

Henty George Alfred

The Cat of Bubastes: A Tale of Ancient Egypt



George Henty

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Tale of Ancient Egypt**

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G. A. Henty

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PREFACE

My Dear Lads: Thanks to the care with which the Egyptians depicted upon the walls of their sepulchers the minutest doings of their daily life, to the dryness of the climate which has preserved these records uninjured for so many thousand years, and to the indefatigable labor of modern investigators, we know far more of the manners and customs of the Egyptians, of their methods of work, their sports and amusements, their public festivals, and domestic life, than we do of those of peoples comparatively modern. My object in the present story has been to give you as lively a picture as possible of that life, drawn from the bulky pages of Sir J. Gardner Wilkinson and other writers on the same subject. I have laid the scene in the time of Thotmes III., one of the greatest of the Egyptian monarchs, being surpassed only in glory and the extent of his conquests by Rameses the Great. It is certain that Thotmes carried the arms of Egypt to the shores of the Caspian, and a people named the Rebu, with fair hair and blue eyes, were among those depicted in the Egyptian sculptures as being conquered and made tributary. It is open to discussion whether the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt took place in the reign of Thotmes or many years subsequently, some authors assigning it to the time of Rameses. Without attempting to enter into this much-discussed question, I have assumed that the Israelites were still in Egypt at the time of Thotmes, and by introducing Moses just at the time he began to take up the cause of the people to whom he belonged, I leave it to be inferred that the Exodus took place some forty years later. I wish you to understand, however, that you are not to accept this date as being absolutely correct. Opinions differ widely upon it; and as no allusion whatever has been discovered either to the Exodus or to any of the events which preceded it among the records of Egypt, there is nothing to fix the date as occurring during the reign of any one among the long line of Egyptian kings. The term Pharaoh used in the Bible throws no light upon the subject, as Pharaoh simply means king, and the name of no monarch bearing that appellation is to be found on the Egyptian monuments. I have in no way exaggerated the consequences arising from the slaying of the sacred cat, as the accidental killing of any cat whatever was an offense punished by death throughout the history of Egypt down to the time of the Roman connection with that country.

Yours sincerely,
G. A. HENTY.

CHAPTER I.

THE KING OF THE REBU

The sun was blazing down upon a city on the western shore of the Caspian. It was a primitive city, and yet its size and population rendered it worthy of the term. It consisted of a vast aggregation of buildings, which were for the most part mere huts. Among them rose, however, a few of more solid build and of higher pretensions. These were the abodes of the chiefs and great men, the temples, and places of assembly. But although larger and more solidly built, these buildings could lay no claim to architectural beauty of any kind, but were little more than magnified huts, and even the king's palace was but a collection of such buildings closely adjoining each other.

The town was surrounded by a lofty wall with battlements and loopholes, and a similar but higher wall girt in the dwellings of the king and of his principal captains. The streets were alive with the busy multitude; and it was evident that although in the arts of peace the nation had made but little progress, they had in every thing appertaining to war made great advances. Most of the men wore helmets closely fitting to the head and surmounted by a spike. These were for the most part composed of hammered brass, although some of the headpieces were made of tough hide studded with knobs of metal. All carried round shields – those of the soldiers, of leather stiffened with metal; those of the captains, of brass, worked with considerable elaboration.

In their belts all wore daggers, while at their backs were slung quivers of iron; painted bows hung over one shoulder, and some had at their waist a pouch of smooth flat stones and leather slings. Their chief garment was a sort of kilt falling to the knee. Above the waist some wore only a thin vest of white linen, others a garment not unlike the nightgown of modern times, but with short sleeves. The kilt was worn over this. Some had breastpieces of thick leather confined by straps behind; while in the case of the officers the leather was covered with small pieces of metal, forming a cuirass.

All carried two or three javelins in the left hand and a spear some ten feet long in the right. Horsemen galloped about at full speed to and from the royal palace, while occasionally chariots, drawn sometimes by one, sometimes by two horses, dashed along. These chariots were small, the wheels not exceeding three feet in height. Between them was placed the body of the vehicle, which was but just large enough for two men to stand on. It consisted only of a small platform, with a semicircular rail running round the front some eighteen inches above it. A close observer would have perceived at once that not only were the males of the city upon the point of marching out on a military expedition, but that it was no mere foray against a neighboring people, but a war on which the safety of the city depended.

Women were standing in tearful groups as they watched the soldiers making toward the gates. The men themselves had a resolute and determined look, but there was none of the light-hearted gayety among them which betokened the expectation of success and triumph. Inside the palace the bustle of preparation was as marked as without. The king and his principal councilors and leaders were assembled in the great circular hut which formed the audience-room and council-chamber. Messengers arrived in close succession with news of the progress and strength of the enemy, or with messages from the neighboring towns and tribes as to the contingents they had furnished, and the time at which these had set out to join the army.

The king himself was a tall and warlike figure, in the prime of life. He had led his warriors on many successful expeditions far to the west, and had repulsed with great loss the attempts of the Persians to encroach upon his territory. Standing behind him was his son, Amuba, a lad of some fifteen years of age. The king and his councilors, as well as all the wealthier inhabitants of the city, wore, in addition to the kilt and linen jacket, a long robe highly colored and ornamented with fanciful devices and having a broad rich border. It was fastened at the neck with a large brooch, fell loosely

from the shoulders to the ankles, and was open in front. The girdles which retained the kilts and in which the daggers were worn were highly ornamented, and the ends fell down in front and terminated in large tassels.

All wore a profusion of necklaces, bracelets, and other ornaments of gold; many of the chiefs wore feathers in their helmets, and the greater portion of all ranks had figures tattooed on their arms and legs. They were fair in complexion, with blue eyes; their hair was for the most part golden or red, and they wore their beards short and pointed. The young Prince Amuba was attired for the field; his helmet was of gold and his cuirass covered with plates of the same metal. He listened with suppressed impatience to the arguments of his elders, for he was eager to be off, this being the first time that he had been permitted to take part in the military expeditions of his country.

After listening for some time and perceiving that there was no prospect of the council breaking up, he retired to the large hut adjoining the council-chamber. This served as the dwelling place of the ladies and their family. It was divided into several apartments by screens formed of hide sewn together and hidden from sight by colored hangings. In one of these a lady was seated on a low couch covered with panthers' skins.

"They have not done talking yet, mother. It has been a question as to where we shall assemble to give battle. It does not seem to me to make much difference where we fight, but they seem to think that it is most important; and of course they know more about it than I do. They have fixed upon a place at last – it is about fifteen miles from here. They say that the ground in front is marshy and can hardly be traversed by the enemy's chariots; but if they cannot get at us, it seems to me that we cannot get at them. Messengers have been sent off to order all the contingents to assemble at that spot. Six thousand men are to remain behind to guard the city, but as we mean to beat them I do not think there can be much occasion for that; for you think we shall beat them – don't you, mother?"

"I hope so, Amuba, but I am very fearful."

"But we have several times repulsed them when they have invaded our country, mother; why should we not do so this time?"

"They are much stronger than they have ever been before when they have come against us, my boy, and their king is a great warrior who has been successful in almost every enterprise he has undertaken."

"I cannot think why he wants to conquer us, mother. They say the riches of Egypt are immense and the splendor of their temples and buildings such as we have no idea of. We have no quarrel with them if they will but let us alone."

"No country is so rich that it does not desire more, my son. We have gold and are skilled in the working of it, and no doubt they anticipate that they will capture much treasure in the land; besides, as you say, their expeditions against the Rebu have been several times repulsed, and therefore their monarch will reap all the greater honor if he should defeat us. As to their having no quarrel with us, have we not made many expeditions to the west, returning with captives and much booty? And yet the people had no quarrel with us – many of them, indeed, could scarcely have known us by name when our army appeared among them. Some day, my son, things may be managed differently; but at present kings who have power make war upon people that are weaker than themselves, spoil them of their goods, and make slaves of them.

"I hope, Amuba, you will not expose yourself too much in the conflict. You have not come to man's strength yet; and remember you are my only child. See that your charioteer covers you with his shield when you have entered the battle, for the Egyptians are terrible as archers. Their bows carry much further than do ours, and the arrows will pierce even the strongest armor. Our spearmen have always shown themselves as good as theirs – nay, better, for they are stronger in body and full of courage. It is in the goodness of her archers and the multitude of her chariots that the strength of Egypt lies. Remember that although your father, as king, must needs go into the thick of the battle to encourage his soldiers, there is no occasion why you, who are yet a boy, should so expose yourself.

“It will doubtless be a terrible battle. The Egyptians have the memory of past defeats to wipe out, and they will be fighting under the eye of their king. I am terrified, Amuba. Hitherto when your father has gone out to battle I have never doubted as to the result. The Persians were not foes whom brave men need dread; nor was it difficult to force the hordes passing us from the eastward toward the setting sun to respect our country, for we had the advantage in arms and discipline. But the Egyptians are terrible foes, and the arms of their king have been everywhere victorious. My heart is filled with dread at the thought of the approaching conflict, though I try to keep up a brave face when your father is with me, for I would not that he should deem me cowardly.”

“I trust, mother, that your fears are groundless, and I cannot think that our men will give way when fighting for their homes and country upon ground chosen by themselves.”

“I hope not, Amuba. But there is the trumpet sounding; it is the signal that the council have broken up and that your father is about to start. Bless you, my dear boy, and may you return safe and sound from the conflict!”

The queen fondly embraced her son, who left the apartment hastily as his father entered in order that the latter might not see the traces of tears on his cheeks. A few minutes later the king, with his captains, started from the palace. Most of them rode in chariots, the rest on horseback. The town was quiet now and the streets almost deserted. With the exception of the garrison, all the men capable of bearing arms had gone forth; the women with anxious faces stood in groups at their doors and watched the royal party as it drove out.

The charioteer of Amuba was a tall and powerful man; he carried a shield far larger than was ordinarily used, and had been specially selected by the king for the service. His orders were that he was not to allow Amuba to rush into the front line of fighters, and that he was even to disobey the orders of the prince if he wished to charge into the ranks of the enemy.

“My son must not shirk danger,” his father said, “and he must needs go well in the fight; but he is still but a boy, not fit to enter upon a hand-to-hand contest with the picked warriors of Egypt. In time I hope he will fight abreast of me, but at present you must restrain his ardor. I need not bid you shield him as well as you can from the arrows of the Egyptians. He is my eldest son, and if aught happens to me he will be the king of the Rebu; and his life is therefore a precious one.”

Half an hour later they came upon the tail of the stragglers making their way to the front. The king stopped his chariot and sharply reproved some of them for their delay in setting out, and urged them to hasten on to the appointed place. In two hours the king arrived at this spot, where already some forty thousand men were assembled. The scouts who had been sent out reported that although the advance-guard of the Egyptians might arrive in an hour’s time, the main body were some distance behind and would not be up in time to attack before dark.

This was welcome news, for before night the rest of the forces of the Rebu, fully thirty thousand more, would have joined. The king at once set out to examine the ground chosen by his general for the conflict. It sloped gently down in front to a small stream which ran through soft and marshy ground, and would oppose a formidable obstacle to the passage of chariots. The right rested upon a dense wood, while a village a mile and a half distant from the wood was held by the left wing.

A causeway which led from this across the marsh had been broken up, and heavy blocks of stone were scattered thickly upon it to impede the passage of chariots. The archers were placed in front to harass the enemy attempting to cross. Behind them were the spearmen in readiness to advance and aid them if pressed. The chariots were on the higher ground in the rear ready to dash in and join in the conflict should the enemy succeed in forcing their way through the marsh.

The visit of inspection was scarcely finished when a cloud of dust was seen rising over the plain. It approached rapidly. The flash of arms could be seen in the sun, and presently a vast number of horses were seen approaching in even line.

“Are they horsemen, father?” Amuba asked.

“No, they are chariots, Amuba. The Egyptians do not, like us, fight on horseback, although there may be a few small bodies of horsemen with the army; their strength lies in their chariots. See, they have halted; they have perceived our ranks drawn up in order of battle.”

The chariots drew up in perfect line, and as the clouds of dust blew away four lines of chariots could be made out ranged at a distance of a hundred yards apart.

“There are about a thousand in each line,” the king said, “and this is but their advance-guard. We have learned from fugitives that there are fully fifteen thousand chariots with their army.”

“Is there no other place where they can pass this swamp, father?”

“Not so well as here, Amuba; the valley deepens further on, and the passage would be far more difficult than here. Above, beyond the wood, there is a lake of considerable extent, and beyond that the ground is broken and unsuited for the action of chariots as far as the sea. Besides, they have come to fight us, and the pride of their king would not permit of their making a detour. See, there is some great personage, probably the king himself, advancing beyond their ranks to reconnoiter the ground.”

A chariot was indeed approaching the opposite brow of the depression; there were two figures in it; by the side walked numerous figures, who, although too far off to be distinguished, were judged to be the attendants and courtiers of the king. The sun flashed from the side of the chariot, which appeared at this distance to be composed of burnished gold. Great fans carried on wands shaded the king from the heat of the sun.

He drove slowly along the edge of the brow until he reached a point opposite the wood, and then, turning, went the other way till he reached the causeway which passed on through the village. After this he rode back to the line of chariots and evidently gave a word of command, for instantly the long line of figures seen above the horses disappeared as the men stepped off the chariots to the ground. No movement took place for an hour; then there was a sudden stir, and the long lines broke up and wheeled round to the right and left, where they took up their position in two solid masses.

“The main army are at hand,” the king said. “Do you see that great cloud, ruddy in the setting sun? That is the dust raised by their advance. In another hour they will be here, but by that time the sun will have set, and assuredly they will not attack until morning.”

The front line were ordered to remain under arms for a time; the others were told to fall out and prepare their food for the night. The Egyptian army halted about a mile distant, and as soon as it was evident that no further movement was intended, the whole of the soldiers were ordered to fall out. A line of archers were placed along the edge of the swamp, and ere long a party of Egyptian bowmen took up their post along the opposite crest. Great fires were lighted, and a number of oxen which had been driven forward in readiness were slaughtered for food.

“If the Egyptians can see what is going on,” the king said to his son, “they must be filled with fury, for they worship the oxen as among their chief gods.”

“Is it possible, father, that they can believe that cattle are gods?” Amuba asked in surprise.

“They do not exactly look upon them as gods, my son, but as sacred to their gods. Similarly they reverence the cat, the ibis, and many other creatures.”

“How strange!” Amuba said. “Do they not worship, as we and the Persians do, the sun, which, as all must see, is the giver of light and heat, which ripens our crops and gives fertility in abundance?”

“Not so far as I know, Amuba; but I know that they have many gods who they believe give them victory over their enemies.”

“They don’t always give them victory,” Amuba said, “since four times they have been repulsed in their endeavors to invade our land. Perhaps our gods are more powerful than theirs.”

“It may be that, my son; but so far as I can see the gods give victory to the bravest and most numerous armies.”

“That is to say, they do not interfere at all, father.”

“I do not say that, my son; we know little of the ways of the gods. Each nation has its own, and as some nations overthrow others, it must be that either some gods are more powerful than others or

that they do not interfere to save those who worship them from destruction. But these things are all beyond our knowledge. We have but to do our part bravely, and we need assuredly not fear the bulls and the cats and other creatures in which the Egyptians trust.”

Some hours were spent by the king, his leaders, and his captains in going about among the troops seeing that all the contingents had arrived well armed and in good order, notifying to the leaders of each the position they should take up in the morning, and doing all in their power to animate and encourage the soldiers. When all was done the king sat down on a pile of skins which had been prepared for him and talked long and earnestly with his son, giving him advice as to his conduct in future if aught should befall him in the coming fight.

“You are my heir,” he said, “and as is customary to the country the throne goes down from father to son. Were I to survive for another eight or ten years you would, of course, succeed me, but should I fall to-morrow and should the Egyptians overrun the land, things may happen otherwise. In that case the great need of the people would be a military leader who would rouse them to prolonged resistance and lead them again and again against the Egyptians until these, worn out by the perpetual fighting, abandon the idea of subjecting us and turn their attention to less stubborn-minded people.

“For such work you are far too young, and the people would look to Amusis or one of my other captains as their leader. Should success crown his efforts they may choose him as their king. In that case I would say, Amuba, it will be far better for you to acquiesce in the public choice than to struggle against it. A lad like you would have no prospect of success against a victorious general, the choice of the people, and you would only bring ruin and death upon yourself and your mother by opposing him.

“I can assure you that there is nothing so very greatly to be envied in the lot of a king, and as one of the nobles of the land your position would be far more pleasant here than as king. A cheerful acquiescence on your part to their wishes will earn you the good will of the people, and at the death of him whom they may choose for their king their next choice may fall upon you. Do all in your power to win the good will of whoever may take the place of leader at my death by setting an example of prompt and willing obedience to his orders. It is easy for an ambitious man to remove a lad from his path, and your safety absolutely demands that you shall give him no reason whatever to regard you as a rival.

“I trust that all this advice may not be needed and that we may conquer in to-morrow’s fight, but if we are beaten the probability that I shall escape is very small, and it is therefore as well that you should be prepared for whatever may happen. If you find that in spite of following my advice the leader of the people, whoever he may be, is ill-disposed toward you, withdraw to the borders of the country, collect as large a band as you can – there are always plenty of restless spirits ready to take part in any adventure – and journey with them to the far west, as so many of our people have done before, and establish yourself there and found a kingdom.

“None of those who have ever gone in that direction have returned, and they must therefore have found space to establish themselves, for had they met with people skilled in war and been defeated, some at least would have found their way back; but so long as traditions have been handed down to us tribes from the east have poured steadily westward to the unknown land, and no band has ever returned.”

His father spoke so seriously that Amuba lay down that night on his couch of skins in a very different mood to that in which he had ridden out. He had thought little of his mother’s forebodings, and had looked upon it as certain that the Rebu would beat the Egyptians as they had done before, but his father’s tone showed him that he too felt by no means confident of the issue of the day.

As soon as daylight broke the Rebu stood to their arms, and an hour later dense masses of the Egyptians were seen advancing. As soon as these reached the edge of the slope and began to descend toward the stream, the king ordered his people to advance to the edge of the swamp and to open fire with their arrows.

A shower of missiles flew through the air and fell among the ranks of the Egyptian footmen who had just arrived at the edge of the swamp. So terrible was the discharge that the Egyptians recoiled and, retreating halfway up the slope, where they would be beyond the reach of the Rebu, in turn discharged their arrows. The superiority of the Egyptian bowmen was at once manifest. They carried very powerful bows, and standing sideways drew them to the ear, just as the English archers did at Crecy, and therefore shot their arrows a vastly greater distance than did their opponents, who were accustomed to draw their bows only to the breast.

Scores of the Rebu fell at the first discharge, and as the storm of arrows continued, they, finding themselves powerless to damage the Egyptians at that distance, retired halfway up the side of the slope. Now from behind the lines of the Egyptian archers a column of men advanced a hundred abreast, each carrying a great fagot. Their object was evident: they were about to prepare a wide causeway across the marsh by which the chariots could pass. Again the Rebu advanced to the edge of the swamp and poured in their showers of arrows; but the Egyptians, covering themselves with the bundles of fagots they carried, suffered but little harm, while the Rebu were mown down by the arrows of the Egyptian archers shooting calmly and steadily beyond the range of their missiles.

As soon as the front rank of the Egyptian column reached the edge of the swampy ground the men of the front line laid down their fagots in a close row and then retired in the intervals between their comrades behind them. Each rank as it arrived at the edge did the same. Many fell beneath the arrows of the Rebu, but the operation went on steadily, the fagots being laid down two deep as the ground became more marshy, and the Rebu saw, with a feeling approaching dismay, the gradual but steady advance of a causeway two hundred yards wide across the swamp.

The king himself and his bravest captains, alighting from their chariots, went down among the footmen and urged them to stand firm, pointing out that every yard the causeway advanced their arrows inflicted more fatal damage among the men who were forming it. Their entreaties, however, were vain; the ground facing the causeway was already thickly incumbered with dead, and the hail of the Egyptian arrows was so fast and deadly that even the bravest shrank from withstanding it. At last even their leaders ceased to urge them, and the king gave the order for all to fall back beyond the range of the Egyptian arrows.

Some changes were made in the formation of the troops, and the best and most disciplined bands were placed facing the causeway so as to receive the charge of the Egyptian chariots. The two front lines were of spearmen, while on the higher ground behind them were placed archers whose orders were to shoot at the horses, and to pay no heed to those in the chariots; then came the chariots, four hundred in number. Behind these again was a deep line of spearmen; on the right and left extending to the wood and village were the main body of the army, who were to oppose the Egyptian footmen advancing across the swamp.

The completion of the last portion of the causeway cost the Egyptians heavily, for while they were exposed to the arrows of the Rebu archers these were now beyond the range of the Egyptians on the opposite crest. But at last the work was completed. Just as it was finished and the workmen had retired, the king leaped from his chariot, and, leading a body of a hundred men carrying blazing brands, dashed down the slope. As soon as they were seen the Egyptian archers ran forward and a storm of arrows was poured into the little band. Two-thirds of them fell ere they reached the causeway; the others applied their torches to the fagots.

The Egyptian footmen rushed across to extinguish the flames, while the Rebu poured down to repel them. A desperate fight ensued, but the bravery of the Rebu prevailed, and the Egyptians were driven back. Their attack, however, had answered its purpose, for in the struggle the fagots had been trodden deeper into the mire, and the fire was extinguished. The Rebu now went back to their first position and waited the attack which they were powerless to avert. It was upward of an hour before it began, then the long line of Egyptian footmen opened, and their chariots were seen fifty abreast, then with a mighty shout the whole army advanced down the slope. The Rebu replied with their warcry.

At full speed the Egyptian chariots dashed down the declivity to the causeway. This was the signal for the Rebu archers to draw their bows, and in an instant confusion was spread among the first line of chariots. The horses wounded by the missiles plunged madly. Many, stepping between the fagots, fell. For a moment the advance was checked, but the Egyptian footmen, entering the swamp waist-deep, opened such a terrible fire with their arrows that the front line of the Rebu were forced to fall back, and the aim of their archers became wild and uncertain.

In vain the king endeavored to steady them. While he was doing so, the first of the Egyptian chariots had already made their way across the causeway, and behind them the others poured on in an unbroken column. Then through the broken lines of spearmen the Rebu chariots dashed down upon them, followed by the host of spearmen. The king's object was to arrest the first onslaught of the Egyptians, to overwhelm the leaders, and prevent the mass behind from emerging from the crowded causeway.

The shock was terrible. Horses and chariots rolled over in wild confusion, javelins were hurled, bows twanged, and the shouts of the combatants and the cries of the wounded as they fell beneath the feet of the struggling horses created a terrible din. Light and active, the Rebu footmen mingled in the fray, diving under the bellies of the Egyptian horses, and inflicting vital stabs with their long knives or engaging in hand-to-hand conflicts with the dismounted Egyptians. Amuba had charged down with the rest of the chariots. He was stationed in the second line, immediately behind his father; and his charioteer, mindful of the orders he had received, strove, in spite of the angry orders of the lad, to keep the chariot stationary; but the horses, accustomed to maneuver in line, were not to be restrained, and in spite of their driver's efforts charged down the slope with the rest.

Amuba, who had hunted the lion and leopard, retained his coolness, and discharged his arrows among the Egyptians with steady aim. For a time the contest was doubtful. The Egyptian chariots crowded on the causeway were unable to move forward, and in many places their weight forced the fagots so deep in the mire that the vehicles were immovable. Meanwhile, along the swamp on both sides a terrible contest was going on. The Egyptians, covered by the fire of their arrows, succeeded in making their way across the swamp, but here they were met by the Rebu spearmen, and the fight raged along the whole line.

Then two thousand chosen men, the bodyguard of the Egyptian king, made their way across the swamp close to the causeway, while at the same time there was a movement among the densely packed vehicles. A tremendous impulse was given to them from behind: some were pressed off into the swamp, some were overthrown or trampled under foot, some were swept forward on to the firm ground beyond, and thus a mass of the heaviest chariots drawn by the most powerful horses forced their way across the causeway over all obstacles.

In their midst was the King of Egypt himself, the great Thotmes.

The weight and impetus of the mass of horses and chariots pressed all before it up the hill. This gave to the chariots which came on behind room to open to the right and left. The king's bodyguard shook the solid formation of the Rebu spearmen with their thick flights of arrows, and the chariots then dashed in among them. The Rebu fought with the valor of their race. The Egyptians who first charged among them fell pierced with their arrows, while their horses were stabbed in innumerable places. But as the stream of chariots poured over without a check, and charged in sections upon them, bursting their way through the mass of footmen by the force and fury with which they charged, the infantry became broken up into groups, each fighting doggedly and desperately.

At this moment the officer in command of the Rebu horse, a thousand strong, charged down upon the Egyptian chariots, drove them back toward the swamp, and for a time restored the conflict; but the breaks which had occurred between the Rebu center and its two flanks had enabled the Egyptian bodyguard to thrust themselves through and to fall upon the Rebu chariots and spearmen, who were still maintaining the desperate conflict. The Rebu king had throughout fought in the front line of his men, inspiriting them with his voice and valor. Many times, when his chariot was so

jammed in the mass that all movement was impossible, he leaped to the ground, and, making his way through the throng, slew many of the occupants of the Egyptian chariots.

But his efforts and those of his captains were unavailing. The weight of the attack was irresistible. The solid phalanx of Egyptian chariots pressed onward, and the Rebu were forced steadily back. Their chariots, enormously outnumbered, were destroyed rather than defeated. The horses fell pierced by the terrible rain of arrows, and the wave of Egyptians passed over them. The king, looking round in his chariot, saw that all was lost here, and that the only hope was to gain one or other of the masses of his infantry on the flank, and to lead them off the field in solid order. But as he turned to give orders, a shaft sent by a bowman in a chariot a few yards away struck him in the eye and he fell back dead in his chariot.

CHAPTER II. THE SIEGE OF THE CITY

Amuba saw his father fall, and leaping from his chariot, strove to make his way through the mingled mass of footmen and chariots to the spot. Jethro followed close behind him. He, too, had caught sight of the falling figure, and knew what Amuba did not – that the Rebu had lost their king. He was not forgetful of the charge which had been laid on him, but the lad was for a moment beyond his control, and he, too, was filled with fury at the fall of the king, and determined if possible to save his body. He reached Amuba's side just in time to interpose his shield between the boy and an Egyptian archer in a chariot he was passing. The arrow pierced the shield and the arm that held it. Jethro paused an instant, broke off the shaft at the shield, and seizing the point, which was projecting two inches beyond the flesh, pulled the arrow through the wound.

It was but a moment's work, but short as it was it almost cost Amuba his life, for the archer, leaning forward, dropped the end of his bow over the lad's head – a trick common among the Egyptian archers – and in a moment dragged him to the ground, while his comrade in the chariot raised his spear to dispatch him. Jethro sprang forward with a shout of rage, and with a blow of his sword struck off the head of the spear as it was descending. Then shortening his sword, he sprang into the chariot, ran the man holding the bow through the body, and grappled with the spearman.

The struggle was a short one. Leaving his sword in the body of the archer, Jethro drew his dagger and speedily dispatched his foe. Then he jumped down, and lifting Amuba, who was insensible from the sharp jerk of the bowstring upon his throat and the violence of his fall, carried him back to his chariot. This with the greatest difficulty he managed to draw out of the heat of the conflict, which was for the moment raging more fiercely than before. The Rebu who had seen the fall of their king had dashed forward to rescue the body and to avenge his death. They cleared a space round him, and as it was impossible to extricate his chariot, they carried his body through the chaos of plunging horses, broken chariots, and fiercely struggling men to the rear.

Then it was placed in another chariot, and the driver started with it at full speed for the city. Jethro, on emerging from the crowd, paused for a moment to look round. He saw at once that the battle was lost. The center was utterly broken, and the masses of the Egyptians who had crossed the swamp were pressing heavily on the flanks of the Rebu footmen, who were still opposing a firm stand to those attacking them in front. For the moment the passage of the Egyptian chariots was arrested; so choked was the causeway with chariots and horses which were imbedded in the mire, or had sunk between the fagots that further passage was impossible, and a large body of footmen were now forming a fresh causeway by the side of the other.

This would soon be completed, for they were now working undisturbed by opposition, and Jethro saw that as soon as it was done the Egyptian host would sweep across and fall upon the rear of the Rebu. Jethro ran up to two mounted men, badly wounded, who had like himself made their way out of the fight.

“See,” he said, “in a quarter of an hour a new causeway will be completed, and the Egyptians will pour over. In that case resistance will be impossible, and all will be lost. Do one of you ride to each flank and tell the captains that the king is dead, that there are none to give orders here, and that their only chance to save their troops is to retreat at full speed but keeping good order to the city.”

The horsemen rode off immediately, for Jethro, as the king's own charioteer, was a man of some impatience. After dispatching the messengers he returned to his chariot and at once drove off. Amuba was now recovering, and the rough motion of the vehicle as it dashed along at full speed aroused him.

“What is it, Jethro? What has happened?”

“The battle is lost, prince, and I am conveying you back to the city. You have had a rough fall and a narrow escape of your life, and can do no more fighting even if fighting were of any good, which it is not.”

“And the king, my father?” Amuba said, struggling to his feet. “What of him? Did I not see him fall?”

“I know naught of him for certain,” Jethro replied. “There was a terrible fight raging, and as I had you to carry out I could take no share in it. Besides, I had an arrow through my left arm – if I had been a moment later it would have gone through your body instead. And now, if you do not mind taking the reins, I will bandage it up. I have not had time to think about it yet, but it is bleeding fast, and I begin to feel faint.”

This was indeed true; but Jethro had called Amuba’s attention to his wound principally for the sake of diverting his thoughts for a moment from his fear for his father. As Amuba drove, he looked back. The plain behind him was covered with a mass of fugitives.

“I see that all is lost,” he said mournfully. “But how is it that we are not pursued?”

“We shall be pursued before long,” Jethro answered. “But I fancy that few of the Egyptian chariots which first passed are in a condition to follow. Most of them have lost horses or drivers. Numbers were broken to pieces in the *mêlée*. But they are making a fresh causeway, and when that is completed those who cross will take up the pursuit. As for their footmen, they have small chance of catching the Rebu.”

“Surely our men ought to retreat in good order, Jethro. Scattered as they are, they will be slaughtered in thousands by the Egyptian chariots.”

“They could not oppose much resistance to them anyhow,” Jethro replied. “On a plain footmen cannot withstand a chariot charge. As it is, many will doubtless fall; but they will scatter to the right and left, numbers will reach the hills in safety, some will take refuge in woods and jungles, while many will outrun the chariots. The new causeway is narrow, and a few only can cross abreast, and thus, though many of our men will be overtaken and killed, I trust that the greater part will escape.”

“Let us draw up here for a short time, Jethro. I see there are several chariots and some horsemen behind, and as they are with the main body of the fugitives, they are doubtless friends. Let us join them and proceed in a body to the town. I should not like to be the first to enter with the news of our defeat.”

“You are right, prince. As our horses are good, we need not fear being overtaken. We can therefore wait a few minutes.”

A score of chariots presently came up, and all halted on seeing Amuba. One of them contained Amusis, the chief captain of the army. He leaped from his chariot when he saw Amuba, and advanced to him.

“Prince,” he said, “why do you delay? I rejoice at seeing that you have escaped in the battle, for I marked you bravely fighting in the midst; but let me beg you to hasten on. A few minutes and the host of Egyptian chariots will be upon us.”

“I am ready to proceed, Amusis, since you have come. Have you any news of my father?”

“The king has been sorely wounded,” the general said, “and was carried off out of the battle; but come, prince, we must hasten on. Our presence will be sorely needed in the city, and we must get all in readiness for defense before the Egyptians arrive.”

The chariots again started, and reached the city without seeing anything of the Egyptians, who did not indeed arrive before the walls until an hour later, having been delayed by the slaughter of the fugitives. As the party entered the town they found confusion and terror prevailing. The arrival of the body of the king was the first intimation of disaster, and this had been followed by several horsemen and chariots, who had spread the news of the defeat of the army. The cries of women filled the air; some in their grief and terror ran wildly here and there; some sat at their doors with their faces hidden by their hands, wailing loudly; others tore their garments and behaved as if demented.

On their way to the palace they met the troops who had been left behind to guard the city, moving down stern and silent to take their places on the wall. During the drive Amusis, who had driven in Amuba's chariot, had broken to the boy the news that his father was dead, and Amuba was prepared for the loud lamentation of women which met him as he entered the royal inclosure.

"I will see my mother," he said to Amusis, "and then I will come down with you to the walls and will take whatever part you may assign me in the defense. It is to your experience and valor we must now trust."

"I will do all that I can, prince. The walls are strong, and if, as I hope, the greater part of our army find their way back, I trust we may be able to defend ourselves successfully against the Egyptian host. Assure your royal mother of my deep sympathy for her in her sorrow, and of my devotion to her personally."

The general now drove off, and Amuba entered the royal dwellings. In the principal apartment the body of the king was laid upon a couch in the middle of the room. The queen stood beside it in silent grief, while the attendants raised loud cries, wrung their hands, and filled the air with their lamentation, mingled with praises of the character and bravery of the king. Amuba advanced to his mother's side. She turned and threw her arms round him.

"Thank the gods, my son, that you are restored to me; but what a loss, what a terrible loss is ours!"

"It is indeed, mother. No better father ever lived than mine. But I pray you, mother, lay aside your grief for awhile; we shall have time to weep and mourn for him afterward. We have need of all our courage. In a few hours the Egyptian hosts will be before our walls, and every arm will be needed for their defense. I am going down to take my place among the men, to do what I can to encourage them; but the confusion in the city is terrible. None know whether they have lost husbands or fathers, and the cries and lamentations of the women cannot but dispirit and dishearten the men. I think, mother, that you might do much if you would; and I am sure that my father in his resting-place with the gods would far rather see you devoting yourself to the safety of his people than to lamentations here."

"What would you have me do?"

"I should say, mother, mount a chariot and drive through the streets of the town; bid the women follow the example of their queen and defer their lamentation for the fallen until the foe has been repelled. Bid each do her part in the defense of the city; there is work for all – stones to be carried to the walls, food to be cooked for the fighting men, hides to be prepared in readiness to be carried to the ramparts where the attack is hottest, to shield our soldiers from arrows. In these and other tasks all can find employment, and, in thus working for the defense of the town, the women would find distraction from their sorrows and anxieties."

"Your advice is wise, Amuba, and I will follow it. Order a chariot to be brought down. My maidens shall come with me; and see that two trumpeters are in readiness to precede us. This will insure attention and silence, and my words will be heard as we pass along. How did you escape from the conflict?"

"The faithful Jethro bore me off, mother, or I, too, should have fallen; and now, with your permission, I will go to the wall."

"Do so, Amuba, and may the gods preserve you. You must partake of some food before you go, for you will need all your strength, my son."

Amuba hastily ate the food that was placed before him in another apartment, and drank a goblet of wine, and then hurried down to the wall.

The scene was a heart-rending one. All over the plain were scattered groups of men hurrying toward the city, while among them dashed the Egyptian chariots, overthrowing and slaying them; but not without resistance. The Rebu were well disciplined, and, as the chariots thundered up, little groups gathered together, shield overlapping shield, and spears projecting, while those within the circle shot

their arrows or whirled stones from their slings. The horses wounded by the arrows often refused to obey their drivers, but rushed headlong across the plain; others charged up only to fall pierced with the spears, while the chariots were often empty of their occupants before they broke into the phalanx.

Thus, although many fell, many succeeded in gaining the gates of the town, and the number of men available for the defense had already largely increased when Amuba reached the walls. Although the Egyptian chariots came up in great numbers, night fell without the appearance of the main body of the Egyptian army. After darkness set in great numbers of the Rebu troops who had escaped to the hills made their way into the town. The men of the contingents furnished by the other Rebu cities naturally made their way direct to their homes, but before morning the six thousand men left behind to guard the city when the army set out had been swelled to four times their numbers.

Although this was little more than half the force which had marched out to battle, the return of so large a number of the fugitives caused a great abatement of the panic and misery that had prevailed. The women whose husbands or sons had returned rejoiced over those whom they had regarded as lost, while those whose friends had not yet returned gained hopes from the narratives of the fresh comers that their loved ones might also have survived, and would ere long make their way back. The example of the queen had already done much to restore confidence. All knew the affection that existed between the king and her, and the women all felt that if she could lay aside her deep sorrow, and set such an example of calmness and courage at such a time, it behooved all others to set aside their anxieties and to do their best for the defense of the town.

Amusis gave orders that all those who had returned from battle should rest for the night in their homes, the troops who had remained in the city keeping guard upon the walls. In the morning, however, all collected at the trumpet-call, and were formed up according to the companies and battalions to which they belonged. Of some of these which had borne the brunt of the combat there were but a handful of survivors, while of others the greater portion were present; weak battalions were joined to the strong; fresh officers were appointed to take the place of those who were missing; the arms were examined, and all deficiencies made good from the public stores.

Ten thousand men were set aside as a reserve to be brought up to the points most threatened, while to the rest were allotted those portions of the wall which they were to occupy. As soon as morning broke the women recommenced the work that had been interrupted by night, making their way to the walls in long trains, carrying baskets of stones on their heads. Disused houses were pulled down for the sake of their stones and timber, parties of women with ropes dragging the latter to the walls in readiness to be hurled down upon the heads of the enemy. Even the children joined in the work, carrying small baskets of earth to those portions of the wall which Amusis had ordered to be strengthened.

The position of the city had been chosen with a view to defense. It stood on a plateau of rock raised some fifty feet above the plain. The Caspian washed its eastern face; on the other three sides a high wall, composed of earth roughly faced with stones, ran along at the edge of the plateau; above it, at distances of fifty yards apart, rose towers. The entire circuit of the walls was about three miles. Since its foundation by the grandfather of the late king the town had never been taken, although several times besieged, and the Rebu had strong hopes that here, when the chariots of the Egyptians were no longer to be feared, they could oppose a successful resistance to all the efforts of the enemy.

At noon the Egyptian army was seen advancing, and, confident as the defenders of the city felt, they could not resist a feeling of apprehension at the enormous force which was seen upon the plain. The Egyptian army was over three hundred thousand strong. It moved in regular order according to the arms or nationality of the men. Here were Nubians, Sardinians, Etruscans, Oscans, Dauni, Maxyes, Kahaka, a race from Iberia, and bodies of other mercenaries from every tribe and people with whom the Egyptians had any dealings.

The Sardinians bore round shields, three or four spears or javelins, a long straight dagger, and a helmet surmounted by a spike, with a ball at the top. The Etruscans carried no shields, and instead

of the straight dagger were armed with a heavy curved chopping-knife; their headdress resembled somewhat in shape that now worn by the Armenians. The Dauni were Greek in the character of their arms, carrying a round shield, a single spear, a short straight sword, and a helmet of the shape of a cone.

The Egyptians were divided according to their arms. There were regiments of archers, who carried, for close combat, a slightly curved stick of heavy wood; other regiments of archers carried hatchets. The heavy infantry all bore the Egyptian shield, which was about three feet long. It was widest at the upper part, where it was semicircular, while the bottom was cut off straight. The shields had a boss near the upper part. Some regiments carried, in addition to the spears, heavy maces, others axes. Their helmets all fitted closely to the head; most of them wore metal tassels hanging from the top. The helmets were for the most part made of thick material, quilted and padded; these were preferred to metal, being a protection from the heat of the sun.

Each company carried its own standard; these were all of religious character, and represented animals sacred to the gods, sacred boats, emblematic devices, or the names of the king or queen. These were in metal, and were raised at the ends of spears or staves. The standard-bearers were all officers of approved valor. Behind the army followed an enormous baggage-train; and as soon as this had arrived on the ground the tents of the king and the principal officers were pitched.

“What a host!” Jethro said to Amuba, who, after having his arm dressed on his arrival at the palace, had accompanied the young prince to the walls. “It seems a nation rather than an army. I do not wonder now that we were defeated yesterday, but that we so long held our ground, and that so many escaped from the battle.”

“It is wonderful, truly, Jethro. Look at the long line of chariots moving in as regular order as the footmen. It is well for us that they will now be forced to be inactive. As to the others, although they are countless in numbers, they cannot do much against our walls. No towers that they can erect upon the plains will place them on a level with us here, and the rock is so steep that it is only here and there that it can be climbed.”

“It would seem impossible for them to take it, prince; but we must not be too confident. We know that many towns which believed themselves impregnable have been captured by the Egyptians, and must be prepared for the most daring enterprises. The gates have been already fastened, and so great a thickness of rocks piled against them that they are now the strongest part of the wall; those parts of the roads leading up to them that were formed of timber have been burned, and they cannot now reach the gates except by climbing, as at other points. We have provisions enough to last for well-nigh a year, for all the harvest has been brought in from the whole district round, together with many thousands of cattle; of wells there are abundance.”

“Yes, I heard the preparations that were being made, Jethro, and doubt not that if we can resist the first onslaught of the Egyptians we can hold out far longer than they can, for the difficulty of victualing so huge an army will be immense. In what way do you think they will attack? For my part I do not see any method which offers a hope of success.”

“That I cannot tell you. We know that to us and to the peoples around our cities seem impregnable. But the Egyptians are skilled in all the devices of war. They have laid siege to and captured great numbers of cities, and are doubtless full of plans and expedients of which we know nothing. However, to-morrow morning will show us something. Nothing will be attempted to-day. The generals have first to inspect our walls and see where the assault is to be delivered, and the army will be given a day’s rest at least before being called upon to assault such a position.”

In the afternoon a *cortége* of chariots made the circuit of the walls from the shore of the sea round the great plateau to the sea again, keeping just beyond the range of arrows.

“If we had but a few of their archers here,” Jethro said, “the Egyptian king would not be so overbold in venturing so near. It is wonderful how strongly they shoot. Their arrows have fully double the range of ours, and their power is sufficient to carry them through the strongest shields, even when

strengthened with metal. Had I not seen it I should have thought it impossible that living men, and those no bigger or stronger than we, could have sent their arrows with such power. They stand in a different attitude to that of our archers, and though their shafts are fully a foot longer than ours they draw them to the head. I regarded myself as a good bowman till I met the Egyptians, and now I feel as a child might do when watching a man performing feats of strength of which he had not even imagined a possibility.”

In the evening the great council met. It included all the principal officers of the army, the priests, the royal councilors, and the leading men in the state. After a discussion it was determined that in the present crisis it were best to postpone taking any steps to appoint a successor to the late king, but that so long as the siege lasted Amosis should be endowed with absolute powers. In order that there should be no loss of time for the necessity of consulting any one Amuba was present with his mother at the council, though neither of them took any active part in it. But at its commencement an announcement was made in their name that they were willing to abide by whatever the council should decide, and that indeed both mother and son desired that while this terrible danger hung over the state the supreme power should be placed in the hands of whomsoever the general voice might select as the person best fitted to take the command in such an extremity.

That night the body of the king was consumed on a great funeral pile. Under ordinary occasions the ceremony would have taken place on a narrow promontory jutting out into the sea, about five miles from the city. Here the previous monarchs had been consumed in sight of a multitude of their people, and had been buried beneath great mounds of earth. The priests had long ago pronounced this place the most sacred in the kingdom, and had declared that the anger of the gods would fall upon any who ventured to set foot upon the holy ground. But it was impossible for the present to lay the ashes of the king by the side of those of his forefathers, and the ceremony was therefore conducted within the royal inclosure, only the officiating priests and the wife and son of the deceased being present. When all was over the ashes were collected and were placed in a casket, which was destined, when better times returned, to be laid, in the sight of the whole people, in the sacred inclosure on the promontory.

Early next morning the trumpets of the guards on the walls called all the troops to arms. As soon as Amuba reached his post he saw the Egyptian army marching against the city. When they arrived within bowshot the archers, who formed the front lines, opened fire upon the defenders on the walls. Their arrows, however, for the most part fell short, while those of the besieged rained down upon them with effect. They were therefore withdrawn a short distance, and contracting their ranks a vast number of footmen poured through, and in irregular order ran forward to the foot of the rock, where they were sheltered from the arrows of those on the wall.

“What can they be going to do now?” Amuba exclaimed, laying aside his bow.

Jethro shook his head.

“They are working with a plan,” he said. “We shall see before very long. Listen.”

Even above the din caused by so vast a multitude a sharp metallic sound was presently heard like that of innumerable hammers striking on steel.

“Surely,” Amuba exclaimed, “they can never be thinking of quarrying the rock away! That is too great a task even were the whole people of Egypt here.”

“It certainly is not that,” Jethro agreed; “and yet I cannot think what else can be their intentions.”

It was nigh an hour before the mystery was solved. Then, at the blast of a trumpet sounded at the post where the Egyptian king had placed himself, and taken up along the whole of the line, a great number of heads appeared along the edge of rock at the foot of the walls. The Egyptians had been employed in driving spikes in the crevices of the rock. Standing on the first so driven, they then inserted others three feet higher, and so had proceeded until a number of men had climbed up the face of the rock. These let down ropes, and ladders had been hauled up the steepest places. Great numbers of ropes were hung down to assist those who followed in the ascent, and the men who first

showed themselves over the brow were followed by a stream of others, until the ledge, which was in most cases but a few feet wide, was crowded with soldiers.

The ladders were now hauled up and placed against the wall, and the Egyptians swarmed up in great numbers; but the Rebu were prepared for the assault, and a storm of stones, beams of wood, arrows, javelins, and other missiles rained down on the Egyptians. Many of the ladders, in spite of the number of men upon them, were thrown back by the defenders, and fell with a crash over the edge of the rock to the plain below. Here and there the Egyptians gained a footing on the wall before the Rebu had recovered from their first surprise at their daring manner of attack; but so soon as they rallied they attacked the Egyptians with such fury that in every case the latter were slain fighting or were thrown over the embattlements.

For several hours the Egyptians continued their efforts, but after losing vast numbers of men without obtaining any success they were recalled by the sound of the trumpet.

“That has not been very serious, Jethro,” Amuba said, wiping the perspiration from his forehead; for he had been encouraging the men by assisting in the lifting and casting over the massive stones and beams of wood.

“It was not difficult to repulse them under such conditions,” Jethro said; “but the manner of their attack was a surprise indeed to us, and they have fought with the greatest bravery. You will see that the next time they will have benefited by the lesson, and that we shall have some new device to cope with. Now that they have once found a way to scale the rock we may expect but little rest.”

The fight was not renewed until evening, when, just as darkness fell, a large number of the Egyptians again ascended the rock. As before, the Rebu poured missiles down upon them; but this time only a sufficient number had climbed up to be able to stand along close to the foot of the wall, where they were to a great extent sheltered from the missiles from above. The night was a dark one, and all night long the Rebu continued to shower down missiles upon their invisible foe, of whose continued presence they were assured by the sounds which from time to time were heard.

When daylight enabled the defenders to see what was going on at the foot of their walls they raised a shout of surprise and dismay. During the night the Egyptians had hoisted up by ropes a quantity of the timber brought with them for the construction of shelters for those who were engaged on siege operations. The timbers were all cut and prepared for fitting together, and were easily jointed even in the dark. Thus, then, when the besiegers looked over, they saw forty or fifty of these shelters erected against the foot of their walls. They were so formed that they sloped down like a pent-house and were thickly covered with hides.

The besieged soon found that so solid were these constructions that the beams and great stones which they dropped upon them simply bounded off and leaped down into the plain. Ladders fastened together had been fixed by the Egyptians from each of these shelters to the plain below, so that the men at work could be relieved or reinforced as the occasion required.

In vain the besieged showered down missiles, in vain poured over the caldrons of boiling oil they had prepared in readiness. The strength of the beams defied the first; the hides lapping over each other prevented the second from penetrating to those below.

“Truly these are terrible foes, prince,” Jethro said. “I told you that we might expect new plans and devices, but I did not think that the very day after the siege began we should find that they had overcome all the difficulties of our natural defenses, and should have established themselves in safety at the foot of our walls.”

“But what is to be done, Jethro? The men working in those shelters will speedily dislodge these stones facing the walls, and will then without difficulty dig through the earthwork behind.”

“The matter is serious,” Jethro agreed; “but as yet there is no reason to alarm ourselves. The greater portion of our troops will be assembled behind the wall, and should the Egyptians gain a way through we should pour in at the openings, and as they can be only reinforced slowly, would speedily hurl them all over the edge of the cliff. It is not that I fear.”

“What is it that you do fear, Jethro?”

“I fear, prince, because I do not know what it is I have to fear. We are as children in a struggle of this kind as opposed to the Egyptians. Already they have wholly overthrown all our calculations, and it is just because I do not know what they will do next that I am afraid. It must be as plain to them as it is to us that if they dig through the walls we shall rush in and overpower them.”

“Perhaps they intend to work right and left and to undermine the walls, until large portions of them tumble over and breaches are made.”

Jethro shook his head.

“That would destroy the Egyptian shelters and bury their workmen; or, even did they manage to retire before the walls fell, they would gain nothing by it. In fact, I wish that we ourselves could tumble the walls over, for in that case the heap of earth and stones would rise from the very edge of the rock, and as the Egyptians could only climb up in small numbers at a time, we could destroy them without difficulty. I see now that our builders made a mistake in surrounding the city with a high wall; it would have been best to have built a mere breastwork at the very edge of the cliff all round. Here comes Amusis; we shall hear what his opinion of the matter is.”

Amusis looked flushed and anxious, although when he saw the prince he assumed an expression of carelessness.

“The Egyptians are going to burrow through our walls,” he said; “but when they do we will drive them like rats out of the holes. Do you not think so, Jethro?”

“I do not know,” Jethro said gravely. “If they dig through our walls we shall certainly, as you say, drive them out of their holes; but I cannot believe that that is what they are going to do.”

“What do you think they are going to do?” Amusis asked roughly.

“I have no idea, Amusis. I wish that I had; but I am quite sure that they haven’t taken all this trouble for nothing.”

CHAPTER III. CAPTIVE

So confident were the Rebu that if the Egyptians dug through their walls, or even threw them down by undermining them, they could repel their assault, that they took but little heed to the huts established at the foot of the wall, except that a strong body of men were stationed behind the walls, half of whom were always to be under arms in readiness to repel the Egyptians should they burrow through. This confidence proved their ruin. The Egyptians were thoroughly accustomed to mining operations, and were fully aware that were they to pierce the wall the Rebu could at once overwhelm the small working parties; they, therefore, after penetrating a considerable distance into the embankment, drove right and left, making an excavation of considerable size, the roof being supported by beams and planks hauled up at night.

The number of those employed in the work was increased as fast as there was room for them; and while the Rebu thought that there were at most a dozen men in each of the sheltered places, there were, at the end of twenty-four hours, fully two hundred men at work in the heart of the embankment at each point. The Egyptian king had ordered the chief of his engineers to have everything in readiness for the capture of the city by the end of the third day.

Each night the numbers of workmen increased, while the excavations were carried in further and further. No picks were used in the work, the earth being cut away with wide daggers. Absolute silence was enjoined among the workers, and they were thus enabled to extend their excavations close to the surface without the defenders having an idea of their proximity. The distance that they were from the inner face was ascertained by boring through at night-time with spears. By the end of the third day the excavations had been carried so far that there was but a foot or so of earth remaining, this being kept from moving, on pressure from the outside, by a lining of boards supported by beams. Thus at twenty points the Egyptians were in readiness to burst through among the unsuspecting defenders.

As soon as it was dark the preparations for the assault began. Great numbers of stagings of vast length had been prepared, together with an immense number of broad and lofty ladders. These last were brought forward noiselessly to the foot of the cliff, and great numbers of the Egyptians mounted before the alarm was given by those on the walls. But by this time the excavations were all crowded with men. The Egyptian army now advanced with shouts to the assault. The great stages were brought forward by the labor of thousands of men and placed against the cliff.

The besieged had now rushed to defend the walls, and volleys of missiles of all sorts were poured down upon the Egyptians as they strove to mount the ladders and stages. No one thought of any possible danger from the little shelters lying at the foot of the wall, and the din was so great that the work of digging through the remaining wall of earth was unheard. The troops who had been specially told off to watch these points had joined their comrades on the walls, and none marked the stream of dark figures which presently began to pour out from the embankment at twenty different points.

At last the besieged, whose hopes were rising as the Egyptians appeared to falter under the showers of missiles poured down, were startled by the sound of a trumpet in their rear – a sound which was answered instantly from a score of points. Rushing with cries of dismay to the back of the rampart, they saw dark bodies of footmen drawn up in regular order, and a rain of arrows was opened upon them. The Rebu, without a moment's hesitation, rushed down to attack the foes who had gained a footing, they scarce knew how, in their fortress. But each of the Egyptian companies was four hundred strong, composed of picked troops, and these for a time easily beat off the irregular attacks of the Rebu.

Amusis and the other leaders of the Rebu strove to get their men into solid order, for so alone could they hope to break the phalanxes of the Egyptians; but the confusion was too great. In the

meantime the Egyptians outside had taken advantage of the diversion created by the attack within, and poured up their ladders and stagings in vast numbers. Some dragging up ladders after them planted them against the walls, others poured through by the passages which had been dug, and these, as soon as they were numerous enough, ascended the embankments from behind and fell upon the Rebu still defending the wall.

Never did the tribesmen fight with greater bravery; but the completeness of the surprise, the number of the Egyptians who had established themselves in their rear, the constant pushing in of reinforcements both through and over the wall, rendered it impossible for them to retrieve their fortunes; and in the confusion and darkness they were unable to distinguish friend from foe. The various battalions and companies were hopelessly mixed together; the orders of their leaders and officers were unheard in the din.

Upon the Egyptian side everything had been carefully planned. One of the companies which first entered had made their way quietly along the foot of the wall, and were not noticed until they suddenly threw themselves upon defenders of one of the gates. As soon as they had obtained possession of this, great fires were lighted, and a large body of Egyptian troops, headed by engineers carrying beams and planks, advanced. The gaps across the roadway were bridged over, and the Egyptians poured in at the gate before the Rebu could dislodge the party which had taken possession of it. Every moment added to the confusion of the scene. To the Rebu it seemed as if their foes were springing from the very earth upon them, and, despairing of regaining the ground that had been lost, they began to break away and make some for their homes, some for the water face of the city – the only one which was open to them, for the Egyptians were now pressing forward from the three other faces of the town. The boats lying along the sand were quickly crowded with fugitives and pushed off from shore, and those who arrived later found all means of escape gone. Some threw down their arms and made their way to their homes, others ran back to meet the Egyptians and die fighting.

It was some hours before the conflict ceased, for the Egyptians too were confused with the darkness, and many desperate fights took place between different battalions before they discovered they were friends. Light was gained by firing numbers of the houses lying nearest to the walls; but as soon as the Egyptians advanced beyond the arc of light they were fiercely attacked by the Rebu, and at last the trumpet sounded the order for the troops to remain in the positions they occupied until daylight.

As soon as morning broke a vast crowd of women were seen advancing from the center of the town. As they neared the Egyptians they threw themselves on the ground with loud cries for mercy. There was a pause; and then some Egyptian officers advanced and bade a score of the women follow them to the presence of the king. Thotmes had entered with the troops who made their way into the city by the gate, but yielding to the entreaties of the officers that he would not expose himself to be killed in the confusion, perhaps by an arrow shot by his own soldiers, he had retired to the plain, and had just returned to take part in the occupation of the city.

The Rebu women were led to him over ground thickly covered with dead. Fully half the defenders of the city had fallen, while the loss of the Egyptians had been almost as large. The women threw themselves on their faces before the great monarch and implored mercy for themselves, their children, and the remnant of the men of the city.

Thotmes was well satisfied. He had captured a city which was regarded as impregnable; he had crushed the people who had inflicted defeats upon his predecessors; he had added to his own glory and to the renown of the Egyptian arms. The disposition of the Egyptians was lenient. Human sacrifices were unknown to their religion, and they do not appear at any time to have slain in cold blood captives taken in war. Human life was held at a far higher value in Egypt than among any other nation of antiquity, and the whole teaching of their laws tended to create a disposition toward mercy.

An interpreter translated to the king the words of the women.

“Has all resistance ceased?” the king asked. “Have all the men laid down their arms?”

The women exclaimed that there was not now an armed man in the city, all the weapons having been collected during the night and placed in piles in the open space in front of the entrance to the palace.

“Then I give to all their lives,” the king said graciously. “When I fight with cowards I have little mercy upon them, for men who are not brave are unfit to live; but when I fight with men I treat them as men. The Rebu are a valiant people, but as well might the jackal fight with the lion as the Rebu oppose themselves to the might of Egypt. They fought bravely in the field, and they have bravely defended their walls; therefore I grant life to all in the city – men, women, and children. Where is your king?”

“He died in the battle four days since,” the women replied.

“Where is your queen?”

“She drank poison last night, preferring to join her husband than to survive the capture of the city.”

Thotmes had now ordered the whole of the inhabitants to be taken out to the plain and kept there under a guard. The town was then methodically searched and everything of value brought together. The king set aside a certain portion of the golden vessels for the services of the Temple, some he chose for himself, and after presenting others to his generals, ordered the rest to be divided among the troops. He then ordered a hundred captives – fifty young men and fifty maidens of the highest rank – to be selected to be taken to Egypt as slaves, and then fixed the tribute which the Rebu were in future to pay. The army then evacuated the city and the inhabitants were permitted to return.

The next day messengers arrived from the other Rebu towns. The fall of the capital, which had been believed to be impregnable, after so short a siege had struck terror into the minds of all, and the messengers brought offers of submission to the king, with promises to pay any tribute that he might lay upon them.

The king, well satisfied with his success and anxious to return to Egypt, from which he had been absent nearly two years, replied graciously to the various deputations, informing them that he had already fixed the tribute that the nation was to pay annually, and ordered a contribution to be sent in at once by each city in proportion to its size. In a few days the required sums, partly in money, partly in vessels of gold, embroidered robes, and other articles of value, were brought in. When the full amount had been received the camp was struck and the army started on their long march back to Egypt, an officer of high rank being left as governor of the newly captured province, with ten thousand men as a garrison.

Amuba was one of the fifty selected as slaves. Amosis had escaped in the confusion, as had many others. Jethro was also one of the selected band. Amuba was for a time careless of what befell him. The news of the death of his mother, which had met him as, after fighting to the last, he returned to the palace, had been a terrible blow, following as it did so closely upon the loss of his father and the overthrow of the nation. His mother had left the message for him that although as life had no longer a charm for her she preferred death to the humiliation of being carried a prisoner to Egypt, she trusted that he would bear the misfortunes which had fallen on him and his people with submission and patience; he was young, and there was no saying what the future had in store for him.

“You will doubtless, my son,” were the words of her message, “be carried away captive into Egypt, but you may yet escape some day and rejoin your people, or may meet with some lot in which you may find contentment or even happiness there. At any rate, my last words to you are, bear patiently whatever may befall you, remember always that your father was king of the Rebu, and whatever your station in life may be, try to be worthy of the rank to which you were born. There is no greater happiness on a throne than in a cottage. Men make their own happiness, and a man may be respected even though only a slave. May the gods of your country preside over and protect you always.”

The message was delivered by an old woman who had been with the queen since her birth, and struck down with grief as Amuba was at his mother’s death, he yet acknowledged to himself that

even this loss was less hard to bear than the knowledge that she who had been so loved and honored by the people should undergo the humiliation of being dragged a slave in the train of the conquering Egyptians. He was, however, so prostrate with grief that he obeyed with indifference the order to leave the city, and was scarcely moved when the Egyptian officer appointed to make the selection chose him as one of the party that were to be taken as slaves to Egypt.

Prostrate as he was, however, he felt it to be a satisfaction and comfort when he found that Jethro was also of the party set aside.

“It is selfish, Jethro,” he said, “for me to feel glad that you too are to be dragged away as a slave, but it will be a great comfort to have you with me. I know almost all the others of the party, but to none shall I be able to talk of my father and mother and my home here as I should to you whom I have known so long.”

“I am not sorry that I have been chosen,” Jethro said, “for I have no family ties, and now that the Rebu are a conquered people I should have little satisfaction in my life here. When we get to Egypt we shall probably be separated, but there is a march of months’ duration before us, and during that time we may at least be together; since, then, my being with you is as you say, prince, a comfort to you, I am well content that I have been chosen. I thought it a hard thing when my wife died but a few weeks after our marriage. Now I rejoice that it was so, and that I can leave without any one’s heart being wrung at my departure. You and I, prince, perhaps of all those chosen will feel the least misery at the fate that has befallen us. Most of those here are leaving wives and children behind; some of the youngest are still unmarried, but they have fathers and mothers from whom they will be separated. Therefore, let us not bemoan our lot, for it might have been worse, and our life in Egypt may not be wholly unbearable.”

“That is just what my dear mother said, Jethro,” Amuba replied, repeating the message the queen had sent him.

“My dear mistress was right,” Jethro said. “We may find happiness in Egypt as elsewhere; and now let us try to cheer up our companions, for in cheering them we shall forget our own misfortunes.”

Jethro and Amuba went among the rest of the captives, most of whom were prostrated with grief, and did their best to rouse them from their stupor.

“The Egyptians have seen that the Rebu are men in the field,” Amuba said to some of them. “Let them see that we can also bear misfortune like men. Grieving will not mitigate our lot, nay, it will add to its burden. If the Egyptians see that we bear our fate manfully they will have far more compassion upon us than if they see that we bemoan ourselves. Remember we have a long and toilsome journey before us, and shall need all our strength. After all, the hardship of our lot is as nothing to that of the women yonder. We are accustomed to exercise and toil, but the journey, which we can support as well as the Egyptians, will be terrible to them, delicate in nature as they are. Let us therefore set them an example of courage and patience; let us bear ourselves as men whose suffering is unmerited, who have been conquered but not disgraced, who are prepared to defy fate and not to succumb to it.”

Amuba’s words had a great effect upon the captives. They regarded him with respect as the son of their late king, and as one who would have been king himself had not this misfortune befallen them; and his calmness and manly speech encouraged them to strive against their grief and to look their fate more hopefully in the face. As long as the army remained in camp the hands of the captives were tied behind them, but when the march was begun they were relieved of their bonds and were placed in the center of an Egyptian regiment.

It was a long and tedious journey. On the way the train of captives was very largely increased by those who had been taken in the earlier conquests of the army, and who had been left in charge of the troops told off to the various provinces brought into subjection by the Egyptians until the army passed through on its homeward march. Provisions had been everywhere collected to supply it on its progress, and as the distance traversed each day was small the captives suffered but little until they entered upon the passage of the desert tract between the southern point of Syria and the mouth of the Nile.

Here, although vast quantities of water were carried in the train of the army, the supply given to the captives was extremely small, and as the sun blazed down with tremendous heat, and they were half-suffocated by the dust which rose in clouds under the feet of the vast body of men, their sufferings were very severe. The Rebu captives had gained the respect of the troops who escorted them by their manly bearing and the absence of the manifestations of grief which were betrayed by most of the other captives. The regiment was composed of Libyan mercenaries, hardy, active men, inured alike to heat and fatigue.

During the three months which the march had occupied Amuba and Jethro, and indeed most of the captives, had acquired some knowledge of the Egyptian language. Jethro had from the first impressed upon the young prince the great advantage this would be to them. In the first place, it would divert their thoughts from dwelling upon the past, and in the second, it would make their lot more bearable in Egypt.

“You must remember,” he said, “that we shall be slaves, and masters are not patient with their slaves. They give them orders, and if the order is not understood so much the worse for the slaves. It will add to our value, and therefore obtain for us better treatment, if we are able to converse in their tongue.”

Amuba was thankful indeed when the gray monotony of the desert was succeeded by the bright verdure of the plains of Egypt. As they entered the land the order in which they had marched was changed, and the long line of captives followed immediately after the chariot of the king. Each of them was laden with a portion of the spoil taken from their native country. Amuba bore on his head a large golden vase which had been used in the ceremonies of the temple. Jethro carried a rich helmet and armor which had belonged to the king.

The first city they entered Amuba was astonished at the massive splendor of the buildings and at the signs of comfort and wealth which everywhere met his eye. The streets were thronged with people who, bending to the ground, shouted their acclamations as the king passed along, and who gazed with interest and surprise at the long procession of captives representing the various nations who had been subjected to his arms. Most of all he was surprised at the temples with their long avenues of sphinxes, the gigantic figures representing the gods, the rows of massive pillars, the majesty and grandeur of the edifices themselves.

“How were they built, Jethro?” he exclaimed over and over again. “How were these massive stones placed in order? How did they drag these huge figures across the plains? What tools could they have used to carve them out of the solid granite?”

“I am afraid, Amuba,” Jethro said grimly, for the lad had positively forbidden him to address him any longer as prince, saying that such title addressed to a slave was no better than mockery, “we are likely to learn to our cost before long how they manage these marvels, for marvels they assuredly are. It must have taken the strength of thousands of men to have transported even one of these strange figures, and although the people themselves may have aided in the work, you may be sure the slaves bore the brunt of it.”

“But what is the meaning of these figures, Jethro? Surely neither in this country nor in any other are there creatures with the faces of women and the bodies of lions and great wings such as these have. Some, too, have the faces of men and the bodies of bulls, while others have heads like birds and bodies like those of men.”

“Assuredly there can be no such creatures, Amuba; and I wonder that a people so enlightened and wise as the Egyptians should choose such strange figures for their gods. I can only suppose that these figures represent their attributes rather than the gods themselves. Do you see, the human head may represent their intelligence, the bodies of the lions or bulls their strength and power, the wings of the bird their swiftness. I do not know that it is so, but it seems to me that it is possible that it may be something of this sort. We cannot but allow that their gods are powerful, since they give them victory over all other people; but no doubt we shall learn more of them and of many other things in time.”

The journey was continued for another three weeks, and was the cause of constant surprises to the captives. The extraordinary fertility of the land especially struck them. Cultivation among the Rebu was of a very primitive description, and the abundance and variety of the crops that everywhere met their eye seemed to them absolutely marvelous. Irrigation was not wholly unknown to the Rebu, and was carried on to a considerable extent in Persia; but the enormous works for the purpose in Egypt, the massive embankments of the river, the network of canals and ditches, the order and method everywhere apparent, filled them with surprise and admiration.

Many of the cities and temples greatly surpassed in magnificence and splendor those they had first met with, and Amuba's wonder reached its climax when they arrived at Memphis, till lately the capital of Egypt. The wealth and contents of the city astonished the captives, but most of all were they surprised when they saw the enormous bulk of the pyramids rising a few miles distant from the town, and learned that these were some of the tombs of the kings.

The country had now altered in character. On the left a range of steep hills approached the river, and as the march proceeded similar though not so lofty hills were seen on the right.

At last, after another fortnight's traveling, a shout of joy from the army proclaimed that Thebes, the capital of Egypt, the goal of the long and weary march was in view.

Thebes stood on both sides of the Nile. On the eastern bank the largest portion of the population was gathered, but this part of the city was inhabited principally by the poorer class. There was, too, a large population on the Libyan side of the Nile, the houses being densely packed near the bank of the river. Behind these were numbers of temples and palaces, while the tombs of the kings and queens were excavated in a valley further back, whose precipitous sides were honeycombed with the rock sepulchers of the wealthy. As the dwelling-houses were all low, the vast piles of the temples, palaces, and public buildings rose above them, and presented a most striking appearance to those approaching the city, which lay in a great natural amphitheater, the hills on both sides narrowing toward the river both above and below it. The march of the royal army from Memphis had been on the western bank of the river, and it was the great Libyan suburb with its palaces and temples that they were approaching. As they neared the city an enormous multitude poured out to welcome the king and the returning army. Shouts of enthusiasm were raised, the sound of trumpets and other musical instruments filled the air, religious processions from the great temples moved with steady course through the dense crowd, which separated at once to allow of the passage of the figures of the gods, and of the priests and attendants bearing their emblems.

"Indeed, Jethro," Amuba exclaimed with enthusiasm, "it is almost worth while being made a slave if it is only to witness this glorious scene. What a wonderful people are these; what knowledge, and power, and magnificence! Why, my father's palace would be regarded as a mere hut in Thebes, and our temples, of which we thought so much, are pygmies by the side of these immense edifices."

"All that is true enough, Amuba, and I do not say that I, too, am not filled with admiration, and yet you know the Rebu several times drove back their forces, and man for man are more than a match for their soldiers. Our people are taller than they by half a head. We have not so much luxury, nor did we want it. All this must make people effeminate."

"Perhaps so," Amuba assented; "but you must remember it is not so very long ago that we were a people living in tents, and wandering at will in search of pasture, and we have not, I think, become effeminate because we have settled down and built towns. No one can say that the Egyptians are not brave; certainly it is not for us to say so, though I agree with you that physically they are not our equals. See how the people stare and point at us, Jethro. I should think they have never seen a race like ours with blue eyes and fair hair, though even among them there are varying shades of darkness. The nobles and upper classes are lighter in hue than the common people."

The surprise of the Egyptians was indeed great at the complexion of their captives, and the decoration of their walls has handed down in paintings which still remain the blue eyes and fair hair of the Rebu. The rejoicings upon the return of the king went on for several days; at the end of that

time the captives were distributed by the royal order. Some were given to the generals who had most distinguished themselves. Many were assigned to the priests, while the great bulk were sent to labor upon the public works.

The Rebu captives, whose singular complexion and fairness caused them to be regarded with special interest, were distributed among the special favorites of the king. Many of the girls were assigned to the queen and royal princesses, others to the wives of the priests and generals who formed the council of the king. The men were, for the most part, given to the priests for service about the temples.

To his great delight Amuba found that Jethro and himself were among the eight captives who were assigned to the service of the priests of one of the great temples. This was scarcely the effect of chance, for the captives were drawn up in line, and the number assigned to each temple were marched off together in order that there might be no picking and choosing of the captives, but that they might be divided impartially between the various temples, and as Jethro always placed himself by Amuba's side, it naturally happened that they fell to the same destination.

On reaching the temple the little band of captives were again drawn up, and the high priest, Ameres, a grave and distinguished-looking man, walked along the line scrutinizing them. He beckoned to Amuba to step forward. "Henceforth," he said, "you are my servant. Behave well, and you will be well treated." He again walked down the line, and Amuba saw that he was going to choose another, and threw himself on his knees before him.

"Will my lord pardon my boldness," he said, "but may I implore you to choose yonder man who stood next beside me? He has been my friend from childhood, he covered me with his shield in battle, he has been a father to me since I have lost my own. Do not, I implore you, my lord, separate us now. You will find us both willing to labor at whatsoever you may give us to do."

The priest listened gravely.

"It shall be as you wish," he said; "it is the duty of every man to give pleasure to those around him if it lies in his power, and as your friend is a man of thews and sinews, and has a frank and honest face, he will assuredly suit me as well as another; do you therefore both follow me to my house."

The other captives saluted Amuba as he and Jethro turned to follow. The priest observed the action, and said to the lad:

"Were you a person of consequence among your people that they thus at parting salute you rather than your comrade, who is older than you?"

"I am the son of him who was their king," Amuba said. "He fell in action with your troops, and had not our city been taken, and the nation subdued by the Egyptians, I should have inherited the throne."

"Is it so?" the priest said. "Truly the changes and fortunes of life are strange. I wonder that, being the son of their king, you were not specially kept by Thotmes himself."

"I think that he knew it not," Amuba said. "We knew not your customs, and my fellow-captives thought that possibly I might be put to death were it known that I was a son of their king, and therefore abstained from all outward marks of respect, which, indeed, would to one who was a slave like themselves have been ridiculous."

"Perhaps it is best so," the priest said thoughtfully. "You would not have been injured, for we do not slay our captives taken in war; still maybe your life will be easier to bear as the servant of a priest than in the household of the king. You had better, however, mention to no one the rank you have borne, for it might be reported to the king, and then you might be sent for to the palace; unless indeed you would rather be a spectator of the pomp and gayety of the court than a servant in a quiet household."

"I would far rather remain with you, my lord," Amuba said eagerly. "You have already shown the kindness of your heart by granting my request, and choosing my comrade Jethro as my fellow-slave, and I feel already that my lot will be a far happier one than I had ventured to hope."

“Judge not hastily by appearances,” the priest said. “At the same time, here in Egypt, slaves are not treated as they are among the wild peoples of Nubia and the desert. There is a law for all, and he who kills a slave is punished as if he took the life of an Egyptian. However, I think I can say that your life will not be a hard one; you have intelligence, as is shown by the fact that you have so rapidly acquired sufficient knowledge of our tongue to speak it intelligibly. Can you, too, speak our language?” he asked Jethro.

“I can speak a little,” Jethro said; “but not nearly so well as Amuba. My lips are too old to fashion a strange tongue as rapidly as can his younger ones.”

“You speak sufficiently well to understand,” the priest said, “and doubtless will in time acquire our tongue perfectly. This is my house.”

The priest entered an imposing gateway, on each side of which stretched a long and lofty wall. At a distance of fifty yards from the gate stood a large dwelling, compared to which the royal abode which Amuba had been brought up in was but a miserable hut. Inclosed within the walls was a space of ground some three hundred yards square, which was laid out as a garden. Avenues of fruit trees ran all round it, a portion was laid out as a vineyard, while separated from the rest by an avenue of palm trees was a vegetable garden.

In front of the house was a large piece of water in which floated a gayly-painted boat; aquatic plants of all kinds bordered its edges. Graceful palms grouped their foliage over it, the broad flat leaves of lilies floated on its surface, while the white flowers which Amuba had seen carried in all the religious processions and by large numbers of people of the upper rank, and which he heard were called the lotus, rose above them. The two captives were struck with surprise and admiration at the beauty of the scene, and forgot for a moment that they were slaves as they looked round at a vegetation more beautiful than they had ever beheld. A smile passed over the countenance of the priest.

“Perfect happiness is for no man,” he said, “and yet methinks that you may in time learn at least contentment here.”

CHAPTER IV. AN EASY SERVITUDE

Just as the priest finished speaking, a lad of about the same age as Amuba appeared at the portico of the house, and ran down to his father.

“Oh, father!” he exclaimed, “have you brought two of those strange captives home? We saw them in the procession, and marveled greatly at the color of their hair and eyes. Mysa and I particularly noticed this lad, whose hair is almost the color of gold.”

“As usual, Chebron, your tongue outruns your discretion. This youth understands enough Egyptian to know what you are saying, and it is not courteous to speak of a person’s characteristics to his face.”

The lad flushed through his olive cheeks.

“Pardon me,” he said courteously to Amuba. “I did not think for a moment that one who had but newly arrived among us understood our language.”

“Do not apologize,” Amuba replied with a smile. “Doubtless our appearance is strange to you, and indeed even among the peoples of Lydia and Persia there are few whose hair and eyes are as fair as ours. Even had you said that you did not like our appearance I should not have felt hurt, for all people I think like that to which they are accustomed; in any case, it is good of you to say that you regret what you said; people do not generally think that captives have feelings.”

“Chebron’s apology was right,” his father said. “Among us politeness is the rule, and every Egyptian is taught to be considerate to all people. It is just as easy to be polite as to be rude, and men are served better for love than for fear.”

“And are they to stay here, father,” Chebron asked, “or have you only brought them for to-day?”

“They are to stay here, my son. I have chosen them from those set aside for our temple. I selected the younger because he was about your age, and it is good for a man to have one near him who has been brought up with him, and is attached to him; who, although circumstances may not have made them equal in condition, can yet be a comrade and a friend, and such, I hope, you will find in Amuba, for such he tells me is his name. I have said whom circumstances have placed in an inferior position, for after all circumstances are everything. This youth, in his own country, held a position even higher than you do here, for he was the son of the king; and, since his father fell in battle, would now be the king of his people had they not been subjected to us. Therefore, Chebron, bear it always in mind that although misfortune has placed him a captive among us, he is in birth your superior, and treat him as you yourself would wish to be treated did you fall a captive into the hands of a hostile nation.”

“I will gladly treat you as my friend,” the young Egyptian said frankly to Amuba. “Although you are so different from me in race, I can see in your face that you are true and loyal. Besides,” he added, “I am sure that my father would not have bade me so trust you had he not read your character and been certain that you will be a fit friend for me.”

“You and your father are both good,” Amuba replied. “I know how hard is the lot of captives taken in war, for we Rebu had many slaves whom we took in various expeditions, and I was prepared to suffer. You can judge, then, how grateful I feel to our gods that they have placed me in hands so different from those I had looked for, and I swear to you, Chebron, that you shall find me faithful and devoted to you. So, too, will you find my friend here, who in any difficulty would be far more able to render you service than I could. He was one of our bravest warriors. He drove my chariot in the great battle we fought with your people, and saved my life several times; and should you need the service of a strong and brave man, Jethro will be able to aid you.”

“And have you been in battle?” Chebron asked in surprise.

“That was the first time I had ever fought with men,” Amuba said; “but I had often hunted the lion, and he is almost as terrible an enemy as your soldiers. I was young to go to battle, but my father naturally wished me to take my place early among the fighting men of our nation.”

“By the way, Chebron,” Ameres said, “I would warn you, mention to no one the rank that Amuba held in his own country. Were it known he might be taken away from us to serve in the palace. His people who were taken captives with him said nothing as to his rank, fearing that ill might befall him were it known, and it was therefore supposed that he was of the same rank as the other captives, who were all men of noble birth among the Rebu. Therefore tell no one, not even your mother or your sister Mysa. If there is a secret to be kept, the fewer who know it the better.”

While this conversation had been going on Amuba had been narrowly examining the lad who had promised to treat him as a friend.

Like his father he was fairer in complexion than the majority of the Egyptians, the lighter hue being, indeed, almost universal among the upper class. He was much shorter and slighter than the young Rebu, but he carried himself well, and had already in his manner something of the calm and dignity that distinguished Egyptians born to high rank. He was disfigured, as Amuba thought, by the custom, general throughout Egypt, of having his head smoothly shaven, except one lock which fell down over the left ear. This, as Amuba afterward learned, was the distinguishing sign of youth, and would be shaved off when he attained man’s estate, married, or entered upon a profession.

At present his head was bare, but when he went out he wore a close-fitting cap with an orifice through which the lock of hair passed out and fell down to his shoulder. He had not yet taken to the custom general among the upper and middle classes of wearing a wig. This general shaving of the head had, to Amuba, a most unpleasant effect until he became accustomed to it. It was adopted, doubtless, by the Egyptians for the purpose of coolness and cleanliness; but Amuba thought that he would rather spend any amount of pains in keeping his hair free from dust than go about in the fantastic and complicated wigs that the Egyptians wore.

The priest now led them within the house. On passing through the entrance they entered a large hall. Along its side ran a row of massive columns supporting the ceiling, which projected twelve feet from each wall; the walls were covered with marble and other colored stones; the floor was paved with the same material; a fountain played in the middle, and threw its water to a considerable height, for the portion of the hall between the columns was open to the sky; seats of a great variety of shapes stood about the room; while in great pots were placed palms and other plants of graceful foliage. The ceiling was painted with an elaborate pattern in colors. A lady was seated upon a long couch. It had no back, but one end was raised as a support for the arm, and the ends were carved into the semblance of the heads of animals.

Two Nubian slave girls stood behind her fanning her, and a girl about twelve years old was seated on a low stool studying from a roll of papyrus. She threw it down and jumped to her feet as her father entered, and the lady rose with a languid air, as if the effort of even so slight a movement was a trouble to her.

“Oh, papa – ” the girl began, but the priest checked her with a motion of his hand.

“My dear,” he said to his wife, “I have brought home two of the captives whom our great king has brought with him as trophies of his conquest. He has handed many over for our service and that of the temples, and these two have fallen to my share. They were of noble rank in their own country, and we will do our best to make them forget the sad change in their position.”

“You are always so peculiar in your notions, Ameres,” the lady said more pettishly than would have been expected from her languid movements. “They are captives; and I do not see that it makes any matter what they were before they were captives, so that they are captives now. By all means treat them as you like, so that you do not place them about me, for their strange-colored hair and eyes and their white faces make me shudder.”

“Oh, mamma, I think it so pretty,” Mysa exclaimed. “I do wish my hair was gold-colored like that boy’s, instead of being black like everyone else’s.”

The priest shook his head at his daughter reprovingly; but she seemed in no way abashed, for she was her father’s pet, and knew well enough that he was never seriously angry with her.

“I do not propose placing them near you, Amense,” he said calmly in reply to his wife. “Indeed, it seems to me that you have already more attendants about you than you can find any sort of employment for. The lad I have specially allotted to Chebron; as to the other I have not exactly settled as to what his duties will be.”

“Won’t you give him to me, papa?” Mysa said coaxingly. “Fatina is not at all amusing, and Dolma, the Nubian girl, can only look good-natured and show her white teeth, but as we can’t understand each other at all I don’t see that she is of any use to me.”

“And what use do you think you could make of this tall Rebu?” the priest asked, smiling.

“I don’t quite know, papa,” Mysa said, as with her head a little on one side she examined Jethro critically, “but I like his looks, and I am sure he could do all sorts of things; for instance, he could walk with me when I want to go out, he could tow me round the lake in the boat, he could pick up my ball for me, and could feed my pets.”

“When you are too lazy to feed them yourself,” the priest put in. “Very well, Mysa, we will try the experiment. Jethro shall be your special attendant, and when you have nothing for him to do, which will be the best part of the day, he can look after the waterfowl. Zunbo never attends them properly. Do you understand that?” he asked Jethro.

Jethro replied by stepping forward, taking the girl’s hand, and bending over it until his forehead touched it.

“There is an answer for you, Mysa.”

“You indulge the children too much, Ameres,” his wife said irritably. “I do not think in all Egypt there are any children so spoiled as ours. Other men’s sons never speak unless addressed, and do not think of sitting down in the presence of their father. I am astonished indeed that you, who are looked up to as one of the wisest men in Egypt, should suffer your children to be so familiar with you.”

“Perhaps, my dear,” Ameres said with a placid smile, “it is because I am one of the wisest men in Egypt. My children honor me in their hearts as much as do those who are kept in slavelike subjection. How is a boy’s mind to expand if he does not ask questions, and who should be so well able to answer his questions as his father? There, children, you can go now. Take your new companions with you, and show them the garden and your pets.”

“We are fortunate, indeed, Jethro,” Amuba said as they followed Chebron and Mysa into the garden. “When we pictured to ourselves as we lay on the sand at night during our journey hither what our life would be, we never dreamed of anything like this. We thought of tilling the land, of aiding to raise the great dams and embankments, of quarrying stones for the public buildings, of a grinding and hopeless slavery, and the only thing that ever we ventured to hope for was that we might toil side by side, and now, see how good the gods have been to us. Not only are we together, but we have found friends in our masters, a home in this strange land.”

“Truly it is wonderful, Amuba. This Priest Ameres is a most excellent person, one to be loved by all who come near him. We have indeed been most fortunate in having been chosen by him.”

The brother and sister led the way through an avenue of fruit trees, at the end of which a gate led through a high paling of rushes into an inclosure some fifty feet square. It was surrounded by trees and shrubs, and in their shade stood a number of wooden structures.

In the center was a pool occupying the third of the area, and like the large pond before the house bordered with aquatic plants. At the edge stood two ibises, while many brilliantly plumaged waterfowl were swimming on its surface or cleaning their feathers on the bank.

As soon as the gate closed there was a great commotion among the waterfowl; the ibises advanced gravely to meet their young mistress, the ducks set up a chorus of welcome, those on the

water made for the shore, while those on land followed the ibises with loud quackings. But the first to reach them were two gazelles, which bounded from one of the wooden huts and were in an instant beside them, thrusting their soft muzzles into the hands of Chebron and Mysa, while from the other structures arose a medley of sounds – the barking of dogs and the sounds of welcome from a variety of creatures.

“This is not your feeding-time, you know,” Chebron said, looking at the gazelles, “and for once we have come empty-handed; but we will give you something from your stores. See, Jethro, this is their larder,” and he led the way into a structure somewhat larger than the rest; along the walls were a number of boxes of various sizes, while some large bins stood below them. “Here, you see,” he went on, opening one of the bins and taking from it a handful of freshly cut vetches, and going to the door and throwing it down before the gazelles, “this is their special food; it is brought in fresh every morning from our farm, which lies six miles away. The next bin contains the seed for the waterfowl. It is all mixed here, you see. Wheat and peas and pulse and other seeds. Mysa, do give them a few handfuls, for I can hardly hear myself speak from their clamor.

“In this box above you see there is a pan of sopped bread for the cats. There is a little mixed with the water; but only a little, for it will not keep good. Those cakes are for them, too. Those large, plain, hard-baked cakes in the next box are for the dogs; they have some meat and bones given them two or three times a week. These frogs and toads in this cage are for the little crocodile; he has a tank all to himself. All these other boxes are full of different food for the other animals you see. There’s a picture of the right animal upon each, so there is no fear of making a mistake. We generally feed them ourselves three times a day when we are here, but when we are away it will be for you to feed them.”

“And please,” Mysa said, “above all things be very particular that they have all got fresh water; they do love fresh water so much, and sometimes it is so hot that the pans dry up in an hour after it has been poured out. You see, the gazelles can go to the pond and drink when they are thirsty, but the others are fastened up because they won’t live peaceably together as they ought to do; but we let them out for a bit while we are here. The dogs chase the waterfowl and frighten them, and the cats will eat up the little ducklings, which is very wrong when they have plenty of proper food; and the ichneumon, even when we are here, would quarrel with the snakes if we let him into their house. They are very troublesome that way, though they are all so good with us. The houses all want making nice and clean of a morning.”

The party went from house to house inspecting the various animals, all of which were most carefully attended. The dogs, which were, Chebron said, of a Nubian breed, were used for hunting; while on comfortable beds of fresh rushes three great cats lay blinking on large cushions, but got up and rubbed against Mysa and Chebron in token of welcome. A number of kittens that were playing about together rushed up with upraised tails and loud mewings. Amuba noticed that their two guides made a motion of respect as they entered the house where the cats were, as well as toward the dogs, the ichneumon, and the crocodile, all of which were sacred animals in Thebes.

Many instructions were given by Mysa to Jethro as to the peculiar treatment that each of her pets demanded, and having completed their rounds the party then explored the garden, and Amuba and Jethro were greatly struck by the immense variety of plants, which had indeed been raised from seeds or roots brought from all the various countries where the Egyptian arms extended.

For a year the time passed tranquilly and pleasantly to Amuba in the household of the priest. His duties and those of Jethro were light. In his walks and excursions Amuba was Chebron’s companion. He learned to row his boat when he went out fishing on the Nile. When thus out together the distinction of rank was altogether laid aside; but when in Thebes the line was necessarily more marked, as Chebron could not take Amuba with him to the houses of the many friends and relatives of his father among the priestly and military classes. When the priest and his family went out to a banquet or entertainment Jethro and Amuba were always with the party of servants who went with torches to escort them home. The service was a light one in their case; but not so in many others, for

the Egyptians often drank deeply at these feasts, and many of the slaves always took with them light couches upon which to carry their masters home. Even among the ladies, who generally took their meals apart from the men upon these occasions, drunkenness was by no means uncommon.

When in the house Amuba was often present when Chebron studied, and as he himself was most anxious to acquire as much as he could of the wisdom of the Egyptians, Chebron taught him the hieroglyphic characters, and he was ere long able to read the inscriptions upon the temple and public buildings and to study from the papyrus scrolls, of which vast numbers were stowed away in pigeon-holes ranged round one of the largest rooms in the house.

When Chebron's studies were over Jethro instructed him in the use of arms, and also practiced with Amuba. A teacher of the use of the bow came frequently – for Egyptians of all ranks were skilled in the use of the national weapon – and the Rebu captives, already skilled in the bow as used by their own people, learned from watching his teaching of Chebron to use the longer and much more powerful weapon of the Egyptians. Whenever Mysa went outside the house Jethro accompanied her, waiting outside the house she visited until she came out, or going back to fetch her if her stay was a prolonged one.

Greatly they enjoyed the occasional visits made by the family to their farm. Here they saw the cultivation of the fields carried on, watched the plucking of the grapes and their conversion into wine. To extract the juice the grapes were heaped in a large flat vat above which ropes were suspended. A dozen barefooted slaves entered the vat and trod out the grapes, using the ropes to lift themselves in order that they might drop with greater force upon the fruit. Amuba had learned from Chebron that although he was going to enter the priesthood as an almost necessary preliminary for state employment, he was not intended to rise to the upper rank of the priesthood, but to become a state official.

“My elder brother will, no doubt, some day succeed my father as high priest of Osiris,” he told Amuba. “I know that my father does not think that he is clever, but it is not necessary to be very clever to serve in the temple. I thought that, of course, I too should come to high rank in the priesthood; for, as you know, almost all posts are hereditary, and though my brother as the elder would be high priest, I should be one of the chief priests also. But I have not much taste that way, and rejoiced much when one day saying so to my father, he replied at once that he should not urge me to devote my life to the priesthood, for that there were many other offices of state which would be open to me, and in which I could serve my country and be useful to the people. Almost all the posts in the service of the state are, indeed, held by the members of priestly families; they furnish governors to the provinces, and not infrequently generals to the army.

“Some,” he said, “are by disposition fitted to spend their lives in ministering in the temples, and it is doubtless a high honor and happiness to do so; but for others a more active life and a wider field of usefulness is more suitable. Engineers are wanted for the canal and irrigation works, judges are required to make the law respected and obeyed, diplomatists to deal with foreign nations, governors for the many peoples over whom we rule; therefore, my son, if you do not feel a longing to spend your life in the service of the temple, by all means turn your mind to study which will fit you to be an officer of the state. Be assured that I can obtain for you from the king a post in which you will be able to make your first essay, and so, if deserving, rise to high advancement.”

There were few priests during the reign of Thotmes III. who stood higher in the opinion of the Egyptian people than Ameres. His piety and learning rendered him distinguished among his fellows. He was high priest in the temple of Osiris, and was one of the most trusted of the councilors of the king. He had by heart all the laws of the sacred books; he was an adept in the inmost mysteries of the religion. His wealth was large, and he used it nobly; he lived in a certain pomp and state which were necessary for his position, but he spent but a tithe of his revenues, and the rest he distributed among the needy.

If the Nile rose to a higher level than usual and spread ruin and destruction among the cultivators, Ameres was ready to assist the distressed. If the rise of the river was deficient, he always set the example of remitting the rents of the tenants of his broad lands, and was ready to lend money without interest to tenants of harder or more necessitous landlords.

Yet among the high priesthood Ameres was regarded with suspicion, and even dislike. It was whispered among them that, learned and pious as he was, the opinions of the high priest were not in accordance with the general sentiments of the priesthood; that although he performed punctiliously all the numerous duties of his office, and took his part in the sacrifices and processions of the god, he yet lacked reverence for him, and entertained notions widely at variance with those of his fellows.

Ameres was, in fact, one of those men who refuse to be bound by the thoughts and opinions of others, and to whom it is a necessity to bring their own judgment to bear on every question presented to them. His father, who had been high priest before him – for the great offices of Egypt were for the most part hereditary – while he had been delighted at the thirst for knowledge and the enthusiasm for study in his son, had been frequently shocked at the freedom with which he expressed his opinions as step by step he was initiated into the sacred mysteries.

Already at his introduction to the priesthood, Ameres had mastered all there was to learn in geometry and astronomy. He was a skillful architect, and was deeply versed in the history of the nation. He had already been employed as supervisor in the construction of canals and irrigation works on the property belonging to the temple, and in all these respects his father had every reason to be proud of the success he had attained and the estimation in which he was held by his fellows. It was only the latitude which he allowed himself in consideration of religious questions which alarmed and distressed his father.

The Egyptians were the most conservative of peoples. For thousands of years no change whatever took place in their constitution, their manners, customs, and habits. It was the fixed belief of every Egyptian that in all respects their country was superior to any other, and that their laws and customs had approached perfection. All, from the highest to the lowest, were equally bound by these. The king himself was no more independent than the peasant; his hour of rising, the manner in which the day should be employed, the very quantity and quality of food he should eat, were all rigidly dictated by custom. He was surrounded from his youth by young men of his own age – sons of priests, chosen for their virtue and piety.

Thus he was freed from the influence of evil advisers, and even had he so wished it, had neither means nor power of oppressing his subjects, whose rights and privileges were as strictly defined as his own. In a country then, where every man followed the profession of his father, and where from time immemorial everything had proceeded on precisely the same lines, the fact that Ameres, the son of the high priest of Osiris, and himself destined to succeed to that dignity, should entertain opinions differing even in the slightest from those held by the leaders of the priesthood, was sufficient to cause him to be regarded with marked disfavor among them; it was indeed only because his piety and benevolence were as remarkable as his learning and knowledge of science that he was enabled at his father's death to succeed to his office without opposition.

Indeed, even at that time the priests of higher grade would have opposed his election; but Ameres was as popular with the lower classes of the priesthood as with the people at large, and their suffrages would have swamped those of his opponents. The multitude had, indeed, never heard so much as a whisper against the orthodoxy of the high priest of Osiris. They saw him ever foremost in the sacrifices and processions; they knew that he was indefatigable in his services in the temple, and that all his spare time was devoted to works of benevolence and general utility; and as they bent devoutly as he passed through the streets they little dreamed that the high priest of Osiris was regarded by his chief brethren as a dangerous innovator.

And yet it was on one subject only that he differed widely from his order. Versed as he was in the innermost mysteries, he had learned the true meaning of the religion of which he was one of

the chief ministers. He was aware that Osiris and Isis, the six other great gods, and the innumerable divinities whom the Egyptians worshiped under the guise of deities with the heads of animals, were in themselves no gods at all, but mere attributes of the power, the wisdom, the goodness, the anger of the one great God – a God so mighty that his name was unknown, and that it was only when each of his attributes was given an individuality and worshiped as a god that it could be understood by the finite sense of man.

All this was known to Ameres and the few who, like him, had been admitted to the inmost mysteries of the Egyptian religion. The rest of the population in Egypt worshiped in truth and in faith the animal-headed gods and the animals sacred to them; and yet as to these animals there was no consensus of opinion. In one nome or division of the kingdom the crocodile was sacred; in another he was regarded with dislike, and the ichneumon, that was supposed to be his destroyer, was deified. In one the goat was worshiped, and in another eaten for food; and so it was throughout the whole of the list of sacred animals, which were regarded with reverence or indifference according to the gods who were looked upon as the special tutelary deities of the nome.

It was the opinion of Ameres that the knowledge, confined only to the initiated, should be more widely disseminated, and, without wishing to extend it at present to the ignorant masses of the peasantry and laborers, he thought that all the educated and intelligent classes of Egypt should be admitted to an understanding of the real nature of the gods they worshiped and the inner truths of their religion. He was willing to admit that the process must be gradual, and that it would be necessary to enlarge gradually the circle of the initiated. His proposals were nevertheless received with dismay and horror by his colleagues. They asserted that to allow others besides the higher priesthood to become aware of the deep mysteries of their religion would be attended with terrible consequences.

In the first place, it would shake entirely the respect and reverence in which the priesthood were held, and would annihilate their influence. The temples would be deserted, and, losing the faith which they now so steadfastly held in the gods, people would soon cease to have any religion at all. “There are no people,” they urged, “on the face of the earth so moral, so contented, so happy, and so easily ruled as the Egyptians; but what would they be did you destroy all their beliefs, and launch them upon a sea of doubt and speculation! No longer would they look up to those who have so long been their guides and teachers, and whom they regard as possessing a knowledge and wisdom infinitely beyond theirs. They would accuse us of having deceived them, and in their blind fury destroy alike the gods and their ministers. The idea of such a thing is horrible.”

Ameres was silenced, though not convinced. He felt, indeed, that there was much truth in the view they entertained of the matter, and that terrible consequences would almost certainly follow the discovery by the people that for thousands of years they had been led by the priests to worship as gods those who were no gods at all, and he saw that the evil which would arise from a general enlightenment of the people would outweigh any benefit that they could derive from the discovery. The system had, as his colleagues said, worked well; and the fact that the people worshiped as actual deities imaginary beings who were really but the representatives of the attributes of the infinite God, could not be said to have done them any actual harm. At any rate, he alone and unaided could do nothing. Only with the general consent of the higher priesthood could the circle of initiated be widened, and any movement on his part alone would simply bring upon himself disgrace and death. Therefore, after unburdening himself in a council composed only of the higher initiates, he held his peace and went on the quiet tenor of his way.

Enlightened as he was, he felt that he did no wrong to preside at the sacrifices and take part in the services of the gods. He was worshiping not the animal-headed idols, but the attributes which they personified. He felt pity for the ignorant multitude who laid their offerings upon the shrine; and yet he felt that it would shatter their happiness instead of adding to it were they to know that the deity they worshiped was a myth. He allowed his wife and daughter to join with the priestesses in the service at the temple, and in his heart acknowledged that there was much in the contention of

those who argued that the spread of the knowledge of the inner mysteries would not conduce to the happiness of all who received it. Indeed he himself would have shrunk from disturbing the minds of his wife and daughter by informing them that all their pious ministrations in the temple were offered to non-existent gods; that the sacred animals they tended were in no way more sacred than others, save that in them were recognized some shadow of the attributes of the unknown God.

His eldest son was, he saw, not of a disposition to be troubled with the problems which gave him so much subject for thought and care. He would conduct the services consciously and well. He would bear a respectable part when, on his accession to the high-priesthood, he became one of the councilors of the monarch. He had common sense, but no imagination. The knowledge of the inmost mysteries would not disturb his mind in the slightest degree, and it was improbable that even a thought would ever cross his mind that the terrible deception practiced by the enlightened upon the whole people was anything but right and proper.

Ameres saw, however, that Chebron was altogether differently constituted. He was very intelligent, and was possessed of an ardent thirst for knowledge of all kinds; but he had also his father's habit of looking at matters from all points of view and of thinking for himself. The manner in which Ameres had himself superintended his studies and taught him to work with his understanding, and to convince himself that each rule and precept was true before proceeding to the next, had developed his thinking powers. Altogether, Ameres saw that the doubts which filled his own mind as to the honesty, or even expediency, of keeping the whole people in darkness and error would probably be felt with even greater force by Chebron.

He had determined, therefore, that the lad should not work up through all the grades of the priesthood to the upper rank, but should, after rising high enough to fit himself for official employment, turn his attention to one or other of the great departments of state.

CHAPTER V. IN LOWER EGYPT

“I am going on a journey,” Ameres said to his son a few days after the return from the farm. “I shall take you with me, Chebron, for I am going to view the progress of a fresh canal that is being made on our estate in Goshen. The officer who is superintending it has doubts whether, when the sluices are opened, it will altogether fulfill its purpose, and I fear that some mistake must have been made in the levels. I have already taught you the theory of the work; it is well that you should gain some practical experience in it; for there is no more useful or honorable profession than that of carrying out works by which the floods of the Nile are conveyed to the thirsty soil.”

“Thank you, father. I should like it greatly,” Chebron replied in a tone of delight, for he had never before been far south of Thebes. “And may Amuba go with us?”

“Yes; I was thinking of taking him,” the high priest said. “Jethro can also go, for I take a retinue with me. Did I consult my own pleasure I would far rather travel without this state and ceremony; but as a functionary of state I must conform to the customs. And, indeed, even in Goshen it is as well always to travel in some sort of state. The people there are of a different race to ourselves. Although they have dwelt a long time in the land and conform to its customs, still they are notoriously a stubborn and obstinate people, and there is more trouble in getting the public works executed there than in any other part of the country.”

“I have heard of them, father. They belong to the same race as the shepherd kings who were such bitter tyrants to Egypt. How is it that they stayed behind when the shepherds were driven out?”

“They are of the same race, but they came not with them, and formed no part of their conquering armies. The shepherds, who, as you know, came from the land lying to the east of the Great Sea, had reigned here for a long time when this people came. They were relations of the Joseph who, as you have read in your history, was chief minister of Egypt.

“He came here as a slave, and was certainly brought from the country whence our oppressors came. But they say that he was not of their race, but that his forefathers had come into the land from a country lying far to the east; but that I know not. Suffice it he gained the confidence of the king, became his minister, and ruled wisely as far as the king was concerned, though the people have little reason to bless his memory. In his days was a terrible famine, and they say he foretold its coming, and that his gods gave him warning of it. So vast granaries were constructed and filled to overflowing, and when the famine came and the people were starving the grain was served out, but in return the people had to give up their land. Thus the whole tenure of the land in the country was changed, and all became the property of the state, the people remaining as its tenants upon the land they formerly owned. Then it was that the state granted large tracts to the temples, and others to the military order, so that at present all tillers of land pay rent either to the king, the temples, or the military order.

“Thus it is that the army can always be kept up in serviceable order, dwelling by its tens of thousands in the cities assigned to it. Thus it is that the royal treasury is always kept full, and the services of the temples maintained. The step has added to the power and dignity of the nation, and has benefited the cultivators themselves by enabling vast works of irrigation to be carried out – works that could never have been accomplished had the land been the property of innumerable small holders, each with his own petty interests.”

“But you said, father, that it has not been for the good of the people.”

“Nor has it in one respect, Chebron, for it has drawn a wide chasm between the aristocratic classes and the bulk of the people, who can never own land, and have no stimulus to exertion.”

“But they are wholly ignorant, father. They are peasants, and nothing more.”

“I think they might be something more, Chebron, under other circumstances. However, that is not the question we are discussing. This Joseph brought his family out of the land at the east of the Great Sea, and land was given to them in Goshen, and they settled there and throve and multiplied greatly. Partly because of the remembrance of the services Joseph had rendered to the state, partly because they were a kindred people, they were held in favor as long as the shepherd kings ruled over us. But when Egypt rose and shook off the yoke they had groaned under so long, and drove the shepherds and their followers out of the land, this people – for they had now so grown in numbers as to be in verity a people – remained behind, and they have been naturally viewed with suspicion by us. They are akin to our late oppressors, and lying as their land does to the east, they could open the door to any fresh army of invasion.

“Happily, now that our conquests have spread so far, and the power of the people eastward of the Great Sea has been completely broken, this reason for distrust has died out, but Joseph’s people are still viewed unfavorably. Prejudices take long to die out among the masses, and the manner in which these people cling together, marrying only among themselves and keeping themselves apart from us, gives a certain foundation for the dislike which exists. Personally, I think the feeling is unfounded. They are industrious and hard-working, though they are, I own, somewhat disposed to resist authority, and there is more difficulty in obtaining the quota of men from Goshen for the execution of public works than from any other of the provinces of Egypt.”

“Do they differ from us in appearance, father?”

“Considerably, Chebron. They are somewhat fairer than we are, their noses are more aquiline, and they are physically stronger. They do not shave their heads as we do, and they generally let the hair on their faces grow. For a long time after their settlement I believe that they worshiped their own gods, or rather their own God, but they have long adopted our religion.”

“Surely that must be wrong,” Chebron said. “Each nation has its gods, and if a people forsake their own gods it is not likely that other gods would care for them as they do for their own people.”

“It is a difficult question, Chebron, and one which it is best for you to leave alone at present. You will soon enter into the lower grade of the priesthood, and although if you do not pass into the upper grades you will never know the greater mysteries, you will yet learn enough to enlighten you to some extent.”

Chebron was too well trained in the respect due to a parent to ask further questions, but he renewed the subject with Amuba as they strolled in the garden together afterward.

“I wonder how each nation found out who were the gods who specially cared for them, Amuba?”

“I have no idea,” Amuba, who had never given the subject a thought, replied. “You are always asking puzzling questions, Chebron.”

“Well, but it must have been somehow,” Chebron insisted. “Do you suppose that any one ever saw our gods? and if not, how do people know that one has the head of a dog and another of a cat, or what they are like? Are some gods stronger than others, because all people offer sacrifices to the gods and ask for their help before going to battle? Some are beaten and some are victorious; some win to-day and lose to-morrow. Is it that these gods are stronger one day than another, or that they do not care to help their people sometimes? Why do they not prevent their temples from being burned and their images from being thrown down? It is all very strange.”

“It is all very strange, Chebron. I was not long ago asking Jethro nearly the same question, but he could give me no answer. Why do you not ask your father. He is one of the wisest of the Egyptians.”

“I have asked my father, but he will not answer me,” Chebron said thoughtfully. “I think sometimes that it is because I have asked these questions that he does not wish me to become a high priest. I did not mean anything disrespectful to the gods. But somehow when I want to know things, and he will not answer me, I think he looks sadly, as if he was sorry at heart that he could not tell me what I want to know.”

“Have you ever asked your brother Neco?”

“Oh, Neco is different,” Chebron said with an accent almost of disdain. “Neco gets into passions and threatens me with all sorts of things; but I can see he knows no more about it than I do, for he has a bewildered look in his face when I ask him these things, and once or twice he has put his hands to his ears and fairly run away, as if I was saying something altogether profane and impious against the gods.”

On the following day the high priest and his party started for Goshen. The first portion of the journey was performed by water. The craft was a large one, with a pavilion of carved wood on deck, and two masts, with great sails of many colors cunningly worked together. Persons of consequence traveling in this way were generally accompanied by at least two or three musicians playing on harps, trumpets, or pipes; for the Egyptians were passionately fond of music, and no feast was thought complete without a band to discourse soft music while it was going on. The instruments were of the most varied kinds; stringed instruments predominated, and these varied in size from tiny instruments resembling zithers to harps much larger than those used in modern times. In addition to these they had trumpets of many forms, reed instruments, cymbals, and drums, the last-named long and narrow in shape.

Ameres, however, although not averse to music after the evening meal, was of too practical a character to care for it at other times. He considered that it was too often an excuse for doing nothing and thinking of nothing, and therefore dispensed with it except on state occasions. As they floated down the river he explained to his son the various objects which they passed; told him the manner in which the fishermen in their high boats made of wooden planks bound together by rushes, or in smaller crafts shaped like punts formed entirely of papyrus bound together with bands of the same plant, caught the fish; pointed out the entrances to the various canals, and explained the working of the gates which admitted the water; gave him the history of the various temples, towns, and villages; named the many waterfowl basking on the surface of the river, and told him of their habits and how they were captured by the fowlers; he pointed out the great tombs to him, and told him by whom they were built.

“The largest, my son, are monuments of pride and folly. The greatest of the pyramids was built by a king who thought it would immortalize him; but so terrible was the labor that its construction inflicted upon the people that it caused him to be execrated, and he was never laid in the mausoleum he had built for himself. You see our custom of judging kings after their death is not without advantages. After a king is dead the people are gathered together and the question is put to them, Has the dead monarch ruled well? If they reply with assenting shouts, he is buried in a fitting tomb which he has probably prepared for himself, or which his successor raises to him; but if the answer is that he has reigned ill, the sacred rites in his honor are omitted and the mausoleum he has raised stands empty forever.

“There are few, indeed, of our kings who have thus merited the execration of their people, for as a rule the careful manner in which they are brought up, surrounded by youths chosen for their piety and learning, and the fact that they, like the meanest of their subjects, are bound to respect the laws of the land, act as sufficient check upon them. But there is no doubt that the knowledge that after death they must be judged by the people exercises a wholesome restraint even upon the most reckless.”

“I long to see the pyramids,” Chebron said. “Are they built of brick or stone? for I have been told that their surface is so smooth and shiny that they look as if cut from a single piece.”

“They are built of vast blocks of stone, each of which employed the labor of many hundreds of men to transport from the quarries where they were cut.”

“Were they the work of slaves or of the people at large?”

“Vast numbers of slaves captured in war labored at them,” the priest replied. “But numerous as these were they were wholly insufficient for the work, and well-nigh half the people of Egypt were forced to leave their homes to labor at them. So great was the burden and distress that even now the builders of these pyramids are never spoken of save with curses; and rightly so, for what might not

have been done with the same labor usefully employed! Why, the number of the canals in the country might have been doubled and the fertility of the soil vastly increased. Vast tracts might have been reclaimed from the marshes and shallow lakes, and the produce of the land might have been doubled.”

“And what splendid temples might have been raised!” Chebron said enthusiastically.

“Doubtless, my son,” the priest said quietly after a slight pause. “But though it is meet and right that the temples of the gods shall be worthy of them, still, as we hold that the gods love Egypt and rejoice in the prosperity of the people, I think that they might have preferred so vast an improvement as the works I speak of would have effected in the condition of the people, even to the raising of long avenues of sphinxes and gorgeous temples in their own honor.”

“Yes, one would think so,” Chebron said thoughtfully. “And yet, father, we are always taught that our highest duty is to pay honor to the gods, and that in no way can money be so well spent as in raising fresh temples and adding to the beauty of those that exist.”

“Our highest duty is assuredly to pay honor to the gods, Chebron; but how that honor can be paid most acceptably is another and deeper question which you are a great deal too young to enter upon. It will be time enough for you to do that years hence. There, do you see that temple standing on the right bank of the river? That is where we stop for the night. My messenger will have prepared them for our coming, and all will be in readiness for us.”

As they approached the temple they saw a number of people gathered on the great stone steps reaching down to the water’s edge, and strains of music were heard. On landing Ameres was greeted with the greatest respect by the priests all bowing to the ground, while those of inferior order knelt with their faces to the earth, and did not raise them until he had passed on. As soon as he entered the temple a procession was formed. Priests bearing sacred vessels and the symbols of the gods walked before him to the altar; a band of unseen musicians struck up a processional air; priestesses and maidens, also carrying offerings and emblems, followed Ameres. He naturally took the principal part in the sacrifice at the altar, cutting the throat of the victim, and making the offering of the parts specially set aside for the gods.

After the ceremonies were concluded the procession moved in order as far as the house of the chief priest. Here all again saluted Ameres, who entered, followed by his son and attendants. A banquet was already in readiness. To this Ameres sat down with the principal priests, while Chebron was conducted to the apartment prepared for him, where food from the high table was served to him. Amuba and the rest of the suit of the high priest were served in another apartment. As soon as Chebron had finished he joined Amuba.

“Let us slip away,” he said. “The feasting will go on for hours, and then there will be music far on into the night. My father will be heartily tired of it all; for he loves plain food, and thinks that the priests should eat none other. Still, as it would not be polite for a guest to remark upon the viands set before him, I know that he will go through it all. I have heard him say that it is one of the greatest trials of his position that whenever he travels people seem to think that a feast must be prepared for him; whereas I know he would rather sit down to a dish of boiled lentils and water than have the richest dishes set before him.”

“Is it going to be like this all the journey?” Amuba asked.

“Oh, no! I know that all the way down the river we shall rest at a temple, for did my father not do so the priests would regard it as a slight; but then we leave the boat and journey in chariots or bullock-carts. When we reach Goshen we shall live in a little house which my father has had constructed for him, and where we shall have no more fuss and ceremony than we do at our own farm. Then he will be occupied with the affairs of the estates and in the works of irrigation; and although we shall be with him when he journeys about, as I am to begin to learn the duties of a superintendent, I expect we shall have plenty of time for amusement and sport.”

They strolled for an hour or two on the bank of the river, for the moon was shining brightly and many boats were passing up and down; the latter drifted with the stream, for the wind was so light

that the sails were scarce filled; the former kept close to the bank, and were either propelled by long poles or towed by parties of men on the bank. When they returned to the house they listened for a time to the music, and then retired to their rooms. Amuba lay down upon the soft couch made of a layer of bulrushes, covered with a thick woollen cloth, and rested his head on a pillow of bulrushes which Jethro had bound up for him; for neither of the Rebu had learned to adopt the Egyptian fashion of using a stool for a pillow.

These stools were long, and somewhat curved in the middle to fit the neck. For the common people they were roughly made of wood, smoothed where the head came; but the head-stools of the wealthy were constructed of ebony, cedar, and other scarce woods, beautifully inlaid with ivory. Amuba had made several trials of these head-stools, but had not once succeeded in going to sleep with one under his head, half an hour sufficing to cause such an aching of his neck that he was glad to take to the pillow of rushes to which he was accustomed. Indeed, to sleep upon the stool-pillows it was necessary to lie upon the side with an arm so placed as to raise the head to the exact level of the stool, and as Amuba had been accustomed to throw himself down and sleep on his back or any other position in which he first lay, for he was generally thoroughly tired either in hunting or by exercise of arms, he found the cramped and fixed position necessary for sleeping with a hard stool absolutely intolerable.

For a week the journey down the river continued, and then they arrived at Memphis, where they remained for some days. Ameres passed the time in ceremonial visits and in taking part in the sacrifices in the temple. Chebron and Amuba visited all the temples and public buildings, and one day went out to inspect the great pyramids attended by Jethro.

“This surpasses anything I have seen,” Jethro said as they stood at the foot of the great pyramid of Cheops. “What a wonderful structure, but what a frightful waste of human labor!”

“It is marvelous, indeed,” Amuba said. “What wealth and power a monarch must have had to raise such a colossal pile! I thought you said, Chebron, that your kings were bound by laws as well as other people. If so, how could this king have exacted such terrible toil and labor from his subjects as this must have cost?”

“Kings should be bound by the laws,” Chebron replied; “but there are some so powerful and haughty that they tyrannize over the people. Cheops was one of them. My father has been telling me that he ground down the people to build this wonderful tomb for himself. But he had his reward, for at his funeral he had to be judged by the public voice, and the public condemned him as a bad and tyrannous king. Therefore he was not allowed to be buried in the great tomb that he had built for himself. I know not where his remains rest, but this huge pyramid stands as an eternal monument of the failure of human ambition – the greatest and costliest tomb in the world, but without an occupant, save that Theliene, one of his queens, was buried here in a chamber near that destined for the king.”

“The people did well,” Jethro said heartily; “but they would have done better still had they risen against him and cut off his head directly they understood the labor he was setting them to do.”

On leaving Memphis one more day’s journey was made by water, and the next morning the party started by land. Ameres rode in a chariot, which was similar in form to those used for war, except that the sides were much higher, forming a sort of deep open box, against which those standing in it could rest their bodies. Amuba and Chebron traveled in a wagon drawn by two oxen; the rest of the party went on foot.

At the end of two days they arrived at their destination. The house was a small one compared to the great mansion near Thebes, but it was built on a similar plan. A high wall surrounded an inclosure of a quarter of an acre. In the center stood the house with one large apartment for general purposes, and small bedchambers opening from it on either side. The garden, although small, was kept with scrupulous care. Rows of fruit trees afforded a pleasant shade. In front of the house there was a small pond bordered with lilies and rushes. A Nubian slave and his wife kept everything in readiness for the owner whenever he should appear. A larger retinue of servants was unnecessary, as a cook and

barber were among those who traveled in the train of Ameres. The overseer of the estate was in readiness to receive the high priest.

“I have brought my son with me,” Ameres said when the ceremonial observances and salutations were concluded. “He is going to commence his studies in irrigation, but I shall not have time at present to instruct him. I wish him to become proficient in outdoor exercises, and beg you to procure men skilled in fishing, fowling, and hunting, so that he can amuse his unoccupied hours with sport. At Thebes he has but rare opportunities for these matters; for, excepting in the preserves, game has become well-nigh extinct, while as for fowling, there is none of it to be had in Upper Egypt, while here in the marshes birds abound.”

The superintendent promised that suitable men should be forthcoming, one of each caste; for in Egypt men always followed the occupation of their fathers, and each branch of trade was occupied by men forming distinct castes, who married only in their own caste, worked just as their fathers had done before them, and did not dream of change or elevation. Thus the fowler knew nothing about catching fish or the fishermen of fowling. Both, however, knew something about hunting; for the slaying of the hyenas, that carried off the young lambs, and kids from the villages, and the great river-horses, which came out and devastated the fields, was a part of the business of every villager.

The country where they now were was for the most part well cultivated and watered by the canals, which were filled when the Nile was high.

A day’s journey to the north lay Lake Menzaleh – a great shallow lagoon which stretched away to the Great Sea, from which it was separated only by a narrow bank of sand. The canals of the Nile reached nearly to the edge of this, and when the river rose above its usual height and threatened to inundate the country beyond the usual limits, and to injure instead of benefiting the cultivators, great gates at the end of these canals would be opened, and the water find its way into the lagoon. There were, too, connections between some of the lower arms of the Nile and the lake, so that the water, although salt, was less so than that of the sea. The lake was the abode of innumerable waterfowl of all kinds, and swarmed also with fish.

These lakes formed a fringe along the whole of the northern coast of Egypt, and it was from these and the swampy land near the mouths of the Nile that the greater portion of the fowl and fish that formed important items in the food of the Egyptians was drawn. To the southeast lay another chain of lakes, whose water was more salt than that of the sea. It was said that in olden times these had been connected by water both with the Great Sea to the north and the Southern Sea; and even now, when the south wind blew strong and the waters of the Southern Sea were driven up the gulf with force, the salt water flowed into Lake Timsah, so called because it swarmed with crocodiles.

“I shall be busy for some days, to begin with,” Ameres said to his son on the evening of their arrival, “and it will therefore be a good opportunity for you to see something of the various branches of sport that are to be enjoyed in this part of Egypt. The steward will place men at your disposal, and you can take with you Amuba and Jethro. He will see that there are slaves to carry provisions and tents, for it will be necessary for much of your sport that you rise early, and not improbably you may have to sleep close at hand.”

In the morning Chebron had an interview with the steward, who told him that he had arranged the plan for an expedition.

“You will find little about here, my lord,” he said, “beyond such game as you would obtain near Thebes. But a day’s journey to the north you will be near the margin of the lake, and there you will get sport of all kinds, and can at your will fish in its waters, snare waterfowl, hunt the great river-horse in the swamps, or chase the hyena in the low bushes on the sandhills. I have ordered all to be in readiness, and in an hour the slaves with the provisions will be ready to start. The hunters of this part of the country will be of little use to you, so I have ordered one of my chief men to accompany you.

“He will see that when you arrive you obtain men skilled in the sport and acquainted with the locality and the habits of the wild creatures there. My lord your father said you would probably be

away for a week, and that on your return you would from time to time have a day's hunting in these parts. He thought that as your time will be more occupied then it were better that you should make this distant expedition to begin with.”

An hour later some twenty slaves drew up before the house, carrying on their heads provisions, tents, and other necessaries. A horse was provided for Chebron, but he decided that he would walk with Amuba.

“There is no advantage in going on a horse,” he said, “when you have to move at the pace of footmen, and possibly we may find something to shoot on the way.”

The leader of the party, upon hearing Chebron's decision, told him that doubtless when they left the cultivated country, which extended but a few miles further north, game would be found. Six dogs accompanied them. Four of them were powerful animals, kept for the chase of the more formidable beasts, the hyena or lion, for although there were no lions in the flat country, they abounded in the broken grounds at the foot of the hills to the south. The other two were much more lightly built, and were capable of running down a deer. Dogs were held in high honor in Egypt. In some parts of the country they were held to be sacred. In all they were kept as companions and friends in the house as well as for the purposes of the chase. The season was the cold one, and the heat was so much less than they were accustomed to at Thebes – where the hills which inclosed the plain on which the city was built cut off much of the air, and seemed to reflect the sun's rays down upon it – that the walk was a pleasant one.

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