushing to the fight.]

might be heard; these beasts followed him into the fight, and were now howling for food, as they had been kept fasting to excite their fury.

In the midst of the camp stood the king's tent, surrounded by foot and chariot-guards. The auxiliary troops were encamped in divisions according to their nationality, and between them the Egyptian legions of heavy-armed soldiers and archers. Here might be seen the black Ethiopian with woolly matted hair, in which a few feathers were stuck—the handsome, well proportioned "Son of the desert" from the sandy Arabian shore of the Red Sea, who performed his wild war-dance flourishing his lance, with a peculiar wriggle of his—hips pale Sardinians, with metal helmets and heavy swords—light colored Libyans, with tattooed arms and ostrich- feathers on their heads—brown, bearded Arabs, worshippers of the stars, inseparable from their horses, and armed, some with lances, and some with bows and arrows. And not less various than their aspect were the tongues of the allied troops—but all obedient to the king's word of command.

In the midst of the royal tents was a lightly constructed temple with the statues of the Gods of Thebes, and of the king's forefathers; clouds of incense rose in front of it, for the priests were engaged from the eve of the battle until it was over, in prayers, and offerings to Amon, the king of the Gods, to Necheb, the Goddess of victory, and to Mentu, the God of war.

The keeper of the lions stood by the Pharaoh's sleeping-

tent, and the tent, which served as a council chamber, was distinguished by the standards in front of it; but the council-tent was empty and still, while in the kitchen-tent, as well as in the wine-store close by, all was in a bustle. The large pavilion, in which Rameses and his suite were taking their evening meal, was more brilliantly lighted than all the others; it was a covered tent, a long square in shape, and all round it were colored lamps, which made it as light as day; a body-guard of Sardinians, Libyans, and Egyptians guarded it with drawn swords, and seemed too wholly absorbed with the importance of their office even to notice the dishes and wine-jars, which the king's pages—the sons of the highest families in Egypt—took at the tent-door from the cooks and butlers.

The walls and slanting roof of this quickly-built and movable banqueting-hall, consisted of a strong, impenetrable carpet-stuff, woven at Thebes, and afterwards dyed purple at Tanis by the Phoenicians. Saitic artists had embroidered the vulture, one of the forms in which Necheb appears, a hundred times on the costly material with threads of silver. The cedar-wood pillars of the tent were covered with gold, and the ropes, which secured the light erection to the tent-pegs, were twisted of silk, and thin threads of silver. Seated round four tables, more than a hundred men were taking their evening meal; at three of them the generals of the army, the chief priests, and councillors, sat on light stools; at the fourth, and at some distance from the others, were the princes of the blood; and the king himself sat apart at a high

table, on a throne supported by gilt figures of Asiatic prisoners in chains. His table and throne stood on a low dais covered with panther-skin; but even without that Rameses would have towered above his companions. His form was powerful, and there was a commanding aspect in his bearded face, and in the high brow, crowned with a golden diadem adorned with the heads of two Uraeus-snakes, wearing the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt. A broad collar of precious stones covered half his breast, the lower half was concealed by a scarf or belt, and his bare arms were adorned with bracelets. His finely-proportioned limbs looked as if moulded in bronze, so smoothly were the powerful muscles covered with the shining copper-colored skin. Sitting here among those who were devoted to him, he looked with kind and fatherly pride at his blooming sons.

The lion was at rest—but nevertheless he was a lion, and terrible things might be looked for when he should rouse himself, and when the mighty hand, which now dispensed bread, should be clenched for the fight. There was nothing mean in this man, and yet nothing alarming; for, if his eye had a commanding sparkle, the expression of his mouth was particularly gentle; and the deep voice which could make itself heard above the clash of fighting men, could also assume the sweetest and most winning tones. His education had not only made him well aware of his greatness and power, but had left him also a genuine man, a stranger to none of the emotions of the human soul.

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