

FICTION

Georg Ebers

The Bride of the Nile



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A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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THE BRIDE OF THE NILE

By Georg Ebers

Translated from the German by Clara Bell

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PREFACE.

The "Bride of the Nile" needs no preface. For the professional student I may observe that I have relied on the authority of de Goeje in adhering to my own original opinion that the word Mukaukas is not to be regarded as a name

but as a title, since the Arab writers to which I have made reference apply it to the responsible representatives of the Byzantine Emperor in antagonism to the Moslem power. I was unfortunately unable to make further use of Karabacek's researches as to the Mukaukas.

I shall not be held justified in placing the ancient Horus Apollo (Horapollo) in the seventh century after Christ by any one who regards the author of the Hieroglyphica as identical with the Egyptian philosopher of the same name who, according to Suidas, lived under Theodosius, and to whom Stephanus of Byzantium refers, writing so early as at the end of the fifth century. But the lexicographer Suidas enumerates the works of Horapollo, the philologer and commentator on Greek poetry, without naming the Hieroglyphica, which is the only treatise alluded to by Stephanus. Besides, all the other ancient writers who mention Horapollo at all leave us quite free to suppose that there may have been two sages of the same name--as does C. Leemans, who is most intimately versed in the Hieroglyphica--and the second certainly cannot have lived earlier than the VIIth century, since an accurate knowledge of hieroglyphic writing must have been lost far more completely in his time than we can suppose possible in the IVth century. It must be remembered that we still possess well-executed hieroglyphic inscriptions dating from the time of Decius, 250 years after Christ. Thus the Egyptian commentator on Greek poetry could hardly have needed a translator, whereas the Hieroglyphica seems to have been first rendered into Greek by Philippus. The combination by which the author called in Egyptian Horus (the son of Isis) is supposed to have been born in Philae, where the cultus of the Egyptian heathen was longest practised, and where some familiarity with hieroglyphics must have been preserved to a late date, takes into due account the real state of affairs at the period I have selected for my story.

GEORG EBERS.

October 1st, 1886.



BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I.

Half a lustrum had elapsed since Egypt had become subject to the youthful power of the Arabs, which had risen with such unexampled vigor and rapidity. It had fallen an easy prey, cheaply bought, into the hands of a small, well-captained troop of Moslem warriors; and the fair province, which so lately had been a jewel of the Byzantine Empire and the most faithful foster-mother to Christianity, now owned the sway of the Khalif Omar and saw the Crescent raised by the side of the Cross.

It was long since a hotter season had afflicted the land; and the Nile, whose rising had been watched for on the Night of Dropping--the 17th of June--with the usual festive preparations, had cheated the hopes of the Egyptians, and instead of rising had shrunk narrower and still narrower in its bed.--It was in this time of sore anxiety, on the 10th of July, A.D. 643, that a caravan from the North reached Memphis.

It was but a small one; but its appearance in the decayed and deserted city of the Pyramids--which had grown only lengthwise, like a huge reed-leaf, since its breadth was confined between the Nile and the Libyan Hills--attracted the gaze of the passers-by, though in former years a Memphite would scarcely have thought it worth while to turn his head to gaze at an interminable pile of wagons loaded with merchandise, an imposing train of vehicles drawn by oxen, the flashing maniples of the imperial cavalry, or an endless procession wending its way down the five miles of high street.

The merchant who, riding a dromedary of the choicest breed, conducted this caravan, was a lean Moslem of mature age, robed in soft silk. A vast turban covered his small head and cast a shadow over his delicate and venerable features.

The Egyptian guide who rode on a brisk little ass by his side, looked up frequently and with evident pleasure at the merchant's face--not in itself a handsome one with its hollow cheeks, meagre beard and large aquiline nose--for it was lighted up by a pair of bright eyes, full of attractive thoughtfulness and genuine kindness. But that this fragile-looking man, in whose benevolent countenance grief and infirmities had graven many a furrow, could not only command but compel submission was legible alike in his thin, firmly-closed lips and in the zeal with which his following of truculent and bearded fighting men, armed to the teeth, obeyed his slightest sign.

His Egyptian attendant, the head of the Hermeneutai--the guild of the Dragomans of that period--was a swarthy and surly native of Memphis; whenever he accidentally came too close to the fierce-looking riders of the dromedaries he shrunk his shoulders as if he expected a blow or a push, while he poured out question and answer to the Merchant Haschim, the owner of the caravan, without timidity and with the voluble garrulity of his tribe.

"You seem very much at home here in Memphis," he observed, when the old man had expressed his surprise at the decadence and melancholy change in the city.

"Thirty years ago," replied the merchant, "my business often brought me hither. How many houses are now empty and in ruins where formerly only heavy coin could secure admittance! Ruins on all sides!--Who has so cruelly mutilated that fine church? My fellow-believers left every Christian fane untouched--that I know from our chief Amru himself."

"It was the principal church of the Melchites, the Emperor's minions," cried the guide, as if that were ample explanation of the fact. The merchant, however, did not take it so.

"Well," he said, "and what is there so dreadful in their creed?"

"What?" said the Egyptian, and his eye flashed wrathfully. "What?--They dismember the divine person of the Saviour and attribute to it two distinct natures. And then!--All the Greeks settled here, and encouraged by the protection of the emperor, treated us, the owners of the land, like slaves, till your nation came to put an end to their oppression. They drove us by force into their churches, and every true-born Egyptian was punished as a rebel and a leper. They mocked at us and persecuted us for our faith in the one divine nature of our Lord."

"And so," interrupted the merchant, "as soon as we drove out the Greeks you behaved more unmercifully to them and their sanctuaries than we--whom you scorn as infidels--did to you!"

"Mercy?--for them!" cried the Egyptian indignantly, as he cast an evil eye on the demolished edifice. "They have reaped what they sowed; and now every one in Egypt who does not believe in your One God--blessed be the Saviour!--confesses the one sole nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. You drove out the Melchite rabble, and then it was our part to demolish the temples of their wretched Saviour, who lost His divine Unity at the synod of Chalcedon--damnation wait upon it!"

"But still the Melchites are fellow-believers with you--they are Christians," said the merchant.

"Christians?" echoed the guide with a contemptuous shrug. "They may regard themselves as Christians; but I, with every one else great and small in this land, am of opinion that they have no right whatever to call themselves our fellow-believers and Christians. They all are and shall be for ever accursed with their hundreds--nay thousands of devilish heresies, by which they degrade our God and Redeemer to the level of that idol on the stone pillar. Half a cow

and half a man! Why, what rational being, I ask you, could pray to such a mongrel thing? We Jacobites or Monophysites or whatever they choose to call us will not yield a jot or tittle of the divine nature of our Lord and Saviour; and if the old faith must die out, I will turn Moslem and be converted to your One Omnipotent God; for before I confess the heresies of the Melchites I will be hewn in pieces, and my wife and children with me. Who knows what may be coming to pass? And there are many advantages in going over to your side: for the power is in your hands, and long may you keep it! We have got to be ruled by strangers; and who would not rather pay small tribute to the wise and healthy Khalif at Medina than a heavy one to the sickly imperial brood of Melchites at Constantinople. The Mukaukas George, to be sure, is not a bad sort of man, and as he so soon gave up all idea of resisting you he was no doubt of my opinion. Regarding you as just and pious folks, as our next neighbors, and perhaps even of our own race and blood, he preferred you--my brother told me so--to those Byzantine heretics, flayers of men and thirsting for blood, but yet, the Mukaukas is as good a Christian as breathes."

The Arab had listened attentively and with a subtle smile to the Memphite, whose duties as guide now compelled him to break off. The Egyptian made the whole caravan turn down an alley that led into a street running parallel to the river, where a few fine houses still stood in the midst of their gardens. When men and beasts were making their way along a better pavement the merchant observed: "I knew the father of the man you were speaking of, very well. He was wealthy and virtuous; of his son too I hear nothing but good. But is he still allowed to bear the title of governor, or, what did you call him?--Mukaukas?"

"Certainly, Master," said the guide. "There is no older family than his in all Egypt, and if old Menas was rich the Mukaukas is richer, both by inheritance and by his wife's dower. Nor could we wish for a more sensible or a juster governor! He keeps his eye on his underlings too; still, business is not done now as briskly as formerly, for though he is not much older than I am--and I am not yet sixty--he is always ailing and has not been seen out of the house for months. Even when your chief wants to see him he comes over to this side of the river. It is a pity with such a man as he; and who was it that broke down his stalwart strength? Why, those Melchite dogs; you may ask all along the Nile, long as it is, who was at the bottom of any misfortune, and you will always get the same answer: Wherever the Melchite or the Greek sets foot the grass refuses to grow."

"But the Mukaukas, the emperor's representative... the Arab began. The Egyptian broke in however:

"He, you think, must be safe from them? They did not certainly injure his person; but they did worse, for when the Melchites rose up against our party--it was at Alexandria, and the late Greek patriarch Cyrus had a finger in that pie--they killed his two sons, two fine, splendid men--killed them like dogs; and it crushed him completely."

"Poor man!" sighed the Arab. "And has he no child left?"

"Oh, yes. One son, and the widow of his eldest. She went into a convent after her husband's death, but she left her child, her little Mary--she must be ten years old now--to live with her grandparents."

"That is well," said the old man, "that will bring some sunshine into the house."

"No doubt, Master. And just lately they have had some cause for rejoicing. The only surviving son--Orion is his name--came home only the day before yesterday from Constantinople where he has been for a long time. There was a to-do! Half the city went crazy. Thousands went out to meet him, as though he were the Saviour; they erected triumphal arches, even folks of my creed--no one thought of hanging back. One and all wanted to see the son of the great Mukaukas, and the women of course were first and foremost!"

"You speak, however," said the Arab, "as though the returning hero were not worthy of so much honor."

"That is as folks think," replied the Egyptian shrugging his shoulders. "At any rate he is the only son of the greatest man in the land."

"But he does not promise to be like the old man?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," said the guide. "My brother, a priest, and the head of one of our great schools, was his tutor, and he never met such a clever head as Orion's, he tells me. He learnt everything without any trouble and at the same time worked as hard as a poor man's son. We may expect him to win fame and honor--so Marcus says--for his parents and for the city of Memphis: but for my part, I can see the shady side, and I tell you the women will turn his head and bring him to a bad end. He is handsome, taller even than the old man in his best days, and he knows how to make the most of himself when he meets a pretty face--and pretty faces are always to be met in his path..."

"And the young rascal takes what he finds!" said the Moslem laughing. "If that is all you are alarmed at I am glad for the youth. He is young and such things are allowable."

"Nay, Sir, even my brother--he lives now in Alexandria, and is blind and foolish enough still in all that concerns his former pupil--and even he thinks this is a dangerous rock ahead. If he does not change in this respect he will wander further and further from the law of the Lord, and imperil his soul, for dangers surround him on all sides like roaring lions. The noble gifts of a handsome and engaging person will lead him to his ruin; and though I do not desire it, I suspect...."

"You look on the dark side and judge hardly," replied the old man. "The young...."

"Even the young, or at least the Christian young, ought to control themselves, though I, if any one, am inclined to make the utmost allowance for the handsome lad--nay, and I may confess: when he smiles at me I feel at once as if I had met with some good-luck; and there are a thousand other men in Memphis who feel the same, and still more the women you may be sure--but many a one has shed bitter tears on his account for all that.--But, by all the saints!--Talk of the wolf and you see his tail! Look, there he is!--Halt! Stop a minute, you men; it is worth while, Sir, to tarry a moment."

"Is that his fine quadriga in front of the high garden gate yonder?"

"Those are the Pannonian horses he brought with him, as swift as lightning and as.... But look! Ah, now they have disappeared behind the hedge; but you, high up on your dromedary, must be able to see them. The little maid by his side is the widow Susannah's daughter. This garden and the beautiful mansion behind the trees belong to her."

"A very handsome property!" said the Arab.

"I should think so indeed!" replied the Memphite. "The garden goes down to the Nile, and then, what care is taken of it!"

"Was it not here that Philommon the corn-merchant lived formerly?" asked the old man, as though some memories were coming back to him.

"To be sure. He was Susannah's husband and must have been a man of fifty when he first wooed her. The little girl is their only child and the richest heiress in the whole province; but she is not altogether grown up though she is sixteen years old--an old man's child, you understand, but a pretty, merry creature, a laughing dove in human form, and so quick and lively. Her own people call her the little water-wagtail."

"Good!--Good and very appropriate," said the merchant well pleased. "She is small too, a child rather than a maiden; but the graceful, gladsome creature takes my fancy. And the governor's son--what is his name?"

"Orion, Sir," replied the guide.

"And by my beard," said the old man smiling. "You have not over-praised him, man! Such a youth as this Orion is not to be seen every day. What a tall fellow, and how becoming are those brown curls. Such as he are spoilt to begin with by their mothers, and then all the other women follow suit. And he has a frank, shrewd face with something behind it. If only he had left his purple coat and gold frippery in Constantinople! Such finery is out of place in this dismal ruinous city."

While he was yet speaking the Memphite urged his ass forward, but the Arab held him back, for his attention was riveted by what was taking place within the enclosure. He saw handsome Orion place a small white dog, a silky creature of great beauty that evidently belonged to him--in the little maiden's arms saw her kiss it and then put a blade of grass round its neck as if to measure its size. The old man watched them as, both laughing gaily, they looked into each other's eyes and presently bid each other farewell. The girl stood on tiptoe in front of some rare shrub to reach two exquisite purple flowers that blossomed at the top, hastily plucked them and offered them to him with a deep blush; she pushed away the hand he had put out to support her as she stretched up for the flowers with a saucy slap; and a bright glance of happiness lighted up her sweet face as the young man kissed the place her fingers had hit, and then pressed the flowers to his lips. The old man looked on with sympathetic pleasure, as though it roused the sweetest memories in his mind; and his kind eyes shone as Orion, no less mischievously happy than the young girl, whispered something in her ear; she drew the long stem of grass out of her waist-belt to administer immediate and condign punishment withal, struck it across his face, and then fled over grass-plot and flower-bed, as swift as a roe, without heeding his repeated shouts of "Katharina! bewitching, big damsel, Katharina!" till she reached the house.

It was a charming little interlude. Old Haschim was still pondering it in his memory with much satisfaction when he and his caravan had gone some distance further. He felt obliged to Orion for this pretty scene, and when he heard the young man's quadriga approaching at an easy trot behind him, he turned round to gaze. But the Arab's face had lost its contentment by the time the four Pannonians and the chariot, overlaid with silver ornamentation and forming, with its driver, a picture of rare beauty and in perfect taste, had slowly driven past, to fly on like the wind as soon as the road was clear, and to vanish presently in clouds of dust. There was something of melancholy in his voice as he desired his young camel-driver to pick up the flowers, which now lay in the dust of the road, and to bring them to him. He himself had observed the handsome youth as, with a glance and a gesture of annoyance with himself, he flung the innocent gift on the hot, sandy highway.

"Your brother is right," cried the old man to the Memphite. "Women are indeed the rock ahead in this young fellow's life--and he in theirs, I fear! Poor little girl!"

"The little water-wagtail do you mean? Oh! with her it may perhaps turn to real earnest. The two mothers have settled the matter already. They are both rolling in gold, and where doves nest doves resort.--Thank God, the sun is low down over the Pyramids! Let your people rest at the large inn yonder; the host is an honest man and lacks nothing, not even shade!"

"So far as the beasts and drivers are concerned," said the merchant, "they may stop here. But I, and the leader of the caravan, and some of my men will only take some refreshment, and then you must guide us to the governor; I have to

Speak with him. It is growing late..."

"That does not matter," said the Egyptian. "The Mukaukas prefers to see strangers after sundown on such a scorching day. If you have any dealings with him I am the very man for you. You have only to make play with a gold piece and I can obtain you an audience at once through Sebek, the house-steward he is my cousin. While you are resting here I will ride on to the governor's palace and bring you word as to how matters stand."

CHAPTER II.

The caravansary into which Haschim and his following now turned off stood on a plot of rising ground surrounded by palm-trees. Before the destruction of the heathen sanctuaries it had been a temple of Imhotep, the Egyptian Esculapius, the beneficent god of healing, who had had his places of special worship even in the city of the dead. It was half relined, half buried in desert sand when an enterprising inn-keeper had bought the elegant structure with the adjacent grove for a very moderate sum. Since then it had passed to various owners, a large wooden building for the accommodation of travellers had been added to the massive edifice, and among the palm-trees, which extended as far as the ill-repaired quay, stables were erected and plots of ground fenced in for beasts of all kinds. The whole place looked like a cattle-fair, and indeed it was a great resort of the butchers and horse-dealers of the town, who came there to purchase. The palm-grove, being one of the few remaining close to the city, also served the Memphites as a pleasure-ground where they could "sniff fresh air" and treat themselves in a pleasant shade. Tables and seats had been set out close to the river, and there were boats on hire in mine host's little creek; and those who took their pleasure in coming thither by water were glad to put in and refresh themselves under the palms of Nesptah.

Two rows of houses had formerly divided this rendezvous for the sober and the reckless from the highroad, but they had long since been pulled down and laid level with the ground by successive landlords. Even now some hundreds of laborers might be seen, in spite of the scorching heat, toiling under Arab overseers to demolish a vast ruin of the date of the Ptolemies and transporting the huge blocks of limestone and marble, and the numberless columns which once had supported the roof of the temple of Zeus, to the eastern shore of the Nile-loading them on to trucks drawn by oxen which hauled them down to the quay to cross the river in flat-bottomed boats.

Amru, the Khaliff's general and representative, was there building his new capital. For this the temples of the old gods were used as quarries, and they supplied not only finely-squared blocks of the most durable stone, but also myriads of Greek columns of every order, which had only to be ferried over and set up again on the other shore; for the Arabs disdained nothing in the way of materials, and made indiscriminate use of blocks and pillars in their own sanctuaries, whether they took them from heathen temples or Christian churches.

The walls of the temple of Imhotep had originally been completely covered with pictures of the gods, and hieroglyphic inscriptions; but the smoke of reeking hearths had long since blackened them, fanatical hands had never been wanting to deface them, and in many places they had been lime-washed and scrawled with Christian symbols or very unchristian mottoes, in Greek and the spoken dialect of the Egyptians. The Arab and his men took their meal in what had been the great hall of the temple--none of them drinking wine excepting the captain of the caravan, who was no Moslem but belonged to the Parsee sect of the Masdakites.

When the old merchant, sitting at a table by himself, had satisfied his hunger, he called this chief and desired him to load the bale containing the hanging on a litter between the two largest baggage camels, and to fasten it securely but so that it could easily be removed.

"It is done," replied the Persian, as he wiped his thick moustache--he was a magnificent man as tall and stalwart as an oak, with light flowing hair like a lion's mane.

"So much the better," said Haschim. "Then come out with me." And he led the way to the palmgrove.

The sun had sunk to rest behind the pyramids, the Necropolis, and the Libyan hills; the eastern sky, and the bare limestone rock of Babylon on the opposite shore were shining with hues of indescribable diversity and beauty. It seemed as though every variety of rose reared by the skilled gardeners of Arsinoe or Naukratis had yielded its hues, from golden buff to crimson and the deepest wine-tinted violet, to shed their magic glow on the plains, the peaks and gorges of the hills, with the swiftness of thought.

The old man's heart beat high as he gazed at the scene; he drew a deep breath, and laying his slender hand on the Persian's mighty arm he said: "Your prophet, Masdak, taught that it was God's will that no one should think himself more or less chosen than another, and that there should be neither rich nor poor on earth, but that every possession should belong to all in common. Well, look around you here as I do. The man who has not seen this has seen nothing. There is no fairer scene here below and to whom does it belong? To poor simple Salech yonder, whom we allowed to tramp half naked at our camels' heels out of pity.--It is his as much as it is yours or mine or the Khaliff's. God has given us all an equal share in the glory of his works, as your prophet would have it. How much beauty is the common possession of our race! Let us be thankful for it, Rustem, for indeed it is no small matter.--But as to property, such as man may win or lose, that is quite a different matter. We all start on the same race-course, and what you Masdakites ask is that lead should be tied to the feet of the swift so that no one should outstrip another; but that would be.... Well, well! Let us feast our eyes now on the marvellous beauty before us. Look: What just now was the purple of this flower is now deep ruby red; what before was a violet gleam now is the richest amethyst. Do you see the golden fringe to those clouds? It is like a setting.--And all this is ours--is yours and mine--so long as we have eyes and heart to enjoy and be uplifted by it!"

The Masdakite laughed, a fresh, sonorous laugh, and said: "Yes, Master, for those who see as you see. The colors are bright no doubt over the sky and the hills, and we do not often see such a red as that at home in my country; but of what use is all that magic show? You see rubies and amethysts--but as for me! The gems in your hanging stand for something more than that shining show. I mean no harm, Master, but I would give all the sunsets that ever glowed on earth for your baes and never repent of the bargain!" He laughed more heartily than before and added: "But you, worthy Father, would think twice before you signed it.--As to what we Masdakites hope for, our time is not yet come."

"And suppose it were, and that the hanging were yours?"

"I should sell it and add the price to my savings, and go home and buy some land, and take a pretty wife, and breed camels and horses."

"And next day would come the poorer men who had laid nothing by, and had made no bargain over hangings and sunsets; and they would ask for a share of your land, and a camel and a foal each, and you would not be able ever to see a sunset again but must wander about the world, and your pretty wife with you to help you share everything with others.--Let us abide by the old order, my Rustem, and may the Most High preserve you your good heart, for you have but a foolish and crotchety head."

The big man bent over his master and gratefully kissed his arm; at this moment the guide rejoined them, but with a long face for he had promised more than he could perform. The Mukaukas George had set out--a quite unheard of event--for an excursion on the river in his barge, with his son and the ladies of the house just as he was hoping to secure an audience for the Arab. Orion's return--the steward had explained--had made the old man quite young again. Haschim must now wait till the morrow, and he, the guide, would counsel him to pass the night in the city at an inn kept by one Moschion, where he would be well cared for.

But the merchant preferred to remain where he was. He did not care about the delay, more particularly as he wished to consult an Egyptian physician with regard to an old standing complaint he suffered from, and there was no more skilful or learned leech in the whole land, the Egyptian guide assured him, than the famous Philip of Memphis. The situation here, outside the town, was very pleasant, and from the river's bank he might observe the comet which had been visible for some nights past--a portent of evil no doubt. The natives of the city had been paralysed with terror; that indeed was evident even here in Nesptah's caravansary, for usually as the evening grew cool, the tables and benches under the palms were crowded with guests; but who would care to think of enjoyment in those days of dread?

So he remounted his ass to fetch the physician, while old Haschim, leaning on the Masdakite's arm, betook himself to a bench by the river. There he sat gazing thoughtfully at the starry sky, and his companion dreamed of home and of buying a meadow, even without the price of the gorgeous hanging, of building a house, and of choosing a pretty little wife to manage it. Should she be fair or dark? He would rather she should be fair.

But his castle in the air was shattered at this point, for an object was approaching across the Nile which attracted his attention, and which he pointed out to his chief. The stream lay before them like a broad belt of black and silver brocade. The waxing moon was mirrored in the almost unruffled surface and where a ripple curled it the tiny crest glittered like white flame. Bats swooped to and fro in the gloom from the city of the dead to the river, and flitted above it like shadows blown about by the wind. A few lateen sails moved like pale, gigantic birds over the dark waters; but now from the north--and from the city--a larger mass came towards the palm-grove with bright, gleaming eyes of light.

"A fine boat,--the governor's no doubt," said the merchant, as it slowly came towards the grove from the middle of the stream. At the same time the clatter of hoofs became audible from the road behind the inn. Haschim turned round and was aware of torchbearers running ahead of a chariot.

"The sick man has come so far by water," said the Arab, "and now, he is to be driven home.--Strange! this is the second time to-day that I have met his much-talked-of son!"

The governor's pleasure-barge was nearing the palm-grove. It was a large and handsome boat, built of cedar-wood and richly gilt, with an image of John, the patron-saint of the family, for a figure-head. The nimbus round the head was a crown of lamps, and large lanterns shone both at the bows and stern of the vessel. The Mukaukas George was reclining under an awning, his wife Neforis by his side. Opposite to them sat their son and a tall young girl, at whose feet a child of ten sat on the ground, leaning her pretty head against her knees. An older Greek woman, the child's governess, had a place by the side of a very tall man, on an ottoman beyond the verge of the awning. This man was Philip the leech. The cheerful sound of the lute accompanied the barge, and the performer was the returned wanderer Orion, who touched the strings with skill and deep feeling.

It was altogether a pleasing scene--a fair picture of a wealthy and united family. But who was the damsel sitting by Orion's side? He was devoting his whole attention to her; as he struck the strings with deeper emphasis his eyes sought hers, and it seemed as though he were playing for her alone. Nor did she appear unworthy of such homage, for when the barge ran into the little haven and Haschim could distinguish her features he was startled by her noble and purely Greek beauty.

A few handsomely-dressed slaves, who must have come with the vehicle by the road, now went on board the boat to

carry their invalid lord to his chariot; and it then became apparent that the seat in which he reclined was provided with arms by which it could be lifted and moved. A burly negro took this at the back, but just as another was stooping to lift it in front Orion pushed him away and took his place, raised the couch with his father on it, and carried him across the landing-stage between the deck and the shore, past Haschim to the chariot. The young man did the work of bearer with cheerful ease, and looked affectionately at his father while he shouted to the ladies--for only his mother and the physician accompanied the invalid after carefully wrapping him in shawls--to get out of the barge and wait for him. Then he went forward, lighted by the torches which were carried before them.

"Poor man!" thought the merchant as he looked after the Mukaukas. "But to a man who has such a son to carry him the saddest and hardest lot floats by like a cloud before the wind."

He was now ready to forgive Orion even the rejected flowers; and when the young girl stepped on shore, the child clinging fondly to her arm, he confessed to himself that Dame Susannah's little daughter would find it hard indeed to hold her own by the side of this tall and royal vision of beauty. What a form was this maiden's, and what princely bearing; and how sweet and engaging the voice in which she named some of the constellations to her little companion, and pointed out the comet which was just rising!

Haschim was sitting in shadow; he could see without being seen, and note all that took place on the bench, which was lighted by one of the barge's lanterns. The unexpected entertainment gave him pleasure, for everything that affected the governor's son roused his sympathy and interest. The idea of forming an opinion of this remarkable young man smiled on his fancy, and the sight of the beautiful girl who sat on the bench yonder warmed his old heart. The child must certainly be Mary, the governor's granddaughter.

Then the chariot started off, clattering away down the road, and in a few minutes Orion came back to the rest of the party.

Alas! Poor little heiress of Susannah's wealth! How different was his demeanor to this beautiful damsel from his treatment of that little thing! His eyes rested on her face in rapture, his speech failed him now and again as he addressed her, and what he said must be sometimes grave and captivating and sometimes witty, for not she alone but the little maid's governess listened to him eagerly, and when the fair one laughed it was in particularly sweet, clear tones. There was something so lofty in her mien that this frank expression of contentment was almost startling; like a breath of perfume from some gorgeous flower which seems created to rejoice the eye only. And she, to whom all that Orion had to say was addressed, listened to him not only with deep attention, but in a way which showed the merchant that she cared even more for the speaker than for what he was so eager in expressing. If this maiden wedded the governor's son, they would indeed be a pair! Taus, the innkeeper's wife, now came out, a buxom and vigorous Egyptian woman of middle age, carrying some of the puffs for which she was famous, and which she had just made with her own hands. She also served them with milk, grapes and other fruit, her eyes sparkling with delight and gratified ambition; for the son of the great Mukaukas, the pride of the city, who in former years had often been her visitor, and not only for the sake of her cakes, in water parties with his gay companions--mostly Greek officers who now were all dead and gone or exiles from the country--now did her the honor to come here so soon after his return. Her facile tongue knew no pause as she told him that she and her husband had gone forth with the rest to welcome him at the triumphal arch near Menes' Gate, and Emau with them, and the little one. Yes, Emau was married now, and had called her first child Orion. And when the young man asked Dame Taus whether Emau was as charming as ever and as like her mother as she used to be, she shook her finger at him and asked in her turn, as she pointed towards the young lady, whether the fickle bird at whose departure so many had sighed, was to be caged at last, and whether yon fair lady...

But Orion cut her short, saying that he was still his own master though he already felt the noose round his neck; and the fair lady blushed even more deeply than at the good woman's first question. He however soon got over his awkwardness and gaily declared that the worthy Taus' little daughter was one of the prettiest girls in Memphis, and had had quite as many admirers as her excellent mother's puff-pastry. Taus was to greet her kindly from him.

The landlady departed, much touched and flattered; Orion took up his lute, and while the ladies refreshed themselves he did the maiden's bidding and sang the song by Alcaeus which she asked for, in a rich though subdued voice to the lute, playing it like a master. The young girl's eyes were fixed on his lips, and again, he seemed to be making music for her alone. When it was time to start homewards, and the ladies returned to the barge, he went up to the inn to pay the reckoning. As he presently returned alone the Arab saw him pick up a handkerchief that the young lady had left on the table, and hastily press it to his lips as he went towards the barge.

The gorgeous red blossoms had fared worse in the morning. The young man's heart was given to that maiden on the water. She could not be his sister; what then was the connection between them?

The merchant soon gained this information, for the guide on his return could give it him. She was Paula, the daughter of Thomas, the famous Greek general who had defended the city of Damascus so long and so bravely against the armies of Islam. She was Mukaukas George's niece, but her fortune was small; she was a poor relation of the family, and after her father's disappearance--for his body had never been found--she had been received into the governor's house out of pity and charity--she, a Melchite! The interpreter had little to say in her favor, by reason of her sect; and though

he could find no flaw in her beauty, he insisted on it that she was proud and ungracious, and incapable of winning any man's love; only the child, little Mary--she, to be sure, was very fond of her. It was no secret that even her uncle's wife, worthy Neforis, did not care for her haughty niece and only suffered her to please the invalid. And what business had a Melchite at Memphis, under the roof of a good Jacobite? Every word the dragoman spoke breathed the scorn which a mean and narrow-minded man is always ready to heap on those who share the kindness of his own benefactors.

But this beautiful and lofty-looking daughter of a great man had conquered the merchant's old heart, and his opinion of her was quite unmoved by the Memphite's strictures. It was ere long confirmed indeed, for Philip, the leech whom the guide had been to find, and whose dignified personality inspired the Arab with confidence, was a daily visitor to the governor, and he spoke of Paula as one of the most perfect creatures that Heaven had ever formed in a happy hour. But the Almighty seemed to have forgotten to care for his own masterpiece; for years her life had been indeed a sad one.

The physician could promise the old man some mitigation of his sufferings, and they liked each other so well that they parted the best of friends, and not till a late hour.

CHAPTER III.

The Mukaukas' barge, urged forward by powerful rowers, made its way smoothly down the river. On board there was whispering, and now and again singing. Little Mary had dropped asleep on Paula's shoulder; the Greek duenna gazed sometimes at the comet which filled her with terrors, sometimes at Orion, whose handsome face had bewitched her mature heart, and sometimes at the young girl whom she was ill-pleased to see thus preferred by this favorite of the gods. It was a deliciously warm, still night, and the moon, which makes the ocean swell and flow, stirs the tide of feeling to rise in the human breast.

Whatever Paula asked for Orion sang, as though nothing was unknown to him that had ever sounded on a Greek lute; and the longer they went on the clearer and richer his voice grew, the more melting and seductive its expression, and the more urgently it appealed to the young girl's heart. Paula gave herself up to the sweet enchantment, and when he laid down the lute and asked in low tones if his native land was not lovely on such a night as this, or which song she liked best, and whether she had any idea of what it had been to him to find her in his parents' house, she yielded to the charm and answered him in whispers like his own.

Under the dense foliage of the sleeping garden he pressed her hand to his lips, and she, tremulous, let him have his way.--Bitter, bitter years lay behind her. The physician had spoken only too truly. The hardest blows of fate had brought her--the proud daughter of a noble father--to a course of cruel humiliations. The life of a friendless though not penniless relation, taken into a wealthy house out of charity, had proved a thorny path to tread, but now--since the day before yesterday--all was changed. Orion had come. His home and the city had held high festival on his return, as at some gift of Fortune, in which she too had a goodly share. He had met her, not as the dependent relative, but as a beautiful and high-born woman. There was sunshine in his presence which warmed her very heart, and made her raise her head once more like a flower that is brought out under the open sky after long privation of light and air. His bright spirit and gladness of life refreshed her heart and brain; the respect he paid her revived her crushed self-confidence and filled her soul with fervent gratitude. Ah! and how delightful it was to feel that she might be grateful, devotedly grateful.--And then, then this evening had been hers, the sweetest, most blessed that she had known for years. He had reminded her of what she had almost forgotten: that she was still young, that she was still lovely, that she had a right to be happy, to enchant and be enchanted--perhaps even to love and to be loved.

Her hand was still conscious of his burning kiss as she entered the cool room where the Lady Neforis sat awaiting the return of the party, turning her spinning-wheel by the couch of her invalid husband who always went to rest at late hours. It was with an overflowing heart that Paula raised her uncle's hand to her lips--Orion's father, might she not say HER Orion's?--Then she kissed her aunt--his mother, and it was long since she had done so--as she and little Mary bid her good-night. Neforis accepted the kiss coolly but with some surprise, and looked up enquiringly at the girl and at her son. No doubt she thought many things, but deemed it prudent to give them no utterance for the present. She allowed the girl to retire as though nothing unusual had occurred, superintended the servants who came to carry her husband into his bedroom, gave him the white globule which was to secure him sleep, and with indefatigable patience turned and moved his pillows till his couch was to his mind. Not till then, nor till she was satisfied that a servant was keeping watch in the adjoining room, did she leave him; and then--for there was danger in delay--she went to seek her son.

This tall, large and rather too portly woman had been in her youth a slender and elegant girl; a graceful creature though her calm and expressionless features had never been strikingly beautiful. Age had altered them but little; her face was now that of a good-looking, plump, easy-going matron, which had lost its freshness through long and devoted attendance on the sick man. Her birth and position gave her confidence and self-reliance, but there was nothing gracious or captivating in her individuality. The joys and woes of others were not hers; still she could be moved and stirred by them, even to self-denial, and was very capable of feeling quite a passionate interest for others; only, those others must be her own immediate belongings and no one else. Thus a more devoted and anxious wife, or a more loving mother would have been hard to find; but, if we compare her faculty for loving with a star, its rays were too short to reach further than to those nearest to her, and these regarded it as an exceptional state of grace to be included within the narrow circle of those beloved by her somewhat grudging soul.

She knocked at Orion's sitting-room, and he hailed her late visit with surprise and pleasure. She had come to speak of a matter of importance, and had done so promptly, for her son's and Paula's conduct just now urged her to lose no time. Something was going on between these two and her husband's niece was far outside the narrow limits of her loving kindness.

This, she began by saying, would not allow her to sleep. She had but one heart's desire and his father shared it: Orion must know full well what she meant; she had spoken to him about it only yesterday. His father had received him with warm affection, had paid his debts unhesitatingly and without a word of reproach, and now it was his part to turn over a new leaf: to break with his former reckless life and set up a home of his own. The bride, as he knew, was chosen for him. "Susannah was here just now," she said. "You scapegrace, she confessed that you had quite turned her

Katharina's little head this morning."

"I am sorry for it," he interrupted in a tone of annoyance. "These ways with women have grown upon me as a habit; but I have done with them henceforth. They are unworthy of me now, and I feel, my dear Mother..."

"That life is beginning in earnest," Neforis threw in. "The wish which brings me to you now entirely accords with that. You know what it is, and I cannot imagine what you can have to say against it. In short, you must let me settle the matter to-morrow with Dame Susannah. You are sure of her daughter's affection, she is the richest heiress in the country, well brought up, and as I said before, she has quite lost her little heart to you."

"And she had better have kept it!" said Orion with a laugh.

Then his mother waxed wroth and exclaimed: "I must beg you to reserve your mirth for a more fitting season and for laughable things. I am very much in earnest when I say: The girl is a sweet, good little creature and will be a faithful and loving wife to you, under God. Or have you left your heart in Constantinople? Has the Senator Justinus' fair relation.-- But nonsense! You can hardly suppose that that volatile Greek girl..."

Orion clasped her in his arms, and said tenderly, "No, dearest mother, no. Constantinople lies far, far behind me, in grey mist beyond the farthest Thule; and here, close here, under my father's roof, I have found something far more lovely and more perfect than has ever been beheld by the dwellers on the Bosphorus. That little girl is no match for a son of our stalwart and broad-shouldered race. Our future generations must still tower proudly above the common herd in every respect; I want no plaything for a wife, but a woman, such as you yourself were in youth--tall, dignified and handsome. My heart goes forth to no gold-crested wren but to a really royal maiden.--Of what use to waste words! Paula, the noble daughter of a glorious father, is my choice. It came upon me just now like a revelation; I ask your blessing on my union with her!"

So far had Neforis allowed her son to speak. He had frankly and boldly uttered what she had indeed feared to hear. And so long she had succeeded in keeping silence!--But now her patience gave way. Trembling with anger she abruptly broke in, exclaiming, as her face grew crimson:

"No more, no more! Heaven grant that this which I have been compelled to hear may be no more than a fleeting and foolish whim! Have you quite forgotten who and what we are? Have you forgotten that those were Melchites who slew your two dear brothers--our two noble sons? Of what account are we among the orthodox Greeks? While among the Egyptians and all who confess the saving doctrine of Eutyches, among the Monophysites we are the chief, and we will remain so, and close our ears and hearts against all heretics and their superstitions. What! A grandson of Menas, the brother of two martyrs for our glorious faith, married to a Melchite! The mere idea is sacrilege, is blasphemy; I can give it no milder name! I and your father will die childless before we consent! And it is for the love of this woman, whose heart is so cold that I shiver only to think of it--for this waif and stray, who has nothing but her ragged pride and the mere scrapings of a lost fortune, which never could compare with ours--for this thankless creature, who can hardly bring herself to bid me, your mother, such a civil good-morning--by Heaven it is the truth--as I can say to a slave--for her that I, that your parents are to be bereft of their son, the only child that a gracious Providence has left to be their joy and comfort? No, no, never! Far be it from me! You, Orion, my heart's darling, you have been a wilful fellow all your life, but you cannot have such a perverse heart as to bring your old mother, who has kept you in her heart these four and twenty years, in sorrow to the grave and embitter your father's few remaining days--for his hours are numbered!--And all for the sake of this cold beauty, whom you have seen for a few hours these last two days. You cannot have the heart to do this, my heart's treasure, no, you cannot!--But if you should in some accursed hour, I tell you--and I have been a tender mother to you all your life--but as surely as God shall be my stay and your father's in our last hour, I will tear all love for you out of my heart like a poisonous weed--I will, though that heart should break!"

Orion put his arms round the excited woman, who had freed herself from his embrace, laid his hand lightly on her lips and kissed her eyes, whispering in her ear:

"I have not the heart indeed, and could scarcely find it." Then, taking both her hands, he looked straight into her face.

"Brrr!" he exclaimed, "your daredevil son was never so much frightened in his life as by your threats. What dreadful words are these--and even worse were at the tip of your tongue! Mother--Mother Neforis! Your name means kindness, but you can be cruel, bitterly cruel!"

Still he drew her fondly to him, and kissed her hair and brow and cheeks with eager haste, in a vehemence of feeling which came over him like a revulsion after the shock he had gone through; and when they parted he had given her leave to negotiate for little Katharina's hand on his behalf, and she had promised in return that it should be not on the morrow but the day after at soonest. This delay seemed to him a sort of victory and when he found himself alone and reflected on what he had done in yielding to his mother, though his heart bled from the wounds of which he himself knew not the depth, he rejoiced that he had not bound Paula by any closer tie. His eyes had indeed told her much, but the word "Love" had not passed his lips--and yet that was what it came to.--But surely a cousin might be allowed to kiss the hand of a lovely relation. She was a desirable woman--ah, how desirable!--and must ever be: but to quarrel with his parents for the sake of a girl, were she Aphrodite herself, or one of the Muses or the Graces--that was impossible!

There were thousands of pretty women in the world, but only one mother; and how often had his heart beat high and won another heart, taken all it had to give, and then easily and quickly recovered its balance.

This time however, it seemed more deeply hit than on former occasions; even the lovely Persian slave for whose sake he had committed the wildest follies while yet scarcely more than a school-boy--even the bewitching Heliadora at Constantinople for whom he still had a tender thought, had not agitated him so strongly. It was hard to give up this Paula; but there was no help for it. To-morrow he must do his best to establish their intercourse on a friendly and fraternal footing; for he could have no hope that she would be content to accept his love only, like the gentle Heliadora, who was quite her equal in birth. Life would have been fair, unutterably fair, with this splendid creature by his side! If only he could take her to the Capital he felt sure that all the world would stand still to turn round and gaze at her. And if she loved him--if she met him open-armed.... Oh, why had spiteful fate made her a Melchite? But then, alas, alas! There must surely be something wrong with her nature and temper; would she not otherwise have been able in two years to gain the love, instead of the dislike, of his excellent and fond mother?--Well, after all, it was best so; but Paula's image haunted him nevertheless and spoilt his sleep, and his longing for her was not to be stilled.

Neforis, meanwhile, did not return at once to her husband but went to find Paula. This business must be settled on all sides and at once. If she could have believed that her victory would give the invalid unqualified pleasure she would have hastened to him with the good news, for she knew no higher joy than to procure him a moment's happiness; but the Mukaukas had agreed to her choice very reluctantly. Katharina seemed to him too small and childish for his noble son, whose mental superiority had been revealed to him unmistakably and undeniably, in many long discussions since his return, to the delight of his father's heart. "The water-wagtail," though he wished her every happiness, did not satisfy him for Orion. To him, the father, Paula would have been a well-beloved daughter-in-law, and he had often found pleasure in picturing her by Orion's side. But she was a Melchite; he knew too how ill-affected his wife was towards her, so he kept his wish locked in his own breast in order not to vex the faithful companion who lived, thought, and felt for him alone; and Dame Neforis knew or guessed all this, and said to herself that it would cost him his night's rest if he were to be told at once what a concession Orion had made.

With Paula it was different. The sooner she learnt that she had nothing to expect from their son, the better for her.

That very morning she and Orion had greeted each other like a couple of lovers and just now they had parted like a promised bride and bridegroom. She would not again be witness to such vexatious doings; so she went to the young girl's room and confided to her with much satisfaction the happy prospects her son had promised them,--only Paula must say nothing about it till the day after to-morrow.

The moment she entered the room Paula inferred from her beaming expression that she had something to say unpleasant to herself, so she preserved due composure. Her face wore a look of unmoved indifference while she submitted to the overflow of a too-happy mother's heart; and she wished the betrothed couple joy: but she did so with a smile that infuriated Neforis.

She was not on the whole spiteful; but face to face with this girl, her nature was transformed, and she rather liked the idea of showing her, once more in her life, that in her place humility would beseem her. All this she said to herself as she quitted Paula's room; but perhaps this woman, who had much that was good in her, might have felt some ruth, if in the course of the next few hours she could but have looked into the heart of the orphan entrusted to her protection. Only once did Paula sob aloud; then she indignantly dried her tears, and sat for a long time gazing at the floor, shaking her pretty head again and again as though something unheard-of and incredible had befallen her.

At last, with a bitter sigh, she went to bed; and while she vainly strove for sleep, and for strength to pray and be silently resigned, Time seemed to her a wild-beast chase, Fate a relentless hunter, and the quarry he was pursuing was herself.

CHAPTER IV.

On the following evening Haschim, the merchant, came to the governor's house with a small part of his caravan. A stranger might have taken the mansion for the home of a wealthy country-gentleman rather than the official residence of a high official; for at this hour, after sunset, large herds of beasts and sheep were being driven into the vast courtyard behind the house, surrounded on three sides by out-buildings; half a hundred horses of choice breed came, tied in couples, from the watering-place; and in a well-sanded paddock enclosed by hurdles, slaves, brown and black, were bringing fodder to a large troop of camels.

The house itself was well-fitted by its unusually palatial size and antique splendor to be the residence of the emperor's viceroy, and the Mukaukas, to whom it all belonged, had in fact held the office for a long time. After the conquest of the country by the Arabs they had left him in possession, and at the present date he managed the affairs of his Egyptian fellow-countrymen, no more in the name of the emperor at Byzantium, but under the authority of the Khaliff at Medina and his great general, Amru. The Moslem conquerors had found him a ready and judicious mediator; while his fellow-Christians and country-men obeyed him as being the noblest and wealthiest of their race and the descendant of ancestors who had enjoyed high distinction even under the Pharaohs.

Only the governor's residence was Greek--or rather Alexandrian-in style; the court-yards and out-buildings on the contrary, looked as though they belonged to some Oriental magnate--to some Erpaha (or prince of a province) as the Mukaukas' forefathers had been called, a rank which commanded respect both at court and among the populace.

The dragoman had not told the merchant too much beforehand of the governor's possessions: he had vast estates, in both Upper and Lower Egypt, tilled by thousands of slaves under numerous overseers. Here in Memphis was the centre of administration of his property, and besides the offices for his private affairs were those he needed as a state official.

Well-kept quays, and the wide road running along the harbor side, divided his large domain from the river, and a street ran along the wall which enclosed it on the north. On this side was the great gate, always wide open by day, by which servants or persons on business-errands made their entrance; the other gate, a handsome portal with Corinthian columns opening from the Nile-quay, was that by which the waterparty had returned the evening before. This was kept closed, and only opened for the family, or for guests and distinguished visitors. There was a guardhouse at the north gate with a small detachment of Egyptian soldiers, who were entrusted with the protection of the Mukaukas' person.

As soon as the refreshing evening breeze came up from the river after the heat of the day there was a stir in the great court-yard. Men, women and girls came trooping out of the retainers' dwellings to breathe the cooler air. Waiting-maids and slaves dipped for water into enormous earthen vessels and carried it away in graceful jars; the free-men of the household rested in groups after the fatigues of the day, chatting, playing and singing. From the slaves' quarters in another court-yard came confused sounds of singing hymns, with the shrill tones of the double pipe and duller noise of the tabor--an invitation to dance; scolding and laughter; the jubilant shouts of a girl led out to dance, and the shrieks of a victim to the overseer's rod.

The servant's gateway, still hung with flowers and wreaths in honor of Orion's recent return, was wide open for the coming and going of the accountants and scribes, or of such citizens as came very willingly to pay an evening call on their friends in the governor's household; for there were always some officials near the Mukaukas' person who knew more than other folks of the latest events in Church and State.

Ere long a considerable number of men had assembled to sit under the deep wooden porch of the head-steward's dwelling, all taking eager part in the conversation, which they would have found very enjoyable even without the beer which their host offered them in honor of the great event of his young lord's return; for what was ever dearer to Egyptians than a brisk exchange of talk, at the same time heaping ridicule or scorn on their unapproachable superiors in rank, and on all they deem enemies to their creed or their country.

Many a trenchant word and many a witty jest must have been uttered this evening, for hearty laughter and loud applause were incessant in the head steward's porch; the captain of the guard at the gate cast envious and impatient glances at the merry band, which he would gladly have joined; but he could not yet leave his post. The messengers' horses were standing saddled while their riders awaited their orders, there were supplicants and traders to be admitted or turned away, and there were still a number of persons lingering in the large vestibule of the governor's palace and craving to speak with him, for it was well known in Memphis that during the hot season the ailing Mukaukas granted audience only in the evening.

The Egyptians had not yet acquired full confidence in the Arab government, and every one tried to avoid being handed over to its representative; for none of its officials could be so wise or so just as their old Mukaukas. How the suffering man found strength and time to keep an eye on everything, it was hard to imagine; but the fact remained that he himself looked into every decision. At the same time no one could be sure of his affairs being settled out of hand unless he could get at the governor himself.

Business hours were now over; the anxiety caused both by the delay in the rising of the Nile and by the advent of the comet had filled the waiting-rooms with more petitioners than usual. Deputations from town and village magistrates had been admitted in parties; supplicants on private business had gone in one by one; and most of them had come forth content, or at any rate well advised. Only one man still lingered,—a countryman whose case had long been awaiting settlement—in the hope that a gift to the great man's doorkeeper, of a few drachmae out of his poverty might at length secure him the fruit of his long patience—when the chamberlain, bidding him return on the morrow, officiously flung open the high doors that led to the Mukaukas' apartments, to admit the Arab merchant, in consideration of Haschim's gold piece which had come to him through his cousin the dragoman. Haschim, however, had observed the countryman, and insisted on his being shown in first. This was done, and a few minutes later the peasant came out satisfied, and gratefully kissed the Arab's hand.

Then the chamberlain led the old merchant, and the men who followed him with a heavy bale, into a magnificent anteroom to wait; and his patience was put to a severe test before his name was called and he could show the governor his merchandise.

The Mukaukas, in fact, after signifying by a speechless nod that he would presently receive the merchant—who came well recommended—had retired to recreate himself, and was now engaged in a game of draughts, heedless of those whom he kept waiting. He reclined on a divan covered with a sleek lioness' skin, while his young antagonist sat opposite on a low stool. The doors of the room, facing the Nile, where he received petitioners were left half open to admit the fresher but still warm evening-air. The green velarium or awning, which during the day had screened off the sun's rays where the middle of the ceiling was open to the sky, was now rolled back, and the moon and stars looked down into the room. It was well adapted to its purpose as a refuge from the heat of the summer day, for the walls were lined with cool, colored earthenware tiles, the floor was a brightly-tinted mosaic of patterns on a ground of gold glass, and in the circular central ornament of this artistic pavement stood the real source of freshness: a basin, two man's length across, of brown porphyry flecked with white, from which a fountain leaped, filling the surrounding air with misty spray. A few stools, couches and small tables, all of cool-looking metal, formed the sole furniture of this lofty apartment which was brilliantly lighted by numerous lamps.

A light air blew in through the open roof and doors, made the lamps flicker, and played with Paula's brown hair as she sat absorbed, as it seemed, in the game. Orion, who stood behind her, had several times endeavored to attract her attention, but in vain. He now eagerly offered his services to fetch her a handkerchief to preserve her from a chill; this, however, she shortly and decidedly declined, though the breeze came up damp from the river and she had more than once drawn her peplos more closely across her bosom.

The young man set his teeth at this fresh repulse. He did not know that his mother had told Paula what he had yesterday agreed to, and could not account for the girl's altered behavior. All day she had treated him with icy coldness, had scarcely answered his questions with a distant "Yes," or "No;" and to him, the spoiled favorite of women, this conduct had become more and more intolerable. Yes, his mother had judged her rightly: she allowed herself to be swayed in a most extraordinary manner by her moods; and now even he was to feel the insolence of her haughtiness, of which he had as yet seen nothing. This repellent coldness bordered on rudeness and he had no mind to submit to it for long. It was with deep vexation that he watched every turn of her hand, every movement of her body, and the varying expression of her face; and the more the image of this proud maiden sank into his heart the more lovely and perfect he thought her, and the greater grew his desire to see her smile once more, to see her again as sweetly womanly as she had been but yesterday. Now she was like nothing so much as a splendid marble statue, though he knew indeed that it had a soul—and what a glorious task it would be to free this fair being from herself, as it were, from the foolish tempers that enslaved her, to show her—by severity if need should be—what best befits a woman, a maiden.

He became more and more exclusively absorbed in watching the young girl, as his mother—who was sitting with Dame Susannah on a couch at some little distance from the players—observed with growing annoyance, and she tried to divert his attention by questions and small errands, so as to give his evident excitement a fresh direction.

Who could have thought, yesterday morning, that her darling would so soon cause her fresh vexation and anxiety.

He had come home just such a man as she and his father could have wished: independent and experienced in the ways of the great world. In the Capital he had, no doubt, enjoyed all that seems pleasant in the eyes of a wealthy youth, but in spite of that he had remained fresh and open-hearted even to the smallest things; and this was what most rejoiced his father. In him there was no trace of the satiety, the blunted faculty for enjoyment, which fell like a blight on so many men of his age and rank. He could still play as merrily with little Mary, still take as much pleasure in a rare flower or a fine horse, as before his departure. At the same time he had gained keen insight into the political situation of the time, into the state of the empire and the court, into administration, and the innovations in church matters; it was a joy to his father to hear him discourse; and he assured his wife that he had learnt a great deal from the boy, that Orion was on the high road to be a great statesman and was already quite capable of taking his father's place.

When Neforis confessed how large a sum in debts Orion had left in Constantinople the old man put his hand in his purse with a sort of pride, delighted to find that his sole remaining heir knew how to spend the immense wealth which

to him was now a burden rather than a pleasure--to make good use of it, as he himself had done in his day, and display a magnificence of which the lustre was reflected on him and on his name.

"With him, at any rate," said the old man, "one gets something for the money. His horses cost a great deal but he knows how to win with them; his entertainments swallow up a pretty sum, but they gain him respect wherever he goes. He brought me a letter from the Senator Justinus, and the worthy man tells me what a leading part he plays among the gilded youth of the Capital. All this is not to be had for nothing, and it will be cheap in the end. What need we care about a hundred talents more or less! And there is something magnanimous in the lad that has given him the spirit to feel that."

And it was not a hale old grey-beard who spoke thus, but a broken man, whose only joy it was to lavish on his son the riches which he had long been incapable of enjoying. The high-spirited and gifted youth, scarcely more than a boy in years, whom he had sent to the Capital with no small misgivings, must have led a far less lawless life than might have been expected; of this the ruddy tinge in his sunburnt cheeks was ample guarantee, the vigorous solidity of his muscles, and the thick waves of his hair, which was artificially curled and fell in a fringe, as was then the fashion, over his high brow, giving him a certain resemblance to the portraits of Antinous, the handsomest youth in the time of the Emperor Hadrian. Even his mother owned that he looked like health itself, and no member of the Imperial family could be more richly, carefully and fashionably dressed than her darling. But even in the humblest garb he would have been a handsome--a splendid youth, and his mother's pride! When he left home there was still a smack of the provincial about him; but now every kind of awkwardness had vanished, and wherever he might go--even in the Capital, he was certain to be one of the first to attract observation and approval.

And what had he not known in his city experience? The events of half a century had followed each other with intoxicating rapidity in the course of the thirty months he had spent there. The greater the excitement, the greater the pleasure was the watchword of his time; and though he had rioted and revelled on the shores of the Bosphorus if ever man did, still the pleasures of feasting and of love, or of racing with his own victorious horses--all of which he had enjoyed there to the full--were as child's play compared with the nervous tension to which he had been strung by the appalling events he had witnessed on all sides. How petty was the excitement of an Alexandrian horse-race! Whether Timon or Ptolemy or he himself should win--what did it matter? It was a fine thing no doubt to carry off the crown in the circus at Byzantium, but there were other and soul-stirring crises there beyond those which were bound up with horses or chariots. There a throne was the prize, and might cost the blood and life of thousands!--What did a man bring home from the churches in the Nile valley? But if he crossed the threshold of St. Sophia's in Constantinople he often might have his blood curdled, or bring home--what matter?--bleeding wounds, or even be carried home--a corpse.

Three times had he seen the throne change masters. An emperor and an empress had been stripped of the purple and mutilated before his eyes.

Aye, then and there he had had real and intense excitement to thrill him to the marrow and quick. As for the rest! Well, yes, he had had more trivial pleasures too. He had not been received as other Egyptians were: half-educated philosophers--who called themselves Sages and assumed a mystic and pompously solemn demeanor, Astrologers, Rhetoricians, poverty-stricken but witty and venomous satirists, physicians making a display of the learning of their forefathers, fanatical theologians--always ready to avail themselves of other weapons than reason and dogma in their bitter contests over articles of faith, hermits and recluses--as foul in mind as they were dirty in their persons, corn-merchants and usurers with whom it was dangerous to conclude a bargain without witnesses. Orion was none of these. As the handsome, genial, and original-minded son of the rich and noble Governor, Mukaukas George, he was welcomed as a sort of ambassador; whatever the golden youth of the city allowed themselves was permitted to him. His purse was as well lined as theirs, his health and vigor far more enduring; and his horses had beaten theirs in three races, though he drove them himself and did not trust them to paid charioteers. The "rich Egyptian," the "New Antinous," "handsome Orion," as he was called, could never be spared from feast or entertainment. He was a welcome guest at the first houses in the city, and in the palace and the villa of the Senator Justinus, an old friend of his father, he was as much at home as a son of the house.

It was under his roof, and the auspices of his kindhearted wife Martina, that he made acquaintance with the fair Heliodora, the widow of a nephew of the Senator; and the whole city had been set talking of the tender intimacy Orion had formed with the beautiful young woman whose rigid virtue had hitherto been a subject of admiration no less than her fair hair and the big jewels with which she loved to set off her simple but costly dress. And many a fair Byzantine had striven for the young Egyptian's good graces before Heliodora had driven them all out of the field. Still, she had not yet succeeded in enslaving Orion deeply and permanently; and when, last evening, he had assured his mother that she was not mistress of his heart he spoke truly.

His conduct in the Capital had not certainly been exemplary, but he had never run wild, and had enjoyed the respect not only of his companions in pleasure, but of grave and venerable men whom he had met in the house of Justinus, and who sang the praises of his intelligence and eagerness to learn. As a boy he had been a diligent scholar, and here he let no opportunity slip. Not least had he cultivated his musical talents in the Imperial city, and had acquired a rare mastery

in singing and playing the lute.

He would gladly have remained some time longer at the Capital, but at last the place grew too hot to hold him--mainly on his father's account. The conviction that George had largely contributed to the disaffection of Egypt for the Byzantine Empire and had played into the hands of the irresistible and detested upstart Arabs, had found increasing acceptance in the highest circles, especially since Cyrus--the deposed and now deceased Patriarch of Alexandria--had retired to Constantinople. Orion's capture was in fact already decided on, when the Senator Justinus and some other friends had hinted a warning which he had acted on just in time.

His father's line of conduct had placed him in great peril; but he owed him no grudge for it--indeed, he most deeply approved of it. A thousand times had he witnessed the contempt heaped on the Egyptians by the Greeks, and the loathing and hatred of the Orthodox for the Monophysite creed of his fellow-countrymen.

He had with difficulty controlled his wrath as he had listened again and again to the abuse and scorn poured out on his country and people by gentle and simple, laymen and priests, even in his presence; regarding him no doubt as one of themselves--a Greek in whose eyes everything "Barbarian" was as odious and as contemptible as in their own.

But the blood of his race flowed in the veins of the "new Antinous" who could sing Greek songs so well and with so pure an accent; every insult to his people was stamped deep in his heart, every sneer at his faith revived his memory of the day when the Melchites had slain his two brothers. And these bloody deeds, these innumerable acts of oppression by which the Greek had provoked and offended the schismatic Egyptian and hunted them to death, were now avenged by his father. It lifted up his heart and made him proud to think of it. He showed his secret soul to the old man who was as much surprised as delighted at what he found there; for he had feared that Orion might not be able wholly to escape the powerful influences of Greek beguilements;--nay, he had often felt anxious lest his own son might disapprove of his having surrendered to the Arab conquerors the province entrusted to his rule, and concluded a peace with them.

The Mukaukas now felt himself as one with Orion, and from time to time looked tenderly up at him from the draught-board. Neforis was doing her best to entertain the mother of her son's future bride, and divert her attention from his strange demeanor. She seemed indeed to be successful, for Dame Susannah agreed to everything she said; but she betrayed the fact that she was keeping a sharp watch by suddenly asking: "Does your husband's lofty niece not think us worthy of a single word?"

"Oh no!" said Neforis bitterly. "I only hope she may soon find some other people to whom she can behave more graciously. You may depend upon it I will put no obstacle in her way."

Then she brought the conversation round to Katharina, and the widow told her that her brother-in-law, Chrysippus, was now in Memphis with his two little daughters. They were to go away on the morrow, so the young girl had been obliged to devote herself to them: "And so the poor child is sitting there at this minute," she lamented, "and must keep those two little chatter-boxes quiet while she is longing to be here instead."

Orion quite understood these last words; he asked after the young girl, and then added gaily:

"She promised me a collar yesterday for my little white keepsake from Constantinople. Fie! Mary, you should not tease the poor little beast."

"No, let the dog go," added the widow, addressing the governor's little granddaughter, who was trying to make the recalcitrant dog kiss her doll. "But you know, Orion, this tiny creature is really too delicate for such a big man as you are! You should give him to some pretty young lady and then he would fulfil his destiny! And Katharina is embroidering him a collar; I ought not to tell her little secret, but it is to have gold stars on a blue ground."

"Because Orion is a star," cried the little girl. "So she is working nothing but Orions."

"But fortunately there is but one star of my name," observed he. "Pray tell her that Dame Susa."

The child clapped her hands. "He does not choose to have any other star near him!" she exclaimed.

The widow broke in: "Little simpleton! I know people who cannot even bear to have a likeness traced between themselves and any one else.--But this you must permit, Orion--you were quite right just now, Neforis; his mouth and brow might have been taken from his father's face."

The remark was quite accurate; and yet it would have been hard to imagine two men more unlike than the bright youth full of vitality, and the languid old man on the couch, to whom even the small exertion of moving the men was an effort. The Mukaukas might once have been like his son, but in some long past time. Thin grey locks now only covered one half of his bald head, and of his eyes, which, thirty years since, had sparkled perhaps as keenly as Orion's, there was usually nothing, or very little to be seen; for the heavy lids always drooped over them as though they had lost the power to open, and this gave his handsome but deathly-pale face a somewhat owl-like look. It was not morose, however; on the contrary the mingled lines of suffering and of benevolent kindness resulted in an expression only of melancholy. The mouth and flabby cheeks were as motionless as though they were dead. Grief, anxiety and alarms seemed to have passed over them with a paralysing hand and had left their trace there. He looked like a man weary unto death, and still living only because fate had denied him the grace to die. Indeed, he had often been taken for dead by his family when he had dipped too freely into a certain little blood-stone box to take too many of the white opium-pills,

one of which he placed between his colorless lips at long intervals, even during his game of draughts.

He lifted each piece slowly, like a sleeper with his eyes half shut; and yet his opponent could not hold her own against his wary tactics and was defeated by him now for the third time, though her uncle himself called her a good player. It was easy to read in her high, smooth brow and dark-blue eyes with their direct gaze, that she could think clearly and decisively, and also feel deeply. But she seemed wilful too, and contradictory--at any rate to-day; for when Orion pointed out some move to her she rarely took his advice, but with set lips, pushed the piece according to her own, rarely wiser, judgment. It was quite plain that she was refractory under the guidance of this--especially of this counsellor.

The bystanders could not fail to see the girl's repellent manner and Orion's eager attempts to propitiate her; and for this reason Neforis was glad when, just as her husband had finished the third game, and had pushed the men together on the board with the back of his hand, his chamberlain reminded him that the Arab was without, awaiting his pleasure with growing impatience. The Mukaukas answered only by a sign, drew his long caftan of the finest wool closer around him, and pointed to the doors and the open roof. The rest of the party had long felt the chill of the damp night air that blew through the room from the river, but knowing that the father suffered more from heat than from anything, they had all willingly endured the draught. Now, however, Orion called the slaves, and before the strangers were admitted the doors were closed and the roof covered.

Paula rose; the governor lay motionless and kept his eyes apparently closed; he must, however, have seen what was going forward through an imperceptible slit, for he turned first to Paula and then to the other women saying: "Is it not strange?--Most old folks, like children, seek the sun, and love to sit, as the others play, in its heat. While I--something that happened to me years ago--you know;--and it seemed to freeze my blood. Now it never gets warm, and I feel the contrast between the coolness in here and the heat outside most acutely, almost as a pain. The older we grow the more ready we are to abandon to the young the things we ourselves used most to enjoy. The only thing which we old folks do not willingly relinquish is personal comfort, and I thank you for enduring annoyances so patiently for the sake of securing mine.--It is a terrific summer! You, Paula, from the heights of Lebanon, know what ice is. How often have I wished that I could have a bed of snow. To feel myself one with that fresh, still coldness would be all I wish for! The cold air which you dread does me good. But the warmth of youth rebels against everything that is cool."

This was the first long sentence the Mukaukas had uttered since the beginning of the game. Orion listened respectfully to the end, but then he said with a laugh: "But there are some young people who seem to take pleasure in being cool and icy--for what cause God alone knows!"

As he spoke he looked the girl at whom the words were aimed, full in the face; but she turned silently and proudly away, and an angry shade passed over her lovely features.

CHAPTER V.

When the Arab was at last admitted to the governor's presence his attendants unfolded a hanging before him. The giant Masdakite did the chief share of the work; but as soon as the Mukaukas caught sight of the big man, with his bushy, mane-like hair, and a dagger and a battle-axe stuck through his belt, he cried out:

"Away, away with him! That man--those weapons--I will not look at the hanging till he is gone."

His hands were trembling, and the merchant at once desired his faithful Rustem, the most harmless of mortals, to quit the room. The governor, whose sensitive nerves had been liable to such attacks of panic ever since an exiled Greek had once attempted to murder him, now soon recovered his composure, and looked with great admiration at the hanging round which the family were standing. They all confessed they had never seen anything like it, and the vivacious Dame Susannah proposed to send for her daughter and her visitors; but it was already late, and her house was so far from the governor's that she gave that up. The father and son had already heard of this marvellous piece of work, which had formed part of the plunder taken by the Arab conquerors of the Persian Empire at the sack of the "White Tower"--the royal palace of Madam, the capital of the Sassanidze. They knew that it had been originally 300 ells long and 60 ells wide, and had heard with indignation that the Khaliff Omar, who always lived and dressed and ate like the chief of a caravan, and looked down with contempt on all such objects of luxury, had cut this inestimable treasure of art into pieces and divided it among the Companions of the Prophet.

Haschim explained to them that this particular fragment had been the share of the booty allotted to Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law. Haschim himself had seen the work before its dismemberment at Madain, where it hung on the wall of the magnificent throne-room, and subsequently, at Medina.

His audience eagerly requested him to describe the other portions; he, however, seemed somewhat uneasy, looking down at his bare feet which were standing on the mosaic pavement, damp from the fountain; for, after the manner of his nation, he had left his shoes in the outer room. The governor had noticed the old man's gestures as he repeatedly put his hand to his mouth, and while his wife, Orion, and the widow were besieging the merchant with questions, he whispered a few words to one of the slaves. The man vanished, and returned bringing in, by his master's orders, a long strip of carpet which he laid in front of the Arab's brown and strong but delicately-formed feet.

A wonderful change came over the merchant's whole being as this was done. He drew himself up with a dignity which none of those present had suspected in the man who had so humbly entered the room and so diligently praised his wares; an expression of satisfaction overspread his calm, mild features, a sweet smile parted his lips, and his kind eyes sparkled through tears like those of a child unexpectedly pleased. Then he bowed before the Mukaukas, touching his brow, lips and breast with the finger-tips of the right hand to express: "All my thoughts, words and feelings are devoted to you,"--while he said: "Thanks, Son of Menas. That was the act of Moslem."

"Of a Christian!" cried Orion hastily. But his father shook his head gently, and said, slowly and impressively: "Only of a man."

"Of a man," repeated the merchant, and then he added thoughtfully: "Of a man! Yes, that is the highest mark so long as we are what we ought to be. The image of the one God. Who is more compassionate than He? And every mother's son who is likewise compassionate, is like him."

"Another Christian rule, thou strange Moslem!" said Orion interrupting him.

"And yet," said Haschim, with tranquil dignity, "it corresponds word for word with the teaching of the Best of men--our Prophet. I am one of those who knew him here on earth. His brother's smallest pain filled his soft heart with friendly sympathy; his law insists on charity, even towards the shrub by the wayside; he pronounces it mortal sin to injure it, and every Moslem must obey him. Compassion for all is the command of the Prophet...." Here the Arab was suddenly and roughly interrupted; Paula, who, till now, had been leaning against a pilaster, contemplating the hanging and silently listening to the conversation, hastily stepped nearer to the old man, and with flaming cheeks and flashing eyes pointed at him wrathfully, while she exclaimed in a trembling voice--heedless alike of the astonished and indignant bystanders, and of the little dog which flew at the Arab, barking furiously:

"You--you, the followers of the false prophet--you, the companions of the bloodhound Khalid--you and Charity! I know you! I know what you did in Syria. With these eyes have I seen you, and your bloodthirsty women, and the foam on your raging lips. Here I stand to bear witness against you and I cast it in your teeth: You broke faith in Damascus, and the victims of your treachery--defenceless women and tender infants as well as men--you killed with the sword or strangled with your hands. You--you the Apostle of Compassion?--have you ever heard of Abyla? You, the friend of your Prophet--I ask you what did you, who so tenderly spare the tree by the wayside, do to the innocent folk of Abyla, whom you fell upon like wolves in a sheepfold? You--you and Compassionate!" The vehement girl, to whom no one had ever shown any pity, and on whose soul the word had fallen like a mockery, who for long hours had been suffering suppressed and torturing misery, felt it a relief to give free vent to the anguish of her soul; she ended with a hard laugh, and waved her hand round her head as though to disperse a swarm of gadflies.

What a woman!

Orion's gaze was fixed on her in horror--but in enchantment. Yes, his mother had judged her rightly. No gentle, tender-hearted woman laughed like that; but she was grand, splendid, wonderful in her wrath. She reminded him of the picture of the goddess of vengeance, by Apelles, which he had seen in Constantinople. His mother shrugged her shoulders and cast a meaning glance at the widow, and even his father was startled at the sight. He knew what had roused her; still he felt that he could not permit this, and he recalled the excited girl to her senses by speaking her name, half-reproachfully and half-regretfully, at first quite gently but then louder and more severely.

She started like a sleep-walker suddenly awaked from her trance, passed her hand over her eyes, and said, as she bowed her head before the governor:

"Forgive me, Uncle, I am sorry for what has occurred--but it was too much for me. You know what my past has been, and when I am reminded--when I must listen to the praises even of the wretches to whom my father and brother..."

A loud sob interrupted her; little Mary was clinging to her and weeping. Orion could hardly keep himself from hastening to her and clasping her in his arms. Ah, how well her woman's weakness became the noble girl! How strongly it drew him to her!

But Paula soon recovered from it; even while the governor was soothing her with kind words she mastered her violent agitation, and said gently, though her tears still quietly flowed: "Let me go to my room, I beg...."

"Good-night, then, child," said the Mukaukas affectionately, and Paula turned towards the door with a silent greeting to the rest of the party; but the Moslem detained her and said:

"I know who you are, noble daughter of Thomas, and I have heard that your brother was the bridegroom who had come to Abyla to solemnize his marriage with the daughter of the prefect of Tripolis. Alas, alas! I myself was there with my merchandise at the fair, when a maddened horde of my fellow-believers fell upon the peaceful town. Poor child, poor child! Your father was the greatest and most redoubtable of our foes. Whether still on earth or in heaven he yet, no doubt honors our sword as we honor his. But your brother, whom we sent to his grave as a bridegroom--he cursed us with his dying breath. You have inherited his rancor; and when it surges up against me, a Moslem, I can do no more than bow my head and do penance for the guilt of those whose blood runs in my veins and whose faith I confess. I have nothing to plead--no, noble maiden, nothing that can excuse the deed of Abyla. There--there alone it was the fate of my grey hairs to be ashamed of my fellow-Moslems--believe me, maiden, it was grievous to me. War, and the memory of many friends slain and of wealth lightly plundered had unchained men's passion; and where passion's pinions wave, whether in the struggle for mine and thine or for other possessions, ever since the days of Cain and Abel, it is always and everywhere the same."

Paula, who till now had stood motionless in front of the old man, shook her head and said bitterly:

"But all this will not give me back my father and brother. You yourself look like a kind-hearted man; but for the future--if you are as just as you are kind--find out to whom you are speaking before you talk of the compassion of the Moslems!"

She once more bowed good-night and left the room. Orion followed her; come what might he must see her. But he returned a few minutes after, breathing hard and with his teeth set. He had taken her hand, had tried to tell her all a loving heart could find to say; but how sharply, how icily had he been repulsed, with what an air of intolerable scorn had she turned her back upon him! And now that he was in their midst again he scarcely heard his father express his regrets that so painful a scene should have occurred under his roof, while the Arab said that he could quite understand why the daughter of Thomas should have been betrayed to anger: the massacre of Abyla was quite inexcusable.

"But then," the old man went on, "in what war do not such things take place? Even the Christian is not always master of himself: you yourself I know, lost two promising sons--and who were the murderers? Christians--your own fellow-believers..."

"The bitterest foes of my beliefs," said the governor slowly, and every syllable was a calm and dignified reproof to the Moslem for supposing that the creed of those who had killed his sons could be his. As he spoke he opened his eyes wide with the look of those hard, opaquely-glittering stones which his ancestors had been wont to set for eyes in their portrait statues. But he suddenly closed them again and said indifferently:

"At what price do you value your hanging? I have a fancy to buy it. Name your lowest terms: I cannot bear to bargain."

"I had thought of asking five hundred thousand drachmæ," said the dealer. "Four hundred thousand drachmæ, and it is yours."

The governor's wife clasped her hands at such a sum and made warning signals to her husband, shaking her head disapprovingly, when Orion, making a great effort to show that he too took an interest in this important transaction, said: "It may be worth three hundred thousand."

"Four hundred thousand," repeated the merchant coolly. "Your father wished to know the lowest price, and I am asking no more than is right. The rubies and garnets in these grapes, the pearls in the myrtle blossoms, the turquoises

in the forget-me-nots, the diamonds hanging as dew on the grass, the emeralds which give brilliancy to the green leaves--this one especially, which is an immense stone--alone are worth more."

"Then why do you not cut them out of the tissue?" asked Neforis.

"Because I cannot bear to destroy this noble work," replied the Arab. "I will sell it as it is or not at all." At these words the Mukaukas nodded to his son, heedless of the disapprobation his wife persisted in expressing, asked for a tablet which lay near the chessboard, and on it wrote a few words.

"We are agreed," he said to the merchant. "The treasurer, Nilus, will hand you the payment to-morrow morning on presenting this order."

A fresh emotion now took possession of Orion, and crying: "Splendid! Splendid!" he rushed up to his father and excitedly kissed his hand. Then, turning to his mother, whose eyes were full of tears of vexation, he put his hand under her chin, kissed her brow, and exclaimed with triumphant satisfaction: "This is how we and the emperor do business! When the father is the most liberal of men the son is apt to look small. Meaning no harm, worthy merchant! As far as the hanging is concerned, it may be more precious than all the treasures of Croesus; but you have something yet to give us into the bargain before you load your camels with our gold: Tell us what the whole work was like before it was divided."

The Moslem, who had placed the precious tablet in his girdle, at once obeyed this request.

"You know how enormous were its length and breadth," he began. "The hall it decorated could hold several thousand guests, besides space for a hundred body guards to stand on each side of the throne. As many weavers, embroiderers and jewellers as there are days in the year worked on it, they say, for the years of a man's life. The woven picture represented paradise as the Persians imagine it--full of green trees, flowers and fruits. Here you can still see a fragment of the sparkling fountain which, when seen from a distance, with its sprinkling of diamonds, sapphires and emeralds, looked like living water. Here the pearls represent the foam on a wave. These leaves, cut across here, belonged to a rose-bush which grew by the fountain of Eden before the evil of the first rain fell on the world.

"Originally all roses were white, but as the limbs of the first woman shone with more dazzling whiteness they blushed for shame, and since then there are crimson as well as white roses. So the Persians say."

"And this--our piece?" asked Orion.

"This," replied the merchant, with a pleasant glance at the young man, "was the very middle of the hanging. On the left you see the judgment at the bridge of Chinvat. The damned were not represented, but only the winged, Fravashi, Genii who, as the Persians believe, dwell one with each mortal as his guardian angel through life, united to him but separable. They were depicted in stormy pursuit of the damned--the miscreant followers of Angramainjus, the evil Spirit, of whom you must imagine a vast multitude fleeing before them. The souls in bliss, the pure and faithful servants of the Persian divinity Auramazda, enter with songs of triumph into the flower-decked pleasure-garden, while at their feet the spirits were shown of those who were neither altogether cursed nor altogether blessed, vanishing in humble silence into a dusky grove. The pure enjoyed the gifts of paradise in peace and contentment.--All this was explained to me by a priest of the Fire-worshippers. Here, you see, is a huge bunch of grapes which one of the happy ones is about to pluck; the hand is uninjured--the arm unfortunately is cut through; but here is a splendid fragment of the wreath of fruit and flowers which framed the whole. That emerald forming a bud--how much do you think it is worth?"

"A magnificent stone!" cried Orion. "Even Heliodora has nothing to equal it.--Well, father, what do you say is its value?"

"Great, very great," replied the Mukaukas. "And yet the whole unmutilated work would be too small an offering for Him to whom I propose to offer it."

"To the great general, Amru?" asked Orion.

"No child," said the governor decidedly. "To the great, indivisible and divine Person of Jesus Christ and his Church."

Orion looked down greatly disappointed; the idea of seeing this splendid gem hidden away in a reliquary in some dim cupboard did not please him: He could have found a much more gratifying use for it.

Neither his father nor his mother observed his dissatisfaction, for Neforis had rushed up to her husband's couch, and fallen on her knees by his side, covering his cold, slender hand with kisses, as joyful as though this determination had relieved her of a heavy burden of dread: "Our souls, our souls, George! For such a gift--only wait--you will be forgiven all, and recover your lost peace!"

The governor shrugged his shoulders and said nothing; the hanging was rolled up and locked into the tablinum by Orion; then the Mukaukas bid the chamberlain show the Arab and his followers to quarters for the night.

CHAPTER VI.

Pangs of soul and doubtings of conscience had, in fact, prompted the governor to purchase the hanging and he therefore might have been glad if it had cost him still dearer. The greater the gift the better founded his hope of grace and favor from the recipient! And he had grounds for being uneasy and for asking himself whether he had acted rightly. Revenge was no Christian virtue, but to let the evil done to him by the Melchites go unpunished when the opportunity offered for crushing them was more than he could bring himself to. Nay, what father whose two bright young sons had been murdered, but would have done as he did? That fearful blow had struck him in a vital spot. Since that day he had felt himself slowly dying; and that sense of weakness, those desperate tremors, the discomforts and suffering which blighted every hour of his life, were also to be set down to the account of the Melchite tyrants.

His waning powers had indeed only been kept up by his original vigor and his burning thirst for revenge, and fate had allowed him to quench it in a way which, as time went on, seemed too absolute to his peace-loving nature. Though not indeed by his act, still with his complicity he saw the Byzantine Empire bereft of the rich province which Caesar had entrusted to his rule, saw the Greeks and everything that bore the name of Melchite driven out of Egypt with ignominy--though he would gladly have prevented it--in many places slain like dogs by the furious populace who hailed the Moslems as their deliverers.

Thus all the evil he had invoked on the murderers of his children and the oppressors and torturers of his people had come upon them; his revenge was complete. But, in the midst of his satisfaction at this strange fulfilment of the fervent wish of years, his conscience had lifted up its voice; new, and hitherto unknown terrors had come upon him. He lacked the strength of mind to be a hero or a reformer. Too great an event had been wrought through his agency, too fearful a doom visited on thousands of men! The Christian Faith--to him the highest consideration--had been too greatly imperilled by his act, for the thought that he had caused all this to be calmly endurable. The responsibility proved too heavy for his shoulders; and whenever he repeated to himself that it was not he who had invited the Arabs into the land, and that he must have been crushed in the attempt to repel them, he could hear voices all round him denouncing him as the man who had surrendered his native land to them, and he fancied himself environed by dangers--believing those who spoke to him of assassins sent forth by the Byzantines to kill him.--But even more appalling, was his dread of the wrath of Heaven against the man who had betrayed a Christian country to the Infidels. Even his consciousness of having been, all his life long, a right-minded, just man could not fortify him against this terror; there was but one thing which could raise his quelled spirit: the white pillules which had long been as indispensable to him as air and water. The kind-hearted old bishop of Memphis, Plotinus, and his clergy had forgiveness for all; the Patriarch Benjamin, on the contrary, had treated him as a reprobate sentenced to eternal damnation, though at the time of this prelate's exile in the desert he had hailed the Arabs as their deliverers from the tyranny of the Melchites, and though George had principally contributed to his recall and reinstatement, and had therefore counted on his support. And, although the Mukaukas could clearly see through the secondary motives which influenced the Patriarch, he nevertheless believed that Benjamin's office as Shepherd of souls gave him power to close the Gates of Heaven against any sheep in his flock.

The more firmly the Arabs took root in his land, the wiser their rule, and the more numerous the Egyptian converts from the Cross to the Crescent, the greater he deemed his guilt; and when, after the accomplishment of his work of vengeance--his double treason as the Greeks called it--instead of the wrath of God, everything fell to his lot which men call happiness and the favors of fortune, the superstitious man feared lest this was the wages of the Devil, into whose clutches his hasty compact with the Moslems had driven so many Christian souls.

He had unexpectedly fallen heir to two vast estates, and his excavators in the Necropolis had found more gold in the old heathen tombs than all the others put together. The Moslem Khaliff and his viceroy had left him in office and shown him friendship and respect; the bulaites--[Town councillors]--of the town had given him the cognomen of "the Just" by acclamation of the whole municipality; his lands had never yielded greater revenues; he received letters from his son's widow in her convent full of happiness over the new and higher aims in life that she had found; his grandchild, her daughter, was a creature whose bright and lovely blossoming was a joy even to strangers; his son's frequent epistles from Constantinople assured him that he was making progress in all respects; and he did not forget his parents; for he was never weary of reporting to them, of his own free impulse, every pleasure he enjoyed and every success he won.

Thus even in a foreign land he had lived with the father and mother who to him were all that was noblest and dearest.

And Paula! Though his wife could not feel warmly towards her the old man regarded her presence in the house as a happy dispensation to which he owed many a pleasant hour, not only over the draughts-board.

All these things might indeed be the wages of Satan; but if indeed it were so, he--George the Mukaukas--would show the Evil One that he was no servant of his, but devoted to the Saviour in whose mercy he trusted. With what fervent gratitude to the Almighty was his soul filled for the return of such a son! Every impulse of his being urged him

to give expression to this feeling; his terrors and gratitude alike prompted him to spend so vast a sum in order to dedicate a matchless gift to the Church of Christ. He viewed himself as a prisoner of war whose ransom has just been paid, as he handed to the merchant the tablet with the order for the money; and when he was carried to bed, and his wife was not yet weary of thanking him for his pious intention, he felt happier and more light-hearted than he had done for many years. Generally he could hear Paula walking up and down her room which was over his; for she went late to rest, and in the silence of the night would indulge in sweet and painful memories. How many loved ones a cruel fate had snatched from her! Father, brother, her nearest relations and friends; all at once, by the hand of the Moslems to whom he had abandoned her native land almost without resistance.

"I do not hear Paula to-night," he remarked, glancing up as though he missed something. "The poor child has no doubt gone to bed early after what passed."

"Leave her alone!" said Neforis who did not like to be interrupted in her jubilant effusiveness, and she shrugged her shoulders angrily. "How she behaved herself again! We have heard a great deal too much about charity, and though I do not want to boast of my own I am very ready to exercise it--indeed, it is no more than my duty to show every kindness to a destitute relation of yours. But this girl! She tries me too far, and after all I am no more than human. I can have no pleasure in her presence; if she comes into the room I feel as though misfortune had crossed the threshold. Besides!--You never see such things; but Orion thinks of her a great deal more than is good. I only wish she had been safe out of the house!"

"Neforis!" her husband said in mild reproach; and he would have reproved her more sharply but that since he had become a slave to opium he had lost all power of asserting himself vigorously whether in small matters or great.

Ere long the Mukaukas had fallen into an uneasy sleep; but he opened his eyes more frequently than usual. He missed the light footfall overhead to which he had been accustomed for these two years past; but she who was wont to pace the floor above half the night through had not gone to rest as he supposed. After the events of the evening she had indeed retired to her room with tingling cheeks and burning eyes; but the slave-girls, who paid little attention to a guest who was no more than endured and looked on askance by their mistress, had neglected to open her window-shutters after sundown, as she had requested, and the room was oppressively sultry and airless. The wooden shutters felt hot to the touch, so did the linen sheets over the wool mattresses. The water in her jug, and even the handkerchief she took up were warm. To an Egyptian all this would have been a matter of course; but the native of Damascus had always passed the summer in her father's country house on the heights of Lebanon, in cool and lucent shade, and the all-pervading heat of the past day had been to her intolerable.

Outside it was pleasant now; so without much reflection she pushed open the shutter, wrapped a long, dark-hued kerchief about her head and stole down the steep steps and out through a little side door into the court-yard.

There she drew a deep breath and spread out her arms longingly, as though she would fain fly far, far from thence; but then she dropped them again and looked about her. It was not the want of fresh air alone that had brought her out; no, what she most craved for was to open her oppressed and rebellious heart to another; and here, in the servants' quarters, there were two souls, one of which knew, understood and loved her, while the other was as devoted to her as a faithful dog, and did errands for her which were to be kept hidden from the governor's house and its inhabitants.

The first was her nurse who had accompanied her to Egypt; the other was a freed slave, her father's head groom, who had escorted the women with his son, a lad, giving them shelter when, after the massacre of Abyla, they had ventured out of their hiding-place, and after lurking for some time in the valley of Lebanon, had found no better issue than to fly to Egypt and put themselves under the protection of the Mukaukas, whose sister had been Paula's father's first wife. She herself was the child of his second marriage with a Syrian of high rank, a relation of the Emperor Heraclius, who had died, quite young, shortly after Paula's birth.

Both these servants had been parted from her. Perpetua, the nurse, had been found useful by the governor's wife, who soon discovered that she was particularly skilled in weaving and who had made her superintendent of the slave-girls employed at the loom; the old woman had willingly undertaken the duties though she herself was free-born, for her first point in life was to remain near her beloved foster-child. Hiram too, the groom, and his son had found their place among the Mukaukas' household; in the first instance to take charge of the five horses from her father's stable which had brought the fugitives to Egypt, but afterwards--for the governor was not slow to discern his skill in such matters--as a leech for all sorts of beasts, and as an adviser in purchasing horses.

Paula wanted to speak with them both, and she knew exactly where to find them; but she could not get to them without exposing herself to much that was unpleasant, for the governor's free retainers and their friends, not to mention the guard of soldiers who, now that the gates were closed, were still sitting in parties to gossip; they would certainly not break up for some time yet, since the slaves were only now bringing out the soldiers' supper.

The clatter in the court-yard was unceasing, for every one who was free to come out was enjoying the coolness of the night. Among them there were no slaves; these had been sent to their quarters when the gates were shut; but even in their dwellings voices were still audible.

With a beating heart Paula tried to see and hear all that came within the ken of her keen eyes and ears. The growing

moon lighted up half the enclosure, the rest, so far as the shadow fell, lay in darkness. But in the middle of a large semi-circle of free servants a fire was blazing, throwing a fitful light on their brown faces; and now and again, as fresh pinecones were thrown in, it flared up and illuminated even the darker half of the space before her. This added to her trepidation; she had to cross the court-yard, as she hoped, unseen; for innocent and natural as her proceedings were, she knew that her uncle's wife would put a wrong construction on her nocturnal expedition.

At first Neforis had begged her husband to assist Paula in her search for her father, of whose death no one had any positive assurance. But his wife's urgency had not been needed: the Mukaukas, of his own free will, had for a whole year done everything in his power to learn the truth as to the lost man's end, from Christian or Moslem, till, many months since, Neforis had declared that any further exertions in the matter were mere folly, and her weak-willed husband had soon been brought to share her views and give up the search for the missing hero. He had secured for Paula, not without some personal sacrifice, much of her father's property, had sold the landed estates to advantage, collected outstanding debts wherever it was still possible, and was anxious to lay before her a statement of what he had recovered for her. But she knew that her interests were safe in his hands and was satisfied to learn that, though she was not rich in the eyes of this Egyptian Croesus, she was possessed of a considerable fortune. When once and again she had asked for a portion of it to prosecute her search, the Mukaukas at once caused it to be paid to her; but the third time he refused, with the best intentions but quite firmly, to yield to her wishes. He said he was her Kyrios and natural guardian, and explained that it was his duty to hinder her from dissipating a fortune which she might some day find a boon or indeed indispensable, in pursuit of a phantom--for that was what this search had long since become.

[Kyrios: The woman's legal proxy, who represented her in courts of justice. His presence gave her equal rights with a man in the eyes of the Law.]

The money she had already spent he had replaced out of his own coffers.

This, she felt, was a noble action; still she urged him again and again to grant her wish, but always in vain. He laid his hand with firm determination on the wealth in his charge and would not allow her another solidus for the sole and dearest aim of her life.

She seemed to submit; but her purpose of spending her all to recover any trace of her lost parent never wavered in her determined soul. She had sold a string of pearls, and for the price, her faithful Hiram had been able first to make a long journey himself and then to send out a number of messengers into various lands. By this time one at least might very well have reached home with some news, and she must see the freed-man.

But how could she get to him undetected? For some minutes she stood watching and listening for a favorable moment for crossing the court-yard. Suddenly a blaze lighted up a face--it was Hiram's.

At this moment the merry semi-circle laughed loudly as with one voice; she hastily made up her mind--drew her kerchief closer over her face, ran quickly along the darker half of the quadrangle and, stooping low, hurried across the moonlight towards the slaves' quarters.

At the entrance she paused; her heart throbbed violently. Had she been observed? No.--There was not a cry, not a following footstep--every dog knew her; the soldiers who were commonly on guard here had quitted their posts and were sitting with their comrades round the fire.

The long building to the left was the weaving shop and her nurse Perpetua lived there, in the upper story. But even here she must be cautious, for the governor's wife often came out to give her orders to the workwomen, and to see and criticise the produce of the hundred looms which were always in motion, early and late. If she should be seen, one of the weavers might only too probably betray the fact of her nocturnal visit. They had not yet gone to rest, for loud laughter fell upon her ear from the large sheds, open on all sides, which stood over the dyers' vats. This class of the governor's people were also enjoying the cool night after the fierce heat of the day, and the girls too had lighted a fire.

Paula must pass them in full moonshine--but not just yet; and she crouched close to the straw thatch which stretched over the huge clay water-jars placed here for the slave-girls to get drink from. It cast a dark triangular shadow on the dusty ground that gleamed in the moonlight, and thus screened her from the gaze of the girls, while she could hear and see what was going on in the sheds.

The dreadful day of torture ending in a harsh discord was at end; and behind it she looked back on a few blissful hours full of the promise of new happiness;--beyond these lay a long period of humiliation, the sequel of a terrible disaster. How bright and sunny had her childhood been, how delightful her early youth! For long years of her life she had waked every morning to new joys, and gone to rest every evening with sincere and fervent thanksgivings, that had welled from her soul as freely and naturally as perfume from a rose. How often had she shaken her head in perplexed unbelief when she heard life spoken of as a vale of sorrows, and the lot of man bewailed as lamentable. Now she knew better; and in many a lonely hour, in many a sleepless night, she had asked herself whether He could, indeed, be a kind and fatherly-loving God who could let a child be born and grow up, and fill its soul with every hope, and then bereave it of everything that was dear and desirable--even of hope.

But the hapless girl had been piously brought up; she could still believe and pray; and lately it had seemed as though Heaven would grant that for which her tender heart most longed: the love of a beloved and love-worthy man. And now--now?

There she stood with an inconsolable sense of bereavement--empty-hearted; and if she had been miserable before Orion's return, now she was far more so; for whereas she had then been lonely she was now defrauded--she, the daughter of Thomas, the relation and inmate of the wealthiest house in the country; and close to her, from the rough hewn, dirty dyers' sheds such clear and happy laughter rang out from a troop of wretched slave wenches, always liable to the blows of the overseer's rod, that she could not help listening and turning to look at the girls on whom such an overflow of high spirits and light-heartedness was bestowed.

A large party had collected under the wide palm-thatched roof of the dyeing shed--pretty and ugly, brown and fair, tall and short; some upright and some bent by toil at the loom from early youth, but all young; not one more than eighteen years old. Slaves were capital, bearing interest in the form of work and of children. Every slave girl was married to a slave as soon as she was old enough. Girls and married women alike were employed in the weaving shop, but the married ones slept in separate quarters with their husbands and children, while the maids passed the night in large sleeping-barracks adjoining the worksheds. They were now enjoying the evening respite and had gathered in two groups. One party were watching an Egyptian girl who was scribbling sketches on a tablet; the others were amusing themselves with a simple game. This consisted in each one in turn flinging her shoe over her head. If it flew beyond a chalk-line to which she turned her back she was destined soon to marry the man she loved; if it fell between her and the mark she must yet have patience, or would be united to a companion she did not care for.

The girl who was drawing, and round whom at least twenty others were crowded, was a designer of patterns for weaving; she had too the gift which had characterized her heathen ancestors, of representing faces in profile, with a few simple lines, in such a way that, though often comically distorted, they were easily recognizable. She was executing these works of art on a wax tablet with a copper stylus, and the others were to guess for whom they were meant.

One girl only sat by herself by the furthest post of the shed, and gazed silently into her lap.

Paula looked on and could understand everything that was going forward, though no coherent sentence was uttered and there was nothing to be heard but laughter--loud, hearty, irresistible mirth. When a girl threw the shoe far enough the youthful crowd laughed with all their might, each one shouting the name of some one who was to marry her successful companion; if the shoe fell within the line they laughed even louder than before, and called out the names of all the oldest and dirtiest slaves. A dusky Syrian had failed to hit the mark, but she boldly seized the chalk and drew a fresh line between herself and the shoe so that it lay beyond, at any rate; and their merriment reached a climax when a number of them rushed up to wipe out the new line, a saucy, crisp-haired Nubian tossed the shoe in the air and caught it again, while the rest could not cease for delight in such a good joke and cried every name they could think of as that of the lover for whom their companion had so boldly seized a spoke in Fortune's wheel.

Some spirit of mirth seemed to have taken up his quarters in the draughty shed; the group round the sketcher was not less noisy than the other. If a likeness was recognized they were all triumphant, if not they cried the names of this or that one for whom it might be intended. A storm of applause greeted a successful caricature of the severest of the overseers. All who saw it held their sides for laughing, and great was the uproar when one of the girls snatched away the tablet and the rest fell upon her to scuffle for it.

Paula had watched all this at first with distant amazement, shaking her head. How could they find so much pleasure in such folly, in such senseless amusements? When she was but a little child even she, of course, could laugh at nothing, and these grown-up girls, in their ignorance and the narrow limitations of their minds, were they not one and all children still? The walls of the governor's house enclosed their world, they never looked beyond the present moment--just like children; and so, like children, they could laugh.

"Fate," thought she, "at this moment indemnifies them for the misfortune of their birth and for a thousand days of misery, and presently they will go tired and happy to bed. I could envy these poor creatures! If it were permissible I would join them and be a child again."

The comic portrait of the overseer was by this time finished, and a short, stout wench burst into a fit of uproarious and unquenchable laughter before any of the rest. It came so naturally, too, from the very depths of her plump little body that Paula, who had certainly not come hither to be gay, suddenly caught the infection and had to laugh whether she would or no. Sorrow and anxiety were suddenly forgotten, thought and calculation were far from her; for some minutes she felt nothing but that she, too, was laughing heartily, irrepressibly, like the young healthful human creature that she was. Ah, how good it was thus to forget herself for once! She did not put this into words, but she felt it, and she laughed afresh when the girl who had been sitting apart joined the others, and exclaimed something which was unintelligible to Paula, but which gave a new impetus to their mirth.

The tall slight form of this maiden was now standing by the fire. Paula had never seen her before and yet she was by far the handsomest of them all; but she did not look happy and perhaps was in some pain, for she had a handkerchief over her head which was tied at the top over the thick fair hair as though she had the toothache. As she looked at her

Paula recovered herself, and as soon as she began to think merriment was at an end. The slave-girls were not of this mind; but their laughter was less innocent and frank than it had been; for it had found an object which they would have done better to pass by.

The girl with the handkerchief over her head was a slave too, but she had only lately come into the weaving-sheds after being employed for a long time at needle work under two old women, widows of slaves. She had been brought as an infant from Persia to Alexandria with her mother, by the troops of Heraclius, after the conquest of Chosroes II.; and they had been bought together for the Mukaukas. When her little one was but thirteen the mother died under the yoke to which she was not born; the child was a sweet little girl with a skin as white as the swan and thick golden hair, which now shone with strange splendor in the firelight. Orion had remarked her before his journey, and fascinated by the beauty of the Persian girl, had wished to have her for his own. Servants and officials, in unscrupulous collusion, had managed to transport her to a country-house belonging to the Mukaukas on the other side of the Nile, and there Orion had been able to visit her undisturbed as often as fancy prompted him. The slave-girl, scarcely yet sixteen, ignorant and unprotected, had not dared nor desired to resist her master's handsome son, and when Orion had set out for Constantinople--heedless and weary already of the girl who had nothing to give him but her beauty--Dame Neforis found out her connection with her son and ordered the head overseer to take care that the unhappy girl should not "ply her seductive arts" any more. The man had carried out her instructions by condemning the fair Persian, according to an ancient custom, to have her ears cut off. After this cruel punishment the mutilated beauty sank into a state of melancholy madness, and although the exorcists of the Church and other thaumaturgists had vainly endeavored to expel the demon of madness, she remained as before: a gentle, good-humored creature, quiet and diligent at her work, under the women who had charge of her, and now in the common work-shop. It was only when she was idle that her craziness became evident, and of this the other girls took advantage for their own amusement.

They now led Mandane to the fire, and with farcical reverence requested her to be seated on her throne--an empty color cask, for she suffered under the strange permanent delusion that she was the wife of the Mukaukas George. They laughingly did her homage, craved some favor or made enquiries as to her husband's health and the state of her affairs. Hitherto a decent instinct of reserve had kept these poor ignorant creatures from mentioning Orion's name in her presence, but now a woolly-headed negress, a lean, spiteful hussy, went up to her, and said with a horrible grimace:

"Oh, mistress, and where is your little son Orion?" The crazy girl did not seem startled by the question; she replied very gravely: "I have married him to the emperor's daughter at Constantinople."

"Hey day! A splendid match!" exclaimed the black girl. "Did you know that the young lord was here again? He has brought home his grand wife to you no doubt, and we shall see purple and crowns in these parts!"

These words brought a deep flush into the poor creature's face. She anxiously pressed her hands on the bandage that covered her ears and said: "Really Has he really come home?"

"Only quite lately," said another and more good-natured girl, to soothe her.

"Do not believe her!" cried the negress. "And if you want to know the latest news of him: Last night he was out boating on the Nile with the tall Syrian. My brother, the boatman, was among the rowers; and he went on finely with the lady I can tell you, finely...."

"My husband, the great Mukaukas?" asked Mandane, trying to collect her ideas.

"No. Your son Orion, who married the emperor's daughter," laughed the negress.

The crazy girl stood up, looked about with a restless glance, and then, as though she had not fully understood what had been said to her, repeated: "Orion? Handsome Orion?"

"Aye, your sweet son, Orion!" they all shouted, as loud as though she were deaf. Then the usually placable girl, holding her hand over her ear, with the other hit her tormentor such a smack on her thick lips that it resounded, while she shrieked out loud, in shrill tones:

"My son, did you say? My son Orion?--As if you did not know! Why, he was my lover; yes, he himself said he was, and that was why they came and bound me and cut my ears.--But you know it. But I do not love him--I could, I might wish, I...." She clenched her fists, and gnashed her white teeth, and went on with panting breath:

"Where is he?--You will not tell me? Wait a bit--only wait. Oh, I am sharp enough, I know you have him here.--Where is he? Orion, Orion, where are you?"

She sprang away, ran through the sheds and lifted the lids of all the color-vats, stooping low to look down into each as if she expected to find him there, while the others roared with laughter.

Most of her companions giggled at this witless behavior; but some, who felt it somewhat uncanny and whom the unhappy girl's bitter cry had struck painfully, drew apart and had already organized some new amusement, when a neat little woman appeared on the scene, clapping her plump hands and exclaiming:

"Enough of laughter--now, to bed, you swarm of bees. The night is over too soon in the morning, and the looms must be rattling again by sunrise. One this way and one that, just like mice when the cat appears. Will you make haste, you night-birds? Come, will you make haste?"

The girls had learnt to obey, and they hurried past the matron to their sleeping-quarters. Perpetua, a woman scarcely past fifty, whose face wore a pleasant expression of mingled shrewdness and kindness, stood pricking up her ears and listening; she heard from the water-shed a peculiar low, long-drawn Wheeuh!--a signal with which she was familiar as that by which the prefect Thomas had been wont to call together his scattered household from the garden of his villa on Mount Lebanon. It was now Paula who gave the whistle to attract her nurse's attention.

Perpetua shook her head anxiously. What could have brought her beloved child to see her at so late an hour? Something serious must have occurred, and with characteristic presence of mind she called out, to show that she had heard Paula's signal: "Now, make haste. Will you be quick? Wheeuh! girls--wheeuh! Hurry, hurry!"

She followed the last of the slave-girls into the sleeping-room, and when she had assured herself that they were all there but the crazy Persian she enquired where she was. They had all seen her a few minutes ago in the shed; so she bid them good-night and left them, letting it be understood that she was about to seek the missing girl.

CHAPTER VII.

Paula went into her nurse's room, and Perpetua, after a short and vain search for the crazy girl, abandoned her to her fate, not without some small scruples of conscience.

A beautifully-polished copper lamp hung from the ceiling and the little room exactly suited its mistress both were neat and clean, trim and spruce, simple and yet nice. Snowy transparent curtains enclosed the bed as a protection against the mosquitoes, a crucifix of delicate workmanship hung above the head of the couch, and the seats were covered with good cloth of various colors, fag-ends from the looms. Pretty straw mats lay on the floor, and pots of plants, filling the little room with fragrance, stood on the window-sill and in a corner of the room where a clay statuette of the Good Shepherd looked down on a praying-desk.

The door had scarcely closed behind them when Perpetua exclaimed: "But child, how you frightened me! At so late an hour!"

"I felt I must come," said Paula. "I could contain myself no longer."

"What, tears?" sighed the woman, and her own bright little eyes twinkled through moisture. "Poor soul, what has happened now?"

She went up to the young girl to stroke her hair, but Paula rushed into her arms, clung passionately round her neck, and burst into loud and bitter weeping. The little matron let her weep for a while; then she released herself, and wiped away her own tears and those of her tall darling, which had fallen on her smooth grey hair. She took Paula's chin in a firm hand and turned her face towards her own, saying tenderly but decidedly: "There, that is enough. You might cry and welcome, for it eases the heart, but that it is so late. Is it the old story: home-sickness, annoyances, and so forth, or is there anything new?"

"Alas, indeed!" replied the girl. She pressed her handkerchief in her hands as she went on with excited vehemence: "I am in the last extremity, I can bear it no longer, I cannot--I cannot! I am no longer a child, and when in the evening you dread the night and in the morning dread the day which must be so wretched, so utterly unendurable...."

"Then you listen to reason, my darling, and say to yourself that of two evils it is wise to choose the lesser. You must hear me say once more what I have so often represented to you before now: If we renounce our city of refuge here and venture out into the wide world again, what shall we find that will be an improvement?"

"Perhaps nothing but a hovel by a well under a couple of palm-trees; that would satisfy me, if I only had you and could be free--free from every one else!"

"What is this; what does this mean?" muttered the elder woman shaking her head. "You were quite content only the day before yesterday. Something must have...."

"Yes, must have happened and has," interrupted the girl almost beside herself. "My uncle's son.--You were there when he arrived--and I thought, even I firmly believed that he was worthy of such a reception.--I--I--pity me, for I... You do not know what influence that man exercises over hearts.--And I--I believed his eyes, his words, his songs and--yes, I must confess all--even his kisses on this hand! But it was all false, all--a lie, a cruel sport with a weak, simple heart, or even worse--more insulting still! In short, while he was doing all in his power to entrap me--even the slaves in the barge observed it--he was in the very act--I heard it from Dame Neforis, who is only too glad when she can hurt me--in the very act of suing for the hand of that little doll--you know her--little Katharina. She is his betrothed; and yet the shameless wretch dares to carry on his game with me; he has the face...."

Again Paula sobbed aloud; but the older woman did not know how to help in the matter and could only mutter to herself: "Bad, bad--what, this too!--Merciful Heaven!..." But she presently recovered herself and said firmly: "This is indeed a new and terrible misfortune; but we have known worse--much, much worse! So hold up your head, and whatever liking you may have in your heart for the traitor, tear it out and trample on it. Your pride will help you; and if you have only just found out what my lord Orion is, you may thank God that things had gone no further between you!" Then she repeated to Paula all that she knew of Orion's misconduct to the frenzied Mandane, and as Paula gave strong utterance to her indignation, she went on:

"Yes, child, he is a man to break hearts and ruin happiness, and perhaps it was my duty to warn you against him; but as he is not a bad man in other things--he saved the brother of Hathor the designer--you know her--from drowning, at the risk of his own life--and as I hoped you might be on friendly terms with him at least, on his return home, I refrained.... And besides, old fool that I am, I fancied your proud heart wore a breastplate of mail, and after all it is only a foolish girl's heart like any other, and now in its twenty-first year has given its love to a man for the first time."

But Paula interrupted her: "I love the traitor no more! No, I hate him, hate him beyond words! And the rest of them! I loathe them all!"

"Alas! that it should be so!" sighed the nurse. "Your lot is no doubt a hard one. He--Orion--of course is out of the question; but I often ask myself whether you might not mend matters with the others. If you had not made it too hard

for them, child, they must have loved you; they could not have helped it; but ever since you have been in the house you have only felt miserable and wished that they would let you go your own way, and they--well they have done so; and now you find it ill to bear the lot you chose for yourself. It is so indeed, child, you need not contradict me. This once we will put the matter plainly: Who can hope to win love that gives none, but turns away morosely from his fellow-creatures? If each of us could make his neighbors after his own pattern--then indeed! But life requires us to take them just as we find them, and you, sweetheart, have never let this sink into your mind!"

"Well, I am what I am!"

"No doubt, and among the good you are the best--but which of them all can guess that? Every one to some extent plays a part. And you! What wonder if they never see in you anything but that you are unhappy? God knows it is ten thousand times a pity that you should be! But who can take pleasure in always seeing a gloomy face?"

"I have never uttered a single word of complaint of my troubles to any one of them!" cried Paula, drawing herself up proudly.

"That is just the difficulty," replied Perpetua. "They took you in, and thought it gave them a claim on your person and also on your sorrows. Perhaps they longed to comfort you; for, believe me, child, there is a secret pleasure in doing so. Any one who is able to show us sympathy feels that it does him more good than it does us. I know life! Has it never occurred to you that you are perhaps depriving your relations in the great house of a pleasure, perhaps even doing them an injury by locking up your heart from them? Your grief is the best side of you, and of that you do indeed allow them to catch a glimpse; but where the pain is you carefully conceal. Every good man longs to heal a wound when he sees it, but your whole demeanor cries out: 'Stay where you are, and leave me in peace.'--If only you were good to your uncle!"

"But I am, and I have felt prompted a hundred times to confide in him--but then..."

"Well--then?"

"Only look at him, Betta; see how he lies as cold as marble, rigid and apathetic, half dead and half alive. At first the words often rose to my lips..."

"And now?"

"Now all the worst is so long past; I feel I have forfeited the right to complain to him of all that weighs me down."

"Hm," said Perpetua who had no answer ready. "But take heart, my child. Orion has at any rate learnt how far he may venture. You can hold your head high enough and look cool enough. Bear all that cannot be mended, and if an inward voice does not deceive me, he whom we seek..."

"That was what brought me here. Are none of our messengers returned yet?"

"Yes, the little Nabathæan is come," replied her nurse with some hesitation, "and he indeed--but for God's sake, child, form no vain hopes! Hiram came to me soon after sun-down..."

"Betta!" screamed the girl, clinging to her nurse's arm. "What has he heard, what news does he bring?"

"Nothing, nothing! How you rush at conclusions! What he found out is next to nothing. I had only a minute to speak to Hiram. To-morrow morning he is to bring the man to me. The only thing he told me..."

"By Christ's Wounds! What was it?"

"He said that the messenger had heard of an elderly recluse, who had formerly been a great warrior."

"My father, my father!" cried Paula. "Hiram is sitting by the fire with the others. Fetch him here at once--at once; I command you, Perpetua, do you hear? Oh best, dearest Betta! Come with me; we will go to him."

"Patience, sweetheart, a little patience!" urged the nurse. "Ah, poor dear soul, it will turn out to be nothing again; and if we again follow up a false clue it will only lead to fresh disappointment."

"Never mind: you are to come with me."

"To all the servants round the fire, and at this time of night? I should think so indeed!--But do you wait here, child. I know how it can be managed."

"I will wake Hiram's Joseph. He sleeps in the stable yonder--and then he will fetch his father. Ah! what impatience! What a stormy, passionate little heart it is! If I do not do your bidding, I shall have you awake all night, and wandering about to-morrow as if in a dream.--There, be quiet, be quiet, I am going."

As she spoke she wrapped her kerchief round her head and hurried out; Paula fell on her knees before the crucifix over the bed, and prayed fervently till her nurse returned, Soon after she heard a man's steps on the stairs and Hiram came in.

He was a powerful man of about fifty, with a pair of honest blue eyes in his plain face. Any one looking at his broad chest would conclude that when he spoke it would be in a deep bass voice; but Hiram had stammered from his infancy; and from constant companionship with horses he had accustomed himself to make a variety of strange, inarticulate noises in a high, shrill voice. Besides, he was always unwilling to speak. When he found himself face to face with the

daughter of his master and benefactor, he knelt at her feet, looked up at her with faithful, dog-like eyes full of affection, and kissed first her dress, and then her hand which she held out to him. Paula kindly but decidedly cut short the expressions of delight at seeing her again which he painfully stammered out; and when he at length began to tell his story his words came far too slowly for her impatience.

He told her that the Nabathæan who had brought the rumor that had excited her hopes, was not unwilling to follow up the trace he had found, but he would not wait beyond noon the next day and had tried to bid for high terms.

"He shall have them--as much as he wants!" cried Paula. "But Hiram entreated her, more by looks and vague cries than by articulate words, not to hope for too much. Duse the Nabathæan--Perpetua now took up the tale--had heard of a recluse, living at Raithu on the Red Sea, who had been a great warrior, by birth a Greek, and who for two years had been leading a life of penance in great seclusion among the pious brethren on the sacred Mount of Sinai. The messenger had not been able to learn what his name in the world had been, but among the hermits he was known as Paulus."

"Paulus!" interrupted the girl with panting breath. "A name that must remind him of my mother and of me, yes, of me! And he, the hero of Damascus, who was called Thomas in the world, believing that I was dead, has no doubt dedicated himself to the service of God and of Christ, and has taken the name of Paulus, as Saul, the other man of Damascus did after his conversion,--exactly like him! Oh! Betta, Hiram, you will see: it is he, it must be! How can you doubt it?"

The Syrian shook his head doubtfully and gave vent to a long-drawn whistle, and Perpetua clasped her hands exclaiming distressfully: "Did I not say so? She takes the fire lighted by shepherds at night to warm their hands for the rising sun--the rattle of chariots for the thunders of the Almighty!--Why, how many thousands have called themselves Paulus! By all the Saints, child, I beseech you keep quiet, and do not try to weave a holiday-robe out of airy mist! Be prepared for the worst; then you are armed against failure and preserve your right to hope! Tell her, tell her, Hiram, what else the messenger said; it is nothing positive; everything is as uncertain as dust in the breeze."

The freedman then explained that this Nabathæan was a trustworthy man, far better skilled in such errands than himself, for he understood both Syriac and Egyptian, Greek and Aramaic; and nevertheless he had failed to find out anything more about this hermit Paulus at Tor, where the monks of the monastery of the Transfiguration had a colony. Subsequently, however, on the sea voyage to Holzum, he had been informed by some monks that there was a second Sinai. The monastery there--but here Perpetua again was the speaker, for the hapless stammerer's brow was beaded with sweat--the monastery at the foot of the peaked, heaven-kissing mountain, had been closed in consequence of the heresies of its inhabitants; but in the gorges of these great heights there were still many recluses, some in a small Coenobium, some in Lauras and separate caves, and among these perchance Paulus might be found. This clue seemed a good one and she and Hiram had already made up their minds to follow it up; but the warrior monk was very possibly a stranger, and they had thought it would be cruel to expose her to so keen a disappointment.

Here Paula interrupted her, crying in joyful excitement:

"And why should not something besides disappointment be my portion for once? How could you have the heart to deprive me of the hope on which my poor heart still feeds?--But I will not be robbed of it. Your Paulus of Sinai is my lost father. I feel it, I know it! If I had not sold my pearls, the Nabathæan.... But as it is. When can you start, my good Hiram?"

"Not before a fortnight at--at--at--soonest," said the man. "I am in the governor's service now, and the day after to-morrow is the great horse-fair at Niku. The young master wants some stallions bought and there are our foals to...."

"I will implore my uncle to-morrow, to spare you," cried Paula. "I will go on my knees to him."

"He will not let him go," said the nurse. "Sebek the steward told him all about it from me before the hour of audience and tried to have Hiram released."

"And he said...?"

"The lady Neforis said it was all a mere will-o'-the-wisp, and my lord agreed with her. Then your uncle forbade Sebek to betray the matter to you, and sent word to me that he would possibly send Hiram to Sinai when the horse-fair was over. So take patience, sweetheart. What are two weeks, or at most three--and then...."

"But I shall die before then!" cried Paula. "The Nabathæan, you say, is here and willing to go."

"Yes, Mistress."

"Then we will secure him," said Paula resolutely. Perpetua, however, who must have discussed the matter fully with her fellow-countryman, shook her head mournfully and said: "He asks too much for us!"

She then explained that the man, being such a good linguist, had already been offered an engagement to conduct a caravan to Ctesiphon. This would be a year's pay to him, and he was not inclined to break off his negotiations with the merchant Hanno and search the deserts of Arabia Petraea for less than two thousand drachmae.

"Two thousand drachmae!" echoed Paula, looking down in distress and confusion; but she presently looked up and

exclaimed with angry determination: "How dare they keep from me that which is my own? If my uncle refuses what I have to ask, and will ask, then the inevitable must happen, though for his sake it will grieve me; I must put my affairs in the hands of the judges."

"The judges?" Perpetua smiled. "But you cannot lay a complaint without your kyrios, and your uncle is yours. Besides: before they have settled the matter the messenger may have been to Ctesiphon and back, far as it is."

Again her nurse entreated her to have patience till the horse-fair should be over. Paula fixed her eyes on the ground. She seemed quite crushed; but Perpetua started violently and Hiram drew back a step when she suddenly broke out in a loud, joyful cry of "Father in Heaven, I have what we need!"

"How, child, what?" asked the nurse, pressing her hand to her heart. But Paula vouchsafed no information; she turned quickly to the Syrian:

"Is the outer court-yard clear yet? Are the people gone?" she asked.

The reply was in the affirmative. The freed servants had retired when Hiram left them. The officials would not break up for some time yet, but there was less difficulty in passing them.

"Very good," said the girl. "Then you, Hiram, lead the way and wait for me by the little side door. I will give you something in my room which will pay the Nabathæan's charges ten times over. Do not look so horrified, Betta. I will give him the large emerald out of my mother's necklace." The woman clasped her hands, and cried out in dismay and warning.

"Child, child! That splendid gem! an heirloom in the family--that stone which came to you from the saintly Emperor Theodosius--to sell that of all things! Nay--to throw it away; not to rescue your father either, but merely--yes child, for that is the truth, merely because you lack patience to wait two little weeks!"

"That is hard, that is unjust, Betta," Paula broke in reprovingly. "It will be a question of a month, and we all know how much depends on the messenger. Do you forget how highly Hiram spoke of this very man's intelligence? And besides--must I, the younger, remind you?--What is the life of man? An instant may decide his life or death; and my father is an old man, scarred from many wounds even before the siege. It may make just the difference between our meeting, or never meeting again."

"Yes, yes," said the old woman in subdued tones, "perhaps you are right, and if I..." But Paula stopped her mouth with a kiss, and then desired Hiram to carry the gem, the first thing in the morning, to Gamaliel the Jew, a wealthy and honest man, and not to sell it for less than twelve thousand drachmæ. If the goldsmith could not pay so much for it at once, he might be satisfied to bring away the two thousand drachmæ for the messenger, and fetch the remainder at another season.

The Syrian led the way, and when, after a long leave-taking, she quitted her nurse's pleasant little room, Hiram had done her bidding and was waiting for her at the little side door.

CHAPTER VIII.

As Hiram had supposed, the better class of the household were still sitting with their friends, and they had been joined by the guide and by the Arab merchant's head man: Rustem the Masdakite, as well as his secretary and interpreter.

With the exception only of Gamaliel the Jewish goldsmith, and the Arab's followers, the whole of the party were Christians; and it had gone against the grain to admit the Moslems into their circle--the Jew had for years been a welcome member of the society. However, they had done so, and not without marked civility; for their lord had desired that the strangers should be made welcome, and they might expect to hear much that was new from wanderers from such a distance. In this, to be sure, they were disappointed, for the dragoman was taciturn and the Masdakite could speak no Egyptian, and Greek very ill. So, after various futile attempts to make the new-comers talk, they paid no further heed to them, and Orion's secretary became the chief speaker. He had already told them yesterday much that was fresh and interesting about the Imperial court; to-day he entered into fuller details of the brilliant life his young lord had led at Constantinople, whither he had accompanied him. He described the three races he had won in the Circus with his own horses; gave a lively picture of his forcing his way with only five followers through a raging mob of rioters, from the palace to the church of St. Sophia; and then enlarged on Orion's successes among the beauties of the Capital.

"The queen of them all," he went on in boastful accents, "was Heliodora--no flute-player nor anything of that kind; no indeed, but a rich, elegant, and virtuous patrician lady, the widow of Flavianus, nephew to Justinus the senator, and a relation of the Emperor. All Constantinople was at her feet, the great Gratian himself sought to win her, but of course, in vain. There is no palace to compare with hers in all Egypt, not even in Alexandria. The governor's residence here--for I think nothing of mere size--is a peasant's hut--a wretched barn by comparison! I will tell you another time what that casket of treasures is like. Its door was besieged day and night by slaves and freedmen bringing her offerings of flowers and fruit, rare gifts, and tender verses written on perfumed, rose-colored silk; but her favors were not to be purchased till she met Orion. Would you believe it: from the first time she saw him in Justinus' villa she fell desperately in love with him; it was all over with her; she was his as completely as the ring on my finger is mine!"

And in his vanity he showed his hearers a gold ring, with a gem of some value, which he owed to the liberality of his young master. "From that day forth," he eagerly went on, "the names of Orion and Heliodora were in every mouth, and how often have I seen men quite beside themselves over the beauty of this divine pair. In the Circus, in the theatre, or sailing about the Bosphorus--they were to be seen everywhere together; and through the hideous, bloody struggle for the throne they lived in a Paradise of their own. He often took her out in his chariot; or she took him in hers."

"Such a woman has horses too?" asked the head groom contemptuously.

"A woman!" cried the secretary. "A lady of rank!--She has none but bright chestnuts; large horses of Armenian breed, and small, swift beasts from the island of Sardinia, which fly on with the chariot, four abreast, like hunted foxes. Her horses are always decked with flowers and ribbons fluttering from the gold harness, and the grooms know how to drive them too!--Well, every one thought that our young lord and the handsome widow would marry; and it was a terrible blow to the hapless Heliodora when nothing came of it--she looks like a saint and is as soft as a kitten. I was by when they parted, and she shed such bitter tears it was pitiable to see. Still, she could not be angry with her idol, poor, gentle, tender kitten. She even gave him her lap-dog for a keepsake--that little silky thing you have seen here. And take my word for it, that was a true love-token, for her heart was as much set on that little beast as if it had been her favorite child. And he felt the parting too, felt it deeply; however, I am his confidential secretary, and it would never do for me to tell tales out of school. He clasped the little dog to his heart as he bid her farewell, and he promised her to send some keepsake in return which should show her how precious her love had been--and it will be no trifle, that any one may swear who knows my master. You, Gamaliel, I daresay he has been to you about it by this time."

The man thus addressed--the same to whom Hiram was to offer Paula's emerald--was a rich Alexandrian of a happy turn of mind; as soon as the incursion of the Saracens had made Alexandria an unsafe residence, so that the majority of his fellow Israelites had fled from the great port, he had found his way to Memphis, where he could count on the protection of his patron, the Mukaukas George.

He shook his grizzled curls at this question, but he presently whispered in the secretary's ear. "We have the very thing he wants. You bring me the cow and you shall have a calf--and a calf with twelve legs too. Is it a bargain?"

"Twelve per cent on the profits? Done!" replied the secretary in the same tone, with a sly smile of intelligence.

When, by-and-bye, an accountant asked him why Orion had not brought home this fair dame, the bearer too of a noble name, to his parents as their daughter-in-law, he replied that, being a Greek, she was of course a Melchite. Those present asked no better reason; as soon as the question of creed was raised the conversation, as usual in these convivial evenings, became a squabble over dogmatic differences; in the course of it a legal official ventured to opine that if the case had been that of a less personage than a son of the Mukaukas--for whom it was, of course, out of the question--of a mere Jacobite citizen and his Melchite sweetheart, for instance, some compromise might have been

effected. They need only have made up their minds each, respectively, to subscribe to the Monothelitic doctrine--though, he, for his part, could have nothing to say to anything of the kind; it was warmly upheld by the Imperial court, and by Cyrus, the deceased patriarch of Alexandria, and was based on the assumption that there were indeed two natures in Christ, but both under the control of one and the same will. By this dogma there were in the Saviour two persons no doubt; still it asserted His unity in a certain qualified sense, and this was the most important point.

Such an heretical proposition was of course loudly disapproved of by the assembled Jacobites; differences of opinion were more and more strongly asserted, and a calm interchange of views turned to a riotous quarrel which threatened to end in actual violence.

This discussion was already beginning when Paula succeeded in slipping unseen across the court-yard.

She silently beckoned to Hiram to follow her; he cautiously took off his shoes, pushed them under the steep servants' stairs, and in a few minutes was standing in the young girl's room. Paula at once opened a chest, and took out a costly and beautifully-wrought necklace set with pearls. This she handed to the Syrian, desiring him to wrench from its setting a large emerald which hung from the middle. The freedman's strong hand, with the aid of a knife, quickly and easily did the work; and he stood weighing the gem, as it lay freed from the gold hemisphere that had held it, larger than a walnut, shining and sparkling on his palm, while Paula repeated the instructions she had already given him in her nurse's room.

The faithful soul had no sooner left his beloved mistress than she proceeded to unplait her long thick hair, smiling the while with happy hope; but she had not yet begun to undress when she heard a knock. She started, flew to the door and hastily bolted it, while she enquired:

"Who is there?"--preparing herself for the worst. "Hiram," was the whispered reply. She opened the door, and he told her that meanwhile the side door had been locked, and that he knew no other way out from the great rambling house whither he rarely had occasion to come.

What was to be done? He could not wait till the door was opened again, for he must carry out her commission quite early in the morning, and if he were caught and locked up for only half the day the Nabathæan would take some other engagement.

With swift decision she twisted up her hair, threw a handkerchief over her head, and said: "Then come with me; the moon is still up; it would not be safe to carry a lamp. I will lead the way and you must keep behind me. If only the kitchen is empty, we can reach the Viridarium unseen. If the upper servants are still sitting in the court-yard the great door will be open, for several of them sleep in the house. At any rate you must go through the vestibule; you cannot miss your way out of the viridarium. But stay! Beki generally lies in front of the tablinum--the fierce dog from Herrionthis in Thebais; and he does not know you, for he never goes out of the house, but he will obey me.

"When I lift my hand, hang back a little. He is quite quiet with his masters, and does not hurt a stranger if they are by. Now, we must not utter another word.--If we are discovered, I will confess the truth; if you alone are seen, you can say--well, say you were waiting for Orion, to speak to him very early about the horse-fair at Niku."

"A horse was off--off--offered me for sale this very day."

"Good, very good; then you lingered in the vestibule to speak of that--to ask the master about it before he should go out. It must be daylight in a few hours.--Now, come."

Paula went down the stairs with a sure and rapid step. At the bottom Hiram again took off his shoes, holding them in his hand, so as to lose no time in following his mistress. They went on in silence through the darkness till they reached the kitchen. Here Paula turned and said to the Syrian:

"If there is any one here, I will say I came to fetch some water; if there is no one I will cough and you can follow. At any rate I will leave the door open, and then you will hear what happens. If I am obliged to return, do you hurry on before me back by the way we came. In that case I will return to my room where you must wait outside till the side door is opened again, and if you are found there leave the explanation to me.--Shrink back, quite into that corner."

She softly opened the door into the kitchen; the roof was open to the light of the declining moon and myriad stars. The room was quite empty: only a cat lay on a bench by the wide hearth, and a few bats flitted to and fro on noiseless wings; a few live coals still glowed among the ashes under the spits, like the eyes of lurking beasts of prey. Paula coughed gently, and immediately heard Hiram's step behind her; then, with a beating heart and agonizing fears, she proceeded on her way. First down a few steps, then through a dark passage, where the bats in their unswerving flight shot by close to her head. At last they had to cross the large, open dining-hall. This led into the viridarium, a spacious quadrangle, paved at the edges and planted in the middle, where a fountain played; round this square the Governor's residence was built. All was still and peaceful in this secluded space, vaulted over by the high heavens whose deep blue was thickly dotted with stars. The moon would soon be hidden behind the top of the cornice which crowned the roof of the building. The large-leaved plants in the middle of the quadrangle threw strange, ghostly shadows on the dewy grass-plot; the water in the fountain splashed more loudly than by day, but with a soothing, monotonous gurgle, broken now and then by a sudden short pause. The marble pillars gleamed as white as snow, and filmy mists, which

were beginning to rise from the damp lawn, floated languidly hither and thither on the soft night breeze, like ghosts veiled in flowing crape. Moths flitted noiselessly round and over the clumps of bushes, and the whole quiet and restful enclosure was full of sweetness from the Lotos flowers in the marble basin, from the blossoms of the luxuriant shrubs and the succulent tropical herbs at their feet. At any other time it would have been a joy to pause and look round, only to breathe and let the silent magic of the night exert its spell; but Paula's soul was closed against these charms. The sequestered silence lent a threatening accent to the furious wrangling in the court-yard, which was audible even here in bursts of uproar; and it was with an anxious heart that she observed that everything was not in its usual order; for her sharp eyes could discern no one, nothing, at the entrance to the tablinum, which was usually guarded by an armed sentinel or by the watch-dog; and surely--yes, she was not mistaken--the bronze doors were open, and the moon shone on the bright metal of one half which stood ajar.

She stopped, and Hiram behind her did the same. They both listened with such tension that the veins in their foreheads swelled; but from the tablinum, which was hardly thirty paces from them, came only very faint and intermittent sounds, indistinct in character and drowned by the tumult without.

A few long and anxious minutes, and then the half-closed door was suddenly opened and a man came forth. Paula's heart stood still, but she did not for an instant lose her keenness of vision; she at once and positively recognized the man who came out of the tablinum as Orion and none other, and the big, long-haired dog too came out and past him, sniffed the air and then, with a loud bark, rushed on the two watchers. Trembling and with clenched teeth, but still mistress of herself, she let him come close to her, and then, calling him by his name: "Beki" in low, caressing tones, as soon as he recognized her, she laid her hand on his shaggy head to scratch his ears, as he loved it done.

Paula and her companion were standing behind a column in the deepest shadow. Thus Orion could not see her, and the dog's loud bark had prevented his hearing her coaxing call; so when Beki was quiet and stood still, Orion whistled to him. The obedient and watchful beast, ran back, wagging his tail; and his master, greeting him as "a stupid old cat-hunter," let him spring over his arm, hugged the creature and then pushed him off again in play. Then he closed the door and went into the apartments leading to the courtyard.

"But he must come back this way to go to his own rooms," said Paula to her companion with a sigh of relief. "We must wait. But now we must not lose a minute. Come over to the door of the tablinum. The dog will know me now and will not bark again." They hastened on, and when they had reached the door, which lay in shadow within a deep doorway, Paula asked her companion: "Did you see who the man was who came out?"

"My lord Orion," said Hiram. "He was co--co--coming home from the town when I preceded you across the yard."

"Indeed?" she said with apparent indifference, and as she leaned against the cold metal door-panels she looked back into the garden and thought she was now free to return. She would describe to the freedman the way he must now go--it was quite simple; but she had not had time to do so when, from a room dividing the viridarium from the vestibule she heard first a woman's shrill voice; then the deeper tones of a man; and hardly had they exchanged a few sentences, when every sound was lost in the furious barking of the hound, and immediately after a loud shriek of pain from a woman fell upon her ear, and the noise of a heavy object falling to the ground.

What had happened? It must be something portentous and terrible; of that there could be no doubt; and ere long Paula's fears were justified. Out from the room where the scene had taken place rushed Orion, and with him the dog, across the grass-plot which was usually respected and cherished as holy ground, towards the side of the house facing the river, which was where he and all the family had their rooms.

"Now!" cried Paula, quickly leading the way.

She flew in breathless haste through the first room and into the unguarded hall; but she had not reached the middle of it when she gave a scream, for before her in the moonlight, lay a body, motionless, at full length, on the hard, marble floor.

"Run, Hiram, fly!" she cried to her companion. "The door is ajar--open--I can see it is."

She fell on her knees by the side of the lifeless form, raised the head, and saw--the beautiful, deathlike face of the crazy Persian slave. She felt her hand wet with the blood that had soaked the hapless girl's thick, fair hair, and she shuddered; but she resisted her impulse of horror and loathing, and perceiving some dark stains on the torn peplos she pulled it aside and saw that the white bosom was bleeding from deep wounds made in the tender flesh by the cruel fangs of the hound.

Paula's heart thrilled with indignation, grief and pity. He--he whom she had only yesterday held to be the epitome of every manly perfection--Orion, was guilty of so foul a deed! He, of whose unflinching, dauntless courage she had heard so much, had fled like a coward, and had left the victim to her fate--twice a victim to him!

But something must be done besides lamenting and raging, and wondering how in one human soul there could be room for so much that was noble and fine with so much that was shameful and cruel. She must save the girl, she must seek help, for Mandane's bosom still faintly rose and fell under Paula's tremulous fingers.

The freedman's brave heart would not allow him to fly to leave her with the injured girl; he flung his shoes on the

floor, raised the senseless form, and propped it against one of the columns that stood round the hall. It was not till his mistress had repeated her orders that he hurried away. Paula watched him depart; as soon as she heard the heavy door of the atrium close upon him, heedless of her own suspicious-looking position, she shouted for help, so loudly that her cries rang through the nocturnal silence of the house, and in a few minutes, from this side and that, a slave, a maid, a clerk, a cook, a watchman, came hurrying in.

Foremost of all--so soon indeed that he must have been on his way when he heard her cry--came Orion. He wore a light night-dress, intended, so she said to herself, to give the wretch the appearance of having sprung out of bed. But was this indeed he? Was this man with a flushed face, staring eyes, disordered hair and hoarse voice, that favorite of fortune whose happy nature, easy demeanor, sunny gaze and enchanting song had bewitched her soul? His hand shook as he came close to her and the injured slave; and how forced and embarrassed was his enquiry as to what had happened; how scared he looked as he asked her what had brought her into this part of the house at such an hour.

She made no reply; but when his mother repeated the question soon after, in a sharp voice, she--she who had never in her life told a lie--said with hasty decision: "I could not sleep, and the bark of the dog and a cry for help brought me here."

"I call that having sharp ears!" retorted Neforis with an incredulous shrug. "For the future, at any rate, under similar circumstances you need not be so prompt. How long, pray, have young girls trusted themselves alone when murder is cried?"

"If you had but armed yourself, fair daughter of heroes!" added Orion; but he had no sooner spoken than he bitterly regretted it. What a glance Paula cast at him! It was more than she could bear to hear him address her in jest, almost in mockery: him of all men, and at this moment for the first time--and to be thus reminded of her father! She answered proudly and with cutting sharpness: "I leave weapons to fighting men and murderers!"

"To fighting men, and murderers!" repeated Orion, pretending not to understand the point of her words. He forced a smile; but then, feeling that he must make some defence, he added bitterly: "Really, that sounds like the utterance of a feeble-hearted damsel! But let me beg you to come closer and be calm. These pitiable gashes on the poor creature's shoulder--I care more about her than you do, take my word for it--were inflicted by a four-footed assassin, whose weapons were given by nature. Yes, that is what happened. Rough old Beki keeps watch at the door of the tablinum. What brought the poor child here I know not, but he caught scent of her and pulled her down."

"Or nothing of the kind!" interrupted Neforis, picking up a pair of man's shoes which lay on the ground by the sufferer.

Orion turned as pale as death and hastily took the shoes from his mother's hand; he would have liked to fling them up and away through the open roof. How came they here? Whose were they? Who had been here this night? Before going into the tablinum he had locked the outer door on that side, and had returned subsequently to open it again for the people in the court-yard. It was not till after he had done this that the crazy girl had rushed upon him; she must have been lurking somewhere about when he first went through the atrium but had not then found courage enough to place herself in his way. When she had thrown herself upon him, the dog had pulled her down before he could prevent it: he would certainly have sprung past her and have come to the rescue but that he must thus have betrayed his visit to the tablinum.

It had required all his presence of mind to hurry to his room, fling on his night garments, and rush back to the scene of disaster. When Paula had first called for help he was already on his way, and with what feelings! Never had he felt so bewildered, so confused, so deeply dissatisfied with himself; for the first time in his life, as he stood face to face with Paula, he dared not look straight into the eyes of his fellow-man.

And now these shoes! The owner must have come there with the crazy girl, and if he had seen him in the tablinum and betrayed what he was doing there, how could he ever again appear in his parents' presence? He had looked upon it as a good joke, but now it had turned to bitter earnest. At any cost he must and would prevent his nocturnal doings from becoming known! Some new wrong-doing-nay, the worst was preferable to a stain on his honor--Whose could the shoes be? He suddenly held them up on high, crying with a loud voice: "Do these shoes belong to any of you, you people? To the gate-keeper perhaps?"

When all were silent, and the porter denied the ownership, he stood thinking; then he added with a defiant glare, and in a husky voice: "Then some one who had broken into the house has been startled and dropped them. Our house-stamp is here on the leather: they were made in our work-shop, and they still smell of the stable-here, Sebek, you can convince yourself. Take them into your keeping, man; and tomorrow morning we will see who has left this suspicious offering in our vestibule.--You were the first to reach the spot, fair Paula. Did you see a man about?"

"Yes," she replied with a hostile and challenging stare.

"And which way did he go?"

"He fled across the viridarium like a coward, running across the poor, well-kept grass-plot to save time, and vanished upstairs in the dwelling-rooms."

Orion ground his teeth, and a mad hatred surged up in him of this mystery in woman's form in whose power, as it seemed, his ruin lay, and whose eyes flashed with revenge and the desire to undo him. What was she plotting against him? Was there a being on earth who would dare to accuse him, the spoilt favorite of great and small...? And her look had meant more than aversion, it had expressed contempt.... How dare she look so at him? Who in the wide world had a right to accuse him of anything that could justify such a feeling? Never, never had he met with enmity like this, least of all from a girl. He longed to annihilate the high-handed, cold-hearted, ungrateful creature who could humble him so outrageously after he had allowed her to see that his heart was hers, and who could make him quail--a man whose courage had been proved a hundred times. He had to exercise his utmost self-control not to forget that she was a woman.--What had happened? What demon had been playing tricks on him--What had so completely altered him within this half-hour that his whole being seemed subverted even to himself, and that any one dared to treat him so?

His mother at once observed the terrible change that came over her son's face when Paula declared that a man had fled towards the dwelling-rooms; but she accounted for it in her own way, and exclaimed in genuine alarm: "Towards the Nile-wing, the rooms where your father sleeps? Merciful Heaven! suppose they have planned an attack there! Run--fly, Sebek.

"Go across with some armed men! Search the whole house from top to bottom! Perhaps you will catch the rascal--he had trodden down the grass--you must find him--you must not let him escape."

The steward hurried off, but Paula begged the head gardener, who had come in with the rest, to compare the foot-prints of the fugitive, which must yet be visible on the damp grass, with the shoes; her heart beat wildly, and again she tried to catch the young man's eye. Orion, however, started forward and went into the viridarium, saying as he went: "That is my concern."

But he was ashamed of himself, and felt as if something tight was throttling him. In his own eyes he appeared like a thief caught in the act, a traitor, a contemptible rascal; and he began to perceive that he was indeed no longer what he had been before he had committed that fatal deed in the tablinum.

Paula breathed hard as she watched him go out. Had he sunk so low as to falsify the evidence, and to declare that the groom's broad sole fitted the tracks of his small and shapely feet? She hated him, and yet she could have found it in her heart to pray that this, at least, he might not do; and when he came back and said in some confusion that he could not be sure, that the shoes did not seem exactly to fit the foot-marks, she drew a breath of relief and turned again to the wounded girl and the physician, who, had now made his appearance. Before Neforis followed her example she drew Orion aside and anxiously asked him what ailed him, he looked so pale and upset. He only said with some hesitation: "That poor girl's fate..." and he pointed to the Persian slave.--"It troubles me."

"You are so soft-hearted--you were as a boy!" said his mother soothingly. She had seen the moisture sparkling in his eyes; but his tears were not for the Persian, but for the mysterious something--he himself knew not what to call it--that he had forfeited in this last hour, and of which the loss gave him unspeakable pain.

But their dialogue was interrupted: the first misfortune of this luckless night had brought its attendant: the body of Rustem, the splendid and radiantly youthful Rustem, the faithful Persian leader of the caravan, was borne into the hall, senseless. He had made some satirical remark on the quarrel over creeds, and a furious Jacobite had fallen upon him with a log of wood, and dealt him a deep and perhaps mortal wound. The leech at once gave him his care, and several of the crowd of muttering and whispering men, who had made their way in out of curiosity or with a wish to be of use, now hurried hither and thither in obedience to the physician's orders.

As soon as he saw the Masdakite's wound he exclaimed angrily:

"A true Egyptian blow, dealt from behind!--What does this mob want here? Out with every man who does not belong to the place! The first things needed are litters. Will you, Dame Neforis, desire that two rooms may be got ready; one for that poor, gentle creature, and one for this fine fellow, though all will soon be over with him, short of a miracle."

"To the north of the viridarium," replied the lady, "there are two rooms at your service."

"Not there!" cried the leech. "I must have rooms with plenty of fresh air, looking out upon the river."

"There are none but the handsome rooms in the visitor's quarters, where my husband's niece has hers, Sick persons of the family have often lain there, but for such humble folk--you understand?"

"No--I am deaf," replied the physician.

"Oh, I know that," laughed Neforis. "But those rooms are really just refurnished for exalted guests."

"It would be hard to find any more exalted than such as these, sick unto death," replied Philippus. "They are nearer to God in Heaven than you are; to your advantage I believe. Here, you people! Carry these poor souls up to the guests' rooms."

CHAPTER IX.

"It is impossible, impossible, impossible!" cried Orion, jumping up from his writing-table. He thought of what he had done as a misfortune, and not as a crime; he himself hardly knew how it had all come about. Yes, there must be demons, evil, spiteful demons--and it was they who had led him to so mad a deed.

Yesterday evening, after the buying of the hanging, he had yielded to his mother's request that he should escort the widow Susannah home. At her house he had met her husband's brother, a jovial old fellow named Chrysippus; and when the conversation turned on the tapestry, and the Mukaukas' purpose of dedicating this work of art with all the gems worked into it, to the Church, the old man had clasped his hands, fully sharing Orion's disapproval, and had exclaimed laughing "What, you the son, and is not even a part of the precious stones to fall to your share? Why Katharina? Just a little diamond, a tiny opal might well add to the earthly happiness of the young, though the old must lay up treasure in heaven.--Do not be a fool! The Church's maw is full enough, and really a mouthful is your due."

And then they drank a good deal of fine wine, till at last the older man had accompanied Orion home, to stretch his limbs in the cool night air. A litter was carried behind him for him to return in, and all the way he had continued to persuade the youth to induce his father not to fling the whole treasure into the jaws of the Church, but to spare him a few stones at least for a more pleasing use. They had laughed over it a good deal, and Orion in his heart had thought Chrysippus very right, and had remembered Heliodora, and her love of large, handsome gems, and the keepsake he owed her. But that neither his father nor his mother would remove a single stone, and that the whole hanging would be dedicated, was beyond a doubt; at the same time, some of this superfluous splendor was in fact his due as their son, and a prettier gift to Heliodora than the large emerald could not be imagined. Yes--and she should have it! How delighted she would be! He even thought of the chief idea for the verses to accompany the gift.

He had the key of the tablinum, in which the work was lying, about his person; and when, on his return, he found the servants still sitting round the fire, he shut the door of the out-buildings while a feeling came over him which he remembered having experienced last on occasions when he and his brothers had robbed a forbidden fruit-tree. He was on the point of giving up his mad project; and when, in the tablinum itself, a horrible inward tremor again came over him he had actually turned to retreat--but he remembered old Chrysippus and his prompts. To turn and fly now would be cowardice. Heliodora must have the large emerald, and with his verses; his father might give away all the rest as he pleased. When he was kneeling in front of the work with his knife in his hand, that sickening terror had come over him for the third time; if the large emerald had not come off into his hand at the first effort he would certainly have rolled the bale up again and have left the tablinum clean-handed. But the evil demon had been at his elbow, had thrust the gem into his hand, as it were, so that two cuts with the knife had sufficed to displace it from its setting. It rolled into his hand and he felt its noble weight; he cast aside all care, and had thought no more with anything but pleasure of this splendid trick, which he would relate to-morrow to old Chrysippus--of course under seal of secrecy.

But now, in the sober light of day, how different did this mad, rash deed appear; how heavily had he already been punished; what consequences might it not entail? His hatred of Paula grew every minute: she had certainly seen all that had happened and would not hesitate to betray him--that she had shown last night. War, as it were, was declared between them, and he vowed to himself, with fire in his eyes, that he would not shirk it! At the same time he could not deny that she had never looked handsomer than when she stood, with hair half undone, confronting him--threatening him. "It is to be love or hate between us," he muttered to himself. "No half-measures: and she has chosen hate! Good! Hitherto I have only had to fight against men; but this bold, hard, and scornful maiden, who rejects every gentle feeling, is no despicable foe. She has me at bay. If she does her worst by me I will return it in kind!--And who is the owner of the shoes? I have taken all possible means to find him. Shameful, shameful! that I cannot hold up my head to look boldly at my own face in the glass. Heliodora is a sweet creature, an angel of kindness. She loved me truly; but this--this--Ah; even for her, this is too great a sacrifice!"

He pressed his hand to his brow and flung himself on a divan. He might well be weary, for he had not closed his eyes for more than thirty hours and had already done much business that morning. He had given orders to Sebek the house-steward and to the captain of the Egyptian guard to hunt out the owner of the sandals by the aid of the dogs, and to cast him into prison; next he had of his own accord--since his father generally did not fall asleep till the morning and had not yet left his room--tried to pacify the Arab merchant with regard to the mishap that had befallen his head man under the governor's roof; but with small success.

Finally the young man had indulged his desire to compose a few lines addressed to the fair Heliodora--for there was no form of physical or mental effort to which he was not trained. He had not lost the idea that had occurred to him yesterday before his theft in the tablinum, and to put it into verse was in his present mood an easy task. He wrote as follows:

*"'Like liketh like' saith the saw; and like to like is but fitting.
Yet, in the hardest of gems thy soft nature rejoices?
Nay, but if noble and rare, if its beauty is priceless,*

*Then, Heliadora, the stone is like thee--akin to thy beauty.
Thus let this emerald please thee;--and know that the fire
That fills it with light burns more fierce in the heart of thy
Friend."*

He penned the lines rapidly; and as he did so he felt, he knew not why, an excited thrill, as though every word he threw off was a blow aimed at Paula. Last night he had intended to send the costly jewel to the handsome widow in a suitable setting; but now it would be madly imprudent to order such a thing. He must send it away at once; he had hastened to pack it up with the verses, with his own hand, and entrusted it to Chusar, a horsedealer's groom from Constantinople, who had brought his Pannonian steeds to Memphis. He had himself seen off this trustworthy messenger, who could speak no Egyptian and very little Greek, and when his horse was lost to sight in the dust of the road leading to Alexandria he had returned home in a calmer mood. Ships were constantly putting to sea from that port for Constantinople, and Chusar was enjoined to sail by the first that should be leaving. At least the odious deed should not have been committed in vain; and yet he would have given a year of his life if now he could but know that it had never been done.

"Impossible!" and "Curse it!" were the words he had most frequently repeated in the course of his retrospect during the past night and morning. How he had had to rush and hurry under the broiling sun! and the sense of being compelled to do so for mere concealment's sake seemed to him--who had never in his life before done anything that he could not justify in the eyes of honest men--so humiliating, that it brought the sweat to his burning brow. He--Orion--to dread discovery as a thief! It was inconceivable, and he was afraid, positively afraid for the first time since his boyhood. His fortunate star, which in the Capital had shone on him so brightly and benevolently, seemed to have proved faithless in this ruinous hole! What had that Persian girl taken into her crazy head that she must rush upon him like some furious beast of prey? He had been bound to her once, no doubt, by a transient passion--and what youth of his age was blind to the charms of a pretty slave-girl? She had been a lovely child, and it was a vexation, nay a grief to him, that she should have been so shamefully punished. If she should recover, and he could have prayed that she might, it would of course be his part to provide for her--of course. To be just, he could not but confess that she indeed had good reason to hate him: but Paula? He had shown her nothing but kindness and yet how unhesitatingly, how openly she had displayed her enmity. He could see her now with the name "murderer" on her quivering lips; the word had stung him like a lance-thrust. What a hideous, degrading and unjust accusation lay in that exclamation! Should he submit to it unrevenged?

Was she as innocent as she was haughty and cold? What was she doing in the viridarium at midnight?--For she must have been there before that ill-starred dog flew at Mandane. An assignation with the owner of the shoes his mother had found was out of the question, for they belonged to some man about the stables. Love, thought he, for a wonder had nothing to do with it; but as he came in he had noticed a man crossing the court-yard who looked like Paula's freedman, Hiram the trainer. Probably she had arranged a meeting with her stammering friend in order--in order?--Well, there was but one thing that seemed likely: She was plotting to fly from his parents' house and needed this man's assistance.

He had seen within a few hours of his return that his mother did not make life sweet to the girl, and yet his father had very possibly opposed her wish to seek another home. But why should she avoid and hate him? In that expedition on the river and on their way home he could have sworn that she loved him, and the remembrance of those hours brought her near to him again, and wiped out his schemes of vengeance against her, of punishment to be visited on her. Then he thought of little Katharina whom his mother intended him to marry, and at the thought he laughed softly to himself. In the Imperial gardens at Constantinople he had once seen a strange Indian bird, with a tiny body and head and an immensely long tail, shining like silver and mother of pearl. This was Katharina! She herself a mere nothing; but then her tail! vast estates and immense sums of money; and this--this was all his mother saw. But did he need more than he had? How rich his father must be to spend so large a sum on an offering to the Church as heedlessly as men give alms to a beggar.

Katharina--and Paula!

Yes, the little girl was a bright, brisk creature; but then Thomas' daughter--what power there was in her eye, what majesty in her gait, how--how--how enchanting her--her voice could be--her voice....

He was asleep, worn out by heat and fatigue; and in a dream he saw Paula lying on a couch strewn with roses while all about her sounded wonderful heart-ensnaring music; and the couch was not solid but blue water, gently moving: he went towards her and suddenly a large black eagle swooped down on him, flapped his wings in his face and when, half-blinded, he put his hand to his eyes the bird pecked the roses as a hen picks millet and barley. Then he was angry, rushed at the eagle, and tried to clutch him with his hands; but his feet seemed rooted to the ground, and the more he struggled to move freely the more firmly he was dragged backwards. He fought like a madman against the hindering force, and suddenly it released him. He was still under this impression when he woke, streaming with perspiration, and opened his eyes. By his couch stood his mother who had laid her hand on his feet to rouse him.

She looked pale and anxious and begged him to come quickly to his father who was much disturbed, and wished to

Speak with him. Then she hurried away.

While he hastily arranged his hair and had his shoes clasped he felt vexed that, under the influence of that foolish dream, and still half asleep, he had let his mother go before ascertaining what the circumstances were that had given rise to his father's anxiety. Had it anything to do with the incidents of the past night? No.--If he had been suspected his mother would have told him and warned him. It must refer to something else. Perhaps the old merchant's stalwart headman had died of his wounds, and his father wished to send him--Orion--across the Nile to the Arab viceroy to obtain forgiveness for the murder of a Moslem, actually within the precincts of the governor's house. This fatal blow might indeed entail serious consequences; however, the matter might very likely be quite other than this.

When he left his room the brooding heat that filled the house struck him as peculiarly oppressive, and a painful feeling, closely resembling shame, stole over him as he crossed the viridarium, and glanced at the grass from which--thanks to Paula's ill-meant warning--he had carefully brushed away his foot-marks before daybreak. How cowardly, how base, it all was! The best of all in life: honor, self-respect, the proud consciousness of being an honest man--all staked and all lost for nothing at all! He could have slapped his own face or cried aloud like a child that has broken its most treasured toy. But of what use was all this? What was done could not be undone; and now he must keep his wits about him so as to remain, in the eyes of others at least, what he had always been, low as he had fallen in his own.

It was scorchingly hot in the enclosed garden-plot, surrounded by buildings, and open to the sun; not a human creature was in sight; the house seemed dead. The gaudy flag-staffs and trellis-work, and the pillars of the verandah, which had all been newly painted in honor of his return and were still wreathed with garlands, exhaled a smell, to him quite sickening, of melting resin, drying varnish and faded flowers. Though there was no breath of air the atmosphere quivered, as it seemed from the fierce rays of the sun, which were reflected like arrows from everything around him. The butterflies and dragonflies appeared to Orion to move their wings more languidly as they hovered over the plants and flowers, the very fountain danced up more lazily and not so high as usual: everything about him was hot, sweltering, oppressive; and the man who had always been so independent and looked up to, who for years had been free to career through life uncontrolled, and guarded by every good Genius now felt trammelled, hemmed in and harassed.

In his father's cool fountain-room he could breathe more freely; but only for a moment. The blood faded from his cheeks, and he had to make a strong effort to greet his father calmly and in his usual manner; for in front of the divan where the governor commonly reclined, lay the Persian hanging, and close by stood his mother and the Arab merchant. Sebek, the steward awaited his master's orders, in the background in the attitude of humility which was torture to his old back, but in which he was never required to remain: Orion now signed to him to stand up:

The Arab's mild features wore a look of extreme gravity, and deep vexation could be read in his kindly eyes. As the young man entered he bowed slightly; they had already met that morning. The Mukaukas, who was lying deathly pale with colorless lips, scarcely opened his eyes at his son's greeting. It might have been thought that a bier was waiting in the next room and that the mourners had assembled here.

The piece of work was only half unrolled, but Orion at once saw the spot whence its crowning glory was now missing--the large emerald which, as he alone could know, was on its way to Constantinople. His theft had been discovered. How fearful, how fatal might the issue be!

"Courage, courage!" he said to himself. "Only preserve your presence of mind. What profit is life with loss of honor? Keep your eyes open; everything depends on that, Orion!"

He succeeded in hastily collecting his thoughts, and exclaimed in a voice which lacked little of its usual eager cheerfulness:

"How dismal you all look! It is indeed a terrible disaster that the dog should have handled the poor girl so roughly, and that our people should have behaved so outrageously; but, as I told you this morning, worthy Merchant, the guilty parties shall pay for it with their lives. My father, I am sure, will agree that you should deal with them according to your pleasure, and our leech Philippus, in spite of his youth, is a perfect Hippocrates I can assure you! He will patch up the fine fellow--your head-man I mean, and as to any question of compensation, my father--well, you know he is no haggler."

"I beg you not to add insult to the injury that I have suffered under your roof," interrupted Haschim. "No amount of money can buy off my wrath over the spilt blood of a friend--and Rustem was my friend--a free and valiant youth. As to the punishment of the guilty: on that I insist. Blood cries for blood. That is our creed; and though yours, to be sure, enjoins the contrary, so far as I know you act by the same rule as we. All honor to your physician; but it goes to my heart, and raises my gall to see such things take place in the house of the man to whom the Khaliff has confided the weal or woe of Egyptian Christians. Your boasted tolerance has led to the death of an honest though humble man in a time of perfect peace--or at least maimed him for life. As to your honesty, it would seem..."

"Who dares impugn it?" cried Orion.

"I, young man," replied the merchant with the calm dignity of age. "I, who sold this piece of work last evening, and find it this morning robbed of its most precious ornament."

"The great emerald has been cut from the hanging during the night." Dame Neforis explained. "You yourself went with the man who carried it to the tablinum and saw it laid there."

"And in the very cloth in which your people had wrapped it," added Orion. "Our good old Sebek there was with me. Who fetched away the bale this morning; who brought it here and opened it?"

"Happily for us," said the Arab, "it was your lady mother herself, with that man--your steward if I mistake not--and your own slaves."

"Why was it not left where it was?" asked Orion, giving vent to the annoyance which at this moment he really felt.

"Because I had assured your father, and with good reason, that the beauty of this splendid work and of the gems that decorate it show to much greater advantage by daylight and in the sunshine than under the lamps and torches."

"And besides, your father wished to see his new purchase once more," Neforis broke in, "and to ask the merchant how the gems might be removed without injury to the work itself. So I went to the tablinum myself with Sebek."

"But I had the key!" cried Orion putting his hand into the breast of his robe.

"That I had forgotten," replied his mother. "But unfortunately we did not need it. The tablinum was open."

"I locked it yesterday; you saw me do it, Sebek..."

"So I told the mistress," replied the steward. "I perfectly recollect hearing the snap of the strong lock."

Orion shrugged his shoulders, and his mother went on:

"But the bronze doors must have been opened during the night with a false key, or by some other means; for part of the hanging had been pulled out of the wrapper, and when we looked closely we saw that the large emerald had been wrenched out of the setting."

"Shameful!" exclaimed Orion.

"Disgraceful!" added the governor, vehemently starting up. He had fallen a prey to fearful unrest and horror: he thought that his Lord and Saviour, to whom he had dedicated the precious jewel, regarded him as so sinful and worthless that He would not accept the gift at his hands. But perhaps it was only Satan striving to hinder him from approaching the Most High with so noble an offering. At any rate, human cunning had been at work, so he said with stern resolution:

"The matter shall be enquired into, and in the name of Jesus Christ, to whom the stone already belongs, I will never rest nor cease till the criminal is in my hands."

"And in the name of Allah and the Prophet," added the Arab, "I will aid thee, if I have to appeal for help to the great chief Amru, the Khaliff's representative in this country.--A word was spoken here just now that I cannot and will not forget. And the tone you have chosen to adopt, young man, seems to spring from the same fount: the old fox, you think, put a false gem of impossible size into the hanging, and has had it stolen that his fraud may not be detected when a jeweller examines the work by daylight. This is too much! I am an honest man, Sirs, and I am fain to add a rich one; and the man who tries to cast a stain on the character I have borne through a long life shall learn, to his ruing, that old Haschim has greater and more powerful friends to back him than you may care to meet!"

As he uttered this threat the merchant's eyes glistened through tears; it grieved him to be unjustly suspected and to be forced to express himself so hardly to the Mukaukas for whom he felt both reverence and pity. It was clear from the tone of his speech that he was in fact a determined and a powerful personage, and Orion interrupted him with the eager enquiry: "Who has dared to think so basely of you?"

"Your own mother, I regret to say," replied the Moslem sadly, with an oriental shrug of distress and annoyance--his shoulders up to his ears.

"Forget it, I beg of you," said the governor. "God knows women have softer hearts than men, and yet they more readily incline to think evil of their fellow-creatures, and particularly of the enemies of their faith. On the other hand they are more sensitive to kindness. A woman's hair is long and her wits short, says the saw."

"You have plenty to say against us women!" retorted Neforis. "But scold away--scold if it is a comfort to you!" But she added, while she affectionately turned her husband's pillows and gave him another of his white pillules: "I will submit to the worst to-day for I am in the wrong. I have already asked your pardon, worthy Haschim, and I do so again, with all my heart."

As she spoke, she went up to the Arab and held out her hand; he took it, but lightly, however, and quickly released it, saying:

"I do not find it hard to forgive. But I find it impossible, here or anywhere, to let so much as a grain of dust rest on my bright good name. I shall follow up this affair, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left.--And now, one question: Is the dog that guarded the tablinum a watchful, savage beast?"

"How savage he is he unfortunately proved on the person of the poor Persian slave; and his watchfulness is known to all the household," cried Orion.

"But I would beg you, worthy merchant," said Neforis, "and in the name of all present, to give us the help of your experience. I myself--wait a little wait: in spite of her long hair and her short wits a woman often has a happy idea. I, probably, was the first to come on the robber's track. It is clear that he must belong to the household since the dog did not attack him. Paula, who was so wonderfully quick in coming to the rescue of the Persian, is of course not to be thought of..."

Here her husband interrupted her with an angry exclamation: "Leave the girl quite out of the question wife!"

"As if I supposed her to be the thief!" retorted Neforis indignantly, and she shrugged her shoulders as Orion, in mild reproach, also cried: "Mother! consider..." and the merchant asked:

"Do you mean the young girl from whom I had to take such hard words last night?--Well, then, I will stake my whole fortune on her innocence. That beautiful, passionate creature is incapable of any underhand dealings."

"Passionate!" Neforis smiled. "Her heart is as cold and as hard as the lost emerald; we have proved that by experience."

"Nevertheless," said Orion, "she is incapable of baseness."

"How zealous men can be for a pair of fine eyes!" interrupted his mother. "But I have not the most remote suspicion of her; I have something quite different in my mind. A pair of man's shoes were found lying by the wounded girl. Did you do what my lord Orion ordered, Sebek?"

"At once, Mistress," replied the steward, "and I have been expecting the captain of the watch for some time; for Psantik..."

But here he was interrupted: the officer in question, who for more than twenty years had commanded the Mukaukas' guard of honor, was shown into the room; after answering a few preliminary enquiries he began his report in a voice so loud that it hurt the governor, and his wife was obliged to request the soldier to speak more gently.

The bloodhounds and terriers had been let out after being allowed to smell at the shoes, and a couple of them had soon found their way to the side-door where Hiram had waited for Paula. There they paused, sniffing about on all sides, and had then jumped up a few steps.

"And those stairs lead to Paula's room," observed Neforis with a shrug.

"But they were on a false scent," the officer eagerly added. "The little toads might have thrown suspicion on an innocent person. The curs immediately after rushed into the stables, and ran up and down like Satan after a lost soul. The pack had soon pulled down the boy--the son of the freedman who came here from Damascus with the daughter of the great Thomas--and they went quite mad in his father's room: Heaven and earth! what a howling and barking and yelping. They poked their noses into every old rag, and now we knew where the hole in the wine-skin was.--I am sorry for the man. He stammered horribly, but as a trainer, and in all that has to do with horses, all honor to him!--The shoes are Hiram's as surely as my eyes are in my head; but we have not caught him yet. He is across the river, for a boat is missing and where it had been lying the dogs began again. Unless the unbelievers over there give him shelter we are certain to have him."

"Then we know who is the criminal!" cried Orion, with a sigh as deep as though some great burden were lifted from his soul. Then he went on in a commanding tone--and his voice rang so fiercely that the color which had mounted to his cheeks could hardly be due to satisfaction at this last good news....

"As it is not yet two hours after noon, send all your men out to search for him and deliver him up. My father will give you a warrant, and the Arabs on the other shore will assist you. Perhaps the thief may fall into our hands even sooner and with him the emerald, unless the rogue has succeeded in hiding it or selling it." Then his voice sank, and he added in a tone of regret. "It is a pity as concerns the man, we had not one in our stables who knew more about horses! Fresh proof of your maxim, mother: if you want to be well served you must buy rascals!"

"Strictly speaking," said Neforis meditatively, "Hiram is not one of our people. He was a freedman of Thomas' and came here with his daughter. Every one speaks highly of his skill in the stable; but for this robbery we might have kept him for the rest of his life still, if the girl had ever taken it into her head to leave us and to take him with her, we could not have detained him.--You may say what you will, and abuse me and mock me; I have none of what you call imagination; I see things simply as they are: but there must be some understanding between that girl and the thief."

"You are not to say another word of such monstrous nonsense!" exclaimed her husband; and he would have said more, but that at that moment the groom of the chambers announced that Gamaliel, the Jewish goldsmith, begged an audience. The man had come to give information with regard to the fate of the lost emerald.

At this statement Orion changed color, and he turned away from the merchant as the slave admitted the same Israelite who had been sitting over the fire with the head-servants. He at once plunged into his story, telling it in his peculiar light-hearted style. He was so rich that the loss he might suffer did not trouble him enough to spoil his good-humor, and so honest that it was a pleasure to him to restore the stolen property to its rightful owner. Early that morning, so he told them, Hiram the groom had been to him to offer him a wonderfully large and splendid emerald for sale. The freedman had assured him that the stone was part of the property left by the famous Thomas, his former

master. It had decorated the head-stall of the horse which the hero of Damascus had last ridden, and it had come to him with the steed.

"I offered him what I thought fair," the Jew went on, "and paid him two thousand drachmae on account; the remainder he begged me to take charge of for the present. To this I agreed, but ere long a fly began to hum suspicion in my ear. Then the police rushed through the town with the bloodhounds. Good Heavens, what a barking! The creatures yelped as if they would bark my poor house down, like the trumpets round the walls of Jericho--you know. 'What is the matter now,' I asked of the dog-keepers, and behold! my suspicions about the emerald were justified; so here, my lord Governor, I have brought you the stone, and as every suckling in Memphis hears from its nurse--unless it is deaf--what a just man Mukaukas George is, you will no doubt make good to me what I advanced to that stammering scoundrel. And you will have the best of the bargain, noble Sir; for I make no demand for interest or even maintenance for the two hours during which it was mine."

"Give me the stone!" interrupted the Arab, who was annoyed by the Jew's jesting tone; he snatched the emerald from him, weighed it in his hand, put it close to his eyes, held it far off, tapped it with a small hammer that he took out of his breast-pocket, slipped it into its place in the work, examining it keenly, suspiciously, and at last with satisfaction. During all this, Orion had more than once turned pale, and the sweat broke out on his handsome, pale face. Had a miracle been wrought here? How could this gem, which was surely on its way to Alexandria, have found its way into the Jew's hands? Or could Chusar have opened the little packet and have sold the emerald to Hiram, and through him to the jeweller? He must get to the bottom of it, and while the Arab was examining the gem he went up to Gamaliel and asked him: "Are you positively certain--it is a matter of freedom or the dungeon--certain that you had this stone from Hiram the Syrian and from no one else? I mean, is the man so well-known to you that no mistake is possible?"

"God preserve us!" exclaimed the Jew drawing back a step from Orion, who was gazing at him with a sinister light in his eyes. "How can my lord doubt it? Your respected father has known me these thirty years, and do you suppose that I--I do not know the Syrian? Why, who in Memphis can stammer to compare with him? And has he not killed half my children with your wild young horses?--Half killed every one of my children I mean--half killed them, I say, with fright. They are all still alive and well, God preserve them, but none the better for your horsebreaker; for fresh air is good for children and my little Rebecca would stop indoors till he was at home again for fear of his terrifying pranks."

"Well, well!" Orion broke in. "And at what hour did he bring you the emerald for sale? Exactly. Now, recollect: when was it? You surely must remember."

"Adonai! How should I?" said the Jew. "But wait, Sir, perhaps I may be able to tell you. In this hot weather we are up before sunrise; then we said our prayers and had our morning broth; then...."

"Senseless chatter!" urged Orion. But Gamaliel went on without allowing himself to be checked. "Then little Ruth jumped into my lap to pull out the white hairs that will grow under my nose and, just as the child was doing it and I cried out: 'Oh, you hurt me!' the sun fell upon the earth bank on which I was sitting."

"And at what time does it reach the bank?" cried the young man.

"Exactly two hours after sunrise," replied the Jew, "at this time of year. Do me the honor of a visit tomorrow morning; you will not regret it, for I can show you some beautiful, exquisite things--and you can watch the shadow yourself."

"Two hours after sunrise," murmured Orion to himself, and then with fresh qualms he reflected that it was fully four hours later when he had given the packet to Chusar. It was impossible to doubt the Jew's statement. The man was rich, honest and content: he did not lie. The jewel Orion had sent away and that purchased from Hiram could not in any case be identical. But how could all this be explained? It was enough to turn his brain. And not to dare to speak when mere silence was falsehood--falsehood to his father and mother!--If only the hapless stammerer might escape! If he were caught; then--then merciful Heaven! But no; it was not to be thought of.--On, then, on; and if it came to the worst the honor of a hundred stablemen could not outweigh that of one Orion; horrible as it was, the man must be sacrificed. He would see that his life was spared and that he was soon set at liberty!

The Arab meanwhile had concluded his examination; still he was not perfectly satisfied. Orion longed to interpose; for if the merchant expressed no doubts and acknowledged the recovered gem to be the stolen one, much would be gained; so he turned to him again and said: "May I ask you to show me the emerald once more? It is quite impossible, do you think, that a second should be found to match it?"

"That is too much to assert," said the Arab gravely. "This stone resembles that on the hanging to a hair; and yet it has a little inequality which I do not remember noticing on it. It is true I had never seen it out of the setting, and this little boss may have been turned towards the stuff, and yet, and yet.--Tell me, goldsmith, did the thief give you the emerald bare--unset?"

"As bare as Adam and Eve before they ate the apple," said the Jew.

"That is a pity--a great pity!--And still I fancy that the stone in the work was a trifle longer. In such a case it is almost folly and perversity to doubt, and yet I feel--and yet I ask myself: Is this really the stone that formed that bud?"

"But Heaven bless us!" cried Orion, "the twin of such an unique gem would surely not drop from the skies and at the

same moment into one and the same house. Let us be glad that the lost sheep has come back to us. Now, I will lock it into this iron casket, Father, and as soon as the robber is caught you send for me: do you understand, Psamtik?" He nodded to his parents, offered his hand to the Arab, and that in a way which could not fail to satisfy any one, so that even the old man was won over; and then he left the room.

The merchant's honor was saved; still his conscientious soul was disturbed by a doubt that he could not away with. He was about to take leave but the Mukaukas was so buried in pillows, and kept his eyes so closely shut, that no one could detect whether he were sleeping or waking; so the Arab, not wishing to disturb him, withdrew without speaking.

CHAPTER X.

After the great excitement of the night Paula had thrown herself on her bed with throbbing pulses. Sleep would not come to her, and so at rather more than two hours after sunrise she went to the window to close the shutters. As she did so she looked out, and she saw Hiram leap into a boat and push the light bark from the shore. She dared neither signal nor call to him; but when the faithful soul had reached open water he looked back at her window, recognized her in her white morning dress and flourished the oar high in the air. This could only mean that he had fulfilled his commission and sold her jewel. Now he was going to the other side to engage the Nabathæan.

When she had closed the shutters and darkened the room she again lay down. Youth asserted its rights the weary girl fell into deep, dreamless slumbers.

When she woke, with the heat drops on her forehead, the sun was nearly at the meridian, only an hour till the Ariston would be served, the Greek breakfast, the first meal in the morning, which the family eat together as they also did the principal meal later in the day. She had never yet failed to appear, and her absence would excite remark.

The governor's household, like that of every Egyptian of rank, was conducted more on the Greek than the Egyptian plan; and this was the case not merely as regarded the meals but in many other things, and especially the language spoken. From the Mukaukas himself down to the youngest member of the family, all spoke Greek among themselves, and Coptic, the old native dialect, only to the servants. Nay, many borrowed and foreign words had already crept into use in the Coptic.

The governor's granddaughter, pretty little Mary, had learnt to speak Greek fluently and correctly before she spoke Coptic, but when Paula had first arrived she could not as yet write the beautiful language of Greece with due accuracy. Paula loved children; she longed for some occupation, and she had therefore volunteered to instruct the little girl in the art. At first her hosts had seemed pleased that she should render this service, but ere long the relation between the Lady Neforis and her husband's niece had taken the unpleasant aspect which it was destined to retain. She had put a stop to the lessons, and the reason she had assigned for this insulting step was that Paula had dictated to her pupil long sentences out of her Orthodox Greek prayerbook. This, it was true, she had done; but without the smallest concealment; and the passages she had chosen had contained nothing but what must elevate the soul of every Christian, of whatever confession.

The child had wept bitterly over her grandmother's fiat, though Paula had always taken the lessons quite seriously, for Mary loved her older companion with all the enthusiasm of a half-grown girl--as a child of ten really is in Egypt; her passionate little heart worshipped the beautiful maiden who was in every respect so far above her, and Paula's arms had opened wide to embrace the child who brought sunshine into the gloomy, chill atmosphere she breathed in her uncle's house. But Neforis regarded the child's ardent love for her Melchite relation as exaggerated and morbid, imperilling perhaps her religious faith; and she fancied that under Paula's influence Mary had transferred her affections from her to the younger woman with added warmth. Nor was this idea wholly fanciful; the child's strong sense of justice could not bear to see her friend misunderstood and slighted, often simply and entirely misjudged and hardly blamed, so Mary felt it her duty, as far as in her lay, to make up for her grandmother's delinquencies in regard to the guest who in the child's eyes was perfection.

But Neforis was not the woman to put up with this demeanor in a child. Mary was her granddaughter, the only child of her lost son, and no one should come between them. So she forbid the little girl to go to Paula's room without an express message, and when a Greek teacher was engaged for her, her instructions were that she should keep her pupil as much as possible out of the Syrian damsel's way. All this only fanned the child's vehement affection; and tenderly as her grandmother would sometimes caress her--while Mary on her part never failed in dutiful obedience--neither of them ever felt a true and steady warmth of heart towards the other; and for this Paula was no doubt to blame, though against her will and by her mere existence.

Often, indeed, and by a hundred covert hints Dame Neforis gave Paula to understand that she it was who had alienated her grandchild; there was nothing for it but to keep the child for whom she yearned, at a distance, and only rarely reveal to her the abundance of her love. At last her life was so full of grievance that she was hardly able to be innocent with the innocent--a child with the child; Mary was not slow to note this, and ascribed Paula's altered manner to the suffering caused by her grandmother's severity.

Mary's most frequent opportunities of speaking to her friend were just before meals; for at that time no one was watching her, and her grandmother had not forbidden her calling Paula to table. A visit to her room was the child's greatest delight--partly because it was forbidden--but no less because Paula, up in her own room, was quite different from what she seemed with the others, and because they could there look at each other and kiss without interference, and say what ever they pleased. There Mary could tell her as much as she dared of the events in their little circle, but the lively and sometimes hoydenish little girl was often withheld from confessing a misdemeanor, or even an inoffensive piece of childishness, by sheer admiration for one who to her appeared nobler, greater and loftier than other

beings.

Just as Paula had finished putting up her hair, Mary, who would rush like a whirlwind even into her grandmother's presence, knocked humbly at the door. She did not fly into Paula's arms as she did into those of Susannah or her daughter Katharina, but only kissed her white arm with fervent devotion, and colored with happiness when Paula bent down to her, pressed her lips to her brow and hair, and wiped her wet, glowing cheeks. Then she took Mary's head fondly between her hands and said:

"What is wrong with you, madcap?"

In fact the sweet little face was crimson, and her eyes swelled as if she had been crying violently.

"It is so fearfully hot," said Mary. "Eudoxia"--her Greek governess--"says that Egypt in summer is a fiery furnace, a hell upon earth. She is quite ill with the heat, and lies like a fish on the sand; the only good thing about it is..."

"That she lets you run off and gives you no lessons?"

Mary nodded, but as no lecture followed the confession she put her head on one side and looked up into Paula's face with large roguish eyes.

"And yet you have been crying!--a great girl like you?"

"I--I crying?"

"Yes, crying. I can see it in your eyes. Now confess: what has happened?"

"You will not scold me?"

"Certainly not."

"Well then. At first it was fun, such fun you cannot think, and I do not mind the heat; but when the great hunt had gone by I wanted to go to my grand mother and I was not allowed. Do you know, something very particular had been going on in the fountain-room; and as they all came out again I crept behind Orion into the tablinum--there are such wonderful things there, and I wanted just to frighten him a little; we have often played games together before. At first he did not see me, and as he was bending over the hanging, from which the gem was stolen--I believe he was counting the stones in the faded old thing--I just jumped on to his shoulder, and he was so frightened--I can tell you, awfully frightened! And he turned upon me like a fighting-cock and--and he gave me a box on the ear; such a slap, it is burning now--and all sorts of colors danced before my eyes. He always used to be so nice and kind to me, and to you, too, and so I used to be fond of him--he is my uncle too--but a box on the ears, a slap such as the cook might give to the turnspit--I am too big for that; that I will certainly not put up with it! Since my last birthday all the slaves and upper servants, too, have had to treat me as a lady and to bow down to me! And now!--it was just here.--How dare he?" She began to cry again and sobbed out: "But that was not all. He locked me into the dark tablinum and left--left me..." her tears flowed faster and faster, "left me sitting there! It was so horrible; and I might have been there now if I had not found a gold plate; I seized my great-grandfather--I mean the silver image of Menas, and hammered on it, and screamed Fire! Then Sebek heard me and fetched Orion, and he let me out, and made such a fuss over me and kissed me. But what is the good of that; my grandfather will be angry, for in my terror I beat his father's nose quite flat on the plate."

Paula had listened, now amused and now grave, to the little girl's story; when she ceased, she once more wiped her eyes and said:

"Your uncle is a man, and you must not play with him as if he were a child like yourself. The reminder you got was rather a hard one, no doubt, but Orion tried to make up for it.--But the great hunt, what was that?"

At this question Mary's eyes suddenly sparkled again. In an instant all her woes were forgotten, even her ancestor's flattened nose, and with a merry, hearty laugh she exclaimed:

"Oh! you should have seen it! You would have been amused too. They wanted to catch the bad man who cut the emerald out of the hanging. He had left his shoes and they had held them under the dogs' noses and then off they went! First they rushed here to the stairs; then to the stables, then to the lodgings of one of the horse-trainers, and I kept close behind, after the terriers and the other dogs. Then they stopped to consider and at last they all ran out at the gate towards the town. I ought not to have gone beyond the court-yard, but--do not be cross with me--it was such fun!--Out they went, along Hapi Street, across the square, and at last into the Goldsmith's Street, and there the whole pack plunged into Gamaliel's shop--the Jew who is always so merry. While he was talking to the others his wife gave me some apricot tartlets; we do not have such good ones at home."

"And did they find the man?" asked Paula, who had changed color repeatedly during the child's story.

"I do not know," said Mary sadly. "They were not chasing any one in particular. The dogs kept their noses to the ground, and we ran after them."

"And only to catch a man, who certainly had nothing whatever to do with the theft.--Reflect a little, Mary. The shoes gave the dogs the scent and they were set on to seize the man who had worn them, but whom no judge had examined. The shoes were found in the hall; perhaps he had dropped them by accident, or some one else may have carried them there. Now think of yourself in the place of an innocent man, a Christian like ourselves, hunted with a pack of dogs like

a wild beast. Is it not frightful? No good heart should laugh at such a thing!"

Paula spoke with such impressive gravity and deep sorrow, and her whole manner betrayed such great and genuine distress that the child looked up at her anxiously, with tearful eyes, threw herself against her, and hiding her face in Paula's dress exclaimed: "I did not know that they were hunting a poor man, and if it makes you so sad, I wish I had not been there! But is it really and truly so bad? You are so often unhappy when we others laugh!" She gazed into Paula's face with wide, wondering eyes through her tears, and Paula clasped her to her, kissed her fondly, and replied with melancholy sweetness:

"I would gladly be as gay as you, but I have gone through so much to sadden me. Laugh and be merry to your heart's content; I am glad you should. But with regard to the poor hunted man, I fear he is my father's freedman, the most faithful, honest soul! Did your exciting hunt drive any one out of the goldsmith's shop?"

Mary shook her head; then she asked:

"Is it Hiram, the stammerer, the trainer, that they are hunting?"

"I fear it is."

"Yes, yes," said the child. "Stay--oh, dear! it will grieve you again, but I think--I think they said--the shoes belonged--but I did not attend. However, they were talking of a groom--a freedman--a stammerer...."

"Then they certainly are hunting down an innocent man," cried Paula with a deep sigh; and she sat down again in front of her toilet-table to finish dressing. Her hands still moved mechanically, but she was lost in thought; she answered the child vaguely, and let her rummage in her open trunk till Mary pulled out the necklace that had been bereft of its gem, and hung it round her neck. Just then there was a knock at the door and Katharina, the widow Susannah's little daughter, came into the room. The young girl, to whom the governor's wife wished to marry her tall son scarcely reached to Paula's shoulder, but she was plump and pleasant to look upon; as neat as if she had just been taken out of a box, with a fresh, merry lovable little face. When she laughed she showed a gleaming row of small teeth, set rather wide apart, but as white as snow; and her bright eyes beamed on the world as gladly as though they had nothing that was not pleasing to look for, innocent mischief to dream of. She too, tried to win Paula's favor; but with none of Mary's devoted and unvarying enthusiasm. Often, to be sure, she would devote herself to Paula with such stormy vehemence that the elder girl was forced to be repellent; then, on the other hand, if she fancied her self slighted, or treated more coolly than Mary, she would turn her back on Paula with sulky jealousy, temper and pouting. It always was in Paula's power to put an end to the "Water-wagtails tantrums"--which generally had their comic side--by a kind word or kiss; but without some such advances Katharina was quite capable of indulging her humors to the utmost.

On the present occasion she flew into Paula's arm, and when her friend begged, more quietly than usual that she would allow her first to finish dressing, she turned away without any display of touchiness and took the necklace from Mary's hand to put it on herself. It was of fine workmanship, set with pearls, and took her fancy greatly; only the empty medallion from which Hiram had removed the emerald with his knife spoiled the whole effect. Still, it was a princely jewel, and when she had also taken from the chest a large fan of ostrich feathers she showed off to her play-fellow, with droll, stiff dignity, how the empress and princesses at Court curtsied and bowed graciously to their inferiors. At this they both laughed a great deal. When Paula had finished her toilet and proceeded to take the necklace off Katharina, the empty setting, which Hiram's knife had bent, caught in the thin tissue of her dress. Mary disengaged it, and Paula tossed the jewel back into the trunk.

While she was locking the box she asked Katharina whether she had met Orion.

"Orion!" repeated the younger girl, in a tone which implied that she alone had the right to enquire about him. "Yes, we came upstairs together; he went to see the wounded man. Have you anything to say to him?"

She crimsoned as she spoke and looked suspiciously at Paula, who simply replied: "Perhaps," and then added, as she hung the ribbon with the key round her neck: "Now, you little girls, it is breakfast time; I am not going down to-day."

"Oh, dear!" cried Mary disappointed, "my grandfather is ailing and grandmother will stay with him; so if you do not come I shall have to sit alone with Eudoxia; for Katharina's chariot is waiting and she must go home at once. Oh! do come. Just to please me; you do not know how odious Eudoxia can be when it is so hot."

"Yes, do go down," urged Katharina. "What will you do up hereby yourself? And this evening mother and I will come again."

"Very well," said Paula. "But first I must go to see the invalids."

"May I go with you?" asked the Water wagtail, coaxingly stroking Paula's arm. But Mary clapped her hands, exclaiming:

"She only wants to go to Orion--she is so fond of him..."

Katharina put her hand over the child's mouth, but Paula, with quickened breath, explained that she had very serious matters to discuss with Orion; so Katharina, turning her back on her with a hasty gesture of defiance, sulkily went

down stairs, while Mary slipped down the bannister rail. Not many days since, Katharina, who was but just sixteen, would gladly have followed her example.

Paula meanwhile knocked at the first of the sickrooms and entered it as softly as the door was opened by a nursing-sister from the convent of St. Katharine. Orion, whom she was seeking, had been there, but had just left.

In this first room lay the leader of the caravan; in that beyond was the crazy Persian. In a sitting-room adjoining the first room, which, being intended for guests of distinction, was furnished with royal magnificence, sat two men in earnest conversation: the Arab merchant and Philippus the physician, a young man of little more than thirty, tall and bony, in a dress of clean but very coarse stuff without any kind of adornment. He had a shrewd, pale face, out of which a pair of bright black eyes shone benevolently but with keen vivacity. His large cheek-bones were much too prominent; the lower part of his face was small, ugly and, as it were, compressed, while his high broad forehead crowned the whole and stamped it as that of a thinker, as a fine cupola may crown an insignificant and homely structure.

This man, devoid of charm, though his strongly-characterized individuality made it difficult to overlook him even in the midst of a distinguished circle, had been conversing eagerly with the Arab, who, in the course of their two-days' acquaintance, had inspired him with a regard which was fully reciprocated. At last Orion had been the theme of their discourse, and the physician, a restless toiler who could not like any man whose life was one of idle enjoyment, though he did full justice to his brilliant gifts and well-applied studies, had judged him far more hardly than the older man. To the leech all forms of human life were sacred, and in his eyes everything that could injure the body or soul of a man was worthy of destruction. He knew all that Orion had brought upon the hapless Mandane, and how lightly he had trifled with the hearts of other women; in his eyes this made him a mischievous and criminal member of society. He regarded life as an obligation to be discharged by work alone, of whatever kind, if only it were a benefit to society as a whole. And such youths as Orion not only did not recognize this, but used the whole and the parts also for base and selfish ends. The old Moslem, on the contrary, viewed life as a dream whose fairest portion, the time of youth, each one should enjoy with alert senses, and only take care that at the waking which must come with death he might hope to find admission into Paradise. How little could man do against the iron force of fate! That could not be forefended by hard work; there was nothing for it but to take up a right attitude, and to confront and meet it with dignity. The bark of Orion's existence lacked ballast; in fine weather it drifted wherever the breeze carried it, He himself had taken care to equip it well; and if only the chances of life should freight it heavily--very heavily, and fling it on the rocks, then Orion might show who and what he was; he, Haschim, firmly believed that his character would prove itself admirable. It was in the hour of shipwreck that a man showed his worth.

Here the physician interrupted him to prove that it was not Fate, as imagined by Moslems, but man himself who guided the bark of life--but at this moment Paula looked into the room, and he broke off. The merchant bowed profoundly, Philippus respectfully, but with more embarrassment than might have been expected from the general confidence of his manner. For some years he had been a daily visitor in the governor's house, and after carefully ignoring Paula on her first arrival, since Dame Neforis had taken to treating her so coolly he drew her out whenever he had the opportunity. Her conversations with him had now become dear and even necessary to her, though at first his dry, cutting tone had displeased her, and he had often driven her into a corner in a way that was hard to bear. They kept her mind alert in a circle which never busied itself with anything but the trivial details of family life in the decayed city, or with dogmatic polemics--for the Mukaukas seldom or never took part in the gossip of the women.

The leech never talked of daily events, but expressed his views as to other and graver subjects in life, or in books with which they were both familiar; and he had the art of eliciting replies from her which he met with wit and acumen. By degrees she had become accustomed to his bold mode of thought, sometimes, it is true, too recklessly expressed; and the gifted girl now preferred a discussion with him to any other form of conversation, recognizing that a childlike and supremely unselfish soul animated this thoughtful reservoir of all knowledge. Almost everything she did displeased her uncle's wife, and so, of course, did her familiar intercourse with this man, whose appearance certainly had in it nothing to attract a young girl.--The physician to a family of rank was there to keep its members in good health, and it was unbecoming in one of them to converse with him on intimate terms as an equal. She reproached Paula--whose pride she was constantly blaming--for her unseemly condescension to Philippus; but what chiefly annoyed her was that Paula took up many a half-hour which otherwise Philippus would have devoted to her husband; and in him and his health her life and thoughts were centred.

The Arab at once recognized his foe of the previous evening; but they soon came to a friendly understanding--Paula confessing her folly in holding a single and kindly-disposed man answerable for the crimes of a whole nation. Haschim replied that a right-minded spirit always came to a just conclusion at last; and then the conversation turned on her father, and the physician explained to the Arab that she was resolved never to weary of seeking the missing man.

"Nay, it is the sole aim and end of my life," cried the girl.

"A great mistake, in my opinion," said the leech. But the merchant differed: there were things, he said, too precious to be given up for lost, even when the hope of finding them seemed as feeble and thin as a rotten reed.

"That is what I feel!" cried Paula. "And how can you think differently, Philip? Have I not heard from your own lips

that you never give up all hope of a sick man till death has put an end to it? Well, and I cling to mine--more than ever now, and I feel that I am right. My last thought, my last coin shall be spent in the search for my father, even without my uncle and his wife, and in spite of their prohibition."

"But in such a task a young girl can hardly do without a man's succor," said the merchant. "I wander a great deal about the world, I speak with many foreigners from distant lands, and if you will do me the honor, pray regard me as your coadjutor, and allow me to help you in seeking for the lost hero."

"Thanks--I fervently thank you!" cried Paula, grasping the Moslem's hand with hearty pleasure. "Wherever you go bear my lost father in mind; I am but a poor, lonely girl, but if you find him..."

"Then you will know that even among the Moslems there are men..."

"Men who are ready to show compassion and to succor friendless women!" interrupted Paula.

"And with good success, by the blessing of the Almighty," replied the Arab. "As soon as I find a clue you shall hear from me; now, however, I must go across the Nile to see Amru the great general; I go in all confidence for I know that my poor, brave Rustem is in good hands, friend Philippus. My first enquiries shall be made in Fostat, rely upon that, my daughter."

"I do indeed," said Paula with pleased emotion. "When shall we meet again?"

"To-morrow, or the morning after at latest."

The young girl went up to him and whispered: "We have just heard of a clue; indeed, I hope my messenger is already on his way. Have you time to hear about it now?"

"I ought long since to have been on the other shore; so not to-day, but to-morrow I hope." The Arab shook hands with her and the physician, and hastily took his leave.

Paula stood still, thinking. Then it struck her that Hiram was now on the further side of the Nile, within the jurisdiction of the Arab ruler, and that the merchant could perhaps intercede for him, if she were to tell him all she knew. She felt the fullest confidence in the old man, whose kind and sympathetic face was still visible to her mind's eye, and without paying any further heed to the physician she went quickly towards the door of the sick-room. A crucifix hung close by, and the nun had fallen on her knees before it, praying for her infidel patient, and beseeching the Good Shepherd to have mercy on the sheep that was not of His fold. Paula did not venture to disturb the worshipper, who was kneeling just in the narrow passage; so some minutes elapsed before the leech, observing her uneasiness, came out of the larger room, touched the nun on the shoulder, and said in a low voice of genuine kindness:

"One moment, good Sister. Your pious intercession will be heard--but this damsel is in haste." The nun rose at once and made way, sending a wrathful glance after Paula as she hurried down the stairs.

At the door of the court-yard she looked out and about for the Arab, but in vain. Then she enquired of a slave who told her that the merchant's horse had waited for him at the gate a long time, that he had just come galloping out, and by this time must have reached the bridge of boats which connected Memphis with the island of Rodah and, beyond the island, with the fort of Babylon and the new town of Fostat.

CHAPTER XI.

Paula went up-stairs again, distressed and vexed with herself. Was it the heat that had enervated her and robbed her of the presence of mind she usually had at her command? She herself could not understand how it was that she had not at once taken advantage of the opportunity to plead to Haschim for her faithful retainer. The merchant might have interested himself for Hiram.

The slave at the gate had told her that he had not yet been taken; the time to intercede, then, had not yet come. But she was resolved to do so, to draw the wrath of her relations down on herself, and, if need should be, to relate all she had seen in the course of the night, to save her devoted servant. It was no less than her duty: still, before humiliating Orion so deeply she would warn him. The thought of charging him with so shameful a deed pained her like the need for inflicting an injury on herself. She hated him, but she would rather have broken the most precious work of art than have branded him--him whose image still reigned in her heart, supremely glorious and attractive.

Instead of following Mary to breakfast, or offering herself as usual to play draughts with her uncle, she went back to the sick-room. To meet Neforis or Orion at this moment would have been painful, indeed odious to her. It was long since she had felt so weary and oppressed. A conversation with the physician might perhaps prove refreshing; after the various agitations of the last few hours she longed for something, be it what it might, that should revive her spirits and give a fresh turn to her thoughts.

In the Masdakite's room the Sister coldly asked her what she wanted, and who had given her leave to assist in tending the sufferers. The leech, who at that moment was moistening the bandage on the wounded man's head, at this turned to the nun and informed her decidedly that he desired the young girl's assistance in attending on both his patients. Then he led the way sitting-room, saying in subdued into the adjoining tones:

"For the present all is well. Let us rest here a little while."

She sat down on a divan, and he on a seat opposite, and Philippus began:

"You were seeking handsome Orion just now, but you must...."

"What?" she asked gravely. "And I would have you to know that the son of the house is no more to me than his mother is. Your phrase 'Handsome Orion' seems to imply something that I do not again wish to hear. But I must speak to him, and soon, in reference to an important matter."

"To what, then, do I owe the pleasure of seeing you here again? To confess the truth I did not hope for your return."

"And why not?"

"Excuse me from answering. No one likes to hear unpleasant things. If one of my profession thinks any one is not well...."

"If that is meant for me," replied the girl, "all I can tell you is that the one thing on which I still can pride myself is my health. Say what you will--the very worst for aught I care. I want something to-day to rouse me from lethargy, even if it should make me angry."

"Very well then," replied the leech, "though I am plunging into deep waters!--As to health, as it is commonly understood, a fish might envy you; but the higher health--health of mind: that I fear you cannot boast of."

"This is a serious beginning," said Paula. "Your reproof would seem to imply that I have done you or some one else a wrong."

"If only you had!" exclaimed he. "No, you have not sinned against us in any way.--'I am as I am' is what you think of yourself; and what do you care for others?"

"That must depend on whom you mean by 'others!'"

"Nothing less than all and each of those with whom you live--here, in this house, in this town, in this world. To you they are mere air--or less; for the air is a tangible thing that can fill a ship's sails and drive it against the stream, whose varying nature can bring comfort or suffering to your body."

"My world is within!" said Paula, laying her hand on her heart.

"Very true. And all creation may find room there; for what cannot the human heart, as it is called, contain! The more we require it to take and keep, the more ready it is to hold it. It is unsafe to let the lock rust; for, if once it has grown stiff, when we want to open it no pulling and wrenching will avail. And besides--but I do not want to grieve you.--You have a habit of only looking backwards...."

"And what that is pleasurable lies before me? Your blame is harsh and at the same time unjust.--Indeed, and how can you tell which way I look?"

"Because I have watched you with the eye of a friend. In truth, Paula, you have forgotten how to look around and forward. The life which lies behind you and which you have lost is all your world. I once showed you on a fragmentary papyrus that belonged to my foster father, Horus Apollo, a heathen demon represented as going forwards, while his

head was turned on his neck so that the face and eyes looked behind him."

"I remember it perfectly."

"Well, you have long been just like him. 'All things move,' says Heraclitus, so you are forced to float onwards with the great stream; or, to vary the image, you must walk forwards on the high-road of life towards the common goal; but your eye is fixed on what lies behind you, feasting on the prospect of a handsome and wealthy home, kindness and tenderness, noble and loving faces, and a happy, but alas! long-lost existence. All the same, on you must go.--What must the result be?"

"I must stumble, you think, and fall?"

The physician's reproof had hit Paula all the harder because she could not conceal from herself that there was much truth in it. She had come hither on purpose to find encouragement, and these accusations troubled even her sense of high health. Why should she submit to be taken to task like a school-girl by this man, himself still young? If this went on she would let him hear.... But he was speaking again, and his reply calmed her, and strengthened her conviction that he was a true and well-meaning friend.

"Not that perhaps," he said, "because--well, because nature has blessed you with perfect balance, and you go forward in full self-possession as becomes the daughter of a hero. We must not forget that it is of your soul that I am speaking; and that maintains its innate dignity of feeling among so much that is petty and mean."

"Then why need I fear to look back when it gives me so much comfort?" she eagerly enquired, as she gazed in his face with fresh spirit.

"Because it may easily lead you to tread on other people's feet! That hurts them; then they are annoyed, and they get accustomed to think grudgingly of you--you who are more lovable than they are."

"But quite unjustly; for I am not conscious of ever having intentionally grieved or hurt any one in my whole life."

"I know that; but you have done so unintentionally a thousand times."

"Then it would be better I should quit them altogether."

"No, and a thousand times no! The man who avoids his kind and lives in solitude fancies he is doing some great thing and raising himself above the level of the existence he despises. But look a little closer: it is self-interest and egoism which drive him into the cave and the cloister. In any case he neglects his highest duty towards humanity--or let us say merely towards the society he belongs to--in order to win what he believes to be his own salvation. Society is a great body, and every individual should regard himself as a member of it, bound to serve and succor it, and even, when necessary, to make sacrifices for it. The greatest are not too great. But those who crave isolation,--you yourself--nay, hear me out, for I may never again risk the danger of incurring your wrath--desire to be a body apart. What Paula has known and possessed, she keeps locked in the treasure-house of her memory under bolt and key; What Paula is, she feels she still must be--and for whom? Again, for that same Paula. She has suffered great sorrow and on that her soul lives; but this is evil nourishment, unwholesome and bad for her."

She was about to rise; but he bent forward, with a zealous conviction that he must not allow himself to be interrupted, and lightly touched her arm as though to prevent her quitting her seat, while he went on unhesitatingly:

"You feed on your old sorrows! Well and good. Many a time have I seen that trial can elevate the soul. It can teach a brave heart to feel the woes of others more deeply; it can rouse a desire to assuage the griefs of others with beautiful self-devotion. Those who have known pain and affliction enjoy ease and pleasure with double satisfaction; sufferers learn to be grateful for even the smaller joys of life. But you?--I have long striven for courage to tell you so--you derive no benefit from suffering because you lock it up in your breast--as if a man were to enclose some precious seed in a silver trinket to carry about with him. It should be sown in the earth, to sprout and bear fruit! However, I do not blame you; I only wish to advise you as a true and devoted friend. Learn to feel yourself a member of the body to which your destiny has bound you for the present, whether you like it or not. Try to contribute to it all that your capacities allow you achieve. You will find that you can do something for it; the casket will open, and to your surprise and delight you will perceive that the seed dropped into the soil will germinate, that flowers will open and fruit will form of which you may make bread, or extract from it a balm for yourself or for others! Then you will leave the dead to bury the dead, as the Bible has it, and dedicate to the living those great powers and gracious gifts which an illustrious father and a noble mother--nay, and a long succession of distinguished ancestors, have bequeathed to a descendant worthy of them. Then you will recover that which you have lost: the joy in existence which we ought both to feel and to diffuse, because it brings with it an obligation which it which is only granted to us once to fulfil. Kind fate has fitted you above a hundred thousand others for being loved; and if you do not forget the gratitude you owe for that, hearts will be turned to you, though now they shun the tree which has beset itself intentionally with thorns, and which lets its branches droop like the weeping-willows by the Nile. Thus you will lead a new and beautiful life, receiving and giving joy. The isolated and charmless existence you drag through here, to the satisfaction of none and least of all to your own, you can transform to one of fruition and satisfaction--breathing and moving healthily and beneficently in the light of day. It lies in your power. When you came up here to give your care to these poor injured creatures, you took the

first step in the new path I desire to show you, to true happiness. I did not expect you, and I am thankful that you have come; for I know that as you entered that door you may have started on the road to renewed happiness, if you have the will to walk in it.--Thank God! That is said and over!"

The leech rose and wiped his forehead, looking uneasily at Paula who had remained seated; her breath came fast, and she was more confused and undecided than he had ever seen her. She clasped her hand over her brow, and gazed, speechless, into her lap as though she wished to smother some pain.

The young physician beat his arms together, like a laborer in the winter when his hands are frozen, and exclaimed with distressful emotion: "Yes, I have spoken, and I cannot regret having done so; but what I foresaw has come to pass: The greatest happiness that ever sweetened my daily life is gone out of it! To love Plato is a noble rule, but greater than Plato is the truth; and yet, those who preach it must be prepared to find that truth scares away friends from the unpleasing vicinity of its ill-starred Apostles!"

At this Paula rose, and following the impulse of her generous heart, offered the leech her hand in all sincerity; he grasped it in both his, pressing it so tightly that it almost hurt her, and his eyes glistened with moisture as he exclaimed: "That is as I hoped; that is splendid, that is noble! Let me but be your brother, high-souled maiden!--Now, come. That poor, crazy, lovely girl will heal of her death-wound under your hands if under any!"

"I will come!" she replied heartily; and there was something healthy and cheerful in her manner as they entered the sick-room; but her expression suddenly changed, and she asked pensively:

"And supposing we restore the unhappy girl--what good will she get by it?"

"She will breathe and see the sunshine," replied the leech; "she will be grateful to you, and finally she will contribute what she can to the whole body. She will be alive in short, she will live. For life--feel it, understand it as I do--life is the best thing we have." Paula gazed with astonishment in the man's unlovely but enthusiastic face. How radiantly joyful!

No one could have called it ugly at this moment, or have said that it lacked charm.

He believed what he had asserted with such fervent feeling, though it was in contradiction to a view he had held only yesterday and often defended: that life in itself was misery to all who could not grasp it of their own strength, and make something of it worth making. At this moment he really felt that it was the best gift.

Paula went forward, and his eyes followed her, as the gaze of the pious pilgrim is fixed on the holy image he has travelled to see, over seas and mountains, with bruised feet.

They went up to the sick girl's bed. The nun drew back, making her own reflections on the physician's altered mien, and his childlike, beaming contentment, as he explained to Paula what particular peril threatened the sufferer, and by what treatment he hoped to save her; how to make the bandages and give the medicines, and how necessary it was to accept the poor crazy girl's fancies and treat them as rational ideas so long as the fever lasted.

At last he was forced to go and attend to other patients. Paula remained sitting at the head of the bed and gazing at the face of the sufferer.

How fair it was! And Orion had snatched this rose in the bud, and trodden it under foot! She had, no doubt, felt for him what Paula herself felt. And now? Did she feel nothing but hatred of him, or could her heart, in spite of her indignation and scorn, not altogether cast off the spell that had once bound it?

What weakness was this! She was, she must, she would be his foe!

Her thoughts went back to the idle and futile life that she had led for so many years. The physician had hit the mark; and he had been too easy rather than severe. Yes, she would begin to make good use of her powers--but how, in what way, here and among these people? How transfigured poor Philippus had seemed when she had given him her hand; with what energy had he poured forth his words.

"And how false," she mused, "is the saying that the body is the mirror of the soul! If it were so, Philippus would have the face of Orion, and Orion that of Philippus." But could Orion's heart be wholly reprobate? Nay, that was impossible; her every impulse resisted the belief. She must either love him or hate him, there was no third alternative; but as yet the two passions were struggling within her in a way that was quite intolerable.

The physician had spoken of being a brother to her, and she could not help smiling at the idea. She could, she thought, live very happily and calmly with him, with her nurse Betta, and with the learned old friend who shared his home, and of whom he had often talked to her; she could join him in his studies, help him in his calling, and discuss many things well worth knowing. Such a life, she told herself, would be a thousand times preferable to this, with Neforis. In him she had certainly found a friend; and her glad recognition of the fact was the first step towards the fulfilment of his promise, since it showed that her heart was still ready to go forth to the kindness of another.

Amid these meditations, however, her anxiety for Hiram constantly recurred to her, and it was clear to her mind that, if she and Orion should come to extremities, she could no longer dwell under the governor's roof. Often she had longed for nothing so fervently as to be able to quit it; but to-day it filled her with dread, for parting from her uncle necessarily involved parting from his son. She hated him; still, to lose sight of him altogether would be very hard to bear. To go

with Philippus and live with him as his sister would never do; nay, it struck her as something inconceivable, strangely incongruous.

Meanwhile she listened to Mandane's breathing and treated her in obedience to the leech's orders, longing for his return; presently however, not he but the nun came to the bed-side, laid her hand on the girl's forehead, and without paying any heed to Paula, whispered kindly: "That is right child, sleep away; have a nice long sleep. So long as she can be kept quiet; if only she goes on like this!--Her head is cooler. Philippus will certainly say there is scarcely any fever. Thank God, the worst danger is over!"

"Oh, how glad I am!" cried Paula, and she spoke with such warmth and sincerity that the nun gave her a friendly nod and left the sick girl to her care, quite satisfied.

It was long since Paula had felt so happy. She fancied that her presence had had a good affect on the sufferer, that Mandane had already been brought by her nursing to the threshold of a new life. Paula, who but just now had regarded herself as a persecuted victim of Fate, now breathed more freely in the belief that she too might bring joy to some one. She looked into Mandane's more than pretty face with real joy and tenderness, laid the bandage which had slipped aside gently over her ears, and breathed a soft kiss on her long silken lashes.

She rapidly grew in favor with the shrewd nun; when the hour for prayer came round, the sister included in her petitions--Paula--the orphan under a stranger's roof, the Greek girl born, by the inscrutable decrees of God, outside the pale of her saving creed. At length Philippus returned; he was rejoiced at his new friend's brightened aspect, and declared that Mandane had, under her care, got past the first and worst danger, and might be expected to recover, slowly indeed, but completely.

After Paula had renewed the compress--and he intentionally left her to do it unaided, he said encouragingly:

"How quickly you have learnt your business.--Now, the patient is asleep again; the Sister will keep watch, and for the present we can be of no use to the girl; sleep is the best nourishment she can have. But with us--or at any rate with me, it is different. We have still two hours to wait for the next meal: my breakfast is standing untouched, and yours no doubt fared the same; so be my guest. They always send up enough to satisfy six bargemen."

Paula liked the proposal, for she had long been hungry. The nun was desired to hasten to fetch some more plates, of drinking-vessels there was no lack--and soon the new allies were seated face to face, each at a small table. He carved the duck and the roast quails, put the salad before her and some steaming artichokes, which the nun had brought up at the request of the cook whose only son the physician had saved; he invited her attention to the little pies, the fruits and cakes which were laid ready, and played the part of butler; and then, while they heartily enjoyed the meal, they carried on a lively conversation.

Paula for the first time asked Philippus to tell her something of his early youth; he began with an account of his present mode of life, as a partner in the home of the singular old priest of Isis, Horus Apollo, a diligent student; he described his strenuous activity by day and his quiet studies by night, and gave everything such an amusing aspect that often she could not help laughing. But presently he was sad, as he told her how at an early age he had lost his father and mother, and was left to depend solely on himself and on a very small fortune, having no relations; for his father had been a grammarian, invited to Alexandria from Athens, who had been forced to make a road for himself through life, which had lain before him like an overgrown jungle of papyrus and reeds. Every hour of his life was devoted to his work, for a rough, outspoken Goliath, such as he, never could find it easy to meet with helpful patrons. He had managed to live by teaching in the high schools of Alexandria, Athens, and Caesarea, and by preparing medicines from choice herbs--drinking water instead of wine, eating bread and fruit instead of quails and pies; and he had made a friend of many a good man, but never yet of a woman--it would be difficult with such a face as his!

"Then I am the first?" said Paula, who felt deep respect for the man who had made his way by his own energy to the eminent position which he had long held, not merely in Memphis, but among Egyptian physicians generally.

He nodded, and with such a blissful smile that she felt as though a sunbeam had shone into her very soul. He noticed this at once, raised his goblet, and drank to her, exclaiming with a flush on his cheek:

"The joy that comes to others early has come to me late; but then the woman I call my friend is matchless!"

"Well, it is to be hoped she may not prove to be so wicked as you just now described her.--If only our alliance is not fated to end soon and abruptly."

"Ah!" cried the physician, "every drop of blood in my veins...."

"You would be ready to shed it for me," Paula broke in, with a pathetic gesture, borrowed from a great tragedian she had seen at the theatre in Damascus. "But never fear: it will not be a matter of life and death--at worst they will but turn me out of the house and of Memphis."

"You?" cried Philippus startled, "but who would dare to do so?"

"They who still regard me as a stranger.--You described the case admirably. If they have their way, my dear new friend, our fate will be like that of the learned Dionysius of Cyrene."

"Of Cyrene?"

"Yes. It was my father who told me the story. When Dionysius sent his son to the High School at Athens, he sat down to write a treatise for him on all the things a student should do and avoid. He devoted himself to the task with the utmost diligence; but when, at the end of four years, he could write on the last leaf of the roll. 'Here this book hath a happy ending,' the young man whose studies it was intended to guide came home to Cyrene, a finished scholar."

"And we have struck up a friendship...?"

"And made a treaty of alliance, only to be parted ere long."

Philippus struck his fist vehemently on the little table in front of his couch and exclaimed: "That I will find means to prevent!--But now, tell me in confidence, what has last happened between you and the family down-stairs?"

"You will know quite soon enough."

"Whichever of them fancies that you can be turned out of doors without more ado and there will be an end between us, may find himself mistaken!" cried the physician with an angry sparkle in his eyes. "I have a right to put in a word in this house. It has not nearly come to that yet, and what is more, it never shall. You shall quit it certainly; but of your own free will, and holding your head high...."

As he spoke the door of the outer room was hastily opened and the next instant Orion was standing before them, looking with great surprise at the pair who had just finished their meal. He said coldly:

"I am disturbing you, I see."

"Not in the least," replied the leech; and the young man, perceiving what bad taste it would be and how much out of place to give expression to his jealous annoyance, said, with a smile: "If only it had been granted to a third person to join in this symposium!"

"We found each other all-sufficient company," answered Philippus.

"A man who could believe in all the doctrines of the Church as readily as in that statement would be assured of salvation," laughed Orion. "I am no spoilsport, respected friends; but I deeply regret that I must, on the present occasion, disturb your happiness. The matter in question...." And he felt he might now abandon the jesting tone which so little answered to his mood, "is a serious one. In the first instance it concerns your freedman, my fair foe."

"Has Hiram come back?" asked Paula, feeling herself turn pale.

"They have brought him in," replied Orion. "My father at once summoned the court of judges. Justice has a swift foot here with us; I am sorry for the man, but I cannot prevent its taking its course. I must beg of you to appear at the examination when you are called."

"The whole truth shall be told!" said Paula sternly and firmly.

"Of course," replied Orion. Then turning to the physician, he added: "I would request you, worthy Esculapius, to leave me and my cousin together for a few minutes. I want to give her a word of counsel which will certainly be to her advantage."

Philippus glanced enquiringly at the girl; she said with clear decision: "You and I can have no secrets. What I may hear, Philippus too may know."

Orion, with a shrug, turned to leave the room:

On the threshold he paused, exclaiming with some excitement and genuine distress:

"If you will not listen to me for your own sake, do so at least, whatever ill-feeling you may bear me, because I implore you not to refuse me this favor. It is a matter of life or death to one human being, of joy or misery to another. Do not refuse me.--I ask nothing unreasonable, Philippus. Do as I entreat you and leave us for a moment alone."

Again the physician's eyes consulted the young girl's; this time she said: "Go!" and he immediately quitted the room.

Orion closed the door.

"What have I done, Paula," he began with panting breath, "that since yesterday you have shunned me like a leper--that you are doing your utmost to bring me to ruin?"

"I mean to plead for the life of a trusty servant; nothing more," she said indifferently.

"At the risk of disgracing me!" he retorted bitterly.

"At that risk, no doubt, if you are indeed so base as to throw your own guilt on the shoulders of an honest man."

"Then you watched me last night?"

"The merest chance led me to see you come out of the tablinum...."

"I do not ask you now what took you there so late," he interrupted, "for it revolts me to think anything of you but the best, the highest.--But you? What have you experienced at my hands but friendship--nay, for concealment or dissimulation is here folly--but what a lover...?"

"A lover!" cried Paula indignantly. "A lover? Dare you utter the word, when you have offered your heart and hand to

another--you...."

"Who told you so?" asked Orion gloomily.

"Your own mother."

"That is it; so that is it?" cried the young man, clasping his hands convulsively. "Now I begin to see, now I understand. But stay. For if it is indeed that which has roused you to hate me and persecute me, you must love me, Paula--you do love me, and then, noblest and sweetest...." He held out his hand; but she struck it aside, exclaiming in a tremulous voice:

"Be under no delusion. I am not one of the feeble lambs whom you have beguiled by the misuse of your gifts and advantages; and who then are eager to kiss your hands. I am the daughter of Thomas; and another woman's betrothed, who craves my embraces on the way to his wedding, will learn to his rueing that there are women who scorn his disgraceful suit and can avenge the insult intended them. Go--go to your judges! You, a false witness, may accuse Hiram, but I will proclaim you, you the son of this house, as the thief! We shall see which they believe."

"Me!" cried Orion, and his eyes flashed as wrathfully and vindictively as her own. "The son of the Mukaukas! Oh, that you were not a woman! I would force you to your knees and compel you to crave my pardon. How dare you point your finger at a man whose life has hitherto been as spotless as your own white raiment? Yes, I did go to the tablinum--I did tear the emerald from the hanging; but I did it in a fit of recklessness, and in the knowledge that what is my father's is mine. I threw away the gem to gratify a mere fancy, a transient whim. Cursed be the hour when I did it!--Not on account of the deed itself, but of the consequences it may entail through your mad hatred. Jealousy, petty, unworthy jealousy is at the bottom of it! And of whom are you jealous?"

"Of no one; not even of your betrothed, Katharina," replied Paula with forced composure. "What are you to me that, to spare you humiliation, I should risk the life of the most honest soul living? I have said: The judges shall decide between you."

"No, they shall not!" stormed Orion. "At least, not as you intend! Beware, beware, I say, of driving me to extremities! I still see in you the woman I loved; I still offer you what lies within my power: to let everything end for the best for you...."

"For me! Then I, too, am to suffer for your guilt?"

"Did you hear the barking of hounds just now?"

"I heard dogs yelping."

"Very well.--Your freedman has been brought in, the pack got on his scent and have now been let into the house close to the tablinum. The dogs would not stir beyond the threshold and on the white marble step, towards the right-hand side, the print of a man's foot was found in the dust. It is a peculiar one, for instead of five toes there are but three. Your Hiram was fetched in, and he was found to have the same number of toes as the mark on the marble, neither more nor less. A horse trod on his foot, in your father's stable, and two of his toes had to be cut off: we got this out of the stammering wretch with some difficulty.--On the other side of the door-way there was a smaller print, but though the dogs paid no heed to that I examined it, and assured myself--how, I need not tell you--that it was you who had stood there. He, who has no business whatever in the house, must have made his way last night into the tablinum, our treasury. Now, put yourself in the judges' place. How can such facts be outweighed by the mere word of a girl who, as every one knows, is on anything rather than good terms with my mother, and who will leave no stone unturned to save her servant."

"Infamous!" cried Paula. "Hiram did not steal the gem, as you must know who stole it. The emerald he sold was my property; and were those stones really so much alike that even the seller..."

"Yes, indeed. He could not tell one from the other. Evil spirits have been at work all through, devilish, malignant demons. It would be enough to turn one's brain, if life were not so full of enigmas! You yourself are the greatest.--Did you give the Syrian your emerald to sell in order to fly from this house with the money?--You are silent? Then I am right. What can my father be to you--you do not love my mother--and the son!--Paula, Paula, you are perhaps doing him an injustice--you hate him, and it is a pleasure to you to injure him."

"I do not wish to hurt you or any one," replied the girl. "And you have guessed wrongly. Your father refused me the means of seeking mine."

"And you wanted to procure money to search for one who is long since dead!--Even my mother admits that you speak the truth; if she is right, and you really take no pleasure in doing me a mischief, listen to me, follow my advice, and grant my prayer! I do not ask any great matter."

"Speak on then."

"Do you know what a man's honor is to him? Need I tell you that I am a lost and despised man if I am found guilty of this act of the maddest folly by the judges of my own house? It may cost my father his life if he hears that the word 'guilty' is pronounced on me; and I--I--what would become of me I cannot foresee!--I--oh God, oh God, preserve me

from frenzy!--But I must be calm; time presses.... How different it is for your servant; he seems ready even now to take the guilt on himself, for, whatever he is asked, he still keeps silence. Do you do the same; and if the judges insist on knowing what you had to do with the Syrian last night--for the dogs traced the scent to your staircase--hazard a conjecture that the faithful fellow stole the emerald in order to gratify your desire to search for your father, his beloved master. If you can make up your mind to so great a sacrifice--oh, that I should have to ask it of you!--I swear to you by all I hold sacred, by yourself and by my father's head, I will set Hiram free within three days, unbeaten and unhurt, and magnificently indemnified; and I will myself help him on the way whither he may desire to go, or you to send him, in search of your father.--Be silent; remain neutral in the background; that is all I ask, and I will keep my word--that, at any rate, you do not doubt?" She had listened to him with bated breath; she pitied him deeply as he stood there, a suppliant in bitter anguish of soul, a criminal who still could not understand that he was one, and who relied on the confidence that, only yesterday, he still had had the right to exact from all the world. He appeared before her like a fine proud tree struck by lightning, whose riven trunk, trembling to its fall, must be crushed to the earth by the first storm, unless the gardener props it up. She longed to be able to forget all he had brought upon her and to grasp his hand in friendly consolation; but her deeply aggrieved pride helped her to preserve the cold and repellent manner she had so far succeeded in assuming.

With much hesitation and reserve she consented to be silent as long as he kept his promise. It was for his father's sake, rather than his own, that she would so far become his accomplice: at the same time everything else was at an end between them, and she should bless the hour which might see her severed from him and his for ever.

The end of her speech was in a strangely hard and repellent tone; she felt she must adopt it to disguise how deeply she was touched by his unhappiness and by the extinction of the sunshine in him which had once warmed her own heart too with bliss. To him it seemed that an icy rigor breathed in her words--bitter contempt and hostile revulsion. He had some difficulty in keeping himself from breaking out again in violent wrath. He was almost sorry that he had trusted her with his secret and begged her for mercy, instead of leaving things to run their course, and if it had come to the worst, dragging her to perdition with him. Sooner would he forfeit honor and peace than humble himself again before this pitiless and cold-hearted foe. At this moment he really hated her, and only wished it were possible to fight her, to break her pride, to see her vanquished and crying for quarter at his feet. It was with a great effort--with tingling cheeks and constrained utterance that he said:

"Severance from you is indeed best for us all.--Be ready: the judges will send for you soon."

"Very well," she replied. "I will be silent; you have only to provide for the Syrian's safety. You have given me your word."

"And so long as you keep yours I will keep mine. Or else..." the words would come from his quivering lips--"or else war to the knife!"

"War to the knife!" she echoed with flashing eyes. "But one thing more. I have proof that the emerald which Hiram sold belonged to me. By all the saints--proof!"

"So much the better for you," he said. "Woe to us both, if you force me to forget that you are a woman!"

And he left the room with a rapid step.

CHAPTER XII.

Orion went down stairs scowling and clenching his fists. His heart ached to bursting.

What had he done, what had befallen him? That a woman should dare to treat him so!--a woman whom he had deigned to love--the loveliest and noblest of women; but at the same time the haughtiest, most vengeful, and most hateful.

He had once read this maxim: "When a man has committed a base action, if only one other knows of it he carries the death-warrant of his peace in the bosom of his garment." He felt the full weight of this sentence; and the other--the one who knew--was Paula, the woman of all others whom he most wished should look up to him. But yesterday it had been a vision of heaven on earth to dream of holding her in his arms and calling her his; now he had but one wish: that he could humble and punish her. Oh, that his hands should be tied, that he should be dependent on her mercy like a condemned criminal! It was inconceivable--intolerable!

But she should be taught to know him. He had passed through life hitherto as white as a swan; if this luckless hour and this woman made him appear as a vulture, it was not his fault, it was hers. She should soon see which was the stronger of the two. He would punish her in every way in which a woman can be punished, even if the way to it led through crime and misery! He was not afraid that the leech had won her affections, for he knew, with strange certainty that, in spite of the hostility she displayed, her heart was his and his alone. "The gold coin called love," said he to himself, "has two faces: tender devotion and bitter aversion; just now she is showing me the latter. But, however different the image and superscription may be on the two sides, if you ring it, it always gives out the same tone; and I can hear it even in her most insulting words."

When the family met at table he made Paula's excuses; he himself ate only a few mouthfuls, for the judges had assembled some time since and were waiting for him.

The right of life and death had been placed in the hands of the ancestors of the Mukaukas, powerful princes of provinces; they had certainly wielded it even in the dynasty of Psammitichus, whose power had been put to a terrible end by Cambyses the Persian. And still the Uraeus snake--the asp whose bite caused almost instant death, reared its head as the time-honored emblem of this privilege, by the side of St. George the Dragon-slayer, over the palaces of the Mukaukas at Memphis, and at Lycopolis in Upper Egypt. And in both these places the head of the family retained the right of arbitrary judgment and capital punishment over the retainers of his house and the inhabitants of the district he governed, after Justinian first, and then the Emperor Heraclius, had confirmed them in their old prerogative. The chivalrous St. George was placed between the snakes so as to replace a heathen symbol by a Christian one. Formerly indeed the knight himself had had the head of a sparrow-hawk: that is to say of the god Horus, who had overthrown the evil-spirit, Seth-Typhon, to avenge his father; but about two centuries since the heathen crocodile-destroyer had been transformed into the Christian conqueror of the dragon.

After the Arab conquest the Moslems had left all ancient customs and rights undisturbed, including those of the Mukaukas.

The court which assembled to sit in judgment on all cases concerning the adherents of the house consisted of the higher officials of the governor's establishment. The Mukaukas himself was president, and his grown-up son was his natural deputy. During Orion's absence, Nilus, the head of the exchequer, a shrewd and judicious Egyptian, had generally represented his invalid master; but on the present occasion Orion was appointed to take his place, and to preside over the assembly.

The governor's son hastened to his father's bedroom to beg him to lend him his ring as a token of the authority transferred to him; the Mukaukas had willingly allowed him to take it off his finger, and had enjoined him to exercise relentless severity. Generally he inclined to leniency; but breaking into a house was punishable with death, and in this instance it was but right to show no mercy, out of deference to the Arab merchant. But Orion, mindful of his covenant with Paula, begged his father to give him full discretion. The old Moslem was a just man, who would agree to a mitigated sentence under the circumstances; besides, the culprit was not in strict fact a member of the household, but in the service of a relation.

The Mukaukas applauded his son's moderation and judgment. If only he had been in rather better health he himself would have had the pleasure of being present at the sitting, to see him fulfil for the first time so important a function, worthy of his birth and position.

Orion kissed his father's hand with heart-felt but melancholy emotion, for this praise from the man he so truly loved was a keen pleasure; and yet he felt that it was of ill-omen that his duties as judge, of which he knew the sacred solemnity, should be thus--thus begun.

It was in a softened mood, sunk in thought as to how he could best save Hiram and leave Paula's name altogether out of the matter, that he went to the hall of justice; and there he found the nurse Perpetua in eager discussion with Nilus.

The old woman was quite beside herself. In the clatter of her loom she had heard nothing of what had been going on till a few minutes ago; now she was ready to swear to the luckless Hiram's innocence. The stone he had sold had belonged to his young mistress, and thank God there was no lack of evidence of the fact; the setting of the emerald was lying safe and sound in Paula's trunk. Happily she had had an opportunity of speaking to her; and that she, the daughter of Thomas, should be brought before the tribunal, like a citizen's daughter or slave-girl, was unheard of, shameful!

At this Orion roughly interfered; he desired the old gate-keeper to conduct Perpetua at once to the storeroom next to the tablinum, where the various stuffs prepared for the use of the household were laid by, and to keep her there under safe guard till further notice. The tone in which he gave the order was such that even the nurse did not remonstrate; and Nilus, for his part obeyed in silence when Orion bid him return to his place among the judges.

Nilus went back to the judgment-hall in uneasy consternation. Never before had he seen his young lord in this mood. As he heard the nurse's statement the veins had swelled in his smooth youthful forehead, his nostrils had quivered with convulsive agitation, his voice had lost all its sweetness, and his eyes had a sinister gleam.

Orion was now alone; he ground his teeth with rage. Paula had betrayed him in spite of her promise, and how mean was her woman's cunning! She could be silent before the judges--yes. Silent in all confidence now, to the very last; but the nurse, her mouthpiece, had already put Nilus, the keenest and most important member of the court, in possession of the evidence which spoke for her and against him. It was shocking, disgraceful! Base and deliberately malicious treachery. But the end was not yet: he still was free to act and to ward off the spiteful stroke by a counterthrust. How it should be dealt was clear from Perpetua's statement; but his conscience, his instincts and long habits of submission to what was right, good, and fitting held him back. Not only had he never himself done a base or a mean action; he loathed it in another, and the only thing he could do to render Paula's perfidy harmless was, as he could not deny, original and bold, but at the same time detestable and shameful.

Still, he could not and he would not succumb in this struggle. Time pressed. Long reflection was impossible; suddenly he felt carried away by a fierce and mad longing to fight it out--he felt as he had felt on a race-day in the hippodrome, when he had driven his own quadriga ahead of all the rest.

Onwards, then, onwards; and if the chariot were wrecked, if the horses were killed, if his wheels maimed his comrades overthrown in the arena--still, onwards, onwards!

A few hasty steps brought him to the lodge of the gate-keeper, a sturdy old man who had held his post for forty years. He had formerly been a locksmith and it still was part of his duty to undertake the repairs of the simple household utensils. Orion as a youth had been a beautiful and engaging boy and a great favorite with this worthy man; he had delighted in sitting in his little room and handing him the tools for his work. He himself had remarkable mechanical facility and had been the old man's apt pupil; nay, he had made such progress as to be able to carve pretty little boxes, prayer-book cases, and such like, and provide them with locks, as gifts to his parents on their birth days--a festival always kept with peculiar solemnity in Egypt, and marked by giving and receiving presents. He understood the use of tools, and he now hastily selected such as he needed. On the window-ledge stood a bunch of flowers which he had ordered for Paula the day before, and which he had forgotten to fetch this terrible morning. With this in one hand, and the tools in the breast of his robe he hastened upstairs.

"Onwards, I must keep on!" he muttered, as he entered Paula's room, bolted the door inside and, kneeling before her chest, tossed the flowers aside. If he was discovered, he would say that he had gone into his cousin's chamber to give her the bouquet.

"Onwards; I must go on!" was still his thought, as he unscrewed the hinge on which the lid of the trunk moved. His hands trembled, his breath came fast, but he did his task quickly. This was the right way to work, for the lock was a peculiar one, and could not have been opened without spoiling it. He raised the lid, and the first thing his hand came upon in the chest was the necklace with the empty medallion--it was as though some kind Genius were aiding him. The medallion hung but slightly to the elegantly-wrought chain; to detach it and conceal it about his person was the work of a minute.

But now the most resolute. "On, on...." was of no further avail. This was theft: he had robbed her whom, if she only had chosen it, he was ready to load with everything wherewith fate had so superabundantly blessed him. No, this--this....

A singular idea suddenly flashed through his brain; a thought which brought a smile to his lips even at this moment of frightful tension. He acted upon it forth with: he drew out from within his under-garment a gem that hung round his neck by a gold chain. This jewel--a masterpiece by one of the famous Greek engravers of heathen antiquity--had been given him in Constantinople in exchange for a team of four horses to which his greatest friend there had taken a fancy. It was in fact of greater price than half a dozen fine horses. Half beside himself, and as if intoxicated, Orion followed the wild impulse to which he had yielded; indeed, he was glad to have so precious a jewel at hand to hang in the place of the worthless gold frame-work. It was done with a pinch; but screwing up the hinge again was a longer task, for his hands trembled violently--and as the moment drew near in which he meant to let Paula feel his power, the more quickly

his heart beat, and the more difficult he found it to control his mind to calm deliberation.

After he had unbolted the door he stood like a thief spying the long corridor of the strangers' wing, and this increased his excitement to a frenzy of rage with the world, and fate, and most of all with her who had compelled him to stoop to such base conduct. But now the charioteer had the reins and goad in his hand. Onwards now, onwards!

He flew down stairs, three steps at a time, as he had been wont when a boy. In the anteroom he met Eudoxia, Mary's Greek governess, who had just brought her refractory pupil into the house, and he tossed her the nosegay he still held in his hands; then, without heeding the languishing glances the middle-aged damsel sent after him with her thanks, he hastened back to the gate-keeper's lodge where he hurriedly disburdened himself of the locksmith's tools.

A few minutes later he entered the judgment-hall. Nilus the treasurer showed him to the governor's raised seat, but an overpowering bashfulness kept him from taking this position of honor. It was with a burning brow, and looks so ominously dark that the assembly gazed at him with timid astonishment, that he opened the proceedings with a few broken sentences. He himself scarcely knew what he was saying, and heard his own voice as vaguely as though it were the distant roar of waves. However, he succeeded in clearly stating all that had happened: he showed the assembly the stone which had been stolen and recovered; he explained how the thief had been taken; he declared Paula's freedman to be guilty of the robbery, and called upon him to bring forward anything he could in his own defence. But the accused could only stammer out that he was not guilty. He was not able to defend himself, but his mistress could no doubt give evidence that would justify him.

Orion pushed the hair from his forehead, proudly raised his aching head, and addressed the judges:

"His mistress is a lady of rank allied to our house. Let us keep her out of this odious affair as is but seemly. Her nurse gave Nilus some information which may perhaps avail to save this unhappy man. We will neglect nothing to that end; but you, who are less familiar with the leading circumstances, must bear this in mind to guard yourselves against being misled: This lady is much attached to the accused; she clings to him and Perpetua as the only friends remaining to her from her native home. Moreover, there is nothing to surprise me or you in the fact that a noble woman, as she is, should assume the onus of another's crime, and place herself in a doubtful light to save a man who has hitherto been honest and faithful. The nurse is here; shall she be called, or have you, Nilus, heard from her everything that her mistress can say in favor of her freedman?"

"Perpetua told me, and told you, too, my lord, certain credible facts," replied the treasurer. "But I could not repeat them so exactly as she herself, and I am of opinion that the woman should be brought before the court."

"Then call her," said Orion, fixing his eyes on vacancy above the heads of the assembly, with a look of sullen dignity.

After a long and anxious pause the old woman was brought in. Confident in her righteous cause she came forward boldly; she blamed Hiram somewhat sharply for keeping silence so long, and then explained that Paula, to procure money for her search for her father, had made the freedman take a costly emerald out of its setting in her necklace, and that it was the sale of this gem that had involved her fellow-countryman in this unfortunate suspicion.

The nurse's deposition seemed to have biased the greater part of the council in favor of the accused; but Orion did not give them time to discuss their impressions among themselves. Hardly had Perpetua ceased speaking, when Orion took up the emerald, which was lying on the table before him, exclaiming excitedly, nay, angrily:

"And the stone which is recognized by the man who sold it--an expert in gems--as being that which was taken from the hanging, and unique of its kind, is supposed, by some miracle of nature, to have suddenly appeared in duplicate?--Malignant spirits still wander through the world, but would hardly dare to play their tricks in this Christian house. You all know what 'old women's tales' are; and the tale that old woman has told us is one of the most improbable of its class. 'Tell that to Apelles the Jew,' said Horace the Roman; but his fellow-Israelite, Gamaliel!--and he turned to the jeweller who was sitting with the other witnesses will certainly not believe it; still less I, who see through this tissue of falsehood. The daughter of the noble Thomas has condescended to weave it with the help of that woman--a skilled weaver, she--to spread it before us in order to mislead us, and so to save her faithful servant from imprisonment, from the mines, or from death. These are the facts.--Do I err, woman, or do you still adhere to your statement?"

The nurse, who had hoped to find in Orion her mistress' advocate, had listened to his speech with growing horror. Her eyes flashed as she looked at him, first with mockery and then with vehement disgust; but, though they filled with tears at this unlooked-for attack, she preserved her presence of mind, and declared she had spoken the truth, and nothing but the truth, as she always did. The setting of her mistress' emerald would prove her statement.

Orion shrugged his shoulders, desired the woman to fetch her mistress, whose presence was now indispensable, and called to the treasurer:

"Go with her, Nilus! And let a servant bring the trunk here that the owner may open it in the presence of us all and before any one else touches the contents. I should not be the right person to undertake it since no one in this Jacobite household--hardly even one of yourselves--has found favor in the eyes of the Melchite. She has unfortunately a special aversion for me, so I must depute to others every proceeding that could lead to a misunderstanding.--Conduct her hither, Nilus; of course with the respect due to a maiden of high rank."

While the envoy was gone Orion paced the room with swift, restless steps, Once only he paused and addressed the judges:

"But supposing the empty setting should be found, how do you account for the existence of two--two gems, each unique of its kind? It is distracting. Here is a soft-hearted girl daring to mislead a serious council of justice for the sake, for the sake of...." he stamped his foot with rage and continued his silent march.

"He is as yet but a beginner," thought the assembled officials as they watched his agitation. "Otherwise how could he allow such an absurd attempt to clear an accused thief to affect him so deeply, or disturb his temper?"

Paula's arrival presently put an end to Orion's pacing the room. He received her with a respectful bow and signed to her to be seated. Then he bid Nilus recapitulate the results of the proceedings up to the present stage, and what he and his colleagues supposed to be her motive for asserting that the stolen emerald was her property. He would as far as possible leave it to the others to question her, since she knew full well on what terms she was with himself. Even before he had come into the council-room she had offered her explanation of the robbery to Nilus, through her nurse Perpetua; but it would have seemed fairer and more friendly in his eyes--and here he raised his voice--if she had chosen to confide to him, Orion, her plan for helping the freedman. Then he might have been able to warn her. He could only regard this mode of action, independently of him, as a fresh proof of her dislike, and she must hold herself responsible for the consequences. Justice must now take its course with inexorable rigor.

The wrathful light in his eyes showed her what she had to expect from him, and that he was prepared to fight her to the end. She saw that he thought that she had broken the promise she had but just now given him; but she had not commissioned Perpetua to interfere in the matter; on the contrary, she had desired the woman to leave it to her to produce her evidence only in the last extremity. Orion must believe that she had done him a wrong; still, could that make him so far forget himself as to carry out his threats, and sacrifice an innocent man--to divert suspicion from himself, while he branded her as a false witness? Aye, even from that he would not shrink! His flaming glance, his abrupt demeanor, his laboring breath, proclaimed it plainly enough.--Then let the struggle begin! At this moment she would have died rather than have tried to mollify him by a word of excuse. The turmoil in his whole being vibrated through hers. She was ready to throw herself at his feet and implore him to control himself, to guard himself against further wrong-doing--but she maintained her proud dignity, and the eyes that met his were not less indignant and defiant than his own.

They stood face to face like two young eagles preparing to fight, with feathers on end, arching their pinions and stretching their necks. She, confident of victory in the righteousness of her cause, and far more anxious for him than for herself; he, almost blind to his own danger, but, like a gladiator confronting his antagonist in the arena, far more eager to conquer than to protect his own life and limb.

While Nilus explained to her what, in part, she already knew, and repeated their suspicion that she had been tempted to make a false declaration to save the life of her servant, whose devotion, no doubt, to his missing master had led him to commit the robbery; she kept her eye on Orion rather than on the speaker. At last Nilus referred to the trunk, which had been brought from Paula's room under her own eyes, informing her that the assembly were ready to hear and examine into anything she had to say in her own defence.

Orion's agitation rose to its highest pitch. He felt that the blood had fled from his cheeks, and his thoughts were in utter confusion. The council, the accused, his enemy Paula--everything in the room lay before him shrouded in a whirl of green mist. All he saw seemed to be tinted with light emerald green. The hair, the faces, the dresses of those present gleamed and floated in a greenish light; and not till Paula went up to the chest with a firm, haughty step, drew out a small key, gave it to the treasurer, and answered his speech with three words: "Open the box!"--uttering them with cold condescension as though even this were too much--not till then did he see clearly once more: her bright brown hair, the fire of her blue eyes, the rose and white of her complexion, the light dress which draped her fine figure in noble folds, and her triumphant smile. How beautiful, how desirable was this woman! A few minutes and she would be worsted in this contest; but the triumph had cost him not only herself, but all that was good and pure in his soul, and worthy of his forefathers. An inward voice cried it out to him, but he drowned it in the shout of "Onwards," like a chariot-driver. Yes--on; still on towards the goal; away over ruins and stones, through blood and dust, till she bowed her proud neck, crushed and beaten, and sued for mercy.

The lid of the trunk flew open. Paula stooped, lifted the necklace, held it out to the judges, pulling it straight by the two ends.... Ah! what a terrible, heartrending cry of despair! Orion even, never, never wished to hear the like again. Then she flung the jewel on the table, exclaiming: "Shameful, shameful! atrocious!" she tottered backwards and clung to her faithful Betta; for her knees were giving way, and she felt herself in danger of sinking to the ground.

Orion sprang forward to support her, but she thrust him aside, with a glance so full of anguish, rage and intense contempt that he stood motionless, and clasped his hand over his heart.--And this deed, which was to work such misery for two human beings, he had smiled in doing! This practical joke which concealed a death-warrant--to what fearful issues might it not lead?

Paula had sunk speechless on to a seat, and he stood staring in silence, till a burst of laughter broke from the

assembly and old Psamtik, the captain of the guard, who had long been a member of the council of justice, exclaimed:

"By my soul, a splendid stone! There is the heathen god Eros with his winged sweetheart Psyche smiling in his face. Did you never read that pretty story by Apuleius--'The Golden Ass' it is called? The passage is in that. Holy Luke! how finely it is carved. The lady has taken out the wrong necklace. Look, Gamaliel, where could your green pigeon's egg have found a place in that thing?" and he pointed to the gem.

"Nowhere," said the Jew. "The noble lady..." But Orion roughly bid the witness to be silent, and Nilus, taking up the engraved gem, examined it closely. Then he--he the grave, just man, on whose support Paula had confidently reckoned--went up to her and with a regretful shrug asked her whether the other necklace with the setting of which she had spoken was in the trunk.

The blood ran cold in her veins. This thing that had happened was as startling as a miracle. But no! No higher Power had anything to do with this blow. Orion believed that she had failed in her promise of screening him by her silence, and this, this was his revenge. By what means--how he had gone to work, was a mystery. What a trick!--and it had succeeded! But should she take it like a patient child? No. A thousand times no! Suddenly all her old powers of resistance came back; hatred steeled her wavering will; and, as in fancy, he had seen himself in the circus, driving in a race, so she pictured herself seated at the chess-board. She felt herself playing with all her might to win; but not, as with his father, for flowers, trifling presents or mere glory; nay, for a very different stake Life or Death!

She would do everything, anything to conquer him; and yet, no--come what might--not everything. Sooner would she succumb than betray him as the thief or reveal what she had discovered in the viridarium. She had promised to keep the secret; and she would repay the father's kindness by screening the son from this disgrace. How beautiful, how noble had Orion's image been in her heart. She would not stain it with this disgrace in her own eyes and in those of the world. But every other reservation must be cast far, far away, to snatch the victory from him and to save Hiram. Every fair weapon she might use; only this treachery she could not, might not have recourse to. He must be made to feel that she was more magnanimous than he; that she, under all conceivable circumstances, kept her word. That was settled; her bosom once more rose and fell, and her eye brightened again; still it was some little time before she could find the right words with which to begin the contest.

Orion could see the seething turmoil in her soul; he felt that she was arming herself for resistance, and he longed to spur her on to deal the first blow. Not a word had she uttered of surprise or anger, not a syllable of reproach had passed her lips. What was she thinking of, what was she plotting? The more startling and dangerous the better; the more bravely she bore herself, the more completely in the background might he leave the painful sense of fighting against a woman. Even heroes had boasted of a victory over Amazons.

At last, at last!--She rose and went towards Hiram. He had been tied to the stake to which criminals were bound, and as an imploring glance from his honest eyes met hers, the spell that fettered her tongue was unloosed; she suddenly understood that she had not merely to protect herself, but to fulfil a solemn duty. With a few rapid steps she went up to the table at which her judges sat in a semi-circle, and leaning on it with her left hand, raised her right high in the air, exclaiming:

"You are the victims of a cruel fraud; and I of an unparalleled and wicked trick, intended to bring me to ruin!--Look at that man at the stake. Does he look like a robber? A more honest and faithful servant never earned his freedom, and the gratitude Hiram owed to his master, my father, he has discharged to the daughter for whose sake he quitted his home, his wife and child. He followed me, an orphan, here into a strange land.--But that matters not to you.--Still, if you will hear the truth, the strict and whole...."

"Speak!" Orion put in; but she went on, addressing herself exclusively to Nilus, and his peers, and ignoring him completely:

"Your president, the son of the Mukaukas, knows that, instead of the accused, I might, if I chose, be the accuser. But I scorn it--for love of his father, and because I am more high-minded than he. He will understand!--With regard to this particular emerald Hiram, my freedman, took it out of its setting last evening, under my eyes, with his knife; other persons besides us, thank God! have seen the setting, empty, on the chain to which it belonged. This afternoon it was still in the place to which some criminal hand afterwards found access, and attached that gem instead. That I have just now seen for the first time--I swear it by Christ's wounds. It is an exquisite work. Only a very rich man--the richest man here, can give away such a treasure, for whatever purpose he may have in view--to destroy an enemy let us say.--Gamaliel," and she turned to the Jew--"At what sum would you value that onyx?"

The Israelite asked to see the gem once more; he turned it about, and then said with a grin: "Well, fair lady, if my black hen laid me little things like that I would feed it on cakes from Arsinoe and oysters from Canopus. The stone is worth a landed estate, and though I am not a rich man, I would pay down two talents for it at any moment, even if I had to borrow the money."

This statement could not fail to make a great impression on the judges. Orion, however, exclaimed: "Wonders on wonders mark this eventful day! The prodigal generosity which had become an empty name has revived again among us! Some lavish demon has turned a worthless plate of gold into a costly gem.--And may I ask who it was that saw the

empty setting hanging to your chain?" Paula was in danger of forgetting even that last reserve she had imposed on herself; she answered with trembling accents:

"Apparently your confederates or you yourself did. You, and you alone, have any cause...."

But he would not allow her to proceed. He abruptly interrupted her, exclaiming: "This is really too much! Oh, that you were a man! How far your generosity reaches I have already seen. Even hatred, the bitterest hostility...."

"They would have every right to ruin you completely!" she cried, roused to the utmost. "And if I were to charge you with the most horrible crime. ..."

"You yourself would be committing a crime, against me and against this house," he said menacingly. "Beware! Can self-delusion go so far that you dare to appeal to me to testify to the fable you have trumped up...."

"No. Oh, no! That would be counting on some honesty in you yet," she loudly broke in. "I have other witnesses: Mary, the granddaughter of the Mukaukas," and she tried to catch his eye.

"The child whose little heart you have won, and who follows you about like a pet dog!" he cried.

"And besides Mary, Katharina, the widow Susannah's daughter," she added, sure of her triumph, and the color mounted to her cheeks. "She is no longer a child, but a maiden grown, as you know. I therefore demand of you--" and she again turned to the assembly--"that you will fulfil your functions worthily and promote justice in my behalf by calling in both these witnesses and hearing their evidence."

On this Orion interposed with forced composure: "As to whether a soft-hearted child ought to be exposed to the temptation to save the friend she absolutely worships by giving evidence before the judges, be it what it may, only her grandparents can decide. Her tender years would at any rate detract from the validity of her evidence, and I am averse to involving a child of this house in this dubious affair. With regard to Katharina, it is, on the contrary, the duty of this court to request her presence, and I offer myself to go and fetch her."

He resolutely resisted Paula's attempts to interrupt him again: she should have a patient hearing presently in the presence of her witness. The gem no doubt had come to her from her father. But at this her righteous indignation was again too much for her; she cried out quite beside herself:

"No, and again no. Some reprobate scoundrel, an accomplice of yours--yes, I repeat it--made his way into my room while I was in the sick-room, and either forced the lock of my trunk or opened it with a false key."

"That can easily be proved," said Orion. In a confident tone he desired that the box should be placed on the table, and requested one of the council, who understood such matters, to give his opinion. Paula knew the man well. He was one of the most respected members of the household, the chief mechanic whose duty it was to test and repair the water-clocks, balances, measures and other instruments. He at once proceeded to examine the lock and found it in perfect order, though the key, which was of peculiar form, could certainly not have found a substitute in any false key; and Paula was forced to admit that she had left the trunk locked at noon and had worn the key round her neck ever since. Orion listened to his opinion with a shrug, and before going to seek Katharina gave orders that Paula and the nurse should be conducted to separate rooms. To arrive at any clear decision in this matter, it was necessary that any communication between these two should be rendered impossible. As soon as the door was shut on them he hastened into the garden, where he hoped to find Katharina.

The council looked after him with divided feelings. They were here confronted by riddles that were hard to solve. No one of them felt that he had a right to doubt the good intentions of their lord's son, whom they looked up to as a talented and high-minded youth. His dispute with Paula had struck them painfully, and each one asked himself how it was that such a favorite with women should have failed to rouse any sentiment but that of hatred in one of the handsomest of her sex. The marked hostility she displayed to Orion injured her cause in the eyes of her judges, who knew only too well how unpleasant her relations were with Neforis. It was more than audacious in her to accuse the Mukaukas' son of having broken open her trunk; only hatred could have prompted her to utter such a charge. Still, there was something in her demeanor which encouraged confidence in her assertions, and if Katharina could really testify to having seen the empty medallion on the chain there would be no alternative but to begin the enquiry again from a fresh point of view, and to inculcate another robber. But who could have lavished such a treasure as this gem in exchange for mere rubbish? It was inconceivable; Ammonius the mechanic was right when he said that a woman full of hatred was capable of anything, even the incredible and impossible.

Meanwhile it was growing dusk and the scorching day had turned to the tempered heat of a glorious evening. The Mukaukas was still in his room while his wife with Susannah and her daughter, Mary and her governess, were enjoying the air and chatting in the open hall looking out on the garden and the Nile. The ladies had covered their heads with gauze veils as a protection against the mosquitoes, which were attracted in swarms from the river by the lights, and also against the mists that rose from the shallowing Nile; they were in the act of drinking some cooling fruit-syrup which had just been brought in, when Orion made his appearance.

"What has happened?" cried his mother in some anxiety, for she concluded from his dishevelled hair and heated cheeks that the meeting had gone anything rather than smoothly.

"Incredible things," he replied. "Paula fought like a lioness for her father's freedman..."

"Simply to annoy us and put us in a difficulty," replied Neforis.

"No, no, Mother," replied Orion with some warmth. "But she has a will of iron; a woman who never pauses at anything when she wants to carry her point; and at the same time she goes to work with a keen wit that is worthy of the greatest lawyer that I ever heard defend a cause in the high court of the capital. Besides this her air of superiority, and her divine beauty turn the heads of our poor household officers. It is fine and noble, of course, to be so zealous in the cause of a servant; but it can do no good, for the evidence against her stammering favorite is overwhelming, and when her last plea is demolished the matter is ended. She says that she showed a necklace to the child, and to you, charming Katharina."

"Showed it?" cried the young girl. "She took it away from us--did not she, Mary?"

"Well, we had taken it without her leave," replied the child.

"And she wants our children to appear in a court of justice to bear witness for her highness?" asked Neforis indignantly.

"Certainly," replied Orion. "But Mary's evidence is of no value in law."

"And even if it were," replied his mother, "the child should not be mixed up with this disgraceful business under any circumstances."

"Because I should speak for Paula!" cried Mary, springing up in great excitement.

"You will just hold your tongue," her grandmother exclaimed.

"And as for Katharina," said the widow, "I do not at all like the notion of her offering herself to be stared at by all those gentlemen."

"Gentlemen!" observed the girl. "Men--household officials and such like. They may wait long enough for me!"

"You must nevertheless do their bidding, haughty rosebud," said Orion laughing. "For you, thank God, are no longer a child, and a court of justice has the right of requiring the presence of every grown person as a witness. No harm will come to you, for you are under my protection. Come with me. We must learn every lesson in life. Resistance is vain. Besides, all you will have to do will be to state what you have seen, and then, if I possibly can, I will bring you back under the tender escort of this arm, to your mother once more. You must entrust your jewel to me to-day, Susannah, and this trustworthy witness shall tell you afterwards how she fared under my care."

Katharina was quite capable of reading the implied meaning of these words, and she was not ill-pleased to be obliged to go off alone with the governor's handsome son, the first man for whom her little heart had beat quicker; she sprang up eagerly; but Mary clung to her arm, and insisted so vehemently and obstinately on being taken with them to bear witness in Paula's behalf, that her governess and Dame Neforis had the greatest difficulty in reducing her to obedience and letting the pair go off without her. Both mothers looked after them with great satisfaction, and the governor's wife whispered to Susannah: "Before the judges to-day, but ere long, please God, before the altar at Church!"

To reach the hall of judgment they could go either through the house or round it. If the more circuitous route were chosen, it lay first through the garden; and this was the course taken by Orion. He had made a very great effort in the presence of the ladies to remain master of the agitation that possessed him; he saw that the battle he had begun, and from which he, at any rate, could not and would not now retire, was raging more and more fiercely, obliging him to drag the young creature who must become his wife--the die was already cast--into the course of crime he had started on.

When he had agreed with his mother that he was not to prefer his suit for Katharina till the following day, he had hoped to prove to her in the interval that this little thing was no wife for him; and now--oh! Irony of Fate--he found himself compelled to the very reverse of what he longed to do: to fight the woman he loved--Yes, still loved--as if she were his mortal foe, and pay his court to the girl who really did not suit him. It was maddening, but inevitable; and once more spurring himself with the word "Onwards!" he flung himself into the accomplishment of the unholy task of subduing the inexperienced child at his elbow into committing even a crime for his sake. His heart was beating wildly; but no pause, no retreat was possible: he must conquer. "Onwards, then, onwards!"

When they had passed out of the light of the lamps into the shade he took his young companion's slender hand--thankful that the darkness concealed his features--and pressed the delicate fingers to his lips.

"Oh!--Orion!" she exclaimed shyly, but she did not resist.

"I only claim my due, sunshine of my soul!" he said insinuatingly. "If your heart beat as loud as mine, our mothers might hear them!"

"But it does!" she joyfully replied, her curly head bent on one side.

"Not as mine does," he said with a sigh, laying her little hand on his heart. He could do so in all confidence, for its spasmodic throbbing threatened to suffocate him.

"Yes indeed," she said. "It is beating..."

"So that they can hear it indoors," he added with a forced laugh. "Do you think your dear mother has not long since read our feelings?"

"Of course she has," whispered Katharina. "I have rarely seen her in such good spirits as since your return."

"And you, you little witch?"

"I? Of course I was glad--we all were.--And your parents!"

"Nay, nay, Katharina! What you yourself felt when we met once more, that is what I want to know."

"Oh, let that pass! How can I describe such a thing?"

"Is that quite impossible?" he asked and clasped her arm more closely in his own. He must win her over, and his romantic fancy helped him to paint feelings he had never had, in glowing colors. He poured out sweet words of love, and she was only too ready to believe them. At a sign from him she sat down confidently on a wooden bench in the old avenue which led to the northern side of the house. Flowers were opening on many of the shrubs and shedding rich, oppressive perfume. The moonlight pierced through the solemn foliage of the sycamores, and shimmering streaks and rings of light played in the branches, on the trunks, and on the dark ground. The heat of the day still lingered in the leafy roofs overhead, sultry and heavy even now; and in this alley he called her for the first time his own, his betrothed, and enthralled her heart in chains and bonds. Each fervent word thrilled with the wild and painful agitation that was torturing his soul, and sounded heartfelt and sincere. The scent of flowers, too, intoxicated her young and inexperienced heart; she willingly offered her lips to his kisses, and with exquisite bliss felt the first glow of youthful love returned.

She could have lingered thus with him for a lifetime; but in a few minutes he sprang up, anxious to put an end to this tender dalliance which was beginning to be too much even for him, and exclaimed:

"This cursed, this infernal trial! But such is the fate of man! Duty calls, and he must return from all the bliss of Paradise to the world again. Give me your arm, my only love, my all!"

And Katharina obeyed. Dazzled and bewildered by the extraordinary happiness that had come to meet her, she allowed him to lead her on, listening with suspended breath as he added: "Out of this beatitude back to the sternest of duties!--And how odious, how immeasurably loathsome is the case in question! How gladly would I have been a friend to Paula, a faithful protector instead of a foe!"

As he spoke he felt the girl's left hand clench tighter on his arm, and this spurred him on in his guilty purpose. Katharina herself had suggested to his mind the course he must pursue to attain his end. He went on to influence her jealousy by praising Paula's charm and loftiness, excusing himself in his own eyes by persuading himself that a lover was justified in inducing his betrothed to save his happiness and his honor.

Still, as he uttered each flattering word, he felt that he was lowering himself and doing a fresh injustice to Paula. He found it only too easy to sing her praises; but as he did so with growing enthusiasm Katharina hit him on the arm exclaiming, half in jest and half seriously vexed:

"Oh, she is a goddess! And pray do you love her or me? You had better not make me jealous! Do you hear?"

"You little simpleton!" he said gaily; and then he added soothingly: "She is like the cold moon, but you are the bright warming sun. Yes, Paula!--we will leave Paula to some Olympian god, some archangel. I rejoice in my gladsome little maiden who will enjoy life with me, and all its pleasures!"

"That we will!" she exclaimed triumphantly; the horizon of her future was radiant with sunshine.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed as if in surprise. "The lights are already shining in that miserable hall of justice! Ah, love, love! Under that enchantment we had forgotten the object for which we came out.--Tell me, my darling, do you remember exactly what the necklace was like that you and Mary were playing with this afternoon?"

"It was very finely wrought, but in the middle hung a rubbishy broken medallion of gold."

"You are a pretty judge of works of art! Then you overlooked the fine engraved gem which was set in that modest gold frame?"

"Certainly not."

"I assure you, little wise-head!"

"No, my dearest." As she spoke she looked up saucily, as though she had achieved some great triumph. "I know very well what gems are. My father left a very fine collection, and my mother says that by his will they are all to belong to my future husband."

"Then I can set you, my jewel, in a frame of the rarest gems."

"No, no," she cried gaily. "Let me have a setting indeed, for I am but a fugitive thing; but only, only in your heart."

"That piece of goldsmith's work is already done.--But seriously my child; with regard to Paula's necklace: it really was a gem, and you must have happened to see only the back of it. That is just as you describe it: a plain setting of gold."

"But Orion...."

"If you love me, sweetheart, contradict me no further. In the future I will always accept your views, but in this case your mistake might involve us in a serious misunderstanding, by compelling me to give in to Paula and make her my ally.--Here we are! But wait one moment longer.--And once more, as to this gem. You see we may both be wrong--I as much as you; but I firmly believe that I am in the right. If you make a statement contrary to mine I shall appear before the judges as a liar. We are now betrothed--we are but one, wholly one; what damages or dignifies one of us humiliates or elevates the other. If you, who love me--you, who, as it is already whispered, are soon to be the mistress of the governor's house--make a statement opposed to mine they are certain to believe it. You see, your whole nature is pure kindness, but you are still too young and innocent quite to understand all the duties of that omnipotent love which beareth and endureth all things. If you do not yield to me cheerfully in this case you certainly do not love me as you ought. And what is it to ask? I require nothing of you but that you should state before the court that you saw Paula's necklace at noon to-day, and that there was a gem hanging to it--a gem with Love and Psyche engraved on it."

"And I am to say that before all those men?" asked Katharina doubtfully.

"You must indeed, you kind little angel!" cried Orion tenderly. "And do you think it pretty in a betrothed bride to refuse her lover's first request so grudgingly, suspiciously, and ungraciously? Nay, nay. If there is the tiniest spark of love for me in your heart, if you do not want to see me reduced to implore Paula for mercy...."

"But what is it all about? How can it matter so much to any one whether a gem or a mere plate of gold...?"

"All that I will explain later," he hastily replied.

"Tell me now...."

"Impossible. We have already put the patience of the judges to too severe a test. We have not a moment to lose."

"Very well then; but I shall die of confusion and shame if I have to make a declaration...."

"Which is perfectly truthful, and by which you can prove to me that you love me," he urged.

"But it is dreadful!" she exclaimed anxiously. "At least fasten my veil closely over my face.--All those bearded men...."

"Like the ostrich," said Orion, laughing as he complied. "If you really cannot agree with your... What is it you called me just now? Say it again."

"My dearest!" she said shyly but tenderly.

She helped Orion to fold her veil twice over her face, and did not thrust him aside when he whispered in her ear: "Let us see if a kiss cannot be sweet even through all that wrapping!--Now, come. It will be all over in a few minutes."

He led the way into the anteroom to the great hall, begged her to wait a moment, and then went in and hastily informed the assembly that Dame Susannah had entrusted her daughter to him only on condition that he should escort her back again as soon as she had given her testimony. Then Paula was brought in and he desired her to be seated.

It was with a sinking and anxious heart that Katharina had entered the anteroom. She had screened herself from a scolding before now by trivial subterfuges, but never had told a serious lie; and every instinct rebelled against the demand that she should now state a direct falsehood. But could Orion, the noblest of mankind, the idol of the whole town, so pressingly entreat her to do anything that was wrong? Did not love--as he had said--make it her duty to do everything that might screen him from loss or injury? It did not seem to her to be quite as it should be, but perhaps she did not altogether understand the matter; she was so young and inexperienced. She hated the idea, too, that, if she opposed her lover, he would have to come to terms with Paula. She had no lack of self-possession, and she told herself that she might hold her own with any girl in Memphis; still, she felt the superiority of the handsome, tall, proud Syrian, nor could she forget how, the day before yesterday, when Paula had been walking up and down the garden with Orion the chief officer of Memphis had exclaimed: "What a wonderfully handsome couple!" She herself had often thought that no more beautiful, elegant and lovable creature than Thomas' daughter walked the earth; she had longed and watched for a glance or a kind word from her. But since hearing those words a bitter feeling had possessed her soul against Paula, and there had been much to foster it. Paula always treated her like a child instead of a grown-up girl, as she was. Why, that very morning, had she sought out her betrothed--for she might call him so now--and tried to keep her away from him? And how was it that Orion, even while declaring his love for her, had spoken more than warmly--enthusiastically of Paula? She must be on her guard, and though others should speak of the great good fortune that had fallen to her lot, Paula, at any rate, would not rejoice in it, for Katharina felt and knew that she was not indifferent to Orion. She had not another enemy in the world, but Paula was one; her love had everything to fear from her--and suddenly she asked herself whether the gold medallion she had seen might not indeed have been a gem? Had she examined the necklace closely, even for a moment? And why should she fancy she had sharper sight than Orion with his large, splendid eyes?

He was right, as he always was. Most engraved gems were oval in form, and the pendant which she had seen and was to give evidence about, was undoubtedly oval. Then it was not like Orion to require a falsehood of her. In any case it was her duty to her betrothed to preserve from evil, and prevent him from concluding any alliance with that false

Siren. She knew what she had to say; and she was about to loosen a portion of her veil from her face that she might look Paula steadfastly in the eyes, when Orion came back to fetch her into the hall where the Court was sitting. To his delight--nay almost to his astonishment--she stated with perfect confidence that a gem had been hanging to Paula's necklace at noon that day; and when the onyx was shown her and she was asked if she remembered the stone, she calmly replied:

"It may or it may not be the same; I only remember the oval gold back to it: besides I was only allowed to have the necklace in my hands for a very short time."

When Nilus, the treasurer, desired her to look more closely at the figures of Eros and Psyche to refresh her memory, she evaded it by saying: "I do not like such heathen images: we Jacobite maidens wear different adornments."

At this Paula rose and stepped towards her with a look of stern reproof; little Katharina was glad now that it had occurred to her to cover her face with a double veil. But the utter confusion she felt under the Syrian girl's gaze did not last long. Paula exclaimed reproach fully: "You speak of your faith. Like mine, it requires you to respect the truth. Consider how much depends on your declaration; I implore you, child..."

But the girl interrupted her rival exclaiming with much irritation and vehement excitement:

"I am no longer a child, not even as compared with you; and I think before I speak, as I was taught to do."

She threw back her little head with a confident air, and said very decidedly:

"That onyx hung to the middle of the chain."

"How dare you, you audacious hussy!" It was Perpetua, quite unable to contain herself, who flung the words in her face. Katharina started as though an asp had stung her and turned round on the woman who had dared to insult her so grossly and so boldly. She was on the verge of tears as she looked helplessly about her for a defender; but she had not long to wait, for Orion instantly gave orders that Perpetua should be imprisoned for bearing false witness. Paula, however, as she had not perjured herself, but had merely invented an impossible tale with a good motive, was dismissed, and her chest was to be replaced in her room.

At this Paula once more stepped forth; she unhooked the onyx from the chain and flung it towards Gamaliel, who caught it, while she exclaimed:

"I make you a present of it, Jew! Perhaps the villain who hung it to my chain may buy it back again. The chain was given to my great-grandmother by the saintly Theodosius, and rather than defile it by contact with that gift from a villain, I will throw it into the Nile!--You--you, poor, deluded judges--I cannot be wroth with you, but I pity you!--My Hiram..." and she looked at the freedman, "is an honest soul whom I shall remember with gratitude to my dying day; but as to that unrighteous son of a most righteous father, that man..." and she raised her voice, while she pointed straight at Orion's face; but the young man interrupted her with a loud:

"Enough!"

She tried to control herself and replied:

"I will submit. Your conscience will tell you a hundred times over what I need not say. One last word..." She went close up to him and said in his ear:

"I have been able to refrain from using my deadliest weapon against you for the sake of keeping my word. Now you, if you are not the basest wretch living, keep yours, and save Hiram."

His only reply was an assenting nod; Paula paused on the threshold and, turning to Katharina, she added: "You, child--for you are but a child--with what nameless suffering will not the son of the Mukaukas repay you for the service you have rendered him!" Then she left the room. Her knees trembled under her as she mounted the stairs, but when she had again taken her place by the side of the hapless, crazy girl a merciful God granted her the relief of tears. Her friend saw her and left her to weep undisturbed, till she herself called him and confided to him all she had gone through in the course of this miserable day.

Orion and Katharina had lost their good spirits; they went back to the colonnade in a dejected mood. On the way she pressed him to explain to her why he had insisted on her making this declaration, but he put her off till the morrow. They found Susannah alone, for his mother had been sent for by her husband, who was suffering more than usual, and she had taken Mary with her.

After bidding the widow good-night and escorting her to her chariot, he returned to the hall where the Court was still sitting. There he recapitulated the case as it now stood, and all the evidence against the freed man. The verdict was then pronounced: Hiram was condemned to death with but one dissentient voice that of Nilus the treasurer.

Orion ordered that the execution of the sentence should be postponed; he did not go back into the house, however, but had his most spirited horse saddled and rode off alone into the desert. He had won, but he felt as though in this race he had rushed into a morass and must be choked in it.

CHAPTER XIII.

Paula's report of the day's proceedings, of Orion's behavior, and of the results of the trial angered the leech beyond measure; he vehemently approved the girl's determination to quit this cave of robbers, this house of wickedness, of treachery, of imbecile judges and false witnesses, as soon as possible. But she had no opportunity for a quiet conversation with him, for Philippus soon had his hands full in the care of the sufferers.

Rustem, the Masdakite, who till now had been lying unconscious, had been roused from his lethargy by some change of treatment, and loudly called for his master Haschim. When the Arab did not appear, and it was explained to him that he could not hope to see him before the morning, the young giant sat up among his pillows, propping himself on his arms set firmly against the couch behind him, looked about him with a wandering gaze, and shook his big head like an aggrieved lion--but that his thick mane of hair had been cut off--abusing the physician all the time in his native tongue, and in a deep, rolling, bass voice that rang through the rooms though no one understood a word. Philippus, quite undaunted, was trying to adjust the bandage over his wound, when Rustem suddenly flung his arms round his body and tried with all his might, and with foaming lips, to drag him down. He clung to his antagonist, roaring like a wild beast; even now Philippus never for an instant lost his presence of mind but desired the nun to fetch two strong slaves. The Sister hurried away, and Paula remained the eyewitness of a fearful struggle. The physician had twisted his ancles round those of the stalwart Persian, and putting forth a degree of strength which could hardly have been looked for in a stooping student, tall and large-boned as he was, he wrenched the Persian's hands from his hips, pressed his fingers between those of Rustem, forced him back on to his pillows, set his knees against the brazen frame of the couch, and so effectually held him down that he could not sit up again. Rustem exerted every muscle to shake off his opponent; but the leech was the stronger, for the Masdakite was weakened by fever and loss of blood. Paula watched this contest between intelligent force and the animal strength of a raving giant with a beating heart, trembling in every limb. She could not help her friend, but she followed his every movement as she stood at the head of the bed; and as he held down the powerful creature before whom her frail uncle had cowered in abject terror, she could not help admiring his manly beauty; for his eyes sparkled with unwonted fire, and the mean chin seemed to lengthen with the frightful effort he was putting forth, and so to be brought into proportion with his wide forehead and the rest of his features. Her spirit quaked for him; she fancied she could see something great and heroic in the man, in whom she had hitherto discovered no merit but his superior intellect.

The struggle had lasted some minutes before Philip felt the man's arms grow limp, and he called to Paula to bring him a sheet--a rope--what not--to bind the raving man. She flew into the next room, quite collected; fetched her handkerchief, snatched off the silken girdle that bound her waist, rushed back and helped the leech to tie the maniac's hands. She understood her friend's least word, or a movement of his finger; and when the slaves whom the nun had fetched came into the room, they found Rustem with his hands firmly bound, and had only to prevent him from leaping out of bed or throwing himself over the edge. Philippus, quite out of breath, explained to the slaves how they were to act, and when he opened his medicine-chest Paula noticed that his swollen, purple fingers were trembling. She took out the phial to which he pointed, mixed the draught according to his orders, and was not afraid to pour it between the teeth of the raving man, forcing them open with the help of the slaves.

The soothing medicine calmed him in a few minutes, and the leech himself could presently wash the wound and apply a fresh dressing with the practised aid of the Sister.

Meanwhile the crazy girl had been waked by the ravings of the Persian, and was anxiously enquiring if the dog--the dreadful dog--was there. But she soon allowed herself to be quieted by Paula, and she answered the questions put to her so rationally and gently, that her nurse called the physician who could confirm Paula in her hope that a favorable change had taken place in her mental condition. Her words were melancholy and mild; and when Paula remarked on this Philippus observed:

"It is on the bed of sickness that we learn to know our fellow-creatures. The frantic girl, who perhaps fell on the son of this house with murderous intent, now reveals her true, sweet nature. And as for that poor fellow, he is a powerful creature, an honest one too; I would stake my ten fingers on it!"

"What makes you so sure of that?"

"Even in his delirium he did not once scratch or bite, but only defended himself like a man.--Thank you, now, for your assistance. If you had not flung the cord round his hands, the game might have ended very differently."

"Surely not!" exclaimed Paula decidedly. "How strong you are, Philip. I feel quite alarmed!"

"You?" said the leech laughing. "On the contrary, you need never be alarmed again now that you have seen by chance that your champion is no weakling.--Pfooh! I shall be glad now of a little rest." She offered him her handkerchief, and while he thankfully used it to wipe his brow--controlling with much difficulty the impulse to press it to his lips, he added lightly:

"With such an assistant everything must go well. There is no merit in being strong; every one can be strong who

comes into the world with healthy blood and well-knit bones, who keeps all his limbs well exercised, as I did in my youth, and who does not destroy his inheritance by dissipated living.--However, I still feel the struggle in my hands; but there is some good wine in the next room yet, and two or three cups of it will do me good." They went together into the adjoining room where, by this time, most of the lamps were extinguished. Paula poured out the wine, touched the goblet with her lips, and he emptied it at a draught; but he was not to be allowed to drink off a second, for he had scarcely raised it, when they heard voices in the Masdakite's room, and Neforis came in. The governor's careful wife had not quitted her husband's couch--even Rustem's storming had not induced her to leave her post; but when she was informed by the slaves what had been going on, and that Paula was still up-stairs with the leech, she had come to the strangers' rooms as soon as her husband could spare her to speak to Philippus, to represent to Paula what the proprieties required, and to find out what the strange noises could be which still seemed to fill the house--at this hour usually as silent as the grave. They proceeded from the sick-rooms, but also from Orion, who had just come in, and from Nilus the treasurer, who had been called by the former into his room, though the night was fast drawing on to morning. To the governor's wife everything seemed ominous at the close of this terrible day, marked in the calendar as unlucky; so she made her way up-stairs, escorted by her husband's night watcher, and holding in her hand a small reliquary to which she ascribed the power of banning vile spirits.

She came into the sick-room swiftly and noiselessly, put the nun through a strict cross-examination with the fretful sharpness of a person disturbed in her night's rest. Then she went into the sitting-room where Philippus was on the point of pledging Paula in his second cup of wine, while she stood before him with dishevelled hair and robe ungirt. All this was an offence against good manners such as she would not suffer in her house, and she stoutly ordered her husband's niece to go to bed. After all the offences that had been pardoned her this day--no, yesterday--she exclaimed, it would have been more becoming in the girl to examine herself in silence, in her own room, to exorcise the lying spirits which had her in their power, and implore her Saviour for forgiveness, than to pretend to be nursing the sick while she was carrying on, with a young man, an orgy which, as the Sister had just told her, had lasted since mid-day.

Paula spoke not a word, though the color changed in her face more than once as she listened to this speech. But when Neforis finally pointed to the door, she said, with all the cold pride she had at her command when she was the object of unworthy suspicions:

"Your aim is easily seen through. I should scorn to reply, but that you are the wife of the man who, till you set him against me, was glad to call himself my friend and protector, and who is also related to me. As usual, you attribute to me an unworthy motive. In showing me the door of this room consecrated by suffering, you are turning me out of your house, which you and your son--for I must say it for once--have made a hell to me."

"I! And my--No! this is indeed--" exclaimed the matron in panting rage. She clasped her hands over her heaving bosom and her pale face was dyed crimson, while her eyes flashed wrathful lightnings. "That is too much; a thousand times too much--a thousand times--do you hear?--And I--I condescend to answer you! We picked her up in the street, and have treated her like a daughter, spent enormous sums on her, and now..."

This was addressed to the leech rather than to Paula; but she took up the gauntlet and replied in a tone of unqualified scorn:

"And now I plainly declare, as a woman of full age, free to dispose of myself, that to-morrow morning I leave this house with everything that belongs to me, even if I should go as a beggar;--this house, where I have been grossly insulted, where I and my faithful servant have been falsely condemned, and where he is even now about to be murdered."

"And where you have been dealt with far too mildly," Neforis shrieked at her audacious antagonist, "and preserved from sharing the fate of the robber you smuggled into the house. To save a criminal--it is unheard of!--you dared to accuse the son of your benefactor of being a corrupt judge."

"And so he is," exclaimed Paula furious. "And what is more, he has inveigled the child whom you destine to be his wife into bearing false witness. More--much more could I say, but that, even if I did not respect the mother, your husband has deserved that I should spare him."

"Spare him--spare!" cried Neforis contemptuously. "You--you will spare us! The accused will be merciful and spare the judge! But you shall be made to speak;--aye, made to speak! And as to what you, a slanderer, can say about false witness..."

"Your own granddaughter," interrupted the leech, "will be compelled to repeat it before all the world, noble lady, if you do not moderate yourself."

Neforis laughed hysterically.

"So that is the way the wind blows!" she exclaimed, quite beside herself. "The sick-room is a temple of Bacchus and Venus; and this disgraceful conduct is not enough, but you must conspire to heap shame and disgrace on this righteous house and its masters."

Then, resting her left hand which held the reliquary on her hip, she added with hasty vehemence:

"So be it. Go away; go wherever you please! If I find you under this roof to-morrow at noon, you thankless, wicked girl, I will have you turned out into the streets by the guard. I hate you--for once I will ease my poor, tormented heart--I loathe you; your very existence is an offence to me and brings misfortune on me and on all of us; and besides--besides, I should prefer to keep the emeralds we have left."

This last and cruelest taunt, which she had brought out against her better feelings, seemed to have relieved her soul of a hundred-weight of care; she drew a deep breath, and turning to Philippus, went on far more quietly and rationally:

"As for you, Philip, my husband needs you. You know well what we have offered you and you know George's liberal hand. Perhaps you will think better of it, and will learn to perceive..."

"I!..." said the leech with a lofty smile. "Do you really know me so little? Your husband, I am ready to admit, stands high in my esteem, and when he wants me he will no doubt send for me. But never again will I cross this threshold uninvited, or enter a house where right is trodden underfoot, where defenceless innocence is insulted and abandoned to despair."

"You may stare in astonishment! Your son has desecrated his father's judgment-seat, and the blood of guiltless Hiram is on his head.--You--well, you may still cling to your emeralds. Paula will not touch them; she is too high-souled to tell you who it is that you would indeed do well to lock up in the deepest dungeon-cell! What I have heard from your lips breaks every tie that time had knit between us. I do not demand that my friends should be wealthy, that they should have any attractions or charm, any special gifts of mind or body; but we must meet on common ground: that of honorable feeling. That you did not bring into the world, or you have lost it; and from this hour I am a stranger to you and never wish to see you again, excepting by the side of your husband when he requires me."

He spoke the last words with such immeasurable dignity that Neforis was startled and bereft of all self-control. She had been treated as a wretch worthy of utter scorn by a man beneath her in rank, but whom she always regarded as one of the most honest, frank and pure-minded she had ever known; a man indispensable to her husband, because he knew how to mitigate his sufferings, and could restrain him from the abuse of his narcotic anodyne. He was the only physician of repute, far and wide. She was to be deprived of the services of this valuable ally, to whom little Mary and many of the household owed their lives, by this Syrian girl; and she herself, sure that she was a good and capable wife and mother, was to stand there like a thing despised and avoided by every honest man, through this evil genius of her house!

It was too much. Tortured by rage, vexation, and sincere distress, she said in a complaining voice, while the tears started to her eyes:

"But what is the meaning of all this? You, who know me, who have seen me ruling and caring for my family, you turn your back upon me in my own house and point the finger at me? Have I not always been a faithful wife, nursing my husband for years and never leaving his sick-bed, never thinking of anything but how to ease his pain? I have lived like a recluse from sheer sense of duty and faithful love, while other wives, who have less means than I, live in state and go to entertainments.--And whose slaves are better kept and more often freed than ours? Where is the beggar so sure of an alms as in our house, where I, and I alone, uphold piety?--And now am I so fallen that the sun may not shine on me, and that a worthy man like you should withdraw his friendship all in a moment, and for the sake of this ungrateful, loveless creature--because, because, what did you call it--because the mind is wanting in me--or what did you call it that I must have before you...?"

"It is called feeling," interrupted the leech, who was sorry for the unhappy woman, in whom he knew there was much that was good. "Is the word quite new to you, my lady Neforis?--It is born with us; but a firm will can elevate the least noble feeling, and the best that nature can bestow will deteriorate through self-indulgence. But, in the day of judgment, if I am not very much mistaken, it is not our acts but our feeling that will be weighed. It would ill-become me to blame you, but I may be allowed to pity you, for I see the disease in your soul which, like gangrene in the body..."

"What next!" cried Neforis.

"This disease," the physician calmly went on--"I mean hatred, should be far indeed from so pious a Christian. It has stolen into your heart like a thief in the night, has eaten you up, has made bad blood, and led you to treat this heavily-afflicted orphan as though you were to put stocks and stones in the path of a blind man to make him fall. If, as it would seem, my opinion still weighs with you a little, before Paula leaves your house you will ask her pardon for the hatred with which you have persecuted her for years, which has now led you to add an intolerable insult--in which you yourself do not believe--to all the rest."

At this Paula, who had been watching the physician all through his speech, turned to Dame Neforis, and unclasped her hands which were lying in her lap, ready to shake hands with her uncle's wife if she only offered hers, though she was still fully resolved to leave the house.

A terrible storm was raging in the lady's soul. She felt that she had often been unkind to Paula. That a painful doubt still obscured the question as to who had stolen the emerald she had unwillingly confessed before she had come up here. She knew that she would be doing her husband a great service by inducing the girl to remain, and she would only

too gladly have kept the leech in the house;--but then how deeply had she, and her son, been humiliated by this haughty creature!

Should she humble herself to her, a woman so much younger, offer her hand, make....

At this moment they heard the tinkle of the silver bowl, into which her husband threw a little ball when he wanted her. His pale, suffering face rose before her inward eye, she could hear him asking for his opponent at draughts, she could see his sad, reproachful gaze when she told him to-morrow that she, Neforis, had driven his niece, the daughter of the noble Thomas, out of the house--; with a swift impulse she went towards Paula, grasping the reliquary in her left hand and holding out her right, and said in a low voice.

"Shake hands, girl. I often ought to have behaved differently to you; but why have you never in the smallest thing sought my love? God is my witness that at first I was fully disposed to regard you as a daughter, but you--well, let it pass. I am sorry now that I should--if I have distressed you."

At the first words Paula had placed her hand in that of Neforis. Hers was as cold as marble, the elder woman's was hot and moist; it seemed as though their hands were typical of the repugnance of their hearts. They both felt it so, and their clasp was but a brief one. When Paula withdrew hers, she preserved her composure better than the governor's wife, and said quite calmly, though her cheeks were burning:

"Then we will try to part without any ill-will, and I thank you for having made that possible. To-morrow morning I hope I may be permitted to take leave of my uncle in peace, for I love him; and of little Mary."

"But you need not go now! On the contrary, I urgently request you to stay," Neforis eagerly put in.

"George will not let you leave. You yourself know how fond he is of you."

"He has often been as a father to me," said Paula, and even her eyes shone through tears. "I would gladly have stayed with him till the end. Still, it is fixed--I must go."

"And if your uncle adds his entreaties to mine?"

"It will be in vain."

Neforis took the maiden's hand in her own again, and tried with genuine anxiety to persuade her,--but Paula was firm. She adhered to her determination to leave the governor's house in the morning.

"But where will you find a suitable house?" cried Neforis. "A residence that will be fit for you?"

"That shall be my business," replied the physician. "Believe me, noble lady, it would be best for all that Paula should seek another home. But it is to be hoped that she may decide on remaining in Memphis."

At this Neforis exclaimed:

"Here, with us, is her natural home!--Perhaps God may turn your heart for your uncle's sake, and we may begin a new and happier life." Paula's only reply was a shake of the head; but Neforis did not see it the metal tinkle sounded for the third time, and it was her duty to respond to its call.

As soon as she had left the room Paula drew a deep breath, exclaiming:

"O God! O God! How hard it was to refrain from flinging in her teeth the crime her wicked son.... No, no; nothing should have made me do that. But I cannot tell you how the mere sight of that woman angers me, how light-hearted I feel since I have broken down the bridge that connected me with this house and with Memphis."

"With Memphis?" asked Philippus.

"Yes," said Paula gladly. "I go away--away from hence, out of the vicinity of this woman and her son!--Whither? Oh! back to Syria, or to Greece--every road is the right one, if it only takes me away from this place."

"And I, your friend?" asked Philippus.

"I shall bear the remembrance of you in a grateful heart."

The physician smiled, as though something had happened just as he expected; after a moment's reflection he said:

"And where can the Nabathæan find you, if indeed he discovers your father in the hermit of Sinai?"

The question startled and surprised Paula, and Philippus now adduced every argument to convince her that it was necessary that she should remain in the City of the Pyramids. In the first place she must liberate her nurse--in this he could promise to help her--and everything he said was so judicious in its bearing on the circumstances that had to be reckoned with, and the facts actual or possible, that she was astonished at the practical good sense of this man, with whom she had generally talked only of matters apart from this world. Finally she yielded, chiefly for the sake of her father and Perpetua; but partly in the hope of still enjoying his society. She would remain in Memphis, at any rate for the present, under the roof of a friend of the physician's--long known to her by report--a Melchite like herself, and there await the further development of her fate.

To be away from Orion and never, never to see him again was her heartfelt wish. All places were the same to her where she had no fear of meeting him. She hated him; still she knew that her heart would have no peace so long as such a meeting was possible. Still, she longed to free herself from a desire to see what his further career would be,

which came over her again and again with overwhelming and terrible power. For that reason, and for that only, she longed to go far, far away, and she was hardly satisfied by the leech's assurance that her new protector would be able to keep away all visitors whom she might not wish to receive. And he himself, he added, would make it his business to stand between her and all intruders the moment she sent for him.

They did not part till the sun was rising above the eastern hills; as they separated Paula said:

"So this morning a new life begins for me, which I can well imagine will, by your help, be pleasanter than that which is past."

And Philippus replied with happy emotion: "The new life for me began yesterday."

CHAPTER XIV.

Between morning and noon Mary was sitting on a low cane seat under the sycamores which yesterday had shaded Katharina's brief young happiness; by her side was her governess Eudoxia, under whose superintendence she was writing out the Ten Commandments from a Greek catechism.

The teacher had been lulled to sleep by the increasing heat and the pervading scent of flowers, and her pupil had ceased to write. Her eyes, red with tears, were fixed on the shells with which the path was strewn, and she was using her long ruler, at first to stir them about, and then to write the words: "Paula," and "Paula, Mary's darling," in large capital letters. Now and again a butterfly, following the motion of the rod, brought a smile to her pretty little face from which the dark spirit "Trouble" had not wholly succeeded in banishing gladness. Still, her heart was heavy. Everything around her, in the garden and in the house, was still; for her grandfather's state had become seriously worse at sunrise, and every sound must be hushed. Mary was thinking of the poor sufferer: what pain he had to bear, and how the parting from Paula would grieve him, when Katharina came towards her down the path.

The young girl did little credit to-day to her nickname of "the water-wagtail;" her little feet shuffled through the shelly gravel, her head hung wearily, and when one of the myriad insects, that were busy in the morning sunshine, came within her reach she beat it away angrily with her fan. As she came up to Mary she greeted her with the usual "All hail!" but the child only nodded in response, and half turning her back went on with her inscription.

Katharina, however, paid no heed to this cool reception, but said in sympathetic tones:

"Your poor grandfather is not so well, I hear?" Mary shrugged her shoulders.

"They say he is very dangerously ill. I saw Philippus himself."

"Indeed?" said Mary without looking up, and she went on writing.

"Orion is with him," Katharina went on. "And Paula is really going away?"

The child nodded dumbly, and her eyes again filled with tears.

Katharina now observed how sad the little girl was looking, and that she intentionally refused to answer her. At any other time she would not have troubled herself about this, but to-day this taciturnity provoked her, nay it really worried her; she stood straight in front of Mary, who was still indefatigably busy with the ruler, and said loudly and with some irritation:

"I have fallen into disgrace with you, it would seem, since yesterday. Every one to his liking; but I will not put up with such bad manners, I can tell you!"

The last words were spoken loud enough to wake Eudoxia, who heard them, and drawing herself up with dignity she said severely:

"Is that the way to behave to a kind and welcome visitor, Mary?"

"I do not see one," retorted the child with a determined pout.

"But I do," cried the governess. "You are behaving like a little barbarian, not like a little girl who has been taught Greek manners. Katharina is no longer a child, though she is still often kind enough to play with you. Go to her at once and beg her pardon for being so rude."

"I!" exclaimed Mary, and her tone conveyed the most positive refusal to obey this behest. She sprang to her feet, and with flashing eyes, she cried: "We are not Greeks, neither she nor I, and I can tell you once for all that she is not my kind and welcome visitor, nor my friend any more! We have nothing, nothing whatever to do with each other any more!"

"Are you gone mad?" cried Eudoxia, and her long face assumed a threatening expression, while she rose from her easy-chair in spite of the increasing heat, intending to capture her pupil and compel her to apologize; but Mary was more nimble than the middle-aged damsel and fled down the alley towards the river, as nimble as a gazelle.

Eudoxia began to run after her; but the heat was soon too much for her, and when she stopped, exhausted and panting, she perceived that Katharina, worthy once more of her name of "water-wagtail," had flown past her and was chasing the little girl at a pace that she shuddered to contemplate. Mary soon saw that no one but Katharina was in pursuit; she moderated her pace, and awaited her cast-off friend under the shade of a tall shrub. In a moment Katharina was facing her; with a heightened color she seized both her hands and exclaimed passionately:

"What was it you said? You--you--If I did not know what a wrong-headed little simpleton you were, I could...."

"You could accuse me falsely!--But now, leave go of my hands or I will bite you. And as Katharina, at this threat, released her she went on vehemently.

"Oh! I know you now--since yesterday! And I tell you, once for all, I say thank you for nothing for such friends. You ought to sink into the earth for shame of the sin you have committed. I am only ten years old, but rather than have done such a thing I would have let myself be shut up in that hot hole with poor, innocent Perpetua, or I would have let

myself be killed, as you want poor, honest Hiram to be! Oh, shame!"

Katharina's crimson cheeks had turned pale at this address and, as she had no answer ready, she could only toss her head and say, with as much pride and dignity as she could assume:

"What can a child like you know about things that puzzle the heads of grown-up people?"

"Grown-up people!" laughed Mary, who was not three inches shorter than her antagonist. "You must be a great deal taller before I call you grown up! In two years time, you will scarcely be up to my eyes." At this the irascible Egyptian fired up; she gave the child a slap in the face with the palm of her hand. Mary only stood still as if petrified, and after gazing at the ground for a minute or two without a cry, she turned her back on her companion and silently went back into the shaded walk.

Katharina watched her with tears in her eyes. She felt that Mary was justified in disapproving of what she had done the day before; for she herself had been unable to sleep and had become more and more convinced that she had acted wrongly, nay, unpardonably. And now again she had done an inexcusable thing. She felt that she had deeply hurt the child's feelings, and this sincerely grieved her. She followed Mary in silence, at some little distance, like a maid-servant. She longed to hold her back by her dress, to say something kind to her, nay, to ask her pardon. As they drew near to the spot where the governess had dropped into her chair again, a hapless victim to the heat of Egypt, Katharina called Mary by her name, and when the child paid no heed, laid her hand on her shoulder, saying in gentle entreaty: "Forgive me for having so far forgotten myself. But how can I help being so little? You know very well when any one laughs at me for it...."

"You get angry and slap!" retorted the child, walking on. "Yesterday, perhaps, I might have laughed over a box on the ear--it is not the first--or have given it to you back again; but to-day!--Just now," and she shuddered involuntarily, "just now I felt as if some black slave had laid his dirty hand on my cheek. You are not what you were. You walk quite differently, and you look--depend upon it you do not look as nice and as bright as you used, and I know why: You did a very bad thing last evening."

"But dear pet," said the other, "you must not be so hard. Perhaps I did not really tell the judges everything I knew, but Orion, who loves me so, and whose wife I am to be...."

"He led you into sin!--Yes; and he was always merry and kind till yesterday; but since--Oh, that unlucky day!"

Here she was interrupted by Eudoxia, who poured out a flood of reproaches and finally desired her to resume her task. The child obeyed unresistingly; but she had scarcely settled to her wax tablets again when Katharina was by her side, whispering to her that Orion would certainly not have asserted anything that he did not believe to be true, and that she had really been in doubt as to whether a gem with a gold back, or a mere gold frame-work, had been hanging to Paula's chain. At this Mary turned sharply and quickly upon her, looked her straight in the eyes and exclaimed--but in Egyptian that the governess might not understand, for she had disdained to learn a single word of it:

"A rubbishy gold frame with a broken edge was hanging to the chain, and, what is more, it caught in your dress. Why, I can see it now! And, when you bore witness that it was a gem, you told a lie--Look here; here are the laws which God Almighty himself gave on the sacred Mount of Sinai, and there it stands written: 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.' And those who do, the priest told me, are guilty of mortal sin, for which there is no forgiveness on earth or in Heaven, unless after bitter repentance and our Saviour's special mercy. So it is written; and you could actually declare before the judges a thing that was false, and that you knew would bring others to ruin?"

The young criminal looked down in shame and confusion, and answered hesitatingly:

"Orion asserted it so positively and clearly, and then--I do not know what came over me--but I was so angry, so--I could have murdered her!"

"Whom?" asked Mary in surprise. "You know very well: Paula."

"Paula!" said Mary, and her large eyes again filled with tears. "Is it possible? Did you not love her as much as I do? Have not you often and often clung about her like a bur?"

"Yes, yes, very true. But before the judges she was so intolerably proud, and then.--But believe me, Mary you really and truly cannot understand anything of all this."

"Can I not?" asked the child folding her arms.

"Why do you think me so stupid?"

"You are in love with Orion--and he is a man whom few can match, over head and ears in love; and because Paula looks like a queen by the side of you, and is so much handsomer and taller than you are, and Orion, till yesterday--I could see it all--cared a thousand times more for her than for you, you were jealous and envious of her. Oh, I know all about it.--And I know that all the women fall in love with him, and that Mandaile had her ears cut off on his account, and that it was a lady who loved him in Constantinople that gave him the little white dog. The slave-girls tell me what they hear and what I like.--And after all, you may well be jealous of Paula, for if she only made a point of it, how soon Orion would make up his mind never to look at you again! She is the handsomest and the wisest and the best girl in the

whole world, and why should she not be proud? The false witness you bore will cost poor Hiram his life: but the merciful Saviour may forgive you at last. It is your affair, and no concern of mine; but when Paula is forced to leave the house and all through you, so that I shall never, never, never see her any more--I cannot forget it, and I do not think I ever shall; but I will pray God to make me."

She burst into loud sobs, and the governess had started up to put an end to a dialogue which she could not understand, and which was therefore vexatious and provoking, when the water-wagtail fell on her knees before the little girl, threw her arms round her, and bursting into tears, exclaimed:

"Mary--darling little Mary forgive me.

[The German has the diminutive 'Mariechen'. To this Dr. Ebers appends this note. "An ignorant critic took exception to the use of the diminutive form of names (as for instance 'Irenchen', little Irene) in 'The Sisters,' as an anachronism. It is nevertheless a fact that the Greeks settled in Egypt were so fond of using the diminutive form of woman's names that they preferred them, even in the tax-rolls. This form was common in Attic Greek.]

Oh, if you could but know what I endured before I came out here! Forgive me, Mary; be my sweet, dear little Mary once more. Indeed and indeed you are much better than I am. Merciful Saviour, what possessed me last evening? And all through him, through the man no one can help loving--through Orion!--And would you believe it: I do not even know why he led me into this sin. But I must try to care for him no more, to forget him entirely, although, although,--only think, he called me his betrothed; but now that he has betrayed me into sin, can I dare to become his wife? It has given me no peace all night. I love him, yes I love him, you cannot think how dearly; still, I cannot be his! Sooner will I go into a convent, or drown myself in the Nile!--And I will say all this to my mother, this very day."

The Greek governess had looked on in astonishment, for it was indeed strange to see the young girl kneeling in front of the child. She listened to her eager flow of unintelligible words, wondering whether she could ever teach her pupil--with her grandmother's help if need should be--to cultivate a more sedate and Greek demeanor.

At this juncture Paula came down the path. Some slaves followed her, carrying several boxes and bundles and a large litter, all making their way to the Nile, where a boat was waiting to ferry her up the river to her new home.

As she lingered unobserved, her eye rested on the touching picture of the two young things clasped in each other's arms, and she overheard the last words of the gentle little creature who had done her such cruel wrong. She could only guess at what had occurred, but she did not like to be a listener, so she called Mary; and when the child started up and flew to throw her arms round her neck with vehement and devoted tenderness, she covered her little face and hair with kisses. Then she freed herself from the little girl's embrace, and said, with tearful eyes:

"Good-bye, my darling! In a few minutes I shall no longer belong here; another and a strange home must be mine. Love me always, and do not forget me, and be quite sure of one thing: you have no truer friend on earth than I am."

At this, fresh tears flowed; the child implored her not to go away, not to leave her; but Paula could but refuse, though she was touched and astonished to find that she had reaped so rich a harvest of love, here where she had sown so little. Then she gave her hand at parting to the governess, and when she turned to Katharina, to bid farewell, hard as it was, to the murderer of her happiness, the young girl fell at her feet bathed in tears of repentance, covered her knees and hands with kisses, and confessed herself guilty of a terrible sin. Paula, however, would not allow her to finish; she lifted her up, kissed her forehead, and said that she quite understood how she had been led into it, and that she, like Mary, would try to forgive her.

Standing by the governor's many-oared barge, to which the young girls now escorted her, she found Orion. Twice already this morning he had tried in vain to get speech with her, and he looked pale and agitated. He had a splendid bunch of flowers in his hand; he bestowed a hasty greeting on Mary and his betrothed, and did not heed the fact that Katharina returned it hesitatingly and without a word.

He went close up to Paula, told her in a low voice that Hiram was safe, and implored her, as she hoped to be forgiven for her own sins, to grant him a few minutes. When she rejected his prayer with a silent shrug, and went on towards the boat he put out his hand to help her, but she intentionally overlooked it and gave her hand to the physician. At this he sprang after her into the barge, saying in her ear in a tremulous whisper:

"A wretch, a miserable man entreats your mercy. I was mad yesterday. I love you, I love you--how deeply!--you will see!"

"Enough," she broke in firmly, and she stood up in the swaying boat. Philippus supported her, and Orion, laying the flowers in her lap, cried so that all could hear: "Your departure will sorely distress my father. He is so ill that we did not dare allow you to take leave of him. If you have anything to say to him..."

"I will find another messenger," she replied sternly.

"And if he asks the reason for your sudden departure?"

"Your mother and Philippus can give him an answer."

"But he was your guardian, and your fortune, I know..."

"In his hands it is safe."

"And if the physician's fears should be justified?"

"Then I will demand its restitution through a new Kyrios."

"You will receive it without that! Have you no pity, no forgiveness?" For all answer she flung the flowers he had given her into the river; he leaped on shore, and regardless of the bystanders, pushed his fingers through his hair, clasping his hands to his burning brow.

The barge was pushed off, the rowers plied their oars like men; Orion gazed after it, panting with laboring breath, till a little hand grasped his, and Mary's sweet, childish voice exclaimed:

"Be comforted, uncle. I know just what is troubling you."

"What do you know?" he asked roughly.

"That you are sorry that you and Katharina should have spoken against her last evening, and against poor Hiram."

"Nonsense!" he angrily broke in. "Where is Katharina?"

"I was to tell you that she could not see you today. She loves you dearly, but she, too, is so very, very sorry."

"She may spare herself!" said the young man. "If there is anything to be sorry for it falls on me--it is crushing me to death. But what is this!--The devil's in it! What business is it of the child's? Now, be off with you this minute. Eudoxia, take this little girl to her tasks."

He took Mary's head between his hands, kissed her forehead with impetuous affection, and then pushed her towards her governess, who dutifully led her away.

When Orion found himself alone, he leaned against a tree and groaned like a wounded wild beast. His heart was full to bursting.

"Gone, gone! Thrown away, lost! The best on earth!" He laid his hands on the tree-stem and pressed his head against it till it hurt him. He did not know how to contain himself for misery and self-reproach. He felt like a man who has been drunk and has reduced his own house to ashes in his intoxication. How all this could have come to pass he now no longer knew. After his nocturnal ride he had caused Nilus the treasurer to be waked, and had charged him to liberate Hiram secretly. But it was the sight of his stricken father that first brought him completely to his sober senses. By his bed-side, death in its terrible reality had stared him in the face, and he had felt that he could not bear to see that beloved parent die till he had made his peace with Paula, won her forgiveness, brought her whom his father loved so well into his presence, and besought his blessing on her and on himself.

Twice he had hastened from the chamber of suffering to her room, to entreat her to hear him, but in vain; and now, how terrible had their parting been! She was hard, implacable, cruel; and as he recalled her person and individuality as they had struck him before their quarrel, he was forced to confess that there was something in her present behavior which was not natural to her. This inhuman severity in the beautiful woman whose affection had once been his, and who, but now, had flung his flowers into the water, had not come from her heart; it was deliberately planned to make him feel her anger. What had withheld her, under such great provocation, from betraying that she had detected him in the theft of the emerald? All was not yet lost; and he breathed more freely as he went back to the house where duty, and his anxiety for his father, required his presence. There were his flowers, floating on the stream.

"Hatred cast them there," thought he, "but before they reach the sea many blossoms will have opened which were mere hard buds when she flung them away. She can never love any man but me, I feel it, I know it. The first time we looked into each other's eyes the fate of our hearts was sealed. What she hates in me is my mad crime; what first set her against me was her righteous anger at my suit for Katharina. But that sin was but a dream in my life, which can never recur; and as for Katharina--I have sinned against her once, but I will not continue to sin through a whole, long lifetime. I have been permitted to trifle with love unpunished so often, that at last I have learnt to under-estimate its power. I could laugh as I sacrificed mine to my mother's wishes; but that, and that alone, has given rise to all these horrors. But no, all is not yet lost! Paula will listen to me; and when she sees what my inmost feelings are--when I have confessed all to her, good and evil alike--when she knows that my heart did but wander, and has returned to her who has taught me that love is no jest, but solemn earnest, swaying all mankind, she will come round--everything will come right."

A noble and rapturous light came into his face, and as he walked on, his hopes rose:

"When she is mine I know that everything good in me that I have inherited from my forefathers will blossom forth. When my mother called me to my father's bed-side, she said: 'Come, Orion, life is earnest for you and me and all our house, your father...' Yes, it is earnest indeed, however all this may end! To win Paula, to conciliate her, to bring her near to me, to have her by my side and do something great, something worthy of her--this is such a purpose in life as I need! With her, only with her I know I could achieve it; without her, or with that gilded toy Katharina, old age will bring me nothing but satiety, sobering and regrets--or, to call it by its Christian designation: bitter repentance. As Antaeus

renewed his strength by contact with mother earth, so, father do I feel myself grow taller when I only think of her. She is salvation and honor; the other is ruin and misery in the future. My poor, dear Father, you will, you must survive this stroke to see the fulfilment of all your joyful hopes of your son. You always loved Paula; perhaps you may be the one to appease her and bring her back to me; and how dear will she be to you, and, God willing, to my mother, too, when you see her reigning by my side an ornament to this house, to this city, to this country--reigning like a queen, your son's redeeming and guardian angel!"

Uplifted, carried away by these thoughts, he had reached the viridarium. He there found Sebek the steward waiting for his young master: "My lord is asleep now," he whispered, "as the physician foretold, but his face.... Oh, if only we had Philippus here again!"

"Have you sent the chariot with the fast horses to the Convent of St. Cecilia?" asked Orion eagerly; and when Sebek had replied in the affirmative and vanished again indoors, the young man, overwhelmed with painful forebodings, sank on his knees near a column to which a crucifix was hung, and lifted up his hands and soul in fervent prayer.

CHAPTER XV.

The physician had installed Paula in her new home, and had introduced her to the family who were henceforth to be her protectors, and to enable her to lead a happier life.

He had but a few minutes to devote to her and her hosts; for scarcely had he taken her into the spacious rooms, gay with flowers, of which she now took possession, when he was enquired for by two messengers, both anxious to speak with him. Paula knew how critical her uncle's state was, and now, contemplating the probability of losing him, she first understood what he had been to her. Thus sorrow was her first companion in her new abode--a sorrow to which the comfort of her pretty, airy rooms added keenness.

One of the messengers was a young Arab from the other side of the river, who handed to Philippus a letter from the merchant Haschim. The old man informed him that, in consequence of a bad fall his eldest son had had, he was forced to start at once for Djiddah on the Red Sea. He begged the physician to take every care of his caravan-leader, to whom he was much attached, to remove him when he thought fit from the governor's house, and to nurse him till he was well, in some quiet retreat. He would bear in mind the commission given him by the daughter of the illustrious Thomas. He sent with this letter a purse well-filled with gold pieces.

The other messenger was to take the leech back again in the light chariot with the fast horses to the suffering Mukaukas. He at once obeyed the summons, and the steeds, which the driver did not spare, soon carried him back to the governor's house.

A glance at his patient told him that this was the beginning of the end; still, faithful to his principle of never abandoning hope till the heart of the sufferer had ceased to beat, he raised the senseless man, heedless of Orion, who was on his knees by his father's pillow, signed to the deaconess in attendance, an experienced nurse, and laid cool, wet cloths on the head and neck of the sufferer, who was stricken with apoplexy. Then he bled him.

Presently the Mukaukas wearily opened his eyes, turned uneasily from side to side, and recognizing his kneeling son and his wife, bathed in tears, he murmured, almost inarticulately, for his paralyzed tongue no longer did his will: "Two pillules, Philip!"

The physician unhesitatingly acceded to the request of the dying man, who again closed his eyes; but only to reopen them, and to say, with the same difficulty, but with perfect consciousness: "The end is at hand! The blessing of the Church--Orion, the Bishop."

The young man hastened out of the room to fetch the prelate, who was waiting in the viridarium with two deacons, an exorcist, and a sacristan bearing the sacred vessels.

The governor listened in devout composure to the service of the last sacrament, looked on at the ceremonies performed by the exorcist as, with waving of hands and pious ejaculations he banned the evil spirits and cast out from the dying man the devil that might have part in him; but he could no longer swallow the bread which, in the Jacobite rite, was administered soaked in the wine. Orion took the holy elements for him, and the dying man, with a smile, murmured to his son:

"God be with thee, my son! The Lord, it seems, denies me His precious Blood--and yet--let me try once more."

This time he succeeded in swallowing the wine and a few crumbs of bread; and the bishop Ptolimus, a gentle old man of a beautiful and dignified presence, spoke comfort to him, and asked him whether he felt that he was dying penitent and in perfect faith in the mercy of his Lord and Saviour, and whether he repented of his sins and forgave his enemies.

The sick man bowed his head with an effort and murmured:

"Even the Melchites who murdered my sons--and even the head of our Church, the Patriarch, who was only too glad to leave it to me to achieve things which he scrupled to do himself. That--that--But you, Ptolimus--a wise and worthy servant of the Lord--tell me to the best of your convictions: May I die in the belief that it was not a sin to conclude a peace with the Arab conquerors of the Greeks?--May I, even at this hour, think of the Melchites as heretics?"

The prelate drew his still upright figure to its full height, and his mild features assumed a determined--nay a stern expression as he exclaimed:

"You know the decision pronounced by the Synod of Ephesus--the words which should be graven on the heart of every true Jacobite as on marble and brass 'May all who divide the nature of Christ--and this is what the Melchites do--be divided with the sword, be hewn in pieces and be burnt alive!'--No Head of our Church has ever hurled such a curse at the Moslems who adore the One God!"

The sufferer drew a deep breath, but he presently added with a sigh:

"But Benjamin the Patriarch, and John of Niku have tormented my soul with fears! Still, you too, Ptolimus, bear the crosier, and to you I will confess that your brethren in office, the shepherds of the Jacobite fold, have ruined my peace for hundreds of days and nights, and I have been near to cursing them. But before the night fell the Lord sent light into my soul, and I forgave them, and now, through you, I crave their pardon and their blessing. The Church has but

reluctantly opened the doors to me in these last years; but what servant can be allowed to complain of the Master from whom he expects grace? So listen to me. I close my eyes as a faithful and devoted adherent of the Church, and in token thereof I will endow her to the best of my power and adorn her with rich and costly gifts; I will--but I can say no more.--Speak for me, Orion. You know--the gems--the hanging...."

His son explained to the bishop what a splendid gift, in priceless jewels, the dying man intended to offer to the Church. He desired to be buried in the church of St. John at Alexandria by his father's side, and to be prayed for in front of the mortuary chapel of his ancestors in the Necropolis; he had set aside a sum of money, in his will, to pay for the prayers to be offered for his soul. The priests were well pleased to hear this, and they absolved him unconditionally and completely; then, after blessing him fervently, they quitted the room.

Philippus heaved a sigh of relief when the ecclesiastics had departed, and constantly renewed the wet compress, while the dying governor lay for a long time in silence with his eyes shut. Presently he rubbed them as though he felt revived, raised his head a little with the physician's help, and looking up, said:

"Draw the ring off my finger, Orion, and wear it worthily.--Where is little Mary, where is Paula? I should wish to bid them farewell too."

The young man and his mother exchanged uneasy glances, but Neforis collected herself at once and replied:

"We have sent for Mary; but Paula--you know she never was happy with us--and since the events of yesterday...."

"Well?" asked the invalid.

"She hastily quitted the house; but we parted friends, I can assure you of that; she is still in Memphis, and she spoke of you most affectionately and wished to see you, and charged me with many loving messages for you; so, if you really care to see her...."

The sick man tried to nod his head, but in vain. He did not, however, insist on her being sent for, but his face wore an expression of deep melancholy and the words came faintly from his lips.

"Thomas' daughter! The noblest and loveliest of all."

"The noblest and loveliest," echoed Orion, in a voice that was tremulous with strong, deep and sincere emotion; then he begged the leech and the deaconess to leave him alone with his parents. As soon as they had left the room the young man spoke softly but urgently into his father's ear:

"You are quite right, Father," he said. "She is better and more noble, more beautiful and more highminded than any girl living. I love her, and will stake everything to win her heart. Oh, God! Oh, God! Merciful Heaven!--Are you glad, do you give your consent, Father? You dearest and best of men; I see it in your face."

"Yes, yes, yes," murmured the governor; his yellow, bloodshot eyes looked up to Heaven, and with a terrible effort he stammered out: "Blessing--my blessing, on you and Paula.--Tell her from me.... If she had confided in her old uncle, as she used to do, the freedman would never have robbed us.--She is a brave soul; how she fought for the poor fellow. I will hear more about it if my strength holds out.--Why is she not here?"

"She wished so much to bid you farewell," replied Neforis, "but you were asleep."

"Was she in such a hurry to be gone?" asked her husband with a bitter smile. "Fear about the emerald may have had something to do with it? But how could I be angry with her? Hiram acted without her knowledge, I suppose? Yes, I knew it!--Ah; that dear, sweet face! If I could but see it once more. The joy--of my eyes, and my companion at draughts! A faithful heart too; how she clung to her father! she was ready to sacrifice everything for him.--And you, you, my old.... But no--no reproaches at such a time. You, Mother--you, my Neforis, thanks, a thousand thanks for all your love and kindness. What a mystical and magic bond is that of a Christian marriage like ours? Mark that, Orion. And you, Mother: I am anxious about this. You--do not hurt the girl's feelings again. Say--say you bless this union; it will make me happier at the last.--Paula and Orion; both of them--both.--I never dared before--but what better could we wish?"

The matron clasped her hands and sobbed out:

"Anything, everything you wish! But Father, Orion, our faith!--And then, merciful Saviour, that poor little Katharina!"

"Katharina!" repeated the sick man, and his feeble lips parted in a compassionate smile. "Our boy and the water--water--you know what I would say."

Then his eyes began to sparkle more brightly and he said in a low voice, but still eagerly, as though death were yet far from him:

"My name is George, the son of the Mukaukas; I am the great Mukaukas and our family--all fine men of a proud race; all: My father, my uncle, our lost sons, and Orion here--all palms and oaks! And shall a dwarf, a mere blade of rice be grafted on to the grand old stalwart stock? What would come of that?--Oh, ho! a miserable little brood! But Paula! The cedar of Lebanon--Paula; she would give new life to the grand old race."

"But our faith, our faith," moaned Neforis. "And you, Orion, do you even know what her feeling is towards you?"

"Yes and no. Let that rest for the present," said the youth, who was deeply moved. "Oh Father! if I only knew that your blessing..."

"The Faith, the Faith," interrupted the Mukaukas in a broken voice.

"I will be true to my own!" cried Orion, raising his father's hand to his lips. "But think, picture to yourself, how Paula and I would reign in this house, and how another generation would grow up in it worthy of the great Mukaukas and his ancestors!"

"I see it, I see it," murmured the sick man sinking back on his pillows, unconscious.

Philippus was immediately called in, and, with him, little Mary came weeping into the room. The physician's efforts to revive the sufferer were presently successful; again the sick man opened his eyes, and spoke more distinctly and loudly than before:

"There is a perfume of musk. It is the fragrance that heralds the Angel of Death."

After this he lay still and silent for a long time. His eyes were closed, but his brows were knit and showed that he was thinking with a painful effort. At length, with a sigh, he said, almost inaudibly: "So it was and so it is: The Greek oppressed my people with arbitrary cruelty as if we were dogs; the Moslem, too, is a stranger, but he is just. That which happened it was out of my power to prevent; and it is well, it is very well that it turned out so.--Very well," he repeated several times, and then he shivered and said with a groan:

"My feet are so cold! But never mind, never mind, I like to be cool."

The leech and the deaconess at once set to work to heat blocks of wood to warm his feet; the sick man looked up gratefully and went on: "At church, in the House of God, I have often found it deliciously cool and to-day it is the Church that eases my death-bed by her pardon. Do you, my Son, be faithful to her. No member of our house should ever be an apostate. As to the new faith--it is overspreading land after land with incredible power; ambition and covetousness are driving thousands into its fold. But we--we are faithful to Christ Jesus, we are no traitors. If I, I the Mukaukas, had consented to go over to the Khaliff I might have been a prince in purple, and have governed my own country in his name. How many have deserted to the Moslems! And the temptation will come to you, too, and their faith offers much that is attractive to the crowd. They imagine a Paradise full of unspeakably alluring joys--but we, my son--we shall meet again in our own, shall we not?"

"Yes, yes, Father!" cried the young man. "I will remain a Christian, staunch and true..."

"That is right," interrupted the sick man. He was determined to forget that his son wished to marry a Melchite and went on quickly: "Paula.... But no more of that. Remain faithful to your own creed--otherwise.... However, child, seek your own road; you are--but you will walk in the right way, and it is because I know that, know it surely, that I can die so calmly.

"I have provided abundantly for your temporal welfare. I have been a good husband, a faithful father, have I not, O Saviour?--Have I not, Neforis? And that which is my best and surest comfort is that for many long years I have administered justice in this land, and never, never once--and Thou my Refuge and Comforter art my witness!--never once consciously or willingly have I been an unrighteous judge. Before me the poor were equal with the rich, the powerful with the helpless widow. Who would have dared..." Here he broke off, his eyes, wandering feebly round the room, fell on Mary who had sunk on her knees, opposite to Orion on the other side of the bed. The dying man, who had thus summed up the outcome of a long and busy life, ceased his reflections, and when the child saw that he was vainly trying to turn his powerless head towards her, she threw her arms round him with passionate grief; unscared by his fixed gaze or the altered hue of his beloved face, she kissed his lips and cheeks, exclaiming:

"Grandfather, dear grandfather, do not leave us; stay with us, pray, pray stay with us!"

Something faintly resembling a smile parted his parched lips, and all the tenderness with which his soul was overflowing for this sweet young bud of humanity would have found expression in his voice but that he could only mutter huskily:

"Mary, my darling! For your sake I should be glad to live a long while yet, a very long while; but the other world--I am standing already on its threshold. Good-bye--I must indeed say good-bye."

"No, no--I will pray; oh! I will pray so fervently that you may get well again!" cried the child. But he replied:

"Nay, nay. The Saviour is already taking me by the hand. Farewell, and again farewell. Did you bring Paula? I do not see her. Did you bring Paula with you, sweetheart? She--did she leave us in anger? If she only knew; ah! your Paula has treated us ill." The child's heart was still full of the horrible crime which had so revolted her truthful nature, and which had deprived her of rest all through an evening, a long night and a morning; she laid her little head close to that of the old man--her dearest and best friend. For years he had filled her father's place, and now he was dying, leaving her forever! But she could not let him depart with a false idea of the woman whom she worshipped with all the fervor of her child's heart; in a subdued voice, but with eager feeling, she said, close to his ear:

"But Grandfather, there is one thing you must know before the Saviour takes you away to be happy in Heaven. Paula

told the truth, and never, never told a lie, not even for Hiram's sake. An empty gold frame hung to her necklace and no gem at all. Whatever Orion may say, I saw it myself and cannot be mistaken, as truly as I hope to see you and my poor father in heaven! And Katharina, too, thought better of it, and confessed to me just now that she had committed a great sin and had borne false witness before the judges to please her dear Orion. I do not know what Hiram had done to offend him; but on the strength of Katharina's evidence the judges condemned him to death. But Paula--you must understand that Paula had nothing, positively nothing whatever to do with the stealing of the emerald."

Orion, kneeling there, was condemned to hear every word the little girl so vehemently whispered, and each one pierced his heart like a dagger-thrust. Again and again he felt inclined to clutch at her across the bed and fling her on the ground before his father's eyes; but grief and astonishment seemed to have paralyzed his whole being; he had not even the power to interrupt her with a single word.

She had spoken, and all was told.

He clung to the couch like a shattered wretch; and when his father turned his eyes on him and gasped out: "Then the Court--our Court of justice pronounced an unrighteous sentence?" he bowed his head in contrition.

The dying man murmured even less articulately and incoherently than before: "The gem--the hanging--you, you perhaps--was it you? that emerald--I cannot..."

Orion helped his father in his vain efforts to utter the dreadful words. Sooner would he have died with the old man than have deceived him in such a moment; he replied humbly and in a low voice:

"Yes, Father--I took it. But as surely as I love you and my mother this, the first reckless act of my life, which has brought such horrors in its train... Shall be the last," he would have said; but the words "I took it," had scarcely passed his lips when his father was shaken by a violent trembling, the expression of his eyes changed fearfully, and before the son had spoken his vow to the end the unhappy father was, by a tremendous effort, sitting upright. Loud sobs of penitence broke from the young man's heaving breast, as the Mukaukas wrathfully exclaimed, in thick accents, as quickly as the heavy, paralyzed tongue would allow:

"You, you! A disgrace to our ancient and blameless Court! You?--Away with you! A thief, an unjust judge, a false witness,--and the only descendant of Menas! If only these hands were able--you--you--Go, villain!" And with this wild outcry, George, the gentle and just Mukaukas, sank back on his pillows; his bloodshot eyes were staring, fixed on vacancy; his gasping lips repeated again and again, but less and less audibly the one word "Villain;" his swollen fingers clutched at the light coverlet that lay over him; a strange, shrill wheezing came through his open mouth, and the heavy corpse of the great dignitary fell, like a falling palm-tree, into Orion's arms.

Orion started up, his eyes inflamed, his hair all dishevelled, and shook the dead man as though to compel him back to life again, to hear his oath and accept his vow, to see his tears of repentance, to pardon him and take back the name of infamy which had been his parting word to his loved and spoiled child.

In the midst of this wild outbreak the physician came back, glanced at the dead man's distorted features, laid a hand on his heart, and said with solemn regret as he led little Mary away from the couch:

"A good and just man is gone from the land of the living."

Orion cried aloud and pushed away Mary, who had stolen close to him; for, young as she was, she felt that it was she who had brought the worst woe on her uncle, and that it was her part to show him some affection.

She ran then to her grandmother; but she, too, put her aside and fell on her knees by the side of her wretched son to weep with him; to console him who was inconsolable, and in whom, a few minutes since, she had hoped to find her own best consolation; but her fond words of motherly comfort found no echo in his broken spirit.

CHAPTER XVI.

When Philippus had parted from Paula he had told her that the Mukaukas might indeed die at any moment, but that it was possible that he might yet struggle with death for weeks to come. This hope had comforted her; for she could not bear to think that the only true friend she had had in Memphis, till she had become more intimate with the physician, should quit the world forever without having heard her justification. Nothing could be more unlikely than that any one in Neforis' household--excepting her little grandchild should ever remember her with kindness; and she scarcely desired it; but she rebelled against the idea of forfeiting the respect she had earned, even in the governor's house. If her friend should succeed in prolonging her uncle's life, by a confidential interview with him she might win back his old affection and his good opinion.

Her new home she felt was but a resting-place, a tabernacle in the desert-journey of her solitary pilgrimage, and she here meant to avail herself of the information she had gathered from her Melchite dependents. Hope had now risen supreme in her heart over grief and disappointment. Orion's presence alone hung like a threatening hail-cloud over the sprouting harvest of her peace of mind. And yet, next to the necessity of waiting at Memphis for the return of her messenger, nothing tied her to the place so strongly as her interest in watching the future course of his life, at any rate from a distance. What she felt for him--and she told herself it was deep aversion--nevertheless constituted a large share of her inner life, little as she would confess it to herself.

Her new hosts had received her as a welcome guest, and they certainly did not seem to be poor. The house was spacious, and though it was old and unpretentious it was comfortable and furnished with artistic taste. The garden had amazed her by the care lavished on it; she had seen a hump-backed gardener and several children at work in it. A strange party--for every one of them, like their chief, was in some way deformed or crippled.

The plot of ground--which extended towards the river to the road-way for foot passengers, vehicles and the files of men towing the Nile-boats--was but narrow, and bounded on either side by extensive premises. Not far from the spot where it lay nearest to the river was the bridge of boats connecting Memphis with the island of Rodah. To the right was the magnificent residence--a palace indeed--belonging to Susannah; to the left was an extensive grove, where tall palms, sycamores with spreading foliage, and dense thickets of blue-green tamarisk trees cast their shade. Above this bower of splendid shrubs and ancient trees rose a long, yellow building crowned with a turret; and this too was not unknown to her, for she had often heard it spoken of in her uncle's house, and had even gone there now and then escorted by Perpetua. It was the convent of St. Cecilia, the refuge of the last nuns of the orthodox creed left in Memphis; for, though all the other sisterhoods of her confession had long since been banished, these had been allowed to remain in their old home, not only because they were famous sick-nurses, a distinction common to all the Melchite orders, but even more because the decaying municipality could not afford to sacrifice the large tax they annually paid to it. This tax was the interest on a considerable capital bequeathed to the convent by a certain wise predecessor of the Mukaukas', with the prudent proviso, ratified under the imperial seal of Theodosius II., that if the convent were at any time broken up, this endowment, with the land and buildings which it likewise owed to the generosity of the same benefactor, should become the property of the Christian emperor at that time reigning.

Mukaukas George, notwithstanding his well-founded aversion for everything Melchite, had taken good care not to press this useful Sisterhood too hardly, or to deprive his impoverished capital of its revenues only to throw them into the hands of the wealthy Moslems. The title-deed on which the Sisters relied was good; and the governor, who was a good lawyer as well as a just man, had not only left them unmolested, but in spite of his fears--during the last few years--for his own safety, had shown himself no respecter of persons by defending their rights firmly and resolutely against the powerful patriarch of the Jacobite Church. The Senate of the ancient capital naturally, approved his course, and had not merely suffered the heretic Sisterhood to remain, but had helped and encouraged it.

The Jacobite clergy of the city shut their eyes, and only opened them to watch the convent at Easter-tide; for on the Saturday before Easter, the nuns, in obedience to an agreement made before the Monophysite Schism, were required to pay a tribute of embroidered vestments to the head of the Christian Churches, with wine of the best vintages of Kochoe near the Pyramid of steps, and a considerable quantity of flowers and confectionary. So the ancient coenobium of women was maintained, and though all Egypt was by this time Jacobite or Moslem, and many of the older Sisters had departed this life within the last year, no one had thought of enquiring how it was that the number of the nuns remained still the same, till the Jacobite archbishop Benjamin filled the patriarchal throne of Alexandria in the place of the Melchite Cyrus.

To Benjamin the heretical Sisters at Memphis--the hawks in a dove-cote, as he called them--were an offence, and he thought that the deed might bear a new interpretation: that as there was no longer a Christian emperor, and as the word "Christian" was used in the document, if the convent were broken up the property should pass into the hands of the only Christian magnate then existing in the country: himself, namely, and his Church. The ill-feeling which the Patriarch fostered against the Mukaukas had been aggravated to hostility by their antagonism on this matter.

A musical dirge now fell on Paula's ear from the convent chapel. Was the worthy Mother Superior dead? No, this lament must be for some other death, for the strange skirling wail of the Egyptian women came up to her corner window from the road, from the bridge, and from the boats on the river. No Jacobite of Memphis would have dared to express her grief so publicly for the death of a Melchite; and as the chorus of voices swelled, the thought struck her with a chill that it must be her uncle and friend who had closed his weary eyes in death.

It was with deep emotion and many tears that she perceived how sincerely the death of this righteous man was bewailed by all his fellow-citizens. Yes, he only, and no other Egyptian, could have called forth this great and expressive regret. The wailing women in the road were daubing the mud of the river on their foreheads and bosoms; men were standing in large groups and beating their heads and breasts with passionate gestures. On the bridge or boats the men would stop others, and from thence, too, piercing shrieks came across to her.

At last Philippus came in and confirmed her fears. The governor's death had shocked him no less than it did her, and he had to tell Paula all he knew of the dead man's last hours.

"Still, one good thing has come out of this misery," he said. "There is nothing so comforting as the discovery that we have been deceived in thinking ill of a man and of his character. This Orion, who has sinned so basely against himself and against you, is not utterly reprobate."

"Not?" interrupted Paula. "Then he has taken you in too!"

"Taken me in?" said the leech. "Hardly, I think. I have, alas! stood by many a death-bed; for I am too often sent for when Death is already beckoning the sick man away. I have met thousands of mourners in these melancholy scenes, which, I can assure you, are the very best school for training any one who desires to search the hearts of his fellow-creatures. By the bed of death, or in the mart, where everything is a question of Mine and Thine, it is easy to see how some--we for instance--are as careful to hide from the world all that is great and noble in us as others are to conceal what is petty and mean--we read men's hearts as an open page. From my observations of the dying and of those who sorrow for them, I, who am not Menander nor Lucian, could draw a series of portraits which should be as truthful likenesses as though the men had turned themselves inside out before me."

"That a dying man should show himself as he really is I can well believe," replied Paula. "He need have no further care for the opinions of others; but the mourners? Why, custom requires them to assume an air of grief and to shed tears."

"Very true; regret repeats itself by the side of the dead," replied the physician. "But the chamber of the dying is like a church. Death consecrates it, and the man who stands face to face with death often drops the mask by which he cheats his fellows. There we may see faces which you would shudder to look on, but others, too, which merely to see is enough to make us regard the degenerate species to which we belong with renewed respect."

"And you found such a comforting vision in Orion,--the thief, the false witness, the corrupt judge!" exclaimed Paula, starting up in indignant astonishment.

"There! you see," laughed Philippus. "Just like a woman! A little juggling, and lo! what was only rose color is turned to purple. No. The son of the Mukaukas has not yet undergone such a dazzling change of hue; but he has a feeling and impressible heart--and I hold even that in high esteem. I have no doubt that he loved his father deeply, nay passionately; though I have ample reason to believe him capable of the very worst. So long as I was present at the scene of death the father and son were parting in all friendship and tenderness, and when the good old man's heart had ceased to beat I found Orion in a state which is only possible to have when love has lost what it held dearest."

"All acting!" Paula put in.

"But there was no audience, dear friend. Orion would not have got up such a performance for his mother and little Mary."

"But he is a poet--and a highly-gifted one too. He sings beautiful songs of his own invention to the lyre; his ecstatic and versatile mind works him up into any frame of feeling; but his soul is perverted; it is soaked in wickedness as a sponge drinks up water. He is a vessel full of beautiful gifts, but he has forfeited all that was good and noble in him--all!"

The words came in eager haste from her indignant lips. Her cheeks glowed with her vehemence, and she thought she had won over the physician; but he gravely shook his head, and said:

"Your righteous anger carries you too far. How often have you blamed me for severity and suspicions but now I have to beg you to allow me to ask your sympathy for an experience to which you would probably have raised no objection the day before yesterday:

"I have met with evil-doers of every degree. Think, for instance, how many cases of wilful poisoning I have had to investigate."

"Even Homer called Egypt the land of poison," exclaimed Paula. "And it seems almost incredible that Christianity has not altered it in the least. Kosmas, who had seen the whole earth, could nowhere find more malice, deceit, hatred, and ill-will than exist here."

"Then you see in what good schools my experience of the wickedness of men has ripened," said Philippus smiling, "and they have taught me chiefly that there is never a criminal, a sinner, or a scapegrace, however infamous he may be, however cruel or lost to virtue, in whom some good quality or other may not be discovered.--Do you remember Nechebt, the horrible woman who poisoned her two brothers and her own father? She was captured scarcely three weeks ago; and that very monster in human form could almost die of hunger and thirst for the sake of her rascally son, who is a common soldier in the imperial army; at last she took to concocting poisons, not to improve her own wretched condition, but to send the shameless wretch means for a fresh debauch. I have known a thousand similar cases, but I will only mention that of one of the wildest and blood-thirstiest of robbers, who had evaded the vigilance of the watch again and again, but at last fell into their hands--and how? Because he had heard that his old mother was ill and he longed to see the withered old woman once more and give her a kiss, since he was her own child! In the same way Orion, however reprobate we may think him, has at any rate one characteristic which we must approve of: a tender affection for his father and mother. Your sponge is not utterly steeped in wickedness; there are still some pores, some cells which resist it; and if in him, as in so many others, the heart is one of them, then I say hopefully, like Horace the Roman: 'Nil desperandum.' It would be unjust to give him up altogether for lost."

To this assurance Paula found no answer; indeed, it struck her that--if Orion had told her the truth--it was only to please his mother that he had asked Katharina to marry him, while she herself occupied his heart.--The physician, wishing to change the subject, was about to speak again of the death of the Mukaukas, when one of the crippled serving girls came to announce a woman who asked to speak with Paula. A few minutes later she was clasped in the embrace of her faithful old friend and nurse, who rejoiced as heartily, laughing and crying for sheer delight, as if no tidings of misfortune had reached her; while Paula, though so much younger, was cut to the heart, and could not shake off the spell of her grief.

Perpetua understood this and owed her no grudge for the coolness with which she met her joyful excitement.

She told Paula that she had been well treated in her hot cell, and that about half an hour since Orion himself, the young Master now, had opened the door of her prison. He had been very gracious to her, but looked so pale and sad. The overbearing young man was quite altered; his eyes, which were dim with weeping, had moved her, Perpetua, to tears. She trusted that God would forgive him for his sins against herself and Paula; he must have been possessed by some evil demon; he had not been at all like himself; for he had a kind, warm heart, and though he had been so hard and unjust yesterday to poor Hiram he had made it up to him the first thing this morning, and had not only let him out of prison but had sent him and his son home to Damascus with large gifts and two horses. Nilus had told her this. He who hoped to be forgiven by his neighbor must also be ready to forgive. The great Augustine, even, had been no model of virtue in his youth and yet he had become a shining light in the Church; and now the son of the Mukaukas would tread in his father's footsteps. He was a handsome, engaging man, who would be the joy of their hearts yet, they might be very sure. Why, he had been as grave and as solemn as a bishop to-day; perhaps he had already turned over a new leaf. He himself had put her into his mother's chariot and desired the charioteer to drive her hither: what would Paula say to that? Her things were to be given over to her to-morrow morning, and packed under her own eyes, and sent after her. Nilus, the treasurer, had come with her to deliver a message to Paula; but he had gone first to the convent.

Paula desired the old woman to go thither and fetch him; as soon as Perpetua had left the room, she exclaimed:

"There, you see, is some one who is quite of your opinion. What creatures we are! Last evening my good Betta would have thought no pit of hell too deep for our enemy, and now? To be led to a chariot by such a fine gentleman in person is no doubt flattering; and how quickly the old body has forgotten all her grievances, how soothed and satisfied she is by the gracious permission to pack her precious and cherished possessions with her own hands.--You told me once that the Jacobites had made a Saint Orion out of the pagan god Osiris, and my old Betta sees a future Saint Augustine in the governor's son. I can see that she already regards him as her tutelary patron, and when we get back to Syria, she will be begging me to join her in a pilgrimage to his shrine!"

"And you will perhaps consent," replied the physician, to whom Paula at this moment, for the first time since his heart had glowed with love for her, did not seem to be quite what a man looks for in the woman he adores. Hitherto he had seen and heard nothing that was not high-minded and worthy of her; but her last words had, been spoken with vehement and indignant irony--and in Philip's opinion irony, blame which was intended to wound and not to improve its object, was unbecoming in a noble woman. The scornful laugh, with which she had triumphantly ended her speech, had opened as it were a wide abyss between his mind and hers. He, as he freely confessed to himself, was of a coarser and humbler grain than Paula, and he was apt to be satirical oftener than was right. She had been wont to dislike this habit in him; he had been glad that she did; it answered to the ideal he had formed of what the woman he loved should be. But now she had turned satirical; and her irony was no jest of the lips. It sprang, full of passion, from her agitated soul; this it was that grieved the leech who knew human nature, and at the same time roused his apprehensions. Paula read his disapproval in his face, and felt that there was a deep significance in his words, "And you will perhaps consent."

"Men are vexed," thought she, "when, after they have decisively expressed an opinion, we women dare

unhesitatingly to assert a different one," so, as she would on no account hurt the feelings of the friend to whom she owed so much, she said kindly:

"I do not care to enquire into the meaning of your strange prognostication. Thank God, by your kindness and care I have severed every tie that could have bound me to my poor uncle's son!--Now we will drop the subject; we have said too much about him already."

"That is quite my opinion," replied Philippus. "And, indeed, I would beg you quite to forget my 'perhaps.' I live wholly in the present and am no prophet; but I foresee, nevertheless, that Orion will make every effort, cost what it may...."

"Well?"

"To approach you again, to win your forgiveness, to touch your heart, to...."

"Let him dare" exclaimed Paula lifting her hand with a threatening gesture.

"And when he, gifted as he is in every way, has found his better self again and can come forward purified and worthy of the approbation of the best...."

"Still I will never, never forget how he has sinned and what he brought upon me!--Do you think that I have already forgotten your conversation with Neforis? You ask nothing of your friends but honest feeling akin to your own,--and what is it that repels me from Orion but feeling? Thousands have altered their behavior, but--answer me frankly--surely not what we mean by their feeling?"

"Yes, that too," said the leech with stern gravity. "Feeling, too, may change. Or do you range yourself on the side of the Arab merchant and his fellow-Moslems, who regard man as the plaything of a blind Fate?--But our spiritual teachers tell us that the evil to which we are predestined, which is that born into the world with us, may be averted, turned and guided to good by what they call spiritual regeneration. But who that lives in the tumult of the world can ever succeed in 'killing himself' in their sense of the word, in dying while yet he lives, to be born again, a new man? The penitent's garb does not suit the stature of an Orion; however, there is for him another way of returning to the path he has lost. Fortune has hitherto offered her spoilt favorite so much pleasure, that sheer enjoyment has left him no time to think seriously on life itself; now she is showing him its graver side, she is inviting him to reflect; and if he only finds a friend to give him the counsel which my father left in a letter for me, his only child, as a youth--and if he is ready to listen, I regard him as saved."

"And that word of counsel--what is it?" asked Paula with interest.

"To put it briefly, it is this: Life is not a banquet spread by fate for our enjoyment, but a duty which we are bound to fulfil to the best of our power. Each one must test his nature and gifts, and the better he uses them for the weal and benefit of the body of which he was born a member, the higher will his inmost gladness be, the more certainly will he attain to a beautiful peace of mind, the less terrors will Death have for him. In the consciousness of having sown seed for eternity he will close his eyes like a faithful steward at the end of each day, and of the last hour vouchsafed to him on earth. If Orion recognizes this, if he submits to accept the duties imposed on him by existence, if he devotes himself to them now for the first time to the best of his powers, a day may come when I shall look up to him with respect--nay, with admiration. The shipwreck of which the Arab spoke has overtaken him. Let us see how he will save himself from the waves, and behave when he is cast on shore."

"Let us see!" repeated Paula, "and wish that he may find such an adviser! As you were speaking it struck me that it was my part.--But no, no! He has placed himself beyond the pale of the compassion which I might have felt even for an enemy after such a frightful blow. He! He can and shall never be anything to me till the end of time. I have to thank you for having found me this haven of rest. Help me now to keep out everything that can intrude itself here to disturb my peace. If Orion should ever dare, for whatever purpose, to force or steal a way into this house, I trust to you, my friend and deliverer!"

She held out her hand to Philippus, and as he took it the blood seethed in his veins with tender emotion.

"My strength, like my heart, is wholly yours!" he exclaimed ardently. "Command them, and if the devoted love of a faithful, plain-spoken man--"

"Say no more, no, no!" Paula broke in with anxious vehemence. "Let us remain closely bound together by friendship--as brother and sister."

"As brother and sister?" he dully echoed with a melancholy smile. "Aye, friendship too is a beautiful, beautiful thing. But yet--let me speak--I have dreamed of love, the tossing sea of passion; I have felt its surges here--in here; I feel them still... But man, man," and he struck his forehead with his fist, "have you forgotten, like a fool, what your image is in the mirror; have you forgotten that you are an ugly, clumsy fellow, and that the gorgeous flower you long for...."

Paula had shrunk back, startled by her friend's vehemence; but she now went up to him, and taking his hand with frank spirit, she said impressively:

"It is not so, Philippus, my dear, kind, only friend. The gorgeous flower you desire I can no longer give you--or any

one. It is mine no longer; for when it had opened, once for all, cruel feet trod it down. Do not abuse your mirrored image; do not call yourself a clumsy fellow. The best and fairest might be proud of your love, just as you are. Am I not proud, shall I not always be proud of your friendship?"

"Friendship, friendship!" he retorted, snatching away his hand. "This burning, longing heart thirsts for other feelings! Oh, woman! I know the wretch who has trodden down the flower of flowers in your heart, and I, madman that I am, can sing his praises, can take his part; and cost what it may, I will still do so as long as you.... But perhaps the glorious flower may strike new roots in the soil of hatred and I, the hapless wretch who water it, may see it."

At this, Paula again took both his hands, and exclaimed in deep and painful agitation of mind:

"Say no more, I beg and entreat you. How can I live in peace here, under your protection and in constant intercourse with you, without knowing myself guilty of a breach of propriety such as the most sacred feelings of a young girl bid her avoid, if you persist in overstepping the limits which bound true and faithful friendship? I am a lonely girl and should give myself up to despair, as lost, if I could not take refuge in the belief that I can rely upon myself. Be satisfied with what I have to offer you, my friend, and may God reward you! Let us both remain worthy of the esteem which, thank Heaven! we are fully justified in feeling for each other."

The physician, deeply moved, bent his head; scarcely able to control himself, he pressed her firm white hand to his lips, while, just at this moment, Perpetua and the treasurer came into the room.

This worthy official--a perfectly commonplace man, neither tall nor short, neither old nor young, with a pale, anxious face, furrowed by work and responsibility, but shrewd and finely cut--glanced keenly at the pair, and then proceeded to lay a considerable sum in gold pieces before Paula. His young master had sent it, in obedience to his deceased father's wishes, for her immediate needs; the rest, the larger part of her fortune, with a full account, would be given over to her after the Mukaukas was buried. Nilus could, however, give her an approximate idea of the sum, and it was so considerable that Paula could not believe her ears. She now saw herself secure against external anxiety, nay, in such ease that she was justified in living at some expense.

Philippus was present throughout the interview, and it cut him to the heart. It had made him so happy to think that he was all in all to the poor orphan, and could shelter her against pressing want. He had been prepared to take upon himself the care of providing Paula with the home she had found and everything she could need; and now, as it turned out, his protegee was not merely higher in rank than himself, but much richer.

He felt as though Orion's envoy had robbed him of the best joy in life. After introducing Paula to her worthy host and his family, he quitted the house of Rufinus with a very crushed aspect.

When night came Perpetua once more enjoyed the privilege of assisting her young mistress to undress; but Paula could not sleep, and when she joined her new friends next morning she told herself that here, if anywhere, was the place where she might recover her lost peace, but that she must still have a hard struggle and a long pilgrimage before she could achieve this.

CHAPTER XVII.

During all these hours Orion had been in the solitude of his own rooms. Next to them was little Mary's sleeping-room; he had not seen the child again since leaving his father's death-bed. He knew that she was lying there in a very feverish state, but he could not so far command himself as to enquire for her. When, now and again, he could not help thinking of her, he involuntarily clenched his fists. His soul was shaken to the foundations; desperate, beside himself, incapable of any thought but that he was the most miserable man on earth--that his father's curse had blighted him--that nothing could undo what had happened--that some cruel and inexorable power had turned his truest friend into a foe and had sundered them so completely that there was no possibility of atonement or of moving him to a word of pardon or a kindly glance--he paced the long room from end to end, flinging himself on his knees at intervals before the divan, and burying his burning face in the soft pillows. From time to time he could pray, but each time he broke off; for what Power in Heaven or on earth could unseal those closed eyes and stir that heart to beat again, that tongue to speak--could vouchsafe to him, the outcast, the one thing for which his soul thirsted and without which he thought he must die: Pardon, pardon, his father's pardon! Now and then he struck his forehead and heart like a man demented, with cries of anguish, curses and lamentations.

About midnight--it was but just twelve hours since that fearful scene, and to him it seemed like as many days--he threw himself on the couch, dressed as he was in the dark mourning garments, which he had half torn off in his rage and despair, and broke out into such loud groans that he himself was almost frightened in the silence of the night. Full of self-pity and horror at his own deep grief, he turned his face to the wall to screen his eyes from the clear, full moon, which only showed him things he did not want to see, while it hurt him.

His torture was beginning to be quite unbearable; he fancied his soul was actually wounded, riven, and torn; it had even occurred to him to seize his sharpest sword and throw himself upon it like Ajax in his fury--and like Cato--and so put a sudden end to this intolerable and overwhelming misery.

He started up for--surely it was no illusion, no mistake--the door of his room was softly opened and a white figure came in with noiseless, ghostly steps. He was a brave man, but his blood ran cold; however, in a moment he recognized his nocturnal visitor as little Mary. She came across the moonlight without speaking, but he exclaimed in a sharp tone:

"What is the meaning of this? What do you want?"

The child started and stood still in alarm, stretching out imploring hands and whispering timidly:

"I heard you lamenting. Poor, poor Orion! And it was I who brought it all on you, and so I could not stay in bed any longer--I must--I could not help..." But she could say no more for sobs. Orion exclaimed:

"Very well, very well: go back to your own room and sleep. I will try not to groan so loud."

He ended his speech in a less rough tone, for he observed that the child had come to see him, though she was ill, with bare feet and only in her night-shift, and was trembling with cold, excitement, and grief. Mary, however, stood still, shook her head, and replied, still weeping though less violently:

"No, no. I shall stop here and not go away till you tell me that you--Oh, God, you never can forgive me, but still I must say it, I must."

With a sudden impulse she ran straight up to him, threw her arms round his neck, laid her head against his, and then, as he did not immediately push her away, kissed his cheeks and brow.

At this a strange feeling came over him; he himself did not know what it was, but it was as though something within him yielded and gave way, and the moisture which felt warm in his eyes and on his cheeks was not from the child's tears but his own. This lasted through many minutes of silence; but at last he took the little one's arms from about his neck, saying:

"How hot your hands and your cheeks are, poor thing! You are feverish, and the night air blows in chill--you will catch fresh cold by this mad behavior."

He had controlled his tears with difficulty, and as he spoke, in broken accents, he carefully wrapped her in the black robe he had thrown off and said kindly:

"Now, be calm, and I will try to compose myself. You did not mean any harm, and I owe you no grudge. Now go; you will not feel the draught in the anteroom with that wrap on. Go; be quick."

"No, no," she eagerly replied. "You must let me say what I have to say or I cannot sleep. You see I never thought of hurting you so dreadfully, so horribly--never, never! I was angry with you, to be sure, because--but when I spoke I really and truly did not think of you, but only of poor Paula. You do not know how good she is, and grandfather was so fond of her before you came home; and he was lying there and going to die so soon, and I knew that he believed Paula to be a thief and a liar, and it seemed to me so horrible, so unbearable to see him close his eyes with such a mistake in his mind, such an injustice!--Not for his sake, oh no! but for Paula's; so then I--Oh Orion! the Merciful Saviour is my witness, I could not help it; if I had had to die for it I could not have helped it! I should have died, if I had not spoken!"

"And perhaps it was well that you spoke," interrupted the young man, with a deep sigh. "You see, child, your lost father's miserable brother is a ruined man and it matters little about him; but Paula, who is a thousand times better than I am, has at least had justice done her; and as I love her far more dearly than your little heart can conceive of, I will gladly be friends with you again: nay, I shall be more fond of you than ever. That is nothing great or noble, for I need love--much love to make life tolerable. The best love a man may have I have forfeited, fool that I am! and now dear, good little soul, I could not bear to lose yours! So there is my hand upon it; now, give me another kiss and then go to bed and sleep."

But still Mary would not do his bidding, but only thanked him vehemently and then asked with sparkling eyes:

"Really, truly? Do you love Paula so dearly?" At this point however she suddenly checked herself. "And little Katharina..."

"Never mind about that," he replied with a sigh. "And learn a lesson from all this. I, you see, in an hour of recklessness did a wrong thing; to hide it I had to do further wrong, till it grew to a mountain which fell on me and crushed me. Now, I am the most miserable of men and I might perhaps have been the happiest. I have spoilt my own life by my own folly, weakness, and guilt; and I have lost Paula, who is dearer to me than all the other creatures on earth put together. Yes, Mary, if she had been mine, your poor uncle would have been the most enviable fellow in the world, and he might have been a fine fellow, too, a man of great achievements. But as it is!--Well, what is done cannot be undone! Now go to bed child; you cannot understand it all till you are older."

"Oh I understand it already and much better perhaps than you suppose," cried the ten years' old child. "And if you love Paula so much why should not she love you? You are so handsome, you can do so many things, every one likes you, and Paula would have loved you, too, if only.... Will you promise not to be angry with me, and may I say it?"

"Speak out, little simpleton."

"She cannot owe you any grudge when she knows how dreadfully you are suffering on her account and that you are good at heart, and only that once ever did--you know what. Before you came home, grandfather said a hundred times over what a joy you had been to him all your life through, and now, now.... Well, you are my uncle, and I am only a stupid little girl; still, I know that it will be just the same with you as it was with the prodigal son in the Bible. You and grandfather parted in anger..."

"He cursed me," Orion put in gloomily.

"No, no! For I heard every word he said. He only spoke of your evil deed in those dreadful words and bid you go out of his sight."

"And what is the difference--Cursed or outcast?"

"Oh! a very great difference! He had good reason to be angry with you; but the prodigal son in the Bible became his father's best beloved, and he had the fatted calf slain for him and forgave him all; and so will grandfather in heaven forgive, if you are good again, as you used to be to him and to all of us. Paula will forgive you, too; I know her--you will see. Katharina loved you of course; but she, dear Heaven! She is almost as much a child as I am; and if only you are kind to her and make her some pretty present she will soon be comforted. She really deserves to be punished for bearing false witness, and her punishment cannot, at any rate, be so heavy as yours."

These words from the lips of an innocent child could not but fall like seed corn on the harrowed field of the young man's tortured soul and refresh it as with morning dew. Long after Mary had gone to rest he lay thinking them over.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The funeral rites over the body of the deceased Mukaukas were performed on the day after the morrow. Since the priesthood had forbidden the old heathen practice of mummifying the dead, and even cremation had been forbidden by the Antonines, the dead had to be interred soon after decease; only those of high rank were hastily embalmed and lay in state in some church or chapel to which they had contributed an endowment. Mukaukas George was, by his own desire, to be conveyed to Alexandria and there buried in the church of St. John by his father's side; but the carrier pigeon, by which the news of the governor's death had been sent to the Patriarch, had returned with instructions to deposit the body in the family tomb at Memphis, as there were difficulties in the way of the fulfillment of his wishes.

Such a funeral procession had not been seen there within the memory of man. Even the Moslem viceroy, the great general Amru, came over from the other side of the Nile, with his chief military and civil officers, to pay the last honors to the just and revered governor. Their brown, sinewy figures, and handsome calm faces, their golden helmets and shirts of mail, set with precious stones--trophies of the war of destruction in Persia and Syria--their magnificent horses with splendid trappings, and the authoritative dignity of their bearing made a great impression on the crowd. They arrived with slow and impressive solemnity; they returned like a cloud driven before the storm, galloping homewards from the burial-ground along the quay, and then thundering and clattering over the bridge of boats. Vivid and dazzling lightnings had flashed through the wreaths of white dust that shrouded them, as their gold armor reflected the sun. Verily, these horsemen, each of them worthy to be a prince in his pride, could find it no very hard task to subdue the mightiest realms on earth.

Men and women alike had gazed at them with trembling admiration: most of all at the heroic stature and noble dusky face of Amru, and at the son of the deceased Mukaukas, who, by the Moslem's desire, rode at his side in mourning garb on a fiery black horse.

The handsome youth, and the lordly, powerful man were a pair from whom the women were loth to turn their eyes; for both alike were of noble demeanor, both of splendid stature, both equally skilled in controlling the impatience of their steeds, both born to command. Many a Memphite was more deeply impressed by the head of the famous warrior, erect on a long and massive throat, with its sharply-chiselled aquiline nose and flashing black eyes, than by the more regular features and fine, slightly-waving locks of the governor's son--the last representative of the oldest and proudest race in all Egypt.

The Arab looked straight before him with a steady, commanding gaze; the youth, too, looked up and forwards, but turned from time to time to survey the crowd of mourners. As he caught sight of Paula, among the group of women who had joined the procession, a gleam of joy passed over his pale face, and a faint flush tinged his cheeks; his fixed outlook had knit his brows and had given his features an expression of such ominous sternness that one and another of the bystanders whispered:

"Our gay and affable young lord will make a severe ruler."

The cause of his indignation had not escaped the notice either of his noble companion or of the crowd. He alone knew as yet that the Patriarch had prohibited the removal of his father's remains to Alexandria; but every one could see that the larger portion of the priesthood of Memphis were absent from this unprecedented following. The Bishop alone marched in front of the six horses drawing the catafalque on which the costly sarcophagus was conveyed to the burying-place, in accordance with ancient custom--Bishop Plotinus, with John, a learned and courageous priest, and a few choristers bearing a crucifix and chanting psalms.

On arriving at the Necropolis they all dismounted, and the barefooted runners in attendance on the Arabs came forward to hold the horses. By the tomb the Bishop pronounced a few warm words of eulogy, after which the thin chant of the choristers sounded trivial and meagre enough; but scarcely had they ceased when the crowd uplifted its many thousand voices, and a hymn of mourning rang out so loud and grand that this burial ground had scarcely ever heard the like. The remaining ceremonies were hasty and incomplete, since the priests who were indispensable to their performance had not made their appearance.

Amru, whose falcon eye nothing could escape, at once noted the omission and exclaimed, in so loud and inconsiderate a voice that it could be heard even at some distance.

"The dead is made to atone for what the living, in his wisdom, did for his country's good, hand-in-hand with us Moslems."

"By the Patriarch's orders," replied Orion, and his voice quavered, while the veins in his forehead swelled with rage. "But I swear, by my father's soul, that as surely as there is a just God, it shall be an evil day for Benjamin when he closes the gate of Heaven against this noblest of noble souls."

"We carry the key of ours under our own belt," replied the general, striking his deep chest, while he smiled consciously and with a kindly eye on the young man. "Come and see me on Saturday, my young friend; I have something to say to you! I shall expect you at sundown at my house over there. If I am not at home by dusk, you must

wait for me."

As he spoke he twisted his hand in his horse's mane and Orion prepared to assist him to mount; but the Arab, though a man of fifty, was too quick for him. He flung himself into the saddle as lightly as a youth, and gave his followers the signal for departure.

Paula had been standing close to the entrance of the tomb with Dame Neforis, and she had heard every word of the dialogue between the two men. Pale, as she beheld him, in costly but simple, flowing, mourning robes, stricken by solemn and manly indignation, it was impossible that she should not confess that the events of the last days had had a powerful effect on the misguided youth.

When Paula had led the grief-worn but tearless widow to her chariot, and had then returned home with Perpetua, the image of the handsome and wrathful youth as he lifted his powerful arm and tightly-clenched fist and shook them in the air, still constantly haunted her. She had not failed to observe that he had seen her standing opposite to him by the open tomb and she had been able to avoid meeting his eye; but her heart had throbbed so violently that she still felt it quivering, she had not succeeded in thinking of the beloved dead with due devotion.

Orion, as yet, had neither come near her in her peaceful retreat, nor sent any messenger to deliver her belongings, and this she thought very natural; for she needed no one to tell her how many claims there must be on his time.

But though, before the funeral, she had firmly resolved to refuse to see him if he came, and had given her nurse full powers to receive from his hand the whole of her property, after the ceremony this line of conduct no longer struck her as seemly; indeed, she considered it no more than her duty to the departed not to repel Orion if he should crave her forgiveness.

And there was another thing which she owed to her uncle. She desired to be the first to point out to Orion, from Philip's point of view, that life was a post, a duty; and then, if his heart seemed opened to this admonition, then--but no, this must be all that could pass between them--then all must be at an end, extinct, dead, like the fires in a sunken raft, like a soap-bubble that the wind has burst, like an echo that has died away--all over and utterly gone.

And as to the counsel she thought of offering to the man she had once looked up to? What right had she to give it? Did he not look like a man quite capable of planning and living his own life in his own strength? Her heart thirsted for him, every fibre of her being yearned to see him again, to hear his voice, and it was this longing, this craving to which she gave the name of duty, connecting it with the gratitude she owed to the dead.

She was so much absorbed in these reflections and doubts that she scarcely heard all the garrulous old nurse was saying as she walked by her side.

Perpetua could not be easy over such a funeral ceremony as this; so different to anything that Memphis had been wont to see. No priests, a procession on horseback, mourners riding, and among them the son even of the dead--while of old the survivors had always followed the body on foot, as was everywhere the custom! And then a mere chirping of crickets at the tomb of such illustrious dead, followed by the disorderly squalling of an immense mob--it had nearly cracked her ears! However, the citizens might be forgiven for that, since it was all in honor of their departed governor!--this thought touched even her resolute heart and brought the tears to her eyes; but it roused her wrath, too, for had she not seen quite humble folk buried in a more solemn manner and with worthier ceremonial than the great and good Mukaukas George, who had made such a magnificent gift to the Church. Oh those Jacobites! They only were capable of such ingratitude, only their heretical prelate could commit such a crime. Every one in the Convent of St. Cecilia, from the abbess down to the youngest novice, knew that the Patriarch had sent word by a carrier pigeon forbidding the Bishop to allow the priests to take part in the ceremony. Plotinus was a worthy man, and he had been highly indignant at these instructions; it was not in his power to contravene them; but at any rate he had led the procession in person, and had not forbidden John's accompanying him. Orion, however, had not looked as though he meant to brook such an insult to his father or let it pass unpunished. And whose arm was long enough to reach the Patriarch's throne if not... But no, it was impossible! the mere thought of such a thing made her blood run cold. Still, still... And how graciously the Moslem leader had talked with him!--Merciful Heaven! If he were to turn apostate from the holy Christian faith, like so many reprobate Egyptians, and subscribe to the wicked doctrines of the Arabian false prophet! It was a tempting creed for shameless men, allowing them to have half a dozen wives or more without regarding it as a sin. A man like Orion could afford to keep them, of course; for the abbess had said that every one knew that the great Mukaukas was a very rich man, though even the chief magistrate of the city could not fully satisfy himself concerning the enormous amount of property left. Well, well; God's ways were past finding out. Why should He smother one under heaps of gold, while He gave thousands of poor creatures too little to satisfy their hunger!

By the end of this torrent of words the two women had reached the house; and not till then was Paula clear in her own mind: Away, away with the passion which still strove for the mastery, whether it were in deed hatred or love! For she felt that she could not rightly enjoy her recovered freedom, her new and quiet happiness in the pretty home she owed to the physician's thoughtful care, till she had finally given up Orion and broken the last tie that had bound her to his house.

Could she desire anything more than what the present had to offer her? She had found a true haven of rest where

she lacked for nothing that she could desire for herself after listening to the admonitions of Philip pus. Round her were good souls who felt with and for her, many occupations for which she was well-fitted, and which suited her tastes, with ample opportunities of bestowing and winning love. Then, a few steps through pleasant shades took her to the convent where she could every day attend divine service among pious companions of her own creed, as she had done in her childhood. She had longed intensely for such food for the spirit, and the abbess--who was the widow of a distinguished patrician of Constantinople and had known Paula's parents--could supply it in abundance. How gladly she talked to the girl of the goodness and the beauty of those to whom she owed her being and whom she had so early lost! She could pour out to this motherly soul all that weighed on her own, and was received by her as a beloved daughter of her old age.

And her hosts--what kind-hearted though singular folks! nay, in their way, remarkable. She had never dreamed that there could be on earth any beings at once so odd and so lovable.

First there was old Rufinus, the head of the house, a vigorous, hale old man, who, with his long silky, snow-white hair and beard, looked something like the aged St. John and something like a warrior grown grey in service. What an amiable spirit of childlike meekness he had, in spite of the rough ways he sometimes fell into. Though inclined to be contradictory in his intercourse with his fellow-men, he was merry and jocose when his views were opposed to theirs. She had never met a more contented soul or a franker disposition, and she could well understand how much it must fret and gall such a man to live on,--day after day, appearing, in one respect at any rate, different from what he really was. For he, too, belonged to her confession; but, though he sent his wife and daughter to worship in the convent chapel, he himself was compelled to profess himself a Coptic Christian, and submit to the necessity of attending a Jacobite church with all his family on certain holy days, averse as he was to its unattractive form of worship.

Rufinus possessed a sufficient fortune to secure him a comfortable maintenance; and yet he was hard at work, in his own way, from morning till night. Not that his labors brought him any revenues; on the contrary, they led to claims on his resources; every one knew that he was a man of good means, and this would have certainly involved him in persecution if the Patriarch's spies had discovered him to be a Melchite, resulting in exile and probably the confiscation of his goods. Hence it was necessary to exercise caution, and if the old man could have found a purchaser for his house and garden, in a city where there were ten times as many houses empty as occupied, he would long since have set out with all his household to seek a new home.

Most aged people of vehement spirit and not too keen intellect, adopt a saying as a stop-gap or resting-place, and he was fond of using two phrases one of which ran: "As sure as man is the standard of all things" and the other--referring to his house--"As sure as I long to be quit of this lumber." But the lumber consisted of a well-built and very spacious dwellinghouse, with a garden which had commanded a high price in earlier times on account of its situation near the river. He himself had acquired it at very small cost shortly before the Arab incursion, and--so quickly do times change--he had actually bought it from a Jacobite Christian who had been forced by the Melchite Patriarch Cyrus, then in power, to fly in haste because he had found means to convert his orthodox slaves to his confession.

It was Philippus who had persuaded his accomplished and experienced friend to come to Memphis; he had clung to him faithfully, and they assisted each other in their works.

Rufinus' wife, a frail, ailing little woman, with a small face and rather hollow cheeks, who must once have been very attractive and engaging, might have passed for his daughter; she was, in fact, twenty years younger than her husband. It was evident that she had suffered much in the course of her life, but had taken it patiently and all for the best. Her restless husband had caused her the greatest trouble and alarms, and yet she exerted herself to the utmost to make his life pleasant. She had the art of keeping every obstacle and discomfort out of his way, and guessed with wonderful instinct what would help him, comfort him, and bring him joy. The physician declared that her stooping attitude, her bent head, and the enquiring expression of her bright, black eyes were the result of her constant efforts to discover even a straw that might bring harm to Rufinus if his callous and restless foot should tread on it.

Their daughter Pulcheria, was commonly called "Pul" for short, to save time, excepting when the old man spoke of her by preference as "the poor child." There was at all times something compassionate in his attitude towards his daughter; for he rarely looked at her without asking himself what could become of this beloved child when he, who was so much older, should have closed his eyes in death and his Joanna perhaps should soon have followed him; while Pulcheria, seeing her mother take such care of her father that nothing was left for her to do, regarded herself as the most superfluous creature on earth and would have been ready at any time to lay down her life for her parents, for the abbess, for her faith, for the leech; nay, and though she had known her for no more than two days, even for Paula. However, she was a very pretty, well-grown girl, with great open blue eyes and a dreamy expression, and magnificent red-gold hair which could hardly be matched in all Egypt. Her father had long known of her desire to enter the convent as a novice and become a nursing sister; but though he had devoted his whole life to a similar impulse, he had more than once positively refused to accede to her wishes, for he must ere long be gathered to his fathers and then her mother, while she survived him, would want some one else to wear herself out for.

Just now "Pul" was longing less than usual to take the veil; for she had found in Paula a being before whom she felt

small indeed, and to whom her unenvious soul, yearning and striving for the highest, could look up in satisfied and rapturous admiration. In addition to this, there were under her own roof two sufferers needing her care: Rustem, the wounded Masdakite, and the Persian girl. Neforis, who since the fearful hour of her husband's death had seemed stunned and indifferent to all the claims of daily life, living only in her memories of the departed, had been more than willing to leave to the physician the disposal of these two and their removal from her house.

In the evening after Paula's arrival Philippus had consulted with his friends as to the reception of these new guests, and the old man had interrupted him, as soon as he raised the question of pecuniary indemnification, exclaiming:

"They are all very welcome. If they have wounds, we will make them heal; if their heads are turned, we will screw them the right way round; if their souls are dark, we will light up a flame in them. If the fair Paula takes a fancy to us, she and her old woman may stay as long as it suits her and us. We made her welcome with all our hearts; but, on the other hand, you must understand that we must be free to bid her farewell--as free as she is to depart. It is impossible ever to know exactly how such grand folks will get on with humble ones, and as sure as I long to be quit of this piece of lumber I might one day take it into my head to leave it to the owls and jackals and fare forth, staff in hand.--You know me. As to indemnification--we understand each other. A full purse hangs behind the sick, and the sound one has ten times more than she needs, so they may pay. You must decide how much; only--for the women's sake, and I mean it seriously--be liberal. You know what I need Mammon for; and it would be well for Joanna if she had less need to turn over every silver piece before she spends it in the housekeeping. Besides, the lady herself will be more comfortable if she contributes to pay for the food and drink. It would ill beseem the daughter of Thomas to be down every evening under the roof of such birds of passage as we are with thanks for favors received. When each one pays his share we stand on a footing of give and take; and if either one feels any particular affection to another it is not strangled by 'thanks' or 'take it;' it is love for love's sake and a joy to both parties."

"Amen," said the leech; and Paula had been quite satisfied by her friend's arrangements.

By the next day she felt herself one of the household, though she every hour found something that could not fail to strike her as strange.

CHAPTER XIX.

When Paula had eaten with Rufinus and his family after the funeral ceremonies, she went into the garden with Pul and the old man--it had been impossible to induce Perpetua to sit at the same table with her mistress. The sun was now low, and its level beams gave added lustre to the colors of the flowers and to the sheen of the thick, metallic foliage of the south, which the drought and scorching heat had still spared. A bright-hued humped ox and an ass were turning the wheel which raised cooling waters from the Nile and poured them into a large tank from which they flowed through narrow rivulets to irrigate the beds. This toil was now very laborious, for the river had fallen to so low a level as to give cause for anxiety, even at this season of extreme ebb. Numbers of birds with ruffled feathers, with little splints on their legs, or with sadly drooping heads, were going to roost in small cages hung from the branches to protect them from cats and other beasts of prey; to each, as he went by, Rufinus spoke a kindly word, or chirruped to encourage and cheer it. Aromatic odors filled the garden, and rural silence; every object shone in golden glory, even the black back of the negro working at the water-wheel, and the white and yellow skin of the ox; while the clear voices of the choir of nuns thrilled through the convent-grove. Pul listened, turning her face to meet it, and crossing her arms over her heart. Her father pointed to her as he said to Paula:

"That is where her heart is. May she ever have her God before her eyes! That cannot but be the best thing for a woman. Still, among such as we are, we must hold to the rule: Every man for his fellowman on earth, in the name of the merciful Lord!--Can our wise and reasonable Father in Heaven desire that brother should neglect brother, or--as in our case--a child forsake its parents?"

"Certainly not," replied Paula. "For my own part, nothing keeps me from taking the veil but my hope of finding my long-lost father; I, like your Pulcheria, have often longed for the peace of the cloister. How piously rapt your daughter stands there! What a sweet and touching sight!--In my heart all was dark and desolate; but here, among you all, it is already beginning to feel lighter, and here, if anywhere, I shall recover what I lost in my other home.--Happy child! Could you not fancy, as she stands there in the evening light, that the pure devotion which fills her soul, radiated from her? If I were not afraid of disturbing her, and if I were worthy, how gladly would I join my prayers to hers!"

"You have a part in them as it is," replied the old man with a smile. "At this moment St. Cecilia appears to her under the guise of your features. We will ask her--you will see."

"No, leave her alone!" entreated Paula with a blush, and she led Rufinus away to the other end of the garden.

They soon reached a spot where a high hedge of thorny shrubs parted the old man's plot from that of Susannah. Rufinus here pricked up his ears and then angrily exclaimed:

"As sure as I long to be quit of this lumber, they are cutting my hedge again! Only last evening I caught one of the slaves just as he was going to work on the branches; but how could I get at the black rascal through the thorns? It was to make a peep-hole for curious eyes, or for spies, for the Patriarch knows how to make use of a petticoat; but I will be even with them! Do you go on, pray, as if you had seen and heard nothing; I will fetch my whip."

The old man hurried away, and Paula was about to obey him; but scarcely had he disappeared when she heard herself called in a shrill girl's voice through a gap in the hedge, and looking round, she spied a pretty face between the boughs which had yesterday been forced asunder by a man's hands--like a picture wreathed with greenery.

Even in the twilight she recognized it at once, and when Katharina put her curly head forward, and said in a beseeching tone: "May I get through, and will you listen to me?" she gladly signified her consent.

The water-wagtail, heedless of Paula's hand held out to help her, slipped through the gap so nimbly that it was evident that she had not long ceased surmounting such obstacles in her games with Mary. As swift as the wind she came down on her feet, holding out her arms to rush at Paula; but she suddenly let them fall in visible hesitancy, and drew back a step. Paula, however, saw her embarrassment; she drew the girl to her, kissed her forehead, and gaily exclaimed:

"Trespassing! And why could you not come in by the gate? Here comes my host with his hippopotamus thong.--Stop, stop, good Rufinus, for the breach effected in your flowery wall was intended against me and not against you. There stands the hostile power, and I should be greatly surprised if you did not recognize her as a neighbor?"

"Recognize her?" said the old man, whose wrath was quickly appeased. "Do we know each other, fair damsel--yes or no? It is an open question."

"Of course!" cried Katharina, "I have seen you a hundred times from the gnat-tower."

"You have had less pleasure than I should have had, if I had been so happy as to see you.--We came across each other about a year ago. I was then so happy as to find you in my large peach-tree, which to this day takes the liberty of growing over your garden-plot."

"I was but a child then," laughed Katharina, who very well remembered how the old man, whose handsome white head she had always particularly admired, had spied her out among the boughs of his peach-tree and had advised her,

with a good-natured nod, to enjoy herself there.

"A child!" repeated Rufinus. "And now we are quite grown up and do not care to climb so high, but creep humbly through our neighbor's hedge."

"Then you really are strangers?" cried Paula in surprise. "And have you never met Pulcheria, Katharina?"

"Pul?--oh, how glad I should have been to call her!" said Katharina. "I have been on the point of it a hundred times; for her mere appearance makes one fall in love with her,--but my mother..."

"Well, and what has your mother got to say against her neighbors?" asked Rufinus. "I believe we are peaceable folks who do no one any harm."

"No, no, God forbid! But my mother has her own way of viewing things; you and she are strangers still, and as you are so rarely to be seen in church..."

"She naturally takes us for the ungodly. Tell her that she is mistaken, and if you are Paula's friend and you come to see her--but prettily, through the gate, and not through the hedge, for it will be closely twined again by to-morrow morning--if you come here, I say, you will find that we have a great deal to do and a great many creatures to nurse and care for--poor human creatures some of them, and some with fur or feathers, just as it comes; and man serves his Maker if he only makes life easier to the beings that come in his way; for He loves them all. Tell that to your mother, little wagtail, and come again very often."

"Thank you very much. But let me ask you, if I may, where you heard that odious nickname? I hate it."

"From the same person who told you the secret that my Pulcheria is called Pul!" said Rufinus; he laughed and bowed and left the two girls together.

"What a dear old man!" cried Katharina. "Oh, I know quite well how he spends his Days! And his pretty wife and Pul--I know them all. How often I have watched them--I will show you the place one day! I can see over the whole garden, only not what goes on near the convent on the other side of the house, or beyond those trees. You know my mother; if she once dislikes any one.... But Pul, you understand, would be such a friend for me!"

"Of course she would," replied Paula. "And a girl of your age must chose older companions than little Mary."

"Oh, you shall not say a word against her!" cried Katharina eagerly. "She is only ten years old, but many a grown-up person is not so upright or so capable as I have found her during these last few miserable days."

"Poor child!" said Paula stroking her hair.

At this a bitter sob broke suddenly and passionately from Katharina; she tried with all her might to suppress it, but could not succeed. Her fit of weeping was so violent that she could not utter a word, till Paula had led her to a bench under a spreading sycamore, had induced her with gentle force to sit down by her side, clasping her in her arms like a suffering child, and speaking to her words of comfort and encouragement.

Birds without number were going to rest in the dense branches overhead, owls and bats had begun their nocturnal raids, the sky put on its spangled glory of gold and silver stars, from the western end of the town came the jackals' bark as they left their lurking-places among the ruined houses and stole out in search of prey, the heavy dew, falling through the mild air silently covered the leaves, the grass, and the flowers; the garden was more powerfully fragrant now than during the day-time, and Paula felt that it was high time to take refuge from the mists that came up from the shallow stream. But still she lingered while the little maiden poured out all that weighed upon her, all she repented of, believing she could never atone for it; and then all she had gone through, thinking it must break her heart, and all she still had to live down and drive out of her mind.

She told Paula how Orion had wooed her, how much she loved him, how her heart had been tortured by jealousy of her, Paula, and how she had allowed herself to be led away into bearing false witness before the judges. And then she went on to say it was Mary who had first opened her eyes to the abyss by which she was standing. In the afternoon after the death of the Mukaukas she had gone with her mother to the governor's house to join in her friends' lamentations. She had at once asked after Mary, but had not been allowed to see her, for she was still in bed and very feverish. She was then on her way to the cool hall when she heard her mother's voice--not in grief, but angry and vehement--so, thinking it would be more becoming to keep out of the way, she wandered off into the pillared vestibule opening towards the Nile. She would not for worlds have met Orion, and was terribly afraid she might do so, but as she went out, for it was still quite light, there she found him--and in what a state! He was sitting all in a heap, dressed in black, with his head buried in his hands. He had not observed her presence; but she pitied him deeply, for though it was very hot he was trembling in every limb, and his strong frame shuddered repeatedly. She had therefore spoken to him, begging him to be comforted, at which he had started to his feet in dismay, and had pushed his unkempt hair back from his face, looking so pale, so desperate, that she had been quite terrified and could not manage to bring out the consoling words she had ready. For some time neither of them had uttered a syllable, but at length he had pulled himself together as if for some great deed, he came slowly towards her and laid his hands on her shoulders with a solemn dignity which no one certainly had ever before seen in him. He stood gazing into her face--his eyes were red with much weeping--and he sighed from his very heart the two words: "Unhappy Child!"--She could hear them still

sounding in her ears.

And he was altered: from head to foot quite different, like a stranger. His voice, even, sounded changed and deeper than usual as he went on:

"Child, child! Perhaps I have given much pain in my life without knowing it; but you have certainly suffered most through me, for I have made you, an innocent, trusting creature, my accomplice in crime. The great sin we both committed has been visited on me alone, but the punishment is a hundred--a thousand times too heavy!"

"And with this," Katharina went on, "he covered his face with his hands, threw himself on the couch again, and groaned and sighed. Then he sprang up once more, crying out so loud and passionately that I felt as if I must die of grief and pity: 'Forgive me if you can! Forgive me, wholly, freely. I want it--you must, you must! I was going to run up to him and throw my arms round him and forgive him everything, his trouble distressed me so much; but he gravely pushed me away--not roughly or sternly, and he said that there was an end of all love-making and betrothal between us--that I was young, and that I should be able to forget him. He would still be a true friend to me and to my mother, and the more we required of him the more gladly would he serve us.'

"I was about to answer him, but he hastily interrupted me and said firmly and decisively: 'Lovable as you are, I cannot love you as you deserve; for it is my duty to tell you, I have another and a greater love in my heart--my first and my last; and though once in my life I have proved myself a wretch, still, it was but once; and I would rather endure your anger, and hurt both you and myself now, than continue this unrighteous tie and cheat you and others.'--At this I was greatly startled, and asked: 'Paula?' However, he did not answer, but bent over me and touched my forehead with his lips, just as my father often kissed me, and then went quickly out into the garden.

"Just then my mother came up, as red as a poppy and panting for breath: she took me by the hand without a word, dragged me into the chariot after her, and then cried out quite beside herself--she could not even shed a tear for rage: 'What insolence! what unheard-of behavior--How can I find the heart to tell you, poor sacrificed lamb...'"

"And she would have gone on, but that I would not let her finish; I told her at once that I knew all, and happily I was able to keep quite calm. I had some bad hours at home; and when Nilus came to us yesterday, after the opening of the will, and brought me the pretty little gold box with turquoises and pearls that I have always admired, and told me that the good Mukaukas had written with his own hand, in his last will, that it was to be given to me I his bright little 'Katharina,' my mother insisted on my not taking it and sent it back to Neforis, though I begged and prayed to keep it. And of course I shall never go to that house again; indeed my mother talks of quitting Memphis altogether and settling in Constantinople or some other city under Christian rule. 'Then our nice, pretty house must be given up, and our dear, lovely garden be sold to the peasant folk, my mother says. It was just the same a year and a half ago with Memnon's palace. His garden was turned into a corn-field, and the splendid ground-floor rooms, with their mosaics and pictures, are now dirty stables for cows and sheep, and pigs are fed in the rooms that belonged to Hathor and Dorothea. Good Heavens! And they were my clearest friends! And I am never to play with Mary any more; and mother has not a kind word for any living soul, hardly even for me, and my old nurse is as deaf as a mole! Am I not a really miserable, lonely creature? And if you, even you, will have nothing to say to me, who is there in all Memphis whom I can trust in? But you will not be so cruel, will you? And it will not be for long, for my mother really means to go away. You are older than I am, of course, and much graver and wiser..."

"I will be kind to you, child; but try to make friends with Pulcheria!"

"Gladly, gladly. But then my mother! I should get on very well by myself if it were not... Well, you yourself heard what Orion said to me, that time in the avenue. He surely loved me a little! What sweet, tender names he gave me then. Oh God! no man can speak like that to any one he is not fond of!--And he is rich himself; it cannot have been only my fortune that bewitched him. And does he look like a man who would allow himself to be parted from a girl by his mother, whether he would or no?"

"He was always fond of me I think; but then, afterwards, he remembered what a high position he had to fill and regarded me as too little and too childish. Oh, how many tears I have shed over being so absurdly little! A Water-wagtail--that is what I shall always be. Your old host called me so; and if a man like Orion feels that he must have a stately wife I can hardly blame him. That other one whom he thinks he loves better than he does me is tall and beautiful and majestic--like you; and I have always told myself that his future wife ought to look like you. It is all over between him and me, and I will submit humbly; but at the same time I cannot help thinking that when he came home he thought me pretty and attractive, and had a real fancy and liking for me. Yes, it was so, it certainly was so!--But then he saw that other one, and I cannot compare with her. She is indeed the woman he wants,--and that other, Paula, is yourself. Yes, indeed, you yourself; an inner voice tells me so. And I tell you truly, you may quite believe me: it is a pain no doubt, but I can be glad of it too. I should hate any mere girl to whom he held out his hand--but, if you are that other--and if you are his wife..."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Paula decidedly. "Consider what you are saying. When Orion tempted you to perjure yourself, did he behave as my friend or as my foe, my bitterest and most implacable enemy?"

"Before the judges, to be sure..." replied the girl looking down thoughtfully. But she soon looked up again, fixed her

eyes on Paula's face with a sparkling, determined glance, and frankly and unhesitatingly exclaimed: "And you?--In spite of it all he is so handsome, so clever, so manly. You can hardly help it--you love him!"

Paula withdrew her arm, which had been round Katharina, and answered candidly.

"Until to-day, at the funeral, I hated and abominated him; but there, by his father's tomb, he struck me as a new man, and I found it easy to forgive him in my heart."

"Then you mean to say that you do not love him?" urged Katharina, clasping her friend's round arm with her slender fingers.

Paula started to feel how icy cold her hand was. The moon was up, the stars rose higher and higher, so, simply saying: "Come away," she rose. "It must be within an hour of midnight," she added. "Your mother will be anxious about you."

"Only an hour of midnight!" repeated the girl in alarm. "Good Heavens, I shall have a scolding! She is still playing draughts with the Bishop, no doubt, as she does every evening. Good-bye then for the present. The shortest way is through the hedge again."

"No," said Paula firmly, "you are no longer a child; you are grown up, and must feel it and show it. You are not to creep through the bushes, but to go home by the gate. Rufinus and I will go with you and explain to your mother..."

"No, no!" cried Katharina in terror. "She is as angry with you as she is with them. Only yesterday she forbid..."

"Forbid you to come to me?" asked Paula. "Does she believe..."

"That it was for your sake that Orion.... Yes, she is only too glad to lay all the blame on you. But now that I have talked to you I.... Look, do you see that light? It is in her sitting-room."

And, before Paula could prevent her, she ran to the hedge and slipped through the gap as nimbly as a weasel.

Paula looked after her with mingled feelings, and then went back to the house, and to bed. Katharina's story kept her awake for a long time, and the suspicion--nay almost the conviction--that it was herself, indeed, who had aroused that "great love" in Orion's heart gave her no rest. If it were she? There, under her hand was the instrument of revenge on the miscreant; she could make him taste of all the bitterness he had brewed for her aching spirit. But which of them would the punishment hurt most sorely: him or herself? Had not the little girl's confidences revealed a world of rapture to her and her longing heart? No, no. It would be too humiliating to allow the same hand that had smitten her so ruthlessly to uplift her to heaven; it would be treason against herself.

Slumber overtook her in the midst of these conflicting feelings and thoughts, and towards morning she had a dream which, even by daylight, haunted her and made her shudder.

She saw Orion coming towards her, as pale as death, robed in mourning, pacing slowly on a coal-black horse; she had not the strength to fly, and without speaking to her or looking at her, he lifted her high in the air like a child, and placed her in front of him on the horse. She put forth all her strength to get free and dismount, but he clasped her with both arms like iron clamps and quelled her efforts. Life itself would not have seemed too great a price for escape from this constraint; but, the more wildly she fought, the more closely she was held by the silent and pitiless horseman. At their feet flowed the swirling river, but Orion did not seem to notice it, and without moving his lips, he coolly guided the steed towards the water. Beside herself now with horror and dread, she implored him to turn away; but he did not heed her, and went on unmoved into the midst of the stream. Her terror increased to an agonizing pitch as the horse bore her deeper and deeper into the water; of her own free will she threw her arms round the rider's neck; his paleness vanished, his cheeks gained a ruddy hue, his lips sought hers in a kiss; and, in the midst of the very anguish of death, she felt a thrill of rapture that she had never known before. She could have gone on thus for ever, even to destruction; and, in fact, they were still sinking--she felt the water rising breast high, but she cared not. Not a word had either of them spoken. Suddenly she felt urged to break the silence, and as if she could not help it she asked: "Am I the other?" At this the waves surged down on them from all sides; a whirlpool dragged away the horse, spinning him round, and with him Orion and herself, a shrill blast swept past them, and then the current and the waves, the roaring of the whirlpool, the howling of the storm--all at once and together, as with one voice, louder than all else and filling her ears, shouted: "Thou!"--Only Orion remained speechless. An eddy caught the horse and sucked him under, a wave carried her away from him, she was sinking, sinking, and stretched out her arms with longing.--A cold dew stood on her brow as she slept, and the nurse, waking her from her uneasy dream, shook her head as she said:

"Why, child? What ails you? You have been calling Orion again and again, at first in terror and then so tenderly.--Yes, believe me, tenderly."

CHAPTER XX.

In the neat rooms which Rufinus' wife had made ready for her sick guests perfect peace reigned, and it was noon. A soft twilight fell through the thick green curtains which mitigated the sunshine, and the nurses had lately cleared away after the morning meal. Paula was moistening the bandage on the Masdakite's head, and Pulcheria was busy in the adjoining room with Mandane, who obeyed the physician's instructions with intelligent submission and showed no signs of insanity.

Paula was still spellbound by her past dream. She was possessed by such unrest that, quite against her wont, she could not long remain quiet, and when Pulcheria came to her to tell her this or that, she listened with so little attention and sympathy that the humble-minded girl, fearing to disturb her, withdrew to her patient's bed-side and waited quietly till her new divinity called her.

In fact, it was not without reason that Paula gave herself up to a certain anxiety; for, if she was not mistaken, Orion must necessarily present himself to hand over to her the remainder of her fortune; and though even yesterday, on her way from the cemetery, she had said to herself that she must and would refuse to meet him, the excitement produced by Katharina's story and her subsequent dream had confirmed her in her determination.

Perpetua awaited Orion's visit on the ground-floor, charged to announce him to Rufinus and not to her mistress. The old man had willingly undertaken to receive the money as her representative; for Philippus had not concealed from her that he had acquainted him with the circumstances under which Paula had quitted the governor's house, describing Orion as a man whom she had good reason for desiring to avoid.

By about two hours after noon Paula's restlessness had increased so much that now and then she wandered out of the sick-room, which looked over the garden, to watch the Nile-quay from the window of the anteroom; for he might arrive by either way. She never thought of the security of her property; but the question arose in her mind as to whether it were not actually a breach of duty to avoid the agitation it would cost her to meet her cousin face to face. On this point no one could advise her, not even Perpetua; her own mother could hardly have understood all her feelings on such an occasion. She scarcely knew herself indeed; for hitherto she had never failed, even in the most difficult cases, to know at once and without long reflection, what to do and to leave undone, what under special circumstances was right or wrong. But now she felt herself a yielding reed, a leaf tossed hither and thither; and every time she set her teeth and clenched her hands, determined to think calmly and to reason out the "for" and "against," her mind wandered away again, while the memory of her dream, of Orion as he stood by his father's grave--of Katharina's tale of "the other," and the fearful punishment which he had to suffer, nay indeed, certainly had suffered--came and went in her mind like the flocks of birds over the Nile, whose dipping and soaring had often passed like a fluttering veil between her eye and some object on the further shore.

It was three hours past noon, and she had returned to the sick-room, when she thought that she heard hoofs in the garden and hurried to the window once more. Her heart had not beat more wildly when the dog had flown at her and Hiram that fateful night, than it did now as she hearkened to the approach of a horseman, still hidden from her gaze by the shrubs. It must be Orion--but why did he not dismount? No, it could not be he; his tall figure would have overtopped the shrubbery which was of low growth.

She did not know her host's friends; it was one of them very likely. Now the horse had turned the corner; now it was coming up the path from the front gate; now Rufinus had gone forth to meet the visitor--and it was not Orion, but his secretary, a much smaller man, who slipped off a mule that she at once recognized, threw the reins to a lad, handed something to the old man, and then dropped on to a bench to yawn and stretch his legs.

Then she saw Rufinus come towards the house. Had Orion charged this messenger to bring her her possessions? She thought this somewhat insulting, and her blood boiled with wrath. But there could be no question here of a surrender of property; for what her host was holding in his hand was nothing heavy, but a quite small object; probably, nay, certainly a roll of papyrus. He was coming up the narrow stairs, so she ran out to meet him, blushing as though she were doing something wrong. The old man observed this and said, as he handed her the scroll:

"You need not be frightened, daughter of a hero. The young lord is not here himself, he prefers, it would seem, to treat with you by letter; and it is best so for both parties."

Paula nodded agreement; she took the roll, and then, while she tore the silken tie from the seal, she turned her back on the old man; for she felt that the blood had faded from her face, and her hands were trembling.

"The messenger awaits an answer," remarked Rufinus, before she began to read it. "I shall be below and at your service." He left; Paula returned to the sick-room, and leaning against the frame of the casement, read as follows, with eager agitation:

"Orion, the son of George the Mukaukas who sleeps in the Lord, to his cousin the daughter of the noble Thomas of Damascus, greeting.

"I have destroyed several letters that I had written to you before this one." Paula shrugged her shoulders incredulously. "I hope I may succeed better this time in saying what I feel to be indispensable for your welfare and my own. I have both to crave a favor and offer counsel."

"Counsel! he!" thought the girl with a scornful curl of the lips, as she went on. "May the memory of the man who loved you as his daughter, and who on his death-bed wished for nothing so much as to see you--averse as he was to your creed--and bless you as his daughter indeed, as his son's wife,--may the remembrance of that just man so far prevail over your indignant and outraged soul that these words from the most wretched man on earth, for that am I, Paula, may not be left unread. Grant me the last favor I have to ask of you--I demand it in my father's name."

"Demand!" repeated the damsel; her cheeks flamed, her eye sparkled angrily, and her hands clutched the opposite sides of the letter as though to tear it across. But the next words: "Do not fear," checked her hasty impulse--she smoothed out the papyrus and read on with growing excitement:

"Do not fear that I shall address you as a lover--as the man for whom there is but one woman on earth. And that one can only be she whom I have so deeply injured, whom I fought with as frantic, relentless, and cruel weapons as ever I used against a foe of my own sex."

"But one," murmured the girl; she passed her hand across her brow, and a faint smile of happy pride dwelt on her lips as she went on:

"I shall love you as long as breath animates this crushed and wretched heart."

Again the letter was in danger of destruction, but again it escaped unharmed, and Paula's expression became one of calm and tender pleasure as she read to the end of Orion's clearly written epistle:

"I am fully conscious that I have forfeited your esteem, nay even all good feeling towards me, by my own fault; and that, unless divine love works some miracle in your heart, I have sacrificed all joy on earth. You are revenged; for it was for your sake--understand that--for your sake alone, that my beloved and dying father withdrew the blessings he had heaped on my remorseful head, and in wrath that was only too just at the recreant who had desecrated the judgment-seat of his ancestors, turned that blessing to a curse."

Paula turned pale as she read. This then was what Katharina had meant. This was what had so changed his appearance, and perhaps, too, his whole inward being. And this, this bore the stamp of truth, this could not be a lie--it was for her sake that a father's curse had blighted his only son! How had it all happened? Had Philippus failed to observe it, or had he held his peace out of respect for the secrets of another?--Poor man, poor young man! She must see him, must speak to him. She could not have a moment's ease till she knew how it was that her uncle, a tender father--But she must go on, quickly to the end:

"I come to you only as what I am: a heart-broken man, too young to give myself over for lost, and at the same time determined to make use of all that remains to me of the steadfast will, the talents, and the self-respect of my forefathers to render me worthy of them, and I implore you to grant me a brief interview. Not a word, not a look shall betray the passion within and which threatens to destroy me.

"You must on no account fail to read what follows, since it is of no small real importance even to you. In the first place restitution must be made to you of all of your inheritance which the deceased was able to rescue and to add to by his fatherly stewardship. In these agitated times it will be a matter of some difficulty to invest this capital safely and to good advantage. Consider: just as the Arabs drove out the Byzantines, the Byzantines might drive them out again in their turn. The Persians, though stricken to the earth, the Avars, or some other people whose very name is as yet unknown to history, may succeed our present rulers, who, only ten years since, were regarded as a mere handful of unsettled camel-drivers, caravan-leaders, and poverty-stricken desert-tribes. The safety of your fortune would be less difficult to provide for if, as was formerly the case here, we could entrust it to the merchants of Alexandria. But one great house after another is being ruined there, and all security is at an end. As to hiding or burying your possessions, as most Egyptians do in these hard times, it is impossible, for the same reason as prevents our depositing it on interest in the state land-register. You must be able to get it at the shortest notice; since you might at some time wish to quit Egypt in haste with all your possessions.

"These are matters with which a woman cannot be familiar. I would therefore propose that you should leave the arrangement of them to us men; to Philippus, the physician, Rufinus, your host--who is, I am assured, an honest man--and to our experienced and trustworthy treasurer Nilus, whom you know as an incorruptible judge.

"I propose that the business should be settled tomorrow in the house of Rufinus. You can be present or not, as you please. If we men agree in our ideas I beg you--I beseech you to grant me an interview apart. It will last but a few minutes, and the only subject of discussion will be a matter--an exchange by which you will recover something you value and have lost, and grant me I hope, if not your esteem, at any rate a word of forgiveness. I need it sorely, believe me, Paula; it is as indispensable to me as the breath of life, if I am to succeed in the work I have begun on myself. If you have prevailed on yourself to read through this letter, simply answer 'Yes' by my messenger, to relieve me from torturing uncertainty. If you do not--which God forefend for both our sakes, Nilus shall this very day carry to you all that

belongs to you. But, if you have read these lines, I will make my appearance to-morrow, at two hours after noon, with Nilus to explain to the others the arrangement of which I have spoken. God be with you and infuse some ruth into your proud and noble soul!"

Paula drew a deep breath as the hand holding this momentous epistle dropped by her side; she stood for some time by the window, lost in grave meditation. Then calling Pulcheria, she begged her to tend her patient, too, for a short time. The girl looked up at her with rapt admiration in her clear eyes, and asked sympathetically why she was so pale; Paula kissed her lips and eyes, and saying affectionately: "Good, happy child!" she retired to her own room on the opposite side of the house. There she once more read through the letter.

Oh yes; this was Orion as she had known him after his return till the evening of that never-to-be-forgotten water-party. He was, indeed, a poet; nature herself had made it so easy to him to seduce unguarded souls into a belief in him! And yet no! This letter was honestly meant. Philippus knew men well; Orion really had a heart, a warm heart. Not the most reckless of criminals could mock at the curse hurled at him by a beloved father in his last moments. And, as she once more read the sentence in which he told her that it was his crime as an unjust judge towards her that had turned the dying man's blessing to a curse, she shuddered and reflected that their relative attitude was now reversed, and that he had suffered more and worse through her than she had through him. His pale face, as she had seen it in the Necropolis, came back vividly to her mind, and if he could have stood before her at this moment she would have flown to him, have offered him a compassionate hand, and have assured him that the woes she had brought upon him filled her with the deepest and sincerest pity.

That morning she had asked the Masdakite whether he had besought Heaven to grant him a speedy recovery, and the man replied that Persians never prayed for any particular blessing, but only for "that which was good;" for that none but the Omnipotent knew what was good for mortals. How wise! For in this instance might not the most terrible blow that could fall on a son--his father's curse--prove a blessing? It was undoubtedly that curse which had led him to look into his soul and to start on this new path. She saw him treading it, she longed to believe in his conversion--and she did believe in it. In this letter he spoke of his love; he even asked her hand. Only yesterday this would have roused her wrath; to-day she could forgive him; for she could forgive anything to this unhappy soul--to the man on whom she had brought such deep anguish. Her heart could now beat high in the hope of seeing him again; nay, it even seemed to her that the youth, whose return had been hailed with such welcome and who had so powerfully attracted her, had only now grown and ripened to full and perfect manhood through his sin, his penitence, and his suffering.

And how noble a task it would be to assist him in seeking the right way, and in becoming what he aspired to be!

The prudent care he had given to her worldly welfare merited her gratitude. What could he mean by the "exchange" he proposed? The "great love" of which he had spoken to Katharina was legible in every line of his letter, and any woman can forgive any man--were he a sinner, and a scarecrow into the bargain--for his audacity in loving her. Oh! that he might but set his heart on her--for hers, it was vain to deny it, was strongly drawn to him. Still she would not call it Love that stirred within her; it could only be the holy impulse to point out to him the highest goal of life and smooth the path for him. The pale horseman who had clutched her in her dream should not drag her away; no, she would joyfully lift him up to the highest pinnacle attainable by a brave and noble man.

So her thoughts ran, and her cheeks flushed as, with swift decision, she opened her trunk, took out papyrus, writing implements and a seal, and seated herself at a little desk which Rufinus had placed for her in the window, to write her answer.

At this a sudden fervent longing for Orion came over her. She made a great effort to shake it off; still, she felt that in writing to him it was impossible that she should find the right words, and as she replaced the papyrus in the chest and looked at the seal a strange thing happened to her; for the device on her father's well-known ring: a star above two crossed swords--perchance the star of Orion--caught her eye, with the motto in Greek: "The immortal gods have set sweat before virtue," meaning that the man who aims at being virtuous must grudge neither sweat nor toil.

She closed her trunk with a pleased smile, for the motto round the star was, she felt, of good augury. At the same time she resolved to speak to Orion, taking these words, which her forefathers had adopted from old Hesiod, as her text. She hastened down stairs, crossed the garden, passing by Rufinus, his wife and the physician, awoke the secretary who had long since dropped asleep, and enjoined him to say: "Yes" to his master, as he expected. However, before the messenger had mounted his mule, she begged him to wait yet a few minutes and returned to the two men; for she had forgotten in her eagerness to speak to them of Orion's plans. They were both willing to meet him at the hour proposed and, while Philippus went to tell the messenger that they would expect his master on the next day, the old man looked at Paula with undisguised satisfaction and said:

"We were fearing lest the news from the governor's house should have spoilt your happy mood, but, thank God, you look as if you had just come from a refreshing bath.--What do you say, Joanna? Twenty years ago such an inmate here would have made you jealous? Or was there never a place for such evil passions in your dove-like soul?"

"Nonsense!" laughed the matron. "How can I tell how many fair beings you have gazed after, wanderer that you are in all the wide world far away?"

"Well, old woman, but as sure as man is the standard of all things, nowhere that I have carried my staff, have I met with a goddess like this!"

"I certainly have not either, living here like a snail in its shell," said Dame Joanna, fixing her bright eyes on Paula with fervent admiration.

CHAPTER XXI.

That evening Rufinus was sitting in the garden with his wife and daughter and their friend Philippus. Paula, too, was there, and from time to time she stroked Pulcheria's silky golden hair, for the girl had seated herself at her feet, leaning her head against Paula's knee.

The moon was full, and it was so light out of doors that they could see each other plainly, so Rufinus' proposition that they should remain to watch an eclipse which was to take place an hour before midnight found all the more ready acceptance because the air was pleasant. The men had been discussing the expected phenomenon, lamenting that the Church should still lend itself to the superstitions of the populace by regarding it as of evil omen, and organizing a penitential procession for the occasion to implore God to avert all ill. Rufinus declared that it was blasphemy against the Almighty to interpret events happening in the course of eternal law and calculable beforehand, as a threatening sign from Him; as though man's deserts had any connection with the courses of the sun and moon. The Bishop and all the priests of the province were to head the procession, and thus a simple natural phenomenon was forced in the minds of the people into a significance it did not possess.

"And if the little comet which my old foster father discovered last week continues to increase," added the physician, "so that its tail spreads over a portion of the sky, the panic will reach its highest pitch; I can see already that they will behave like mad creatures."

"But a comet really does portend war, drought, plague, and famine," said Pulcheria, with full conviction; and Paula added:

"So I have always believed."

"But very wrongly," replied the leech. "There are a thousand reasons to the contrary; and it is a crime to confirm the mob in such a superstition. It fills them with grief and alarms; and, would you believe it--such anguish of mind, especially when the Nile is so low and there is more sickness than usual, gives rise to numberless forms of disease? We shall have our hands full, Rufinus."

"I am yours to command," replied the old man. "But at the same time, if the tailed wanderer must do some mischief, I would rather it should break folks' arms and legs than turn their brains."

"What a wish!" exclaimed Paula. "But you often say things--and I see things about you too--which seem to me extraordinary. Yesterday you promised...."

"To explain to you why I gather about me so many of God's creatures who have to struggle under the burden of life as cripples, or with injured limbs."

"Just so," replied Paula. "Nothing can be more truly merciful than to render life bearable to such hapless beings...."

"But still, you think," interrupted the eager old man, "that this noble motive alone would hardly account for the old oddity's riding his hobby so hard.--Well, you are right. From my earliest youth the structure of the bones in man and beast has captivated me exceedingly; and just as collectors of horns, when once they have a complete series of every variety of stag, roe, and gazelle, set to work with fresh zeal to find deformed or monstrous growths, so I have found pleasure in studying every kind of malformation and injury in the bones of men and beasts."

"And to remedy them," added Philippus. "It has been his passion from childhood."

"And the passion has grown upon me since I broke my own hip bone and know what it means," the old man went on. "With the help of my fellow-student there, from a mere dilettante I became a practised surgeon; and, what is more, I am one of those who serve Esculapius at my own expense. However, there are accessory reasons for which I have chosen such strange companions: deformed slaves are cheap and besides that, certain investigations afford me inestimable and peculiar satisfaction. But this cannot interest a young girl."

"Indeed it does!" cried Paula. "So far as I have understood Philippus when he explains some details of natural history...."

"Stay," laughed Rufinus, "our friend will take good care not to explain this. He regards it as folly, and all he will admit is that no surgeon or student could wish for better, more willing, or more amusing house-mates than my cripples."

"They are grateful to you," cried Paula.

"Grateful?" asked the old man. "That is true sometimes, no doubt; still, gratitude is a tribute on which no wise man ever reckons. Now I have told you enough; for the sake of Philippus we will let the rest pass."

"No, no," said Paula putting up entreating hands, and Rufinus answered gaily:

"Who can refuse you anything? I will cut it short, but you must pay good heed.--Well then Man is the standard of all things. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, I often hear you say so. Things you mean are only what they seem to us."

"To us, you say, because we--you and I and the rest of us here--are sound in body and mind. And we must regard all

things--being God's handiwork--as by nature sound and normal. Thus we are justified in requiring that man, who gives the standard for them shall, first and foremost, himself be sound and normal. Can a carpenter measure straight planks properly with a crooked or sloping rod?"

"Certainly not."

"Then you will understand how I came to ask myself: 'Do sickly, crippled, and deformed men measure things by a different standard to that of sound men? And might it not be a useful task to investigate how their estimates differ from ours?'"

"And have your researches among your cripples led to any results?"

"To many important ones," the old man declared; but Philippus interrupted him with a loud: "Oho!" adding that his friend was in too great a hurry to deduce laws from individual cases. Many of his observations were, no doubt, of considerable interest.... Here Rufinus broke in with some vehemence, and the discussion would have become a dispute if Paula had not intervened by requesting her zealous host to give her the results, at any rate, of his studies.

"I find," said Rufinus very confidently, as he stroked down his long beard, "that they are not merely shrewd because their faculties are early sharpened to make up by mental qualifications for what they lack in physical advantages; they are also witty, like AEsop the fabulist and Besa the Egyptian god, who, as I have been told by our old friend Horus, from whom we derive all our Egyptian lore, presided among those heathen over festivity, jesting, and wit, and also over the toilet of women. This shows the subtle observation of the ancients; for the hunchback whose body is bent, applies a crooked standard to things in general. His keen insight often enables him to measure life as the majority of men do, that is by a straight rule; but in some happy moments when he yields to natural impulse he makes the straight crooked and the crooked straight; and this gives rise to wit, which only consists in looking at things obliquely and--setting them askew as it were. You have only to talk to my hump-backed gardener Gibbus, or listen to what he says. When he is sitting with the rest of our people in an evening, they all laugh as soon as he opens his mouth.--And why? Because his conformation makes him utter nothing but paradoxes.--You know what they are?"

"Certainly."

"And you, Pul?"

"No, Father."

"You are too straight-nay, and so is your simple soul, to know what the thing is! Well, listen then: It would be a paradox, for instance, if I were to say to the Bishop as he marches past in procession: 'You are godless out of sheer piety;' or if I were to say to Paula, by way of excuse for all the flattery which I and your mother offered her just now: 'Our incense was nauseous for very sweetness.'--These paradoxes, when examined, are truths in a crooked form, and so they best suit the deformed. Do you understand?"

"Certainly," said Paula.

"And you, Pul?"

"I am not quite sure. I should be better pleased to be simply told: 'We ought not to have made such flattering speeches; they may vex a young girl.'"

"Very good, my straightforward child," laughed her father. "But look, there is the man! Here, good Gibbus--come here!--Now, just consider: supposing you had flattered some one so grossly that you had offended him instead of pleasing him: How would you explain the state of affairs in telling me of it?"

The gardener, a short, square man, with a huge hump but a clever face and good features, reflected a minute and then replied: "I wanted to make an ass smell at some roses and I put thistles under his nose."

"Capital!" cried Paula; and as Gibbus turned away, laughing to himself, the physician said:

"One might almost envy the man his hump. But yet, fair Paula, I think we have some straight-limbed folks who can make use of such crooked phrases, too, when occasion serves."

But Rufinus spoke before Paula could reply, referring her to his Essay on the deformed in soul and body; and then he went on vehemently:

"I call you all to witness, does not Baste, the lame woman, restrict her views to the lower aspect of things, to the surface of the earth indeed? She has one leg much shorter than the other, and it is only with much pains that we have contrived that it should carry her. To limp along at all she is forced always to look down at the ground, and what is the consequence? She can never tell you what is hanging to a tree, and about three weeks since I asked her under a clear sky and a waning moon whether the moon had been shining the evening before and she could not tell me, though she had been sitting out of doors with the others till quite late, evening after evening. I have noticed, too, that she scarcely recognizes men who are rather tall, though she may have seen them three or four times. Her standard has fallen short-like her leg. Now, am I right or wrong?"

"In this instance you are right," replied Philippus, "still, I know some lame people..."

And again words ran high between the friends; Pulcheria, however, put an end to the discussion this time, by

exclaiming enthusiastically:

"Baste is the best and most good-natured soul in the whole house!"

"Because she looks into her own heart," replied Rufinus. "She knows herself; and, because she knows how painful pain is, she treats others tenderly. Do you remember, Philippus, how we disputed after that anatomical lecture we heard together at Caesarea?"

"Perfectly well," said the leech, "and later life has but confirmed the opinion I then held. There is no less true or less just saying than the Latin motto: 'Mens sana in corpore sano,' as it is generally interpreted to mean that a healthy soul is only to be found in a healthy body. As the expression of a wish it may pass, but I have often felt inclined to doubt even that. It has been my lot to meet with a strength of mind, a hopefulness, and a thankfulness for the smallest mercies in the sickliest bodies, and at the same time a delicacy of feeling, a wise reserve, and an undeviating devotion to lofty things such as I have never seen in a healthy frame. The body is but the tenement of the soul, and just as we find righteous men and sinners, wise men and fools, alike in the palace and the hovel--nay, and often see truer worth in a cottage than in the splendid mansions of the great--so we may discover noble souls both in the ugly and the fair, in the healthy and the infirm, and most frequently, perhaps, in the least vigorous. We should be careful how we go about repeating such false axioms, for they can only do harm to those who have a heavy burthen to bear through life as it is. In my opinion a hunchback's thoughts are as straightforward as an athlete's; or do you imagine that if a mother were to place her new-born children in a spiral chamber and let them grow up in it, they could not tend upwards as all men do by nature?"

"Your comparison limps," cried Rufinus, "and needs setting to rights. If we are not to find ourselves in open antagonism..."

"You must keep the peace," Joanna put in addressing her husband; and before Rufinus could retort, Paula had asked him with frank simplicity:

"How old are you, my worthy host?"

"Your arrival at my house blessed the second day of my seventieth year," replied Rufinus with a courteous bow. His wife shook her finger at him, exclaiming:

"I wonder whether you have not a secret hump? Such fine phrases..."

"He is catching the style from his cripples," said Paula laughing at him. "But now it is your turn, friend Philippus. Your exposition was worthy of an antique sage, and it struck me--for the sake of Rufinus here I will not say convinced me. I respect you--and yet I should like to know how old..."

"I shall soon be thirty-one," said Philippus, anticipating her question.

"That is an honest answer," observed Dame Joanna. "At your age many a man clings to his twenties."

"Why?" asked Pulcheria.

"Well," said her mother, "only because there are some girls who think a man of thirty too old to be attractive."

"Stupid creatures," answered Pulcheria. "Let them find me a young man who is more lovable than my father; and if Philippus--yes you, Philippus--were ten or twenty years over nine and twenty, would that make you less clever or kind?"

"Not less ugly, at any rate," said the physician. Pulcheria laughed, but with some annoyance, as though she had herself been the object of the remark. "You are not a bit ugly!" she exclaimed. "Any one who says so has no eyes. And you will hear nothing said of you but that you are a tall, fine man!"

As the warm-hearted girl thus spoke, defending her friend against himself, Paula stroked her golden hair and added to the physician:

"Pulcheria's father is so far right that she, at any rate, measures men by a true and straight standard. Note that, Philippus!--But do not take my questioning ill.--I cannot help wondering how a man of one and thirty and one of seventy should have been studying in the high schools at the same time? The moon will not be eclipsed for a long time yet--how bright and clear it is!--So you, Rufinus, who have wandered so far through the wide world, if you would do me a great pleasure, will tell us something of your past life and how you came to settle in Memphis."

"His history?" cried Joanna. "If he were to tell it, in all its details from beginning to end, the night would wane and breakfast would get cold. He has had as many adventures as travelled Odysseus. But tell us something husband; you know there is nothing we should like better."

"I must be off to my duties," said the leech, and when he had taken a friendly leave of the others and bidden farewell to Paula with less effusiveness than of late, Rufinus began his story.

"I was born in Alexandria, where, at that time, commerce and industry still flourished. My father was an armorer; above two hundred slaves and free laborers were employed in his work-shops. He required the finest metal, and commonly procured it by way of Massilia from Britain. On one occasion he himself went to that remote island in a friend's ship, and he there met my mother. Her ruddy gold hair, which Pul has inherited, seems to have bewitched him

and, as the handsome foreigner pleased her well--for men like my father are hard to match nowadays--she turned Christian for his sake and came home with him. They neither of them ever regretted it; for though she was a quiet woman, and to her dying day spoke Greek like a foreigner, the old man often said she was his best counsellor. At the same time she was so soft-hearted, that she could not bear that any living creature should suffer, and though she looked keenly after everything at the hearth and loom, she could never see a fowl, a goose, or a pig slaughtered. And I have inherited her weakness--shall I say 'alas!' or 'thank God?'

"I had two elder brothers who both had to help my father, and who were to carry on the business. When I was ten years old my calling was decided on. My mother would have liked to make a priest of me and at that time I should have consented joyfully; but my father would not agree, and as we had an uncle who was making a great deal of money as a Rhetor, my father accepted a proposal from him that I should devote myself to that career. So I went from one teacher to another and made good progress in the schools.

"Till my twentieth year I continued to live with my parents, and during my many hours of leisure I was free to do or leave undone whatever I had a fancy for; and this was always something medical, if that is not too big a word. I was but a lad of twelve when this fancy first took me, and that through pure accident. Of course I was fond of wandering about the workshops, and there they kept a magpie, a quaint little bird, which my mother had fed out of compassion. It could say 'Blockhead,' and call my name and a few other words, and it seemed to like the noise, for it always would fly off to where the smiths were hammering and filing their loudest, and whenever it perched close to one of the anvils there were sure to be mirthful faces over the shaping and scraping and polishing. For many years its sociable ways made it a favorite; but one day it got caught in a vice and its left leg was broken. Poor little creature!"

The old man stooped to wipe his eyes unseen, but he went on without pausing:

"It fell on its back and looked at me so pathetically that I snatched the tongs out of the bellows-man's hand--for he was going to put an end to its sufferings in all kindness--and, picking it up gently, I made up my mind I would cure it. Then I carried the bird into my own room, and to keep it quiet that it might not hurt itself, I tied it down to a frame that I contrived, straightened its little leg, warmed the injured bone by sucking it, and strapped it to little wooden splints. And behold it really set: the bird got quite well and fluttered about the workshops again as sound as before, and whenever it saw me it would perch upon my shoulder and peck very gently at my hair with its sharp beak.

"From that moment I could have found it in me to break the legs of every hen in the yard, that I might set them again; but I thought of something better. I went to the barbers and told them that if any one had a bird, a dog, or a cat, with a broken limb, he might bring it to me, and that I was prepared to cure all these injuries gratis; they might tell all their customers. The very next day I had a patient brought me: a black hound, with tan spots over his eyes, whose leg had been smashed by a badly-aimed spear: I can see him now! Others followed; feathered or four-footed sufferers; and this was the beginning of my surgical career. The invalid birds on the trees I still owe to my old allies the barbers. I only occasionally take beasts in hand. The lame children, whom you saw in the garden, come to me from poor parents who cannot afford a surgeon's aid. The merry, curly-headed boy who brought you a rose just now is to go home again in a few days.--But to return to the story of my youth.

"The more serious events which gave my life this particular bias occurred in my twentieth year, when I had already left even the high school behind me; nor was I fully carried away by their influence till after my uncle had procured me several opportunities of proving my proficiency in my calling. I may say without vanity that my speeches won approval; but I was revolted by the pompous, flowery bombast, without which I should have been hissed down, and though my parents rejoiced when I went home from Niku, Arsmoe, or some other little provincial town, with laurel-wreaths and gold pieces, to myself I always seemed an impostor. Still, for my father's sake, I dared not give up my profession, although I hated more and more the task of praising people to the skies whom I neither loved nor respected, and of shedding tears of pathos while all the time I was minded to laugh.

"I had plenty of time to myself, and as I did not lack courage and held stoutly to our Greek confession, I was always to be found where there was any stir or contention between the various sects. They generally passed off with nothing worse than bruises and scratches, but now and then swords were drawn. On one occasion thousands came forth to meet thousands, and the Prefect called out the troops--all Greeks--to restore order by force. A massacre ensued in which thousands were killed. I could not describe it! Such scenes were not rare, and the fury and greed of the mob were often directed against the Jews by the machinations of the creatures of the archbishop and the government. The things I saw there were so horrible, so shocking, that the tongue refuses to tell them; but one poor Jewess, whose husband the wretches--our fellow Christians--killed, and then pillaged the house, I have never forgotten! A soldier dragged her down by her hair, while a ruffian snatched the child from her breast and, holding it by its feet, dashed its skull against the wall before her eyes--as you might slash a wet cloth against a pillar to dry it--I shall never forget that handsome young mother and her child; they come before me in my dreams at night even now.

"All these things I saw; and I shuddered to behold God's creatures, beings endowed with reason, persecuting their fellows, plunging them into misery, tearing them limb from limb--and why? Merciful Saviour, why? For sheer hatred--as sure as man is the standard for all things--merely carried away by a hideous impulse to spite their neighbor for not

thinking as they do--nay, simply for not being themselves--to hurt him, insult him, work him woe. And these fanatics, these armies who raised the standard of ruthlessness, of extermination, of bloodthirstiness, were Christians, were baptized in the name of Him who bids us forgive our enemies, who enlarged the borders of love from the home and the city and the state to include all mankind; who raised the adulteress from the dust, who took children into his arms, and would have more joy over a sinner who repents than over ninety and nine just persons!--Blood, blood, was what they craved; and did not the doctrine of Him whose followers they boastfully called themselves grow out of the blood of Him who shed it for all men alike,--just as that lotos flower grows out of the clear water in the marble tank? And it was the highest guardians and keepers of this teaching of mercy, who goaded on the fury of the mob: Patriarchs, bishops, priests and deacons--instead of pointing to the picture of the Shepherd who tenderly carries the lost sheep and brings it home to the fold.

"My own times seemed to me the worst that had ever been; aye, and--as surely as man is the standard of all things--so they are! for love is turned to hatred, mercy to implacable hardheartedness. The thrones not only of the temporal but of the spiritual rulers, are dripping with the blood of their fellow-men. Emperors and bishops set the example; subjects and churchmen follow it. The great, the leading men of the struggle are copied by the small, by the peaceful candidates for spiritual benefices. All that I saw as a man, in the open streets, I had already seen as a boy both in the low and high schools. Every doctrine has its adherents; the man who casts in his lot with Cneius is hated by Caius, who forthwith speaks and writes to no other end than to vex and put down Cneius, and give him pain. Each for his part strives his utmost to find out faults in his neighbor and to put him in the pillory, particularly if his antagonist is held the greater man, or is likely to overtop him. Listen to the girls at the well, to the women at the spindle; no one is sure of applause who cannot tell some evil of the other men or women. Who cares to listen to his neighbor's praises? The man who hears that his brother is happy at once envies him! Hatred, hatred everywhere! Everywhere the will, the desire, the passion for bringing grief and ruin on others rather than to help them, raise them and heal them!

"That is the spirit of my time; and everything within me revolted against it with sacred wrath. I vowed in my heart that I would live and act differently; that my sole aim should be to succor the unfortunate, to help the wretched, to open my arms to those who had fallen into unmerited contumely, to set the crooked straight for my neighbor, to mend what was broken, to pour in balm, to heal and to save!

"And, thank God! it has been vouchsafed to me in some degree to keep this vow; and though, later, some whims and a passionate curiosity got mixed up with my zeal, still, never have I lost sight of the great task of which I have spoken, since my father's death and since my uncle also left me his large fortune. Then I had done with the Rhetor's art, and travelled east and west to seek the land where love unites men's hearts and where hatred is only a disease; but as sure as man is the standard of all things, to this day all my endeavors to find it have been in vain. Meanwhile I have kept my own house on such a footing that it has become a stronghold of love; in its atmosphere hatred cannot grow, but is nipped in the germ.

"In spite of this I am no saint. I have committed many a folly, many an injustice; and much of my goods and gold, which I should perhaps have done better to save for my family, has slipped through my fingers, though in the execution, no doubt, of what I deemed the highest duties. Would you believe it, Paula?--Forgive an old man for such fatherly familiarity with the daughter of Thomas;--hardly five years after my marriage with this good wife, not long after we had lost our only son, I left her and our little daughter, Pul there, for more than two years, to follow the Emperor Heraclius of my own free will to the war against the Persians who had done me no harm--not, indeed, as a soldier, but as a surgeon eager for experience. To confess the truth I was quite as eager to see and treat fractures and wounds and injuries in great numbers, as I was to exercise benevolence. I came home with a broken hip-bone, tolerably patched up, and again, a few years later, I could not keep still in one place. The bird of passage must need drag wife and child from the peace of hearth and homestead, and take them to where he could go to the high school. A husband, a father, and already grey-headed, I was a singular exception among the youths who sat listening to the lectures and explanations of their teachers; but as sure as man is the standard of all things, they none of them outdid me in diligence and zeal, though many a one was greatly my superior in gifts and intellect, and among them the foremost was our friend Philippus. Thus it came about, noble Paula, that the old man and the youth in his prime were fellow-students; but to this day the senior gladly bows down to his young brother in learning and feeling. To straighten, to comfort, and to heal: this is the aim of his life too. And even I, an old man, who started long before Philippus on the same career, often long to call myself his disciple."

Here Rufinus paused and rose; Paula, too, got up, grasped his hand warmly, and said:

"If I were a man, I would join you! But Philippus has told me that even a woman may be allowed to work with the same purpose.--And now let me beg of you never to call me anything but Paula--you will not refuse me this favor. I never thought I could be so happy again as I am with you; here my heart is free and whole. Dame Joanna, do you be my mother! I have lost the best of fathers, and till I find him again, you, Rufinus, must fill his place!"

"Gladly, gladly!" cried the old man; he clasped both her hands and went on vivaciously: "And in return I ask you to be an elder sister to Pul. Make that timid little thing such a maiden as you are yourself.--But look, children, look up

quickly; it is beginning!--Typhon, in the form of a boar, is swallowing the eye of Horns: so the heathen of old in this country used to believe when the moon suffered an eclipse. See how the shadow is covering the bright disk. When the ancients saw this happening they used to make a noise, shaking the sistrum with its metal rings, drumming and trumpeting, shouting and yelling, to scare off the evil one and drive him away. It may be about four hundred years since that last took place, but to this day--draw your kerchiefs more closely round your heads and come with me to the river--to this day Christians degrade themselves by similar rites. Wherever I have been in Christian lands, I have always witnessed the same scenes: our holy faith has, to be sure, demolished the religions of the heathen; but their superstitions have survived, and have forced their way through rifts and chinks into our ceremonial. They are marching round now, with the bishop at their head, and you can hear the loud wailing of the women, and the cries of the men, drowning the chant of the priests. Only listen! They are as passionate and agonized in their entreaty as though old Typhon were even now about to swallow the moon, and the greatest catastrophe was hanging over the world. Aye, as surely as man is the standard of all things, those terrified beings are diseased in mind; and how are we to forgive those who dare to scare Christians; yes, Christian souls, with the traditions of heathen folly, and to blind their inward vision?"

CHAPTER XXII.

Up to within a few days Katharina had still been a dependent and docile child, who had made it a point of honor to obey instantly, not only her mother's lightest word, but Dame Neforis, too; and, since her own Greek instructress had been dismissed, even the acid Eudoxia. She had never concealed from her mother, or the worthy teacher whom she had truly loved, the smallest breach of rules, the least naughtiness or wilful act of which she had been guilty; nay, she had never been able to rest till she had poured out a confession, before evening prayer, of all that her little heart told her was not perfectly right, to some one whom she loved, and obtained full forgiveness. Night after night the "Water-wagtail" had gone to sleep with a conscience as clear and as white as the breast of her whitest dove, and the worst sin she had ever committed during the day was some forbidden scramble, some dainty or, more frequently, some rude and angry word.

But a change had first come over her after Orion's kiss in the intoxicating perfume of the flowering trees; and almost every hour since had roused her to new hopes and new views. It had never before occurred to her to criticise or judge her mother; now she was constantly doing so. The way in which Susannah had cut herself off from her neighbors in the governor's house, to her daughter seemed perverse and in bad taste; and the bitterly vindictive attacks on her old friends, which were constantly on Susannah's lips, aggrieved the girl, and finally set her in opposition to her mother, whose judgment had hitherto seemed to her infallible. Thus, when the governor's house was closed against her, there was no one in whom she cared to confide, for a barrier stood between her and Paula, and she was painfully conscious of its height each time the wish to pass it recurred to her mind. Paula was certainly "that other" of whom Orion had spoken; when she had stolen away to see her in the evening after the funeral, she had been prompted less by a burning wish to pour out her heart to a sympathizing hearer, than by torturing curiosity mingled with jealousy. She had crept through the hedge with a strangely-mixed feeling of tender longing and sullen hatred; when they had met in the garden she had at first given herself up to the full delight of being free to speak, and of finding a listener in a woman so much her superior; but Paula's reserved replies to her bold questioning had revived her feelings of envy and grudge. Any one who did not hate Orion must, she was convinced, love him.

Were they not perhaps already pledged to each other! Very likely Paula had thought of her as merely a credulous child, and so had concealed the fact!

This "very likely" was torture to her, and she was determined to try, at any rate, to settle the doubt. She had an ally at her command; this was her foster-brother, the son of her deaf old nurse; she knew that he would blindly obey all her wishes--nay, to please her, would throw himself to the crocodiles in the Nile. Anubis had been her comrade in all her childish sports, till at the age of fourteen, after learning to read and write, her mother had obtained an appointment for him in the governor's household, as an assistant to be further trained by the treasurer Nilus. Dame Susannah intended to find him employment at a future date on her estates, or at Memphis, the centre of their administration, as he might prove himself capable. The lad was still living with his mother under the rich widow's roof, and only spent his working days at the governor's house, he was industrious and clever during office hours, though between whiles he busied himself with things altogether foreign to his future calling. At Katharina's request he had opened a communication between the two houses by means of carrier-pigeons, and many missives were thus despatched with little gossip, invitations, excuses, and the like, from Katharina to Mary and back again. Anubis took great pleasure in the pretty creatures, and by the permission of his superiors a dovecote was erected on the roof of the treasurer's house. Mary was now lying ill, and their intercourse was at an end; still, the well-trained messengers need not be idle, and Katharina had begun to use them for a very different purpose.

Orion's envoy had been detained a long time at Rufinus' door the day before; and she had since learnt from Anubis, who was acquainted with all that took place in Nilus' office, that Paula's moneys were to be delivered over to her very shortly, and in all probability by Orion himself. They must then have an interview, and perhaps she might succeed in overhearing it. She knew well how this could be managed; the only thing was to be on the spot at the right moment.

On the morning after the full-moon, at two hours and a half before noon, the little boy whose task it was to feed the feathered messengers in their dove-cote brought her a written scrap, on which Anubis informed her that Orion was about to set out; but he was not very warmly welcomed, for the hour did not suit her at all. Early in the morning Bishop Plotinus had come to inform Susannah that Benjamin, Patriarch of Alexandria, was visiting Amru on the opposite shore, and would presently honor Memphis with his presence. He proposed to remain one day; he had begged to have no formal reception, and had left it to the bishop to find suitable quarters for himself and his escort, as he did not wish to put up at the governor's house. The vain widow had at once pressingly urged her readiness to receive the illustrious guest under her roof. The prelate's presence must bring a blessing on the house, and she thought, too, that she might turn it to advantage for several ends she just now happened to have in view.

A handsome reception must be prepared; there were but a few hours to spare, and even before the bishop had left her, she had begun to call the servants together and give them orders. The whole house must be turned upside down; some of the kitchen staff were hurried off into the town to make purchases, others bustled round the fire; the gardeners

plundered the beds and bushes to weave wreaths and nosegays for decorations; from cellar to roof half a hundred of slaves, white, brown and black, were toiling with all their might, for each believed that, by rendering a service to the Patriarch, he might count on the special favor of Heaven, while their unresting mistress never ceased screaming out her orders as to what she wished done.

Susannah, who as a girl had been the eldest of a numerous and not wealthy family, and had been obliged to put her own hand to things, quite forgot now that she was a woman of position and fortune whom it ill-beseemed to do her own household work; she was here, there, and everywhere, and had an eye on all--excepting indeed her own daughter; but she was the petted darling of the house, brought up to Greek refinement, whose help in such arduous labors was not to be thought of; indeed, she would only have been in the way.

When the bishop had taken his leave Katharina was merely desired to be ready in her best attire, with a nosegay in her hand, to receive the Patriarch under the awning spread outside the entrance. More than this the widow did not require of her, and as the girl flew up the stairs to her room she was thinking: "Orion will be coming directly: it still wants fully two hours of noon, and if he stays there half an hour that will be more than enough. I shall have time then to change my dress, but I will put my new sandals on at once as a precaution; nurse and the maid must wait for me in my room. They must have everything ready for my return--perhaps he and Paula may have much to say to each other. He will not get off without a lecture, unless she has already found an opportunity elsewhere of expressing her indignation."

A few minutes later she had sprung to the top of a mound of earth covered with turf, which she had some time since ordered to be thrown up close behind the hedge through which she had yesterday made her way. Her little feet were shod with handsome gold sandals set with sapphires, and she seated herself on a low bench with a satisfied smile, as though to assist at a theatrical performance. Some broad-leaved shrubs, placed behind this place of ambush, screened her to some extent from the heat of the sun, and as she sat watching and listening in this lurking place, which she was not using for the first time, her heart began to beat more quickly; indeed, in her excitement she quite forgot some sweetmeats which she had brought to wile away the time and had poured into a large leaf in her lap.

Happily she had not long to wait; Orion arrived in his mother's four-wheeled covered chariot. By the side of the driver sat a servant, and a slave was perched on the step to the door on each side of the vehicle. It was followed by a few idlers, men and women, and a crowd of half-naked children. But they got nothing by their curiosity, for the caruca did not draw up in the road, but was driven into Rufinus' garden, and the trees and shrubs hid it from the gaze of the expectant mob, which presently dispersed.

Orion got out at the principal door of the house, followed by the treasurer; and while the old man welcomed the son of the Mukaukas, Nilus superintended the transfer of a considerable number of heavy sacks to their host's private room.

Nothing of all this had seemed noteworthy to Katharina but the quantity and size of the bags--full, no doubt, of gold--and the man, whom alone she cared to see. Never had she thought Orion so handsome; the long, flowing mourning robe, which he had flung over his shoulder in rich folds, added to the height of his stately form; his abundant hair, not curled but waving naturally, set off his face which, pale and grave as it was, both touched and attracted her irresistibly. The thought that this splendid creature had once courted her, loved her, kissed her--that he had once been hers, and that she had lost him to another, was a pang like physical agony, mounting from her heart to her brain.

After Orion had vanished indoors, she still seemed to see him; and when she thrust his image from her fancy, forced to remind herself that he was now standing face to face with that other, and was looking at Paula as, a few days since, he had looked at her, the anguish of her soul was doubled. And was Paula only half as happy as she had been in that hour of supreme bliss? Ah! how her heart ached! She longed to leap over the hedge--she could have rushed into the house and flung herself between Paula and Orion.

Still, there she sat; restless but without moving; wholly under the dominion of evil thoughts, among which a good one rarely and timidly intruded, with her eyes fixed on Rufinus' dwelling. It stood in the broad sunshine as silent as death, as if all were sleeping. In the garden, too, all was motionless but the thin jet of water, which danced up from the marble tank with a soft and fitful, but monotonous tinkle, while butterflies, dragonflies, bees, and beetles, whose hum she could not hear, seemed to circle round the flowers without a sound. The birds must be asleep, for not one was to be seen or broke the oppressive stillness by a chirp or a twitter. The chariot at the door might have been spellbound; the driver had dismounted, and he, with the other slaves, had stretched himself in the narrow strips of shade cast by the pillars of the verandah; their chins buried in their breasts, they spoke not a word. The horses alone were stirring--flicking off the flies with their flowing tails, or turning to bite the burning stings they inflicted. This now and then lifted the pole, and as the chariot crunched backwards a few inches, the charioteer growled out a sleepy "Brrr."

Katharina had laid a large leaf on her head for protection against the sun; she did not dare use a parasol or a hat for fear of being seen. The shade cast by the shrubs was but scanty, the noontide heat was torment; still, though minute followed minute and one-quarter of an hour after another crept by at a snail's pace, she was far too much excited to be sleepy. She needed no dial to tell her the time; she knew exactly how late it was as one shadow stole to this point and

another to that, and, by risking the danger to her eyes of glancing up at the sun, she could make doubly sure.

It was now within three-quarters of an hour of noon, and in that house all was as still as before; the Patriarch, however, might be expected to be punctual, and she had done nothing towards dressing but putting on those gilt sandals. This brought her to swift decision she hurried to her room, desired the maid not to dress her hair, contenting herself with pinning a few roses into its natural curls. Then, in fierce haste, she made her throw on her sea-green dress of bombyx silk edged with fine embroidery, and fasten her peplos with the first pins that came to hand; and when the snap of her bracelet of costly sapphires broke, as she herself was fastening it, she flung it back among her other trinkets as she might have tossed an unripe apple back upon a heap. She slipped her little hand into a gold spiral which curled round half her arm, and gathered up the rest of her jewels, to put them on out of doors as she sat watching. The waiting-woman was ordered to come for her at noon with the flowers for the Patriarch, and, in a quarter of an hour after leaving her lurking place, she was back there again. Just in time;--for while she was putting on the trinkets Nilus came out, followed by some slaves with several leather bags which they replaced in the chariot. Then the treasurer stepped in and with him Philippus, and the vehicle drove away.

"So Paula has entrusted her property to Orion again," thought Katharina. "They are one again; and henceforth there will be endless going and coming between the governor's house and that of Rufinus. A very pretty game!--But wait, only wait." And she set her little white teeth; but she retained enough self-possession to mark all that took place.

During her absence indoors Orion's black horse had been brought into the garden; a groom on horseback was leading him, and as she watched their movements she muttered to herself with a smile of scorn: "At any rate he is not going to carry her home with him at once."

A few minutes passed in silence, and at last Paula came out, and close behind her, almost by her side, walked Orion.

His cheeks were no longer pale, far from it, no more than Katharina's were; they were crimson! How bright his eyes were, how radiant with satisfaction and gladness!--She only wished she were a viper to sting them both in the heel!--At the same time Paula had lost none of her proud and noble dignity--and he? He gazed at his companion like a rapt soul; she fancied she could see the folds of his mourning cloak rising and falling with the beating of his heart. Paula, too, was in mourning. Of course. They were one; his sorrow must be hers, although she had fled from his father's house as though it were a prison. And of course this virtuous beauty knew full well that nothing became her better than dark colors! In manner, gait and height this pair looked like two superior beings, destined for each other by Fate; Katharina herself could not but confess it.

Some spiteful demon--a friendly one, she thought--led them past her, so close that her sharp ears could catch every word they said as they slowly walked on, or now and then stood still, dogged by the agile water-wagtail, who stole along parallel with them on the other side of the hedge.

"I have so much to thank you for," were the first words she caught from Orion, "that I am shy of asking you yet another favor; but this one indeed concerns yourself. You know how deep a blow was struck me by little Mary's childish hand; still, the impulse that prompted her had its rise in her honest, upright feeling and her idolizing love of you."

"And you would like me to take charge of her?" asked Paula. "Such a wish is of course granted beforehand--only...."

"Only?" repeated Orion.

"Only you must send her here; for you know that I will never enter your doors again."

"Alas that it should be so!--But the child has been very ill and can hardly leave the house at present; and--since I must own it--my mother avoids her in a way which distresses the child, who is over-excited as it is, and fills her with new terrors."

"How can Neforis treat her little favorite so?"

"Remember," said Orion, "what my father has been to my poor mother. She is now completely crushed: and, when she sees the little girl, that last scene of her unhappy husband's life is brought back to her, with all that came upon my father and me, beyond a doubt through Mary. She looks on the poor little thing as the bane of the family?"

"Then she must come away," said Paula much touched. "Send her to us. Kind and comforting souls dwell under Rufinus' roof."

"I thank you warmly. I will entreat my mother most urgently...."

"Do so," interrupted Paula. "Have you ever seen Pulcheria, the daughter of my worthy host?"

"Yes.--A singularly lovable creature!"

"She will soon take Mary into her faithful heart--"

"And our poor little girl needs a friend, now that Susannah has forbidden her daughter to visit at our house."

The conversation now turned on the two girls, of whom they spoke as sweet children, both much to be pitied; and, when Orion observed that his niece was old for her tender years, Paula replied with a slight accent of reproach: "But Katharina, too, has ripened much during the last few days; the lively child has become a sober girl; her recent

experience is a heavy burden on her light heart."

"But, if I know her at all, it will soon be cast off," replied Orion. "She is a sweet, happy little creature; and, of all the dreadful things I did on that day of horrors, the most dreadful perhaps was the woe I wrought for her. There is no excuse possible, and yet it was solely to gratify my mother's darling wish that I consented to marry Katharina.-- However, enough of that.--Henceforth I must march through life with large strides, and she to whom love gives courage to become my wife, must be able to keep pace with me."

Katharina could only just hear these last words. The speakers now turned down the path, sparsely shaded from the midday sun by a few trees, which led to the tank in the centre of the garden, and they went further and further from her.

She heard no more--still, she knew enough and could supply the rest. The object of her ambush was gained: she knew now with perfect certainty who was "the other." And how they had spoken of her! Not as a deserted bride, whose rights had been trodden in the dust, but as a child who is dismissed from the room as soon as it begins to be in the way. But she thought she could see through that couple and knew why they had spoken of her thus. Paula, of course, must prevent any new tie from being formed between herself and Orion; and as for Orion, common prudence required that he should mention her--her, whom he had but lately loaded with tenderness--as a mere child, to protect himself against the jealousy of that austere "other" one. That he had loved her, at any rate that evening under the trees, she obstinately maintained in her own mind; to that conviction she must cling desperately, or lose her last foothold. Her whole being was a prey to a frightful turmoil of feeling. Her hands shook; her mouth was parched as by the midday heat; she knew that there were withered leaves between her feet and the sandals she wore, that twigs had got caught in her hair; but she could not care and when the pair were screened from her by the denser shrubs she flew back to her raised seat--from which she could again discover them. At this moment she would have given all she held best and dearest, to be the thing it vexed her so much to be called: a water-wagtail, or some other bird.

It must be very near noon if not already past; she dusted her sandals and tidied her curly hair, picking out the dry leaves and not noticing that at the same time a rose fell out on the ground. Only her hands were busy; her eyes were elsewhere, and suddenly they brightened again, for the couple on which she kept them fixed were coming back, straight towards the hedge, and she would soon be able again to hear what they were saying.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Orion and Paula had had much to talk about, since the young man had arrived. The discussion over the safe keeping of the girl's money had been tedious. Finally, her counsellors had decided to entrust half of it to Gamaliel the jeweller and his brother, who carried on a large business in Constantinople. He happened to be in Memphis, and they had both declared themselves willing each to take half of the sum in question and use it at interest. They would be equally responsible for its security, so that each should make good the whole of the property in their hands in case of the other stopping payment. Nilus undertook to procure legal sanction and the necessary sixteen witnesses to this transaction.

The other half of her fortune was, by the advice of Philippus, to be placed in the hands of a brother of Haschim's, the Arab merchant, who had a large business as money changer in Fostat, the new town on the further shore, in which the merchant himself was a partner. This investment had the advantage of being perfectly safe, at any rate so long as the Arabs ruled the land.

After all this was settled Nilus departed with that half of the money which Orion was to hand over to the keeping of the Moslem money changer on the following morning.

Paula, though she had taken no part in the men's discussion, had been present throughout, and had expressed her grateful consent. The clearness, gravity, and decision which Orion had displayed had not escaped her notice; and though the treasurer's shrewd remarks, briefly and modestly made, had in every case proved final, it was Orion's reasoning and explanations that had most come home to her, for it seemed to her that he was always prompted by loftier, wider, and more statesmanlike considerations than the others.

When this was over she and Orion were left together, and neither she nor the young man had been able to escape a few moments of anxious heart-beating.

It was not till the governor's son had summoned up his courage and, sinking on his knees, was imploring her pardon, that she recovered some firmness and reminded him of the letter he had sent her. But her heart drew her to him almost irresistibly, and in order not to yield to its urgent prompts, she hastily enquired what he had meant by the exchange he had written about.

At this he went up to her with downcast eyes, drew a small box out of the breast of his robe, and took out the emerald with the damaged setting. He held them towards her with a beseeching gesture, exclaiming, with all the peculiar sweetness of his deep voice:

"It is your property! Take it and give me in return your confidence, your forgiveness."

She drew back a little, looking first at him and then at the stone and its setting--surprised, pleased, and deeply moved, with a bright light in her eyes. The young man found it impossible to utter a single word, only holding the jewel and the broken setting closer to her, and yet closer, like some poor man who makes bold to offer the best he has to a wealthy superior, though conscious that it is all too humble a gift to find favor.

And Paula was not long undecided; she took the proffered gem and feasted her glistening eyes with glad thankfulness on her recovered treasure.

Two days ago she had thought of it as defiled and desecrated; it had gratified her pride to fancy that she had cast the precious jewel at the feet, as it were, of Neforis and her son, never to see it again. So hard is it to forego the right of hating those who have basely brought grief into our lives and anguish to our souls!--and yet Paula, who would not have yielded this right at any price a short time since, now waived it of her own free will--nay, thrust it from her like some tormenting incubus which choked her pulses and kept her from breathing freely. In this gem she saw once more a cherished memorial of her lost mother, the honorable gift of a great monarch to her forefathers; and she was happy to possess it once more. But it was not this that gave life to the warm, sunny glow of happiness which thrilled through her, or occasioned its quick and delightful growth; for her eye did not linger on the large and glittering stone, but rested spellbound on the poor gold frame which had once held it, and which had cost her such hours of anguish. This broken and worthless thing, it is true, was powerful to justify her in the opinions of her judges and her enemies; with this in her hand she would easily confute her accusers. Still, it was not that which so greatly consoled her. The physician's remark, that there was no greater joy than the discovery that we have been deceived in thinking ill of another, recurred to her mind; and she had once loved the man who now stood before her open to every good influence, deeply moved in her presence; and her judgment of him had been a hundred, a thousand times too hard. Only a noble soul could confidently expect magnanimity from a foe and he, he had put himself defenceless into the power of her who had been mortally stricken by the most fateful, and perhaps the only disgraceful act of his life. In giving up this gold frame Orion also gave himself up; with this talisman in her possession she stood before him as irresistible Fate. And now, as she looked up at him and met his large eyes, full of life and intellect but sparkling through tears of violent agitation, she felt absolutely certain that this favorite of Fortune, though he had indeed sinned deeply and disastrously, was capable of the highest and greatest aims if he had a friend to show him what life required of him and were but ready to follow such guidance. And such a friend she would be to him!

She, like Orion, could not for some time speak; but he, at last, was unable to contain himself; he hastened towards her and pressed her hand to his lips with fervent gratitude, while she--she had to submit; nay, she would have been incapable of resisting him if, as in her dream, he had clasped her in his arms, to his heart. His burning lips had rested fervently on her hand, but it was only for an instant that she abandoned herself to the violent agitation that mastered her. Then with a great effort her instinct and determination to do right enabled her to control it; she pushed him from her decisively but not ungently, and then, with some emotion and an arch sweetness which he had never before seen in her, and which charmed him even more than her noble and lofty pride, she said, threatening him with her finger.

"Take care, Orion! Now I have the stone and the setting; yes, that very setting. Beware of the consequences, rash man!"

"Not at all. Say rather: Fool, who at last has succeeded in doing something rational," he replied joyfully. "What I have brought you is not a gift; it is your own. To you it can be neither more nor less than it was before; but to me it has gained inestimably in value since it places my honor, perhaps my life even, in your keeping; I am in your power as completely as the humblest slave in the palace is in that of the Emperor. Keep the gem, and use it and this fateful gold trifle till the day shall come when my weal and woe are one with yours."

"For your dead father's sake," she answered, coloring deeply, "your weal lies already very near my heart. Am not I, who brought upon you your father's curse, bound indeed to help you to free yourself from the burden of it? And it may perhaps be in my power to do so, Orion, if you do not scorn to listen to the counsels of an ignorant girl?"

"Speak," he cried; but she did not reply immediately. She only begged him to come into the garden with her; the close atmosphere of the room had become intolerable to both, and when they got out and Katharina had first caught sight of them their flushed cheeks had not escaped her watchful eye.

In the open air, a scarcely perceptible breath from the river moderated the noontide heat, and then Paula found courage to tell him what Philippus had called his apprehension in life. It was not new to him; indeed it fully answered to the principles he had laid down for the future. He accepted it gratefully: "Life is a function, a ministry, a duty!" the words were a motto, a precept that should aid him in carrying out his plans.

"And the device," he exclaimed, "will be doubly precious to me as having come from your lips.--But I no longer need its warning. The wisest and most practical axioms of conduct never made any man the better. Who does not bring a stock of them with him when he quits school for the world at large? Precepts are of no use unless, in the voyage of life, a manly will holds the rudder. I have called on mine, and it will steer me to the goal, for a bright guiding star lights the pilot on his way. You know that star; it is...."

"It is what you call your love," she interposed, with a deep blush.--"Your love for me, and I will trust it."

"You will!" he cried passionately. "You allow me to hope...."

"Yes, yes, hope!" she again broke in, "but meanwhile...."

"Meanwhile," he said, "'do not press me further,' ought to end your sentence. Oh! I quite understand you; and until I feel that you have good reason once more to respect the maniac who lost you by his own fault, I, who fought you like your most deadly foe, will not even speak the final word. I will silence my longing, I will try...."

"You will try to show me--nay, you will show me--that in you, my foe and persecutor, I have gained my dearest friend!--And now to quite another matter. We know how we stand towards each other and can count on each other with glad and perfect confidence, thanking the Almighty for having opened out a new life to us. To Him we will this day...."

"Offer praise and thanksgiving," Orion joyfully put in.

And here began the conversation relating to little Mary which Katharina had overheard.

They had gone out of hearing again when Orion explained to Paula that all arrangements for the little girl must be postponed till the morrow, as he had business now with Amru, on the other shore of the Nile. He decisively confuted her fears lest he should allow himself to be perverted by the Moslems to their faith; for though he ardently desired to let the Patriarch feel that he had no mind to submit patiently to the affront to his deceased father, he clung too firmly to his creed, and knew too well what was due to the memory of the dead, and to Paula herself, ever to take this extreme step. He spoke in glowing terms as he described how, for the future, he purposed to devote his best powers to his hapless and oppressed country, whether it were in the service of the Khaliff or in some other way; and she eagerly entered into his schemes, quite carried away by his noble enthusiasm, and acknowledging to herself with silent rapture the superiority of his mind and the soaring loftiness of his soul.

When, presently, they began talking again of the past she asked him quite frankly, but in a low voice and without looking up, what had become of the emerald he had taken from the Persian hanging. He turned pale at this, looked at the ground, and hesitatingly replied that he had sent it to Constantinople--"to have it set--set in an ornament--worthy of her whom--whom he...."

But here he broke off, stamped angrily with his foot, and looking straight into the girl's eyes exclaimed:

"A pack of lies, foul and unworthy lies!--I have been truthful by nature all my life; but does it not seem as though that accursed day forced me to some base action every time it is even mentioned? Yes, Paula; the gem is really on its way to Byzantium. But the stolen gift was never meant for you, but for a fair, gentle creature, in nothing blameworthy, who gave me her heart. To me she was never anything but a pretty plaything; still, there were moments when I believed--poor soul!--I first learnt what love meant through you, how great and how sacred it is!--Now you know all; this, indeed, is the truth!"

They walked on again, and Katharina, who had not been able to gather the whole of this explanation, could plainly hear Paula's reply in warm, glad accents:

"Yes, that is the truth, I feel. And henceforth that horrible day is blotted out, erased from your life and mine; and whatever you tell me in the future I shall believe."

And the listener heard the young man answer in a tremulous voice:

"And you shall never be deceived in me. Now I must leave you; and I go, in spite of my griefs, a happy man, entitled to rejoice anew. O Paula, what do I not owe to you! And when we next meet you will receive me, will you not, as you did that evening on the river after my return?"

"Yes, indeed; and with even more glad confidence," replied Paula, holding out her hand with a lovely graciousness that came from her heart; he pressed it a moment to his lips, and then sprang on to his horse and rode off at a round trot, his slave following him.

"Katharina, child, Katharina!" was shouted from Susannah's house in a woman's high-pitched voice. The water-wagtail started up, hastily smoothing her hair and casting an evil glance at her rival, "the other," the supplanter who had basely betrayed her under the sycamores; she clenched her little fist as she saw Paula watching Orion's retreating form with beaming eyes. Paula went back into the house, happy and walking on air, while the other poor, deeply-wounded child burst into violent weeping at the first hasty words from her mother, who was not at all satisfied with the disorder of her dress; and she ended by declaring with defiant audacity that she would not present the flowers to the patriarch, and would remain in her own room, for she was dying of headache.--And so she did.

CHAPTER XXIV.

In the course of the afternoon Orion paid his visit to the Arab governor. He crossed the bridge of boats on his finest horse.

Only two years since, the land where the new town of Fostat was now growing up under the old citadel of Babylon had been fields and gardens; but at Amru's word it had started into being as by a miracle; house after house already lined the streets, the docks were full of ships and barges, the market was alive with dealers, and on a spot where, during the siege of the fortress, a sutler's booth had stood, a long colonnade marked out the site of a new mosque.

There was little to be seen here now of native Egyptian life; it looked as though some magician had transported a part of Medina itself to the shores of the Nile. Men and beasts, dwellings and shops, though they had adopted much of what they had found in this ancient land of culture, still bore the stamp of their origin; and wherever Orion's eye fell on one of his fellow-countrymen, he was a laborer or a scribe in the service of the conquerors who had so quickly made themselves at home.

Before his departure for Constantinople one of his father's palm-groves had occupied the spot where Amru's residence now stood opposite the half-finished mosque. Where, now, thousands of Moslems, some on foot, some on richly caparisoned steeds, were passing to and fro, turbaned and robed after the manner of their tribe, with such adornment as they had stolen or adopted from intercourse with splendor-loving nations, and where long trains of camels dragged quarried stones to the building, in former times only an occasional ox-cart with creaking wheels was to be seen, an Egyptian riding an ass or a bare-backed nag, and now and then a few insolent Greek soldiers. On all sides he heard the sharper and more emphatic accent of the sons of the desert instead of the language of his forefathers and their Greek conquerors. Without the aid of the servant who rode at his side he could not have made himself understood on the soil of his native land.

He soon reached Amru's house and was there informed by an Egyptian secretary that his master was gone out hunting and would receive him, not in the town, but at the citadel. There, on a pleasant site on the limestone hills which rose behind the fortress of Babylon and the newly-founded city, stood some fine buildings, originally planned as a residence for the Prefect; and thither Amru had transported his wives, children, and favorite horses, preferring it, with very good reason, to the palace in the town, where he transacted business, and where the new mosque intercepted the view of the Nile, while this eminence commanded a wide prospect.

The sun was near setting when Orion reached the spot, but the general had not yet come in from the chase, and the gate-keeper requested that he would wait.

Orion was accustomed to be treated in his own country as the heir of the greatest man in it; the color mounted to his brow and his Egyptian heart revolted at having to bend his pride and swallow his wrath before an Arab. He was one of the subject race, and the thought that one word from his lips would suffice to secure his reception in the ranks of the rulers forced itself suddenly on his mind; but he repressed it with all his might, and silently allowed himself to be conducted to a terrace screened by a vine-covered trellis from the heat of the sun.

He sat down on one of the marble seats by the parapet of this hanging garden and looked westward. He knew the scene well, it was the playground of his childhood and youth; hundreds of times the picture had spread before him, and yet it affected him to-day as it had never done before. Was there on earth--he asked himself--a more fertile and luxuriant land? Had not even the Greek poets sung of the Nile as the most venerable of rivers? Had not great Caesar himself been so fascinated by the idea of discovering its source that to that end--so he had declared--he would have thought the dominion of the world well lost? On the produce of those wide fields the weal and woe of the mightiest cities of the earth had been dependent for centuries; nay, imperial Rome and sovereign Constantinople had quaked with fears of famine, when a bad harvest here had disappointed the hopes of the husbandman.

And was there anywhere a more industrious nation of laborers, had there ever been, before them, a thriftier or a more skilful race? When he looked back on the fate and deeds of nations, on the remotest horizon where the thread of history was scarcely perceptible, that same gigantic Sphinx was there--the first and earliest monument of human joy in creative art--those Pyramids which still proudly stood in undiminished and inaccessible majesty beyond the Nile, beyond the ruined capital of his forefathers, at the foot of the Libyan range. He was the son of the men who had raised these imperishable works, and in his veins perchance there still might flow a drop of the blood of those Pharaohs who had sought eternal rest in these vast tombs, and whose greater progeny, had overrun half the world with their armies, and had exacted tribute and submission. He, who had often felt flattered at being praised for the purity of his Greek--pure not merely for his time: an age of bastard tongues--and for the engaging Hellenism of his person, here and now had an impulse of pride of his Egyptian origin. He drew a deep breath, as he gazed at the sinking sun; it seemed to lend intentional significance to the rich beauty of his home as its magical glory transmuted the fields, the stream, and the palm-groves, the roofs of the city, and even the barren desert-range and the Pyramids to burning gold. It was fast going to rest behind the Libyan chain. The bare, colorless limestone sparkled like translucent crystal; the glowing sphere

looked as though it were melting into the very heart of the mountains behind which it was vanishing, while its rays, shooting upwards like millions of gold threads, bound his native valley to heaven--the dwelling of the Divine Power who had blessed it above all other lands.

To free this beautiful spot of earth and its children from their oppressors--to restore to them the might and greatness which had once been theirs--to snatch down the crescent from the tents and buildings which lay below him and plant the cross which from his infancy he had held sacred--to lead enthusiastic troops of Egyptians against the Moslems--to quell their arrogance and drive them back to the East like Sesostrius, the hero of history and legend--this was a task worthy of the grandson of Menas, of the son of George the great and just Mukaukas.

Paula would not oppose such an enterprise; his excited imagination pictured her indeed as a second Zenobia by his side, ready for any great achievement, fit to aid him and to rule.

Fully possessed by this dream of the future, he had long ceased to gaze at the glories of the sunset and was sitting with eyes fixed on the ground. Suddenly his soaring visions were interrupted by men's voices coming up from the street just below the terrace. He looked over and perceived at its foot about a score of Egyptian laborers; free men, with no degrading tokens of slavery, making their way along, evidently against their will and yet in sullen obedience, with no thought of resistance or evasion, though only a single Arab held them under control.

The sight fell on his excited mood like rain on a smouldering fire, like hail on sprouting seed. His eye, which a moment ago had sparkled with enthusiasm, looked down with contempt and disappointment on the miserable creatures of whose race he came. A line of bitter scorn curled his lip, for this troop of voluntary slaves were beneath his anger--all the more so as he more vividly pictured to himself what his people had once been and what they were now. He did not think of all this precisely, but as dusk fell, one scene after another from his own experience rose before his mind's eye--occasions on which the Egyptians had behaved ignominiously, and had proved that they were unworthy of freedom and inured to bow in servitude. Just as one Arab was now able to reduce a host of his fellow-countrymen to subjection, so formerly three Greeks had held them in bondage. He had known numberless instances of almost glad submission on the part of freeborn Egyptians--peasants, village magnates, and officials, even on his father's estates and farms. In Alexandria and Memphis the sons of the soil had willingly borne the foreign yoke, allowing themselves to be thrust into the shade and humbled by Greeks, as though they were of a baser species and origin, so long only as their religious tenets and the subtleties of their creed remained untouched. Then he had seen them rise and shed their blood, yet even then only with loud outcries and a promising display of enthusiasm. But their first defeat had been fatal and it had required only a small number of trained soldiers to rout them.

To make any attempt against a bold and powerful invader as the leader of such a race would be madness; there was no choice but to rule his people in the service of the enemy and so exert his best energies to make their lot more endurable. His father's wiser and more experienced judgment had decided that the better course was to serve his people as mediator between them and the Arabs rather than to attempt futile resistance at the head of Byzantine troops.

"Wretched and degenerate brood!" he muttered wrathfully, and he began to consider whether he should not quit the spot and show the arrogant Arab that one Egyptian, at any rate, still had spirit enough to resent his contempt, or whether he should yet wait for the sake of the good cause, and swallow down his indignation. No! he, the son of the Mukaukas, could not--ought not to brook such treatment. Rather would he lose his life as a rebel, or wander an exile through the world and seek far from home a wider field for deeds of prowess, than put his free neck under the feet of the foe.

But his reflections were disturbed by the sound of footsteps, and looking round he saw the gleam of lanterns moving to and fro on the terrace, turned directly on him. These must be Amru's servants come to conduct him to their master, who, as he supposed, would now do him the honor to receive him--tired out with hunting, no doubt, and stretched on his divan while he imperiously informed his guest, as if he were some freed slave, what his wishes were.

But the steps were not those of a messenger. The great general himself had come to welcome him; the lantern-bearers were not to show the way to Amru's couch, but to guide Amru to the "son of his dear departed friend." The haughty Vicar of the Khaliffs was the most cordial host, prompted by hospitality to make his guest's brief stay beneath his roof as pleasant as possible, and giving him the right hand of welcome.

He apologized for his prolonged absence in very intelligible Greek, having learnt it in his youth as a caravan-leader to Alexandria; he expressed his regret at having left Orion to wait so long, blamed his servants for not inviting him indoors and for neglecting to offer him refreshment. As they crossed the garden-terrace he laid his hand on the youth's shoulder, explained to him that the lion he had been pursuing, though wounded by one of his arrows, had got away, and added that he hoped to make good his loss by the conquest of a nobler quarry than the beast of prey.

There was nothing for it but that the young man should return courtesy for courtesy; nor did he find it difficult. The Arab's fine pleasant voice, full of sincere cordiality, and the simple distinction and dignity of his manner appealed to Orion, flattered him, gave him confidence, and attracted him to the older man who was, besides, a valiant hero.

In his brightly-lighted room hung with costly Persian tapestry, Amru invited his guest to share his simple hunter's supper after the Arab fashion; so Orion placed himself on one side of the divan while the Governor and his Vëkeel--

[Deputy]--Obada--a Goliath with a perfectly black moorish face squatted rather than sat on the other, after the manner of his people.

Amru informed his guest that the black giant knew no Greek, and he only now and then threw in a few words which the general interpreted to Orion when he thought fit; but the negro's remarks were not more pleasing to the young Egyptian than his manner and appearance.

Obada had in his childhood been a slave and had worked his way up to his present high position by his own exertions; his whole attention seemed centred in the food before him, which he swallowed noisily and greedily, and yet that he was able to follow the conversation very well, in spite of his ignorance of Greek, his remarks sufficiently proved. Whenever he looked up from the dishes, which were placed in the midst on low tables, to put in a word, he rolled his big eyes so that only the whites remained visible; but when he turned them on Orion, their small, black pupils transfixed him with a keen and, as the young man thought, exceedingly sinister glare.

The presence of this man oppressed him; he had heard of his base origin, which to Orion's lofty ideas rendered him contemptible, of his fierce valor, and remarkable shrewdness; and though he did not understand what Obada said, more than once there was something in the man's tone that brought the blood into his face and made him set his teeth. The more kindly and delightful the effect of the Arab's speech and manner, the more irritating and repulsive was his subordinate; and Orion was conscious that he would have expressed himself more freely, and have replied more candidly to many questions, if he had been alone with Amru.

At first his host made enquiries as to his residence in Constantinople and asked much about his father; and he seemed to take great interest in all he heard till Obada interrupted Orion, in the midst of a sentence, with an enquiry addressed to his superior. Amru hastily answered him in Arabic and soon after gave a fresh turn to the conversation.

The Vêkeel had asked why Amru allowed that Egyptian boy to chatter so much before settling the matter about which he had sent for him, and his master had replied that a man is best entertained when he has most opportunity given him for hearing himself talk; that moreover the young man was well-informed, and that all he had to say was interesting and important.

The Moslems drank nothing; Orion was served with capital wine, but he took very little, and at length Amru began to speak of his father's funeral, alluding to the Patriarch's hostility, and adding that he had talked with him that morning and had been surprised at the marked antagonism he had confessed towards his deceased fellow-believer, who seemed formerly to have been his friend. Then Orion spoke out; he explained fully what the reasons were that had moved the Patriarch to display such conspicuous and far-reaching animosity towards his father. All that Benjamin cared for was to stand clear in the eyes of Christendom of the reproach of having abandoned a Christian land to conquerors who were what Christians termed "infidels" and his aim at present was to put his father forward as the man wholly and solely responsible for the supremacy of the Moslems in the land.

"True, true; I understand," Amru put in, and when the young man went on to tell him that the final breach between the Patriarch and the Mukaukas George had been about the convent of St. Cecilia, whose rights the prelate had tried to abrogate by an illegal interpretation of certain ancient and perfectly clear documents; the Arab exchanged rapid glances with the Vêkeel and then broke in:

"And you? Are you disposed to submit patiently to the blow struck at you and at your parent's worthy memory by this restless old man, who hates you as he did your father before you?"

"Certainly not," replied the youth proudly.

"That is right!" cried the general. "That is what I expected of you; but tell me now, with what weapons you, a Christian, propose to defy this shrewd and powerful man, in whose hands--as I know full well--you have placed the weal and woe, not of your souls alone...."

"I do not know yet," replied Orion, and as he met a glance of scorn from the Vêkeel, he looked down.

At this Amru rose, went closer to him, and said "And you will seek them in vain, my young friend; nor, if you found them, could you use them. It is easier to hit a woman, an eel, a soaring bird, than these supple, weak, unarmed, robed creatures, who have love and peace on their tongues and use their physical helplessness as a defence, aiming invisible but poisoned darts at those they hate--at you first and foremost, Son of the Mukaukas; I know it and I advise you: Be on your guard! If indeed manly revenge for this slight on your father's memory is dear to your heart you can easily procure it--but only on one condition."

"Show it me!" cried Orion with flaming eyes. "Become one of us."

"That is what I came here for. My brain and my arm from this day forth are at the service of the rulers of my country: yourself and our common master the Khaliff."

"Ya Salaam--that is well!" cried Amru, laying his hand on Orion's shoulder. "There is but one God, and yours is ours, too, for there is none other but He! you will not have to sacrifice much in becoming a Moslem, for we, too, count your lord Jesus as one of the prophets; and even you must confess that the last and greatest of them is Mohammed, the true prophet of God. Every man must acknowledge our lord Mohammed, who does not wilfully shut his eyes to the events

which have come about under his government and in his name. Your own father admitted..."

"My father?"

"He was forced to admit that we are more zealous, more earnest, more deeply possessed by our faith than you, his own fellow-believers."

"I know it."

"And when I told him that I had given orders that the desk for the reader of the Koran in our new mosque should be discarded, because when he stepped up to it he was uplifted above the other worshippers, the weary Mukaukas was quite agitated with satisfaction and uttered a loud cry of approbation. We Moslems--for that was what my commands implied--must all be equal in the presence of God, the Eternal, the Almighty, the All-merciful; their leader in prayer must not be raised above them, even by a head; the teaching of the Prophet points the road to Paradise, to all alike, we need no earthly guide to show us the way. It is our faith, our righteousness, our good deeds that open or close the gates of heaven; not a key in the hand of a priest. When you are one of us, no Benjamin can embitter your happiness on earth, no Patriarch can abrogate your claims and your father's to eternal bliss. You have chosen well, boy! Your hand, my convert to the true faith!"

And he held out his hand to Orion with glad excitement. But the young man did not take it; he drew back a little and said rather uneasily:

"Do not misunderstand me, great Captain. Here is my hand, and I can know no greater honor than that of grasping yours, of wielding my sword under your command, of wearing it out in your service and in that of my lord the Khaliff; but I cannot be untrue to my faith."

"Then be crushed by Benjamin--you and all your people!" cried Amru, disappointed and angry. He waved his hand with a gesture of disgust and dismissal, and then turned to the Vêkeel with a shrug, to answer the man's scornful exclamation.

Orion looked at them in dumb indecision; but he quickly collected himself, and said in a tone of modest but urgent entreaty:

"Nay; hear me and do not reject my petition. It could only be to my advantage to go over to you; and yet I can resist so great a temptation; but for that very reason I shall keep faith with you as I do to my religion."

"Until the priests compel you to break it," interrupted the Arab roughly.

"No, no!" cried Orion. "I know that Benjamin is my foe; but I have lost a beloved parent, and I believe in a meeting beyond the grave."

"So do I," replied the Moslem. "And there is but one Paradise and one Hell, as there is but one God."

"What gives you this conviction?"

"My faith."

"Then forgive me if I cling to mine, and hope to see my father once more in that Heaven...."

"The heaven to which, as you fools believe, no souls but your own are admitted! But supposing that it is open only to the immortal spirit of Moslems and closed against Christians?--What do you know of that Paradise? I know your sacred Scriptures--Is it described in them? But the All-merciful allowed our Prophet to look in, and what he saw he has described as though the Most High himself had guided his reed. The Moslem knows what Heaven has to offer him,--but you? Your Hell, you do know; your priests are more readier to curse than to bless. If one of you deviates by one hair's breadth from their teaching they thrust him out forthwith to the abode of the damned.--Me and mine, the Greek Christians, and--take my word for it boy--first and foremost you and your father!"

"If only I were sure of finding him there!" cried Orion striking his breast. "I really should not fear to follow him. I must meet him, must see him again, were it in Hell itself!"

At these words the Vêkeel burst into loud laughter, and when Amru reproved him sharply the negro retorted and a vehement dialogue ensued.

Obada's contumely had roused Orion's wrath; he was longing, burning to reduce this insolent antagonist to silence. However, he contained himself by a supreme effort of will, till Amru turned to him once more and said in a reserved tone, but not unkindly:

"This clear-sighted man has mentioned a suspicion which I myself had already felt. A worldly-minded young Christian of your rank is not so ready to give up earthly joys and happiness for the doubtful bliss of your Paradise and when you do so and are prepared to forego all that a man holds most dear: Honor, temporal possessions, a wide field of action, and revenge on your enemies, to meet the spirit of the departed once more after death, there must be some special reason in the background. Try to compose yourself, and believe my assurances that I like you and that you will find in me a zealous protector and a discreet friend if you will but tell me candidly and fully what are the motives of your conduct. I myself really desire that our interview should be fruitful of advantages on both sides. So put your trust in a man so much your senior and your father's friend, and speak."

"On no consideration in the presence of that man!" said Orion in a tremulous voice. "Though he is supposed not to understand Greek, he follows every word I say with malicious watchfulness; he dared to laugh at me, he..."

"He is as discreet as he is brave, and my Vêkeel," interrupted Amru reprovingly. "If you join us you will have to obey him; and remember this, young man. I sent for you to impose conditions on you, not to have them dictated to me. I grant you an audience as the ruler of this country, as the Vicar of Omar, your Khaliff and mine."

"Then I entreat you to dismiss me, for in the presence of that man my heart and lips are sealed; I feel that he is my enemy."

"Beware of his becoming so!" cried the governor, while Obada shrugged his shoulders scornfully.

Orion understood this gesture, and although he again succeeded in keeping cool he felt that he could no longer be sure of himself; he bowed low, without paying any heed to the Vêkeel, and begged Amru to excuse him for the present.

Amru, who had not failed to observe Obada's demeanor and who keenly sympathized with what was going on in the young man's mind, did not detain him; but his manner changed once more; he again became the pressing host and invited his guest, as it was growing late, to pass the night under his roof. Orion politely declined, and when at length he quitted the room--without deigning even to look at the Negro--Amru accompanied him into the anteroom. There he grasped the young man's hand, and said in a low voice full of sincere and fatherly interest:

"Beware of the Negro; you let him perceive that you saw through him--it was brave but rash. For my part I honestly wish you well."

"I believe it, I know it," replied Orion, on whose perturbed soul the noble Arab's warm, deep accents fell like balm. "And now we are alone I will gladly confide in you. I, my Lord, I--my father--you knew him. In cruel wrath, before he closed his eyes, he withdrew his blessing from his only son."

The memory of the most fearful hour of his life choked his voice for a moment, but he soon went on: "One single act of criminal folly roused his anger; but afterwards, in grief and penitence, I thought over my whole life, and I saw how useless it had been; and now, when I came hither with a heart full of glad expectancy to place all I have to offer of mind and gifts at your disposal, I did so, my Lord, because I long to achieve great and noble, and difficult or, if it might be, impossible deeds--to be active, to be doing..."

Here he was interrupted by Amru, who said, laying his sinewy arm across the youth's shoulders:

"And because you long to let the spirit of your dead father, that righteous man, see that a heedless act of youthful recklessness has not made you unworthy of his blessing; because you hope by valiant deeds to compel his wrath to turn to approval, his scorn to esteem..."

"Yes, yes, that is the thing, the very thing!" Orion broke in with fiery enthusiasm, but the Arab eagerly signed to him to lower his voice, as though to cheat some listener, and whispered hastily, but with warm kindness:

"And I, I will help you in this praiseworthy endeavor. Oh, how much you remind me of the son of my heart who, like you, erred, and who was permitted to atone for all, for more than all by dying like a hero for his faith on the field of battle!--Count on me, and let your purpose become deed. In me you have found a friend.--Now, go. You shall hear from me before long. But, once more: Do not provoke the Negro; beware of him; and the next time you meet him subdue your pride and make as though you had never seen him before."

He looked sadly at Orion, as though the sight of him revived some loved image in his mind, kissed his brow, and as soon as the youth had left the anteroom he hastily drew open the curtain that hung across the door into the dining-room.--A few steps behind it stood the Vêkeel, who was arranging the straps of his sword-belt.

"Listener!" exclaimed the Arab with intense scorn, "you, a man of gifts, a man of deeds! A hero in battle and in council; lion, serpent, and toad in one! When will you cast out of your soul all that is contemptible and base? Be what you have made yourself, not what you were; do not constantly remind the man who helped you to rise that you were born of a slave!"

"My Lord!" began the Moor, and the whites of his rolling eyes were ominously conspicuous in his black face. But Amru took the words out of his mouth and went on in stern and determined reproof:

"You behaved to that noble youth like an idiot, like a buffoon at a fair, like a madman."

"To Hell with him!" cried Obada, "I hate the gilded upstart."

"Envious wretch! Do not provoke him! Times change, and the day may come when you will have reason to fear him."

"Him?" shrieked the other. "I could crush the puppet like a fly! And he shall live to know it."

"Your turn first and then his!" said Amru. "To us he is the more important of the two--yes, he, the up start, the puppet. Do you hear? Do you understand? If you touch a hair of his head, it will cost you your nose and ears! Never for an hour forget that you live--and ought not to live--only so long as two pairs of lips are sealed. You know whose. That clever head remains on your shoulders only as long as they choose. Cling to it, man; you have only one to lose! It was necessary, my lord Vêkeel, to remind you of that once more!"

The Negro groaned like a wounded beast and sullenly panted out: "This is the reward of past services; these are the thanks of Moslem to Moslem!--And all for the sake of a Christian dog."

"You have had thanks, and more than are your due," replied Amru more calmly. "You know what you pledged yourself to before I raised you to be my Vêkeel for the sake of your brains and your sword, and what I had to overlook before I did so--not on your behalf, but for the great cause of Islam. And, if you wish to remain where you are, you will do well to sacrifice your wild ambition. If you cannot, I will send you back to the army, and to-day rather than to-morrow; and if you carry it with too high a hand you will find yourself at Medina in fetters, with your death-warrant stuck in your girdle."

The Negro again groaned sullenly; but his master was not to be checked.

"Why should you hate this youth? Why, a child could see through it! In the son and heir of George you see the future Mukaukas, while you are cherishing the insane wish to become the Mukaukas yourself."

"And why should such a wish be insane?" cried the other in a harsh voice. "Putting you out of the question, who is there here that is shrewder or stronger than I?"

"No Moslem, perhaps. But neither you nor any other true believer will succeed to the dead man's office, but an Egyptian and a Christian. Prudence requires it, and the Khaliff commands it."

"And does he also command that this curled ape shall be left in possession of his millions?"

"So that is what you covet, you greedy curmudgeon--that is it? Do not all the crimes you have committed out of avarice weigh upon you heavily enough? Gold, and yet more gold--that is the end, the foul end, of all your desires. A fat morsel, no doubt: the Mukaukas' estates, his talents of gold, his gems, slaves, and horses; I admit that. But thank God the All-merciful, we are not thieves and robbers!"

"And who was it that dug out the hidden millions from beneath the reservoir of Peter the Egyptian, and who made him bite the dust?"

"I--I. But--as you know--only to send the money to Medina. Peter had hidden it before we killed him. The Mukaukas and his son have declared all their possessions to the uttermost dinar and hide of land; they have faithfully paid the taxes, and consequently their property belongs to them as our swords, our horses, our wives belong to you or me. What will not your grasping spirit lead you to!--Take your hand from your dagger!--Not a copper coin from them shall fall into your hungry maw, so help me God! Do not again cast an evil eye on the Mukaukas' son! Do not try my patience too far, man, or else--Hold your head tight on your shoulders or you will have to seek it at your feet; and what I say I mean!--Now, good-night! To-morrow morning in the divan you are to explain your scheme for the new distribution of the land; it will not suit me in any way, and I shall have other projects to propose for discussion."

With this the Arab turned his back on the Vêkeel; but no sooner had the door closed on him than Obada clenched his fist in fury at his lord and master, who had hitherto said nothing of his having had purloined a portion of the consignment of gold which Amru had charged him to escort to Medina. Then he rushed up and down the room, snorting and foaming till slaves came in to clear the tables.

CHAPTER XXV.

Orion made his way home under the moonlit and starry night. He held his head high, and not since that evening on the water with Paula had he felt so glad or so hopeful. On the other side of the bridge he did not at once turn his horse's head homewards; the fresh night air was so delightful, his heart beat so high that he shrunk from the oppression of a room. Full of renewed life, freed from a burden as it were, he made his way at a round pace to the house that held his beloved, picturing to himself how gladly she would welcome the news that he had found Amru ready to encourage him in his projects, indeed, to be a fatherly friend.

The Arab general, whose lofty character, intellect, and rectitude his father had esteemed highly, had impressed him, too, as the ideal of noble manliness, and as he compared him with the highest officials and warriors he had met at the Court of Byzantium he could not help smiling. By the side of this dignified, but impetuous and warm-hearted man they appeared like the old, rigid idols of his ancestors in comparison with the freely-wrought works of Greek art. He could bless the memory of his father for having freed the land from that degenerate race. Now, he felt, that lost parent, whose image lived in his soul, was satisfied with him, and this gave him a sense of happiness which he meant to cling to and enhance by every thought and deed in the future. "Life is a function, a ministry, and a duty!" this watchword, which had been given him by those beloved lips, should keep him in the new path; and soon he hoped to feel sure of himself, to be able to look back on such deeds of valor as would give him a right in his own judgment to unite his lot to that of this noblest of women.

Full of such thoughts as these, he made his way to the house of Rufinus. The windows of the corner room on the upper floor were lighted up; two of these windows looked out on the river and the quay. He did not know which rooms were Paula's, but he looked up at the late-burning light with a vague feeling that it must be hers; a female figure which now appeared framed in the opening, showed him that he was not mistaken; it was that of Perpetua. The sound of hoofs had roused her curiosity, but she did not seem to recognize him in the dim starlight.

He slowly rode past, and when he presently turned back and again looked up, in the hope this time of seeing Paula, the place was vacant: however, he perceived a tall dark shadow moving across from one side of the room to the other, which could not be that of the nurse nor of her slender mistress. It must indeed be that of a remarkably big man, and stopping to gaze with anxious and unpleasant apprehension, he plainly recognized Philippus.

It was past midnight. How could he account for his being with Paula at this hour?--Was she ill?--Was this room hers after all?--Was it merely by chance that the nurse was in Rufinus' room with the physician.

No. The woman whom he could now see pass across the window and go straight up to the man, with outstretched hands, was Paula and none other. Isis heart was already beating fast, and now a suspicion grew strong in him which his vanity had hitherto held in check, though he had often seen the friendly relations that subsisted between Paula and the leech.--Perhaps it was a warmer feeling than friendship and guileless trust, which had led her so unreservedly to claim this man's protection and service. Could he have won Paula's heart--Paula's love?

Was it conceivable!--But why not?

What was there against Philippus but his homely face and humble birth? And how many a woman had he not seen set her heart on quite other things! The physician was not more than five years his senior; and recalling the expression in his eyes as he looked at Paula only that morning Orion felt more and more uneasy.

Philippus loved Paula.--A trifling incident suddenly occurred to his mind which made him certain on that point; he had only too much experience in such matters. Yesterday, it had struck him that ever since his father's death--that was ever since Paula's change of residence--Philippus dressed more carefully than had been his wont. "Now this," thought he, "is a change that does not come over so serious a man unless it is caused by love."

A mingled torment of pain and rage shot through him as he again saw the tall shadow cross the window. For the first time in his life he felt the pangs of jealousy, which he had so often laughed at in his friends; but was it not absurd to allow it to torture him; was he not sure, since that morning's meeting, quite sure of Paula? And Philippus! Even if he, Orion, must retire into the background before a higher judge, in the eyes of a woman he surely had the advantage!--But in spite of all this it troubled him to know that the physician was with Paula at such an hour; he angrily pulled his horse's head round, and it was a pleasure to him to feel the fiery creature, unused as it was to such rough treatment, turn restive at it now. By the time he had gone a hundred steps from those windows with their cursed glare, the horse was displaying all the temper and vice that had been taken out of him as a foal. Orion had to fight a pitched battle with his steed, and it was a relief to him to exercise his power with curb and knee. In vain did the creature dance round and round; in vain did he rear and plunge; the steady rider was his master; and it was not till he had brought him to quietness and submission that Orion drew breath and looked about him while he patted the horse's smooth neck.

Close at hand, behind a low hedge, spread the thick, dark groves of Susannah's garden and between them the back of the house was visible, being more brilliantly lighted than even Paula's rooms. Three of the windows showed lights; two were rather dim, however, the result probably of one lamp only.

All this could not matter to him; nevertheless he remained gazing at the roof of the colonnade which went round the house below the upper floor; for, on the terrace it formed, leaning against a window-frame, stood a small figure with her head thrust so far forth to listen that the light shone through the curls that framed it. Katharina was trying to overhear a dialogue between the Patriarch Benjamin--whose bearded and apostolic head Orion could clearly recognize--and the priest John, an insignificant looking little man, of whom, however, the deceased Mukaukas had testified that he was far superior to old Plotinus the Bishop in intellect and energy.

The young man could easily have watched Katharina's every movement, but he did not think it worth while. Nevertheless, as he rode on, the water-wagtail's little figure dwelt in his mind; not alone, however, for that of Paula immediately rose by her side; and the smaller Katharina's seemed, the more ample and noble did the other appear. Every word he had heard that day from Paula's lips rushed to his remembrance, and the vivid and lovely memory drove out all care. That woman, who only a few hours since, had declared herself ready, with him, to hope all things, to believe all things, and to accept his protection--that lordly maiden whom he had been glad to bid fix her eye, with him, on the goal of his future efforts, whose pure gaze could restrain his passion and impetuosity as by a charm, and who yet granted him the right to strive to possess her--that proud daughter of heroes, whom even his father would have clasped to his heart as a daughter--was it possible that she should betray him like some pleasure-seeking city beauty? Could she forget her dignity as a woman?--No! and a thousand times no. To doubt her was to insult her--was to wrong her and himself.

The physician loved her; but it certainly was not any warmer feeling than friendship on her part that made her receive him at this late hour. The shame would be his own, if he ever again allowed such base suspicion to find place in his soul!

He breathed a deep sigh of relief. And when his servant, who had lingered to pay the toll at the bridge, came up with him, Orion dismounted and desired him to lead his horse home, for he himself wished to return on foot, alone with his thoughts. He walked meditatively and slowly under the sycamores, but he had not gone far when, on the other side of the deserted road, he heard some one overtaking him with long, quick strides. He recognized the leech Philippus at a glance and was glad, for this proved to him how senseless and unjust his doubts had been, and how little ground he had for regarding the physician as a rival; for indeed this man did not look like a happy lover. He hurried on with his head bent, as though under a heavy burthen, and clasped his hand to his forehead with a gesture of despair. No, this nocturnal wanderer had left no hour of bliss behind him; and if his demeanor was calculated to rouse any feeling it was not envy, but pity.

Philippus did not heed Orion; absorbed in himself, he strode on, moaning dully, as if in pain. For a few minutes he disappeared into a house whence came loud cries of suffering, and when he came out again, he walked on, shaking his head now and then, as a man who sees many things happen which his understanding fails to account for.

The end of his walk was a large, palatial building. The stucco had fallen off in places, and in the upper story the windows had been broken away till their openings were a world too wide. In former times this house had accommodated the State officers of Finance for the province, and the ground-floor rooms had been suitably and comfortably fitted up for the Ideologos--the supreme controller of this department, who usually resided at Alexandria, but who often spent some weeks at Memphis when on a tour of inspection. But the Arabians had transferred the management of the finances of the whole country to the new capital of Fostat on the other shore of the river, and that of the monetary affairs of the decaying city had been incorporated with the treasurer's department of the Mukaukas' household. The senate of the city had found the expense of this huge building too heavy, and had been well content to let the lower rooms to Philippus and his Egyptian friend, Horapollo.

The two men occupied different rooms, but the same slaves attended to their common housekeeping and also waited on the physician's assistant, a modest and well-informed Alexandrian.

When Philippus entered his old friend's lofty and spacious study he found him still up, sitting before a great number of rolls of manuscript, and so absorbed in his work that he did not notice his late-coming comrade till the leech bid him good-evening. His only reply was an unintelligible murmur, for some minutes longer the old man was lost in study; at last, however, he looked up at Philippus, impatiently tossing an ivory ruler--which he had been using to open and smooth the papyrus on to the table; and at the same moment a dark bundle under it began to move--this was the old man's slave who had long been sleeping there.

Three lamps on the writing-table threw a bright light on the old man and his surroundings, while the physician, who had thrown himself on a couch in a corner of the large room, remained in the dark.

What startled the midnight student was his housemate's unwonted silence; it disturbed him as the cessation of the clatter of the wheel disturbs a man who lives in a mill. He looked at his friend with surprised enquiry, but Philippus was dumb, and the old man turned once more to his rolls of manuscript. But he had lost the necessary concentration; his brown hand, in which the blue veins stood out like cords, fidgeted with the scrolls and the ivory rule, and his sunken lips, which had before been firmly closed, were now twitching restlessly.

The man's whole aspect was singular and not altogether pleasing; his lean brown figure was bent with age, his

thoroughly Egyptian face, with broad cheekbones and outstanding ears, was seamed and wrinkled like oak-bark; his scalp was bare of its last hair, and his face clean-shaved, but for a few tufts of grey hair by way of beard, sprouting from the deep furrows on his cheeks and chin, like reeds from the narrow bed of a brook; the razor could not reach them there, and they gave him an untidy and uncared-for appearance. His dress answered to his face--if indeed that could be called dress which consisted of a linen apron and a white kerchief thrown over his shoulders after sundown. Still, no one meeting him in the road could have taken him for a beggar; for his linen was fine and as white as snow, and his keen, far-seeing eyes, above which, exactly in the middle, his bristly eyebrows grew strangely long and thick, shone and sparkled with clear intelligence, firm self-reliance, and a repellent severity which would no more have become an intending mendicant than the resolute and often scornful expression which played about his lips. There was nothing amiable, nothing prepossessing, nothing soft in this man's face; and those who knew what his life had been could not wonder that the years had failed to sweeten his abrupt and contradictory acerbity or to transmute them into that kindly forbearance which old men, remembering how often they have stumbled and how many they have seen fall, sometimes find pleasure in practising.

He had been born, eighty years before, in the lovely island of Philae, beyond the cataract in the district of the temple of Isis, and under the shadow of the only Egyptian sanctuary in which the heathen cultus was kept up, and that publicly, as late as in his youth. Since Theodosius the Great, one emperor and one Praefectus Augustalis after another had sent foot-soldiers and cavalry above the falls to put an end to idolatry in the beautiful isle; but they had always been routed or destroyed by the brave Blemmyes who haunted the desert between the Nile and the Red Sea. These restless nomad tribes acknowledged the Isis of Philae as their tutelary goddess, and, by a very ancient agreement, the image of their patroness was carried every year by her priests in a solemn procession to the Blemmyes, and then remained for a few weeks in their keeping. Horapollo's father was the last of the horoscope readers, and his grandfather had been the last high-priest of the Isis of Philae. His childhood had been passed on the island but then a Byzantine legion had succeeded in beating the Blemmyes, in investing the island, and in plundering and closing the temple. The priests of Isis escaped the imperial raid and Horapollo had spent all his early years with his father, his grandfather, and two younger sisters, in constant peril and flight. His youthful spirit was unremittingly fed with hatred of the persecutors, the cruel contemners and exterminators of the faith of his forefathers; and this hatred rose to irreconcilable bitterness after the massacre at Antioch where the imperial soldiery fell upon all his family, and his grandfather and two innocent sisters were murdered. These horrors were committed at the instigation of the Bishop, who denounced the Egyptian strangers as idolaters, and to whom the Roman prefect, a proud and haughty patrician, had readily lent the support of an armed force. It was owing to the narrowest chance--or, as the old man would have it, to the interposition of great Isis, that his father had been so happy as to get away with him and the treasures he had brought from the temple at Philae. Thus they had means to enable them to travel farther under an assumed name, and they finally settled in Alexandria. Here the persecuted youth changed his name, Horus, to its Greek equivalent, and henceforth he was known at home and in the schools as Apollo. He was highly gifted by nature, and availed himself with the utmost zeal of the means of learning that abounded in Alexandria; he labored indefatigably and dug deep into every field of Greek science, gaining, under his father's guidance, all the knowledge of Egyptian horoscopy, which was not wholly lost even at this late period.

In the midst of the contentious Christian sects of the capital, both father and son remained heathen and worshippers of Isis; and when the old priest died at an advanced age, Horapollo moved to Memphis where he led the quiet and secluded life of a student, mingling only now and then with the astronomers, astrologers, and calendar-makers at the observatory, or visiting the alchemists' laboratories, where, even in Christian Egypt, they still devoted themselves to attempts to transmute the baser into the noble metals. Alchemists and star-readers alike soon detected the old man's superior knowledge, and in spite of his acrid and often offensively-repellent demeanor, took counsel of him on difficult questions. His fame had even reached the Arabs, and, when it was necessary to find the exact direction towards Mecca for the prayer niche in Amru's new mosque, he was appealed to, and his decision was final.

Philippus had, some years since, been called to the old man's bedside in sickness, and being then a beginner and in no great request, he had given the best of his time and powers to the case. Horapollo had been much attracted by the young physician's wide culture and earnest studiousness; he had conceived a warm liking for him, the warmest perhaps that he had ever felt for any fellow-human since the death of his own family. At last the elder took the younger man into his heart with such overflowing affection, that it seemed as though his spirit longed to make up now for the stint of love it had hitherto shown. No father could have clung to his son with more fervent devotion, and when a relapse once more brought him to death's door he took Philippus wholly into his confidence, unrolled before his eyes the scroll of his inner and outer life from its beginnings, and made him his heir on condition that he should abide by him to the end.

Philippus, who, from the first, had felt a sympathetic attraction to this venerable and talented man, agreed to the bargain; and when he subsequently became associated with the old man in his studies, assisting him from time to time, Horapollo desired that he would help him to complete a work he hoped to finish before he died. It was a treatise on hieroglyphic writing, and was to interpret the various signs so far as was still possible, and make them intelligible to

posterity.

The old man disliked writing anything but Egyptian, using Greek unwillingly and clumsily, so he entrusted to his young friend the task of rendering his explanations into that language. Thus the two men--so different in age and character, but so closely allied in intellectual aims--led a joint existence which was both pleasant and helpful to both, in spite of the various eccentricities, the harshness and severity of the elder.

Horapollo lived after the manner of the early Egyptian priests, subjecting himself to much ablution and shaving; eating little but bread, vegetables, and poultry, and abstaining from pulse and the flesh of all beasts--not merely of the prohibited animal, swine; wearing nothing but pure linen clothing, and setting apart certain hours for the recitation of those heathen forms of prayer whose magic power was to compel the gods to grant the desires of those who thus appealed to them.

And if the old man had given his full confidence to Philippus, the leech, on his part, had no secrets from him; or, if he withheld anything, Horapollo, with wonderful acumen, was at once aware of it. Philippus had often spoken of Paula to his parental friend, describing her charms with all the fervor of a lover, but the old man was already prejudiced against her, if only as the daughter of a patrician and a prefect. All who bore these titles were to him objects of hatred, for a patrician and a prefect had been guilty of the blood of those he had held most dear. The Governor of Antioch, to be sure, had acted only under the orders of the bishop; but old Horapollo, and his father before him, from the first had chosen to throw all the blame on the prefect, for it afforded some satisfaction to the descendant of an ancestral race of priests to be able to vent all his wrathful spite on any one rather than on the minister of a god--be that god who or what he might.

So when Philippus praised Paula's dignified grandeur, her superior elegance, the height of her stature or the loftiness of her mind, the old man would bound up exclaiming: "Of course--of course!--Beware boy, beware! You are disguising haughtiness, conceit, and arrogance under noble names. The word 'patrician' includes everything we can conceive of as most insolent and inhuman; and those apes in purple who disgrace the Imperial throne pick out the worst of them, the most cold-hearted and covetous, to make prefects of them. And as they are, so are their children! Everything which they in their vainglory regard as 'beneath them' they tread into the dust--and we--you and I, all who labor with their hands in the service of the state--we, in their dull eyes, are beneath them. Mark me, boy! To-day the governor's daughter, the patrician maiden, can smile at you because she needs you; tomorrow she will cast you aside as I push away the old panther-skin which keeps my feet warm in winter, as soon as the March days come!"

Nor was his aversion less for the son of the Mukaukas, whom, however, he had never seen; when the leech had confessed to him how deep a grudge against Orion dwelt in the heart of Paula, old Horapollo had chuckled scornfully, and he exclaimed, as though he could read hearts and look into the future--: "They snap at each other now, and in a day or two they will kiss again! Hatred and love are the opposite ends of the same rod; and how easily it is reversed!--Those two!--Like in blood is like in kind;--such people attract each other as the lodestone tends towards the iron and the iron towards the lodestone!"

But these and similar admonitions had produced little effect on the physician's sentiments; even Paula's repulse of his ardent appeal after she had moved to the house of Rufinus had failed to extinguish his hope of winning her at last. This very morning, in the course of the discussion as to the stewardship of her fortune, Paula had been ready and glad to accept him as her Kyrios--her legal protector and representative; but he now thought that he could perceive by various signs that his venerable friend was right: that the rod had been reversed, and that aversion had been transformed to love in the girl's heart. The anguish of this discovery was hard to bear. And yet Paula had never shown him such hearty warmth of manner, never had she spoken to him in a voice so soft and so full of feeling, as this evening in the garden. More cheerful and talkative than usual, she had constantly turned to address him, while he had felt his pain and torment of mind gradually eased, till in him too, sentiment had blossomed anew, and his intellectual power had expanded. Never--so he believed--had he expressed his thoughts better or more brilliantly than in that hour. Nor had she withheld her approval; she had heartily agreed with his views; and when, half an hour before midnight, he had gone with her to visit his patients, rapturous hopes had sprung once more in his breast. Ecstatically happy, like a man intoxicated, he had, by her own desire, accompanied her into her sitting-room, and then--and there....

Poor, disappointed man, sitting on the divan in a dark corner of the spacious room! In his soul hitherto the intellect had alone made itself heard, the voice of the heart had never been listened to.

How he had found his way home he never knew. All he remembered was that, in the course of duty, he had gone into the house of a man whose wife--the mother of several children--he had left at noon in a dying state; that he had seen her a corpse, surrounded by loud but sincere mourners; that he had gone on his way, weighed down by their grief and his own, and that he had entered his friend's rooms rather than his own, to feel safe from himself. Life had no charm, no value for him now; still, he felt ashamed to think that a woman could thus divert him from the fairest aims of life, that he could allow her to destroy the peace of mind he needed to enable him to carry out his calling in the spirit of his friend Rufinus. He knew his house-mate well and felt that he would only pour vitriol into his wounds, but it was best so. The old man had already often tried to bring down Paula's image from its high pedestal in his soul, but always in vain; and

even now he should not succeed. He would mar nothing, scatter nothing to the winds, tread nothing in the dust but the burning passion, the fevered longing for her, which had fired his blood ever since that night when he had vanquished the raving Masdakite. That old sage by the table, on whose stern, cold features the light fell so brightly, was the very man to accomplish such a work of destruction, and Philippus awaited his first words as a wounded man watches the surgeon heating the iron with which to cauterize the sore.

Poor disappointed wretch, sorely in need of a healing hand!

He lay back on the divan, and saw how his friend leaned over his scroll as if listening, and fidgeted up and down in his arm-chair.

It was clear that Horapollo was uneasy at Philippus' long silence, and his pointed eyebrows, raised high on his brow, plainly showed that he was drawing his own conclusions from it--no doubt the right ones. The peace must soon be broken, and Philippus awaited the attack. He was prepared for the worst; but how could he bring himself to make his torturer's task easy for him. Thus many minutes slipped away; while the leech was waiting for the old man to speak, Horapollo waited for Philippus. However, the impatience and curiosity of the elder were stronger than the young man's craving for comfort; he suddenly laid down the roll of manuscript, impatiently snatched up the ivory stick which he had thrown aside, set his heavy seat at an angle with a shove of amazing vigor for his age, turned full on Philippus, and asked him, in a loud voice, pointing his ruler at him as if threatening him with it:

"So the play is out. A tragedy, of course!"

"Hardly, since I am still alive," replied the other.

"But there is inward bleeding, and the wound is painful," retorted the old man. Then, after a short pause, he went on: "Those who will not listen must feel! The fox was warned of the trap, but the bait was too tempting! Yesterday there would still have been time to pull his foot out of the spring, if only he had sincerely desired it; he knew the hunter's guile. Now the foe is down on the victim; he has not spared his weapons, and there lies the prey dumb with pain and ignominy, cursing his own folly.--You seem inclined for silence this evening. Shall I tell you just how it all came about?"

"I know only too well," said Philippus.

"While I, to be sure, can only imagine it!" growled the old man. "So long as that patrician hussy needed the poor beast of burthen she could pet it and throw barley and dates to it. Now she is rolling in gold and living under a sheltering roof, and hey presto, the discarded protector is sent to the right about in no time. This mistress of the hearts of our weak and bondage-loving sex raises this rich Adonis to fill the place of the hapless, overgrown leech, just as the sky lets the sun rise when the pale moon sinks behind the hills. If that is not the fact give me the lie!"

"I only wish I could," sighed Philippus. "You have seen rightly, wonderfully rightly--and yet, as wrongly as possible."

"Dark indeed!" said the old man quietly. "But I can see even in the dark. The facts are certain, though you are still so blinded as not to see their first cause. However, I am satisfied to know that your delusion has come to so abrupt, and in my opinion so happy, an end. To its cause--a woman, as usual--I am perfectly indifferent. Why should I needlessly ascribe to her any worse sin than she had committed? If only for your sake I will avoid doing so, for an honorable soul clings to those whom it sees maligned. Still, it seems to me that it is for you to speak, not for me. I should know you for a philosopher, without such persistent silence; and as for myself, I am not altogether bereft of curiosity, in spite of my eighty years."

At this Philippus hastily rose and pacing the room while he spoke, or pausing occasionally in front of the old man, he poured out with glowing cheeks and eager gestures, the history of his hopes and sufferings--how Paula had filled him with fresh confidence, and had invited him to her rooms--only to show him her whole heart; she had been strongly moved, surprised at herself, but unable and unwilling to conceal from him the happiness that had come into her life. She had spoken to him, her best friend, as a burthened soul pours itself out to a priest: had confessed all that she had felt since the funeral of the deceased Mukaukas, and said that she felt convinced now that Orion had come to a right mind again after his great sin.

"And that there, was so much joy over him in heaven," interrupted Horapollo, "that she really could not delay doing her cast-off lover the honor of inviting his sympathy!"

"On the contrary. It was with the utmost effort that she uttered all her heart prompted her to tell; she had nothing to look for from me but mockery, warning, and reproach, and yet she opened her heart to me."

"But why? To what end?" shrieked the old man. "Shall I tell you. Because a man who is a friend must still be half a lover, and a woman cannot bear to give up even a quarter of one."

"Not so!" exclaimed Philippus, indignantly interrupting him. "It was because she esteems and values me,--because she regards me as a brother, and--I am not a vain man--and could not bear--those were her very words--to cheat me of my affection for even an hour! It was noble, it was generous, worthy of her! And though every fibre of my nature rebelled I found myself compelled to admire her sincerity, her true friendship, her disregard of her own feelings, and her womanly tenderness!--Nay, do not interrupt me again, do not laugh at me. It is no small matter for a proud girl,

conscious of her own dignity, to lay bare her heart's weakness to a man who, as she knows, loves her, as she did just now to me. She called me her benefactor and said she would be a sister to me; and whatever motive you--who hate her out of a habit of prejudice without really knowing her--may choose to ascribe her conduct to, I--I believe in her, and understand her.

"Could I refuse to grasp the hand she held out to me as she entreated me with tears in her eyes to be still her friend, her protector, and her Kyrios! And yet, and yet!--Where shall I find resolution enough to ask of her who excites me to the height of passion no more than a kind glance, a clasp of the hand, an intelligent interest in what I say? How am I to preserve self-control, calmness, patience, when I see her in the arms of that handsome young demi-god whom I scorned only yesterday as a worthless scoundrel? What ice may cool the fire of this burning heart? What spear can transfix the dragon of passion which rages here? I have lived almost half my life without ever feeling or yearning for the love of which the poets sing. I have never known anything of such feelings but through the pangs of some friend whose weakness had roused my pity; and now, when love has come upon me so late with all its irresistible force--has subjugated me, cast me into bondage--how shall I, how can I get free?

"My faithful friend, you who call me your son, whom I am glad to hear speak to me as 'boy,' and 'child,' who have taken the place of the father I lost so young--there is but one issue: I must leave you and this city--flee from her neighborhood--seek a new home far from her with whom I could have been as happy as the Saints in bliss, and who has made me more wretched than the damned in everlasting fire. Away, away! I will go--I must go unless you, who can do so much, can teach me to kill this passion or to transmute it into calm, brotherly regard."

He stood still, close in front of the old man and hid his face in his hands. At his favorite's concluding words, Horapollo had started to his feet with all the vigor of youth; he now snatched his hand down from his face, and exclaimed in a voice hoarse with indignation and the deepest concern:

"And you can say that in earnest? Can a sensible man like you have sunk so deep in folly? Is it not enough that your own peace of mind should have been sacrificed, flung at the feet of this--what can I call her?--Do you understand at last why I warned you against the Patrician brood?--The faith, gratitude, and love of a good man!--What does she care for them? Unhook the whiting; away with him in the dust! Here comes a fine large fish who perhaps may swallow the bait!--Do you want to ruin, for her sake, and the sake of that rascally son of the governor, the comfort and happiness of an old man's last years when he has become accustomed to love you, who so well deserve it, as his own son? Will you--an energetic student, you--a man of powerful intellect, zealous in your duty, and in favor with the gods--will you pine like a deserted maiden or spring from the Leucadian rock like love-sick Sappho in the play while the spectators shake with laughter? You must stay, Boy, you must stay; and I will show you how a man must deal with a passion that dishonors him."

"Show me," replied Philippus in a dull voice. "I ask no more. Do you suppose that I am not myself ashamed of my own weakness? It ill beseems me of all men, formed by fate for anything rather than to be a sighing and rapturous lover. I will struggle with it, wrestle with it with all the strength that is in me; but here, in Memphis, close to her and as her Kyrios, I should be forced every day to see her, and day after day be exposed to fresh and humiliating defeat! Here, constantly near her and with her, the struggle must wear me out--I should perish, body and soul. The same place, the same city, cannot hold her and me."

"Then she must make way for you," croaked Horus. Philippus raised his bowed head and asked, in some surprise and with stern reproof:

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing," replied the other airily. He shrugged his shoulders and went on more gently: "Memphis has greater need of you than of the patrician hussy." Then he shook himself as if he were cold, struck his breast and added: "All is turmoil here within; I can neither help nor advise you. Day must soon be dawning in the east; we will try to sleep. A knot can often be untied by daylight which by lamplight seems inextricable, and perhaps on my sleepless couch the goddess may reveal to me the way I have promised to show you. A little more lightness of heart would do neither of us any harm.--Try to forget your own griefs in those of others; you see enough of them every day. To wish you a good night would probably be waste of words, but I may wish you a soothing one, You may count on my aid; but you will not let me, a poor old man, hear another word about flight and departure and the like, will you? No, no. I know you better, Philippus--you will never treat your lonely old friend so!"

These were the tenderest words that the leech had ever heard from the old man's lips, and it comforted him when Horapollo pressed him to his heart in a hasty embrace. He thought no more of the hint that it was Paula's part to make room for him. But the old man had spoken in all seriousness, for, no sooner was he alone than he petulantly flung down the ivory ruler on the table, and murmured, at first angrily and then scornfully, his eyes sparkling the while:

"For this true heart, and to preserve myself and the world from losing such a man, I would send a dozen such born hussies to Amentis--[The Nether world of the ancient Egyptians.]--Hey, hey! My beauty! So this noble leech is not good enough for the like of us; he may be tossed away like a date-stone that we spit out? Well, every one to his taste; but how would it be if old Horapollo taught us his value? Wait a bit, wait!--With a definite aim before my eyes I have

never yet failed to find my way--in the realm of science, of course; but what is life--the life of the sage but applied knowledge? And why should not old Horapollo, for once before he dies, try what his brains can contrive to achieve in the busy world of outside human existence? Pleasant as you may think it to be in Memphis with your lover, fair heart-breaker, you will have to make way for the plaything you have so lightly tossed aside! Aye, you certainly will, depend upon that my beauty, depend upon that!--Here, Anubis!"

He gave the slave, who had fallen asleep again under the table, a kick with his bare foot, and while Anubis lighted his master to his sleeping-room, and helped him in his long and elaborate ablutions, Horapollo never ceased muttering broken sentences and curses, or laughing maliciously to himself.

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER I.

If Philippus found no sleep that night, neither did Orion. He no longer doubted Paula, but his heart was full of longing to hear her say once more that she loved him and him alone, and the yearning kept him awake. He sprang from his bed at the first glimmer of dawn, glad that the night was past, and started to cross the Nile in order to place half of Paula's fortune in the hands of Salech, the brother of Haschim the merchant.

In Memphis all was still silent, and all he saw in the old town struck him as strangely worn-out, torpid, and decayed; it seemed only fit to be left to ruin, while on the other side of the river, in the new town of Fostat, on all hands busy, eager, new-born vitality met his eyes.

He involuntarily compared the old capital of the Pharaohs to a time-eaten mummy, and Amru's new city to a vigorous youth. Here every one was astir and in brisk activity. The money-changer, who had risen, like all Moslems, to perform his morning prayer, "as soon as a white thread could be distinguished from a black one," was already busy with his rolls of gold and silver coin; and how quick, clear, and decisive the Arab was in concluding his bargain with Orion and with Nilus, who had accompanied him!

Whichever way the young man turned, bright and flashing eyes met his gaze, energetic, resolute, and enterprising faces; no bowed heads, no dull, brooding looks, no gloomy resignation like those in his native town on the other shore. Here, in Fostat, his blood flowed more swiftly; there, existence was an oppressive burden. Everything attracted him to the Arabs!

The changer's shop, like all those in the Sook or Bazaar of Fostat, consisted of a wooden stall in which he sat with his assistants. On the side open to the street he transacted business with his customers, who, when the affair promised to be lengthy, were invited by the Arab to seat themselves with him on his little platform.

Orion and Nilus had accepted such an invitation, and it happened that, while they sat in treaty with Salech, visible to the passers-by, the Vêkeel Obada, who had so deeply stirred the wrath of the governor's son on the previous evening, came by, close to him. To Orion's amazement he greeted him with great amiability, and he, remembering Amru's warning, responded, though not without an effort, to his hated foe's civility. When Obada passed the stall a second and a third time, Orion felt that he was watching him; however, it was quite possible that the Vêkeel might also have business with the money-changer and be waiting only for the conclusion of his.

At any rate Orion ere long forgot the incident, for matters of more pressing importance claimed his attention at home.

As often happens, the death of one man had changed everything in his house so utterly as to make it unlike the same; though his removal had made it neither richer nor poorer, and though his secluded presence of late had scarcely had an appreciable influence. The rooms formerly so full of life now seemed dead. Petitioners and suppliants no longer crowded the anteroom, and all visits of condolence had, according to the ancient custom, been received on the day after the funeral. The Lady Neforis had ceased fussing and bustling, the clatter of her keys and her scolding were no longer to be heard; she sat apart, either in her sleeping-room or the cool hall with the fountain which had been her husband's favorite room, excepting when she was at church whither she went twice every day. She returned from thence with the same weary, abstracted expression that she took there, and any one seeing her lying on the divan which her husband had formerly occupied, idly absorbed in gloomy thought, would hardly have recognized her as the same woman who had but lately been so active and managing. She did not exactly mourn or bewail her loss; indeed, she had no tears for her grief, as though she had shed them all, once for all, during the night after his death and burial. But she could not attain to that state of sadness made sacred by memories with which consoling angels so often mingle some drops of sweetness, after the first anguish is overpast. She felt--she knew--that with her husband a portion of her own being had been riven from her, but she could not yet perceive that this last portion was nothing less than the very foundations of her whole moral and social being.

Her father and her husband's father had been the two leading men in Memphis, nay, in all Egypt. She had given her hand and a heart full of love to the son of Menas, a proud and happy woman. It was as one with her, and not by himself alone, that he had risen to the highest dignity attainable by a native Egyptian, and she had done everything that lay in her power to uphold him in a position which many envied him, and in filling it with dignity and effect. After many years of rare happiness their grief at the loss of their murdered sons only bound the attached couple more closely, and when her husband had fallen into bad health she had gladly shared his seclusion, had devoted herself entirely to caring for him, and divided all the doubts and anxieties which came upon him from his political action. The consciousness of being not merely much but everything to him, was her pride and her joy. Her dislike of Paula had its rise, in the first instance, in the discovery that she, his wife, was no longer indispensable to the sufferer when he had his fair young niece's company. And now?

At night, after long lying awake, when she woke from a snatch of uneasy sleep, she involuntarily listened for the faint panting breath, but no heart now throbbed by her side; and when she quitted her lonely couch at dawn the coming day lay before her as a desert and treeless solitude. By night, as by day, she constantly tried to call up the

image of the dead, but whenever her small imaginative power had succeeded in doing so--not unfrequently at first--she had seen him as in the last moments of his life, a curse on his only son on his trembling lips. This horrible impression deprived her of the last consolation of the mourner: a beautiful memory, while it destroyed her proud and glad satisfaction in her only child. The youth, who had till now been her soul's idol, was stigmatized and branded in her eyes. She might not ignore the burden laid on Orion by that most just man; instead of taking him to her heart with double tenderness and softening or healing the fearful punishment inflicted by his father, she could only pity him. When Orion came to see her she would stroke his waving hair and, as she desired not to wound him and make him even more unhappy than he must be already, she neither blamed nor admonished him, and never reminded him of his father's curse. And how beggared was that frugal heart, accustomed to spend all its store of love on so few objects--nay, chiefly on one alone who was now no more!

The happy voices of the children had always given her pleasure, so long as they did not disturb her suffering husband; now, they too were silent. She had withdrawn the sunshine of her narrow affection from her only grandchild, who had hitherto held a place in it, for little Mary had had a share in the horrors that had come upon her and Orion in her husband's last moments. Indeed, the bereaved woman's excited fancy had firmly conceived the mad notion that the child was the evil genius of the house and the tool of Satan.

Neforis had, however, enjoyed some hours of greater ease during the last two days. In the misery of wakefulness which was beginning to torture her like an acute pain, she had suddenly recollected what relief from sleeplessness her husband had been wont to find in the opium pillules, and a box of the medicine, only just opened, was at hand. And was not she, too, suffering unutterable wretchedness? Why should she neglect the remedy which had so greatly mitigated her husband's distress? It was said to have a bad effect after long and frequent use, and she had often checked the Mukaukas in taking it too freely; but could her sufferings be greater? Would she not, indeed, be thankful to the drug if it should shorten her miserable existence?

So she took the familiar remedy, at first hesitatingly and then more freely; and on the second day again, with real pleasure and happy expectancy, for it had not merely procured her a good night but had brought her joy in the morning: The dead had appeared to her, and for the first time not in the act of cursing, but as a young and happy man.

No one in the house knew what comfort the widow had had recourse to; the physician and her son had been glad yesterday to find her more composed.

When Orion returned home, after concluding his business with the money-changer at Fostat, he had to make his way through a crowd of people, and found the court-yard full of men, and the guards and servants in the greatest excitement. No less a personage than the Patriarch had arrived on a visit, and was now in conference with Neforis. Sebek, the steward, informed Orion that he had asked for him, and that his mother wished that he should immediately join them and pay his respects to the very reverend Father.

"She wished it?" asked the young man, as he tossed his riding-hat to a slave, and he stood hesitating.

He was too much a son of his time, and the Church and her ministers had exercised too marked influence on his education, for the great prelate's visit to be regarded otherwise than as a high honor. At the same time he could not forget the insult done to his father's vanes, nor the Arab general's warning to be on his guard against Benjamin's enmity; and perhaps, he said to himself, it might be better to avoid a meeting with the powerful priest than to expose himself to the danger of losing his self-control and finding fresh food for his wrath.

However, he had in fact no choice, for the patriarch just now came out of the fountain-hall into the viridarium. The old man's tall figure was not bent, his snowy hair flowed in abundance round his proud head, and a white beard fell in soft waves far down his breast. His fine eyes rested on the young man with a keen glance, and though he had last seen Orion as a boy he recognized him at once as the master of the house. While Orion bowed low before him, the patriarch, in his deep, rich voice, addressed him with cheerful dignity.

"All hail, son of my never-to-be-forgotten friend! The child I remember, has, I see, grown to a fine man. I have devoted a short time to the mother, and now I must say what is needful to the son."

"In my father's study," Orion said to the steward; and he led the way with the ceremonious politeness of a chamberlain of the imperial court.

The patriarch, as he followed him, signed to his escort to remain behind, and as soon as the door was closed upon them, he went up to Orion and exclaimed: "Again I greet you! This, then, is the descendant of the great Menas, the son of Mukaukas George, the adored ruler of my flock at Memphis, who held the first place among the gilded youth of Constantinople in their gay whirl! A strange achievement for an Egyptian and a Christian! But first of all, child, first give me your hand!" He held out his right hand and Orion accepted it, but not without reserve, for he had suspected a scornful ring in the patriarch's address, and he could not help asking himself whether this man honestly meant so well by him, that he could address him thus paternally as "child" in all sincerity of heart? To refuse his hand was, however, impossible; still, he found courage to reply:

"I can but obey your desire, holy Father; but, at the same time, I do not know whether it becomes the son to grasp

the hand of the foe who was not to be appeased even by Death, the reconciler--who grossly insulted the father, the noblest of men, and, in him, the son too, at the grave itself."

The patriarch shook his head with a supercilious smile, and a hot thrill shot through Orion as Benjamin laid his hand on his shoulder and said with grave kindness:

"A Christian does not find it hard to forgive a sinner, an antagonist, an enemy; and it is a joy to me to pardon the son who feels himself injured through his lost father, blind and foolish as his indignation may be. Your wrath can no more affect me, Child, than the Almighty in Heaven, and it would not even be blameworthy, but that--and of this we must speak presently--but that--well, I will be frank with you at once--but that your manner clearly and unmistakably betrays what you lack to make you a true Christian, and such a man as he must be who fills so conspicuous a position in this land governed by infidels. You know what I mean?"

The prelate let his hand slip from the young man's shoulder, looking enquiringly in his face; and when Orion, finding no reply ready, drew back a step or two, the old man went on with growing excitement:

"It is humility, pious and submissive faith, that I find you lack, my friend. Who, indeed, am I? But as the Vicar, the representative of Him before whom we all are as worms in the dust, I must insist that every man who calls himself a Christian, a Jacobite, shall submit to my will and orders, without hesitation or doubt, as obediently and unresistingly as though salvation or woe had fallen on him from above. What would become of us, if individuals were to take upon themselves to defy me and walk in their own way? In one miserable generation, and with the death of the elders who had grown up as true Christians, the doctrine of the Saviour would be extinct on the shores of the Nile, the crescent would rise in the place of the Cross, and our cry would go up to Heaven for so many lost souls. Learn, haughty youth, to bow humbly and submissively to the will of the Most High and of His vicar on earth, and let me show you, from your demeanor to myself especially, how far your own judgment is to be relied on. You regard me as your father's enemy?"

"Yes," said Orion firmly.

"And I loved him as a brother!" replied the patriarch in a softer voice. "How gladly would I have heaped his bier with palm branches of peace, such as the Church alone can grow, wet with my own tears!"

"And yet," cried Orion, "you denied to him, whom you call your friend, what the Church does not refuse to thieves and murderers, if only they desire forgiveness and have received absolution from a priest; and that...."

"And that your father did!" interrupted the old man. "Peace be to him! He is now, no doubt, gazing on the glory of the Lord. And nevertheless I could forbid the priesthood here showing him honor at the grave.--Why? For what urgent reason was such a prohibition spoken by a friend against a friend?"

"Because you wished to brand him, in the eyes of the world, as the man who lent his support to the unbelievers and helped them to victory," said Orion gloomily.

"How well the boy can read the thoughts of men!" exclaimed the prelate, looking at the young man with approbation in which, however, there was some irony and annoyance. "Very good. We will assume that my object was to show the Christians of Memphis what fate awaits the man, who surrenders his country to the enemy and walks hand-in-hand with unbelievers? And may I not possibly have been right?"

"Do you suppose my father invited the Arabs?" interrupted the young man.

"No, Child," replied the patriarch, "the enemy came of his own free will."

"And you," Orion went on, "after the Greeks had driven you into exile, prophesied from the desert that they would come and overthrow the Melchites, the Greek enemies of our faith, drive them out of the country."

"It was revealed to me by the Lord!" replied the old man, bowing his head reverently. "And yet other things were shown to me while I dwelt a devout ascetic, mortifying my flesh under the scorching sun of the desert. Beware my son, beware! Heed my warning, lest it should be fulfilled and the house of Menas vanish like clouds swept before the wind.--Your father, I know, regarded my prophecy as advice given by me to receive the infidels as the instrument of the Almighty and to support them in driving the Melchite oppressors out of the land."

"Your prophecy," replied Orion, "had, no doubt, a marked effect on my father; and when the cause of the emperor and the Greeks was lost, your opinion that the Melchites were unbelievers as much as the sons of Islam, was of infinite comfort to him. For he, if any one--as you know--had good reason to hate the sectarians who killed his two sons in their prime. What followed, he did to rescue his and your unfortunate brethren and dependants from destruction. Here, here in this desk, lies his answer to the emperor's accusations, as given to the Greek deputation who had speech of him in this very room. He wrote it down as soon as they had left him. Will you hear it?"

"I can guess its purport."

"No, no!" cried the excited youth; he hastily opened his father's desk, laid his hand at once on the wax tablet, and exclaimed: "This was his reply!" And he proceeded to read:

"These Arabs, few as they are, are stronger and more powerful than we with all our numbers. One man of them is equal to a hundred of us, for they rush on death and love it better than life. Each of them presses to the front in battle,

and they have no longing to return home and to their families. For every Christian they kill they look for a great reward in Heaven, and they say that the gates of Paradise open at once for those who fall in the fight. They have not a wish in this world beyond the satisfaction of their barest need of food and clothing. We, on the contrary, love life and dread death;--how can we stand against them? I tell you that I will not break the peace I have concluded with the Arabs. ..."

"And what is the upshot of all this reply?" interrupted the patriarch shrugging his shoulders.

"That my father found himself compelled to conclude a peace, and that--but read on.--That as a wise man he was forced to ally himself with the foe."

"The foe to whom he yielded more readily and paid much greater honor than became him as a Christian!--Does not this discourse convey the idea that the joys of Paradise solely and exclusively await our damned and blood-thirsty oppressors?--And the Moslem Paradise! What is it but a gulf of iniquity, in which they are to wallow in sensual delight? The false prophet invented it to tempt his followers to force his lying creed, by might of arms and in mad contempt of death, on nation after nation. Our Lord, the Word made flesh, came down on earth to win hearts and souls by the persuasive power of the living truth, one and eternal, which emanates from Him as light proceeds from the sun; this Mohammed, on the contrary, is a sword made flesh! For me, then, there is no choice but to submit to superior strength; but I can still hate and loathe their accursed and soul-destroying superstition.--And so I do, and so I shall, to the last throb of this old heart, which only longs for rest, the sooner the better..."

"But you? And your father? Verily, verily, the man who, even for an instant, ceases to hate unbelief or false doctrine has sinned for his whole life on this side of the grave and beyond it; sinned against the only true and saving faith and its divine Founder. Blasphemous and flattering praise of the piety and moderation of our foes, the very antichrist incarnate, who kill both body and soul.--With these your father fouled his heart and tongue..."

"Fouled?" cried Orion and the blood tingled in his cheeks. "He kept his heart and tongue alike pure and honorable; never did a false word pass his lips. Justice, justice to all, even to his enemies, was the ruling principle, the guiding clue of his blameless life; and the noblest of the heathen Greeks admired the man who could so far triumph over himself as to recognize what was fine and good in a foe."

"And they were right," replied the patriarch, "for they were not yet acquainted with truth. In a worldly sense, even now, each of us may aim at such magnanimity; but the man who forgives those who tamper with the sacred truth, which is the bread, meat, and wine of the Christian's soul, sins against that truth; and, if he is a leader of men, he draws on those who look up to him, and who are only too ready to follow his example, into everlasting fire. Where your father ought to have been a recalcitrant though conquered enemy, he became an ally; nay, so far as the leader of the infidels was concerned, a friend--how many tears it cost me! And our hapless people were forced to see this attitude of their chief, and imitated it.--Forgive their seducer, Merciful God!--forming their conduct on his. Thousands fell away from our saving faith and went over to those, who in their eyes could not be reprobate, could not be damned, since they saw them dwelling and working hand-in-hand with their wise and righteous leader; and it was simply and solely to warn his misguided people that I did not hesitate to wound my own heart, to raise the voice of reproof at the grave of a dear friend, and to refuse the honor and blessing of which his just and virtuous life rendered him more worthy than thousands of others. I have spoken, and now your foolish anger must be appeased; now you will grasp the hand held out to you by the shepherd of the souls entrusted to him with an easy and willing heart."

And again he offered his hand to Orion, who, however, again took it doubtfully, and instead of looking the prelate in the face, cast down his eyes in gloomy bewilderment. The patriarch appeared not to observe the young man's repulsion and clasped his hand warmly. Then he changed the subject, speaking of the grieving widow, of the decadence of Memphis, of Orion's plans for the future, and finally of the gems dedicated to the Church by the deceased Mukaukas. The dialogue had taken a calm, conversational tone; the patriarch was sitting in the dead man's arm-chair, and there was nothing forced or unnatural in his asking, in the course of discussing the jewels, what had become of the great emerald.

Orion replied, in the same tone, that this stone was not, strictly speaking, any part of his father's gift; but Benjamin expressed an opposite opinion.

All the tortures Orion had endured since that luckless deed in the tablinum revived in his soul during this discussion; however, it was some small relief to him to perceive, that neither his mother nor Dame Susannah seemed to have told the patriarch the guilt he had incurred by reason of that gem. Susannah, of course, had said nothing of the incident in order to avoid speaking of her daughter's false evidence; still, this miserable business might easily have come to the ears of the stern old man, and to the guilty youth no sacrifice seemed too great to smother any enquiry for the ill-fated jewel. He unhesitatingly explained that the emerald had disappeared, but that he was quite ready to make good its value. Benjamin might fix his own estimate, and name any sum he wished for some benevolent purpose, and he, Orion, was ready to pay it to him on the spot.

The prelate, however, calmly persisted in his demand, enjoined Orion to have a diligent search made for the gem, and declared that he regarded it as the property of the Church. He added that, when his patience was at an end, he should positively insist on its surrender and bring every means at his disposal into play to procure it.

Orion had no choice but to say that he would prosecute his search for the lost stone; but his acquiescence was

sullen, as that of a man who accedes to an unreasonable demand.

At first the patriarch took this coolly; but presently, when he rose to take leave, his demeanor changed; he said, with stern solemnity:

"I know you now, Son of Mukaukas George, and I end as I began: The humility of the Christian is far from you, you are ignorant of the power and dignity of our Faith, you do not even know the vast love that animates it, and the fervent longing to lead the straying sinner back to the path of salvation.--Your admirable mother has told me, with tears in her eyes, of the abyss over which you are standing. It is your desire to bind yourself for life to a heretic, a Melchite--and there is another thing which fills her pious mother's heart with fears, which tortures it as she thinks of you and your eternal welfare. She promised to confide this to my ear in church, and I shall find leisure to consider of it on my return home; but at any rate, and be it what it may, it cannot more greatly imperil your soul than marriage with a Melchite.

"On what have you set your heart? On the mere joys of earth! You sue for the hand of an unbeliever, the daughter of an unbelieving heretic; you go over to Fostat--nay, hear me out--and place your brain and your strong arm at the service of the infidels--it is but yesterday; but I, I, the shepherd of my flock, will not suffer that he who is the highest in rank, the richest in possessions, the most powerful by the mere dignity of his name, shall pervert thousands of the Jacobite brethren. I have the will and the power too, to close the sluice gates against such a disaster. Obey me, or you shall rue it with tears of blood."

The prelate paused, expecting to see Orion fall on his knees before him; but the young man did nothing of the kind. He stood looking at him, open-eyed and agitated, but undecided, and Benjamin went on with added vehemence:

"I came to you to lift up my voice in protest, and I desire, I require, I command you: sever all ties with the enemies of your nation and of your faith, cast out your love for the Melchite Siren, who will seduce your immortal part to inevitable perdition...."

Till this Orion had listened with bowed head and in silence to the diatribe which the patriarch had hurled at him like a curse; but at this point his whole being rose in revolt, all self-control forsook him, and he interrupted the speaker in loud tones:

"Never, never, never will I do such a thing! Insult me as you will. What I am, I will still be: a faithful son of the Church to which my fathers belonged, and for which my brothers died. In all humility I acknowledge Jesus Christ as my Lord. I believe in him, believe in the God-made-man who died to save us, and who brought love into the world, and I will remain unpersuaded and faithful to my own love. Never will I forsake her who has been to me like a messenger from God, like a good angel to teach me how to lay hold on what is earnest and noble in life--her whom my father, too, held dear. Power, indeed, is yours. Demand of me anything reasonable, and within my attainment, and I will try to force myself to obedience; but I never can and never will be faithless to her, to prove my faith to you; and as to the Arabs...."

"Enough!" exclaimed the prelate. "I am on my way to Upper Egypt. Make your choice by my return. I give you till then to come to a right mind, to think the matter over; and it is quite deliberately that I bid you to forget the Melchite. That you, of all men, should marry a heretic would be an abomination not to be borne. With regard to your alliance with the Arabs, and whether it becomes you--being what you are--to take service with them, we will discuss it at a future day. If, by the time I return, you have thought better of the matter as regards your marriage--and you are free to choose any Jacobite maiden--then I will speak to you in a different tone. I will then offer you my friendship and support; instead of the Church's curse I will pronounce her blessing on you--the pardon and grace of the Almighty, a smooth path to eternity and peace, and the prospect of giving new joy to the aching heart of your sorrowing mother. My last word is that you must and shall give up the woman from whom you can look for nothing but perdition."

"I cannot, and shall not, and I never will!" replied Orion firmly.

"Then I can, and shall, and will make you feel how heavily the curse falls which, in the last resort, I shall not hesitate to pronounce upon you!"

"It is in your power," said Orion. "But if you proceed to extremities with me, you will drive me to seek the blessing for which my soul thirsts more ardently than you, my lord, can imagine, and the salvation I crave, with her whom you hold reprobate, and on the further side of the Nile."

"I dare you!" cried the patriarch, quitting the room with a resolute step and flaming cheeks.

CHAPTER II.

Orion was alone in the spacious room, feeling as though the whole world were sinking into nothingness after the rack of storm and tempest. At first he was merely conscious of having gone through a fearful experience, which threatened to fling him far outside the sphere of everything he was wont to reverence and hold sacred. For love and honor of his guardian angel he had declared war to the patriarch, and that man's power was as great as his stature. Still, the image of Paula rose high and supreme above that of the terrible old man, in Orion's fancy, and his father, as it seemed to him, was like an ally in the battle he was destined to wage in his own strength.

The young man's vivid imagination and excellent memory recapitulated every word the prelate had uttered. The domineering old man, overflowing with bigoted zeal, had played with him as a cat with a mouse. He had tried to search his soul and sift him to the bottom before he attacked the subject with which he ought to have begun, and concerning which he was fully informed when he offered him his hand that first time--as cheerfully, too, as though he had no serious grievance seething in his soul. Orion resolved that he would cling fast to his faith without Benjamin's interposition, and not allow his hold on the two other Christian graces, Hope and Love, to be weakened by his influence.

By some miracle his mother had not yet told the prelate of his father's curse, in spite of the anguish of her aching heart; and what a weapon would not that have been in Benjamin's hand. It was with the deepest pity that he thought of that poor, grief-stricken woman, and the idea flashed through his mind that the patriarch might have gone back to his mother to accuse him and to urge her to further revelations.

Many minutes had passed since the patriarch had left him; Orion had allowed his illustrious guest to depart unescorted, and this could not fail to excite surprise. Such a breach of good manners, of the uncodified laws of society, struck Orion, the son of a noble and ancient house, who had drunk in his regard for them as it were with his mother's milk, as an indignity to himself; and to repair it he started up, hastily smoothing down his tumbled hair, and hurried into the viridarium. His fears were confirmed, for the patriarch's following were standing in the fountain-hall close to the exit; his mother, too, was there and Benjamin was in the act of departure.

The old man accepted his offered escort with dignified affability, as if nothing but what was pleasant had passed between him and Orion. As they crossed the viridarium he asked his young host what was the name of some rare flower, and counselled him to take care that shade-giving trees were planted in abundance on his various estates. In the outer hall, on either side of the door, was a statue: Truth and justice, two fine works by Aristeas of Alexandria, who flourished in the time of the Emperor Hadrian. Justice held the scales and sword, Truth was gazing into her mirror. As the patriarch approached them, he said to the priest who walked by his side: "Still here!" Then, standing still, he said, partly to Orion and partly to his companion:

"Your father, I see, neglected my suggestion that these heathen images had no place in any Christian house, and least of all in one attached, as this is, to a public function. We, no doubt, know the meaning of the symbols they bear; but how easily might the ordinary man, waiting here, mistake the figure with the mirror for Vanity and that with the scales Venality: 'Pay us what we ask,' she might be saying, 'or else your life is a forfeit,'--so the sword would imply."

He smiled and walked on, but added airily to Orion:

"When I come again--you know--I shall be pleased if my eye is no longer offended by these mementos of an extinct idolatry."

"Truth and justice!" replied Orion in a constrained voice. "They have dwelt on this spot and ruled in this house for nearly five hundred years."

"It would look better, and be more suitable," retorted the patriarch, "if you could say that of Him to whom alone the place of honor is due in a Christian house; in His presence every virtue flourishes of itself. The Christian should proscribe every image from his dwelling; at the door of his heart only should he raise an image on the one hand of Faith and on the other of Humility."

By this time they had reached the court-yard, where Susannah's chariot was waiting. Orion helped the prelate into it, and when Benjamin offered him his hand to kiss, in the presence of several hundred slaves and servants, all on their knees, the young man lightly touched it with his lips. He stood bowed low in reverence so long as the holy father remained visible, in the attitude of blessing the crowd from the open side of the chariot; then he hurried away to join his mother.

He expected to find her exhausted by the excitement of the patriarch's visit; but, in fact, she was more composed than he had seen her yet since his father's death. Her eyes indeed, commonly so sober in their expression, were bright with a kind of rapture which puzzled Orion. Had she been thinking of his father? Could the patriarch have succeeded in inspiring her pious fervor to such a pitch, that it had carried her, so to speak, out of herself?

She was dressed to go to church, and after expressing her delight at the honor done to herself and her whole

household by the prelate's visit, she invited Orion to accompany her. Though he had proposed devoting the next few hours to a different purpose, the dutiful son at once acceded to this wish; he helped her into her chariot, bid the driver go slowly, and seated himself by her side.

As they drove along he asked her what she had told the patriarch, and her replies might have reassured him but that she filled him with grave anxiety on fresh grounds. Her mind seemed to have suffered under the stress of grief. It was usually so clear, so judicious, so reasonable; and now all she said was incoherent and not more than half intelligible. Still, one thing he distinctly understood: that she had not confided to the patriarch the fact of his father's curse. The prelate must certainly have censured the conduct of the deceased to her also and that had sealed her lips. She complained to her son that Benjamin had never understood her lost husband, and that she had felt compelled to repress her desire to disclose everything to him. Nowhere but in church, in the very presence of the Redeemer, could she bring herself to allow him to read her heart as it were an open book. A voice had warned her that in the house of God alone, could she find salvation for herself and her son; that voice she heard day and night, and much as it pained her to grieve him he must hear it now--: That voice never ceased to enjoin her to tear asunder his connection with the Melchite maiden. Last evening it had seemed to her that it was her eldest son, who had died for the Jacobite faith, that was speaking to her. The voice had sounded like his, and it had warned her that the ancient house of Menas must perish, if a Melchite should taint the pure blood of their race. And Benjamin had confirmed her fears; he had come back to her on purpose to beseech her to oppose Orion's sinful affection for Thomas' daughter with the utmost maternal authority, and, as the patriarch expressed the same desire as the voice, it must be from God and she must obey it.

Her old grudge against Paula had revived, and her very tones betrayed that it grew stronger with every word she spoke which had any reference to the girl.

At this Orion begged her to be calm, reminding her of the promise she had made him by his father's deathbed; and just as his mother was about to reply in a tone of pitiful recrimination, the chariot stopped at the door of the church. He did everything in his power to soothe her; his gentle and tender tones comforted her, and she nodded to him more happily, following him into the sanctuary.

Beyond the narthex--the vestibule of the church, where three penitents were flaying their backs with scourges by the side of a small marble fountain, and in full view of the crowd--they were forced to part, as the women were divided from the men by a screen of finely-carved woodwork.

As Neforis went to her place, she shook her bowed head: she was meditating on the choice offered her by Orion, of yielding to the patriarch's commands or to her son's wishes. How gladly would she have seen her son in bright spirits again. But Benjamin had threatened her with the loss of all the joys of Heaven, if she should agree to Orion's alliance with the heretic--and the joys of Heaven to her meant a meeting, a recognition, for which she would willingly have sacrificed her son and everything else that was dear to her heart.

Orion assisted at the service in the place reserved for the men of his family, close to the hekel, or holy of holies, where the altar stood and the priests performed their functions. A partition, covered with ill-wrought images and a few gilt ornaments, divided it from the main body of the church, and the whole edifice produced an impression that was neither splendid nor particularly edifying. The basilica, which had once been richly decorated, had been plundered by the Melchites in a fight between them and the Jacobites, and the impoverished city had not been in a position to restore the venerable church to anything approaching its original splendor. Orion looked round him; but could see nothing calculated to raise his devotion.

The congregation were required to stand all through the service; and as it often was a very long business, not the women only, behind the screen, but many of the men supported themselves like cripples on crutches. How displeasing, too, were the tones of the Egyptian chant, accompanied by the frequent clang of a metal cymbal and mingled with the babble of chattering men and women, checked only when the talk became a quarrel, by a priest who loudly and vehemently shouted for silence from the hekel.

Generally the chanted liturgy constituted the whole function, unless the Lord's Supper was administered; but in these anxious times, for above a week past, a priest or a monk preached a daily sermon. This began a short while after the young man had taken his place, and it was with painful feelings that he recognized, in the hollow-eyed and ragged monk who mounted the pulpit, a priest whom he had seen more than once drunk to imbecility, in Nesptah's tavern, And the revolting creature, who thus flaunted his dirty, dishevelled person even in the pulpit, thundered down on the trembling congregation declarations that the delay in the rising of the Nile was the consequence of their sins, and God's punishment for their evil deeds. Instead of comforting the terrified souls, or encouraging their faith and bidding them hope for better times, he set before them in burning words the punishment that awaited their wicked despondency.

God Almighty was plaguing them and the land with great heat; but this was like the cool north wind at Advent-tide, as compared with the fierceness of the furnace of hell which Satan was making hot for them. The scorching sun on earth at any rate gave them daylight, but the flames of hell shed no light, that the terrors might never cease of those whom the devil's myrmidons drove over the narrow bridge leading to his horrible realm, goading them with spears and

pitchforks, with heavy cudgelling or gnawing of their flesh. In the anguish of death, and the crush by the way, mothers trod down their infants and fathers their daughters; and when the damned reached the spiked threshold of hell itself, a hideous and poisoned vapor rose up to meet them, choking them, and yet giving them renewed strength to feel fresh torments with increased keenness of every sense. Then the devil's shrieks of anguish, which shake the vault of hell, came thundering on their ears; with hideous yells he snatched at them from the grate on which he lay, crushed and squeezed them in his iron jaws like a bunch of grapes, and swallowed them into his fiery maw; or else they were hung up by their tongues by attendant friends in Satan's fiery furnace, or dragged alternately through ice and flames, and finally beaten to pieces on the anvil of hell, or throttled and wrung with ropes and cloths.--As compared with the torments they would suffer there, every present anxiety was as the kiss of a lover. Mothers would hear the brain seething in their infants' skulls....

At this point of the monk's grewsome discourse, Orion turned away with a shudder. The curse with which the patriarch had threatened him recurred to his mind; he could have fancied that the hot, stuffy, incense-laden air of the church was full of flapping daws and hideous bats. Deadly horror crept over him; but then, suddenly, the rebound came of youthful vigor, longing for freedom and joy in living; a voice within cried out: "Away with coercion and chains! Winged spirit, use your pinions! Down with the god of terrors! He is not that Heavenly Father whose love embraces mankind. Forward, leap up and be free! Trusting in your own strength, guided by your own will, go boldly forth into the open sunshine of life! Be free, be free!--Still, be not like a slave who is no sooner cut adrift and left to himself than he falls a slave again to his own senses. No; but striving unceasingly and of your own free will, in the sweat of your brow, to reach the high goal, to work out to its fulfilment and fruition everything that is best in your soul and mind. Yes--life is a ministry.... I, like the disciples of the Stoa, will strive after all that is known as virtue, with no other end in view than to practise it for its own sake, because it is fair and gives unmixed joys. I will rely on myself to seek the truth--and do what I feel to be right and good; this, henceforth, shall be the lofty aim of my existence. To the two chief desires of my heart--: atonement to my father and union with Paula, I here add a third: the attainment of the loftiest goal that I may reach, by valiant striving to get as near to it as my strength will allow. The road thither is by Work; the guiding star I must keep before me that I may not go astray is my Love!"

His cheeks were burning, and with a deep breath he looked about him as though to find an adversary with whom he might measure his strength. The horrible sermon was ended and the words of the chanting crowd fell on his ear. "Lord, reward me not according to mine iniquities!" The load of his own sin fell on his heart again, and his dying father's curse; his proud head drooped on his breast, and he said to himself that his burthen was too heavy for him to venture on the bold flight for which he had but now spread his wings. The ban was not yet lifted; he was not yet redeemed from its crushing weight. But the mere word "redeemed" brought to his mind the image of Him who took on Himself the sins of the world; and the more deeply he contemplated the nature of the Saviour whom he had loved from his childhood, the more surely he felt that it would be doing no violence to the freedom of his own will, but rather be the fulfilment of a long-felt desire, if he were to tell Jesus simply all that oppressed him; that his love for Him, his faith in Him, had a saving power even for his soul. He lifted up his eyes and heart to Him, and to Him, as to a trusted friend, confided all that troubled and hindered him and besought His aid.

In loving Him, he and Paula were one, he knew, though they had not the same idea of His nature.

Orion, as he meditated, thought out the points on which her views deviated from his own: she believed that the divine and the human natures were distinct in the person of Christ. And as he reflected on this creed, till now so horrible in his eyes, he felt that the unique individuality of the Saviour, shedding forth love and truth, came home to him more closely when he pictured Him perfect and spotless, yet feeling as a man; walking among men with all their joy in life in His heart, alive to every pang and sorrow which can torture mortals, rejoicing with them, and taking upon Himself unspeakable humiliation, suffering, and death, with a stricken, bleeding, and yet self-devoting heart, for pure love of the wretched race to which He could stoop from His glory. Yes, this Christ could be his Redeemer too. The Almighty Lord had become his perfect and most loving friend, his glorious, but lenient and tender brother, to whom he could gladly give his whole heart, who understood everything, who was ready to forgive everything--even all that was seething in his aching heart which longed for purification--and all because He once had suffered as a man suffers.

For the first time he, the Jacobite, dared to confess so much to himself; and not solely for Paula's sake. A violent clanging on a cracked metal plate roused him from his meditations by its harsh clamor; the sacrament of the Last Supper was about to be administered: the invariable conclusion of the Jacobite service. The bishop came forth from behind the screen of the inner sanctuary, poured some wine into a silver cup and crumbled into it two little cakes stamped with the Coptic cross. Of this mixture he first partook, and then gave it in a spoon to each member of the congregation who came up to receive it. Orion approached after two elders of the Church. Finally the priest rinsed out the cup, and drained the very washings, that no drop of the saving liquid should be lost.

How high had Orion's heart throbbed when, as a youth, he had been admitted for the first time to this most sacred of all Christian privileges! He was instructed in its deep and glorious symbolism, and had often felt the purifying, saving, and refreshing effect of the sacrament, strengthening him in all goodness, when he had partaken of it with his parents and brothers. Hand-in-hand, they had gone home feeling as if newly robed in body and soul and more closely bound

together than before. And to-day, insensible as he was to the repulsiveness of the forms of worship of his confession he felt as though the bread and wine--the Flesh and Blood of the Saviour--had sealed the bond he had silently entered into with himself; as though the Lord had put forth an invisible hand to remove the guilt and the curse that crushed him so sorely. Deep devotion fell on his soul: his future life, he thought, should bring him nearer to God than ever before, and be spent in loving, and in the more earnest, full, and laborious exercise of the gifts Heaven had bestowed on him.

CHAPTER III.

Orion had dreaded the drive home with his mother, but after complaining to him of Susannah's conduct in having made a startling display of her vexation in the women's place behind the screen, she had leaned on him and fallen fast asleep. Her head was on her son's shoulder when they reached home, and Orion's anxiety for the mother he truly loved was enhanced when he found it difficult to rouse her. He felt her stagger like a drunken creature, and he led her not into the fountain-room but to her bed-chamber, where she only begged to lie down; and hardly had she done so when she was again overcome by sleep.

Orion now made his way to Gamaliel the jeweller, to purchase from him a very large and costly diamond, plainly set, and the Israelite's brother undertook to deliver it to the fair widow at Constantinople, who was known to him as one of his customers. Orion, in the jeweller's sitting-room, wrote a letter to his former mistress, in which he begged her in the most urgent manner to accept the diamond, and in exchange to return to him the emerald by a swift and trustworthy messenger, whom Simeon the goldsmith would provide with everything needful.

After all this he went home hungry and weary, to the late midday meal which he shared, as for many days past, with no one but Eudoxia, Mary's governess. The little girl was not yet allowed to leave her room, and of this, for one reason, her instructress was glad, for a dinner alone with the handsome youth brought extreme gratification to her mature heart. How considerate was the wealthy and noble heir in desiring the slaves to offer every dish to her first, how kind in listening to her stories of her young days and of the illustrious houses in which she had formerly given lessons! She would have died for him; but, as no opportunity offered for such a sacrifice, at any rate she never omitted to point out to him the most delicate morsels, and to supply his room with fresh flowers.

Besides this, however, she had devoted herself with the most admirable unselfishness to her pupil, since the child had been ill and her grandmother had turned against her, noticing, too, that Orion took a tender and quite fatherly interest in his little niece. This morning the young man had not had time to enquire for Mary, and Eudoxia's report that she seemed even more excited than on the day before disturbed him so greatly, that he rose from table, in spite of Eudoxia's protest, without waiting till the end of the meal, to visit the little invalid.

It was with genuine anxiety that he mounted the stairs. His heart was heavy over many things, and as he went towards the child's room he said to himself with a melancholy smile, that he, who had contemned many a distinguished man and many a courted fair one at Constantinople because they had fallen short of his lofty standard, had here no one but this child who would be sure to understand him. Some minutes elapsed before his knock was answered with the request to 'come in,' and he heard a hasty bustle within. He found Mary lying, as the physician had ordered, on a couch by the window, which was wide open and well-shaded; her couch was surrounded by flowering plants and, on a little table in front of her, were two large nosegays, one fading, the other quite fresh and particularly beautiful.

How sadly the child had changed in these few days. The soft round cheeks had disappeared, and the pretty little face had sunk into nothingness by comparison with the wonderful, large eyes, which had gained in size and brilliancy. Yesterday she had been free from fever and very pale, but to-day her cheeks were crimson, and a twitching of her lips and of her right shoulder, which had come on since the scene at the grandfather's deathbed, was so incessant that Orion sat down by her side in some alarm.

"Has your grandmother been to see you?" was his first question, but the answer was a mournful shake of her head.

The blossoming plants were his own gift and so was the fading nosegay; the other, fresher one had not come from him, so he enquired who was the giver, and was not a little astonished to see his favorite's confusion and agitation at the question. There must be something special connected with the posey, that was very evident, and the young man, who did not wish to excite her sensitive nerves unnecessarily, but could not recall his words, was wishing he had never spoken them, when the discovery of a feather fan cut the knot of his difficulty; he took it up, exclaiming: "Hey--what have we here?"

A deeper flush dyed Mary's cheek, and raising her large eyes imploringly to his face, she laid a finger on her lips. He nodded, as understanding her, and said in a low voice:

"Katharina has been here? Susannah's gardener ties up flowers like that. The fan--when I knocked--she is here still perhaps?"

He had guessed rightly; Mary pointed dumbly to the door of the adjoining room.

"But, in Heaven's name, child," Orion went on, in an undertone, "what does she want here?"

"She came by stealth, in the boat," whispered the child. "She sent Anubis from the treasurer's office to ask me if she might not come, she could not do without me any longer, and she never did me any harm and so I said yes--and then, when I knew it was your knock, whisk--off she went into the bedroom."

"And if your grandmother were to come across her?"

"Then--well, then I do not know what would become of me! But oh! Orion, if you only knew how--how...." Two big

tears rolled down her cheeks and Orion understood her; he stroked her hair lovingly and said in a whisper, glancing now and again at the door of the next room.

"But I came up on purpose to tell you something more about Paula. She sends you her love, and she invites you to go to her and stay with her, always. But you must keep it quite a secret and tell no one, not even Eudoxia and Katharina; for I do not know myself how we can contrive to get your grandmother's consent. At any rate we must set to work very prudently and cautiously, do you understand? I have only taken you into our confidence that you may look forward to it and have something to be glad of at night, when you are such a silly little thing as to keep your eyes open like the hares, instead of sleeping like a good child. If things go well, you may be with Paula to-morrow perhaps--think of that! I had quite given up all hope of managing it at all; but now, just now--is it not odd--just within these two minutes I suddenly said to myself: 'It will come all right!'--So it must be done somehow."

A flood of tears streamed down Mary's burning cheeks but, freely as they flowed, she did not sob and her bosom did not heave. Nor did she speak, but such pure and fervent gratitude and joy shone from her glistening eyes that Orion felt his own grow moist. He was glad to find some way of concealing his emotion when Mary seized his hand and, pressing a long kiss on it, wetted it with her tears.

"See!" he exclaimed. "All wet! as if I had just taken it out of the fountain."

But he said no more, for the bedroom door was suddenly thrown open and Eudoxia's high, thin voice was heard saying:

"But why make any fuss? Mary will be enchanted! Here, Child, here is your long-lost friend! Such a surprise!" And the water-wagtail, pushed forward by no gentle hand, appeared within the doorway. Eudoxia was as radiant as though she had achieved some heroic deed; but she drew back a little when she found that Orion was still in the room. The divided couple stood face to face. What was done could not be undone; but, though he greeted her with only a calm bow, and she fluttered her fan with abrupt little jerks to conceal her embarrassment, nothing took place which could surprise the bystander; indeed, Katharina's pretty features assumed a defiant expression when he enquired how the little white dog was, and she coldly replied that she had had him chained up in the poultry-yard, for that the patriarch, who was their guest, could not endure dogs.

"He honors a good many men with the same sentiments," replied Orion, but Katharina retorted, readily enough.

"When they deserve it."

The dialogue went on in this key for some few minutes; but the young man was not in the humor either to take the young girl's pert stings or to repay her in the same coin; he rose to go but, before he could take leave, Katharina, observing from the window how low the sun was, cried: "Mercy on me! how late it is--I must be off; I must not be absent at supper time. My boat is lying close to yours in the fishing-cove. I only hope the gate of the treasurer's house is still open."

Orion, too, looked at the sun and then remarked: "To-day is Sanutius."

"I know," said Katharina. "That is why Anubis was free at noon."

"And for the same reason," added Orion, "there is not a soul at work now in the office."

This was awkward. Not for worlds would she have been seen in the house; and knowing, as she did from her games with Mary, every nook and corner of it, she began to consider her position. Her delicate features assumed a sinister expression quite new to Orion, which both displeased him and roused his anxiety--not for himself but for Mary, who could certainly get no good from such a companion as this. These visits must not be repeated very often; he would not allude to the subject in the child's presence, but Katharina should at once have a hint. She could not get out of the place without his assistance; so he intruded on her meditations to inform her that he had the key of the office about him. Then he went to see if the hall were empty, and led her at once to the treasurer's office through the various passages which connected it with the main buildings. The office at this hour was as lonely as the grave, and when Orion found himself standing with her, close to the door which opened on the road to the harbor, and had already raised the key to unlock it, he paused and for the first time broke the silence they had both preserved during their unpleasant walk, saying:

"What brought you to see Mary, Katharina? Tell me honestly." Her heart, which had been beating high since she had found herself alone with him in the silent and deserted house, began to throb wildly; a great terror, she knew not of what, came over her.

"She had come to the house for several reasons, but one had outweighed all the rest: Mary must be told that her young uncle and Paula were betrothed; for she knew by experience that the child could keep nothing of importance from her grandmother, and that Neforis had no love for Paula was an open secret. As yet she certainly could know nothing of her son's formal suit, but if once she were informed of it she would do everything in her power--of this Katharina had not a doubt--to keep Orion and Paula apart. So the girl had told Mary that it was already reported that they were a betrothed and happy pair, and that she herself had watched them making love in her neighbor's garden. To her great annoyance, however, Mary took this all very coolly and without any special excitement.

"So, when Orion enquired of his companion what had brought her to the governor's house, she could only reply that she longed so desperately to see little Mary.

"Of course," said Orion. "But I must beg of you not to yield again to your affectionate impulse. Your mother makes a public display of her grudge against mine, and her ill-feeling will only be increased if she is told that we are encouraging you to disregard her wishes. Perhaps you may, ere long, have opportunities of seeing Mary more frequently; but, if that should be the case, I must especially request you not to talk of things that may agitate her. You have seen for yourself how excitable she is and how fragile she looks. Her little heart, her too precocious brain and feelings must have rest, must not be stirred and goaded by fresh incitements such as you are in a position to apply. The patriarch is my enemy, the enemy of our house, and you--I do not say it to offend you--you overheard what he was saying last night, and probably gathered much important information, some of which may concern me and my family."

Katharina stood looking at her companion, as pale as death. He knew that she had played the listener, and when, and where! The shock it gave her, and the almost unendurable pang of feeling herself lowered in his eyes, quite dazed her. She felt bewildered, offended, menaced; however, she retained enough presence of mind to reply in a moment to her antagonist:

"Do not be alarmed! I will come no more. I should not have come at all, if I could have foreseen..."

"That you would meet me?"

"Perhaps.--But do not flatter yourself too much on that account!--As to my listening.... Well, yes; I was standing at the window. Inside the room I could only half hear, and who does not want to hear what great men have to say to each other? And, excepting your father, I have met none such in Memphis since Memnon left the city. We women have inherited some curiosity from our mother Eve; but we rarely indulge it so far as to hunt for a necklace in our neighbor's trunk! I have no luck as a criminal, my dear Orion. Twice have I deserved the name. Thanks to the generous and liberal use you made of my inexperience I sinned--sinned so deeply that it has ruined my whole life; and now, again, in a more venial way; but I was caught out, you see, in both cases."

"Your taunts are merited," said Orion sadly. "And yet, Child, we may both thank Providence, which did not leave us to wander long on the wrong road. Once already I have besought your forgiveness, and I do so now again. That does not satisfy you I see--and I can hardly blame you. Perhaps you will be better pleased, when I assure you once more that no sin was ever more bitterly or cruelly punished than mine has been."

"Indeed!" said Katharina with a drawl; then, with a flutter of her fan, she went on airily: "And yet you look anything rather than crushed; and have even succeeded in winning 'the other'--Paula, if I am not mistaken."

"That will do!" said Orion decisively, and he raised the key to the lock. Katharina, however, placed herself in his way, raised a threatening finger, and exclaimed:

"So I should think!--Now I am certain. However, you are right with your insolent 'That will do!' I do not care a rush for your love affairs; still, there is one thing I should like to know, which concerns myself alone; how could you see over our garden hedge? Anubis is scarcely a head shorter than you are..."

"And you made him try?" interrupted Orion, who could not forbear smiling, perceiving that his honestly meant gravity was thrown away on Katharina. "Notwithstanding such a praiseworthy experiment, I may beg you to note for future cases that what is true of him is not true of every one, and that, besides foot-passengers, a tall man sometimes mounts a tall horse?"

"It was you, then, who rode by last night?"

"And who could not resist glancing up at your window."

At these words she drew back in surprise, and her eyes lighted up, but only for an instant; then, clenching the feathers of her fan in both hands, she sharply asked:

"Is that in mockery?"

"Certainly not," said Orion coolly; "for though you have reason enough to be angry with me..."

"I, at any rate, have, so far given you none," she petulantly broke in. "No, I have not. It is I, and I alone, who have been insulted and ill-used; you must confess that you owe me some amends, and that I have a right to ask them."

"Do so," replied he. "I am yours to command." She looked him straight in the face.

"First of all," she began, "have you told any one else that I was..."

"That you were listening? No--not a living soul."

"And will you promise never to betray me?"

"Willingly. Now, what is the 'secondly' to this 'first of all?'"

But there was no immediate answer; the water-wagtail evidently found it difficult. However, she presently said, with downcast eyes:

"I want.... You will think me a greater fool than I am... nevertheless, yes, I will ask you, though it will involve me in

fresh humiliation.--I want to know the truth; and if there is anything you hold sacred, before I ask, you must swear by what is holiest to answer me, not as if I were a silly girl, but as if I were the Supreme judge at the last day.--Do you hear?"

"This is very solemn," said Orion. "And you must allow me to observe that there are some questions which do not concern us alone, and if yours is such...."

"No, no," replied Katharina, "what I mean concerns you and me alone."

"Then I see no reason for refusing," he said. "Still, I may ask you a favor in return. It seems to me no less important than it did to you, to know what a great man like the patriarch finds to talk about, and since I place myself at your commands...."

"I thought," said the girl with a smile, "that your first object would be to discharge some small portion of your debt to me; however, I expect no excessive magnanimity, and the little I heard is soon told. It cannot matter much to you either--so I will agree to your wishes, and you, in return, must promise...."

"To speak the whole truth."

"As truly as you hope for forgiveness of your sins?"

"As truly as that."

"That is well."

"And what is it that you want to know?"

At this she shook her head, exclaiming uneasily:

"Nay, nay, not yet. It cannot be done so lightly. First let me speak; and then open the door, and if I want to fly let me go without saying or asking me another word.--Give me that chair; I must sit down." And in fact she seemed to need it; for some minutes she had looked very pale and exhausted, and her hands trembled as she drew her handkerchief across her face.

When she was seated she began her story; and while her words flowed on quickly but without expression, as though she spoke mechanically, Orion listened with eager interest, for what she had to tell struck him as highly significant and important.

He had been watched by the patriarch's orders. By midnight Benjamin had already been informed of Orion's visit to Fostat, and to the Arab general. Nothing, however, had been said about it beyond a fear lest he had gone thither with a view to abjuring the faith of his fathers and going over to the Infidels. Far more important were the facts Orion gathered as to the prelate's negotiations with the Khaliff's representative. Amru had urged a reduction of the number of convents and of the monks and nuns who lived on the bequests and gifts of the pious, busied in all kinds of handiwork according to the rule of Pachomius, and enabled, by the fact of their living at free quarters, to produce almost all the necessaries of life, from the mats on the floors to the shoes worn by the citizens, at a much lower price than the independent artisans, whether in town or country. The great majority of these poor creatures were already ruined by such competition, and Amru, seeing the Arab leather-workers, weavers, ropemakers, and the rest, threatened with the same fate, had determined to set himself firmly to restrict all this monastic work. The patriarch had resisted stoutly and held out long, but at last he had been forced to sacrifice almost half the convents for monks and nuns.

But nothing had been conceded without an equivalent; for Benjamin was well aware of the immense difficulties which he, as chief of the Church, could put in the way of the new government of the country. So it was left to him to designate which convents should be suppressed, and he had, of course, begun by laying hands on the few remaining Melchite retreats, among them the Convent of St. Cecilia, next to the house of Rufinus. This establishment was now to be closed within three days and to become the property of the Jacobite Church; but it was to be done quite quietly, for there was no small fear that now, when the delayed rising of the river was causing a fever of anxiety in all minds, the impoverished populace of the town might rise in defence of the wealthy sisterhood to whom they were beholden for much benevolence and kind care.

Opposition from the town-senate was also to be looked for, since the deceased Mukaukas had pronounced this measure unjust and detrimental to the common welfare. The evicted orthodox nuns were to be taken into various Jacobite convents as lay sisters similar cases had already been known; but the abbess, whose superior intellect, high rank, and far-reaching influence might, if she were left free to act, easily rouse the prelates of the East to oppose Benjamin, was to be conveyed to a remote convent in Ethiopia, whence no flight or return was possible.

Katharina's report took but few minutes, and she gave it with apparent indifference; what could the suppression of an orthodox cloister, and the dispersion of its heretic sisterhood, matter to her, or to Orion, whose brothers had fallen victims to Melchite fanaticism? Orion did not betray his deep interest in all he heard, and when at length Katharina rose and pointed feebly to the door, all she said, as though she were vexed at having wasted so much time, was: "That, on the whole, is all."

"All?" asked Orion unlocking the door.

"Certainly, all," she repeated uneasily. "What I meant to ask--whether I ever know it or not--it does not matter.--It would be better perhaps--yes, that is all.--Let me go."

But he did not obey her.

"Ask," he said kindly. "I will answer you gladly."

"Gladly?" she retorted, with an incredulous shrug. "In point of fact you ought to feel uncomfortable whenever you see me; but things do not always turn out as they ought, in Memphis or in the world; for what do you men care what becomes of a poor girl like me? Do not imagine that I mean to reproach you; God forbid! I do not even owe you a grudge. If anyone can live such a thing down I can. Do not you think so? Everything is admirably arranged for me; I cannot fail to do well. I am very rich, and not ugly, and I shall have a hundred suitors yet. Oh, I am a most enviable creature! I have had one lover already, and the next will be more faithful, at any rate, and not throw me over so ruthlessly as the first.--Do not you think so?"

"I hope so," said Oriole gravely. "Bitter as the cup is that you offer me to drink..."

"Well?"

"I can only repeat that I must even drink it, since the fault was mine. Nothing would so truly gladden me as to be able to atone in some degree for my sin against you."

"Oh dear no!" she scornfully threw in. "Our hopes shall not be fixed so high as that! All is at an end between us, and if you ever were anything to me, you are nothing to me now--absolutely nothing. One hour in the past we had in common; it was short indeed, but to me--would you believe it?--a very great matter. It aged the young creature, whom you, but yesterday, still regarded as a mere child--that much I know--with amazing rapidity; aye, and made a worse woman of her than you can fancy."

"That indeed would grieve me to the bottom of my soul," replied Orion. "There is, I know, no excuse for my conduct. Still, as you yourself know, our mothers' wish in the first instance..."

"Destined us for each other, you would say. Quite true!--And it was all to please Dame Neforis that you put your arms round me, under the acacias, and called me your own, your all, your darling, your rose-bud? Was that--and this is exactly what I want to ask you, what I insist on knowing--was that all a lie--or did you, at any rate, in that brief moment, under the trees, love me with all your heart--love me as now you love--I cannot name her--that other?--The truth, Orion, the whole truth, on your oath!"

She had raised her voice and her eyes glowed with the excitement of passion; and now, when she ceased speaking, their sparkling, glistening enquiry plainly and unreservedly confessed that her heart still was his, that she counted on his high-mindedness and expected him to say "yes." Her round arm lay closely pressed to her bosom, as though to keep its wild heaving within bounds. Her delicate face had lost its pallor and seemed bathed in a glow, now tender and now crimson. Her little mouth, which but now had uttered such bitter words, was parted in a smile as if ready to bestow a sweet reward for the consoling, saving answer, for which her whole being yearned, and her eager eyes, shining through tears, did not cease to entreat him so pathetically, so passionately! How bewitching an image of helpless, love-sick, beseeching youth and grace.

"As you love that other,--on your oath."--The words still rang in the young man's ear. All that was soft in his soul urged him to make good the evil he had brought upon this fair, hapless young creature; but those very words gave him strength to remain steadfast; and though he felt himself appealed to for comfort and compassion, he could only stretch out imploring hands, as though praying for help, and say:

"Ah Katharina, and you are as lovely, as charming now, as you were then; but--much as you attracted me, the great love that fills a life can come but once.... Forget what happened afterwards.... Put your question in another form, alter it a little, and ask me again--or let me assure you."

But he had no time to say more; for, before he could atone her, she had slipped past him and flown away like some swift wild thing into the road and down to the fishing cove.

CHAPTER IV.

Orion stood alone gazing sadly after her. Was this his father's curse--that all who loved him must reap pain and grief in return?

He shivered; still, his youthful energy and powers of resistance were strong enough to give him speedy mastery over these torturing reflections. What opportunities lay before him of proving his prowess! Even while Katharina was telling her story, the brave and strenuous youth had set himself the problem of rescuing the cloistered sisters. The greater the danger its solution might involve him in, the more impossible it seemed at first sight, the more gladly, in his present mood, would he undertake it. He stepped out into the road and closed the door behind him with a feeling of combative energy.

It was growing dusk. Philippus must now be with Mary and, with the leech's aid, he was resolved to get the child away from his mother's house. Not till he felt that she was safe with Paula in Rufinus' house, could he be free to attempt the enterprise which floated before his eyes. On the stairs he shouted to a slave:

"My chariot with the Persian trotting horse!" and a few minutes after he entered the little girl's room at the same time with a slave girl who carried in a lamp. Neither Mary nor the physician observed him at first, and he heard her say to Philippus, who sat holding her wrist between his fingers.

"What is the matter with you this evening? Good heavens, how pale and melancholy you look!" The lamplight fell full on his face. "Look here, I have just made such a smart little man out of wax.."

She hoped to amuse the friend who was always so kind to her with this comical work of art; but, as she leaned forward to reach it, she caught sight of her uncle and exclaimed: "Philippus comes here to cure me, but he looks as if he wanted a draught himself. Take care, or you will have to drink that bitter brown stuff you sent yesterday; then you will know for once how nasty it can be." Though the child's exclamation was well-meant, neither of the men took any notice of it. They stood face to face in utter silence and with only a formal greeting; for Orion, without Mary's remark, had been struck by the change that had come over the physician since yesterday. Ignoring Orion's presence, he asked the child a few brief questions, begged Eudoxia to persevere in the same course of treatment, and then hastily bid a general farewell to all present; Orion, however, did not respond, but said, with an affectionate glance at the little patient: "One word with you presently."

This made Philippus turn to look at Mary and, as the eyes of the rivals met, they knew that on one subject at any rate they thought and felt alike. The leech already knew how tenderly the young man had taken to Mary, and he followed him into the room which Orion now occupied, and which, as Philippus was aware, had formerly been Paula's.

"In the cause of duty," he said to himself again and again, to keep himself calm and enable him to gather at least the general sense of what the handsome young fellow opposite to him was saying in his rich, pleasant voice, and urging as a request with more warmth than the leech had given him credit for. Philippus, of course, had heard of the grandmother's lamentable revulsion of feeling against her grandchild, and he thought Orion's wish to remove the little girl fully justified. But, on learning that she was to be placed under Paula's care, he seemed startled, and gazed at the floor in such sullen gloom that the other easily guessed what was going on in his mind. In fact, the physician suspected that the child was to serve merely as an excuse for the more frequent meetings of the lovers. Unable to bury this apprehension in his own breast he started to his feet, and was about to put it into words, when Orion took the words out of his mouth, saying modestly but frankly, with downcast eyes:

"I speak only for the child's--for Mary's sake. By my father's soul..."

But Philippus shook his head dismally, went up to his rival, and murmured dully:

"For the sake of that child I am capable of doing or enduring a great deal. She could not be better cared for than with Rufinus and Paula; but if I could suppose," and he raised his voice, while his eyes took a sinister and threatening expression, "if I could suppose that her sacred and suffering innocence were merely an excuse...."

"No, no," said Orion urgently. "Again, on my sacred word, I assure you that I have no aim in view but the child's safety; and, as we have said so much, I will not stick at a word more or less! Rufinus' house is open to you day and night, and I, if all turns out as I expect, shall ere long be far from hence--from Memphis--from Paula. There is mischief brewing--I dare say no more--an act of treachery; and I will try to prevent it at the risk of my life. You, every one, shall no longer have a right to think me capable of things which are as repulsive to my nature as to yours. You and I, if I mistake not, strive for the same prize, and so far are rivals; but why should the child therefor suffer? Forget it in her presence, and that forgetting will, as you well know, enhance your merit in her--her eyes."

"My merit?" retorted the other scornfully. "Merit is not in the balance; nothing but the gifts of blind Fortune--a nose, a chin, an eye, anything in short--a crime as much as a deed of heroism--that happens to make a deep impression on the wax of a girl's soft heart. But curse me," and he shouted the words at Orion as if he were beside himself, "if I know how we came to talk of such things! Has my folly gone running through the streets, bare-bosomed, to display itself to the

world at large? How do you know what my feelings are? She, perhaps, has laughed with you at her ridiculous lover?-- Well, no matter. You know already, or will know by to-morrow, which of us has won the cock-fight. You have only to look at me! What woman ever broke her heart for such a Thersites-face. Good-luck to the winner, and the other one-- well, since it must be so, farewell till to-morrow."

He hastily made his way towards the door; Orion, however, detained him, imploring him to set aside his ill-feeling--at any rate for the present; assured him that Paula had not betrayed what his feelings were; that, on the contrary, he himself, seeing him with her so late on the previous night, had been consumed by jealousy, and entreated him to vent his wrath on him in abusive words, if that could ease his heart, only, by all that was good, not to withdraw his succor from that poor, innocent child.

The physician's humane heart was not proof against his prayer; and when at length he prepared to depart, in the joyful and yet painful conviction that his happier rival had become more worthy of the prize, he had agreed that he would impress on Neforis, whose mind he suspected to be slightly affected, that the air of the governor's residence did not suit Mary, and that she should place her in the care of a physician outside the town.

As soon as Philippus had quitted the house, Orion went to see Rufinus, who, on his briefly assuring him that he had come on grave and important business, begged him to accompany him to his private room. The young man, however, detained him till he had made all clear with the women as to the reception of little Mary.

"By degrees all the inhabitants of the residence will be transplanted into our garden!" exclaimed Rufinus. "Well, I have no objection; and you, old woman, what do you say to it?"

"I have none certainly," replied his wife. "Besides, neither you nor I have to decide in this case: the child is to be Paula's guest."

"I only wish she were here already," said Paula, "for who can say whether your mother, Orion--the air here is perilously Melchite."

"Leave Philippus and me to settle that.--You should have seen how pleased Mary was."

Then, drawing Paula aside, he hastily added:

"Have I not hoped too much? Is your heart mine? Come what may, can I count on you--on your love--?"

"Yes, Yes!" The words rushed up from the very bottom of her heart, and Orion, with a sigh of relief, followed the old man, glad and comforted.

The study was lighted up, and there, without mentioning Katharina, he told Rufinus of the patriarch's scheme for dispersing the nuns of St. Cecilia. What could he care for these Melchite sisters? But, since that consoling hour in the church, he felt as though it were his duty to stand forth for all that was right, and to do battle against everything that was base. Besides, he knew how warmly and steadfastly his father had taken the part of this very convent against the patriarch. Finally, he had heard how strongly his beloved was attached to this retreat and its superior, so he prepared himself gleefully to come forth a new man of deeds, and show his prowess.

The old man listened with growing surprise and horror, and when Orion had finished his story he rose, helplessly wringing his hands. Orion spoke to him encouragingly, and told him that he had come, not merely to give the terrible news, but to hold council with him as to how the innocent victims might be rescued. At this the grey-headed philanthropist and wanderer pricked up his ears; and as an old war horse, though harnessed to the plough, when he hears the trumpet sound lifts his head and arches his neck as proudly and nobly as of yore under his glittering trappings, so Rufinus drew himself up, his old eyes sparkled, and he exclaimed with all the enthusiasm and eagerness of youth:

"Very good, very good; I am with you; not merely as an adviser; no, no. Head, and hand, and foot, from crown to heel! And as for you, young man--as for you! I always saw the stuff that was in you in spite--in spite.--But, as surely as man is the standard of all things, those who reach the stronghold of virtue by a winding road are often better citizens than those who are born in it.--It is growing late, but evensong will not yet have begun and I shall still be able to see the abbess. Have you any plan to propose?"

"Yes; the day after to-morrow at this hour..."

"And why not to-morrow?" interrupted the ardent old man.

"Because I have preparations to make which cannot be done in twelve hours of daylight."

"Good! Good!"

"The day after to-morrow at dusk, a large barge--not one of ours--will be lying by the bank at the foot of the convent garden. I will escort the sisters as far as Doomiat on the Lake. I will send on a mounted messenger to-night, and I will charter a ship for the fugitives by the help of my cousin Columella, the greatest ship-owner of that town. That will take them over seas wherever the abbess may command."

"Capital, splendid!" cried Rufinus enthusiastically. He took up his hat and stick, and the radiant expression of his face changed to a very grave one. He went up to the young man with solemn dignity, looked at him with fatherly

kindliness, and said:

"I know what woes befell your house through those of our confession, the fellow-believers of these whom you propose to protect with so much prudence and courage; and that, young man, is noble, nay, is truly great. I find in you--you who were described to me as a man of the world and not over-precise--for the first time that which I have sought in vain for many years and in many lands, among the pious and virtuous: the spirit of willing self-sacrifice to save an enemy of a different creed from pressing peril.--But you are young, Orion, and I am old. You triumph in the action only, I foresee the consequences. Do you know what lies before you, if it should be discovered that you have covered the escape of the prey whom the patriarch already sees in his net? Have you considered that Benjamin, the most implacable and most powerful hater among the Jacobites, will pursue you as his mortal foe with all the fearful means at his command?"

"I have considered it," replied Orion.

Rufinus laid his left hand on the young man's shoulder, and his right hand on his head, saying, "Then take with you, to begin with, an old man's--a father's blessing."

"Yes, a father's," repeated Orion softly. A happy thrill ran through his body and soul, and he fell on the old man's neck deeply moved.

For a minute they stood clasped in each other's arms; then Rufinus freed himself, and set out to seek the abbess. Orion returned to the women, whose curiosity had been roused to a high pitch by seeing Rufinus disappear through the gate leading to the convent-garden. Dame Joanna could not sit still for excitement, and Pulcheria answered at random when Orion and Paula, who had an infinity of things to say or whisper to each other, now and then tried to draw her into the conversation. Once she sighed deeply, and when her friend asked her: "What ails you, Child?" she answered anxiously:

"Something serious must be going forward, I feel it. If only Philippos were here!"

"But we are all safe and well, thank God!" observed Orion, and she quickly replied:

"Yes indeed, the Lord be praised!" But she thought to herself:

"You think he is of no use but to heal the sick; but it is only when he is here that everything goes right and happens for the best!"

Still, all felt that there was something unusual and ominous in the air, and when the old man presently returned his face confirmed their suspicions. He laid aside his hat and staff in speechless gravity; then he put his arm affectionately round his wife and said:

"You will need all your courage and self-command once more, as you have often done before, good wife; I have taken upon myself a serious duty."

Joanna had turned very pale, and while she clung to her husband and begged him to speak and not to torture her with suspense, her frail figure was trembling, and bitter tears ran down her cheeks. She could guess that her husband was once more going away from her and their child, in the service and for the benefit of others, and she knew full well that she could not prevent it. If she could, she never would have had the heart to interfere: for she always understood him, and felt with him that something to take him out of the narrow circle of home-life was indispensable to his happiness.

He read her thoughts, and they gave him pain; but he was not to be diverted from his purpose. The man who would try to heal every suffering brute was accustomed to see those whom he loved best grieve on his account. Marriage, he would say, ought not to hinder a man in following his soul's vocation; and he was fond of using this high-sounding name to justify himself in his own and his wife's eyes, in doing things to which he was prompted only by restlessness and unsatisfied energy. Without this he would, no doubt, have done his best for the imperilled sisterhood, but it added to his enjoyment of the grand and dangerous rescue.

The wretched fate of the hapless nuns, and the thought of losing them as near neighbors, grieved the women deeply, and the men saw many tears flow; at the same time they had the satisfaction of finding them all three firmly and equally determined to venture all, and to bid these whom they loved venture all, to hinder the success of a deed which filled them with horror and disgust.

Joanna spoke not a word of demur when Rufinus said that he intended to accompany the fugitives; and when, with beaming looks, he went on to praise Orion's foresight and keen decisiveness, Paula flew to him proudly and gladly, holding out both her hands. As for the young man, he felt as though wings were growing from his shoulders, and this fateful evening was one of the happiest of his life.

The superior had agreed to his scheme, and in some details had improved upon it. Two lay sisters and one nun should remain behind. The two former were to attend to the sick in the infirmary, to ring the bell and chant the services as usual, that the escape of the rest might not be suspected; and Joanna, Paula, and Pulcheria, were to assist them.

When, at a late hour, Orion was about to leave, Rufinus asked whether, under these circumstances, it would be well

to bring Mary to his house; he himself doubted it. Joanna was of his opinion; Paula, on the contrary, said that she believed it would be better to let the child run the risk of a remote danger--hardly to be called danger, than to leave her to pine away body and soul in her old home. Pulcheria supported her, but the two girls were forced to yield to the decision of the elders.

CHAPTER V.

After that interview with Orion, Philippus hurried off through the town, paying so little heed to the people he met and to the processions besieging Heaven with loud psalms to let the Nile at last begin to rise, that he ran up against more than one passer-by, and had many a word of abuse shouted after him. He went into two or three houses, and neither his patients nor their attendants could recognize, in this abrupt and hasty visitor, the physician and friend who was usually so sympathetic to the sufferer: who would speak with a cordiality that brought new life to his heart, who would toss the children in the air, kiss one and nod merrily to another. To-day their elders even felt shy and anxious in his presence. For the first time he found the duty he loved a wearisome burthen; the sick man was a tormenting spirit in league with the world against his peace of mind. What possessed him, that he should feel such love of his fellow-men as to deprive himself of all comfort in life and of his night's rest for their sake? Rufinus was right. In these times each man lived solely to spite his neighbor, and he who could be most brazenly selfish, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, was the most certain to get on in life. Fool that he was to let other folks' woes destroy his peace and hinder him in his scientific advancement!

Tormented by such bitter thoughts as these, he went into a neat little house by the harbor where a worthy pilot lay dying, surrounded by his wife and children; and there, at once, he was himself again, putting forth all his knowledge and heartfelt kindness, quitting the scene with a bleeding heart and an empty purse; but no sooner was he out of doors than his former mood closed in upon him with double gloom. The case was plain: Even with the fixed determination not to sacrifice himself for others he could not help doing it; the impulse was too strong for him. He could no more help suffering with the sufferer, and giving the best he had to give with no hope of a return, than the drunkard can help drinking. He was made to be plundered; it was his fate!

With a drooping head he returned to his old friend's work-room. Horapollo was sitting, just as he had sat the night before, at his writing-table with his scrolls and his three lamps, a slave below, snoring while he awaited his master's pleasure.

The leech's pretty Greek greeting "Rejoice!" sounded rather like "May you choke!" as he flung aside his upper garment; and to the old man's answer and anxious exclamation: "How badly you look, Philip!" he answered crossly: "Like a man who deserves a kick rather than a welcome; a booby who has submitted to have his nose pulled; a cur who has licked the hand of the lout who has thrashed him!"

He threw himself on the divan and told Horapollo all that had passed between him and Orion. "And the maddest part of it all," he ended, "is that I almost like the man; that he really seems to me to be on the high road to become a capital fellow; and that I no longer feel inclined to pitch him into a lime-kiln at the mere thought of his putting out a hand to Paula. At the same time," and he started to his feet, "even if I help him to bring the poor little girl away from that demented old hag, I cannot and will not continue to be her physician. There are plenty of quacks about in this corpse of a town, and they may find one of them.

"You will continue to treat the child," interrupted the old man quietly.

"To have my heart daily flogged with nettles!" exclaimed the leech, going towards Horapollo with wild gesticulations. "And do you believe that I have any desire to meet that young fellow's sweetheart day after day, often twice a day, that the barb may be twisted round and round in my bleeding wound?"

"I expect a quite different result from your frequent meeting," said the other. "You will get accustomed to see her under the aspect which alone she can hence forth bear to you: that of a handsome girl--there are thousands such in Egypt,--and the betrothed of another."

"Certainly, if my heart were like a hunting-dog that lies down the moment it is bid," said Philippus with a scornful laugh. "The end of it is that I must go away, away from Memphis--away from this miserable world for all I care! I--Recover my peace of mind within reach of her? Alas, for my blissful, lost peace!"

"And why not? To every man a thing is only as he conceives of it. Only listen to me: I had finished a treatise on the old and new Calendars, and my master desired me to deliver a lecture on it in the Museum--if the school of pedants in Alexandria now deserves the name; but I did not wish to do so because I knew that the presence of such a large and learned audience would embarrass me. But my master advised me to imagine that my hearers were not men, but mere cabbages. This gave me new light; I took his advice, got over my shyness, and my speech flowed like oil."

"A very good story," said Philippus, "but I do not see..."

"The moral of it for you," interrupted the old man, "is that you must regard the supremely adorable lady of your love as one among a dozen others--I will not say as a cabbage--as one with whom your heart has no more concern. Put a little strength of will into it, and you will succeed."

"If a heart were a cipher, and if passion were calendar-making!..." retorted Philippus. "You are a very wise man, and your manuscripts and tables have stood like walls between you and passion."

"Who can tell?" said Horapollo. "But at any rate, it never should have had such power over me as to make me embitter the few remaining days under the sun yet granted to my father and friend for the sake of a woman who scorned my devotion. Will you promise me to talk no more nonsense about flying from Memphis, or anything of the kind?"

"Teach me first to measure my strength of will."

"Will you try, at any rate?"

"Yes, for your sake."

"Will you promise to continue your treatment of that poor little girl, whom I love dearly in spite of her forbears?"

"As long as I can endure the daily meeting with her--you know..."

"That, then, is a bargain.--Now, come and let us translate a few more chapters."

The friends sat at work together till a late hour, and when the old man was alone again he reflected: "So long as he can be of use to the child he will not go away, and by that time I shall have dug a pit for that damned siren."

.....

Orion had his hands full of work for the next morning. Before it was light he sent off two trustworthy messengers to Doomiat, giving each of them a letter with instructions that a sailing vessel should be held in readiness for the fugitives. One was to start three hours after the other, so that the business in hand should not fail if either of them should come to grief.

He then went out; first to the harbor, where he succeeded in hiring a large, good Nile-boat from Doomiat, whose captain, a trustworthy and experienced man, promised to keep their agreement a secret and to be prepared to start by noon next day. Next, after taking council with himself, he went to the treasurer's office, and there, with the assistance of Nilus, made his will, to be ratified and signed next morning in the presence of a notary and witnesses. His mother, little Mary, and Paula were to inherit the bulk of his property. He also bequeathed a considerable sum as a legacy to the hospitals and orphan asylums, as well as to the Church, to the end that they might pray for his soul; and a legacy to Nilus "as the most just judge of his household." Eudoxia, Mary's Greek governess, was not forgotten; and finally he commanded that all his house-slaves should be liberated, and to the end that they might not suffer from want he bequeathed to them one of his largest estates in Upper Egypt, where they might settle and labor for their common good. He increased the handsome sums already devised by his father to the freedmen of his family.

This business occupied several hours. Nilus, who wrote while Orion dictated, giving the document a legal form, was deeply touched by the young man's fore thought and kindness; for in truth, since his desecration of the judgment-seat, he had given him up for a lost soul.

By Orion's orders this will was to be opened after four weeks, in case he should not have returned from a journey on which he proposed starting on the morrow, and this injunction revealed to the faithful steward, who had grown grey in the service, that the last scion of the house expected to run considerable risk; however, he was too modest to ask any questions, and his master did not take him into his confidence.

When, after all this, the two men went back into the anteroom, Anubis, the young clerk and Katharina's ally, was standing there. Nilus took no notice of him, and while he, with tearful eyes, stooped to kiss the hand Orion held out to him as he bid him come to take leave of him once more next evening, Anubis, who had withdrawn respectfully to a little distance, keeping his ears open, however, officiously opened the heavy iron-plated door.

Orion was exhausted and hungry; he enquired for his mother, and hearing that she had gone to lie down, he went into the dining-room to get some food. Although breakfast had but just been served, Eudoxia was awaiting him with evident impatience. Her heart was bursting with a great piece of news, and as Orion entered, greeting her, she cried out:

"Have you heard? Do you know?" Then she began, encouraged by his curt negative, to pour out to him how that Neforis, by the desire of the physician who had lately been to see her, had decided on sending her, Eudoxia, away with her granddaughter to enjoy better air under the roof of a friend of the leech's; they were to go this very day, or to-morrow at latest.

Orion was disagreeably startled by this intelligence. He had not expected that Philippus would come so early, and he himself had been the first to promote a scheme which now no longer seemed advisable.

"How very provoking!" he muttered between his teeth, as a slave offered him a roast fowl and asparagus.

"Is it not? And perhaps we shall have to go quite far into the country," said the Greek, with a languishing look, as she drew one of the long stems between her teeth.

The words and the glance made Orion feel as if he grudged the old fool the good food she was eating, and his voice was not particularly ingratiating as he replied that town and country were all the same, the only point was which would be best for the child. When he went on to say that he was quitting home next evening, Eudoxia cried out, let a stick of asparagus drop in her lap, and said despairingly: "Oh, then everything is at an end!"

He, however, interposed reproachfully: "On the contrary, then your duty begins; you must devote yourself wholly and exclusively to the child. You know that her own grandmother is averse to her. Give her your best affection, as you have already begun to do, be a mother to her; and if you really are my well-wisher, show it in that way. For my part you will find me grateful, and not in words alone. Go tomorrow to the treasurer's office; Nilus will give you the only thing by which I can at present prove my gratitude. Do your best to cherish the child; I have taken care to provide for your old age."

He rose, cutting short the Greek's profuse expressions of thanks, and betook himself to his mother. She was still in her room; however, he now sent word that he had come to see her, and she was ready to admit him, having expected that he would come even sooner.

She was reclining, half-sitting, on a divan in her cool and shady bedroom, and she at once told her son of her determination to follow the physician's advice and entrust the little girl to his friend. She spoke in a tone of sleepy indifference; but as soon as Orion opposed her and begged her to keep Mary at home, she grew more lively, and looking him wrathfully in the face exclaimed: "Can you wish that? How can you ask me?" and she went on in repining lamentation:

"Everything is changed nowadays. Old age no longer forgets; it is youth that has a short memory. Your head has long been full of other things, but I--I still remember who it was that made my lost dear one's last hours on earth a hell, even in view of the gates of Heaven!" Her breast heaved with feeble, tearless sobs--a short, convulsive gasping, and Orion did not dare contravene her wishes. He sought to soothe her with loving words and, when she recovered herself, he told her that he proposed to leave her for a short time to look after his estates, as the law required, and this information gladdened her greatly. To be alone--solitary and unobserved now seemed delightful. Those white pills did more for her, raised her spirits better, than any human society. They brought her dreams, sleeping or waking; dreams a thousand times more delightful than her real, desolate existence. To give herself up to memory, to pray, to dream, to picture herself in the other world among her beloved dead--and besides that to eat and drink, which she was always ready to do very freely--this was all she asked henceforth of life on earth.

When, to her further questions, Orion replied that he was going first to the Delta, she expressed her regret, since, if he had gone to Upper Egypt, he might have visited his sister-in-law, Mary's mother, in her convent. She sat up as she spoke, passed her hand across her forehead, and pointed to a little table near the head of the couch, on which, by the side of a cup with fruit syrup, phials, boxes, and other objects, lay a writing-tablet and a letter-scroll. This she took up and handed to Orion, saying:

"A letter from your sister-in-law. It came last evening and I began to read it; but the first words are a complaint of your father, and that--you know, just before going to sleep--I could not read any more; I could not bear it! And to-day; first there was church, and then the physician came with his request about the child; I have not yet found courage to read the rest of it.--What can any letter bring to me but evil! Do you know at all whence anything pleasant could come to me? But now: read me the letter. Not that part again about your father; that I will keep till presently for myself alone."

Orion undid the roll, and with quivering lips glanced over the nun's accusations against his father. The wildest fanaticism breathed in every line of this epistle from the martyr's widow. She had found in the cloister all she sought: she lived now, she said, in God alone and in the Divine Saviour. She thought of her child, even, only as an alien, one of God's young creatures for whom it was a joy to pray. At the same time it was her duty to care for the little one's soul, and if it were not too hard for her grandmother to part from her, she longed to see Mary once more. She had lately been chosen abbess of her convent--and no one could prevent her taking possession of the child; but she feared lest an overwhelming natural affection might drag her back to the carnal world, which she had for ever renounced, so she would have Mary brought up in a neighboring nunnery, and led to Heavenly joys, not to earthly misery--to be the wife of no sinful husband, but a pure bride of Christ.

Orion shuddered as he read and, when he laid the letter down, his mother exclaimed:

"Perhaps she is right, perhaps it is already ordained that the child should be sent to the convent, and not to the leech's friend, and started on the only path that leads to Heaven without danger or hindrance!"

But Orion said to himself that he would make it his duty to guard the happy-hearted child from this fate, and he begged his mother to consider that the first important point was to restore the little girl to health. He now saw that she had been right. His father had always obeyed the prescriptions of Philippus, and for that reason, if for no other, it would be her duty to act by his advice.

Neforis, who for some time had been casting longing eyes at a small box by her side, did not contradict him; and in the course of the afternoon Orion conducted little Mary and her governess to the house of Rufinus, who, notwithstanding the doubts he had expressed the day before, made them heartily welcome.

When Mary was lying in her bed, close by the side of Paula's, the child threw her arms round the young girl's neck as she leaned over her, and laying her head on her bosom, felt herself in soft and warm security. There, as one released from prison and bondage, she wept out her woes, pouring all the grief of her deeply wounded child's heart into that of her friend.

Paula, however, heard Orion's voice, and she longed to go down to her lover, whom she had greeted but briefly on his arrival; still, she could not bear to snatch the child from her bosom, to disturb her in her newly-found happiness and leave her at this very moment! And yet, she must--she must see him! Every impulse urged her towards him and, when Pulcheria came into the room, she placed Mary's hand in hers and said: "There, now make friends and stay together like good children till I come back again and have something nice to tell you. You are fond of Orion, little one, my story shall be all about him."

"He was obliged to go," said Pulcheria, interrupting her. "Here is his message on this tablet. He was almost dying of impatience, and when he could wait no longer he wrote this for you."

Paula took the tablet, with a cry of regret, and carried it to her room to read. He had longed for their meeting as eagerly as herself, but at last he could wait no longer. How differently--so he wrote--had he hoped to end this day which must be devoted to the rescue of her friends.

Why, oh why had she allowed herself to be detained here? Why had she not flown to him, at least for a few moments, to thank him for his kindness and faithfulness, and to hear him confess publicly and aloud what he had but murmured in her ear the day before? She returned to the little girl, anxious and dissatisfied with herself.

Orion had in fact postponed his departure till the last moment; he thought it necessary to give Amru due notice of his journey and of his rupture with the patriarch. Of all the motives which could prompt him to aid the nuns, revenge was that which the Arab could best understand.

CHAPTER VI.

As Orion rode across the bridge of boats to Fostat, the gladness that had inspired him died away. Could not--ought not Paula to have spared him a small part of the time she had devoted to the child? He had been left to make the most of a kind grasp of the hand and a grateful look of welcome. Would she not have flown to meet him, if the love of which she had assured him yesterday were as fervent, as ardent as his own? Was the proud spirit of this girl, who, as his mother said, was cold and unapproachable, incapable of passionate, self-forgetting devotion? Was there no way of lighting up in her the sacred fire which burnt in him? He was tormented by many doubts and a bitter feeling of disappointment, and a crowd of suspicions forced themselves upon him, which would never have troubled him if only he had seen her once more, had heard her happy words of love, and felt his lips consecrated by his mistress' first kiss.

He was out of spirits, indeed out of temper, as he entered the Arab general's dwelling. In the anteroom he was met by rejected petitioners, and he said to himself, with a bitter smile, that he had just been sent about his business in the same unsatisfied mood--yes, sent about his business--and by whom?

He was announced, and his spirits rose a little when he was at once admitted and led past many, who were left waiting, into the Arab governor's presence-chamber. He was received with paternal warmth; and, when Amru heard that Orion and the patriarch had come to high words, he jumped up and holding out both his hands exclaimed:

"My right hand on that, my friend; come over to Islam, and with my left I will appoint you your father's successor, in the Khaliff's name, in spite of your youth. Away with hesitation! Clasp hands; at once, quickly! I cannot bear to quit Egypt and know that there is no governor at Memphis!"

The blood tingled in the young man's veins. His father's successor! He, the new Mukaukas! How it flattered his ambition, what a way to all activity it opened out to him! It dazzled his vision, and moved him strongly to grasp the right hand which his generous patron still held out to him. But suddenly his excited fancy showed him the image of the Redeemer with whom he had entered into a silent covenant in the church, sadly averting his gentle face. At this he remembered what he had vowed; at this he forgot all his grievance against Paula; he took the general's hand, indeed, but only to raise it to his lips as he thanked him with all his heart. But then he implored him, with earnest, pleading urgency, not to be wroth with him if he remained firm and clung to the faith of his father and his ancestors. And Amru was not wroth, though it was with none of the hearty interest with which he had at first welcomed him, that he hastily warned Orion to be on his guard against the prelate, since, so long as he remained a Christian, he had no power to protect him against Benjamin.

When Orion went on to tell him that he was intending to travel for a short time, and had, in fact, come to take leave of him, the Arab was much annoyed. He, too, he said, must be going away and was starting within two days for Medina.

"And in casting my eye on you," he went on, "in spite of your youth, to fill your father's place, I took care to find a task for you which would enable you to prove that I had not put too great confidence in you. But, if you persist in your own opinions, I cannot possibly entrust so important a post as the governorship of Memphis to a Christian so young as you are; with the youthful Moslem I might have ventured on it.--However, I will not deprive you of the enterprise which I had intended for you. If you succeed in it, it will be a good thing for yourself, and I can, I believe, turn it to the benefit of the whole province--for what could take me from hence at this time, when my presence is so needful for a hundred incomplete projects, but my anxiety for the good of this country--in which I am but an alien, while you must love it as your native soil, the home of your race?--I am going to Medina because the Khaliff, in this letter, complains that I send too small a revenue into the treasury from so rich a land as Egypt. And yet not a single dinar of your taxes finds its way into my own coffers. I keep a hundred and fifty thousand laborers at work to restore the canals and waterworks which my predecessors, the blood-sucking Byzantines, neglected so disgracefully and left to fall to ruin--I build, and plan, and sow seed for posterity to reap. All this costs money. It swallows up the lion's share of the revenue. And I am making the journey, not merely to purge myself from reproach, but to obtain Omar's permission for the future to exact no extortionate payments, but to consider only the true weal of the province. I am most unwilling to go, for a thousand reasons; and you, young man, if you care for your native land, ought.... Do you really love it and wish it well?"

"With all my soul!" cried Orion.

"Well then, at this time, if by any possibility you can arrange it so, you ought to remain at home, and devote yourself heart and soul to the task I have to propose to you. I hate postponements. Ride straight at the foe, and do not canter up and down till you tire the horses! that is my principle, and not in battle only. Take the moral to heart!--And you will have no time to waste; what I require is no light matter: It is that you should endeavor to sketch a new division of the districts, drawing on your own knowledge of the country and its inhabitants, and using the records and lists in the archives of your ancient government-offices, of which your father has told me; you must have special regard to the financial condition of each district. That the old mode of levying taxes is unsatisfactory we find every day; you will have ample room for improvements in every respect. Overthrow the existing arrangements, if you consider it necessary.

Other men have attempted to redistribute the divisions and devise new modes of collecting the revenue. The best scheme will have the preference; and you seem to me to be the man to win the prize, and, with it, a wide and noble field of work in the future. It is not a mere sense of tedium, or a longing for the pleasures of the capital to which you are accustomed, that are tempting you to quit Memphis the melancholy...."

"No, indeed, my Lord," Orion assured him. "The duty I have in view does not even profit me, and if I had not given my word I would throw myself, heart and soul, into so grand a task, no later than to-morrow. That you should expect me to solve so hard a problem is the most precious incense ever offered me. If it is only to be worthy of your confidence, I will return as soon as possible and put forth my utmost powers of intelligence and prudence, of endurance and patriotism. I have always been a diligent student; and it would be a shame indeed, if my experiences as a youth could hinder the man from outdoing the school-boy."

"That is right, well said!" replied Amru, holding out his hand. "Do your best, and you shall have ample opportunity of proving your powers.--Take my warnings to heart as regards the patriarch and the black Vekel. I unfortunately have no one who could fill his place except the worthy Kadi Othman; but he is no soldier, and he cannot be spared from his post. Keep out of Obada's way, return soon, and may the All-merciful protect you...."

When Orion had recrossed the bridge on his way home, he saw a gaily-dressed Nile-boat, such as now but rarely stopped at Memphis, lying at anchor in the dock, and on the road he met two litters followed by beasts of burden and a train of servants. The whole party had a brilliant and wealthy appearance, and at any other time would have roused his curiosity; but to-day he merely wondered for a moment who these new-comers might be, and then continued to meditate on the task proposed to him by Amru. From the bottom of his heart he cursed the hour in which he had pledged himself to take the part of these strangers; for after such long idleness he longed to be able to prove his powers. Suddenly, and as if by a miracle, he saw the way opened before him which he had himself hoped to tread, and now he was fettered and held back from an enterprise which he felt he could carry out with success and benefit to his country, while it attracted him as with a hundred lode-stones.

Next morning, when his will had been duly signed and witnessed, he called the treasurer for an interview alone with him. He had made up his mind that one person, at least, must be informed of the enterprise he had planned, and that one could be no other than Nilus. So he begged him to accompany him to the impluvium of his private residence; and several office scribes who were present heard the invitation given. They did not, however, allow themselves to be disturbed in their work; the youngest only--a handsome lad of sixteen, an olive-complexioned Egyptian, with keen, eager black eyes, who had listened sharply to every word spoken by the treasurer and his master, quietly rose from his squatting posture as soon as they had quitted the office, and, stole, unobserved into the anteroom. From thence he flew up the ladder-like steps which led to the dovecote of which he had the care, sprang on to the roof of the lower story, and crept flat on his face till he was close to the edge of the large square opening which gave light and air to the impluvium below. With a swift movement of the hand he pushed back the awning which shaded it at midday, and listened intently to the dialogue that went on below.

This listener was Anubis, the water-wagtail's foster-brother; and he seemed to be in no way behind his beloved mistress in the art of listening; for no one could prick up his ears more sharply than Anubis. He knew, too, what was to be his reward for exposing himself on a roof to the shafts of the pitiless African sun, for Katharina, his adored play-fellow and the mistress of his ardent boy's heart, had promised him a sweet kiss, if only he would bring her back some more exact news as to Orion's perilous journey. Anubis had told her, the evening before, all he had heard in the anteroom to the office, but such general information had not satisfied her. She must see clearly before her, must know exactly what was going on, and she was not mistaken when she imagined that the reward she had promised the lad would spur him to the utmost.

Anubis had not indeed expected to gain his end so soon, boldly as he dared to hope; scarcely had he pushed aside the awning, when Orion began to explain to Nilus all his plan and purpose.

When he had finished speaking, the boy did not wait to hear Nilus reply. Intoxicated with his success, and the prospect of a guerdon which to him included all the bliss of heaven, he crept back to the dovecote. But he could not go back by the way by which he had come; for if one of the older scribes should meet him in the anteroom, he would be condemned to return to his work. He therefore wriggled along the ridge of the roof towards the fishing-cove, got over it, and laid hold of a gutter pipe, intending to slip down it; unfortunately it was old and rotten--rain was rare in Memphis--and hardly had he trusted his body after his hands when the lead gave way. The rash youth fell with the clattering fragments of the gutter from a height of four men; a heavy thump on the pavement was followed by a loud cry, and in a few minutes all the officials had heard that poor Anubis, nimble as he was, had fallen from the roof while attending to his pets, and had broken his leg.

The two men in the impluvium were not informed of the accident till some time later, for strict orders had been given that they were not to be disturbed.

Nilus had received his young master's communication with growing amazement, indignation, and horror. When Orion ended, the treasurer put forth all the eloquence of a faithful heart, anxious for the safety of the body and soul of the

youth he loved, to dissuade him from a deed of daring which could bring him nothing but misapprehension, disaster, and persecution. Nilus was with all his soul a Jacobite; and the idea that his young master was about to risk everything for a party of Melchite nuns, and draw down upon himself the wrath and maledictions of the patriarch, was more than he could bear.

His faithful friend's warnings and entreaties did not leave Orion unmoved; but he clung to his determination, representing to Nilus that he had pledged his word to Rufinus, and could not now draw back, though he had already lost all his pleasure in the enterprise. But it went against him to leave the brave old man to face the danger alone--indeed, it was out of the question.

Genuine anxiety is fertile in expedient; Orion had scarcely done speaking, when Nilus had a proposal to make which seemed well calculated to dispel the youth's last objections. Melampus, the chief shipbuilder, was a Greek and a zealous Melchite, though he no longer dared to confess his creed openly. He and his sons, two bold and sturdy ships carpenters, had often given proof of their daring, and Nilus had no doubt that they would be more than willing to share in an expedition which had for its object the rescue of so many pious fellow-believers. They might take Orion's place, and would be far more helpful to the old man than Orion himself.

Orion so far approved of this suggestion as to promise himself good aid from the brave artisans, who were well known to him; and he was willing to take them with him, though he would not give up his own share in the business.

Nilus, though he adhered firmly to his objections, was at last reduced to silence. However, Orion went with his anxious friend to the ship-yard; the old ship-builder, a kind-hearted giant, was as ready and glad to undertake the rescue of the Sisters as if each one was his own mother. It would be a real treat to the youngsters to have a hand in such a job,--and he was right, for when they were taken into confidence one flourished his hatchet with enthusiasm, and the tether struck his horny fist against his left palm as gleefully as though he were bidden to a dance.

Orion took boat at once with the three men, and was rowed to the house of Rufinus, to whom he introduced them; the old man was entirely satisfied.

Orion remained with him after dismissing them. He had promised last evening to breakfast with him, and the meal was waiting. Paula had gone, about an hour since, to the convent, and Joanna expected her to return at any moment. They began without her, however; the various dishes were carried away, the meal was nearly ended--still she had not returned. Orion, who had at first been able to conceal his disappointment, was now so uneasy that his host could with difficulty extract brief and inadvertent replies to his repeated questions. Rufinus himself was anxious; but just as he rose to go in search of her, Pulcheria, who was at the window, saw her coming, and joyfully exclaiming: "There she is!" ran out.

But now again minute after minute passed, a quarter of an hour grew to half an hour, and still Orion was waiting in vain. Glad expectation had long since turned to impatience, impatience to a feeling of injured dignity, and this to annoyance and bitter vexation, when at last Pulcheria came back instead of Paula, and begged him from Paula to join her in the garden.

She had been detained too long at the convent. The terrible rumor had scared the pious sisters out of their wonted peace and put them all into confusion, like smoke blown into a bee-hive. The first thing was to pack their most valuable possessions; and although Orion had expressly said only a small number of cases and bags could be taken on board, one was for dragging her prayer-desk, another a large picture of some saint, a third a copper fish-kettle, and the fourth, fifth, and sixth the great reliquary with the bones of Ammonius the Martyr, to which the chapel owed its reputation for peculiar sanctity. To reduce this excess of baggage, the abbess had been obliged to exert all her energy and authority, and many a sister retired weeping over some dear but too bulky treasure.

The superior had therefore been unable to devote herself to Paula till this portable property had been under review. Then the damsel had been admitted to her parlor, a room furnished with rich and elegant simplicity, and there she had been allowed to pour out her whole heart to warm and sympathetic ears.

Any one who could have seen these two together might have thought that this was a daughter in grief seeking counsel on her mother's breast. In her youth the grey-haired abbess must have been very like Thomas' daughter; but the lofty and yet graceful mien of the younger woman had changed in the matron to majestic and condescending dignity, and it was impossible to guess from her defiantly set mouth that it had once been the chief charm of her face.

As she listened to the girl's outpourings the expression of her calm eyes changed frequently; when her soul was fired by fanatical zeal they could gleam brightly; but now she was listening to a variety of experiences, for Paula regarded this interview as a solemn confession, and concealed nothing from the friend who was both mother and priest--neither of what had happened to her in external circumstances, nor of what had moved her heart and mind ever since she had first entered the house of the Mtikaukas. Not a corner of her soul did she leave unsearched; she neither concealed nor palliated anything; and when she described her lover's strenuous efforts to apprehend the whole seriousness of life, her love and enthusiasm fairly carried her away, making his image shine all the more brightly by comparison with the brief, but dark shadow, that had fallen upon it. When Paula had at last ended her confession, the superior had remained silent for some time; then drawing the girl to her, she had affectionately asked her:

"And now? Now, tell me truly, does not the passion that has such wonderful power over you prompt and urge your inmost soul to yield--to fly to the embrace of the man you love--to give all up for him and say: 'Here I am--I am yours! Call a priest to bless our union!--Is it not so--am I not right?'"

Paula, deeply blushing, bowed assent; but the old woman drew her head on to her motherly bosom, and went on thoughtfully:

"I saw him drive past in his quadriga, and was reminded of many a noble statue of the heathen Greeks. Beauty, rank, wealth, aye--and talents and intellect--all that could ruin the heart of a Paula are his, and she--I see it plainly--will give it to him gladly."

And again the maiden bowed her head. The abbess sighed, and went on as though she had with difficulty succeeded in submitting to the inevitable "Then all warning would be in vain.--Still, he is not of our confession, he...."

"But how highly he esteems it!" cried Paula. "That he proves by risking his freedom and life for you and your household."

"Say rather for you whom he loves," replied the other. "But putting that out of the question, it pains me deeply to think of Thomas' daughter as the wife of a Jacobite. You will not, I know, give him up; and the Father of Love often leads true love to good ends by wonderful ways, even though they are ways of error, passing through pitfalls and abysses."

Paula fell on her neck to kiss her gratefully: but the abbess could only allow the girl a few minutes to enjoy her happiness. She desired her to sit down by her side, and holding Paula's hand in both her own, she spoke to her in a tone of calm deliberation. She and her sisterhood, she began by saying, were deeply indebted to Orion. She had no dearer wish than that Paula should find the greatest earthly happiness in her marriage; still, it was her part to tender advice, and she dared not blind herself to the dangers which threatened this happiness. She herself had a long life behind her of varied experience, in which she had seen hundreds of young men who had been given up as lost sinners by father and mother--lost to the Church and to all goodness--and among these many a one, like Saul, had had his journey to Damascus. A turning point had come to them, and the outcast sons had become excellent and pious men.

Paula, as she listened, had drawn closer to the speaker, and her eyes beamed with joy; but the elder woman shook her head, and her gaze grew more devout and rapt, as she went on with deep solemnity:

"But then, my child, in all of these Grace had done its perfect work; the miracle was accomplished which we term regeneration. They were still the same men in the flesh and in the elements of their sensible nature, but their relation to the world and to life was altogether new. All that they had formerly thought desirable they could now hate; what they had deemed important was now worthless, and the worthless precious in their eyes; whereas they once referred everything to their own desires, they now referred all to God and His will. Their impulses were the same as of old, but they kept them within bounds by a never-sleeping consciousness that they led, not to joys, but to everlasting punishment. These regenerate souls learned to condemn the world, and instead of gazing down at the dust their eyes were fixed upwards on Heaven. If either of them tottered, his whole 'new man' prompted him to recover his balance before he fell to the ground.--But Orion! Your lover? His guilt seems to have passed over him; he hopes for reunion with God from a more meritorious life in the world. Not only is his nature unaltered, but his attitude with regard to life and to the joys it offers to the children of this world. Earthly love is spurring him on to strive for what is noble and great and he earnestly seeks to attain it; but he will fall over every stone that the devil casts in his path, and find it hard to pick himself up again, for misfortune has not led him to the new birth or the new life in God. Just such men have I seen, numbers of times, relapsing into the sins they had escaped from. Before we can entirely trust a man who has once--though but once--wandered so far from God's ways, while Grace has not yet worked effectually in him, we shall do well to watch his dealings and course for more than a few short days. If you still feel that you must follow the dictates of your heart, at any rate do not fly into your lover's open arms, do not abandon to him the pure sanctuary of your body and soul, do not be wholly his till he has been fully put to the proof."

"But I believe in him entirely!" cried Paula, with a flood of tears.

"You believe because you love him," replied the abbess.

"And because he deserves it."

"And how long has he deserved it?"

"Was he not a splendid man before his fall?"

"And so was many a murderer. Most criminals become outcasts from society in a single moment."

"But society still accepts Orion."

"Because he is the son of the Mukaukas."

"And because he wins all hearts!"

"Even that of the Almighty?"

"Oh! Mother, Mother! why do you measure him by the standard of your own sanctified soul? How few are the elect

who find a share of the grace of which you speak!"

"But those who have sinned like him must strive for it."

"And he does so, Mother, in his way."

"It is the wrong way; wrong for those who have sinned as he has. All he strives for is worldly happiness."

"No, no. He is firm in his faith in God and the Saviour. He is not a liar."

"And yet he thinks he may escape the penalty?"

"And does not the Lord pardon true repentance?--He has repented; and how bitterly, how fearfully he has suffered!"

"Say rather that he has felt the stripes that his own sin brought upon him.--There are more to come; and how will he take them? Temptation lurks in every path, and how will he avoid it? As your mother, indeed it is my duty to warn you: Keep your passion and yourself still under control; continue to watch him, and grant him nothing--not the smallest favor, as you are a maiden, before he..."

"Till when; how long am I to be so basely on my guard?" sobbed Paula. "Is that love which trusts not and is not ready to share the lot even of the backslider?"

"Yes, child, yes," interrupted the old woman. "To suffer all things, to endure all things, is the duty of true love, and therefore of yours; but you must not allow the most indissoluble of all bonds to unite you to him till the back-slider has learnt to walk firmly. Follow him step by step, hold him up with faithful care, never despair of him if he seems other than what you had hoped. Make it your duty, pious soul, to render him worthy of grace--but do not be in a hurry to speak the final yes--do not say it yet."

Paula yielded, though unwillingly, to this last word of counsel; but, in fact, Orion's fault had filled the abbess with deep distrust. So great a sinner, under the blight, too, of a father's curse, ought, in her opinion, to have retired from the world and besieged Heaven for grace and a new birth, instead of seeking joys, such as she thought none but the most blameless--and, those of her own confession--could deserve, in union with so exceptional a creature as her beloved Paula. Indeed, having herself found peace for her soul only in the cloister, after a stormy and worldly youth, she would gladly have received the noble daughter of her old friend as the Bride of Christ within those walls, to be, perhaps, her successor as Mother Superior. She longed that her darling should be spared the sufferings she had known through the ruthlessness of faithless men; so she would not abate a jot of the tenor of her advice, or cease to impress on Paula, firmly though lovingly, the necessity of following it. At last Paula took leave of her, bound by a promise not to pledge herself irrevocably to Orion till his return from Doomiati, and till the abbess had informed her by letter what opinion she had formed of him in the course of their flight.

The high-spirited girl had not shed so many tears, as in the course of this interview, since the fatal affair at Abyla where she had lost her father and brother; it was with a tear-stained face and aching head that she had made her way back, under the scorching mid-day sun, to Rufinus' house, where she sought her old nurse. Betta had earnestly entreated her to lie down, and when Paula refused to hear of it she persuaded her at any rate to bathe her head with water as cold as was procurable in this terrific heat, and to have her hair carefully rearranged by her skilful hand; for this had been her mother's favorite remedy against headache. When, at length, Paula and her lover stood face to face, in a shady spot in the garden, they both looked embarrassed and estranged. He was pale, and gazed at her with some annoyance; and her red eyes and knit brows, for her brain was throbbing with piercing pain, did not tend to improve his mood. It was her part to explain and excuse herself; and as he did not at once address her after they had exchanged greetings, she said in a low tone of urgent entreaty:

"Forgive me for coming so late. How long you must have been waiting! But parting from my best friend, my second mother, agitated me so painfully--it was so unspeakably sad.--I did not know how to hold up my head, it ached so when I came home, and now--oh, I had hoped that we might meet to-day so differently!"

"But even yesterday you had no time to spare for me," he retorted sullenly, "and this morning--you were present when Rufinus invited me--this morning!--I am not exacting, and to you, good God! How could I be?--But have we not to part, to bid each other farewell--perhaps for ever? Why should you have given up so much time and strength to your friend, that so scanty a remnant is left for the lover? That is an unfair division."

"How could I deny it?" she said with melancholy entreaty. "You are indeed very right; but I could not leave the child last evening, as soon as she came, and while she was weeping out all her sorrows; and if you only knew how surprised and grieved I was--how my heart ached when, instead of finding you, your note..."

"I was obliged to go to Amru," interrupted Orion. "This undertaking compels me to leave much behind, and I am no longer the freest of the free, as I used to be. During this dreadful breakfast I have been sitting on thorns. But let all that pass. I came hither with a heart high with hope--and now?--You see, Paula, this enterprise tears me in two in more ways than you can imagine, puts me into a more critical position, and weighs more on my mind than you can think or know--I will explain it all to you at another time--and to bear it all, to keep up the spirit and happy energy that I need, I must be secure of the one thing for which I could take far greater toil and danger as mere child's play; I must know..."

"You must know," she interposed, "whether my heart is fully and wholly open to your love..."

"And whether," he added, with growing ardor, "in spite of the bitter suffering that weighs on my wretched soul, I may hope to be happier than the saints in bliss. O Paula, adored and only woman, may I...."

"You may," she said clearly and fervently. "I love you, Orion, and shall never, never cease to love you with my whole soul."

He flew to her side, clasped both her hands as if beside himself, snatched them to his lips regardless of the nearness of the house, whence ten pairs of eyes might have seen him, and covered them with burning kisses, till she drew them from him with the entreaty: "No, no; forbear, I entreat you. No--not now."

"Yes, now, at this very moment--or, if not, when?" he asked vehemently. "But here, in this garden--you are right, this is no place for two human beings so happy as we are. Come with me; come into the house and lead the way to a spot where we may be unseen and unheard, alone with each other and our happiness."

"No, no, no!" she hastily put in, pressing her hand to her aching brow. "Come with me to the bench under the sycamore; it is shady there, and you can tell me everything, and hear once more how entirely love has taken possession of me."

He looked in her face, surprised and disappointed; but she turned towards the sycamore and sat down beneath it. He slowly followed her. She signed to him to take a seat by her side, but he stood up in front of her, saying sadly and despondently.

"Always the same--always calm and cold. Is this fair, Paula? Is this the overwhelming love of which you spoke? Is this your response to the yearning cry of a passionately ardent heart? Is this all that love can grant to love--that a betrothed owes to her lover on the very eve of parting?"

At this she looked up at him, deeply distressed, and said in pathetically urgent entreaty: "O Orion, Orion! Have I not told you, can you not see and feel how much I love you? You must know and feel it; and if you do, be content, I entreat. You, whom alone I love, be satisfied to know that this heart is yours, that your Paula--your own Paula, for that indeed I am--will think of nothing, care for nothing, pray and entreat Heaven for nothing but you, yes you, my own, my all."

"Then come, come with me," he insisted, "and grant your betrothed the rights that are his due."

"Nay, not my betrothed--not yet," she besought him, with all the fervor of her tortured soul. "In my veins too the blood flows warm with yearning. Gladly would I fly to your arms and lay my head against yours, but not to-day can I become your betrothed, not yet; I cannot, I dare not!"

"And why not? Tell me, at any rate, why not," he cried indignantly, clenching his fist to his breast. "Why will you not be my bride, if indeed it is true that you love me? Why have you invented this new and intolerable torment?"

"Because prudence tells me," she replied in a low, hurried voice, while her bosom heaved painfully, as though she were afraid to hear her own words; "because I see that the time is not yet come. Ah, Orion! you have not yet learnt to bridle the desires and cravings that burn within you; you have forgotten all too quickly what is past--what a mountain we had to cross before we succeeded in finding each other, before I--for I must say it, my dear one--before I could look you in the face without anger and aversion. A strange and mysterious ordering has brought it about; and you, too, have honestly done your best that everything should be changed, that what was white should now be black, that the chill north wind should turn to a hot southerly one. Thus poison turns to healing, and a curse to a blessing. In this foolish heart of mine passionate hatred has given way to no less fervent love. Still, I cannot yet be your bride, your wife. Call it cowardice, call it selfish caution, what you will. I call it prudence, and applaud it; though it cost my poor eyes a thousand bitter tears before my heart and brain could consent to be guided by the warning voice. Of one thing you may be fully assured: my heart will never be another's, come what may--it is yours with my whole soul!--But I will not be your bride till I can say to you with glad confidence, as well as with passionate love: 'You have conquered--take me, I am yours!' Then you shall feel and confess that Paula's love is not less vehement, less ardent.... O God! Orion, learn to know and understand me. You must--for my sake and your own, you must!--My head, merciful Heaven, my head!"

She bowed her face and clasped her hands to her burning brow; Orion, pale and shivering, laid his hand on her shoulder, and said in a harsh, forced voice that had lost all its music: "The Esoterics impose severe trials on their disciples before they admit them into the mysteries. And we are in Egypt--but the difference is a wide one when the rule is applied to love. How ever, all this is not from yourself. What you call prudence is the voice of that nun!"

"It is the voice of reason," replied Paula softly. "The yearning of my heart had overpowered it, and I owe to my friend...."

"What do you owe her?" cried the young man furiously indignant. "You should curse her, rather, for doing you so ill a turn, as I do at this moment. What does she know of me? Has she ever heard a word from my lips? If that despotic and casuistic recluse could have known what my heart and soul are like, she would have advised you differently. Even as a child's confidence and love alone could influence me. Whatever my faults might be, I never was false to kindness and trust.--And, so far as you are concerned--you who are prudence and reason in person--blest in your love, I should

have cared only for your approbation. If I could have overcome the last of your scruples, I should indeed have been proud and happy!--I would have brought the sun and stars down from the sky for you, and have laughed temptation to scorn!--But as it is--instead of being raised I am lowered, a laughing-stock even in my own eyes. One with you, I could have led the way on wings to the realms of light where Perfection holds sway!--But as it is? What a task lies before me!--To heat your frigid love to flaming point by good deeds, as though they were olive-logs. A pretty task for a man--to put himself to the proof before the woman he loves! It is a hideous and insulting torture which I will not submit to, against which my whole inner man revolts, and which you will and must forego--if indeed it is true that you love me!"

"I love you, oh! I love you," she cried, beside herself, and seizing his hands. "Perhaps you are right. I--my God what shall I do? Only do not ask me yet, to speak the final yes or no. I cannot control myself to the feeblest thought. You see, you see, how I am suffering!"

"Yes, I see it," he replied, looking compassionately at her pale face and drawn brow. "And if it must be so, I say: till this evening then. Try to rest now, and take care of yourself.--But then...."

"Then, during the voyage, the flight, repeat to the abbess all you have just said to me. She is a noble woman, and she, too, will learn to understand and to love you, I am sure. She will retract the word I know...."

"What word?"

"My word, given to her, that I would not be yours...."

"Till I had gone through the Esoteric tests?" exclaimed Orion with an angry shrug. "Now go,--go and lie down. This hour, which should have been the sweetest of our lives, a stranger has embittered and darkened. You are not sure of yourself--nor I of myself. Anything more that we could say now and here would lead to no good issue for either you or me. Go and rest; sleep off your pain, and I--I will try to forget.--If you could but see the turmoil in my soul!--But farewell till our next, more friendly--I hardly dare trust myself to say our happier meeting."

He hastily turned away, but she called after him in sad lament: "Orion do not forget--Orion, you know that I love you."

But he did not hear; he buried on with his head bowed over his breast, down to the road, without reentering Rufinus' house.

CHAPTER VII.

When Orion reached home, wounded to the quick, he flung himself on a divan. Paula had said that her heart was his indeed, but what a cool and grudging love was this that would give nothing till it had insured its future. And how could Paula have allowed a third person to come between them, and rule her feelings and actions? She must have revealed to that third person all that had previously passed between them--and it was for this Melchite nun, his personal foe, that he was about to--it was enough to drive him mad!--But he could not withdraw; he had pledged himself to the brave old man to carry out this crazy enterprise. And in the place of the lofty, noble mistress of his whole being, his fancy pictured Paula as a tearful, vacillating, and cold-hearted woman.

There lay the maps and plans which he had desired Nilus to send in from his room for his study of the task set him by Amru; as his eye fell upon them, he struck his fist against the wall, started up, and ran like a madman up and down the room which had been sacred to her peaceful life.

There stood her lute; he had freshly strung and tuned it. To calm himself he drew it to him, took up the plectrum, and began to play. But it was a poor instrument; she had been content with this wretched thing! He flung it on the couch and took up his own, the gift of Heliadora. How sweetly, how delightfully she had been wont to play it! Even now its strings gave forth a glorious tone; by degrees he began to rejoice in his own playing, and music soothed his excitement, as it had often done before. It was grand and touching, though he several times struck the strings so violently that their loud clanging and sighing and throbbing answered each other like the wild wailing of a soul in torment.

Under this vehement usage the bridge of the lute suddenly snapped off with a dull report; and at the same instant his secretary, who had been with him at Constantinople, threw open the door in glad excitement, and began, even before he had crossed the threshold:

"Only think, my lord! Here is a messenger come from the inn kept by Sostratus with this tablet for you.--It is open, so I read it. Only think! it is hardly credible! The Senator Justinus is here with his wife, the noble Martina--here in Memphis, and they beg you to visit them at once to speak of matters of importance. They came last night, the messenger tells me, and now--what joy! Think of all the hospitality you enjoyed in their house. Can we leave them in an inn? So long as hospitality endures, it would be a crime!"

"Impossible, quite impossible!" cried Orion, who had cast aside the lute, and was now reading the letter himself. "It is true indeed! his own handwriting. And that immovable pair are in Egypt--in Memphis! By Zeus!"--for this was still the favorite oath of the golden youth of Alexandria and Constantinople, even in these Christian times.--"By Zeus, I ought to receive them here like princes!--Wait!--of course you must tell the messenger that I am coming at once--have the four new Pannonians harnessed to the silver-plated chariot. I must go to my mother; but there is time enough for that. Desire Sebek to have the guest-chambers prepared for distinguished guests--those sick people are out of them, thank God! Take my present room for them too; I will go back to the old one. Of course they have a numerous suite. Set twenty or thirty slaves to work. Everything must be ready in two hours at furthest. The two sitting-rooms are particularly handsome, but where anything is lacking, place everything in the house at Sebek's command.--Justinus in Egypt!--But make haste, man! Nay, stay! One thing more. Carry these maps and scrolls--no; they are too heavy for you. Desire a slave to fetch them, and take them to Rufinus; he must keep them till I come. Tell him I meant to use them on the way--he knows."

The secretary rushed off; Orion performed a rapid toilet and had his mourning dress rearranged in fresh folds; then he went to his mother. She had often heard of the cordial reception that her son, and her husband, too, in former days, had met with in the senator's house, and she took it quite as a matter of course that the strangers' rooms, and among them that which had been Paula's, should be prepared for the travellers; all she asked was that it should be explained that she was suffering, so that she might not have to trouble herself to entertain them.

She advised Orion to put off his journey and to devote himself to his friends; but he explained that even their arrival must not delay him. He had entire confidence in Sebek and the upper housekeeper, and the emperor himself would remit the duties of hostess to a sick woman. Once, at any rate, she would surely allow the illustrious guests to pay their respects to her,--but even this Neforis refused. It would be quite enough if her visitors received messages and greetings daily in her name, with offerings of choice fruit and flowers, and on the last day some costly gift. Orion thought this proposal quite worthy of them both, and presently drove off behind his Pannonians to the hostelry.

By the harbor he met the captain of the boat he had hired; to him he held up two fingers, and the boatman signified by repeated nodding that he had understood the meaning of this signal: "Be ready at two hours before midnight."

The sight of this weather-beaten pilot, and the prospect of making some return to his noble friends for all their kindness, cheered Orion greatly; and though he regretted being obliged to leave these guests of all others, the perils that lay before him reassured their charm. He could surely win over the abbess in the course of the voyage, and Paula might be brought to reason, perhaps, this very evening. Justinus and his wife were Melchites, and he knew that both

these friends--for whom he had a particular regard--would be enchanted with his scheme if he took them into his confidence.

The inn kept by Sostratus, a large, square building surrounding a spacious court-yard, was the best and most frequented in the town. The eastern side faced the road and the river, and contained the best rooms, in which, on the previous night, the senator had established himself with his wife and servants. The clatter of the quadriga drew Justinus to the window; as soon as he recognized Orion he waved a table-napkin to him, shouting a hearty "Welcome!" and then retired into the room again.

"Here he is!" he cried to his wife, who was lying on a couch in the lightest permissible attire, and sipping fruit-syrup from time to time to moisten her dry lips, while a boy fanned her for coolness.

"That is well indeed!" she exclaimed, and desired her maid to be quick, very quick, and fetch her a wrap, but to be sure it was a thin one. Then, turning to a very lovely young woman who had started to her feet at Justinus' first exclamation, she asked:

"Would you rather that he should find you here, my darling, or shall we see him first, and tell him that we have brought you with us?"

"That will be best," answered the other in a sweet voice, and she sighed softly before she added: "What will he not think of me? We may grow older, but folly--folly..."

"Grows with years?" laughed the matron. "Or do you think it decreases?--But here he is."

The younger woman hurried away by a side door, behind which she disappeared. Martina looked after her, and pointing that way to direct her husband's glance, she observed: "She has left herself a chink. Good God! Fancy being in love in such heat as this; what a hideous thought!"

At this moment the door was opened, and the heartiest greetings ensued. It was evident that the meeting was as great a pleasure to the elderly pair as to the young man. Justinus embraced him warmly, while the matron cried out: "And a kiss for me too!" And when the youth immediately and heartily gave it, she exclaimed with a groan:

"O man, and child of man, great Sesostris! How did your famous ancestor ever achieve heroic deeds under such a sun as this? For my part I am fast disappearing, melting away like butter; but what will a man not do for love's sake?--Syra, Syra; for God's sake bring me something, however small, that looks like a garment! How rational is the fashion of the people of Africa whom we met with on our journey. If they have three fingers' breadth of cloth about them, they consider themselves elegantly dressed.--But come, sit down--there, at my feet. A seat, Argos, and some wine, and water in a damp clay pitcher, and cool like the last. Husband, the boy seems to me handsomer than ever. But dear God! he is in mourning, and how becoming it is! Poor boy, poor boy! Yes, we heard in Alexandria."

She wiped first her eyes and then her damp brow, and her husband added his expressions of sympathy at the death of the Mukaukas.

They were a genial and comfortable couple, Justinus and his wife Martina. Two beings who felt perfectly secure in their vast inherited wealth, and who, both being of noble birth, never need make any display of dignity, because they were sure of it in the eyes of high and low alike. They had asserted their right to remain natural and human under the formalities of the most elaborately ceremonious society; those who did not like the easy tone adopted by them in their house might stay away. He, devoid of ambition, a senator in virtue of his possessions and his name, never caring to make any use of his adventitious dignity but that of procuring good appointments for his favorite clients, or good places for his family on any festive occasion, was a hospitable soul; the good friend of all his friends, whose motto was "live and let live." Martina, with a heart as good as gold, had never made any pretensions to beauty, but had nevertheless been much courted. This worthy couple had for many years thought that nothing could be more delightful than a residence in the capital, or at their beautiful villa on the Bosphorus, scorning to follow the example of other rich and fashionable folks, and go to take baths or make journeys. It was enough for them to be able to make others happy under their roof; and there was never any lack of visitors, just because those who were weary of bending their backs at the Byzantine Court, found this unceremonious circle particularly restful.

Martina was especially fond of having young people about her, and Heliodora, the widow of her nephew, had found comfort with her in her trouble; it was in her house that Orion and Heliodora had met. The young widow was a great favorite with the old couple, but higher in their esteem even than she, had been the younger brother of her deceased husband. He was to have been their heir; but they had mourned his death now two years; for news had reached them that Narses, who had served in the Imperial army as tribune of cavalry, had fallen in battle against the infidels. No one, however, had ever brought a more exact report of his death; and at last their indefatigable enquiries had resulted in their learning that he had been taken prisoner by the Saracens and carried into slavery in Arabia. This report received confirmation through the efforts of Orion and his deceased father. Within a few hours of the young Egyptian's departure, they received a letter from the youth they had given up for lost, written in trembling characters, in which he implored them to effect his deliverance through Amru, the Arab governor of Egypt. The old people had set forth at once on their pilgrimage, and Heliodora had done her part in urging them to this step. Her passion for Orion, to whom,

for more than a year, her gentle heart had been wholly devoted, had increased every hour since his departure. She had not concealed it from Martina, who thought it no less than her duty to stand by the poor lovesick child; for Heliadora had nursed her husband, the senator's nephew, to the end, with touching fidelity and care; and besides, Martina had given the young Egyptian--with whom she was "quite in love herself"--every opportunity of paying his addresses to the young widow.

They were a pair that seemed made for each other, and Martina delighted in match-making. But in this case, though hearts had met, hands had not, and finally it had been a real grief to Martina to hear Orion and Heliadora called--and with good reason--a pair of lovers.

Once she had appealed in her genial way to the young man's conscience, and he had replied that his father, who was a Jacobite, would never consent to his union with a woman of any other confession. At that time she had found little to answer; but she had often thought if only she could make the Mukaukas acquainted with Heliadora, he, whom she had known in the capital as a young and handsome admirer of every charming woman, would certainly capitulate.

Her favorite niece had indeed every grace that a father's heart could desire to attract the son. She was of good family, the widow of a man of rank, rich, but just two and twenty, and beautiful enough to bewitch old or young. A sweeter and gentler soul Martina had never known. Those large dewy eyes--imploing eyes, she called them--might soften a stone, and her fair waving hair was as soft as her nature. Add to this her full, supple figure--and how perfectly she dressed, how exquisitely she sang and struck the lute! It was not for nothing that she was courted by every youth of rank in Constantinople--and if the old Mukaukas could but hear her laugh! There was not a sound on earth more clear, more glad than Heliadora's laugh. She was not indeed remarkable for intellect, but no one could call her a simpleton, and your very clever women were not to every man's taste.

So, when they were to travel to Egypt, Martina took it for granted that Heliadora must go with them, and that the flirtation which had made her favorite the talk of the town must, in Memphis, become courtship in earnest. Then, when she heard at Alexandria that the Mukaukas was lately dead, she regarded the game as won. Now they were in Memphis, Orion was sitting before her, and the young man had invited her and her following of above twenty persons to stay in his house. It was a foregone conclusion that the travellers were to accept this bidding as prescribed by the laws of hospitality, and preparations for the move were immediately set on foot.

Justinus meanwhile explained what had brought them to Egypt, and begged Orion's assistance. The young man had known the senator's nephew well as one of the most brilliant and amiable youths of the capital, and he was sincerely distressed to be forced to inform his friends that Amru, who could easily have procured the release of Narses, was to start within two days for Medina, while he himself was compelled to set out on a journey that very evening, at an hour he could not name.

He saw how greatly this firmly-expressed determination agitated and disturbed the old couple, and the senator's urgency led him to tell them, under the pledge of strict secrecy, what business it was that took him away and what a perilous enterprise he had before him.

He began his story confident of his orthodox guests' sympathy; but to his amazement they both disapproved of the undertaking, and not, as they declared, on his account only or for the sake of the help they had counted on.

The senator reminded him that he was the natural chief of the Egyptian population in Memphis, and that, by such a scheme, he was undermining his influence with those whose leader he was by right and duty as his father's son. His ambition ought to make him aim at this leadership; and instead of offering such a rebuff to the patriarch, it was his part to work with him--whose power he greatly underrated--so as to make life tolerable to their fellow-Christians in a land ruled by Moslems.

Paula's name was not once mentioned; but Orion thought of her and remained firm, though not without an inward struggle.

At the same time, to prove to his friends how sincerely he desired to please them, he proposed that he and Justinus should immediately cross the Nile to lay his application before the Khaliff's vicar. A glance at the sky showed him that it wanted still an hour and a half of sunset. His swift horses would not need more than that time for the journey, and during their absence the rest of the party could move from the inn. Carts for the baggage were already in waiting below, and chariots had been ordered to follow and convey his beloved guests to their new quarters.

The senator agreed to this proposal, and as the two men went off Martina called after Orion.

"My senator must talk to you on the road, and if you can be brought to reason you will find your reward waiting for you! Do not be saving of your talents of gold, old man, till the general has promised to procure the lad's release.--And listen to me, Orion; give up your mad scheme."

The sun had not wholly disappeared behind the Libyan range when the snorting Pannonians, all flecked with foam, drove back into the court-yard of the governor's residence. The two men had unfortunately gained nothing; for Amru was absent, reviewing the troops between Heliopolis and Onix, and was not expected home till night or even next morning. The party had removed from the inn and the senator's white slaves were already mixing with the black and

brown ones of the establishment.

Martina was delighted with her new quarters, and with the beautiful flowers--most of them new to her--with which the invalid mistress of the house had had the two great reception-rooms garnished in token of welcome; but the failure of Justinus' visit to Fostat fell like hoar-frost on her happy mood.

Orion, she asserted, ought to regard this stroke of ill-luck as a judgment from God. It was the will of Heaven that he should give up his enterprise and be content to make due preparations for a noble work which could be carried through without him, in order to accomplish another, out of friendship, which urgently needed his help. However, he again expressed his regret that in spite of everything he must adhere to his purpose; and when Martina asked him: "What, even if my reward is one that would especially delight you?" he nodded regretfully. "Yes, even then."

So she merely added, "Well, we shall see," and went on impressively: "Every one has some peculiarity which stamps his individuality and becomes him well: in you it is amiability, my son. Such obstinacy does not suit you; it is quite foreign to you, and is the very opposite to what I call amiability. Be yourself, even in this instance."

"That is to say weak and yielding, especially when a kind woman...."

"When old friends ask it," she hastily put in; but almost before she had finished she turned to her husband, exclaiming: "Good Heavens! come to the window. Did you ever see such a glorious mingling of purple and gold in the sky? It is as though the old pyramids and the whole land of Egypt were in flames. But now, great Sesostris,"--the name she gave to Orion when she was in a good humor with him, "it is time that you should see what I have brought you. In the first place this trinket," and she gave him a costly bracelet of old Greek workmanship set with precious stones, "and then--nay, no Thanks--and then--Well the object is rather large, and besides--come with me."

As she spoke she went from the reception-room into the anteroom, led the way to the door of the room which had once been Paula's, and then his own, opened it a little way, peeped in, and then pushed Orion forward, saying hastily: "There--do you see--there it is!"

By the window stood Heliodora. The bright radiance of the sinking sun bathed her slender but round and graceful form, her "imploring" eyes looked up at him with rapturous delight, and her white arms folded across her bosom gave her the aspect of a saint, waiting with humble longing for some miracle, in expectation of unutterable joys.

Martina's eyes, too, were fixed on Orion; she saw how pale he turned at seeing the young widow, she saw him start as though suddenly overcome by some emotion--what, she could not guess--and shrink back from the sunlit vision in the window. These were effects which the worthy matron had not anticipated.

Never off the stage, thought she, had she seen a man so stricken by love; for she could not suspect that to him it was as though a gulf had suddenly yawned at his feet.

With a swiftness which no one could have looked for from her heavy and bulky figure, Martina hastily returned to her husband, and even at the door exclaimed: "It is all right, all has gone well! At the sight of her he seemed thunderstruck! Mark my words: we shall have a wedding here by the Nile."

"My blessing on it," replied Justinus. "But, wedding or no wedding, all I care is that she should persuade that fine young fellow to give up his crazy scheme. I saw how even the brown rascals in the Arab's service bowed down before him; and he will persuade the general, if any one can, to do all in his power for Narses. He must not and shall not go! You impressed it strongly on Heliodora...."

"That she should keep him?" laughed the matron. "I tell you, she will nail him down if need be."

"So much the better," replied her husband. "But, wife, folks might say that it was not quite seemly in you to force them together. Properly speaking, you are as it were her female mentor, the motherly patroness."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Martina. "At home they invited no witnesses to look on at their meetings. The poor love-lorn souls must at any rate have a chance of speaking to each other and rejoicing that they have met once more. I will step in presently, and be the anxious, motherly friend. Tine, Tine! And if it does not end in a wedding, I will make a pilgrimage to St. Agatha, barefoot."

"And I with only one shoe!" the senator declared, "for, everything in reason--but the talk about Dora was at last beyond all bounds. It was no longer possible to have them both together under the same roof. And you yourself--no, seriously; go in to them."

"Directly, directly.--But first look out of this window once more. Oh, what a sun!--there, now it is too late. Only two minutes ago the whole heaven was of the hue of my red Syrian cloak; and now it is all dark!--The house and garden are beautiful, and everything is old and handsome; just what I should have expected in the home of the rich Mukaukas."

"And I too," replied Justinus. "But now, go. If they have come to an understanding, Dora may certainly congratulate herself."

"I should think so! But she need not be ashamed even of her villa, and they must spend every summer there, I will manage that. If that poor, dear fellow Narses does not escape with his life--for two years of slavery are a serious matter--then I should be able...."

"To alter your will? Not a bad idea; but there is no hurry for that; and now, you really must go."

"Yes, yes, in a minute. Surely I may have time to speak.--I, for my part, know of no one whom I would sooner put in the place of Narses...."

"Than Orion and Heliadora? Certainly, I have no objection; but now...."

"Well, perhaps it is wicked to think of a man who may still be alive as numbered with the dead.--At any rate the poor boy cannot go back to his legion...."

"On no consideration. But, Martina...."

"To-morrow morning Orion must urge our case on the Arab...."

"If he does not go away."

"Will you bet that she fails to keep him."

"I should be a fool for my pains," laughed Justinus. "Do you ever pay me when I win?--But now, joking apart, you must go and see what they are about."

And this time she obeyed. She would have won her bet; for Orion, who had remained unmoved by his sister-in-law's letter, by the warning voice of the faith of his childhood, by the faithful council of his honest servant Nilus, or by the senator's convincing arguments--had yielded to Heliadora's sweet blandishments.

How ardently had her loving heart flamed up, when she saw him so deeply agitated at the sight of her! With what touching devotion had she sunk into his arms; how humbly-half faint with sweet sorrow and sweeter ecstasy--had she fallen at his feet, and clasped his knees, and entreated him, with eyes full of tears of adoring rapture, not to leave to-day, to wait only till tomorrow, and then, if he would, to tread her in the dust. Now--now when she had just found him again after being worn out with pining and longing--to part now, to see him rush on an uncertain fate--it would kill her, it would certainly be her death! And when he still had tried to resist she had rushed into his arms, had stopped his lips with burning kisses, and whispered in his ear all the flattering words of love he once had held so dear.

Why had he never seriously tried to win her, why had he so soon forgotten her? Because she, who could assert her dignity firmly enough with others, had abandoned herself to him unresistingly after a few meetings, as if befooled by some magician's spell. The precious spoil so easily won had soon lost its value in his eyes. But to-day the fire which had died out blazed up again. Yes, this was the love he craved, he must have! To be loved with entire and utter devotion, with a heart that thought only of him and not of itself, that asked only for love in return for love, that did not fence itself round with caution and invoke the aid of others for protection against him. This lovely creature, all passion, who had taken upon herself to endure the contumely of society, and pain and grief for his sake, knowing too that he had abandoned her, and would never make her his wife before God and men--she indeed knew what it was to love; and he who was so often inclined to despair of himself felt his heart uplifted at the thought that he was so precious in her eyes, nay--he would own it--so idolized.

And how sweet, how purely womanly she was! Those imploring eyes--which he had grown quite sick of in Constantinople, for they were as full of pathetic entreaty when she merely begged him to hold her cloak for her as when she appealed to his heart of hearts not to leave her--that entrancing play of glances which had first bewitched him, came to him to-day as something new and worked the old spell.

In this moment of tender reunion he had promised her at any rate to consider whether he could not release himself from the pledge by which he was bound; but hardly had he spoken the words when the memory of Paula revived in his mind, and an inward voice cried out to him that she was a being of nobler mould than this yielding, weak woman, abject before him--that she symbolized his upward struggle, Heliadora his perdition.

At length he was able to tear himself from her embrace; and at the first step out of this intoxication into real life again he looked about like one roused from sleep, feeling as though it were by some mocking sport of the devil himself that Paula's room should have been the scene of this meeting and of his weakness.

An enquiry from Heliadora, as to the fate of the little white dog that she had given him as a remembrance, recalled to his mind that luckless emerald which was to have been his return offering or antidote. He evasively replied that, remembering her love of rare gems, he had sent her a remarkably fine stone about which he had a good deal to say; and she gave such childlike and charming expression to her delight and gratitude, and took such skilful advantage of his pleasure in her clinging tenderness, to convince him of the necessity for remaining at home, that he himself began to believe in it, and gave way. The more this conclusion suited his own wishes the easier it became to find reasons for it: old Rufinus really did not need him; and if he--Orion--had cause to be ashamed of his vacillation, on the other hand he could comfort himself by reflecting that it would be unkind and ungrateful to his good friends to leave them in the lurch just when he could be of use to them. One pair of protecting arms more or less could not matter to the nuns, while the captive Narses might very probably perish before he could be rescued without his interest with the Arab general.

It was high time to decide one way or the other.--Well, no; he ought not to go away to-day!

That was settled!

Rufinus must at once be informed of his change of purpose. To sit down and write at such a moment he felt was impossible: Nilus should go and speak in his name; and he knew how gladly and zealously he would perform such an errand.

Heliodora clapped her hands, and just as Martina knocked at the door the pair came out into the anteroom: She, radiant with happiness, and so graceful in her fashionable, costly, and well-chosen garb, so royal-looking in spite of her no more than middle height, that even in the capital she would have excited the admiration of the men and the envy of the women: He, content, but with a thoughtful smile on his lips.

He had not yet closed the door when in the anteroom he perceived two female figures, who had come in while Martina was knocking at her niece's door. These were Katharina and her waiting-maid.

Anubis had been brought to these rooms after his fall from the roof, and notwithstanding the preparations that had been made for illustrious guests Philippus could not be persuaded to allow his patient, for whom perfect quiet was indispensable, to be moved to the lower floor.

The listener who had been so severely punished had with him his mother, Katharina's old nurse; the water-wagtail, with her maid, had accompanied her to see the lad, for she was very anxious to assure herself whether her foster-brother, before his tumble, had succeeded in hearing anything; but the poor fellow was so weak and his pain so severe that she had not the heart to torment him with questions. However, her Samaritan's visit brought her some reward, for to meet Orion coming out of Paula's room with so beautiful and elegant a woman was a thing worth opening her eyes to see. She would have walked from home hither twice over only to see the clothes and jewels of this heaven sent stranger. Such a being rarely strayed to Memphis,--and might not this radiant and beautiful creature be "the other" after all, and not Paula? Might not Orion have been trifling with her rival as he had already trifled with her? They must have had a rapturous meeting in that room; every feature of the fair beauty's saint-like face betrayed the fact. Oh, that Orion! She would have liked to throttle him; and yet she was glad to think that there was another besides herself--and she so elegant and lovely--whom he had betrayed.

"He will stay!" Heliodora exclaimed as she came out of the room; and Martina held out her hand to the young man, with a fervent: "God bless you for that!"

She was delighted to see how happy her niece looked but the lively old woman's eyes were everywhere at once, and when she caught sight of Katharina who had stood still with curiosity, she turned to her with a friendly nod and said to Orion:

"Your sister? Or the little niece of whom you used to speak?"

Orion called Katharina and introduced her to his guests, and the girl explained what had brought her hither; in such a sweet and pathetic manner--for she was sincerely fond of her foster-brother and play-fellow--that she quite charmed Martina and Heliodora, and the younger woman expressed a hope that they might see her often. Indeed, when she was gone, Martina exclaimed: "A charming little thing! As fresh and bright as a newly-fledged bird, so brisk and pretty too--and how nicely she prattles!"

"And the richest heiress in Memphis into the bargain," added Orion. But, noticing that on this Heliodora cast down her eyes with a troubled expression, he went on with a laugh: "Our mothers destined us to marry each other, but we are too ill-matched in size, and not exactly made for a pair in other ways."

Then, taking leave of them, he went to Nilus and informed him of his decision. His request that the treasurer would make his excuses to Rufinus, carry his greetings to Thomas' daughter, and make the most of his reasons for remaining behind, sent the good man almost beside himself for joy; and he so far forgot his modest reserve as to embrace Orion as a son.

The young host sat with his visitors till nearly midnight: and when, on the following morning, Martina first greeted her niece--who looked peacefully happy though somewhat tired--she was able to tell her that the two men had already gone across the Nile, and, she hoped, settled everything with the Arab governor. Great was her disappointment when presently Justinus and Orion came back to say that Amru, instead of returning to Fostat from the review at Heliopolis, had gone straight to Alexandria. He had engagements there for a few days, and would then start for Medina.

The senator saw nothing for it but to follow him up, and Orion volunteered to accompany him.

A faint attempt on Heliodora's part to detain him met with a decisive, nay, stern refusal. This journey was indeed sheer flight from his own weakness and from the beautiful creature who could never be anything to him.

Early in the day he had found time to write to Paula; but he had cast aside more than one unfinished letter before he could find the right words. He told her that he loved her and her alone; and as his stylus marked the wax he felt, with horror of himself, that in fact his heart was Paula's, and his determination ripened to put an end once for all to his connection with Heliodora, and not allow himself to see Paula again till he had forever cut the tie that bound him to the young widow.

The two women went out to see the travellers start, and as they returned to the house, hanging their heads like defeated warriors, in the vestibule they met Katharina and her maid. Martina wanted to detain the little girl, and to

persuade her to go up to their rooms with them; but Katharina refused, and appeared to be in a great hurry. She had just come from seeing Anubis, who was in less pain to-day, and who had done his best to tell her what he had overheard. That the flight was to be northwards he was certain; but he had either misunderstood or forgotten the name of the place whither the sisters were bound.

His mother and the nurse were dismissed from the room, and then the water-wagtail in her gratitude had bent over him, had raised his pretty face a little, and had given him two such sweet kisses that the poor boy had been quite uneasy. But, when he was alone with his mother once more, he had felt happier and happier, and the remembrance of the transient rapture he had known had alleviated the pain he was suffering on Katharina's account.

Katharina, meanwhile, did not go home at once to her mother; on the contrary, she went straight off to the Bishop of Memphis, to whom she divulged all she had learnt with regard to the inhabitants of the convent and the intended rescue. The gentle Plotinus even had been roused to great wrath, and no sooner had she left him than he set out for Fostat to invoke the help of Amru, and--finding him absent--of his Vakeel to enable him to pursue the fugitive Melchite sisters.

When the water-wagtail was at home again and alone in her room, she said to herself, with calm satisfaction, that she had now contrived something which would spoil several days for Orion and for Paula, and that might prove even fatal, so far as she was concerned.

CHAPTER VIII.

Nilus had performed his errand well, and Rufinus was forced to admit that Orion had done his part and had planned the enterprise with so much care and unselfishness that his personal assistance could be dispensed with. Under these circumstances he scarcely owed the young man a grudge for placing himself at the service of his Byzantine friends; still, his not coming to the house disturbed and vexed him, less on his own account, or that of the good cause, than for Paula's sake, for her feelings towards Orion had remained no secret to him or his wife.

Dame Joanna, indeed, felt the young man's conduct more keenly than Rufinus; she would have been glad to withhold her husband from the enterprise, whose dangers now appeared to her frightened soul tenfold greater than they were. But she knew that the Nile would flow backwards before she could dissuade him from keeping his promise to the abbess, so she forced herself to preserve at any rate outward composure.

Before Paula, Rufinus declared that Orion was fully justified and he loudly praised the young man's liberality in providing the Nile-boat and the vessel for the sea-voyage, and such admirable substitutes for himself. Pulcheria was delighted with her father's undertaking; she only longed to go with him and help him to save her dear nuns. The ship-builder had brought with him, besides his sons, three other Greeks of the orthodox confession, shipwrights like himself, who were out of work in consequence of the low ebb of the Nile, which had greatly restricted the navigation. Hence they were glad to put a hand to such a good work, especially as it would be profitable, too, for Orion had provided the old man with ample funds.

As the evening grew cooler after sundown Paula had got better. She did not, indeed, know what to think of Orion's refusal to start. First she was grieved, then she rejoiced; for it certainly preserved him from great perils. In the early days after his return from Constantinople she had heard his praise of the senator's kindness and hospitality, in which the Mukaukas, who had pleasant memories of the capital, heartily joined. He must, of course, be glad to be able to assist those friends, of all others; and Nilus, who was respectfully devoted to her, had greeted her from Orion with peculiar warmth. He would come to-morrow, no doubt; and the oftener she repeated to herself his assertion that he had never betrayed affectionate trust, the more earnestly she felt prompted, in spite of the abbess' counsel, to abandon all hesitancy, to follow the impulse of her heart, and to be his at once in full and happy confidence.

The waning moon had not yet risen, and the night was very dark when the nuns set forth. The boat was too large to come close to the shore in the present low state of the river, and the sisters, disguised as peasant-women, had to be carried on board one by one from the convent garden. Last of all the abbess was to be lifted over the shallow water, and the old ship-builder held himself in readiness to perform this service. Joanna, Pulcheria, Perpetua, and Eudoxia, who was also zealously orthodox, were standing round as she gave Paula a parting kiss and whispered: "God bless thee, child!--All now depends on you, and you must be doubly careful to abide by your promise."

"I owe him, in the first place, friendly trust," was Paula's whispered reply, and the abbess answered: "But you owe yourself firmness and caution." Rufinus was the last; his wife and daughter clung around him still.

"Take example from that poor girl," cried the old man, clasping his wife in his arms. "As sure as man is the standard of all things, all must go well with me this time if everlasting Love is not napping. Till we meet again, best of good women!--And, if ill befalls your stupid old husband, always remember that he brought it upon himself in trying to save a quarter of a hundred innocent women from the worst misfortunes. At any rate I shall fall on the road I myself have chosen.--But why has Philippus not come to take leave of me?"

Dame Joanna burst into tears: "That-that is so hard too! What has come over him that he has deserted us, and just now of all times? Ah, husband! If you love me, take Gibbus with you on the voyage."

"Yes, master, take me," the hunchbacked gardener interposed. "The Nile will be rising again by the time we come back, and till then the flowers can die without my help. I dreamt last night that you picked a rose from the middle of my Bump. It stuck up there like the knob on the lid of a pot. There is some meaning in it and, if you leave me at home, what is the good of the rose--that is to say what good will you get out of me?"

"Well then, carry your strange flower-bed on board," said the old man laughing. "Now, are you satisfied Joanna?"

Once more he embraced her and Pulcheria and, as a tear from his wife's eyes dropped on his hand, he whispered in her ear: "You have been the rose of my life; and without you Eden--Paradise itself can have no joys."

The boat pushed out into the middle of the stream and was soon hidden by the darkness from the eyes of the women on the bank.

The convent bells were soon heard tolling after the fugitives: Paula and Pulcheria were pulling them. There was not a breath of air; not enough even to fill the small sail of the seaward-bound boat; but the rowers pulled with all their might and the vessel glided northward. The captain stood at the prow with his pole; sounding the current: his brother, no less skilled, took the helm.--The shallowness of the water made navigation very difficult, and those who knew the river best might easily run aground on unexpected shoals or newly-formed mud-drifts. The moon had scarcely risen when the

boat was stranded at a short distance below Fostat, and the men had to go overboard to push it off to an accompaniment of loud singing which, as it were, welded their individual wills and efforts into one. Thus it was floated off again; but such delays were not unfrequent till they reached Letopolis, where the Nile forks, and where they hoped to steal past the toll-takers unobserved. Almost against their expectation, the large boat slipped through under the heavy mist which rises from the waters before sunrise, and the captain and crew, steering down the Phatmetic branch of the river with renewed spirit, ascribed their success to the intercession of the pious sisters.

By daylight it was easier to avoid the sand-banks; but how narrow was the water-way-at this season usually overflowing! The beds of papyrus on the banks now grew partly on dry land, and their rank green had faded to straw-color. The shifting ooze of the shore had hardened to stone, and the light west wind, which now rose and allowed of their hoisting the sail, swept clouds of white dust before it. In many cases the soil was deeply fissured and wide cracks ran across the black surface, yawning to heaven for water like thirsty throats. The water-wheels stood idle, far away from the stream, and the fields they were wont to irrigate looked like the threshing floors on which the crops they bore should be threshed out. The villages and palm-groves were shrouded in shimmering mist, quivering heat, and dazzling yellow light; and the passer-by on the raised dykes of the shore bent his head as he dragged his weary feet through the deep dust.

The sun blazed pitilessly in the cloudless sky, down on land and river, and on the fugitive nuns who had spread their white head-cloths above them for an awning and sat in dull lethargy, awaiting what might be before them.

The water-jar passed from hand to hand; but the more they drank the more acute was their discomfort, and their longing for some other refreshment. At meal time the dishes were returned to the tiny cabin almost untouched. The abbess and Rufinus tried to speak comfort to them; but in the afternoon the superior herself was overpowered by the heat, and the air in the little cabin, to which she retired, was even less tolerable stuffy than on deck.

Thus passed a long day of torment, the hottest that even the men could remember; and they on the whole suffered least from it, though they toiled at the oar without ceasing and with wonderful endurance.

At length evening fell after those fearful midday hours; and as a cool breeze rose shortly before sunset to fan their moist brows, the hapless victims awoke to new energies. Their immediate torment had so crushed them that, incapable of anticipating the future, they had ceased either to fear or to hope; but now they could rejoice in thinking of the start they had gained over their pursuers. They were hungry and enjoyed their evening meal; the abbess made friends with the worthy ship-wright, and began an eager conversation with Rufinus as to Paula and Orion: Her wish that the young man should spend a time of probation did not at all please Rufinus; with such a wife as Paula, he could not fail to be at all times the noble fellow which his old friend held him to be in spite of his having remained at home.

The hump-backed gardener made the younger nuns merry with his jests, and after supper they all united in prayer.

Even the oarsmen had found new vigor and new life; and it was well that few of the Greek sisters understood Egyptian, for the more jovial of them started a song in praise of the charms of the maids they loved, which was not composed for women's ears.

The nuns chatted of those they had left behind, and many a one spoke of a happy meeting at home once more; but an elderly nun put a stop to this, saying that it was a sin to anticipate the ways of God's mercy, or, when His help was still so sorely needed, to speak as though He had already bestowed it. They could only tremble and pray, for they knew from experience that a threatening disaster never turned to a good end unless it had been expected with real dread.

Another one then began to speculate as to whether their pursuers could overtake them on foot or on horseback, and as it seemed only too probable that they could, their hearts sank again with anxiety. Ere long, however, the moon rose; the objects that loomed on the banks and were mirrored in the stream, were again clearly visible and lost their terrors.

The lower down they sailed, the denser were the thickets of papyrus on the shore. Thousands of birds were roosting there, but they were all asleep; a "dark ness that might be felt" brooded over the silent land scape. The image of the moon floated on the dark water, like a gigantic lotos-flower below the smaller, fragrant lotos-blossoms that it out-did in sheeny whiteness; the boat left a bright wake in its track, and every stroke of the oar broke the blackness of the water, which reflected the light in every drop. The moonlight played on the delicate tufts that crowned the slender papyrus-stems, filmy mist, like diaphanous brocade of violet and silver, veiled the trees; and owls that shun the day, flew from one branch to another on noiseless, rhythmic wings.

The magic of the night fell on the souls of the nuns; they ceased prattling; but when Sister Martha, the nightingale of the sisterhood, began to sing a hymn the others followed her example. The sailors' songs were hushed, and the psalms of the virgin sisters, imploring the protection of the Almighty, seemed to float round the gliding boat as softly as the light of the circling moon. For hours--and with increased zeal as the comet rose in the sky--they gave themselves up to the soothing and encouraging pleasure of singing; but one by one the voices died away and their peaceful hymn was borne down the river to the sea, by degrees more low, more weary, more dreamlike.

They sat looking in their laps, gazing in rapture up to heaven, or at the dazzling ripples and the lotos flowers on the surface. No one thought of the shore, not even the men, who had been lulled to sleep or daydreams by the nuns'

singing. The pilot's eyes were riveted on the channel--and yet, as morning drew near, from time to time there was a twinkle, a flash behind the reed-beds on the eastern bank, and now and then there was a rustling and clatter there. Was it a jackal that had plunged into the dense growth to surprise a brood of water-fowl; was it a hyena trampling through the thicket?

The flashing, the rustling, the dull footfall on parched earth followed the barge all through the night like a sinister, lurid, and muttering shadow.

Suddenly the captain started and gazed eastwards.--What was that?

There was a herd of cattle feeding in a field beyond the reeds--two bulls perhaps were sharpening their horns. The river was so low, and the banks rose so high, that it was impossible to see over them. But at this moment a shrill voice spoke his name, and then the hunchback whispered in his ear:

"There--over there--it is glittering again.--I will bite off my own nose if that is not--there, again. Merciful God! I am not mistaken. Harness--and there, that is the neighing of a horse; I know the sound. The east is growing grey. By all the saints, we are pursued!"

The captain looked eastwards with every sense alert, and after a few minutes silence he said decidedly "Yes."

"Like a flight of quail for whom the fowler spreads his net," sighed the gardener; but the boatman impatiently signed to him to be quiet, and gazed cautiously on every side. Then he desired Gibbus to wake Rufinus and the shipwrights, and to hide all the nuns in the cabin.

"They will be packed as close as the dates sent to Rome in boxes," muttered the gardener, as he went to call Rufinus. "Poor souls, their saints may save them from suffocation; and as for me, on my faith, if it were not that Dame Joanna was the very best creature on two legs, and if I had not promised her to stick to the master, I would jump into the water and try the hospitality of the flamingoes and storks in the reeds! We must learn to condescend!"

While he was fulfilling his errand, the captain was exchanging a few words with his brother at the helm. There was no bridge near, and that was well. If the horsemen were indeed in pursuit of them, they must ride through the water to reach them; and scarcely three stadia lower down, the river grew wider and ran through a marshy tract of country; the only channel was near the western bank, and horsemen attempting to get to it ran the risk of foundering in the mud. If the boat could but get as far as that reach, much would be gained.

The captain urged the men to put forth all their strength, and very soon the boat was flying along under the western shore, and divided by an oozy flat from the eastern bank. Day was breaking, and the sky was tinged red as with blood--a sinister omen that this morning was destined to witness bitter strife and gaping wounds.

The seed sown by Katharina was beginning to grow. At the bishop's request the Vêkeel had despatched a troop of horse in pursuit of the nuns, with orders to bring the fugitives back to Memphis and take their escort prisoners. As the boat had slipped by the toll watch unperceived, the Arabs had been obliged to divide, so as to follow down each arm of the Nile. Twelve horsemen had been told off to pursue the Phasmetic branch; for by every calculation these must suffice for the capture of a score or so of nuns, and a handful of sailors would scarcely dare to attempt to defend themselves. The Vêkeel had heard nothing of the addition to the party of the ship-master and his sons.

The pursuers had set out at noon of the previous day, and had overtaken the vessel about two hours before daylight. But their leader thought it well to postpone the attack till after sunrise, lest any of the fugitives should escape. He and his men were all Arabs, and though well acquainted with the course of that branch of the river which they were to follow, they were not familiar with its peculiarities.

As soon as the morning star was invisible, the Moslems performed their devotions, and then rushed out of the papyrus-beds. Their leader, making a speaking trumpet of his hand, shouted to the boat his orders to stop. He was commissioned by the governor to bring it back to Fostat. And the fugitives seemed disposed to obey, for the boat lay to. The captain had recognized the speaker as the captain of the watch from Fostat, an inexorable man; and now, for the first time, he clearly understood the deadly peril of the enterprise. He was accustomed, no doubt, to evade the commands of his superiors, but would no more have defied them than have confronted Fate; and he at once declared that resistance was madness, and that there was no alternative but to yield. Rufinus, however, vehemently denied this; he pointed out to him that the same punishment awaited him, whether he laid down his arms or defended himself, and the old ship-wright eagerly exclaimed:

"We built this boat, and I know you of old, Setnau; You will not turn Judas--and, if you do, you know that Christian blood will be shed on this deck before we can show our teeth to those Infidels."

The captain, with all the extravagant excitability of his southern blood, beat his forehead and his breast, bemoaned himself as a betrayed and ruined man, and bewailed his wife and children. Rufinus, however, put an end to his ravings. He had consulted with the abbess, and he put it strongly to the unhappy man that he could, in any case, hope for no mercy from the unbelievers; while, on Christian ground, he would easily find a safe and comfortable refuge for himself and his family. The abbess would undertake to give them all a passage on board the ship that was awaiting her, and to set them on shore wherever he might choose.

Setnau thought of a brother living in Cyprus; still, for him it meant sacrificing his house and garden at Doomiati, where, at this very hour, fifty date-palms were ripening their fruit; it meant leaving the fine new Nile-boat by which he and his family got their living; and as he represented this to the old man, bitter tears rolled down his brown cheeks. Rufinus explained to him that, if he should succeed in saving the sisters, he might certainly claim some indemnification. He might even calculate the value of his property, and not only would he have the equivalent paid to him out of the convent treasure, now on board in heavy coffers, but a handsome gift into the bargain.

Setnau exchanged a meaning glance with his brother, who was a single man, and when it was also agreed that he, too, might embark on the sea-voyage he shook hands with Rufinus on the bargain. Then, giving himself a shake, as if he had thrown off something that cramped him, and sticking his leather cap knowingly on one side of his shaven head, he drew himself up to his full height and scornfully shouted back to the Arab—who had before now treated him and other Egyptian natives with insolent haughtiness—that if he wanted anything of him he might come and fetch it.

The Moslem's patience was long since exhausted, and at this challenge he signed to his followers and sprang first into the river; but the foremost horses soon sank so deep in the ooze that further advance was evidently impossible, and the signal to return was perforce given. In this manoeuvre a refractory horse lost his footing, and his rider was choked in the mud.

On this, the men in the boat could see the foe holding council with lively gesticulations, and the captain expressed his fears lest they should give up all hope of capturing the boat, and ride forward to Doomiati to combine with the Arab garrison to cut off their further flight. But he had not reckoned on the warlike spirit of these men, who had overcome far greater difficulties in twenty fights ere this. They were determined to seize the boat, to take its freight prisoners, and have them duly punished.

Six horsemen, among them the leader of the party, were now seen to dismount; they tied their horses up, and then proceeded to fell three tall palms with their battle-axes; the other five went off southwards. These, no doubt, were to ride round the morass, and ford the river at a favorable spot so as to attack the vessel from the west, while the others tried to reach it from the east with the aid of the palm-trunks.

On the right, or eastern shore, where the Arabs were constructing the raft, spread solid ground-fields through which lay the road to Doomiati; on the other shore, near which the boat was lying, the bog extended for a long way. An interminable jungle of papyrus, sedge, and reeds, burnt yellow by the heat of the sun and the extraordinary drought, covered almost the whole of this parched and baked wilderness; and, when a stiff morning breeze rose from the northeast, the captain was inspired with a happy thought. The five men who had ridden forward would have to force their way through the mass of scorched and dried up vegetation. If the Christians could but set fire to it, on the further side of a canal which must hinder their making a wide sweep to the north, the wind would carry it towards the enemy; and, they would be fortunate if it did not stifle them or compel them to jump into the river, where, when the flames reached the morass, they must inevitably perish.

As soon as the helmsman's keen eyes had made sure, from the mast-head, that the Arabs had forded the river at a point to the south, they set fire to several places and it roared and flared up immediately. The wind swept it southwards, and with it clouds of pale grey smoke through which the rising sun shot shafts of light. The flames writhed and darted over the baked earth like gigantic yellow and orange lizards, here shooting upwards, there creeping low. Almost colorless in the ardent daylight, they greedily consumed everything they approached, and white ashes marked their track. Their breath added to the heat of the advancing day; and though the smoke was borne southwards by the wind, a few cloudlets came over to the boat, choking the sisters and their deliverers.

A large vessel now came towards them from Doomiati and found the narrow channel barred by the other one. The captain was related to Setnau, and when Setnau shouted to him that they were engaged in a struggle with Arab robbers, his friend followed his advice, turned the boat's head with considerable difficulty, and cast anchor at the nearest village to warn other vessels southward bound not to get themselves involved in so perilous an adventure. Any that were coming north would be checked by the fire and smoke.

The six horsemen left on the eastern shore beheld the spreading blaze with rage and dismay; however, they had by this time bound the palm-trunks together, and were preparing by their aid to inflict condign punishment on the refractory Christians. These, meanwhile, had not been idle. Every man on board was armed, and one of the ship-wrights was sent on shore with a sailor, to steal through the reeds, ford the river at a point lower down and, as soon as the Arabs put out to the attack, to slaughter their horses, or—if one of them should be left to go forward on the road to Doomiati—to drag him from his steed.

The six men now laid hold of the slightly-constructed float, on which they placed their bows and quivers; they pushed it before them, and it supported them above the shallow water, while their feet only just touched the oozy bottom. They were all thorough soldiers, true sons of the desert and of their race—men whom nature seemed to have conceived as a counterpart to the eagle, the master-piece of the winged creation. Keen-eyed, strongly-knit though small-boned, bereft of every fibre of superfluous flesh on their sinewy limbs, with bold brown faces and sharply-cut features, suggesting the king of birds not merely by the aquiline nose, they had also the eagle's courage, thirst for

blood, and greed of victory.

Each held on to the raft by one lean, wiry arm, carrying on the other the round bucklers on which the arrows that came whistling from the boat, fell and stuck as soon as they were within shot. They ground their white teeth with fury and nothing within ken escaped their bright hawk's eyes. They had come to fight, even if the boat had been defended by fifty Egyptian soldiers instead of carrying a score or so of sailors and artisans. Their brave hearts felt safe under their shirts of mail, and their ready, fertile brains under their brazen helmets; and they marked the dull rattle of the arrows against their metal shields with elation and contempt. To deal death was the wish of their souls; to meet it caused them no dread; for their glowing fancy painted an open Paradise where beautiful women awaited them open-armed, and brimming goblets promised to satisfy every desire.

Their keen ears heard their captain's whispered commands; when they reached the ship's side, one caught hold of the sill of the cabin window, their leader, as quick as thought, sprang on to his shoulders, and from thence on to the deck, thrusting his lance through the body of a sailor who tried to stop him with his axe. A second Arab was close at his heels; two gleaming scimitars flashed in the sun, the shrill, guttural, savage war-cry of the Moslems rent the air, and the captain fell, the first victim to their blood-thirsty fury, with a deep cut across the face and forehead; in a moment, however, a heavy spar sang through the air down on the head of the Moslem leader and laid him low. The helmsman, the brother of the fallen pilot, had wielded it with the might of the avenger.

A fearful din, increased by the shrieks and wailing of the nuns, now filled the vessel. The second Arab dealt death on all sides with the courage and strength of desperation, and three of his fellows managed to climb up the boat's side; but the last man was pushed back into the water. By this time two of the shipwrights and five sailors had fallen. Rufinus was kneeling by the captain, who was crying feebly for help, bleeding profusely, though not mortally wounded. Setnau had spoken with much anxiety of his wife and children, and Rufinus, hoping to save his life for their sakes, was binding up the wounds, which were wide and deep, when suddenly a sabre stroke came down on the back of his head and neck, and a dark stream of blood rushed forth. But he, too, was soon avenged: the old shipwright hewed down his foe with his heavy axe. On the eastern shore, meanwhile, the men charged to kill the Arabs' horses were doing their work, so as to prevent any who might escape from returning to Fostat, or riding forward to Doormat and reporting what had occurred.

On board silence now prevailed. All five Arabs were stretched on the deck, and the insatiate boatmen were dealing a finishing stroke to those who were only wounded. A sailor, who had taken refuge up a mast, could see how the other five horsemen had plunged into the bog to avoid the fire and had disappeared beneath the waters; so that none of the Moslems had escaped alive--not even that one which Fate and romance love to save as a bearer of the disastrous tidings.

By degrees the nuns ventured out on deck again.

Those who were skilled in tending the wounded gathered round them, and opened their medicine cases; as they proceeded on their voyage, under the guidance of the steersman, they had their hands full of work and the zeal they gave to it mitigated the torment of the heat.

The bodies of the five Moslems and eight Christians--among these, two of the Greek ship-wrights--were laid on the shore in groups apart, in the neighborhood of a village; in the hand of one of them the abbess placed a tablet with this inscription:

"These eight Christians met their death bravely fighting to defend a party of pious and persecuted believers. Pray for them and bury them as well as those who, in obedience to their duty and their commander, took their lives."

Rufinus, lying with his head on the gardener's knee, and sheltered from the sun under the abbess' umbrella, presently recovered his senses; looking about him he said to himself in a low voice, as he saw the captain lying by his side:

"I, too, had a wife and a dear child at home, and yet--Ah! how this aches! We may well do all we can to soothe such pain. The only reality here below is not pleasure, it is pain, vulgar, physical pain; and though my head burns and aches more than enough.--Water, a drink of water.--How comfortable I could be at this moment with my Joanna, in our shady house.--But yet, but yet--we must heal or save, it is all the same, any who need it.--A drink--wine and water, if it is to be had, worthy Mother!"

The abbess had it at hand; as she put the cup to his lips she spoke her warm and effusive thanks, and many words of comfort; then she asked him what she could do for him and his, when they should be in safety.

"Love them truly," he said gently. "Pul will certainly never be quite happy till she is in a convent. But she must not leave her mother--she must stay with her; Joanna-Joanna...."

He repeated the name several times as if the sound pleased his ear and heart. Then he shuddered again and again, and muttered to himself: "Brrr!--a cold shiver runs all over me--it is of no use!--The cut in my shoulder.--It is my head that hurts worst, but the other--it is bad luck that it should have fallen on the left side. And yet, no; it is best so; for if he--if it had damaged my right shoulder I could not write, and I must--I must--before it is too late. A tablet and stylus; quick, quick! And when I have written, good mother, close the tablet and seal it--close and tight. Promise! Only one

person may read it, he to whom it must go.--Gibbus, do you hear, Gibbus?--It is for Philippus the leech. Take it to him.--Your dream about a rose on your hump, if I read rightly, means that peace and joy in Heaven blossom from our misery on earth.--Yes, to Philippus. And listen my old school friend Christodorus, a leech too, lives at Doornat. Take my body to him--mind me now? He is to pack it with sand which will preserve it, and have it buried by the side of my mother at Alexandria. Joanna and the child--they can come and visit me there. I have not much to leave; whatever that may cost...."

"That is my affair, or the convent's," cried the abbess.

"Matters are not so bad as that," said the old man smiling. "I can pay for my own share of the business; your revenue belongs to the poor, noble Mother.--You will find more than enough in this wallet, good Gibbus. But now, quick, make haste--the tablets."

When he had one in his hand, and a stylus for writing with, he thought for some time, and then wrote with trembling fingers, though exerting all his strength. How acutely he was suffering could be seen in his drawn mouth and sad eyes, but he would not allow himself to be interrupted, often as the abbess and the gardener entreated him to lay aside the stylus. At last, with a deep sigh of relief, he closed the tablets, handed them to the abbess, and said:

"There! Close it fast.--To Philippus the physician; into his own hand: You hear, Gibbus?"

Here he fainted; but after they had bathed his forehead and wounds he came to himself, and softly murmured: "I was dreaming of Joanna and the poor child. They brought me a comic mask. What can that mean? That I have been a fool all my life for thinking of other folks' troubles and forgetting myself and my own family? No, no, no! As surely as man is the standard of all things--if it were so, then, then folly would be truth and right.--I, I--my desire--the aim to which my life was devoted...."

He paused; then he suddenly raised himself, looked up with a bright light in his eyes, and cried aloud with joy: "O Thou, most merciful Saviour! Yes, yes--I see it all now. I thank thee--All that I strove for and lived for, Thou, my Redeemer who art Love itself--Ah how good, how comforting to think of that!--It is for this that Thou grantest me to die!"

Again he lost consciousness; his head grew very hot, his breath came hoarsely and his parched lips, though frequently moistened by careful hands, could only murmur the names of those he loved best, and among them that of Paula.

At about five hours after noon he fell back on the hunchback's knees; he had ceased to suffer. A happy smile lighted up his features, and in death the old man's calm face looked like that of a child.

The gardener felt as though he had lost his own father, and his lively tongue remained speechless till he entered Doornat with the rescued sisters, and proceeded to carry out his master's last orders. The abbess' ship took the wounded captain Setnau on board, with his wife, his children, his brother the steersman, and the surviving shipwrights.

At the very hour when Rufinus closed his eyes, the town-watch of Memphis, led by Bishop Plotinus, appeared to claim the Melchite convent of St. Cecilia, and all the possessions of the sisterhood, in the name of the patriarch and the Jacobite church. Next morning the bishop set out for Upper Egypt to make his report to the prelate.

CHAPTER IX.

Philippus started up from the divan on which he had been reclining at breakfast with his old friend. Before Horapollo was a half-empty plate; he had swallowed his meal less rapidly than his companion, and looked disapprovingly at the leech, who drank off his wine and water as he stood, whereas he generally would sit and enjoy it as he talked to the old man of matters light or grave. To the elder this was always the pleasantest hour of the day; but now Philippus would hardly allow himself more than just time enough to eat, even at their principal evening meal.

Indeed, not he alone, but every physician in the city, had as much as he could do with the utmost exertion. Nearly three weeks had elapsed since the attack on the nuns, and the fearful heat had still gone on in creasing. The river, instead of rising had sunk lower and lower; the carrier-pigeons from Ethiopia, looked for day by day with growing anxiety and excitement, brought no news of a rising stream even in the upper Nile, and the shallow, stagnant and evil-smelling waters by the banks began to be injurious, nay, fatal, to the health of the whole population.

Close to the shore, especially, the water had a reddish tinge, and the usually sweet, pure fluid in the canals was full of strange vegetable growths and other foreign bodies putrid and undrinkable. The common people usually shirked the trouble of filtering it, and it was among them that the greater number died of a mortal and infectious pestilence, till then unknown. The number of victims swelled daily, and the approach of the comet kept pace with the growing misery of the town. Every one connected it with the intense heat of the season, with the delay in the inundation, and the appearance of the sickness; and the leech and his friend often argued about these matters, for Philippus would not admit that the meteor had any influence on human affairs, while Horapollo believed that it had, and supported his view by a long series of examples.

His antagonist would not accept them and asked for arguments; at the same time he, like every one else, felt the influence of a vague dread of some imminent and terrible disaster hanging over the earth and humanity at large.

And, just as every heart in Memphis felt oppressed by such forebodings, and by the weight of a calamity, which indeed no longer threatened them but had actually come upon them, so the roads, the gardens, the palms and sycamores by the way-side were covered by thick layers of dingy, choking dust. The hedges of tamarisk and shrubs looked like decaying walls of colorless, unburnt mud-bricks; even in the high-roads the wayfarer walked in the midst of dense white clouds raised by his feet, and if a chariot, or a horseman galloped down the scorching street, fine, grey sand at once filled the air, compelling the foot-passengers to shut their eyes and lips.

The town was so silent, so empty, so deserted! No one came out of doors unless under pressure of business or piety. Every house was a furnace, and even a bath brought no refreshment, for the water had long since ceased to be cold. A disease had also attacked the ripening dates as they hung; they dropped off in thousands from the heavy clusters under the beautiful bending crown of leaves; and now for two days hundreds of dead fish had been left on the banks. Even the scaly natives of the river were plague-stricken; and the physician explained to his friend that this brought the inhabitants a fresh danger; for who could clear the shores of the dead fish?--And, in such heat, how soon they would become putrid!

The old man did not conceal from himself that it was hard, cruelly hard, for the physician to follow his calling conscientiously at such a time; but he knew his friend; he had seen him during months of pestilence two years since--always brisk, decisive and gay, indeed inspired to greater effort by the greater demands on him. What had so completely altered him, had poisoned and vexed his soul as with a malignant spell? It was not the almost superhuman sacrifices required by his duties;--it came of the unfortunate infatuation of his heart, of which he could not rid himself.

Philippus had kept his promise. He went every day to the house of Rufinus, and every day he saw Paula; but, as a murdered body bleeds afresh in the presence of the assassin, so every day the old pain revived when he was forced to meet her and speak with her. The only cure for this particular sufferer was to remove the cause of his pain: that is to say, to take Paula away out of his path; and this the old man made his care and duty.

Little Mary and the other patients under Rufinus' roof were on the way to recovery; still there was much to cast gloomy shadows over this happy termination. Joanna and Pulcheria were very anxious as to the fate of Rufinus. No news had been received of him or of the sisters, and Philippus was the vessel into which the forsaken wife and Pulcheria--who looked up to him as to a kind, faithful, and all-powerful protecting spirit-poured all their sorrows, cares, and fears. Their forebodings were aggravated by the fact that three times Arab officials had come to the house to enquire about the master and his continued absence. All that the women told them was written down, and Dame Joanna, whose lips had never yet uttered a lie, had found herself forced to give a false clue by saying that her husband had gone to Alexandria on business, and might perhaps have to proceed to Syria.--What could these enquiries forebode? Did they not indicate that Rufinus' complicity in the rescue of the nuns was known at Fostat?

The authorities there were, in fact, better informed than the women could suspect. But they kept their knowledge a secret, for it would never do to let the oppressed people know that a handful of Egyptians had succeeded in defeating a party of Arab soldiers; so the Memphites heard no more than a dark rumor of what had occurred.

Philippus had known nothing of the old man's purpose till he had gone too far to be dissuaded; and it was misery to him now to reflect that his dear old friend, and his whole household, might come to ruin for the sake of the sisterhood who were nothing to them; for he had received private information that there had been a skirmish between the Moslems and the deliverers of the nuns, which had cost the lives of several combatants on both sides.

And Paula! If only he could have seen her happy--But she was pale; and that which robbed the young girl--healthy as she was in mind and body--of her proud, frank, independent bearing was not the heat, which tormented all creation, but a secret, devouring sorrow; and this sorrow was the work of one alone--of him on whom she had set her heart, and who made, ah! what a return, for the royal gift of her love.

Philippus had frequent business at the governor's residence, and a fortnight since he had plainly perceived what it was that had brought Neforis into this strange state. She was taking the opium that her husband had had, taking it in excessive quantities; and she could easily procure more through some other physician. However, her piteous prayer that Philippus would not abandon her to her fate had prevailed to induce him to continue to see her, in the hope of possibly restricting her use of the drug.

The senator's wife, Martina, also required his visits to the palace. She was not actually ill, but she suffered cruelly from the heat, and she had always been wont to see her worthy old house-physician every day, to hear all the latest gossip, and complain of her little ailments when anything went wrong with her usually sound health. Philippus was indeed too much overburdened to chatter, but his professional advice was good and helped her to endure the fires of this pitiless sky. She liked this incisive, shrewd, plain-spoken man--often indeed sharp and abrupt in his freedom--and he appreciated her bright, natural ways. Now and then Martina even succeeded in winning a smile from "Hermes Trismegistus," who was "generally as solemn as though there was no such thing on earth as a jest," and in spurring him to a rejoinder which showed that this dolorous being had a particularly keen and ready wit.

Heliodora attracted him but little. There was, to be sure, an unmistakable likeness in her "imploring eyes" to those of Pulcheria; but the girl's spoke fervent yearning for the grace and love of God, while the widow's expressed an eager desire for the admiration of the men she preferred. She was a graceful creature beyond all question, but such softness, which never even attempted to assert a purpose or an opinion, did not commend itself to his determined nature; it annoyed him, when he had contradicted her, to hear her repeat his last statement and take his side, as if she were ashamed of her own silliness. Her society, indeed, did not seem to satisfy the clever older woman, who at home, was accustomed to a succession of visitors, and to whom the word "evening" was synonymous with lively conversation and a large gathering. She spoke of the leech's visits as the oasis in the Egyptian desert, and little Katharina even she regarded as a Godsend.

The water-wagtail was her daily visitant, and the girl's gay and often spiteful gossip helped to beguile her during this terrific heat. Katharina's mother made no difficulties; for Heliodora had gone to see her in all her magnificence, and had offered her and her daughter hospitality, some day, at Constantinople. They were very likely going thither; at any rate they would not remain in Memphis, and then it would be a piece of good fortune to be introduced to the society of the capital by such people as their new acquaintances.

Martina thus heard a great deal about Paula; and though it was all adverse and colored to her prejudice she would have liked to see the daughter of the great and famous Thomas whom she had known; besides, after all she had heard, she could fear nothing from Paula for her niece: uncommonly handsome, but haughty, repellent, unamiable, and--like Heliodora herself--of the orthodox sect.--What could tempt "great Sesostriis" to give her the preference?

Katharina herself proposed to Martina to make them acquainted; but nothing would have induced Dame Martina to go out of her rooms, protected to the utmost from the torrid sunshine, so she left it to Heliodora to pay the visit and give her a report of the hero's daughter. Heliodora had devoted herself heart and soul to the little heiress, and humored her on many points.

This was carried out. Katharina actually had the audacity to bring the rivals together, even after she had reported to each all she knew of Orion's position with regard to the other. It was exquisite sport; still, in one respect it did not fulfil her intentions, for Paula gave no sign of suffering the agonies of jealousy which Katharina had hoped to excite in her. Heliodora, on the other hand, came home depressed and uneasy; Paula had received her coldly and with polite formality, and the young widow had remained fully aware that so remarkable a woman might well cast her own image in Orion's heart into the shade, or supplant it altogether.

Like a wounded man who, in spite of the anguish, cannot resist touching the wound to assure himself of its state, Heliodora went constantly to see Katharina in order to watch her rival from the garden or to be taken to call on her, though she was always very coldly received.

At first Katharina had pitied the young woman whose superior in intelligence she knew herself to be; but a certain incident had extinguished this feeling; she now simply hated her, and pricked her with needle-thrusts whenever she had a chance. Paula seemed invulnerable; but there was not a pang which Katharina would not gladly have given her to whom she owed the deepest humiliation her young life had ever known. How was it that Paula failed to regard Heliodora as a rival? She had reflected that, if Orion had really returned the widow's passion, he could not have borne

so long a separation. It was on purpose to avoid Heliadora, and to remain faithful to what he was and must always be to Paula, that he had gone with the senator, far from Memphis. Heliadora--her instinct assured her--was the poor, forsaken woman with whom he had trifled at Byzantium, and for whom he had committed that fatal theft of the emerald. If Fate would but bring him home to her, and if she then yielded all he asked--all her own soul urged her to grant, then she would be the sole mistress and queen of his heart--she must be, she was sure of it! And though, even as she thought of it, she bowed her head in care, it was not from fear of losing him; it was only her anxiety about her father, her good old friend, Rufinus, and his family, whom she had made so entirely her own.

This was the state of affairs this morning, when to his old friend's vexation, Philippus had so hastily and silently drunk off his after-breakfast draught; just as he set down the cup, the black door-keeper announced that a hump-backed man wished to see his master at once on important business.

"Important business!" repeated the leech. "Give me four more legs in addition to my own two, or a machine to make time longer than it is, and then I will take new patients--otherwise no! Tell the fellow...."

"No, not sick...." interrupted the negro. "Come long way. Gardener to Greek man Rufinus."

Philippus started: he could guess what this messenger had to say, and his heart sank with dread as he desired that he might be shown in.

A glance at Gibbus told him what he had rightly feared. The poor fellow was hardly recognizable. He was coated with dust from head to foot, and this made him look like a grey-haired old man; his sandals hung to his feet in strips; the sweat, pouring down his cheeks, had made gutters as it were in the dust on his face, and his tears, as the physician held out his hand to him, washed out other channels.

In reply to the leech's anxious, long drawn "Dead?" he nodded silently; and when Philippus, clasping his hands to his temples, cried out: "Dead! My poor old Rufinus dead! But how, in Heaven's name, did it happen? Speak, man, speak!"--Gibbus pointed to the old philosopher and said: "Come out then, with me, Master. No third person...."

Philippus, however, gave him to understand that Horapollo was his second self; and the hunch-back went on to tell him what he had seen, and how his beloved master had met his end. Horapollo sat listening in astonishment, shaking his head disapprovingly, while the physician muttered curses. But the bearer of evil tidings was not interrupted, and it was not till he had ended that Philippus, with bowed head and tearful eyes, said:

"Poor, faithful old man; to think that he should die thus--he who leaves behind him all that is best in life, while I--I...." And he groaned aloud. The old man glanced at him with reproachful displeasure.

While the leech broke the seals of the tablets, which the abbess had carefully closed, and began to read the contents, Horapollo asked the gardener: "And the nuns? Did they all escape?"

"Yes, Master! on the morning after we reached Doomiati, a trireme took them all out to sea."

And the old man grumbled to himself: "The working bees killed and the Drones saved!"

Gibbus, however, contradicted him, praising the laborious and useful life of the sisters, in whose care he himself had once been.

Meanwhile Philippus had read his friend's last letter. Greatly disturbed by it he turned hither and thither, paced the room with long steps, and finally paused in front of the gardener, exclaiming: "And what next? Who is to tell them the news?"

"You," replied Gibbus, raising his hands in entreaty.

"I--oh, of course, I!" growled the physician. "Whatever is difficult, painful, intolerable, falls on my shoulders as a matter of course! But I cannot--ought not--I will not do it. Had I any part or lot in devising this mad expedition? You observe, Father?--What he, the simpleton, brewed, I--I again am to drink. Fate has settled that!"

"It is hard, it is hard, child!" replied the old man. "Still, it is your duty. Only consider--if that man, as he stands before us now, were to appear before the women...."

But Philippus broke in: "No, no, that would not do! And you, Gibbus--this very day there has been an Arab again to see Joanna; and if they were to suspect that you had been with your master--for you look strangely.--No, man; your devotion merits a better reward. They shall not catch you. I release you from your service to the widow, and we--what do you say, Father?--we will keep him here."

"Right, very right," said Horapollo. "The Nile must some day rise again. Stay with us; I have long had a fancy to eat vegetables of my own growing."

But Gibbus firmly declined the offer, saying he wished to return to his old mistress. When the physician again pointed out to him how great a danger he was running into, and the old man desired to know his reasons, the hunch-back exclaimed:

"I promised my master to stay with the women; and now, while in all the household I am the only free man, shall I leave them unprotected to secure my own miserable life? Sooner would I see a scimitar at my throat. When my head is off the rascals are welcome to all that is left."

The words came hollow and broken from his parched tongue, and as he spoke the faithful fellow's face changed. Even under the dust he turned pale, and Philippus had to support him, for his feet refused their office. His long tramp through the torrid heat had exhausted his strength; but a draught of wine soon brought him to himself again and Horapollo ordered the slave to lead him to the kitchen and desire the cook to take the best care of him.

As soon as the friends were alone, the elder observed:

"That worthy, foolhardy, old child who is now dead, seems to have left you some strange request. I could see that as you were reading."

"There--take it!" replied Philippus; and again he walked up and down the room, while Horapollo took the letter. Both faces of the tablets were covered with irregular, up-and-down lines of writing to the following effect:

"Rufinus, in view of death, to his beloved Philippus:

"One shivering fit after another comes over me; I shall certainly die to-day. I must make haste. Writing is difficult. If only I can say what is most pressing.--First: Joanna and the poor child. Be everything you can be to them. Protect them as their guardian, Kyrios, and friend. They have enough to live on and something still to spare for others. My brother Leonax manages the property, and he is honest. Joanna knows all about it.--Tell her and the poor child that I send them ten thousand blessings--and to Joanna endless thanks for all her goodness.--And to you, my friend: heed the old man's words. Rid your heart of Paula. She is not for you: you know, young Orion. But as to yourself: Those who were born in high places rarely suit us, who have dragged ourselves up from below to a better position. Be her friend; that she deserves--but let that be all. Do not live alone, a wife brings all that is best into a man's life; it is she who weaves sweet dreams into his dull sleep. You know nothing of all this as yet; and your worthy old friend--to whom my greetings--has held aloof from it all his life...."

"For your private eye: it is a dying man who speaks thus. You must know that my poor child, our Pul, regards you as the most perfect of men and esteems you above all others. You know her and Joanna. Bear witness to your friend that no evil word ever passed the lips of either of them. Far be it from me to advise you, who bear the image of another woman in your heart,--to say: marry the child, she is the wife for you. But this much to you both--Father and son--I do advise you to live with the mother and daughter as true and friendly house-mates. You will none of you repent doing so. This is a dying man's word. I can write no more. You are the women's guardian, Philip, a faithful one I know. A common aim makes men grow alike. You and I, for many a year.--Take good care of them for me; I entreat you--good care."

The last words were separated and written all astray; the old man could hardly make them out. He now sat looking, as Phillipus had done before, sorely puzzled and undecided over this strange document.

"Well?" asked the leech at last.

"Aye-well?" repeated the other with a shrug. Then both again were silent; till Horapollo rose, and taking his staff, also paced the room while he murmured, half to himself and half to his younger friend "They are two quiet, reasonable women. There are not many of that sort, I fancy. How the little one helped me up from the low seat in the garden!" It was a reminiscence that made him chuckle to himself; he stopped Philippus, who was pacing at his side, by lightly patting his arm, exclaiming with unwonted vivacity: "A man should be ready to try everything--the care of women even, before he steps into the grave. And is it a fact that neither of them is a scold or a chatter-box?"

"It is indeed."

"And what 'if' or 'but' remains behind?" asked the old man. "Let us be reckless for once, brother! If the whole business were not so diabolically serious, it would be quite laughable. The young one for me and the old one for you in our leisure hours, my son; better washed linen; clothes without holes in them; no dust on our books; a pleasant 'Rejoice' every morning, or at meal-times;--only look at the fruit on that dish! No better than the oats they strew before horses. At the old man's everything was as nice as it used to be in my own home at Philae: Supper a little work of art, a feast for the eye as well as the appetite! Pulcheria seems to understand all that as well as my poor dead sister did. And then, when I want to rise, such a kind, pretty little hand to help one up! I have long hated this dwelling. Lime and dust fall from the ceiling in my bedroom, and here there are wide gaps in the flooring--I stumbled over one yesterday--and our niggardly landlords, the officials, say that if we want anything repaired we may do it ourselves, that they have no money left for such things. Now, under that worthy old man's roof everything was in the best order." The philosopher chuckled aloud and rubbed his hands as he went on: "Supposing we kick over the traces for once, Philip. Supposing we were to carry out our friend's dying wish? Merciful Isis! It would certainly be a good action, and I have not many to

boast of. But cautiously--what do you say? We can always throw it up at a month's notice."

Then he grew grave again, shook his head, and said meditatively: "No, no; such plans only disturb one's peace of mind. A pleasant vision! But scarcely feasible."

"Not for the present, at any rate," replied the leech.

"So long as Paula's fate remains undecided, I beg you to let the matter rest."

The old man muttered a curse on her; then he said with a vicious, sharp flash in his eyes: "That patrician viper! Every where in everything--she spoils it all! But wait a while! I fancy she will soon be removed from our path, and then.... No, even now, at the present time, I will not allow that we should be deprived of what would embellish life, of doing a thing which may turn the scale in my favor in the day of judgment. The wishes of a dying man are sacred: So our fathers held it; and they were right. The old man's will must be done! Yes, yes, yes. It is settled. As soon as that hindrance is removed, we will keep house with the two women. I have said; and I mean it."

At this point the gardener came in again, and the old man called out to him:

"Listen, man. We shall live together after all; you shall hear more of this later. Stay with my people till sundown, but you must keep your own counsel, for they are all listeners and blabs. The physician here will now take the melancholy tidings to the unfortunate widow, and then you can talk it all over with her at night. Nothing startling must take place at the house there; and with regard to your master, even his death must remain a secret from every one but us and his family."

The gardener knew full well how much depended on his silence; Philippus tacitly agreed to the old man's arrangement, but for the present he avoided discussing the matter with the women. When, at length he set off on his painful errand to the widow, Horapollo dismissed him saying:

"Courage, courage, my Son.--And as you pass by, just glance at our little garden;--we grieved to see the fine old palm-tree perish; but now a young and vigorous shoot is growing from the root."

"It has been drooping since yesterday and will die away," replied Philippus shrugging his shoulders.

But the old man exclaimed: "Water it, Gibbus! the palm-tree must be watered at once."

"Aye, you have water at hand for that!" retorted the leech, but he added bitterly as he reached the stairs, "If it were so in all cases!"

"Patience and good purpose will always win," murmured the old man; and when he was alone he growled on angrily: "Only be rid of that dry old palm-tree--his past life in all its relations to that patrician hussy Away with it, into the fire!--But how am I to get her? How can I manage it?"

He threw himself back in his arm-chair, rubbing his forehead with the tips of his fingers. He had come to no result when the negro requested an audience for some visitors. These were the heads of the senate of Memphis, who had come as a deputation to ask counsel of the old sage. He, if any one, would find some means of averting or, at any rate, mitigating the fearful calamity impending over the town and country, and against which prayer, sacrifice, processions, and pilgrimages had proved abortive. They were quite resolved to leave no means untried, not even if heathen magic should be the last resource.

CHAPTER X.

All Katharina's sympathy with Heliodora had died finally in the course of the past, moonless night. She had secretly accompanied her, with her maid and an old deaf and dumb stable-slave, to a soothsayer--for there still were many in Memphis, as well as magicians and alchemists; and this woman had told the young widow that her line of life led to the greatest happiness, and that even the wildest wishes of her heart would find fulfilment. What those wishes were Katharina knew only too well; the probability of their accomplishment had roused her fierce jealousy and made her hate Heliodora.

Heliodora had gone to consult the sorceress in a simple but rich dress. Her peplos was fastened on the shoulder, not by an ordinary gold pin, but by a button which betrayed her taste for fine jewels, as it consisted of a sapphire of remarkable size; this had at once caught the eye of the witch, showing her that she had to deal with a woman of rank and wealth. She had taken Katharina, who had come very plainly dressed, for her companion or poor friend, so she had promised her no more than the removal of certain hindrances, and a happy life at last, with a husband no longer young and a large family of children.

The woman's business was evidently a paying one; the interior of her house was conspicuously superior to the wretched hovels which surrounded it, in the poorest and most squalid part of the town. Outside, indeed, it differed little from its neighbors; in fact, it was intentionally neglected, to mislead the authorities, for witchcraft and the practice of magic arts were under the penalty of death. But the fittings of the roofless centre-chamber in which she was wont to perform her incantations and divinations argued no small outlay. On the walls were hangings with occult figures; the pillars were painted with weird and grewsome pictures; crucibles and cauldrons of various sizes were simmering over braziers on little altars; on the shelves and tables stood cups, phials, and vases, a wheel on which a wryneck hopped up and down, wax images of men and women--some with needles through their hearts, a cage full of bats, and glass jars containing spiders, frogs, leeches, beetles, scorpions, centipedes and other foul creatures; and lengthways down the room was stretched a short rope walk, used in a Thracian form of magic. Perfumes and pungent vapors filled the air, and from behind a curtain which hid the performers came a monotonous music of children's voices, bells, and dull drumming.

Medea, so the wise woman was called, though scarcely past five and forty, harmonized in appearance with this strange habitation, full as it was of objects calculated to rouse repulsion, dread, and amazement. Her face was pale, and her extraordinary height was increased by a mass of coal-black hair, curled high over a comb at the very top of her head.

At the end of the first visit paid her by the two young women, who had taken her by surprise, so that several things were lacking which on the second occasion proved to be very effective in the exercise of her art, she had made Heliodora promise to return in three days' time. The young widow had kept her word, and had made her appearance punctually with Katharina.

To be in Egypt, the land of sorcery and the magic arts, without putting them to the test, was impossible. Even Martina allowed this, though she did not care for such things for herself. She was content with her lot; and if any change for the worse were in prospect she would rather not be tormented beforehand by a wise prophet; nor was it better to be deluded by a foolish one. Happiness as of Heaven itself she no longer craved; it would only have disturbed her peace. But she was the last person to think ill of the young, whose life still lay before them, if they longed to look into futurity.

The fair widow and her companion crossed the sorceress' threshold in some trepidation, and Katharina was the more agitated of the two; for this afternoon she had seen Philippus leave the house of Rufinus, and not long after some Arab officials had called there. Paula had come into the garden shortly before sundown, her eyes red with weeping; and when, soon after, Pulcheria and her mother had joined her there, Paula had thrown herself on Joanna's neck, sobbing so bitterly that the mother and daughter--"whose tears were near her eyes"--had both followed her example. Something serious had occurred; but when she had gone to the house to pick up further information, old Betta, who was particularly snappish with her, had refused her admission quite rudely.

Then, on their way hither, she and Heliodora had had a painful adventure; the chariot, lent by Neforis to convey them as far as the edge of the necropolis, was stopped on the way by a troop of Arab horse, and they were subjected to a catechism by the leader.

So they entered the house of "Medea of the curls," as the common people called the witch, with uneasy and throbbing hearts; they were received, however, with such servile politeness that they soon recovered themselves, and even the timid Heliodora began to breathe freely again. The sorceress knew this time who Katharina was, and paid more respectful attention to the daughter of the wealthy widow.

The young crescent moon had risen, a circumstance which Medea declared enabled her to see more clearly into the future than she could do at the time of the Luna-negers as she called the moonless night. Her inward vision had been

held in typhomian darkness at the time of their first visit, by the influence of some hostile power. She had felt this as soon as they had quitted her, but to-day she saw clearer. Her mind's eye was as clear as a silver mirror, she had purified it by three days' fasting and not a mote could escape her sight.--"Help, ye children of Horapollo! Help, Hapi and Ye three holy ones!"

"Oh, my beauties, my beauties!" she went on enthusiastically. "Hundreds of great dames have proved my art, but such splendid fortunes I never before saw crowding round any two heads as round yours. Do you hear how the cauldrons of fortune are seething? The very lids lift! Amazing, amazing."

She stretched out her hand towards the vessels as though conjuring them and said solemnly: "Abundance of happiness; brimming over, brimming over! Bursting storehouses! Zefa-oo Metramao. Return, return, to the right levels, the right heights, the right depth, the right measure! Your Elle Mei-Measurer, Leveller, require them, Techuti, require them, double Ibis!"

She made them both sit down on elegant seats in front of the boiling pots, tied the "thread of Anubis" round the ring-finger of each, asked in a low whisper between muttered words of incantation for a hair of each, and after placing the hairs both in one cauldron she cried out with wild vehemence, as though the weal or woe of her two visitors were involved in the smallest omission:

"Press the finger with the thread of Anubis on your heart; fix your eyes on the cauldron and the steam which rises to the spirits above, the spirits of light, the great One on high!"

The two women obeyed the sorceress' directions with beating hearts, while she began spinning round on her toes with dizzy rapidity; her curls flew out, and the magic wand in her extended hand described a large and beautiful curve. Suddenly, and as if stricken by terror, she stopped her whirl, and at the same instant the lamps went out and the only light was from the stars and the twinkling coals under the cauldrons. The low music died away, and a fresh strong perfume welled out from behind the curtain.

Medea fell on her knees, lifted up her hands to Heaven, threw her head so far back that her whole face was turned up to the sky and her eyes gazed straight up at the stars--an attitude only possible to so supple a spine. In this torturing attitude she sang one invocation after another, to the zenith of the blue vault over their heads, in a clear voice of fervent appeal. Her body was thrown forward, her mass of hair no longer stood up but was turned towards the two young women, who every moment expected that the supplicant would be suffocated by the blood mounting to her head, and fall backwards; but she sang and sang, while her white teeth glittered in the starlight that fell straight upon her face. Presently, in the midst of the torrent of demoniacal names and magic formulas that she sang and warbled out, a piteous and terrifying sound came from behind the curtain as of two persons gasping, sighing, and moaning: one voice seemed to be that of a man oppressed by great anguish; the other was the half-suffocated wailing of a suffering child. This soon became louder, and at length a voice said in Egyptian: "Water, a drink of water."

The woman started to her feet, exclaiming: "It is the cry of the poor and oppressed who have been robbed to enrich those who have too much already; the lament of those whom Fate has plundered to heap you with wealth enough for hundreds." As she spoke these words, in Greek and with much unction, she turned to the curtain and added solemnly, but in Egyptian: "Give drink to the thirsty; the happy ones will spare him a drop from their overflow. Give the white drink to the wailing child-spirit, that he may be soothed and quenched.--Play, music, and drown the lamentations of the spirits in sorrow."

Then, turning to Heliadora's kettle she said sternly, as if in obedience to some higher power:

"Seven gold pieces to complete the work,"--and while the young widow drew out her purse the sorceress lighted the lamps, singing as she did so and as she dropped the coin into the boiling fluid: "Pure, bright gold! Sunlight buried in a mine! Holy Seven. Shashef, Shashef! Holy Seven, marry and mingle--melt together!"

When this was done she poured out of the cauldron a steaming fluid as black as ink, into a shallow saucer, called Heliadora to her side, and told her what she could see in the mirror of its surface.

It was all fair, and gave none but delightful replies to the widow's questioning. And all the sorceress said tended to confirm the young woman's confidence in her magic art; she described Orion as exactly as though she saw him indeed in the surface of the ink, and said he was travelling with an older man. And lo! he was returning already; in the bright mirror she could see Heliadora clasped in her lover's arms; and now--it was like a picture: A stranger--not the bishop of Memphis--laid her hand in his and blessed their union before the altar in a vast and magnificent cathedral.

Katharina, who had been chilled with apprehensions and a thrill of awe, as she listened to Medea's song, listened to every word with anxious attention; what Medea said--how she described Orion--that was more wonderful than anything else, beyond all she had believed possible. And the cathedral in which the lovers were to be united was the church of St. Sophia at Constantinople, of which she had heard so much.

A tight grip seemed to clutch her heart; still, eagerly as she listened to Medea's words, her sharp ears heard the doleful gasping and whimpering behind the hanging; and this distressed and dismayed her; her breath came short, and a deep, torturing sense of misfortune possessed her wholly. The wailing child-spirit within, a portion of whose joys

Medea said had been allotted to her--nay, she had not robbed him, certainly not--for who could be more wretched than she? It was only that beautiful, languishing young creature who was so lavishly endowed by Fortune with gifts enough and to spare for others without number. Oh! if she could but have snatched them from her one after another, from the splendid ruby she was wearing to-day, to Orion's love!

She was pale and tremulous as she rose at the call of the sorceress, after she also had offered seven gold pieces. She would gladly have purchased annihilating curses to destroy her happier rival.

The black liquid in the saucer began to stir, and a sharply smelling vapor rose from it; the witch blew this aside, and as soon as the murky fluid was a little cool, and the surface was smooth and mirror-like, she asked Katharina what she most desired to know. But the answer was checked on her lips; a fearful thundering and roaring suddenly made the house shake; Medea dropped the saucer with a piercing shriek, the contents splashed up, and warm, sticky drops fell on the girl's arms and dress. She was quite overcome with the startling horror, and Heliodora, who could herself scarcely stand, had to support her, for she tottered and would have fallen.

The sorceress had vanished; a half-grown lad, a young man, and a very tall Egyptian girl in scanty attire were rushing about the room. They flew hither and thither, throwing all the vessels they could lay hands on into an opening in the floor from which they had lifted a trap-door; pouring water on the braziers and extinguishing the lights, while they drove the two strangers into a corner of the hall, rating and abusing them. Then the lads clambered like cats up to the opening in the roof, and sprang off and away.

A shrill whistle rang through the house, and in moment Medea burst into the room again, clutched the two trembling women by the shoulders, and exclaimed: "For Christ's sake, be merciful! My life is at stake Sorcery is punishable by death. I have done my best for you. You came here--that is what you must say--out of charity to nurse the sick." She pushed them both behind the hanging whence they still heard feeble groans, into a low, stuffy room, and the overgrown girl slipped in behind them.

Here, on miserable couches, lay an old man shivering, and showing dark spots on his bare breast and face: and a child of five, whose crimson cheeks were burning with fever.

Heliodora felt as if she must suffocate in the plague stricken, heavy atmosphere, and Katharina clung to her helplessly; but the soothsayer pulled her away, saying: "Each to one bed: you to the child, and you--the old man."

Involuntarily they obeyed the woman who was panting with fright. The water-wagtail, who never in her life thought of a sick person, turned very sick and looked away from the sufferer; but the your widow, who had spent many and many a night by the death-bed of a man she had loved, and who, tender-hearted, had often tended her sick slaves with her own hand, looked compassionately into the pretty, pain-stricken face of the child, and wiped the dews from his clammy brow.

Katharina shuddered; but her attention was presently attracted to something fresh; from the other side of the house came a clatter of weapons, the door was pushed open, and the physician Philippus walked into the room. He desired the night-watch, who were with him, to wait outside. He had come by the command of the police authorities, to whose ears information had been brought that there were persons sick of the plague in the house of Medea, and that she, nevertheless, continued to receive visitors. It had long been decided that she must be taken in the act of sorcery, and warning had that day been given that she expected illustrious company in the evening. The watch were to find her red-handed, so to speak; the leech was to prove whether her house was indeed plague-stricken; and in either case the senate wished to have the sorceress safe in prison and at their mercy, though even Philippus had not been taken into their confidence.

The visitors he had come upon were the last he had expected to find here. He looked at them with a disapproving shake of the head, interrupted the woman's voluble asseverations that these noble ladies had come, out of Christian charity, to comfort and help the sick, with a rough exclamation: "A pack of lies!" and at once led the coerced sick nurses out of the house. He then represented to them the fearful risk to which their folly had exposed them, and insisted very positively on their returning home and, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, taking a bath and putting on fresh garments.

With trembling knees they found their way back to the chariot; but even before it could start Heliodora had broken down in tears, while Katharina, throwing herself back on the cushions, thought, as she glanced at her weeping companion: "This is the beginning of the wonderful happiness she was promised! It is to be hoped it may continue!"

It seemed indeed as though Katharina's guardian spirit had overheard this amiable wish; for, as the chariot drove past the guard-house into the court-yard of the governor's house, it was stopped by armed men with brown, warlike faces, and they had to wait some minutes till an Arab officer appeared to enquire who they were, and what they wanted. This they explained in fear and trembling, and they then learnt that the Arab government had that very evening taken possession of the residence. Orion was accused of serious crimes, and his guests were to depart on the following day.

Katharina, who was known to the interpreter, was allowed to go with Heliodora to the senator's wife; she might also

use the chariot to return home in, and if she pleased, take the Byzantines with her, for the palace would be in the hands of the soldiery for the next few days.

The two young women held council. Katharina pressed her friend to come at once to her mother's house, for she felt certain that they were plague-stricken, and how could they procure a bath in a house full of soldiers? Heliodora could not and must not remain with Martina in this condition, and the senator's wife could follow her next day. Her mother, she added, would be delighted to welcome so dear a guest.

The widow was passive, and when Martina had gladly consented to accept the invitation of her "delivering angel," the chariot carried them to Susannah's house. The widow had long been in bed, firmly convinced that her daughter was asleep and dreaming in her own pretty room.

Katharina would not have her disturbed, and the bath-room was so far from Susannah's apartment that she slept on quietly while Katharina and her guest purified themselves.

CHAPTER XI.

The inhabitants of the governor's residence passed a fearful night. Martina asked herself what sin she had committed that she, of all people, should be picked out to witness such a disaster.

And where were her schemes of marriage now? Any movement in such heat was indeed scarcely endurable; but she would have moved from one part of the house to another a dozen times, and allowed herself to be tossed hither and thither like a ball, if it could have enabled her to save her dear "great Sesostris" from such hideous peril. And at the bottom of all this was, no doubt, this wild, senseless business of the nuns.

And these Arabs! They simply helped themselves to whatever they fancied, and were, of course, in a position to strip the son of the great Mukaukas of all he possessed and reduce him to beggary. A pretty business this!

Heliodora, to be sure, had enough for both, and she and her husband would not forget them in their will; but there was more than this in the balance now: it was a matter of life and death.

A cold shudder ran through her at the thought; and her fears were only too well founded: the black Arab who had come to parley with her, and had finally allowed her to remain under this roof till next day, had told her as much through the interpreter. A fearful, horrible, nameless catastrophe! And that she should be in the midst of it and have to see it all!

Then her husband, her poor Justinus! How hard this would fall on him! She could not cease weeping; and before she fell asleep she prayed fervently indeed, to the saints and the dear Mother of God, that they would bring all to a happy issue. She closed her eyes on the thought: "What a misfortune!" and she woke to it again early in the morning.

She, however, had known nothing of the worst horrors of that fatal night.

A troop of Arab soldiers had crossed the Nile at nightfall, some on foot or on horseback and some in boats, led by Obada the Vêkeel, and had invested the governor's residence. When they had fully assured themselves that Orion was indeed absent they took Nilus prisoner. It was then Obada's business to inform the Mukaukas' widow of what had happened, and to tell her that she must quit the house next day. This must be done, because he had views of his own as to what was to become of the venerable house of the oldest family in the country.

Neforis was still up, and when the interpreter was announced as Obada's forerunner, she was in the fountain-room. He found her a good deal excited; for, although she was incapable of any consecutive train of thought and, when her mind was required to exert itself, her ideas only came like lightning-flashes through her brain, she had observed that something unusual was going on. Sebek and her maid had evaded her enquiries, and would say no more than that Amru's representative had come to speak with the young master. It seemed to be something important, perhaps some false accusation.

The interpreter now explained that Orion himself was accused of having planned and aided an enterprise which had cost the lives of twelve Arab soldiers; and, as she knew, any injury inflicted even on a single Moslem by an Egyptian was punished by death and the confiscation of his goods. Besides this, her son was accused of a robbery.

At the close of this communication, to which Neforis listened with a vacant stare, horrified and at last almost crushed, the interpreter begged that she would grant the Vêkeel an audience.

"Not just yet--give me a few minutes," said the widow, bringing out the words with difficulty: first she must have recourse to her secret specific. When she had done so, she expressed her readiness to see Obada. Her son's swarthy foe was anxious to appear a mild and magnanimous man in her eyes, so it was with flattering servility and many smirking grins that he communicated to her the necessity for her quitting the house in which she had passed the longest and happiest half of her life, and no later than next day.

To his announcement that her private fortune would remain untouched, and that she would be at liberty to reside in Memphis or to go to her own house in Alexandria, she indifferently replied that "she should see."

She then enquired whether the Arabs had yet succeeded in capturing her son.

"Not actually," replied the Vêkeel. "But we know where he is hiding, and by to-morrow or the next day we shall lay hands on the unhappy young man."

But, as he spoke, the widow detected a malicious gleam in his eyes to which, so far, he had tried to give a sympathetic expression, and she went on with a slight shake of the head: "Then it is a case of life and death?"

"Compose yourself, noble lady," was the reply. "Of death alone."

Neforis looked up to heaven and for some minutes did not speak; then she asked:

"And who has accused him of robbery?" "The head of his own Church...."

"Benjamin?" she murmured with a peculiar smile. Only yesterday she had made her will in favor of the patriarch and the Church. "If Benjamin could see that," said she to herself, "he would change his views of you and your people, and have prayers constantly said for us."

As she spoke no more the Vêkeel sat looking at her inquisitively and somewhat at a loss, till at length she rose, and

with no little dignity dismissed him, remarking that now their business was at an end and she had nothing further to say to him.

This closed the interview; and as the Vêkeel quitted the fountain-room he muttered to himself: "What a woman! Either she is possessed and her brain is crazed, or she is of a rarely heroic pattern."

Neforis was supported to her own room; when she was in bed she desired her maid to bring a small box out of her chest and place it on the little table containing medicines by the head of the couch.

As soon as she was alone she took out two letters which George had written to her before their marriage, and a poem which Orion had once addressed to her; she tried to read them, but the words danced before her eyes, and she was forced to lay them aside. She took up a little packet containing hair cut from the heads of her sons after death, and a lock of her husband's. She gazed on these dear memorials with rapt tenderness, and now the poppy juice began to take effect: the images of those departed ones rose clear in her mind, and she was as near to them as though they were standing in living actuality by her side.

Still holding the curls in her hand, she looked up into vacancy, trying to apprehend clearly what had occurred within the last few hours and what lay before her: She must leave this room, this ample couch, this house--all, in short, that was bound up with the dearest memories of those she had loved. She was to be forced to this--but did it beseem her to submit to this Negro, this stranger in the house where she was mistress? She shook her head with a scornful smile; then opening a glass phial, which was still half-full of opium pillules, she placed a few on her tongue and again gazed sky-wards.--Another face now looked down on her; she saw the husband from whom not even death could divide her, and at his feet their two murdered sons. Presently Orion seemed to rise out of the clouds, as a diver comes up from the water, and make for the shore of the island on which George and the other two seemed to be standing. His father opened his arms to receive him and clasped him to his heart, while she herself--or was it only her wraith--went to the others, who hurried forward to greet her tenderly; and then her husband, too, met her, and she found rest on his bosom.

For hours, and long before the incursion of the Arabs, she had been feeling half stunned and her mind clouded; but now a delicious, slumberous lethargy came over her, to which her whole being urged her to yield. But every time her eyes closed, the thought of the morrow shot through her brain, and finally, with a great effort, she sat up, took some water--which was always close at hand--shook into it the remaining pillules in the bottle, and drank it off to the very last drop.

Her hand was steady; the happy smile on her lips, and the eager expression of her eyes, might have led a spectator to believe that she was thirsty and had mixed herself a refreshing draught. She had no look of a desperate creature laying violent hands on her own life; she felt no hesitancy, no fear of death, no burthen of the guilt she was incurring--nothing but ecstatic weariness and hope; blissful hope of a life without end, united to those she loved.

Hardly had she swallowed the deadly draught when she shivered with a sudden chill. Raising herself a little she called her maid, who was sitting up in the adjoining room; and as the woman looked alarmed at her mistress's fixed stare, she stammered out: "A priest--quick--I am dying."

The woman flew off to the viridarium to call Sebek, who was standing in front of the tablinum with the Vêkeel; she told him what had happened, and the Negro gave him leave to obey his dying mistress, escorting him as far as the gate. Just outside, the steward met a deacon who had been giving the blessing of the Church to a poor creature dying of the pestilence, and in a few minutes they were standing by the widow's bed.

The locks of her sons' hair lay by her side; her hands were folded over a crucifix; but her eyes, which had been fixed on the features of the Saviour, had wandered from it and again gazed up to Heaven.

The priest spoke her name, but she mistook him for her son and murmured in loving accents:

"Orion, poor, poor child! And you, Mary, my darling, my sweet little pet! Your father--yes, dear boy, only come with me.--Your father is kind again and forgives you. All those I loved are together now, and no one--Who can part us? Husband--George, listen..."

The priest performed his office, but she paid no heed, still staring upwards; her smiling lips continued to move, but no articulate sound came from them. At last they were still, her eyelids fell, her hands dropped the crucifix, a slight shiver ran through her limbs, which then relaxed, and she opened her mouth as though to draw a deeper breath. But it closed no more, and when the faithful steward pressed her lips together her face was rigid and her heart had ceased to beat.

The honest man sobbed aloud; when he carried the melancholy news to the Vêkeel, Obada growled out a curse, and said to a subaltern officer who was super-intending the loading of his camels with the treasures from the tablinum:

"I meant to have treated that cursed old woman with conspicuous generosity, and now she has played me this trick; and in Medina they will lay her death at my door, unless..."

But here he broke off; and as he once more watched the loading of the camels, he only thought to himself: "In playing for such high stake's, a few gold pieces more or less do not count. A few more heads must fall yet--the

handsome Egyptian first and foremost.--If the conspirators at Medina only play their part! The fall of Omar means that of Amru, and that will set everything right."

CHAPTER XII.

Katharina slept little and rose very early, as was her habit, while Heliodora was glad to sleep away the morning hours. In this scorching season they were, to be sure, the pleasanter of the twenty-four, and the water-wagtail usually found them so; but to-day, though a splendid Indian flower had bloomed for the first time, and the head gardener pointed it out to her with just pride, she could not enjoy it and be glad. It might perish for aught she cared, and the whole world with it!

There was no one stirring yet in the next garden, but the tall leech Philippus might be seen coming along the road to pay a visit to the women.

A few swift steps carried her to the gate, whence she called him. She must entreat him to say nothing of her last night's expedition; but before she had time to prefer her request he had paused to tell her that the widow of the Mukaukas, overcome by alarm and horror, had followed her husband to the next world.

There had been a time when Katharina had been devoted to Neforis, regarding her as a second mother; when the governor's residence had seemed to her the epitome of all that was great, venerable, and illustrious; and when she had been proud and happy to be allowed to run in and out, and to be loved like a child of the family. The tears that started to her eyes were sincere, and it was a relief to her, too, to lay aside the gay and defiantly happy mien which she wore as a mask, while all in her soul was dark, wild, and desperate.

The physician understood her grief; he readily promised not to betray her to any one, and did not blame her, though he again pointed out the danger she had incurred and earnestly insisted that every article of clothing, which she or Heliodora had worn, must be destroyed. The subtle germ of the malady, he said, clung to everything; every fragment of stuff which had been touched by the plague-stricken was especially fitted to carry the infection and disseminate the disease. She listened to him in deep alarm, but she could satisfy him on this point; everything she or her companion had worn had been burnt in the bath-room furnace.

The physician went on; and she, heedless of the growing heat, wandered restlessly about the grounds. Her heart beat with short, quick, painful jerks; an invisible burthen weighed upon her and prevented her breathing freely. A host of torturing thoughts haunted her unbidden; they were not to be exorcised, and added to her misery: Neforis dead; the residence in the hands of the Arabs; Orion bereft of his possessions and held guilty of a capital crime.

And the peaceful house beyond the hedge--what trouble was hanging over its white-haired master and his guileless wife and daughter? A storm was gathering, she could see it approaching--and beyond it, like another murky, death-dealing thunder-cloud, was the pestilence, the fearful pestilence.

And it was she, a fragile, feeble girl--a volatile water-wagtail--who had brought all these terrors down on them, who had opened the sluice-gates through which ruin was now beginning to pour in on all around her. She could see the flood surging, swelling--saw it lapping round her own house, her own feet; drops of sweat bedewed her forehead and hands from terror at the mere thought. And yet, and yet!--If she had really had the power to bind calamity in the clouds, to turn the tide back into its channel, she would not have done so! The uttermost that she longed for, as the fruit of the seed she had sown and which she longed to see ripen, had not yet come to pass--and to see that she would endure anything, even death and parting from this deceitful, burning, unlovely world.

Death awaited Orion; and before it overtook him he should know who had sharpened the sword. Perhaps he might escape with his life; but the Arab would not disgorge what he once had seized, and if that young and splendid Croesus should come out of prison alive, but a beggar, then--then.... And as for Paula! As for Heliodora! For once her little hand had wrenched the thunderbolts from Zeus' eagle, and she would find one for them!

The sense of her terrible power, to which more than one victim had already fallen, intoxicated her. She would drive Orion--Orion who had betrayed her--into utter ruin and misery; she would see him a beggar at her feet!--And this it was that gave her courage to do her worst; this, and this alone. What she would do then, she herself knew not; that lay as yet in the womb of the Future. She might take a fancy to do something kind, compassionate, and tender.

By the time she went into the house again her fears and depression had vanished; revived energy possessed her soul, and the little eavesdropper and tale-bearer had become in this short hour a purposeful and terrible woman, ready for any crime.

"Poor little lamb!" thought Philippus, as he went into Rufinus' garden. "That miserable man may have brought pangs enough to her little heart!"

His old friend's garden-plot was deserted. Under the sycamore, however, he perceived the figures of a very tall young man and a pretty woman, delicate, fair-haired, and rather pale. The big young fellow was holding a skein of wool on his huge, outstretched hands; the girl was winding it on to a ball. These were Rustem the Masdakite and Mandane, both now recovered from their injuries; the girl, indeed, had been restored to the new life of a calm and understanding mind. Philippus had watched over this wonderful resuscitation with intense interest and care. He ascribed it, in the first

instance, to the great loss of blood from the wound in her head; and secondly, to the fresh air and perfect nursing she had had. All that was now needful was to protect her against agitation and violent emotions. In the Masdakite she had found a friend and a submissive adorer; and Philippus could rejoice as he looked at the couple, for his skill had indeed brought him nothing but credit.

His greeting to them was cheery and hearty, and in answer to his enquiry: "How are you getting on?" Rustem replied, "As lively as a fish in water," adding, as he pointed to Mandane, "and I can say the same for my fellow-countrywoman."

"You are agreed then?" said the leech, and she nodded eager assent.

At this Philippus shook his finger at the man, exclaiming: "Do not get too tightly entangled here, my friend. Who knows how soon Haschim may call you away."

Then, turning his back on the convalescents, he murmured to himself: "Here again is something to cheer us in the midst of all this trouble--these two, and little Mary."

Rufinus, before starting on his journey, had sent back all the crippled children he had had in his care to their various parents; thus the anteroom was empty.

The women apparently were at breakfast in the dining-room. No, he was mistaken; it was yet too early, and Pulcheria was still busy laying the table. She did not notice him as he went in, for she was busy arranging grapes, figs, pomegranates and sycamore-figs, a fruit resembling mulberries in flavor which grow in clusters from the trunk of the tree-between leaves, which the drought and heat of the past weeks had turned almost yellow. The tempting heap was fast rising in an elegant many-hued hemisphere; but her thoughts were not in her occupation, for tears were coursing each other down her cheeks.

"Those tears are for her father," thought the leech as he watched her from the threshold. "Poor child!"--How often he had heard his old friend call her so!

And till now he had never thought of her but as a child; but to-day he must look at her with different eyes--her own father had enjoined it. And in fact he gazed at her as though he beheld a miracle.

What had come over little Pulcheria?--How was it that he had never noticed it before?--It was a well-grown maiden that he saw, moving round, snowwhite arms; and he could have sworn that she had only thin, childish arms, for she had thrown them round his neck many a time when she had ridden up and down the garden on his back, calling him her fine horse.

How long ago was that? Ten years! She was now seventeen!

And how slender, and delicate, and white her hands were--those hands for which her mother had often scolded her when, after building castles of sand, she had sat down to table unwashed.

Now she was laying the grapes round the pomegranates, and he remembered how Horapollo, only yesterday, had praised her dainty skill.

The windows were well screened, but a few sunbeams forced their way into the room and fell on her red-gold hair. Even the fair Boeotians, whom he had admired in his student-days at Athens, had no such glorious crown of hair. That she had a sweet and pretty face he had always known; but now, as she raised her eyes and first observed him, meeting his gaze with maidenly embarrassment and sweet surprise, and yet with perfect welcome, he felt himself color and he had to pause a moment to collect himself before he could respond with something more than an ordinary greeting to hers. The dialogue that flashed through his mind in that instant began with sentences full of meaning. But all he said was:

"Yes, here I am," which really did not deserve the hearty reply:

"Thank God for that!" nor the bewitching embarrassment of the explanation that ensued: "on my mother's account."

Again he blushed; he, the man who had long since forgotten his youthful shyness. He asked after Dame Joanna, and how she was bearing her trouble, and then he said gravely: "I was the bearer of bad news yesterday, and to-day again I have come like a bird of ill-omen."

"You?" she said with a smile, and the simple word conveyed so sweet a doubt of his capacity for bringing evil that he could not help saying to himself that his friend, in leaving this child, this girl, to his care, had bequeathed to him the best gift that one mortal can devise to another: a dear, trustful, innocent daughter--or no, a younger sister--as pure, as engaging, and as lovable as only the child of such parents could be.

While he stood telling her of what had happened at the governor's house, he noted how deeply, for Paula's and Mary's sake, she took to heart the widow's death, though Neforis had been nothing to her; and he decided that he would at once make Pulcheria's mother acquainted with her dead husband's wishes.

All this did not supplant his old passion for Paula; far from it--that tortured him still as deeply and hotly as ever. But at the same time he was conscious of its evil influence; he knew that by cherishing it he was doing himself harm--nay a real injury since it was not returned. He knew that within reach of Paula, and condemned to live with her, he could never

recover his peace, but must suffer constant pangs. It was only away from her, and yet under the same roof with Joanna and her daughter, that he could ever hope to be a contented and happy man; but he dared not put this thought into words.

Pulcheria detected that he had something in reserve, and feared lest he should know of some new impending woe; however, on this head he could reassure her, telling her that, on the contrary, he had something in his mind which, so far at least as he was concerned, was a source of pleasure. Her grieved and anxious spirit could indeed hardly believe him; and he begged her not to lose all hope in better days, asking her if she had true and entire trust in him.

She warmly replied that he must surely feel that she did; and now, as the others came into the room, she nodded to her mother, whom she had already seen quite early, and offering him her hand shook his heartily. This had been a restful interval; but the sight of Paula, and the news he had to give her, threw him back into his old depressed and miserable mood.

Little Mary, whose cheeks had recovered their roses and who looked quite well again, threw her arms round Paula's neck as she heard the evil tidings; but Paula herself was calmer than he had expected. She turned very pale at the first shock, but soon she could listen to him with composure, and presently quite recovered her usual demeanor. Philippus, as he watched her, had to control himself sternly, and as soon as possible he took his leave.

It was as though he had been fated once more to see with agonizing clearness what he had lost in her; she walked through life as though borne up by lofty feeling, and a thoughtful radiance lent her noble features a bewitching charm which grieved while it enchanted him.

Orion a prisoner, and all his possessions confiscated! The thought had horrified her for a little while; but then it had come to her that this was just as it should be--that what had at first looked like a dreadful disaster had been sent to enable her love to cast off its husks, to appear in all its loftiness and purity, and to give it, by the help of the All-merciful, its true consecration.

She did not fear for his life, for he had told her and written to her that Amru had been paternal in his kindness; and all that had occurred was, she was sure, the work of the Vêkeel, of whose odious and cruel character he had given her a horrible picture that day when Rufinus had gone to warn the abbess.

When Philippus had left his friends, he sighed deeply. How different he had found these women from what he had expected. Yes, his old friend knew men well!

From trifling details he had succeeded in forming a more accurate idea of Pulcheria than the leech himself had gained in years of intimacy. Horapollo had foreseen, too, that the danger which threatened the Mukaukas' son would fan Paula's passions like a fresh breeze; and Joanna, frail, ailing Joanna! she had behaved heroically under the loss of the companion with whom she had lived for so many years in faithful love. He could not help comparing her with the wretched Neforis; what was it that enabled one to bear the equal loss with so much more dignity than the other? Nothing but the presence of the tender-hearted Pulcheria, who shared her sorrow with such beautiful resignation, such ready and complete sympathy. This the governor's widow had wholly lacked; and how happy were they who could call such a heart their own! He walked through the garden with his head bent, and looking neither to the right hand nor the left.

The Masdakite, who was still sitting with Mandane under the sycamore, as indifferent to the torrid heat as she was, looked after him, and said with a sigh as he pointed to him:

"There he goes. This is the first time he ever said a rude word to you or to me: or did you not understand?"

"Oh yes," said she in a low voice, looking down at her needlework.

They talked in Persian, for she had not forgotten the language which her mother had spoken till her dying day.

Life is sometimes as strange as a fairy-tale; and the accident was indeed wonderful which had brought these two beings, of all others, at the same time to the sick room. His distant home was also hers, and he even knew her uncle--her father's brother--and her father's sad history.

When the Greek army had taken possession of the province where they had lived, the men had fled into the woods with their flocks and herds, while the women and children took refuge in the fortress which defended the main road. This had not long held out against the Byzantines, and the women, among them Mandane with her mother, had been handed over to the soldiers as precious booty. Her father had then joined the troops to rescue the women, but he and his comrades had only lost their lives in the attempt. To this day the valiant man's end was a tale told in his native place, and his property and valuable rose gardens now belonged to his younger brother. So the two convalescents had plenty to talk about.

It was curious to note how clearly the memories of her childhood were stamped on Mandane's mind.

She had laid her wounded head on the pillow of sickness with a darkened brain, and the new pain had lifted the veil from her mind as a storm clears the oppressive atmosphere of a sultry summer's day. She loved to linger now among the scenes of her childhood--the time when she had a mother.--Or she would talk of the present; all between was like a night-sky black, and only lighted up by an awful comet and shining stars. That comet was Orion. All she had enjoyed

with him and suffered through him she consigned to the period of her craziness; she had taught herself to regard it all as part of the madness to which she had been a victim. Her nature was not capable of cherishing hatred and she could feel no animosity towards the Mukaukas' son. She thought of him as of one who, without evil intent, had done her great wrong; one whom she might not even remember without running into peril.

"Then you mean to say," the Masdakite began once more, "that you would really miss me if Haschim sent for me?"

"Yes indeed, Rustem; I should be very sorry."

"Oh!" said the other, passing his hand over his big head, on which the dense mane of hair which had been shaved off was beginning to grow again. "Well then, Mandane, in that case--I wanted to say it yesterday, but I could not get it out.--Tell me: why would you be sorry if I were to leave you?"

"Because--well, no one can have all their reasons ready; because you have always been kind to me; and because you came from my country, and talk Persian with me as my mother used."

"Is that all?" said the man slowly, and he rubbed his forehead.

"No, no. Because--if once you go away, you will not be here."

"Aye that is it; that is just the thing. And if you would be sorry for that, then you must have liked being here--with me."

"And why not? It has been very nice," said the girl blushing and trying not to meet his eyes.

"That it has--and that it is!" cried Rustem, striking his palm with the other huge fist. "And that is why I must have it out; that is why, if we have any sense, we two need never part."

"But your master is sure to want you," said she with growing confusion, "and we cannot always remain a burthen on the kind folks here. I shall not work at the loom again; but as I am now free, and have the scroll that proves it, I must soon look about for some employment. And a strong, healthy fellow like you cannot always be nursing yourself."

"Nursing myself!" and he laughed gaily. "I will earn money, and enough for three!"

"By your camels always, up and down the country?"

"I have done with that," said he with a grin. "We will go back to our own country; there I will buy a good piece of pasture land, for my eldest brother has our little estate, and you may ask Haschim whether I understand camel-breeding."

"But Rustem, consider."

"Consider! Think this, and think that! Where there's a will there's a way. That is the upshot of it all. And if you mean to say that before you buy you must have money, and that the best may come to grief, all I can tell you is.... Can you read? No? nor I; but here in my pocket I have my accounts in the master's own hand. Eleven thousand, three hundred and sixty drachmae were due to me for wages the last time we reckoned: all the profit the master had set down to my credit since I led his caravan. He has kept almost all of it for me; for food was allowed, and there was almost always a bit of stuff for a garment to be found among the bales, and I never was a sot. Eleven thousand, three hundred and sixty drachmae! Hey, little one, that is the figure. And now what do you say? Can we buy something with that? Yes or no?"

He looked at her triumphantly, and she eagerly replied: "Yes, yes indeed; and in our country I think something worth having."

"And we--you and I--we will begin a quite new life. I was seventeen when I first set out with my master, and I was twenty-six last midsummer. How many years wandering does that make?"

They both thought this over for some time; then Mandane said doubtfully

"If I am not mistaken it is eight."

"I believe it is nine," he exclaimed. "Let us see. Here, give me your little paw! There, I begin with seventeen, that is where I started. First your little-finger--what a mite of a thing, and then the rest." He took her right hand and counted off her fingers till he ended with the last finger of the left. The result puzzled him; he shook his head, saying: "There are ten fingers on both hands, sure enough, and yet it cannot be ten years; it is nine at most I know."

He began the counting, which he liked uncommonly, all over again; but with the same result. Mandane said it was but nine, she had counted it up herself; and he agreed, and declared that her little fingers must be bewitched. And this game would have gone on still longer but that she remembered that the seventeen must not be included at all, and that he ought to begin with eighteen. Rustem could not immediately take this in, and even when he admitted it he did not release her hand, but went on with gay resolution:

"And you see, my girl, I mean to keep this little hand--you may pull it away if you choose--but it is mine, and the pretty little maid, and all that belongs to it. And I will take you and both your hands, bewitched fingers and all, home with me. There they may weave and stitch as much as you like; but as man and wife no one shall part us, and we will lead a life such a life! The joys of Paradise shall be no better than a rap on the skull with an olive-wood log in comparison!"

He tried to take her hand again, but she drew it away, saying in deep confusion and without looking up: "No, Rustem. I was afraid yesterday that it would come to this; but it can never, never be. I am grateful--oh! so grateful; but no, it cannot be, and that must be the end of it. I can never be your wife. Rustem."

"No?" he asked with a scowl, and the veins swelled in his low forehead. "Then you have been making a fool of me!--as to the gratitude you talk of..."

He stood up in hot excitement; she laid her hand on his arm, drew him down on to the seat again, and ventured to steal an imploring look into his eyes, which never could long flash with anger. Then she said:

"How you break out! I shall really and truly be very grieved to part from you; cannot you see that I am fond of you? But indeed, indeed it will never do, I--oh! if only I might go back, home, and with you. Yes, with you, as your wife. What a proud and happy thought! And how gladly would I work for us both--for I am very handy and hard-working, but..."

"But?" he repeated, and he put his big, sun-burnt face close to hers, looking as if he could break her in pieces.

"But it cannot be, for your sake; it must not be, positively, certainly. I will not make you so bad a return for all your kindness. What! have you forgotten what I was, what I am? You, as a freeman, will soon have a nice little estate at home, and may command respect and reverence from all; but how different it would be if you had a wife like me at your heels--if only from the fact that I was once a slave."

"That is the history of it all!" he interrupted, and his brow cleared. "That is what is troubling your dear little soul! But do you not know who and what I am? Have I not told you what a Masdakite is?"

[Euty chius, Bishop of Alexandria thus describes the communistic doctrine of Masdak: "God has given to men on earth that which is of the earth to the end that it may be divided equally among them, and that no more falls to the lot of one than another. And if one hath more than is seemly of money or wives or slaves or movable goods, we will take it from him to the end that he and the rest may be equal."]

We Masdakites believe, nay, we know, that all men are born equal, and that this mad-cap world would be a better place if there were neither masters nor servants; however, as things are, so they must remain. The great Lord of Heaven will suffer it yet for a season; but sooner or later, perhaps very soon, everything will be quite different, and it is our business to make ready for the day of equality. Then Paradise will return on earth; there will be none greater or less than another; but we shall all walk hand-in-hand and stand by each other on an equal footing. Then shall war and misery cease; for all that is fair and good on earth belongs to all men in common; and then all men shall be as willing to give and to help others, as they now are to seize and to oppress.--We have no marriage bond like other people; but when a man loves a woman he says, 'Will you be mine?' and if her heart consents she follows him home; and one may quit the other if love grows cold. Still, no married couple, whether Christian or Parsee, ever clung together more faithfully than my parents or my grandparents; and we will do the same to the end, for our love will bind us firmly together with strong cords that will last longer than our lives.--So now you know the doctrine of our master Masdak; my father and grandfather both followed it, and I was taught it by my mother when I was a little child. All in our village were Masdakites; and there was not a slave in the place; the land belonged to all in common and was tilled by all, and the harvest was equally shared. However, they no longer receive strangers, and I must seek for fellow-believers elsewhere. Still, a Masdakite I shall always remain; and, if I were to take a slave for my wife, I should only be acting on the precepts of the master and helping them on. But as for you, the case does not apply to you, for you are the child of a brave freeman, respected in all the land; our people will regard you as a prisoner of war, not as a slave. They will look up to me as your deliverer. And if I had found you, just as you are, the meanest of slaves and keeping pigs, I would have put my hand in my wallet at once and have bought your freedom and have carried you off home as my wife--and no Masdakite who saw you would ever blame me. Now you know all about it, and there, I hope, is an end of your coyness and mincing."

Mandane, however, still would not yield; she looked at him with eyes that entreated his pity, and pointed to her cropped ears.

Rustem shrugged his shoulders with a laugh. "Of course, that too, into the bargain; You will not let me off any part of it! If it had been your eyes now, you would not have been able to see, and no countryman can do with a blind wife, so I should leave you where you are. But you, little one, have hearing as sharp as a bird's? And what bird--pretty little things--did you ever see with ears, unless it were a bat or a nasty owl?--That is all nonsense. Besides, who can see what you have lost now that Pulcheria has brought your hair down so prettily? And do not you remember the head-dress our women wear? You might have ears as long as a hare's, and what good would it do you?--no one could see them. Just as you are, a lily grown like a cypress, you are ten times sweeter to look at than the prettiest girl there, if she had three or even four ears. A girl with three ears! Only think, Mandane, where could the third ear grow?"

How heartily he laughed, and how glad he was to have hit on this jest and have turned off a subject which might so well be painful to her! But his mirth failed of its effect, and only brought a silent smile to her lips. Even this died quickly

away, and in its place there came such a sad, pathetic expression, as she hung her pretty head, that he could neither carry on the joke nor reproach her sharply. He said compassionately, with a little shake of the head:

"But you must not look like that, my pigeon: I cannot bear it. What is it that is weighing on your little soul? Courage, courage, sweetheart, and make a clean breast of it!--But no! Do not speak. I can spare you that! I know, poor little darling--it is that old story of the governor's son."

She nodded, and her eyes filled with tears; and he, with a loud sigh, exclaimed: "I thought as much, I was right, poor child!"

He took her hand, and went on bravely:

"Yes, that has given me some bad hours, too, and a great deal to think about; in fact, I came very near to leaving you alone and spoiling my own happiness and yours too. But I came to my senses before it was too late. Not on account of what Dame Joanna said the day before yesterday--though what she says must be true, and she told me that all--you know what--was at an end. No; my own sense told me this time; for I said to myself: Such a motherless, helpless little thing, a slave, too, and as pretty as the angels, her master's son took a fancy to her, how could she defend herself? And how cruelly the poor little soul was punished!--Yes, little one, you may well weep! Why, my own eyes are full of tears. Well, so it had to be and so it was. You and I and the Lord Almighty and the Hosts of Heaven--who can do anything against us?--So you see that even a poor fool like me can understand how it all came about; and I do not accuse you, nor have I anything to forgive. It was just a dreadful misfortune. But it has come to a good end, thank God I and I can forget it entirely and for ever, if only you can say: 'It is all over and done with and buried like the dead!'"

Before he could hinder her, she snatched his hand, to her lips with passionate affection and sobbed out:

"You are so good! Oh! Rustem, there is not another man on earth so good as you are, and my mother will bless you for it. Do what you will with me! And I declare to you, once for all that all that is past and gone, and only to think of it gives me horror. And it was exactly as you say: my mother dead, no one to warn me or protect me,--I was hardly sixteen, a simple, ignorant creature, and he called me, and it all came over me like a dream in my sleep; and when I awoke...."

"There we are," he interrupted and he tried to laugh as he wiped his eyes. "Both laid up with holes in our heads.--And when I am in my own country I always think the prettiest time is just when the hard winter-frost is over, and the snow melted, and all the flowers in the valleys rush into bloom--and so I feel now, my little girl. Everything will be well now, we shall be so wonderfully happy. The day before yesterday, do you know, I still was not quite clear about it all. Your trouble gave me no peace, and it went against the grain--well, you can understand. But then, later, when I was lying in my room and the moon shone down on my bed..." and a rapt expression came into his face that strangely beautified his harsh features, "I could not help asking myself: 'Although the moon went down into the sea this morning, does that prevent its shining as brightly as ever to-night, and bringing a cooler breeze?' And if a human soul has gone under in the same way, may it not rise up again, bright and shining, when it has bathed and rested? And such a heart--of course every man would like to have its love all to himself, but it may have enough to give more than once. For, as I remembered, my mother, though she loved me dearly, when another child came and yet another gave them the best she had to give; and I was none the worse when she had my youngest sister at the breast, nor was she when I was petted and kissed. And it must be just the same with you. Thought I to myself: though she once loved another man, she may still have a good share left for me!"

"Yes, indeed, Rustem!" she exclaimed, looking tearfully but gratefully into his eyes. "All that is in me of love and tenderness is for you--for you only."

At this he joyfully exclaimed:

"All, that is indeed good hearing! That will do for me; that is what I call a good morning's work! I sat down under this tree a vagabond and a wanderer, and I get up a future land-holder, with the sweetest little wife in the world to keep house for me."

They sat a long time under the shady foliage; he craved no more than to gaze at her and, when he put the old questions asked by all lovers, to be answered with lips and eyes, or merely a speechless nod. Her hands no longer plied the needle, and the pair would have smiled in pity on any one who should have complained of the intolerable heat of this scorching, parching forenoon. A pair of turtle doves over their heads were less indifferent to the sun's rays than they, for the birds had closed their eyes, and the head of the mother bird was resting languidly against the dark collar round her mate's neck.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Vêkeel, like the Persian lovers, did not allow the heat of the day to interfere with his plans. He regarded the governor's house as his own; all he found there aroused, not merely his avarice, but his interest. His first object was to find some document which might justify his proceedings against Orion and the sequestration of his estates, in the eyes of the authorities at Medina.

Great schemes were brewing there; if the conspiracy against the Khaliff Omar should succeed, he had little to fear; and the greater the sum he could ere long forward to the new sovereign, the more surely he could count on his patronage--a sum exceeding, if possible, the largest which his predecessor had ever cast into the Khaliff's treasury.

He went from room to room with the curiosity and avidity of a child, touching everything, testing the softness of the pillows, peeping into scrolls which he did not understand, tossing them aside, smelling at the perfumes in the dead woman's rooms, and the medicines she had used. He showed his teeth with delight when he found in her trunks some costly jewels and gold coins, stuck the finest of her diamond rings on his finger, already covered with gems, and then eagerly searched every corner of the rooms which Orion had occupied.

His interpreter, who could read Greek, had to translate every document he found that did not contain verses. While he listened, he clawed and strummed on the young man's lyre and poured out the scented oil which Orion had been wont to use to smear it over his beard. In front of the bright silver mirror he could not cease from making faces.

To his great disgust he could find nothing among the hundred objects and trifles that lay about to justify suspicion, till, just as he was leaving the room, he noticed in a basket near the writing-table some discarded tablets. He at once pointed them out to the interpreter and, though there was but little to read on the Diptychon,--[Double writing-tablets, which folded together]--it seemed important to the negro for it ran as follows:

"Orion, the son of George, to Paula the daughter of Thomas!

"You have heard already that it is now impossible for me to assist in the rescue of the nuns. But do not misunderstand me. Your noble, and only too well-founded desire to lend succor to your fellow-believers would have sufficed..."

From this point the words written on the wax were carefully effaced, and hardly a letter was decipherable; indeed, there were so few lines that it seemed as though the letter had never been ended--which was the fact.

Though it gave the Vêkeel no inculcating evidence against Orion it pointed to his connection with the guilty parties: Paula, doubtless, had been concerned in the scheme which had cost the lives of so many brave Moslems. The negro had learnt, through the money-changer at Fostat, that she was on terms of close intimacy with the Mukaukas' son and had entrusted her property to his stewardship. They must both be accused as accomplices in the deed, and the document proved Orion's knowledge of it, at any rate.

Plotinus, the bishop, at whose instigation the fugitives had been chased, could fill up what the damsel might choose to conceal.

He had started to follow the patriarch immediately after the pursuers had set out, and had only returned from Upper Egypt early on the previous day. On his arrival he had forwarded to the Vêkeel two indictments brought against Orion by the prelate: the first relating to the evasion of the nuns; the other to the embezzlement of a costly emerald; the rightful property of the church. These accusations were what had encouraged the Negro to confiscate the young man's estate, particularly as the bitter tone of the patriarch's document sufficiently proved that in him he had found an ally.

Paula must next be placed in safe custody, and he had no doubt whatever that her statement would incriminate Orion in some degree. He would gladly have cross-examined her at once, but he had other matters in hand to-day.

The longest part of his task was ransacking the treasurer's office; Nilus himself had to conduct the search. Everything which he pointed out as a legal document, title-deed, contract for purchase or sale, revenue account or the like, was at once placed in oxcarts or on camels, with the large sums of gold and silver coin, and carried across the river under a strong escort. All the more antique deeds and the family archives, the Vêkeel left untouched. He was indeed an indefatigable man, for although these details kept him busy the whole day, he allowed himself no rest nor did he once ask for the refreshment of food or a cooling draught. As the day went on he enquired again and again for the bishop, with increasing impatience and irritation. It would have been his part to wait on the patriarch, but who was Plotinus? Thin-skinned, like all up-starts in authority, he took the bishop's delay as an act of personal contumely. But the shepherd of the flock at Memphis was not a haughty prelate, but a very humble and pious minister. His superior, the patriarch, had entrusted him with an important mission to Amru or his lieutenant, and yet he could let the Vêkeel wait in vain, and not even send him a message of explanation; in the afternoon, however, his old housekeeper dispatched the acolyte who was attached to his person to seek Philippus. Her master, a hale and vigorous man, had gone to bed by broad day-light a few hours after his return home, and had not again left it. He was hot and thirsty, and did not seem fully conscious of where he was or of what was happening.

Plotinus had always maintained that prayer was the Christian's best medicine; still, as his poor body had become alarmingly heated the old woman ventured to send for the physician; but the messenger came back saying that Philippus was absent on a journey. This was in fact the case: He had quitted Memphis in obedience to a letter from Haschim. The merchant's unfortunate son was not getting better. There seemed to be an injury to some internal organ, which threatened his life. The anxious father besought the leech, in whom he had the greatest confidence, to hasten to Djidda, there to examine the sufferer and undertake the case. At the same time he desired that Rustem should join him as soon as his health would permit.

This letter--which ended with greetings to Paula, for whose father he was making diligent search--agitated Philippus greatly. How could he leave Memphis at a time of such famine and sickness?--And Dame Joanna and her daughter!

On the other hand he was much drawn to get away on Paula's account--away, far away; and then how gladly would he do his best to save that fine old man's son. In spite of all this he would have remained, but that his old friend, quite unexpectedly, took Haschim's side of the question and implored him to make the journey. He would make it his business and his pleasure to take charge of the women in Rufinus' house; Philip's assistant could fill his place at the bedside of many of the sick, and the rest could die without him. Had not he himself said that there was no remedy for the disease? Again, Philip had said not long since that there could be no peace for him within reach of Paula: here was a favorable opportunity for escape without attracting remark, and at the same time for doing a work of the truest charity.

So Philippus had yielded, and had started on his journey with very mixed feelings.

Horapollo did not devote any particular attention to his personal comfort; but in one respect he took especial care of himself. He had great difficulty in walking and, as he loved to breathe the fresh air at sundown, and sometimes to study the stars at a late hour, he kept an ass of the best and finest breed. He did not hesitate to pay a high price for such a beast if it really answered his requirements; that is to say if it were strong, surefooted, gentle, and light-colored. His father and grandfather, priests of Isis, had always ridden white asses, and so he would do the same.

During the last few sultry weeks he had rarely gone out of doors, and to-day he waited till the hour before sunset before starting to keep his promise.

Robed in snowy-white linen, with new sandals on his feet, freshly shaven, and protected from the sun's rays by a crisply curled, flowing wig, after the manner of his fathers, as well as by an umbrella, he mounted his beautiful white ass in the conviction that he had done his best for his outer man, and set forth, followed by his black slave trotting on foot.

It was not yet dark when he stopped at the house of Rufinus. His heart had not beat so high for many a day.

"I feel as if I had come courting," said he, laughing at himself. "Well, and I really am come to propose an alliance for the rest of my life! Still, curiosity, one would think, might be shed with the hair and the teeth!" However, it still clung to him, and he could not deny to himself that he was very curious as to the person whom he hated, though he had never seen her, simply because she was the daughter of a patrician and a prefect, and had made his Philippus miserable. As he was dismounting, a graceful young girl and an older woman, in very costly though simple dresses, came through the garden. These must be the water-wagtail, and Orion's Byzantine guest.--How annoying! So many women at once!

Their presence here could only embarrass and disturb him--a lonely student unused to the society of women. However, there was no help for it; and the new-comers were not so bad after all.

Katharina was a very attractive, pretty little mouse, and even without her millions much too good for the libertine Orion. The matron, who had a kind, pleasant face, was exactly what Philippus had described her. But then--and this spoilt all--in their presence he must not allude to the death of Rufinus, so that he could not mention his proposed arrangement. He had swallowed all that dust, and borne that heat for nothing, and to-morrow he must ignominiously go through it all again!

The first people he met were a handsome young couple: Rustem and Mandane. There could be no doubt as to their identity; so he went up to them and gave Rustem the merchant's message, offering in Philip's name to advance the money for the journey. But the Masdakite patted his sleeve, in which he carried a good round sum in gold pieces, and exclaimed cheerily:

"It is all here, and enough for two travellers to the East.--My little wife, by your leave; the time has come, little pigeon! Off we go, homeward bound!"

The huge fellow shouted it out in his deep voice with such effervescent contentment, and the pretty girl, as she looked up at him, was so glad, so much in love, and so grateful, that it quite cheered the old man; and he, who read an omen in every incident, accepted this meeting as of good augury at his first entering the house which was probably to be his home.

His visit went on as well as it had begun, for he was welcomed very warmly both by the widow and daughter of Rufinus. Pulcheria at once pushed forward her father's arm-chair and placed a pillow behind his back, and she did it so quietly, so simply, and so amiably that it warmed his old heart, and he said to himself that it would be almost too much of a good thing to have such care given him every day and every hour.

He could not forbear from a kindly jest with the young girl over her attentions, and Martina at once entered into the

joke. She had seen him coming on his fine ass; she praised the steed, and then refused to believe that the rider was past eighty. His news of Philip's departure was regretted by all, and he was delighted to perceive that Pulcheria seemed startled and presently shrank into the background. What a sweet, pure, kind face the child had--and pretty withal; she must and should be his little daughter; and all the while he was talking, or listening to Katharina's small jokes and a friendly catechism from Martina and Dame Joanna, in his mind's eye he saw Philippus and that dear little creature as man and wife, surrounded by pretty children playing all about him.

He had come to comfort and to condole, and lo! he was having as pleasant an hour as he had known in a long time.

He and the other visitors had been received in the vindarium, which was now brightly lighted up, and now and then he glanced at the doors which opened on this, the centre of the house, trying to imagine what the different rooms should by-and-by be used for.

But he heard a light step behind him; Martina rose, the water-wagtail hurried to meet the new-comer, and there appeared on the scene the tall figure of a girl dressed in mourning-robos. She greeted the matron with distinguished dignity, cast a cordial glance of sympathetic intelligence to Joanna and Pulcheria, and when the mistress of the house told her who the old man was, she went up to him and held out her hand--a cool, slender hand, as white as marble; the true patrician hand.

Yes, she was beautiful, wonderfully beautiful! He could hardly remember ever to have seen her equal. A spotless masterpiece of the Creator's hand, made like some unapproachable goddess, to command the worship of subject adorers; however, she must renounce all hope of his, for those marble features, all the whiter by contrast with her black dress, had no attraction for him. No warming glow shone in those proud eyes; and under that lordly bosom beat no loving or lovable heart; he shivered at the touch of her fingers, and her presence, he thought, had a chilling and paralyzing influence on all the party.

This was, in fact, the case.

Paula had been sent for to see the senator's wife and Katharina. Martina, thought she, had come out of mere curiosity, and she had a preconceived dislike to any one connected with Heliodora. She had lost her confidence in the water-wagtail, for only two days ago the acolyte in personal attendance on the bishop--and whose child Rufinus had cured of a lame foot--had been to the house to warn Joanna against the girl. Katharina, he told her, had a short while since betrayed to Plotinus some important secret relating to her husband, and the bishop had immediately gone over to Fostat. It was hard to believe such a thing of any friend, still, the girl who, by her own confession, had been so ready to play the part of spy in the neighboring garden, was the only person who would have told the prelate what plan was in hand for the rescue of the sisters. The acolyte's positive statement, indeed, left no room for doubt.

It was not in Paula's nature to think ill of others; but in this case her candid spirit, incapable of falsehood, would not suffer her to be anything but cool to the child; the more effusively Katharina clung to her, the more icily Paula repelled her.

The old man saw this, and he concluded that this mien and demeanor were natural to Paula at all times patrician haughtiness, cold-hearted selfishness, the insolent and boundless pride of the race he loathed--noble by birth alone--stood before him incarnate. He hated the whole class, and he hated this specimen of the class; and his aversion increased tenfold as he remembered what woe this cold siren had wrought for the son of his affections and might bring on him if she should thwart his favorite project. Sooner would he end his days in loneliness, parted even from Philippus, than share his home, his table, and his daily life with this woman, who could repel the sincerely-meant caresses of that pretty, childlike, simple little Katharina with such frigid and supercilious haughtiness. The mere sight of her at meals would embitter every mouthful; only to hear her domineering tones in the next room would spoil his pleasure in working; the touch of her cold hand as she bid him good-night would destroy his night's rest!

Here and now her presence was more than he could bear. It was an offense to him, a challenge; and if ever he had wished to clear her out of his path and the physician's--by force, if need should be--the idea wholly possessed him now.

Irritated and provoked, he took leave of all the others, carefully avoiding a glance even at Paula, though, after he rose, she went up to him on purpose to say a few pleasant words, and to assure him how highly she esteemed his adopted son.

Pulcheria escorted him through the garden and he promised her to return on the morrow, or the day after, and then she must take care that he found her and her mother alone, for he had no fancy to allow Paula to thrust her pride and airs under his nose a second time.

He angrily rejected Pulcheria's attempts to take her friend's part, and he trotted home again, mumbling curses between his old lips.

Martina, meanwhile, had made friends with Paula in her genial, frank way. She had met her parents in time past in Constantinople and spoke of them with heart-felt warmth. This broke the ice between them, and when Martina spoke of Orion--her 'great Sesostris'--of the regard and popularity he had enjoyed in Constantinople, and then, with due

recognition and sympathy, of his misfortune, Paula felt drawn towards her indeed. Her reserve vanished entirely, and the conversation between the new acquaintances became more and more eager, intimate, and delightful.

When they parted both felt that they could only gain by further intercourse. Paula was called away at the very moment of leave-taking, and left the room with warm expressions intended only for the matron: "Not good-bye--we must meet again. But of course it is my part, as the younger, to go to you!" And she was no sooner gone than Martina exclaimed:

"What a lovely creature! The worthy daughter of a noble father! And her mother! O dame Joanna! A sweeter being has rarely graced this miserable world; she was born to die young, she was only made to bloom and fade!" Then, turning to Katharina, she went on: with kindly reproof. "Evil tongues gave me a very false idea of this girl. 'A silver kernel in a golden shell,' says the proverb, but in this case both alike are of gold.--Between you two--good God!--But I know what has blinded your clear eyes, poor little kitten. After all, we all see things as we wish to see them. I would lay a wager, dame Joanna, that you are of my opinion in thinking the fair Paula a perfectly noble creature. Aye, a noble creature; it is an expressive word and God knows! How seldom is it a true one? It is one I am little apt to use, but I know no other for such as she is, and on her it is not ill-bestowed."

"Indeed it is not!" answered Joanna with warm assent; but Martina sighed, for she was thinking to herself! "Poor Heliadora! I cannot but confess that Paula is the only match for my 'great Sesostris.' But what in Heaven's name will become of that poor, unfortunate, love-sick little woman?"

All this flashed through her quick brain while Katharina was trying to justify herself, and asserting that she fully recognised Paula's great qualities, but that she was proud, fearfully proud--she had given Martina herself some evidence of that.

At this Pulcheria interposed in zealous defense of her friend. She, however, had hardly begun to speak when she, too, was interrupted, for men's voices were heard in loud discussion in the vestibule, and Perpetua suddenly rushed in with a terrified face, exclaiming, heedless of the strangers: "Oh Dame Joanna! Here is another, dreadful misfortune! Those Arab devils have come again, with an interpreter and a writer. And they have been sent--Merciful Saviour, is it possible?--they have brought a warrant to take away my poor dear child, to take her to prison--to drag her all through the city on foot and throw her into prison."

The faithful soul sobbed aloud and covered her face with her hands. Terror fell upon them all; Joanna left the viridarium in speechless dismay, and Martina exclaimed:

"What a horrible, vile country! Good God, they are even falling on us women. Children, children--give me a seat, I feel quite ill.--In prison! that beautiful, matchless creature dragged through the streets to prison. If the warrant is all right she must go--she must! Not an angel from heaven could save her. But that she should be marched through the town, that noble and splendid creature, as if she were a common thief--it is not to be borne. So much as one woman can do for another at any rate shall be done, so long as I am here to stand on two feet!--Katharina, child, do not you understand? Why do you stand gaping at me as if I were a feathered ape? What do your fat horses eat oats for? What, you do not understand me yet? Be off at once, this minute, and have the horses put in the large closed chariot in which I came here, and bring it to the door.--Ah! At last you see daylight; now, take to your heels and fly!"

And she clapped her hands as if she were driving hens off a garden-bed; Katharina had no alternative but to obey.

Martina then felt for her purse, and when she had found it she added confidently:

"Thank God! I can talk to these villains! This is a language," and she clinked the gold pieces, intelligible to all. "Come, where are the rascals?"

The universal tongue had the desired effect. The chief of the guard allowed it to persuade him to convey Paula to prison in the chariot, and to promise that she should find decent accommodation there, while he also granted old Betta the leave she insisted on with floods of tears, to share the girl's captivity.

Paula maintained her dignity and composure under this unexpected shock. Only when it came to taking leave of Pulcheria and Mary, who clung to her in frantic grief and begged to go with her and Betta to prison, she could not restrain her tears.

The scribe had informed her that she was charged by Bishop Plotinus with having plotted the escape and flight of the nuns, and Joanna's knees trembled under her when Paula whispered in her ear:

"Beware of Katharina! No one else could have betrayed us; if she has also revealed what Rufinus did for the sisters we must deny it, positively and unflinchingly. Fear nothing: they will get not a word out of me." Then she added aloud: "I need not beg you to remember me lovingly; thanks to you both--the warmest, deepest thanks for all.... You, Pul...." And she clasped the mother and daughter to her bosom, while Mary, clinging to her, hid her little face in her skirts, weeping bitterly.... "You, Dame Joanna, took me in, a forlorn creature, and made me happy till Fate fell on us all--you know, ah! you know too well.--The kindness you have shown to me show now to my little Mary. And there is one thing more--here comes the interpreter again!--A moment yet, I beg!--If the messenger should return and bring news of my father or, my God! my God!--my father himself, let me know, or bring him to me!--Or, if I am dead by the time he comes,

tell him that to find him, to see him once more, was my heart's dearest wish. And beg my father," she breathed the words into Joanna's ear, "to love Orion as a son. And tell them both that I loved them to the last, deeply, perfectly, beyond words!" Then she added aloud as she kissed each on her eyes and lips: "I love you and shall always love you--you, Joanna, and you, my Pulcheria, and you, Mary, my sweet, precious darling."

At this the water-wagtail humed forward with outstretched arms, but Dame Joanna put out a significantly warning hand; and they who were one in heart clasped each other in a last embrace as though they were indeed but one and no stranger could have any part in it.

Once more Katharina tried to approach Paula; but Martina, whose eyes filled with tears as she looked on the parting, held her back by the shoulder and whispered:

"Do not disturb them, child. Such hearts spontaneously attract those for whom they yearn. I, old as I am, would gladly be worthy to be called."

The interpreter now sternly insisted on starting. The three women parted; but still the little girl held tightly to Paula, even when she went up to the matron and kissed her with a natural impulse. Martina took her head between her hands, kissed her fondly, and said in a voice she could scarcely control: "God protect and keep you, child! I thank Him for having brought us together. A soul so pure and clear as yours is not to be found in the capital, but we still know how to be friends to our friends--at any rate I and my husband do--and if Heaven but grants me the opportunity you shall prove it. You never need feel alone in the world; never, so long as Justinus and his wife are still in it. Remember that, child; I mean it in solemn earnest."

With this, she again embraced Paula, who as she went out to enter the chariot also bestowed a farewell kiss on Eudoxia and Mandane, for they, too, stood modestly weeping in the background; then she gave her hand to the hump-backed gardener, and to the Masdakite, down whose cheeks tears were rolling. At this moment Katharina stood in her path, seized her arm in mortified excitement, and said insistently:

"And have you not a word for me?"

Paula freed herself from her clutch and said in a low voice: "I thank you for lending me the chariot. As you know, it is taking me to prison, and I fear it is your perfidy that has brought me to this. If I am wrong, forgive me--if I am right, your punishment will hardly be lighter than my fate. You are still young, Katharina; try to grow better."

And with this she stepped into the chariot with old Betta, and the last she saw was little Mary who threw herself sobbing into Joanna's arms.

CHAPTER XIV.

Susannah had never particularly cared for Paula, but her fate shocked her and moved her to pity. She must at once enquire whether it was not possible to send her some better food than the ordinary prison-fare. That was but Christian charity, and her daughter seemed to take her friend's misfortune much to heart. When she and Martina returned home she looked so cast down and distracted that no stranger now would ever have dreamed of comparing her with a brisk little bird.

Once more a poisoned arrow had struck her. Till now she had been wicked only in her own eyes; now she was wicked in the eyes of another. Paula knew it was she who had betrayed her. The traitress had been met by treachery. The woman she hated had a right to regard her as spiteful and malignant, and for this she hated her more than ever.

Till now she had nowhere failed to find an affectionate greeting and welcome; and to-day how coldly she had been repulsed--and not by Paula alone, but also by Martina, who no doubt had noticed something, and whose dry reserve had been quite intolerable to the girl.

It was all the old bishop's fault; he had not kept his promise that her tale-bearing should remain as secret as a confession. Indeed, he must have deliberately revealed it, for no one but herself knew of the facts. Perhaps he had even mentioned her name to the Arabs; in that case she would have to bear witness before the judges, and then in what light would she appear to Orion, to her mother, to Joanna and Martina?

She had not failed to understand that old Rufinus must have perished in the expedition, and she was truly grieved. His wife and daughter had always been kind neighbors to her; and she would not have willingly brought sorrow on them. If she were called up to give evidence it might go hard with them, and she wished no harm to any one but those who had cheated her out of Orion's love. This idea of standing before a court of justice was the worst of all; this must be warded off at any cost.

Where could Bishop Plotinus be? He had returned to Memphis the day before, and yet he had not been to see her mother, to whom he usually paid a daily visit. This absence seemed to her ominous. Everything depended on her reminding the old man of his promise as soon as possible; for if at the trial next morning--which of course, he must attend--he should happen to mention her name, the guards, the interpreter, and the scribe would invade her home too and then--horror! She had given evidence once already, and could never again go through all that had ensued.

But how was she to get at the bishop in the course of the night or early to-morrow at latest?

The chariot had not yet returned, and if--it still wanted two hours of midnight; yes--it must be done.

She began talking to her mother of the prelate's absence; Susannah, too, was uneasy about it, particularly since she had heard that the old man had come home ill and that his servant had been out and about in search of a physician. Katharina promptly proposed to go and see him: the horses were still in harness, her nurse could accompany her. She really must go and learn how her venerable friend was going on.

Susannah thought this very sweet; still, she said it was very late for such a visit; however, her spoilt child had said that she "must" and the answer was a foregone conclusion. Dame Susannah gave way; the nurse was sent for, and as soon as the chariot came round Katharina flung her arms round her mother's neck, promising her not to stay long, and in a few minutes the chariot stopped at the door of the bishop's palace. She bid the nurse wait for her and went alone into the vast, rambling house.

The spacious hall, lighted feebly by a single lamp, was silent and deserted, even the door-keeper had left his post; however, she was familiar with every step and turning, and went on through the impluvium into the library where, at this hour, the bishop was wont to be found. But it was dark, and her gentle call met with no reply. In the next room, to which she timidly felt her way, a slave lay snoring; beside him were a wine jar and a hand-lamp. The sight somewhat reassured her. Beyond was the bishop's bedroom, which she had never been into. A dim light gleamed through the open door and she heard a low moaning and gasping. She called the house-keeper by name once, twice; no answer. The sleeping slave did not stir; but a familiar voice addressed her from the bedroom, groaning rather than saying:

"Who is there? Is he come? Have you found him at last?"

The whole household had fled in fear of the pestilence; even the acolyte, who had indeed a wife and children. The housekeeper had been forced to leave the master to seek the physician, who had already been there once, and the last remaining slave, a faithful, goodhearted, heedless sot, had been left in charge; but he had brought a jar of wine up from the unguarded cellar, had soon emptied it, and then, overcome by drink and the heat of the night, he had fallen asleep.

Katharina at once spoke her name and the old man answered her, saying kindly, but with difficulty: "Ah, it is you, you, my child!"

She took up the lamp and went close to the sick man. He put out his lean arm to welcome her; but, as her approach brought the light near to him he covered his eyes, crying out distressfully: "No, no; that hurts. Take away the lamp."

Katharina set it down on a low chest behind the head of the bed; then she went up to the sufferer, gave him her

mother's message, and asked him how he was and why he was left alone. He could only give incoherent answers which he gasped out with great difficulty, bidding her go close to him for he could not hear her distinctly. He was very ill, he told her--dying. It was good of her to have come for she had always been his pet, his dear, good little girl.

"And it was a happy impulse that brought you," he added, "to receive an old man's blessing. I give it you with my whole heart."

As he spoke he put forth his hand and she, following an instinctive prompting, fell on her knees by the side of the couch.

He laid his burning right hand on her head and murmured some words of blessing; she, however, scarcely heeded them, for his hand felt like lead and its heat oppressed and distressed her dreadfully. It was a sincere grief to her to see this true old friend of her childhood suffering thus--perhaps indeed dying; at the same time she did not forget what had brought her here--still, she dared not disturb him in this act of love. He gave her his blessing--that was kind; but his mutterings did not come to an end, the weight of the hot hand on her head grew heavier and heavier, and at last became intolerable. She felt quite dazed, but with an effort she collected her senses and then perceived that the old man had wandered off from the usual formulas of blessing and was murmuring disconnected and inarticulate words.

At this she raised the terrible, fevered hand, laid it on the bed, and was about to ask him whether he had betrayed her to Benjamin, and if he had mentioned her name, when--Merciful God! there on his cheeks were the same livid spots that she had noticed on those of the plague stricken man in Medea's house. With a cry of horror she sprang up, snatched at the lamp, held it over the sufferer, heedless of his cries of anguish, looked into his face, and pulled away the weary hands with which he tried to screen his eyes from the light. Then, having convinced herself that she was not mistaken, she fled from room to room out into the hall.

Here she was met by the housekeeper, who took the lamp out of her hand and was about to question her; but Katharina only screamed:

"The plague is in the house! Lock the doors!" and then rushed away, past the leech who was coming in. With one bound she was in the chariot, and as the horses started she wailed out to the nurse:

"The plague--they have the plague. Plotinus has taken the plague!"

The terrified woman tried to soothe her, assuring her that she must be mistaken for such hellish fiends did not dare come near so holy a man. But the girl vouchsafed no reply, merely desiring her to have a bath made ready for her as soon as they should reach home.

She felt utterly shattered; on the spot where the old man's plague-stricken hand had rested she was conscious of a heavy, hateful pressure, and when the chariot at length drove into their own garden something warm and heavy--something she could not shake off, still seemed to weigh on her brain.

The windows were all dark excepting one on the ground-floor, where a light was still visible in the room inhabited by Heliadora. A diabolical thought flashed through her over-excited and restless mind; without looking to the right hand or the left she obeyed the impulse and went forward, just as she was, into her friend's sitting-room and then, lifting a curtain, on into the bedroom. Heliadora was lying on her couch, still suffering from a headache which had prevented her going to visit their neighbors; at first she did not notice the late visitor who stood by her side and bid her good evening.

A single lamp shed a dim light in the spacious room, and the young girl had never thought their guest so lovely as she looked in that twilight. A night wrapper of the thinnest material only half hid her beautiful limbs. Round her flowing, fair hair, floated the subtle, hardly perceptible perfume which always pervaded this favorite of fortune. Two heavy plaits lay like sheeny snakes over her bosom and the white sheet. Her face was turned upwards and was exquisitely calm and sweet; and as she lay motionless and smiled up at Katharina, she looked like an angel wearied in well-doing.

No man could resist the charms of this woman, and Orion had succumbed. By her side was a lute, from which she brought the softest and most soothing tones, and thus added to the witchery of her appearance.

Katharina's whole being was in wild revolt; she did not know how she was able to return Heliadora's greeting, and to ask her how she could possibly play the lute with a headache.

"Just gliding my fingers over the strings calms and refreshes my blood," she replied pleasantly. "But you, child, look as if you were suffering far worse than I.--Did you come home in the chariot that drove up just now?"

"Yes," replied Katharina. "I have been to see our dear old bishop. He is very ill, dying; he will soon be taken from us. Oh, what a fearful day! First Orion's mother, then Paula, and now this to crown all! Oh, Heliadora, Heliadora!"

She fell on her knees by the bed and pressed her face against her pitying friend's bosom. Heliadora saw the tears which had risen with unaffected feeling to the girl's eyes; her tender soul was full of sympathy with the sorrow of such a gladsome young creature, who had already had so much to suffer, and she leaned over the child, kissing her affectionately on the brow, and murmuring words of consolation. Katharina clung to her closely, and pointing to the top of her head where that burning hand had pressed it, she said: "There, kiss there: there is where the pain is worst!--"

Ah, that is nice, that does me good."

And, as the tender-hearted Heliodora's fresh lips rested on the plague-tainted hair, Katharina closed her eyes and felt as a gladiator might who hitherto has only tried his weapons on the practising ground, and now for the first time uses them in the arena to pierce his opponent's heart. She had a vision of herself as some one else, taller and stronger than she was; aye, as Death itself, the destroyer, breathing herself into her victim's breast.

These feelings entirely possessed her as she knelt on the soft carpet, and she did not notice that another woman was crossing it noiselessly to her comforter's bed-side, with a glance of intelligence at Heliodora. Just as she exclaimed: "Another kiss there-it burns so dreadfully," she felt two hands on her temples and two lips, not Heliodora's, were pressed on her head.

She looked up in astonishment and saw the smiling face of her mother, who had come after her to ask how the bishop was, and who wished to take her share in soothing the pain of her darling.

How well her little surprise had succeeded!

But what came over the child? She started to her feet as if lightning had struck her, as if an asp had stung her, looked horror-stricken into her mother's eyes, and then, as Susannah was on the point of clasping the little head to her bosom once more to kiss the aching, the cursed spot, Katharina pushed her away, flew, distracted, through the sitting-room into the vestibule, and down the narrow steps leading to the bathroom.

Her mother looked after her, shaking her head in bewilderment. Then she turned to Heliodora with a shrug, and said, as the tears filled her eyes:

"Poor, poor little thing! Too many troubles have come upon her at once. Her life till lately was like a long, sunny day, and now the hail is pelting her from all sides at once. She has bad news of the bishop, I fear."

"He is dying, she said," replied the young widow with feeling.

"Our best and truest friend," sobbed Susannah. "It is, it really is too much. I often think that I must myself succumb, and as for her--hardly more than a child!--And with what resignation she bears the heaviest sorrows!--You, Heliodora, are far from knowing what she has gone through; but you have no doubt seen how her only thought is to seem bright, so as to cheer my heart. Not a sigh, not a complaint has passed her lips. She submits like a saint to everything, without a murmur. But, now that her clear old friend is stricken, she has lost her self-control for the first time. She knows all that Plotinus has been to me." And she broke down into fresh sobbing. When she was a little calmer, she apologised for her weakness and bid her fair guest good night.

Katharina, meanwhile, was taking a bath.

A bathroom was an indispensable adjunct to every wealthy Graeco-Egyptian house, and her father had taken particular pains with its construction. It consisted of two chambers, one for men and one for women; both fitted with equal splendor.

White marble, yellow alabaster, purple porphyry on all sides; while the pavement was of fine Byzantine mosaic on a gold ground. There were no statues, as in the baths of the heathen; the walls were decorated with bible texts in gold letters, and above the divan, which was covered with a giraffe skin, there was a crucifix. On the middle panel of the coffered ceiling was inscribed defiantly, in the Coptic language the first axiom of the Jacobite creed: "We believe in the single, indivisible nature of Christ Jesus." And below this hung silver lamps.

The large bath had been filled immediately for Katharina, as the furnace was heated every evening for the ladies of the house. As she was undressing, her maid showed her a diseased date. The head gardener, had brought it to her, for he had that afternoon, discovered that his palms, too, had been attacked. But the woman soon regretted her loquacity, for when she went on to say that Anchhor, the worthy shoemaker who, only the day before yesterday, had brought home her pretty new sandals, had died of the plague, Katharina scolded her sharply and bid her be silent. But as the maid knelt before her to unfasten her sandals, Katharina herself took up the story again, asking her whether the shoemaker's pretty young wife had also been attacked. The girl said that she was still alive, but that the old mother-in-law and all the children had been shut into the house, and even the shutters barred as soon as the corpse had been brought out. The authorities had ordered that this should be done in every case, so that the pestilence might not pervade the streets or be disseminated among the healthy. Food and drink were handed to the captives through a wicket in the door. Such regulations, she added, seemed particularly well-considered and wise. But she would have done better to keep her opinions to herself, for before she had done speaking Katharina gave her an angry push with her foot. Then she desired her not to be sparing with the 'smegma',--[A material like soap, but used in a soft state.]-and to wash her hair as thoroughly as possible.

This was done; and Katharina herself rubbed her hands and arms with passionate diligence. Then she had water poured over her head again and again, till, when she desired the maid to desist, she had to lean breathless and almost exhausted against the marble.

But in spite of smegma and water she still felt the pressure of the burning hand on top of her head, and her heart seemed oppressed by some invisible load of lead.

Her mother! oh, her mother! She had kissed her there, where the plague had actually touched her, and in fancy she could hear her gasping and begging for a drink of water like the dying wretches to whom her fate had led her. And then--then came the servants of the senate and shut her into the pestilential house with the sick; she saw the pest in mortal form, a cruel and malignant witch; behind her, tall and threatening, stood her inexorable companion Death, reaching out a bony hand and clutching her mother, and then all who were in the house with her, and last of all, herself.

Her arms dropped by her side: powerful and terrible as she had felt herself this morning, she was now crushed by a sense of miserable and impotent weakness. Her defiance had been addressed to a mortal, a frail, tender woman; and God and Fate had put her in the front of the battle instead of Heliodora. She shuddered at the thought.

As she went up from the bath-room, her mother met her in the hall and said:

"What, still here, Child? How you startled me! And is it true? Is Plotinus really ill of a complaint akin to the plague?"

"Worse than that, mother," she replied sadly. "He has the plague; and I remembered that a bath is the right thing when one has been in a plague-stricken house; you, too, have kissed and touched me. Pray have the fire lighted again, late as it is, and take a bath too."

"But, Child," Susannah began with a laugh; but Katharina gave her no peace till she yielded, and promised to bathe in the men's room, which had not been used at all since the appearance of the epidemic. When Dame Susannah found herself alone she smiled to herself in silent thankfulness, and in the bath again she lifted up her heart and hands in prayer for her only child, the loving daughter who cared for her so tenderly.

Katharina went to her own room, after ascertaining that the clothes she had worn this evening had been sacrificed in the bath-furnace.

It was past midnight, but still she bid the maid sit up, and she did not go to bed. She could not have found rest there. She was tempted to go out on the balcony, and she sat down there on a rocking chair. The night was sultry and still. Every house, every tree, every wall seemed to radiate the heat it had absorbed during the day. Along the quay came a long procession of pilgrims; this was followed by a funeral train and soon after came another--both so shrouded in clouds of dust that the torches of the followers looked like coals glimmering under ashes. Several who had died of the pestilence, and whom it had been impossible to bury by day, were being borne to the grave together. One of these funerals, so she vaguely fancied, was Heliodora's; the other her own perhaps--or her mother's--and she shivered at the thought. The long train wandered on under its shroud of dust, and stood still when it reached the Necropolis; then the sledge with the bier came back empty on red hot runners--but she was not one of the mourners--she was imprisoned in the pestiferous house. Then, when she was freed again--she saw it all quite clearly--two heads had been cut off in the courtyard of the Hall of justice: Orion's and Paula's--and she was left alone, quite alone and forlorn. Her mother was lying by her father's side under the sand in the cemetery, and who was there to care for her, to be troubled about her, to protect her? She was alone in the world like a tree without roots, like a leaf blown out to sea, like an unfledged bird that has fallen out of the nest.

Then, for the first time since that evening when she had borne false witness, her memory reverted to all she had been taught at school and in the church of the torments of hell, and she pictured the abode of the damned, and the scorching, seething Lake of fire in which murderers, heretics, false witnesses....

What was that?

Had hell indeed yawned, and were the flames soaring up to the sky through the riven shell of the earth? Had the firmament opened to pour living fire and black fumes on the northern part of the city?

She started up in dismay, her eyes fixed on the terrible sight. The whole sky seemed to be in flames; a fiery furnace, with dense smoke and myriads of shooting sparks, filled the whole space between earth and heaven. A devouring conflagration was apparently about to annihilate the town, the river, the starry vault itself; the metal heralds which usually called the faithful to church lifted up their voices; the quiet road at her feet suddenly swarmed with thousands of people; shrieks, yells and frantic commands came up from below, and in the confusion of tongues she could distinguish the words "Governor's Palace"--"Arabs"--"Mukaukas"--"Orion"--"fire"--"Put it out"--"Save it."

At this moment the old head-gardener called up to her from the lotos-tank: "The palace is in flames! And in this drought--God All-merciful save the town!"

Her knees gave way; she put out her hands with a faint cry to feel for some support, and two arms were thrown about her--the arms which she so lately had pushed away: her mother's: that mother who had bent over her only child and inhaled death in a kiss on her plague-tainted hair.

CHAPTER XV.

The governor's palace, the pride and glory of Memphis, the magnificent home of the oldest and noblest family of the land--the last house that had given birth to a race of native Egyptians held worthy, even by the Greeks, to represent the emperor and uphold the highest dignity in the world--the very citadel of native life, lay in ashes; and just as a giant of the woods crushes and destroys in its fall many plants of humbler growth, so the burning of the great house destroyed hundreds of smaller dwellings.

This night's work had torn the mast and rudder, and many a plank besides, from that foundering vessel, the town of Memphis. It seemed indeed a miracle that had saved the whole from being reduced to cinders; and for this, next to God's providence, they might thank the black incendiary himself and his Arabs. The crime was committed with cool and shrewd foresight, and carried through to the end. During his visitation throughout the rambling buildings Obada had looked out for spots that might suit his purpose, and two hours after sunset he had lighted fire after fire with his own hand, in secret and undetected. The troops he intended to employ later were waiting under arms at Fostat, and when the fire broke out, first in the treasury and afterwards in three other places in the palace, they were immediately marched across and very judiciously employed.

All that was precious in this ancient home of a wealthy race, was conveyed to a place of safety, even the numerous fine horses in the stables; and the title-deeds of the estate, slaves, and so forth were already secured at Fostat; still, the flames consumed vast quantities of treasures that could never be replaced. Beautiful works of art, manuscripts and books such as were only preserved here, old and splendid plants from every zone, vessels and woven stuffs that had been the delight of connoisseurs--all perished in heaps. But the incendiary regretted none of them, for all possibility of proving how much that was precious had fallen into his hands was buried under their ashes.

The worst that could happen to him now was to be deposed from office for his too audacious proceedings. Of all the towns he had seen in the course of the triumphant incursions of Islam none had attracted him so greatly as Damascus, and he now had the means of spending the latter half of his life there in luxurious enjoyment.

At the same time it was desirable to rescue as much as possible from the flames; for it would have given his enemies a fatal hold upon him, if the famous old city of Memphis should perish by his neglect. And he was a man to give battle to the awful element.

Not another building fell a prey to it on the Nile quay; but a light southerly breeze carried burning fragments to the northwest, and several houses in the poorer quarter on the edge of the desert caught fire. Thither the larger portion of those who could combat the flames and rescue the inhabitants were at once directed; and here, as at the palace, he acted on the principle of sacrificing whatever could not be saved entire. Thus a whole quarter of the town was destroyed, hundreds of beggared families lost all they possessed; and yet he, whose ruthless avarice had cast so many into misery, was admired and lauded; for he was everywhere at once: now by the river and now by the desert, always where the danger was greatest, and where the presence of the leader was most needed. Here he was seen in the very midst of the fire, there he swung the axe with his own hand; now, mounted on horseback, he rode down the line where the dry grass was to be torn up by the roots and soaked with water; now, on foot, he directed the scanty jet from the pipes or, with Herculean strength, flung back into the flames a beam which had fallen beyond the limits he had set. His shrill voice sounded, as his huge height towered, above all others; every eye was fixed on his black face and flashing eyes and teeth, while his example carried away all his followers to imitate it. His shouts of command made the scene of the fire like a battle-field; the Moslems, so ably led, regardless of life as they were and ready to strain and exert their strength to the utmost, wrought wonders in the name of their God and His Prophet.

The Egyptians, too, did their best; but they felt themselves impotent by comparison with what these Arabs did, and they hardly felt anything but the disgrace of being over-mastered by them.

The light shone far across the country; even he whose splendid inheritance was feeding the flames perceived, between midnight and dawn, a glow on the distant western horizon which he was unable to account for.

He had been riding towards it for about half an hour when the caravan halted at the last station but one, on the high road between Kolzum and Babylon.

[Suez, and the Greek citadel near which Amru founded Fostat and Cairo subsequently grew up.]

A considerable troop of horse soldiers dismounted at the same time, but Orion had not summoned these to protect him; on the contrary, he was in their charge and they were taking him, a prisoner, to Fostat. He had quitted the chariot in which he had set out and had been made to mount a dromedary; two horsemen armed to the teeth rode constantly at his side. His fellow-travellers were allowed to remain in their chariot.

At the inn which they had now reached Justinus got out and desired his companion, a pale-faced man who sat sunk into a heap, to do the same; but with a weary shake of the head he declined to move.

"Are you in pain, Narses?" asked Justinus affectionately, and Narses briefly replied in a husky voice: "All over," and settled himself against the cushion at the back of the chariot. He even refused the refreshments brought out to him by the Senator's servant and interpreter. He seemed sunk in apathy and to crave nothing but peace.

This was the senator's nephew.

With Orion's help, and armed with letters of protection and recommendation from Amru, the senator had gained his purpose. He had ransomed Narses, but not before the wretched man had toiled for some time as a prisoner, first at the canal on the line of the old one constructed by the Pharaohs, which was being restored under the Khaliff Omar, to secure the speediest way of transporting grain from Egypt to Arabia and afterwards in the rock-bound harbor of Aila. On the burning shores of the Red Sea, under the fearful sun of those latitudes, Narses was condemned to drag blocks of stone; many days had elapsed before his uncle could trace him--and in what a state did Justinus find him at last!

A week before he could reach him, the ex-officer of cavalry had laid himself down in the wretched sheds for the sick provided for the laborers; his back still bore the scars of the blows by which the overseer had spurred the waning strength of his exhausted and suffering victim. The fine young soldier was a wreck, broken alike in heart and body and sunk in melancholy. Justinus had hoped to take him home jubilant to Martina, and he had only this ruin to show her, doomed to the grave.

The senator was glad, nevertheless, to have saved this much at any rate. The sight of the sufferer touched him deeply, and the less Narses would take or give, the more thankful was Justinus when he gave the faintest sign of reviving interest.

In the course of this journey by land and water--and latterly as sharing the senator's care of his nephew--Orion had become very dear to his old friend; and at the risk of incurring his displeasure he had even confessed the reasons that had prompted him to leave Memphis.

He never could cease to feel that everything good or lofty in himself was Paula's alone; that her love ennobled and strengthened him; that to desert her was to abandon himself. His trifling with Heliadora could but divert him from the high aim he had set before himself. This aim he kept constantly in view; his spirit hungered for peaceful days in which he might act on the resolution he had formed in church and fulfil the task set before him by the Arab governor.

The knowledge that he had inherited an enormous fortune now afforded him no joy, for he was forced to confess to himself that but for this superabundant wealth he might have been a very different man; and more than once a vehement wish came over him to fling away all his possessions and wrestle for peace of mind and the esteem of the best men by his own unaided powers.

The senator had taken his confession as it was meant: if Thomas' daughter was indeed what Orion described her there could be but small hope for his beautiful favorite. He and Martina must e'en make their way home again with two adopted dear ones, and it must be the care of the old folks to comfort the young ones instead of the young succoring the old as was natural. And in spite of everything Orion had won on his affections, for every day, every hour he was struck by some new quality, some greater trait than he had looked for in the young man.

Torches were flaring in the inn-yard where, under a palm-thatched roof supported on poles and covering a square space in the middle, benches stood for the guests to rest. Here Justinus and Orion again met for a few minutes' conversation.

His warders were also seated near them; they did not let Orion out of their sight even while they ate their meal of mutton, bread, onions, and dates. The senator's servants brought some food from the chariot, and just as Justinus and Orion had begun their attack on it, a tall man came into the yard and made his way to the benches. This was Philippus, pausing on his road to Djidda. He had learnt, even before coming in, whom he would find here, a prisoner; and the Arabs, to whom the leech was known, allowed him to join the pair, though at the same time they came a little nearer, and their leader understood Greek.

Philippus was anything rather than cordially disposed towards Orion; still, he knew what peril hung over the youth, and how sad a loss he had suffered. His conscience bid him do all he could to prove helpful in the trial that awaited him in the matter of the expedition in which Rufinus had perished. He was the bearer, too, of sad news which the Arabs must necessarily hear. Orion was indeed furious when he heard of the seizure and occupation of the governor's residence; still, he believed that Amru would insist on restitution; but on hearing of his mother's death he broke down completely. Even the Arabs, seeing the strong man shaken with sobs and learning the cause of his grief, respectfully withdrew; for the anguish of a son at the loss of his mother was sacred in their eyes. They regard the man who mourns for one he loves as stricken by the hand of the Almighty and hallowed by his touch and treat him with the reverence of pious awe.

Orion had not observed their absence, but Philippus at once took advantage of it to tell him, as briefly as possible, all that related to the escape of the nuns. He himself knew not yet of the burning of the palace, or of Paula's imprisonment; but he could tell the senator where he would find his wife and niece. So by the time he was bidden to mount and start once more Orion was informed of all that had happened.

It was with a drooping head, and sunk in melancholy thought that he rode on his way.

As for the residence!--whether the Arabs gave it back to him or not, what did he care?--but his mother, his mother! All she had been to him from his earliest years rose before his mind; in the deep woe of this parting he forgot the imminent danger and the dungeon that awaited him, and the intolerable insult to his rights; nay, even the image of the woman he loved paled by the side of that of the beloved dead. Perhaps he might not even gain permission to bury her!

The way lay through a parched tract of rocky desert, and the further they went the more intense was that wonderful flush in the west, till day broke behind the travellers and the glory of the sunrise quenched the vividness of its glow.

Another scorching day! The rocks by the wayside still threw long shadows on the sandy desert-road, when a party of Arab horsemen came from Fostat to meet the travellers, shouting the latest news to the prisoner's escort. It was evidently important; but Orion did not understand a word of what they said. Evil tidings fly fast, however; while the men were talking together, the dragoman rode up to him and told him that his home was burnt to the ground and half Memphis still in flames. Then came other newsbearers, on horseback and on dromedaries; and they met chariots and files of camels loaded with corn and Egyptian merchandise; and each and all shouted to the Arab escort reports of what was going on in Memphis, hoping to be the first to tell the homeward bound party.

How many times did Orion hear the story--and each time that a traveller began with: "Have you heard?" pointing westward, the wounds the first news had inflicted bled anew.

What lay beneath that mass of ashes? How much had the flames consumed that never could be replaced! Much that he had silently wished were possible had in fact been fulfilled--and so soon! Where now was the burthen of great wealth which had hung about his heels and hindered his running freely? And yet he did not, even now, feel free; the way was not yet open before him; he secretly mourned over the ruined house of his fathers and the wrecked home; a miserable sense of insecurity weighed him down. No father--no mother--no parental roof! For years he had been, in fact, perfectly independent, and yet he felt now like a pilot whose boat had lost its rudder.

Before him lay a prison, and the closing act of the great tragedy of which he himself had been the hero. Fate had fallen on his house, had marked it for destruction as erewhile that of Tantalus. It lay in ashes, and the victims were already many: two brothers, father, mother--and, far away from home, Rufinus too.

But whose was the guilt?

It was not his ancestors who had sinned; it could only be his own that had called down this ruin. But was there then such a power as the Destiny of the ancients--inexorable, iron Fate? Had he not repented and suffered, been reconciled to his Redeemer, and prepared himself to fight the hard fight? Perhaps he was indeed to be the hero of a tragedy; then he would show that it was not the blind Inevitable, but what a man can make of himself, and what he can do by the aid of the God of might, which determines his fate. If he must still succumb, it should only be after a valiant struggle and defense. He would battle fearlessly against every foe, would press onward in the path he had laid down for himself. His heart beat high once more; he felt as though he could see his father's example as a guiding star in the sky, so that he must be true to that whether to live or to die. And when he turned his eye earthwards again, still, even there, he had that which made it seem worth the cost of enduring the pangs of living and the brunt of the hardest battle: Paula and her love.

The nearer he approached Fostat, the more ardently his heart swelled with longing. Heaven must grant him to see her once more, once more to clasp her in his arms, before--the end!

It seemed to him that what he had gone through in these few hours must have removed and set aside everything that could part them. Now, he felt, he had strength to remain worthy of her; if Heliodora were to come in his way again he would now certainly, positively, regard and treat her only as a sister.

He was conducted at once to the house of the Kadi; but this official was at the Divan--the council, which his arch-foe, that black monster Obada, had called together.

After the labors of the past night the Negro had allowed himself only a few hours rest, and then had met the council, where he had not been slow to discover that he had as many enemies as there were members present.

His most determined opponents were the Kadi Othman, the head of the Courts of justice and administration, and Khalid the governor of the exchequer. Neither of them hesitated to express his opinion; and indeed, no one present at this meeting would have suspected for a moment that most of the members had, in their peaceful youth, guarded flocks as shepherds on the mountains, led caravans across the desert, or managed some small trade. In the contests of tribe against tribe they had found opportunities for practice in the use of weapons, and for steeling their courage; but where had they learnt to choose their words with so much care, and emphasize them with gestures of such natural grace that any Greek orator would have admired them? It was only when the indignant orator "thundered and lightened" and was carried away by the heat of passion that he forgot his dignified moderation, and then how grandly voice, eye, and action helped each other! And never, even under the highest excitement, was purity of language overlooked. These men, of whom very few could read and write, had at their command all the most effective verses of their poets having thousands of lines stored in their minds.

The discussion to-day dealt with the social aspects of an ancient civilization, unknown but a few years since to the warlike children of the desert, and yet how ably had the four overseers of public buildings the comptrollers of the markets, of the irrigation works, and of the mills, achieved their ends. These bright and untamished spirits were equal to the hardest task and capable of carrying it through with energy, acumen, and success.

And the sons of these men who had passed through no school were already well-fitted and invited to give new splendor to cities in their decline, and new life to the learning of the countries they had subdued. Everything in this council revealed talent, vitality, and ardor; and Obada, who had been a slave, found it by no means easy to uphold his pre-eminence among these assertive scions of free and respectable families.

The Kadi spoke frankly and fearlessly against his recent proceedings, declaring in the name of every member of the Divan, that they disclaimed all responsibility for what had been done, and that it rested on the Vêkeel alone. Obada was very ready to accept it; and he announced with such fiery eloquence his determination to give shelter at Fostat to the natives whom the conflagration had left roofless, he was so fair-spoken, and he had shown his great qualities in so clear a light during the past night, that they agreed to postpone their attainder and await the reply from Medina to the complaints they had forwarded. Discipline, indeed, required that they should submit; and many a man who would have flown to meet death on the field as a bride, quailed before the terrible adventurer who would not shrink from the most hideous deeds.

Obada had won by hard fighting. No one could prove a theft against him of so much as a single drachma; but he nevertheless had to take many a rough word, and with one consent the assembly refused him the deference justly due to the governor's representative.

Bitterly indignant, he remained till the very last in the council-chamber, no one staying with him, not even his own subalterns, to speak a soothing word in praise of the power and eloquence of his address, while the same cursed wretches would, under similar circumstances, have buzzed round Amru like swarming bees, and have escorted him home like curs wagging their tails. He ascribed the contumely and opposition he met with to their prejudice, as haughty, free-born men against his birth, and not to any fault of his own, and yet he looked down on them all, feeling himself the superior of each by himself; if the blow in Medina were successful, he would pick out his victims, and then....

His dreams of vengeance were abruptly broken by a messenger, covered with dust from head to foot; he brought good news: Orion was taken and safely bestowed in the Kadi's house.

"And why not in mine?" asked Obada in peremptory tones. "Who is the governor's representative here. Othman or I? Take the prisoner to my house."

And he forthwith went home. But instead of the prisoner there presently appeared before him an official of the Kadi's household, who informed him, from his master, that as the Khaliff had constituted Othman supreme judge in Egypt this matter was in his hands; if Obada wished to see the prisoner he might go to the Kadi's residence, or visit him later in the town prison of Memphis, whither Orion would presently be transferred.

He rushed off, raging, to his enemy's house, but his stormy fury was met by the placidity of a calm and judicial mind. Othman was a man between forty and fifty years old, but his soft, black beard was already turning grey; his noble dark face bore the stamp of a lofty, high-bred soul, and a keen but temperate spirit shone in his eyes. There was something serene and clear in his whole person; he was a man to bear the burthen of life's vicissitudes with dignity, while he had set himself the task of saving others from them so far as in him lay.

The patriarch's complaints had come also to the Kadi's knowledge, and he, too, was minded to exact retribution for the massacre of the Moslem soldiers; but the punishment should fall on none but the guilty. He would have been sorry to believe that Orion was one of them, for he had esteemed his father as a brave man and a just judge, and had taken many a word of good advice from the experienced Egyptian.

The scene between him and the infuriated Vêkeel was a painful one even for the attendants who stood round; and Orion, who heard Obada's raging from the adjoining room, could gather from it some idea of the relentless hatred with which his negro enemy would persecute him.

However, as after the wildest storm the sea ebbs in ripples so even this tempest came to a more peaceful conclusion. The Kadi represented to the Vêkeel what an unheard-of thing it would be, and in what a disgraceful light it would set Moslem justice if one of the noblest families in the country--to whose head, too, the cause of Islam owed so much--were robbed of its possessions on mere suspicion. To this the Vêkeel replied that there were definite accusations brought by the head of the native Church, and that nothing had been robbed, but merely confiscated and placed in security. As to what Allah had thought fit to destroy by fire, no one could be held answerable for that. There was no "mere suspicion" in the case, for he himself had in his possession a document which amply proved that Paula, Orion's beloved, had been the instigator of the crime which had cost the lives of twelve of the true believers.--The girl herself had been taken into custody yesterday. He would cross-examine her himself, too, in spite of all the Kadis in the world; for though Othman might choose to let any number of Moslems be murdered by these dogs of Christians he, Obada, would not overlook it; and if he did, by tomorrow morning the thousand Egyptians who were digging the canal would have killed with their shovels the three Moslems who kept guard over them.

At this, Othman assured the Vêkeel that he was no less anxious to punish the miscreants, but that he must first make sure of their identity, and that, in accordance with the law, justly and without fear of man or blind hatred, with due caution and justice. He, as judge, was no less averse to letting off the guilty than he was to punishing the innocent; so the enquiry must be allowed to proceed quietly. If Obada wished to examine Paula he, the Kadi, had no objection; to preside over the court and to direct the trial was his business, and that he would not abdicate even for the Khaliff himself so long as Omar thought him worthy to hold his office.

To all this Obada had no choice but to agree, though with an ill-grace; and as the Vêkeel wished to see Orion, the young man was called in. The huge negro looked at him from head to foot like a slave he proposed to buy; and, when Othman went to the door and so could not see him, he could not resist the malicious impulse: he glanced significantly at the prisoner, and drew his forefinger sharply and quickly across his black throat as though to divide the head from the trunk. Then he contemptuously turned his back on the youth.

CHAPTER XVI.

In the course of the afternoon the Vekel rode across to the prison in Memphis. He expected to find the bishop there, but instead he was met with the news that Plotinus was dead of the pestilence.

This was a malignant stroke of fate; for with the bishop perished the witness who could have betrayed to him the scheme plotted for the rescue of the nuns.--But no! The patriarch, too, no doubt, knew all.

Still, of what use was that at this moment? He had no time to lose, and Benjamin could hardly be expected to return within three weeks.

Obada had met Paula's father in the battle-field by Damascus, and it had often roused his ire to know that this hero's name was held famous even among the Moslems. His envious soul grudged even to the greatest that pure honor which friend and foe alike are ready to pay; he did not believe in it, and regarded the man to whom it was given as a time-serving hypocrite.

And as he hated the father so he did the daughter, though he had never seen her. Orion's fate was sealed in his mind; and before his death he should suffer more acutely through the execution of Paula, whether she denied or owned her guilt. He might perhaps succeed in making her confess, so he desired that she should at once be brought into the judge's council-room; but he failed completely in his attempt, though he promised her, through the interpreter, the greatest leniency if she admitted her guilt and threatened her with an agonizing death if she refused to do so. His prisoner, indeed, was not at all what he had expected, and the calm pride with which she denied every accusation greatly impressed the upstart slave. At first he tried to supplement the interpreter by shouting words of broken Greek, or intimidating her by glaring looks whose efficacy he had often proved on his subordinates but without the least success; and then he had her informed that he possessed a document which placed her guilt beyond doubt. Even this did not shake her; she only begged to see it. He replied that she would know all about it soon enough, and he accompanied the interpreter's repetition of the answer with threatening gestures.

He had met with shrewd and influential women among his own people; he had seen brave ones go forth to battle, and share the perils of a religious war, with even wilder and more blood-thirsty defiance of death than the soldiers themselves; but these had all been wives and mothers, and whenever he had seen them break out of the domestic circle, beyond which no maiden could ever venture, it was because they were under the dominion of some passionate impulse and a burning partisanship for husband or son, family or tribe. The women of his nation lived for the most part in modest retirement, and none but those who were carried away by some violent emotion infringed the custom.

But this girl! There she stood, immovably calm, like a warrior at the head of his tribe. There was something in her mien that quelled him, and at the same time roused to the utmost his desire to make her feel his power and to crush her pride. She was as much taller than the women of his nation as he was taller than any other captain in the Moslem army; prompted by curiosity, he went close up to her to measure her height by his own, and passed his hand through the air from his swarthy throat to touch the crown of her head; and the depth of loathing with which she shrank from him did not escape his notice. The blood mounted to his head; he desired the interpreter to inform her that she was to hope for no mercy, and inwardly devoted her to a cruel death.

Pale, but prepared to meet the worst, Paula returned to the squalid room she occupied with her faithful Betta.

Her arrival at the prison had been terrible. The guards had seemed disposed to place her in a room filled with a number of male and female criminals, whence the rattle of their chains and a frantic uproar of coarse voices met her ear; however, the interpreter and the captain of the town-watch had taken charge of her, prompted by Martina's promise of a handsome reward if they could go to her next morning with a report that Paula had been decently accommodated.

The warder's mother-in-law, too, had taken her under her protection. This woman was the inn-keeper's wife from the riverside inn of Nesptah, and she at once recognized Paula as the handsome damsel who had refreshed herself there after the evening on the river with Orion, and whom she had supposed to be his betrothed. She happened to be visiting her daughter, the keeper's wife, and induced her to do what she could to be agreeable to Paula. So she and Betta were lodged in a separate cell, and her gold coin proved acceptable to the man, who did his utmost to mitigate her lot. Indeed, Pulcheria had even been allowed to visit her and to bring her the last roses that the drought had left in the garden.

Susannah had carried out her purpose of sending her food and fruit; but they remained in the outer room, and the messenger was desired to explain that no more were to be sent, for that she was supplied with all she needed.

Confident in her sense of innocence, she had looked forward calmly to her fate building her hopes on the much lauded justice of the Arab judges. But it was not they, it would seem, who were to decide it, but that black monster Orion's foe; crushed by the sense of impotence against the arbitrary despotism of the ruthless villain, whose victim she must be, she sat sunk in gloomy apathy, and hardly heard the old nurse's words of encouragement.

She did not fear death; but to die without having seen her father once more, without saying and proving to Orion

that she was his alone, wholly his and for ever--that was too hard to bear.

While she was wringing her hands, in a state verging on despair, the man who had ruined the happiness, the peace, and the fortunes of so many of his fellow-creatures was cantering through the streets of Memphis, mounted on the finest horse in Orion's stable, and firmly determined to make his defiant prisoner feel his power. When he reached the great market-place in the quarter known as Ta-anch he was forced to bring his steed to a quieter pace, for in front of the Curia--the senatehouse--an immense gathering of people had collected. The Vekel forced his way through them with cruel indifference. He knew what they wanted and paid no heed to them. The hapless crowd had for some time past met here daily, demanding from the authorities some succor in their fearful need. Processions and pilgrimages had had no result yesterday, so to-day they besieged the Curia. But could the senate make the Nile rise, or stay the pestilence, or prevent the dates dropping from the palm-trees? Could they help, when Heaven denied its aid?

These were the questions which the authorities had already put at least ten times to the shrieking multitude from the balcony of the town hall, and each time the crowd had yelled in reply: "Yes--yes. You must!--it is your duty; you take the taxes, and you are put there to take care of us!"

Even yesterday the distracted creatures had been wholly unmanageable and had thrown stones at the building: to-day, after the fearful conflagration and the death of their bishop, they had assembled in vast numbers, more furious and more desperate than ever. The senators sat trembling on their antique seats of gilt ivory, the relics of departed splendor imitated from those of the Roman senators, looking at each other and shrugging their shoulders while they listened to a letter which had just reached them from the hadi. This document required them, in conformity with Obada's determination, to make known to the populace, by public proclamation and declaration, that any citizen whose house had been destroyed by the fire of the past night would be granted ground and building materials without payment, at Fostat across the Nile, where he might find a new home provided he would settle there and embrace Islam.

This degrading offer must be announced: no discussion or recalcitrancy could help that.

And what could they, for their part, do for the complaining crowd?

The plague was snatching them away; the vegetables, which constituted half their food at this season, were dried up; the river, their palatable and refreshing drink, was poisoned; the dates, their chief luxury, ripened only to be rejected with loathing. Then there was the comet in the sky, no hope of a harvest--even of a single ear, for months to come. The bishop dead, all confidence lost in the intercessions of the Church, God's mercy extinct as it would seem, withdrawn from the land under infidel rule!

And they on whose help the populace counted,--poor, weak men, councillors of no counsel, liable from hour to hour to be called to follow those who had succumbed to the plague, and who had but just quitted their vacant seats in obedience to the fateful word.

Yesterday each one had felt convinced that their necessity and misery had reached its height, and yet in the course of the night it had redoubled for many. Their self-dependence was exhausted; but there still was one sage in the city who might perhaps find some new way, suggest some new means of saving the people from despair.

Stones were again flying down through the open roof, and the members of the council started up from their ivory seats and sought shelter behind the marble piers and columns. A wild turmoil came up from the market-place to the terror-stricken Fathers of the city, and the mob was hammering with fists and clubs on the heavy doors of the Curia. Happily they were plated with bronze and fastened with strong iron bolts, but they might fly open at any moment and then the furious mob would storm into the hall.

But what was that?

For a moment the roar and yelling ceased, and then began again, but in a much milder form. Instead of frenzied curses and imprecations shouts now rose of "Hail, hail!" mixed with appeals: "Help us, save us, give us council. Long live the sage!" "Help us with your magic, Father!" "You know the secrets and the wisdom of the ancients!" "Save us, Save us! Show those money-bags, those cheats in the Curia the way to help us!"

At this the president of the town-council ventured forth from his refuge behind the statue of Trajan--the only image that the priesthood had spared--and to climb a ladder which was used for lighting the hanging lamps, so as to peep out of the high window.

He saw an old man in shining white linen robes, riding on a fine white ass through the crowd which reverently made way for him. The lictors of the town marched before him with their fasces, on to which they had tied palm branches in token of a friendly embassy. Looking further he could see that behind the old man came a slave, besides the one who drove his ass, carrying a quantity of manuscript scrolls. This raised his hopes, for the scrolls looked very old and yellow, and no doubt contained a store of wisdom; nay, probably magic formulas and effectual charms.

With a loud exclamation of "Here he comes!" the senator descended the ladder; in a few minutes the door was opened with a rattling of iron bolts, and it was with a sigh of relief that they saw the old man come in and none attempt to follow him.

When Horapollo entered the council-chamber he found the senators sitting on their ivory chairs with as much

dignified calm as though the meeting had been uninterrupted; but at a sign from the president they all rose to receive the old man, and he returned their greeting with reserve, as homage due to him. He also accepted the raised seat, which the president quitted in his honor while he himself took one of the ordinary chairs at his side.

The negotiation began at once, and was not disturbed by the crowd, though still from the market-place there came a ceaseless roar, like the breaking of distant waves and the buzzing of thousands of swarming bees.

The sage began modestly, saying that he, in his simplicity, could not but despair of finding any help where so many wise men had failed; he was experienced only in the lore and mysteries of the Fathers, and he had come thither merely to tell the council what they had considered advisable in such cases, and to suggest that their example should be followed.

He spoke low but fluently, and a murmur of approval followed; then, when the president went on to speak of the low state of the Nile as the root of all the evil, the old man interrupted him, begging them to begin by considering the particular difficulties which they might attack by their own efforts.

The pestilence was in possession of the city; he had just come through the quarter that had been destroyed by the fire, and had seen above fifty sick deprived of all care and reduced to destitution. Here something could be done; here was a way of showing the angry populace that their advisers and leaders were not sitting with their hands in their laps.

A councillor then proposed that the convent of St. Cecilia, or the now deserted and dilapidated odeum should be given up to them; but Horapollo objected explaining very clearly that such a crowd of sick in the midst of the city would be highly dangerous to the healthy citizens. This opinion was shared by his friend Philippus, who had indeed commended the plan he had to propose as the only right one. Whither had their forefathers transported, not merely their beneficent institutions, but their vast temples and tomb-buildings which covered so much space? Always to the desert outside the town. Arrianus had even written these verses on the gigantic sphinx near the Pyramids.

"The gods erewhile created these far-shining forms, wisely sparing the fields and fertile corn-bearing plain."

The modems had forgotten thus to spare the arable land, and they had also neglected to make good use of the desert. The dead and plague-stricken must not be allowed to endanger the living; they must therefore be lodged away from the town, in the Necropolis in the desert.

"But we cannot let them be under the broiling sun," cried the president.

"Still less," added another, "can we build a house for them in a day."

To this Horapollo replied:

"And who would be so foolish as to ask you to do either? But there are linen and posts to be had in Memphis. Have some large tents pitched in the Necropolis, and all who fall sick of the pestilence removed there at the expense of the city and tended under their shade. Appoint three or four of your number to carry this into execution and there will be a shelter for the roofless sick in a few hours. How many boatmen and shipwrights are standing idle on the quays! Call them together and in an hour they will be at work."

This suggestion was approved. A linen-merchant present exclaimed: "I can supply what is needed," and another who dealt in the same wares, and exported this famous Egyptian manufacture to remote places, also put in a word, desiring that his house might have the order as he could sell cheaper. This squabble might have absorbed the attention of the meeting till it rose, and perhaps have been renewed the next day, if Horapollo's proposal that they should divide the commission equally had not been hastily adopted.

The populace hailed the announcement that tents would be erected for the sick in the desert, with applause from a thousand voices. The deputies chosen to superintend the task set to work at once, and by night the most destitute were safe under the first large hospital tent.

The old man settled some other important questions in the same way, always appealing to the lore of the ancients.

At length he spoke of the chief subject, and he did so with great caution and tact.

All the events of the last few weeks, he said, pointed to the conclusion that Heaven was wroth with the hapless land of their fathers. As a sign of their anger the Immortals had sent the comet, that terrible star whose ominous splendor was increasing daily. To make the Nile rise was not in the power of men; but the ancients--and here his audience listened with bated breath--the ancients had been more intimately familiar with the mysterious powers that rule the life of Nature than men in the later times, whether priests or laymen. In those days every servant of the Most High had been a naturalist and a student, and when Egypt had been visited by such a calamity as that of this year, a sacrifice had been offered--a precious victim against which all mankind, nay and all his own feelings revolted; still, this sacrifice had never failed of its effect, no, never. Here was the evidence--and he pointed to the manuscripts in his lap.

The councillors had begun to be restless in their seats, and first the president and then the others, one after another, exclaimed and asked:

"But the victim?"

"What did they sacrifice?"

"What about the victim?"

"Allow me to say no more about it till another time," said the old man. "What good could it do to tell you that now? The first thing is to find the thing that is acceptable to the gods."

"What is it?"

"Speak--do not keep us on the rack!" was shouted on all sides; but he remained inexorable, promising only to call the council together when the right time should come and desiring that the president would proclaim from the balcony that Horapollo knew of a sacrifice which would cause the Nile at last to rise. As soon as the right victim could be found, the people should be invited to give their consent. In the time of their forefathers it had never failed of its effect, so men, women, and children might go home in all confidence, and await the future with new and well-founded hopes.

And this announcement, with which the president mingled his praises of the venerable Horapollo, had a powerful effect. The crowd hallooed with glee, as though they had found new life. "Hail, hail!" was shouted again and again, and it was addressed, not merely to the old man who had promised them deliverance, but also to the Fathers of the city, who felt as if a fearful load had fallen from their souls.

The old man's scheme was, to be sure, not pious nor rightly Christian; but had the power of the Church been in any way effectual? And this having failed they must of their own accord have had recourse to means held reprobate by the priesthood. Magic and the black arts were genuinely Egyptian; and when faith had no power, these asserted themselves and superstition claimed its own. Though Medea had been taken by surprise and imprisoned, this had not been done to satisfy the law, but with a view to secretly utilizing her occult science for the benefit of the community. In such dire need no means were too base; and though the old man himself was horrified at those he proposed he was sure of public approbation if only they had the desired result. If only they could avert the calamity the sin could be expiated, and the Almighty was so merciful!

The bishop had a seat and voice in the council, but Fate itself had saved them from the dilemma of having to meet his remonstrances.

When Horapollo went out into the market-place he was received with acclamations, and as much gratitude as though he had already achieved the deliverance of the people and country.

What had he done?--Whether the work he had set going were to fail or to succeed he could not remain in Memphis, for in either case he would never have peace again. But that did not daunt him; it would certainly be very good for the two women to be removed from the perilous neighborhood of the Arab capital, and he was firmly determined to take them away with him. For his dear Philip, too, nothing could be better than a transplantation into other soil.

At the house of Rufinus he now learnt the fate that had fallen on Paula.

She was out the way, at any rate for the present; still, if she should be released to-morrow or the day after, or even a month hence, she would be as great a hindrance as ever. His plots against her must therefore be carried out. His own isolation provoked him, and what a satisfaction it would be if only he should succeed in stirring up the Egyptian Christians to the heathen deed to which he was endeavoring to prompt them.

If Paula should be condemned to death by the Arabs, the execution of the scheme would be greatly promoted; and now the first point was to ensure the favor of the black Vêkeel, for everything depended on his consent.

Joanna and Pulcheria thought him more good-humored and amiable than they had ever known him; his proposal that he and Philippus should join their household was hailed with delight even by little Mary, and the women conducted him all over the house, supporting his steps with affectionate care. All he saw there pleased him beyond measure. Such neatness and comfort could only exist where there was a woman's eye to direct and watch over everything. The rooms on the ground floor, which had been the master's, should be his, and the corresponding wing on the other side could be made ready for Philippus. The dining-room, the large ante-chamber, and the viridarium would be common ground, and the upper story was large enough for the women and any guests. He would move in as soon as he had settled some business he had in hand.

It must be something of a pleasant nature, for as the old man spoke of it his sunken lips mumbled with satisfaction, while his sparkling eyes seemed to say to Pulcheria: "And I have something good in store for you, too, dear child."

CHAPTER XVII.

Paula passed a fearful night in the small, frightfully hot prison-cell in which she and Betta were shut up. She could not sleep, and when once she succeeded in closing her eyes she was roused by the yells and clanking chains of the captives in the common prison and the heavy step of another sufferer who paced the room overhead, even more restless than herself.

Poor fellow-victim! Was it a tortured conscience that drove him hither and thither, or was he as innocent as she was, and was it longing, love, and anxiety that bereft him of sleep?

He was no vulgar criminal. There was no room for those in this part of the building; and at midnight, when the noise in the large hall was suddenly silenced, soft sounds of the lute came down to her from his cell, and only a master could strike the strings with such skill.

She cared nothing for the stranger; but she was grateful for his gift of music, for it diverted her thoughts from herself, and she listened with growing interest. Glad of an excuse for rising from her hard, hot bed, she sprang up and placed herself close to the one window, an opening barred with iron. But then the music ceased and a conversation began between the warder and her fellow-prisoner.

What voice was that? Did she deceive herself, or hear rightly?

Her heart stood still while she listened; and now every doubt was silenced: It was Orion, and none other, whom she heard speaking in the room above. Then the warder spoke his name; they were talking of her deceased uncle; and now, as if in obedience to some sign, they lowered their voices. She heard whispering but could not distinguish what was said. At length parting words were uttered in louder tones, the door of the cell was locked and the prisoner approached his window.

At this she pressed her face close to the heated iron bars, looked upwards, listened a moment and, as nothing was stirring, she said, first softly, and then rather louder: "Orion, Orion!"

And, from above, her name was spoken in reply. She greeted him and asked how and when he had come hither; but he interrupted her at the first words with a decisive: "Silence!" adding in a moment, "Look out!"

She listened in expectancy; the minutes crept on at a snail's pace to a full half hour before he at last said: "Now!" And, in a few moments, she held in her hand a written scroll that he let down to her by a lute string weighted with a scrap of wood.

She had neither light nor fire, and the night was moonless. So she called up "Dark!" and immediately added, as he had done: "Look out."

She then tied to the string the two best roses of those Pulcheria had brought her, and at her glad "Now!" they floated up.

He expressed his thanks in a few low chords overflowing with yearning and passion; then all was still, for the warder had forbidden him to sing or play at night and he dared not risk losing the man's favor.

Paula laid down again with Orion's letter in her hand, and when she felt slumber stealing upon her, she pushed it under her pillow and ere long was sleeping on it. When they both woke, soon after sunrise, they had been dreaming of each other and gladly hailed the return of day.

How furious Orion had felt when the prison door closed upon him! He longed to wrench the iron bars from the window and kick down or force the door; and there is no more humiliating and enraging feeling for a man than that of finding himself shut up like a wild beast, cut off from the world to which he belongs and which he needs, both to give him all that makes life worth having, and to receive such good as he can do and give.

Yesterday their dungeon had seemed a foretaste of hell, they had each been on the verge of despair; to-day what different feelings animated them! Orion had been the victim of blow on blow from Fate--Paula had looked forward to his return with an anxious and aching heart; to-day how calm were their souls, though both stood in peril of death.

The legend tells us that St. Cecilia, who was led away to the rack from her marriage feast, even in the midst of the torments of martyrdom, listened in ecstasy to heavenly music and sweet echoes of the organ; and how many have had the same experience! In the extremity of anguish and danger they find greater joys than in the midst of splendor, ease and the intoxicating pleasures of life; for what we call happiness is the constant guest of those who have within reach that for which their souls most ardently long, irrespective of place and outward circumstances.

So these two in their prison were what they had not been for a long time: full of heartfelt bliss; Paula with his letter, which he had begun at the Kadi's house, and in which he poured out his whole soul to her; Orion in the possession of her roses, on which he feasted his eyes and heart, and which lay before him while he wrote the following lines, which the kindhearted warder willingly transmitted to her:

Lo! As night in its gloom and horror fell on my prison,

Methought the sun sank black, dark forever in death.

*I drew thy roses up, and behold! from their crimson petals
Beamed a glory of light, a glow as of sunshine and day!*

*Love! Love is the star that rose with those fragrant flowers;
Rose, as Phoebus' car comes up from the tossing waves.*

*Is not the ardent flame of a heart that burns with passion
Like the sparkling glow-worm hid in the heart of the rose?*

*While it yet was day, and we breathed in freedom and gladness,
While the sun still shone, that light seemed small and dim;*

*But now, when night has fallen, sinister, dark, portentous,
Its kindly ray beams forth to raise our drooping souls.*

*As seeds in the womb of earth break from the brooding darkness,
Or as the soul soars free, heaven-seeking from the grave,*

*So the hopeless soil of a dungeon blossoms to rapture,
Blooms with roses of Love, more sweet than the wildling rose!*

And when had Paula ever felt happier than at the moment when this offering from her lover, this humble prison-flower, first reached her.

Old Betta could not hear the verses too often, and cried with joy, not at the poem, but at the wonderful change it had produced in her darling. Paula was now the radiant being that she had been at home on the Lebanon; and when she appeared before the assembled judges in the hall of justice they gazed at her in amazement, for never had a woman on her trial for life or death stood in their presence with eyes so full of happiness. And yet she was in evil straits. The just and clement Kadi, himself the loving father of daughters, felt a pang at his heart as he noted the delusive confidence which so evidently filled the soul of this noble maiden.

Yes, she was in evil straits: a crushing piece of evidence was in their hands, and the constitution of the court--which was in strict conformity with the law must in itself be unfavorable to her. Her case was to be tried by an equal number of Egyptians and of Arabs. The Moslems were included because by her co-operation, Arabs had been slain; while Paula, as a Christian and a resident in Memphis, came under the jurisdiction of the Egyptians.

The Kadi presided, and experience had taught him that the Jacobite members of the bench of judges kept the sentence of death in their sleeves when the accused was of the Melchite confession. What had especially prejudiced them against this beautiful creature he knew not; but he easily discovered that they were hostile to the accused, and if they should utter the verdict "guilty", and only two Arabs should echo it, the girl's fate was sealed.

And what was the declaration which that whiterobed old man among the witnesses desired to make--the venerable and learned Horapollo? The glances he cast at Paula augured her no good.

It was so oppressively, so insufferably hot in the hall! Each one felt the crushing influence, and in spite of the importance of the occasion, the proceedings every now and then came to a stand-still and then were hurried on again with unseemly haste.

The prisoner herself seemed happily to be quite fresh and not affected by the sultriness of the day. It had cost her small effort to adhere to her statement that she had had no share in the escape of the sisters, when catechised by the ruffianly negro; but she found it hard to defy Othman's benevolent questioning. However, there was no choice, and she succeeded in proving that she had never quitted Memphis nor the house of Rufinus at the time when the Arab warriors met their death between Athribis and Doomiati. The Kadi endeavored to turn this to account for her advantage and Obada, who had found much to whisper over with his grey-headed neighbor on the bench reserved for witnesses, let him talk; but no sooner had he ended than the Vekel rose and laid before the judges the note he had found in Orion's room.

It was undoubtedly in the young man's handwriting and addressed to Paula, and the final words: "But do not misunderstand me. Your noble, and only too well-founded desire to lend succor to your fellow-believers would have sufficed..." could not fail to make a deep impression. When the Kadi questioned Paula, however, she replied with perfect truth that this document was absolutely unknown to her; at the same time she did not deny that the sisters of St. Cecilia, who were of her own confession, had always had her warmest wishes, and that she had hoped they might succeed in asserting their rights in opposition to the patriarch.

The deceased Mukaukas, and the Jacobite members of the town-council even, had shared these feelings and the Arabs had never interfered with the pious sicknurses.

The calm conciseness with which she made these statements had a favorable effect, on her Moslem judges especially, and the Kadi began to have some hopes for her; he desired that Orion should be called as being best able to account for the meaning of the letter he had written but never sent.

On this the young man appeared, and though he and Paula did their utmost to preserve a suitable demeanor, every one could see the violent agitation they felt at meeting each other in such a situation. Horapollo never took his eyes off Orion, whom he now saw for the first time, and his features put on a darkening and menacing expression.

The young man acknowledged that he had written the letter in question, but he and Paula alike referred it to the danger with which the sisterhood had long been threatened from the patriarch's hostility. The assistance which, in that document, he had refused he would have afforded readily and zealously at a later and fit season, and he could have counted on the aid of the Arab governor Amru, who, as he would himself confirm, shared the views of the Mukaukas George as to the nuns' rights.

At this the old sage murmured loud enough to be heard: "Clever, very clever!" and the Vêkeel laughed aloud, exclaiming:

"I call that a cunning way of lengthening your days! Be on your guard, my lords. These two are partners in the game and are intimately allied. I have proof of that in my own hands. That youngster takes as good care of the damsel's fortune as though it were his own already, and what is more..."

Here Paula broke in. She did not know what the malicious man was going to say, but it was something insulting beyond a doubt. And there stood Orion, just as she had pictured him in moments of tender remembrance; she felt his eye resting on her in ecstasy. To go up to him, to tell him all she was feeling in this critical struggle for life or death, seemed impossible; but as the Vêkeel began to disclose to their judges matters which concerned only herself and her lover, every impulse prompted her to interpose and, in this fateful hour, to do her friend such service as she once, like a coward, had shrank from. So with eager emotion, her eyes flashing, she interrupted the negro "Stop!" she cried, "you are wasting words and trouble. What you are trying to prove by subtlety I am proud and glad to declare. Hear it, all of you. The son of the Mukaukas is my betrothed!"

At the same time her eye sought to meet Orion's. And thus, in the very extremity of danger, they enjoyed a solemn moment of the purest, deepest happiness. Paula's eyes were moist with grateful tenderness, when Orion exclaimed:

"You have heard from her own lips what makes the greatest bliss of my life. The noble daughter of Thomas is my promised bride!"

There was a murmur among the Jacobite judges. 'Till this moment several of them, oppressed by the heat, had sat dreaming with their heads sunk on their breasts, but now they were suddenly as wide-awake and alert as though a jet of cold water had been turned on to them, and one cried out: "And your father, young man? You have forgotten him in a hurry! What would he have said to such a disgrace to his blood as your marriage to a Melchite, the daughter of those who caused your two brothers to be murdered? Oh! if the dead could...."

"He blessed our union on his death-bed," Orion put in.

"Did he, indeed?" asked another Jacobite with sarcastic scorn. "Then the patriarch was in the right when he refused to let the priests follow his corpse. That I should live to be witness to such crimes!"

But such words fell on the ears of the enraptured pair like the chirping of crickets. They felt, they cared for nothing but what this blissful moment had brought them, and never suspected that Paula's glad avowal had sealed her death-warrant.

The wrath of the Jacobite faction now hastened the end. The prosecutor, an Arab, now represented how many Moslems had lost their lives in the affair of the nuns, and once more read Orion's letter. His Christian colleagues tried to prove that this document could only refer to the flight, so ingeniously plotted, of the sisters; and now something quite new and unlooked-for occurred, which gave a fresh turn to the proceedings: the old man interrupted the Kadi to make a statement. At this Paula's confidence rose again for the last speaker had somewhat shaken it. She felt sure that the tried friend and adoptive father of her faithful Philippos would take her part.

But what was this?

The old man seemed to measure her height in a glance which struck to her heart with its fierce enmity, and then he said deliberately:

"On the morning of the nuns' flight the accused, Paula, went to the convent and there tolled the bell. Contradict me if you can, proud prefect's daughter; but I warn you beforehand, that in that case, I shall be compelled to bring forward fresh charges."

At this the horror-stricken girl pictured to herself the widow and daughter of Rufinus at her side on the condemned bench before the judges, and felt that denial would drag her friends to destruction with her; with quivering lips she confirmed the old man's statement.

"And why did you toll the bell?" asked the Kadi.

"To help them," replied Paula. "They are my fellow-believers, and I love them."

"She was the originator of the treasonable and bloody scheme," cried the Vêkeel, "and did it for no other purpose than to cheat us, the rulers of this country."

The Kadi however signed to him to be silent and bid the Jacobite counsel for the accused speak next. He had seen her early in the day, and came forward in the Egyptian manner with a written defence in his hand; but it was a dull formal performance and produced no effect; though the Kadi did his utmost to give prominence to every point that might help to justify her, she was pronounced guilty.

Still, could her crime be held worthy of death? It was amply proved that she had had a hand in the rescue of the nuns; but it was no less clear that she had been far enough away from the sisters and their defenders when the struggle with the Arabs took place. And she was a woman, and how pardonable it seemed in a pious maiden that she should help the fellow-believers whom she loved to evade persecution.

All this Othman pointed out in eloquent words, repeatedly and sternly silencing the Vêkeel when he sought to argue in favor of the sentence of death; and the humane persuasiveness of the lenient judge won the hearts of most of the Moslems.

Paula's appearance had a powerful effect, too, and not less the circumstance that their noblest and bravest foe had been the father of the accused.

When at length it was put to the vote the extraordinary result was that all her fellow Christians--the Jacobites--without exception demanded her death, while of the infidels on the judges' bench only one supported this severe meed of punishment.

Sentence was pronounced, and as the Vêkeel Obada passed close to Orion--who was led back to his cell pale and hardly master of himself--he said, mocking him in broken Greek: "It will be your turn to-morrow, Son of the Mukaukas!"

Orion's lips framed the retort: "And yours, too, some day, Son of a Slave!"--but Paula was standing opposite, and to avoid infuriating her foe he was able to do what he never could have done else: to let the Vêkeel and Horapollo pass on without a word in reply.

As soon as the door was closed on this couple, Othman nodded approvingly at Orion and said:

"Rightly and wisely done, my friend! The eagle should never forget that he must not use his pinions in a cage as he does between the desert and the sky."

He signed to the guards to lead him away, and stood apart while the young man looked and waived an adieu to his betrothed.

Finally the Kadi went up to Paula, whose heroic composure as she heard the sentence of death had filled him with admiration.

"The court has decided against you, noble maiden," he said. "But its verdict can be overruled by the clemency of our Sovereign Lord the Khaliff and the mercy of God the compassionate. Do you pray to Him--I and a few friends will appeal to the Khaliff."

He disclaimed her gratitude, and when she, too, had been led away he added, in the figurative language of his nation, to the friends who were waiting for him:

"My heart aches! To have to pronounce such a verdict oppressed me like a load; but to have an Obada for a fellow Moslem and be bound to obey him--there is no heavier lot on earth!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

The mysterious old sage had no sooner left the judgment-hall with the Vekel than he begged for a private interview. Obada did not hesitate to turn the keeper of the prison, with his wife and infant, out of his room, and there he listened while Horapollo informed him of the fate to which he destined the condemned girl. The old man's scheme certainly found favor with the Negro; still, it seemed to him in many respects so daring that, but for an equivalent service which Horapollo was in a position to offer Obada, he would scarcely have succeeded in obtaining his consent.

All the Vekel aimed at was to make it very certain that Orion had had a hand in the flight of the nuns, and chance had placed a document in the old man's hands which seemed to set this beyond a doubt.

He had effected his removal to the widow's dwelling in the cool hours of early morning. He had taken with him, in the first instance, only the most valuable and important of his manuscripts, and as he was placing these in a small desk--the very same which Rufinus had left for Paula's use--Horapollo found in it the note which the youth had hastily written when, after waiting in vain for Paula as she sat with little Mary, he had at last been obliged to depart and take leave of Amru. This wax-tablet, on which the writing was much defaced and partly illegible, could not fail to convince the judges of Orion's guilt, and the production of this piece of evidence enabled the old man to extort Obada's consent to his proposal as to the mode of Paula's death. When they finally left the warder's room, the Negro once more turned to the keeper of the prison and told him with a snort, as he pointed to his pretty wife and the child at her breast, that they should all three die if he allowed Orion to quit his cell for so much as an instant.

He then swung himself on to his horse, while Horapollo rode off to the Curia to desire the president of the council to call a meeting for that evening; then he betook himself to his new quarters.

There he found his room carefully shaded, and as cool as was possible in such heat. The floor had been sprinkled with water, flowers stood wherever there was room for them, and all his properties in scrolls and other matters had found places in chests or on shelves. There was not a speck of dust to be seen, and a sweet pervading perfume greeted his sensitive nostrils.

What a good exchange he had made! He rubbed his withered hands with satisfaction as he seated himself in his accustomed chair, and when Mary came to call him to dinner, it was a pleasure to him to jest with her.

Pulcheria must lead him through the viridarium into the dining-room; he enjoyed his meal, and his cross, wrinkled old face lighted up amazingly as he glanced round at his feminine associates; only Eudoxia was absent, confined to her room by some slight ailment. He had something pleasant to say to each; he frankly compared his former circumstances with his present position, without disguising his heartfelt thankfulness; then, with a merry glance at Pulcheria, he described how delightful it would be when Philippus should come home to make the party complete--a true and perfect star: for every Egyptian star must have five rays. The ancients had never painted one otherwise nor graven it in stone; nay, they had used it as the symbol for the number five.

At this Mary exclaimed: "But then I hope--I hope we shall make a six-rayed star; for by that time poor Paula may be with us again!"

"God grant it!" sighed Dame Joanna. Pulcheria, however, asked the old man what was wrong with him, for his face had suddenly clouded. His cheerfulness had vanished, his tufted eyebrows were raised, and his pinched lips seemed unwilling to part, when at length he reluctantly said:

"Nothing--nothing is wrong.... At the same time; once for all--I loathe that name."

"Paula?" cried the child in astonishment. "Oh! but if you knew..."

"I know more than enough," interrupted the old man. "I love you all--all; my old heart expands as I sit in your midst; I am comfortable here, I feel kindly towards you, I am grateful to you; every little attention you show me does me good; for it comes from your hearts: if I could repay you soon and abundantly--I should grow young again with joy. You may believe me, as I can see indeed that you do. And yet," and again his brows went up, "and yet, when I hear that name, and when you try to win me over to that woman, or if you should even go so far as to assail my ears with her praises--then, much as it would grieve me, I would go back again to the place where I came from."

"Why, Horapollo, what are you saying?" cried Joanna, much distressed.

"I say," the old man went on, "I say that in her everything is concentrated which I most hate and condemn in her class. I say that she bears in her bosom a cold and treacherous heart; that she blights my days and my nights; in short, that I would rather be condemned to live under the same roof with clammy reptiles and cold-blooded snakes than..."

"Than with her, with Paula?" Mary broke in. The eager little thing sprang to her feet, her eyes flashed lightnings and her voice quivered with rage, as she exclaimed: "And you not only say it but mean it? Is it possible?"

"Not only possible, but positive, sweetheart," replied the old man, putting out his hand to take hers, but she shrank back, exclaiming vehemently:

"I will not be your sweetheart, if you speak so of her! A man as old as you are ought to be just. You do not know her

at all, and what you say about her heart..."

"Gently, gently, child," the widow put in; and Horapollo answered with peculiar emphasis.

"That heart, my little whirlwind!--it would be well for us all if we could forget it, forget it for good or for evil. She has been tried to-day, and that heart is sentenced to cease beating."

"Sentenced! Merciful Heaven!" shrieked Pulcheria, and as she started up her mother cried out:

"For God's sake do not jest about such things, it is a sin.--Is it true?--Is it possible? Those wretches, those... I see in your face it is true; they have condemned Paula."

"As you say," replied Horapollo calmly. "The girl is to be executed."

"And you only tell us now?" wept Pulcheria, while Mary broke out:

"And yet you have been able to jest and laugh, and you--I hate you! And if you were not such a helpless, old, old man..." But here Joanna again silenced the child, and she asked between her sobs:

"Executed?--Will they cut off her head? And is there no mercy for her who was as far away from that luckless fight as we were--for her, a girl, and the daughter of Thomas?"

To which the old man replied:

"Wait a while, only wait! Heaven has perhaps chosen her for great ends. She may be destined to save a whole country and nation from destruction by her death. It is even possible..."

"Speak out plainly; you make me shudder with your oracular hints," cried the widow; but he only shrugged his shoulders and said coolly:

"What we foresee is not yet known. Heaven alone can decide in such a case. It will be well for us all--for me, for her, for Pulcheria, and even our absent Philip, if the divinity selects her as its instrument. But who can see into darkness? If it is any comfort to you, Joanna, I can inform you that the soft-hearted Kadi and his Arab colleagues, out of sheer hatred of the Vêkeel, who is immeasurably their superior in talent and strength of will, will do everything in their power..." "To save her?" exclaimed the widow.

"To-morrow they will hold council and decide whether to send a messenger to Medina to implore pardon for her," Horapollo went on with a horrible smile. "The day after they will discuss who the messenger is to be, and before he can reach Arabia fate will have overtaken the prisoner. The Vêkeel Obada moves faster than they do, and the power lies in his hands so long as Amru is absent from Egypt. He, they say, perfectly dotes on the Mukaukas' son, and for his sake--who knows? Paula as his betrothed."

"His betrothed?"

"He called her by that name before the judges, and congratulated himself on his promised bride."

"Paula and Orion!" cried Pulcheria, jubilant in the midst of her tears, and clapping her hands for joy.

"A pair indeed!" said the old man. "You may well rejoice, my girl! Feeble hearts as you all are, respect the experience of the aged, and bless Fate if it should lame the horse of the Kadi's messenger!--However, you will not listen to anything oracular, so it will be better to talk of something else."

"No, no," cried Joanna. "What can we think of but her and her fate? Oh, Horapollo, I do not know you in this mood. What has that poor soul done to you, persecuted as she is by the hardest fate--that noble creature who is so dear to us all? And do you forget that the judges who have sentenced her will now proceed to enquire what Rufinus, and we all of us..."

"What you had to do with that mad scheme of rescue?" interrupted Horapollo. "I will make it my business to prevent that. So long as this old brain is able to think, and this mouth to speak, not a hair of your heads shall be hurt."

"We are grateful to you," said Joanna. "But, if you have such power, set to work--you know how dear Paula is to us all, how highly your friend Philip esteems her--use your power to save her."

"I have no power, and refuse to have any," retorted the old man harshly.

"But Horapollo, Horapollo!--Come here, children!--We were to find in you a second father--so you promised. Then prove that those were no empty words, and be entreated by us."

The old man drew a deep breath; he rose to his feet with such vigor as he could command, a bright, sharply-defined patch of color tinged each pale cheek, and he exclaimed in husky tones:

"Not another word! No attempt to move me, not a cry of lamentation! Enough, and a thousand times too much, of that already. You have heard me, and I now say again--me or Paula, Paula or me. Come what may in the future, if you cannot so far control yourselves as never to mention her in my presence, I--no, I do not swear, but when I have said a thing I keep to it--I will go back to my old den and drag out life the richer by a disappointment--or die, as my ruling goddess shall please."

With this he left the room, and little Mary raised her clenched right fist and shook it after him, exclaiming: "Then let him go, hard-hearted, unjust, old scarecrow! Oh, if only I were a man!" And she burst out crying aloud. Heedless of the

widow's reproof, she went on quite beside herself: "Oh, there is no one more wicked than he is, Dame Joanna! He wants to see her die, he wishes her to be dead; I know it, he even wishes it! Did you hear him, Pul, he would be glad if the messenger's horse went lame before he could save her? And now she is my Orion's betrothed--I always meant them for each other--and they want to kill him, too, but they shall not, if there is still a God of justice in heaven! Oh if I--if I..." Her voice failed her, choked with sobs. When she had somewhat recovered she implored Pulcheria and her mother to take her to see Paula, and as they shared her wish they prepared to start for the prison before it should grow dark.

The nearer they went to the market-place, which they must cross, the more crowded were the streets. Every one was going the same way; the throng almost carried the women with it; yet, from the market came, as it were, a contrary torrent of shouts and shrieks from a myriad of human throats. Dame Joanna was terrified in the press by the uproarious doings in the market, and she would gladly have turned back with the girls, or have made her way through by-streets, but the tide bore her on, and it would have been easier to swim against a swollen mountain stream than to return home. Thus they soon reached the square, but there they were brought to a standstill in the crush.

The widow's terrors now increased. It was dreadful to be kept fast with the young people in such a mob. Pulcheria clung closely to her, and when she bid Mary take her hand the child, who thoroughly enjoyed the adventure, exclaimed: "Only look, Mother Joanna, there is our Rustem. He is taller than any one."

"If only he were by our side!" sighed the widow. At this the little girl snatched away her hand, made her way with the nimbleness of a squirrel through the mass of men, and soon had reached the Masdakite. Rustem had not yet quitted Memphis, for the first caravan, which he and his little wife were to join, was not to start for a few days. The worthy Persian and Mary were very good friends; as soon as he heard that his benefactress was alarmed he pushed his way to her, with the child, and the widow breathed more freely when he offered to remain near her and protect her.

Meanwhile the yelling and shouting were louder than ever. Every face, every eye was turned to the Curia, in the evident expectation of something great and strange taking place there.

"What is it?" asked Mary, pulling at Rustem's coat. The giant said nothing, but he stooped, and to her delight, a moment later she had her feet on his arms, which he folded across his chest, and was settling herself on his broad shoulder whence she could survey men and things as from a tower. Joanna laid her hand in some tremor on the child's little feet, but Mary called down to her: "Mother--Pulcheria--I am quite sure our old Horapollo's white ass is standing in front of the Curia, and they are putting a garland round the beast's neck--a garland of olive."

At this moment the blare of a tuba rang out from the Senate-house across the square, through the suffocatingly hot, quivering air; a sudden silence fell and spread till, when a man opened his mouth to shout or to speak, a neighbor gave him a shove and bid him hold his tongue. At this the widow held Mary's ankles more tightly, asking, while she wiped the drops from her brow:

"What is going on?" and the child answered quickly, never taking her eyes off the scene:

"Look, look up at the balcony of the Curia; there stands the chief of the Senate--Alexander the dyer of purple--he often used to come to see my grandfather, and grandmother could not bear his wife. And by his side--do you not see who the man is close by him?"

"It is old Horapollo. He is taking the laurel-crown off his wig!--Alexander is going to speak."

She was interrupted by another trumpet call, and immediately after a loud, manly voice was heard from the Curia, while the silence was so profound that even the widow and her daughter lost very little of the speech which followed:

"Fellow-citizens, Memphites, and comrades in misfortune," the president began in slow, ringing tones, "you know what the sufferings are which we all share. There is not a woe that has not befallen us, and even worse loom before us."

The crowd expressed their agreement by a fearful outcry, but they were reduced to silence by the sound of the tuba, and the speaker went on:

"We, the Senate, the fathers of the city, whom you have entrusted with the care of your persons and your welfare..."

At this point he was interrupted by wild yells, and cries could be distinguished of: "Then take care of us--do your duty!"

"Money bags!"

"Keep your pledge!"

"Save us from destruction!"

The trumpet call, however, again silenced them, and the speaker went on, almost beside himself with vehement excitement.

"Hearken! Do not interrupt me! The dearth and misery fall on our heads as much as on yours. My own wife and son died of the plague last night!"

At this only a low murmur ran through the crowd, and it died away of its own accord as the dignified old man on the balcony wiped his eyes and went on:

"If there is a single man among you who can prove us guilty of neglect--a man, woman, or child--let him accuse us before God, before our new ruler the Khaliff, and yourselves, the citizens of Memphis; but not now, my fellow-sufferers, not now! At this time cease your cries and lamentations; now when rescue is in sight. Listen to me, and let us know what you feel with regard to the last and uttermost means of deliverance which I now come to propose to you."

"Silence! Hear him! Down with the noisy ones!" was heard on all sides, and the orator went on:

"We, as Christians, in the first instance addressed ourselves to our Father in Heaven, to our one and only divine Redeemer, and to His Holy Church to aid us; and I ask you: Has there been any lack of prayers, processions, pilgrimages, and pious gifts? No, no, my beloved fellow-citizens! Each one be my witness--certainly not! But Heaven has remained blind and deaf and dumb in sight of our need, yea as though paralyzed. And yet no; not indeed paralyzed, for it has been powerful and swift to move only to heap new woes upon us. Not a thing that human foresight and prudence could devise or execute has remained untried.

"The time-honored arts of the magicians, sorcerers, and diviners, which aforesaid have often availed to break the powers of evil spirits, have proved no less delusive and ineffectual. So then we remembered our glorious forefathers and ancestors, and we recollected that a man lives in our midst who knew many things which we others have lost sight of in the lapse of years. He has made the wisdom of our forefathers his own in the course of a long life of laborious days and nights. He has the key to the writing and the secrets of the ancients, and he has communicated to us the means of deliverance to which they resorted, when they suffered from such afflictions as have befallen us in these dreadful days; and this venerable man at my side, the wise and truthful Horapollo, will acquaint us with it. You see the antique scrolls in his hand: They teach us the wonders it wrought in times past."

Here the speaker was interrupted by a cry of: "Hail Horapollo, the Deliverer!" and thousands took it up and expressed their satisfaction and gratitude by loud shouting.

The old man bowed modestly, pointed to his narrow chest and toothless mouth and then to the head of the Council as the man who had undertaken to transmit his opinion to the populace; so Alexander went on:

"Great favors, my friends and fellow-citizens, must be purchased by great gifts. The ancients knew this, and when the river--on which, as we know only too well, the weal or woe of this land solely depends--refused to rise, and its low ebb brought evils of many kinds upon its banks, they offered in sacrifice the thing they deemed most noble of all the earth has to show a pure and beautiful maiden.

"It is just as we expected: you are horrified! I hear your murmur, I see your horror-stricken faces; how can a Christian fail to be shocked at the thought of such a victim? But is it indeed so extraordinary? Have we ever wholly given up everything of the kind? Which of us does not entreat Saint Orion, either at home or under the guidance of the priests in church, whenever he craves a gift from our splendid river; and this very year as usual, on the Night of Dropping, did we not cast into the waters a little box containing a human finger.

[So late as in the XIV. century after Christ the Egyptian Christians still threw a small casket containing a human finger into the Nile to induce it to rise. This is confirmed by the trustworthy Makrizi.]

"This lesser offering takes the place of the greater and more precious sacrifice of the heathen; it has been offered, and its necessity has never at any time been questioned; even the severest and holiest luminaries of the Church--Antonius and Athanasius, Theophilus and Cyrillus had nothing to say against it, and year after year it has been thrown into the waters under their very eyes.

"A finger in a box! What a miserable exchange for the fairest and purest that God has allowed to move on earth among men. Can we wonder if the Almighty has at last disdained and rejected the wretched substitute, and claims once more for His Nile that which was formerly given? But where is the mother, where is the father, you will ask, who, in our selfish days, is so penetrated with love for his country, his province, his native town, that he will dedicate his virgin daughter to perish in the waters for the common good? What daughter of our nation is ready of her own free will to die for the salvation of others?

"But be not afraid. Have no fears for the growing maiden, the very apple of your eye, in your women's rooms. Fear not for your granddaughters, sisters, playfellows and betrothed: From the earliest ages a stringent law forbade the sacrifice of Egyptian blood; strangers were to perish, or those who worshipped other gods than those in Egypt.

"The same law, citizens and fellow-believers, is incumbent on us. And mark me well, all of you! Would it not seem as though Fate desired to help us to bring to our blessed Nile the offering which for so many centuries has been withheld? The river claims it; and, as if by a miracle, it has been brought to our hand. For a crime which does not taint her purity our judges have to-day condemned to death a beautiful and spotless maiden--a stranger, and at the same time a Greek and a heretic Melchite.

"This stirs you, this fills your souls with joyful thankfulness; I see it! Then make ready for thy bridal, noble stream, Benefactor of our land and nation! The virgin, the bride that thou hast longed for, we deck for thee, we lead to thine

embrace--she shall be Thine!

"And you, Memphites, citizens and fellow-sufferers," and the orator leaned far over the parapet towards the crowd, "when I ask you for your suffrages, when I appeal to you in the name of the senate, and of this venerable sage...."

But here he was interrupted by the triumphant shout of the assembled multitude; a thousand voices went up in a mighty, heaven-rending cry:

"To the Nile with her--the maiden to the Nile!"

"Marry the Melchite to the river! Bring wreaths for the bride of the Nile, bring flowers for her marriage."

"Let us abide by the teaching of our fathers!"

"Hail to the councillor! Hail to the sage, Horapollo! Hail to our chief Senator!"

These were the glad and enthusiastic shouts that rose in loud confusion; and it was only on the north side, where the money-changers' tables now stood deserted--for gold and silver had long since been placed in safety--that a sinister murmur of dissent was heard. The little girl in the Persian's arms had long since been breathing hard and deep. She thought she knew whom that fiend up there had his eye upon for his cursed heathen sacrifice; and as Mary bent down to Dame Joanna to see whether she shared her hideous suspicion, she perceived that her eyes and Pulcheria's were full of tears.--That was enough; she asked no questions, for a new act in the drama claimed her attention.

Close to the money-changer's stalls a hand was lifted on high, holding a crucifix, and the child could see it steadily progressing through the crowd towards the Curia. Every one made way for the sacred symbol and the bearer of it; and to Mary's fancy the throng parted on each side of the advancing image of the Redeemer, as the waters of the Red Sea had parted at the approach of the people of God. The murmurs in that part of the square grew louder; the acclamations of the populace waxed fainter; every voice seemed to fail, and presently a frail figure in bishop's robes, small but rigidly dignified, was seen to mount the steps and finally disappear within the portals of the Curia.

The turmoil sank like an ebbing wave to a low, enquiring mutter, and even this died away when the diminutive personage, who looked the taller, however, for the crucifix which he still held, came out on the balcony, approached the parapet, and stretched forth the arm that held the image above the heads of the foremost rows of the people.

At this Horapollo stepped up to Alexander, his eyes flashing with rage, and demanded that the intruder should be forbidden to speak; but the commanding eye of the new-comer rested on the dyer, who bowed his head and allowed him to proceed. Nor did one of the senators dare to hinder him, for every one recognized him as the zealous, learned, and determined priest who had, since yesterday, filled the place of the deceased bishop.

Their new pastor began, addressing his flock in as loud a voice as he could command:

"Look on this Cross and hearken to its minister! You languish for the blessing of Christ, and you follow after heathen abominations. The superstitious triumph, through which I have struggled to reach you, will be turned to howls of anguish if you stop your ears and are deaf to the words of salvation.

"Yea, you may murmur! You will not reduce me to silence, for Truth speaks in me and can never be dumb. I say to each of you that knows it not: The staff of the departed Plotinus has been placed in my hands. I would fain bear it with gentleness and mercy; but, if I must, I will wield it as a sword and a scourge till your wounds bleed and your bruises ache.

"Behold in my right hand the image of your Redeemer! I hold it up as a wall between you and the heathen abomination which you hail with joy in your blindness.

"Ye are accursed and apostate. Lift up your hearts, and look at Him who died on the cross to save you. Verily He will not let him perish who believeth in Him; but you! where is your faith? Because it is night ye lament and cry: The Light is dead! Because ye are sick ye say: 'The physician cannot heal!'

"What are these blasphemies that I hear: 'The Lord and His Church are powerless! Magic, enchantments, and heathen abominations may save us.'--But, inasmuch as ye trust not in the true Saviour and Redeemer, but in heathen wickedness, magic, and enchantments, punishment shall be heaped on punishment; and so it will be,--I see it coming--till ye are choked in the mud and seek with groans the only Hand that is able to save.

"That whereby the blinded sons of men hope to escape from the evil, that, and that only, is the source of their sufferings and I stand here to stay that spring and dig a channel for its overflow.

"Children of Moloch ye try to be and I hope to make you Christians again. But the maiden whom your fury would cast into the abyss of the river is under the merciful protection of the supreme Church, for the death of her body will bring death to your souls. Saint Orion turns from you with horror! Away from the hapless victim! Away, I say, with your accursed desires and sacrilegious hands!"

"And sit with them in our laps and wring them in prayer till they ache, while want and the plague snatch away those that are left!" interrupted the old man's voice, thin and feeble, but audible at a considerable distance, and from the market-place thousands proclaimed their approval by loud shouts.

The president of the senate had listened with a penitent mien and bowed head, but now he recovered his presence of

mind and exclaimed indignantly:

"The people die, the town and country are going to ruin, plague and horrors rise up from the river. Show us some other way of escape, or let us trust to our forefathers and try this last means."

But the little man drew himself up more stiffly, pointed with his left hand to the crucifix, and cried with unmoved composure:

"Believe, hope, and pray!"

"Perhaps you think that no evil is come upon us!" cried Alexander. "You, to be sure, have seen no wife with glazing eyes, no child struggling for breath...." And a fresh tumult came up from below, wilder and louder than ever. Each one whose home or beasts had been blighted by death, whose gardens and fields had perished of drought, whose dates had dropped one by one from the trees, lifted up his voice and shrieked:

"The victim, the victim!"

"To the river with the maiden!"

"All hail to our deliverer, the wise Horapollo!" But others shouted against them:

"Let us remain Christians! Hail to Bishop John!"

"Think of our souls!"

The prelate made an effort once more to rivet the attention of the populace, and failing in this he turned to the senators and the trumpeters, whom at length he succeeded in persuading to blow again and again, and more loudly through their brazen tuba. But the call produced no effect, for in the market square groups had formed on opposite sides, and blows and wrestling threatened to end in a sanguinary street-riot.

The women succeeded in getting away from the scene of action under the protection of the Masdakite, before the Arab cavalry rode across to separate the combatants; but in the Curia Bishop John explained to the Fathers that he would make every effort to prevent this inhuman and unchristian sacrifice of a young girl, even though she was a Melchite and under sentence of death. This very day a carrier pigeon should be dispatched to the patriarch in Upper Egypt, and bring back his decision.

When, on this, Horapollo replied that the Khaliff's representative here had signified his consent to the proceedings, and that even against the will of the clergy the misery of the people must be put an end to, the Bishop broke out vehemently and threatened all who had first suggested this hideous scheme with the anathema of the Church. But Horapollo retorted again with flaming eloquence, the desperate Senators took his part, and the Bishop left the Curia in the highest wrath.

CHAPTER XIX.

Few things could be more intolerable to the gentle and retiring widow than such a riot of the people. The unchained passion, the tumult, and all the vulgar accessories that surrounded her there grieved her tender nature; all through the old man's speech she had felt nothing but the desire to escape, but as soon as she had acquired the certainty that Paula was the hapless being whom her terrible house-mate was preparing to hand over to the superstition of the mob, she thought no more of getting home, but waited in the crush till at length she and the two children could be conducted by Rustem to the prison, though the way thither was through the most crowded streets.

Had the nameless horrors that hung over Paula already found their way to her ears through the prison walls, or might it yet be her privilege to be able to prepare the girl for the worst, and to comfort the victim who must already have been driven to the verge of desperation by the sentence of death?

On the previous day the chief warder had acceded without demur to her wish to see Paula, for the Kadi had enjoined him to show her and Orion all possible courtesy, but the Vekel's threats made him now refuse to admit Dame Joanna. However, while he was talking with her, his infant son stretched out his arms to Pulcheria, who had played with him the day before in her sweet way, and she now took him up and kissed him, thus bringing a kindly feeling to three hearts at once; and most of all to that of the child's mother who immediately interested herself for them, and persuaded her husband to oblige them once more.

Pretty Emau had always waited on the mirthful Orion, under the palms by her father's inn, more gladly than on most other guests; and her husband who, after the manner of the Egyptians, was docile to his better half though till now he had not been quite free from jealousy, was even more ready to serve his benefactor's son since hearing that he was betrothed to the fair Paula.

There was a great uproar in the large common prison to-day, as usual when the judges had passed sentence of death on any criminal, and the women shuddered as the miserable wretches hallooed and bellowed. Many a shriek came up, of which it was hard to say whether it was the expression of wild defiance or of bitter jesting, and no more suitable accompaniment could be conceived to this terrific riot than the clank of chains.

When the women reached Paula's cell their hearts throbbed painfully, for within the door which the warder unlocked anguish and despair must dwell.

The prisoner was standing at the window, pressing her brow against the iron bars and listening to the lute played by her lover, which sounded, amid the turmoil of the other prisoners, like a bell above the roar of thunder and the storm. By the bed sat Betta on a low stool, asleep with the distaff in her lap; and neither she nor her mistress heeded the entrance of the visitors. A miserable lamp lighted the squalid room.

Mary would have flown to her friend, but Joanna held her back and called Paula tenderly by name in a low voice. But Paula did not hear; her soul was no doubt absorbed in anguish and the terror of death. The widow now raised her voice, and the ill-fated girl turned round; then, with a little cry of joy, she hastened to meet the faithful creatures who could find her even in prison, and clasped first the widow, then Pulcheria, then the child in a tender embrace. Joanna put her hands fondly round her face to kiss it, and to see how far fear and affliction had altered her lovely features, and a faint cry of astonishment escaped her, for she was looking, not at a grief and terror-stricken face, but a glad and calm one, and a pair of large eyes looked brightly and gratefully into hers.

Had she not been told then what was hanging over her? Nay--for she at once asked whether they had heard that she was condemned to die. And she went on to tell them how things had gone with her at her trial, and how her good Philip's friend and foster-father had suddenly and inexplicably become her bitterest foe.

At this the others could not check their tears; it was Paula who had to comfort and soothe them, by telling them that she had found a paternal friend in the Kadi who had promised to intercede for her with the Khaliff.

Dame Joanna could scarcely take it all in. This girl and her heroic demeanor, in the face of such disaster, seemed to her miraculous. Her trust was beautiful; but how easily might it be deceived! how insecure was the ground in which she had cast the anchor of hope.

Even little Mary seemed more troubled than her friend, and threw herself sobbing on her bosom. And Paula returned her fondness, and tried to mollify Pulcheria as to the disgraceful conduct of their old housemate, and smiled kindly at the widow when she asked where she had found such composure in the face of so much misfortune, saying that it was from her example that she had learnt resignation to the worst that could befall her. Even in this dark hour she found more to be thankful for than to lament over; indeed, it had brought her a glorious joy. And this for the first time reminded Joanna and the girls that she was now betrothed, and again she was clasped in their loving arms.

Just then the warder rapped; Paula rose thoughtfully, and exclaimed in a low voice: "I have something to send to Orion that I dare not entrust to a stranger: but now, now I have you, my Mary, and you shall take it to him."

As she spoke she took out the emerald, gave it to the little girl, and charged her to deliver it to her uncle as soon as

they should be alone together. In the little note which she had wrapped around it she implored her lover to regard it as his own property, and to use it to satisfy the claims of the Church.

The man was easily induced to take Mary to her uncle; and how happily she ran on before him up to Orion's cell, how great was his joy at seeing her again, how gratefully he pressed the emerald to his lips! But when she exclaimed that her prophecy had been fulfilled, and that Paula, was now his, his brow was knit as he replied, with gloomy regret, that though he had won the woman he loved, it was only to lose her again.

"But the Kadi is your friend and will gain pardon from the Khaliff!" cried the child.

"But then another enemy suddenly starts up: Horapollo!"

"Oh, our old man!" and the child ground her teeth. "If you did but know, Orion!--And to think that I must live under the same roof with him!"

"You!" asked the young man.

"Yes, I. And Pulcheria, and Mother Joanna," and Mary went on to tell him how the old man had come to live with them and Orion could guess from various indications that she was concealing some important fact; so he pressed her to keep nothing from him, till the child could not at last evade telling him all she had seen and heard.

At this he lost all caution and self-control. Quite beside himself he called aloud the name of his beloved, invoking in passionate tones the return of the Governor Amru, the only man who could help them in this crisis. His sole hope was in him. He had shown himself a real father to him, and had set him a difficult but a noble task.

"Into which you have plunged over head and ears!" cried the child.

"I thought it all out while on my journey," replied Orion. "I tried yesterday to write out a first sketch of it, but I lacked what I most wanted: maps and lists. Nilus had put them all up together; I was to have taken them with me on the voyage with the nuns, and I ordered that they should be carried to the house of Rufinus...."

"That they should come to us?" interrupted the child with sparkling eyes. "Oh, they are all there! I saw the documents myself, when the chest was cleared out for old Horapollo, and to-morrow, quite early to-morrow, you shall have them." Orion kissed her brow with glad haste; then, striking the wall of his cell with his fist, he waited till something had been withdrawn with a grating sound on the other side, and exclaimed:

"Good news, Nilus! The plans and lists are found: I shall have them to-morrow!"

"That is well!" replied the treasurer's thin voice from the adjoining room. "We shall need something to comfort us! A prisoner has just been brought in for having attacked an Arab horseman in a riot in the market square. He tells me some dreadful news."

"Concerning my betrothed?"

"Alas! yes, my lord."

"Then I know it already," replied the young man; and after exchanging a few words with his master with reference to the old man's atrocious proposal, Nilus went on:

"My prison-mate tells me, too, that while he was in custody in the guard-house the Arabs were speaking of a messenger from the governor announcing his arrival at Medina, and also that he intended making only a short stay there. So we may expect his return before long."

"Then he will have started long before the Kadi's messenger can have arrived and laid the petition for pardon before the Khaliff!--We have no hope but in Amru; if only we could send information to him on his way...."

"He would certainly not tarry in Upper Egypt, but hasten his journey, or send on a plenipotentiary," said the voice on the other side of the wall. "If we had but a trusty man to despatch! Our people are scattered to the four winds, and to hunt them up now...."

At this Mary's childish tones broke in with: "I can find a messenger."

"You? What are you thinking of, child?" said Orion. She did not heed his remonstrance, but went on eagerly, quite sure of her own meaning:

"He shall be told everything, everything! Ought he to know what I heard about your share in the flight of the sisters?"

"No, no; on no account!" cried Nilus and his master both at once; and Mary understood that her proposition was accepted. She clapped her hands, and exclaimed full of enterprise and with glowing cheeks:

"The messenger shall start to-morrow; rely on me. I can do it as well as the greatest. And now tell me exactly the road he is to take. To make sure, write the names of the stages on my little tablet.--But wait, I must rub it smooth."

"What is this on the wax?" asked Orion. "A large heart with squares all over it.--And that means?"

"Oh! mere nonsense," said the child somewhat abashed. "It was only to show how my heart was divided among the persons I love. A whole half of it belongs to Paula, this quarter is yours; but there, there, there," and at each word she prodded the wax with the stylus, "that is where I had kept a little corner for old Horapollo. He had better not come in my

way again!"

Her nimble fingers smoothed the wax, and over the effaced heart--a child's whim--Orion wrote things on which the lives of two human beings depended. He did so with sincere confidence in his little ally's adroitness and fidelity. Early next morning she was to receive a letter to be conveyed to Amru by the messengers.

"But a rapid journey costs money, and Amru always chooses the road by the mountains and Berenice," observed the treasurer. "If we put together our last gold pieces they will hardly suffice."

"Keep them, you will want them here," said the little girl. "And yet--there are my pearls, to be sure, and my mother's jewels--at the same time...."

"You ought never to part from such things, you heart of gold!" cried Orion.

"Oh yes, yes! What do I want with them? But Dame Joanna has my mother's things in her keeping."

"And you are afraid to ask her for them?" asked the young man. He appealed to Nilus, and when the treasurer had calculated the cost, Orion took off a costly sapphire ring, which he gave to Mary, charging her to hand it to Joanna. Gamaliel, the Jew, would lend her as much as she would require on this gem. Mary joyfully took possession of the ring; but presently, when the warder appeared to fetch her, her satisfaction suddenly turned to no less vehement grief, and she took leave of Orion as if they were parting for ever.

In the passage leading to Paula's cell the man suddenly stood still: some one was approaching up the stairs.--If it should be the black Vêkeel, and he should find visitors in the prison at so late an hour!

But no. Two lamps were borne in front of the new-comers, and by their light the warder recognized John, the new Bishop of Memphis, who had often been here before now to console prisoners.

He had come to-night prompted by his desire to see the condemned Melchite. Mary's dress and demeanor betrayed at once that she could not belong to any official employed here; and, as soon as he had learnt who she was, he whispered to his companion, an aged deacon who always accompanied him when he visited a female prisoner: "We find her here!" And when he had ascertained with whom the child had come hither at so late an hour, he turned again to his colleague and added in a low voice:

"The wife and daughter of Rufinus! Just so: I have long had my eye on these Greeks. In church once or twice every year!--Melchites in disguise! Allied with this Melchite! And this is the school in which the Mukaukas' granddaughter is growing up! An abominable trick! Benjamin judged rightly, as he always did!" Then, in a subdued voice, he asked:

"Shall we take her away with us at once?" But, as the deacon made objections, he hastily replied: "You are right; for the present it is enough that we know where she is to be found."

The warder meanwhile had opened Paula's cell; before the bishop went in he spoke a few kind words to the child, asking her whether she did not long to see her mother; and when Mary replied: "Very often!" he stroked her hair with his bony hand and said:

"So I thought.--You have a pretty name, child, and you, like your mother, will perhaps ere long dedicate your life to the Blessed among women, whose name you bear." And, holding the little girl by the hand, he entered the cell. While Paula looked in amazement at the prelate who came so late a visitor, Joanna and Pulcheria recognized him as the brave ecclesiastic who had so valiantly opposed the old sage and the misled populace, and they bowed with deep reverence. This the bishop observed, and came to the conclusion that these Greeks perhaps after all belonged to his Church. At any rate, the child might safely be left in their care a few days longer.

After he had exchanged a few cordial words with them the widow prepared to withdraw, and was about to take leave when he went up to her and announced that he would pay her a visit the next day or the day after; that he wished to speak with her of matters involving the happiness of one who was dear to them both, and Dame Joanna, believing that he referred to Paula, whispered:

"She has no idea as yet of the terrible fate the people have in store for her. If possible, spare her the fearful truth before she sleeps this night."

"If possible," repeated the prelate. Then, as Mary kissed his hand before leaving, he drew her to him and said: "Like the Infant Christ, every Christian child is the Mother's. You, Mary, are chosen before thousands! The Lord took your father to himself as a martyr; your mother has dedicated herself to Heaven. Your road is marked out for you, child, reflect on this. To-morrow-no, the day after, I will see you and guide you in the new path."

At these words Joanna turned pale. She now understood what the bishop's purpose was in calling on her. At the bottom of the stairs, she threw her arms round the child and asked her in--a low voice: "Do you pine for the cloister--do you wish to go away from us like your mother, to think of nothing but saving your soul, to live a nun in the holy seclusion which Pulcheria has described to you so often?"

But this the child positively denied; and as Joanna's head drooped anxiously and sadly, Mary looked up brightly and exclaimed: "Never fear, Mother dear! Things will have altered greatly by the day after tomorrow. Let the bishop come! I shall be a match for him!--Oh! you do not know me yet. I have been like a lamb among you through all this misfortune

and serious trouble; but there is something more in me than that. You will be quite astonished!"

"Nay, nay. Remain what you are," the widow said.

"Always and ever full of love for you and Pul. But I am a grand and trusted person now! I have something very important to do for Orion to-morrow. Something--Rustem will go with me.--Important, very important, Mother Joanna. But what it is I must not tell--not even you!"

Here she was interrupted, for the heavy prison door opened for their exit.

It was many hours before it was again unlocked to let out the bishop, so long was he detained talking to Paula in her cell.

To his enquiry as to whether she was an orthodox Greek, or as the common people called it, a Melchite, she replied that she was the latter; adding that, if he had come with a view to perverting her from the confession of her forefathers, his visit was thrown away; at the same time she revered him as a Christian and a priest; as a learned man, and the friend whom her deceased uncle had esteemed above every other minister of his confession; she was gladly ready to disclose to him all that lay on her soul in the face of death. He looked into the pure, calm face; and though, at her first declaration, he had felt prompted to threaten her with the hideous end which he had but just done his utmost to avert, he now remembered the Greek widow's request and bound himself to keep silence.

He allowed her to talk till midnight, giving him the whole history of all she had known of joy and sorrow in the course of her young life; his keen insight searched her soul, his pious heart rose to meet the strength and courage of hers; and when he quitted her, as he walked home with the deacon, the first words with which he broke a long silence were:

"While you were asleep, God vouchsafed me an edifying hour through that heretic child of earth."

CHAPTER XX.

When the door in the tall prison-wall was closed behind the women, Joanna made her way through streets still sultry under the silence of the night, Rustem following with the child.

The giant's good heart was devoted to Mary, and he often passed his huge hand over his eyes while she told him all that the scene they had witnessed meant, and the fearful end that threatened Paula. He broke in now and again, giving utterance to his grief and wrath in strange, natural sounds; for he looked up to his beautiful sick nurse as to a superior being, and Mandane, too, had often remarked that they could never forget all that the noble maiden had done for them.

"If only," Rustem cried at length, clenching his powerful fist, "If only I could--they should see..." and the child looked up with shrewd, imploring eyes, exclaiming eagerly:

"But you could, Rustem, you could!"

"I?" asked Rustem in surprise, and he shook his head doubtfully.

"Yes, you, Rustem; you of all men. We were talking over something in the prison, and if only you were ready and willing to help us in the matter."

"Willing!" laughed the worthy fellow striking his heart; and he went on in his strangely-broken Greek, which was, however, quite intelligible: "I would give hair and skin for the noble lady. You have only to speak out."

The child clung to the big man with both hands and drew him to her saying: "We knew you had a grate ful heart. But you see..." and she interrupted herself to ask in an altered voice:

"Do you believe in a God? or stay--do you know what a sacred oath is? Can you swear solemnly? Yes, yes..." and drawing herself up as tall as possible she went on very seriously: "Swear by your bride Mandane--as truly as you believe that she loves you...."

"But, sweet soul..."

"Swear that you will never betray to a living soul what I am going to say--not even to Mother Joanna and Pulcheria; no, nor even to your Mandane, unless you find you cannot help it and she gives her sacred word...."

"What is it? You quite frighten me! What am I to swear?"

"Not to reveal what I am now going to tell you."

"Yes, yes, little Mistress; I can promise you that." Mary sighed, a long-drawn "Ah...!" and told him that a trustworthy messenger must be found to go forth to meet Amru, so as to be in time to save Paula. Then came the question whether he knew the road over the hills from Babylon to the ancient town of Berenice; and when he replied that he had lately travelled that way, and that it was the shortest road to the sea for Djidda and Medina, she repeated her satisfied "Ah!" took his hand, and went on with coaxing but emphatic entreaty while she played with his big fingers: "And now, best and kindest Rustem, in all Memphis there is but one really trusty messenger; but he, you see, is betrothed, and so he would rather get married and go home with his bride than help us to save the life of poor Paula."

"The cur!" growled the Persian.

At this Mary laughed out: "Yes, the cur!" and went on gaily: "But you are abusing yourself, you stupid Rustem. You, you are the messenger I mean, the only faithful and trustworthy one far or near. You, you must meet the governor...."

"I!" said the man, and he stood still with amazement; but Mary pulled him onward, saying: "But come on, or the others will notice something.--Yes, you, you must...."

"But child, child," interrupted Rustem lamentably,

"I must go back to my master; and you see, common right and justice...."

"You do not choose to leave your sweetheart; not even if the kind creature who watched over you day and night should die for it--die the most cruel and horrible death! You were ready enough to call that other, as you supposed, a cur--that other whom no one nursed till he was well again; but as for yourself...."

"Have patience then! Hear me, little Mistress!" Rustem broke in again, and pulled away his hand. "I am quite willing to wait and Mandane must just submit. But one man is not good for all tasks. To ride, or guide a train of merchandise, to keep the cameldrivers in order, to pitch a camp--all that I can do; but to parley with grand folks, to go straight up to such a man as the great chief Amru with prayers and supplications--all that, you see, sweetheart--even if it were to save my own father, that would be...."

"But who asks you to do all that?" said the child. "You may stand as mute as a fish: it will be your companion's business to do the talking."

"There is to be another one then? But, great Masdak! I hope that will be enough at any rate!"

"Why will you constantly interrupt me?" the little girl put in. "Listen first and raise objections after wards. The

second messenger--now open your ears wide--it is I, I myself;--but if you stand still again, you will really betray me. The long and short of it is, that as surely as I mean to save Paula, I mean to go forth to meet Amru, and if you refuse to go with me I will set out alone and try whether Gibbus the hunchback...."

Rustem had needed some time to collect his senses after this stupendous surprise, but now he exclaimed: "You--you--to Berenice, and over the mountains...."

"Yes, over the mountains," she repeated, "and if need be, through the clouds."

"But such a thing was never heard of, never heard of on this earth!" the Persian remonstrated. "A girl, a little lady like you--a messenger, and all alone with a clumsy fellow like me. No, no, no!"

"And again no, and a hundred times over no!" cried the child merrily. "The little lady will stop at home and you will take a boy with you--a boy called Marius, not Mary."

"A boy! But I thought.--It is enough to puzzle one...."

"A boy who is a girl and a boy in one," laughed Mary. "But if you must have it in plain words: I shall dress up as a boy to go with you; to-morrow when we set out you will see, you will take me for my own brother."

"Your own brother! With a little face like yours! Then the most impossible things will become possible," cried Rustem laughing, and he looked down good humoredly at the little girl. But suddenly the preposterousness of her scheme rose again before his mind, and he exclaimed half-frantically: "But then my master!--It will not do--It will never do!"

"It is for his sake that you will do us this service," said Mary confidently. "He is Paula's friend and protector; and when he hears what you have done for her he will praise you, while if you leave us in the lurch I am quite sure..."

"Well?"

"That he will say: 'I thought Rustem was a shrewder man and had a better heart.'"

"You really think he will say that?"

"As surely as our house stands before us!--Well, we have no time for any more discussion, so it is settled: we start together. Let me find you in the garden early to-morrow morning. You must tell your Mandane that you are called away by important business."

"And Dame Joanna?" asked the Persian, and his voice was grave and anxious as he went on: "The thing I like least, child, is that you should not ask her, and take her into your confidence."

"But she will hear all about it, only not immediately," replied Mary. "And the day after to-morrow, when she knows what I have gone off for and that you are with me, she will praise us and bless us; yes, she will, as surely as I hope that the Almighty will succor us in our journey!"

At these words, which evidently came from the very depths of her heart, the Masdakite's resistance altogether gave way--just in time, for their walk was at an end, and they both felt as though the long distance had been covered by quite a few steps. They had passed close to several groups of noisy and quarrelsome citizens, and many a funeral train had borne the plague-stricken dead to the grave by torchlight under their very eyes, but they had heeded none of these things.

It was not till they reached the garden-gate that they observed what was going on around them. There they found the gardener and all the household, anxiously watching for the return of their belated mistress. Eudoxia too was waiting for them with some alarm. In the house they were met by Horapollo, but Joanna and Pulcheria returned his greeting with a cold bow, while Mary purposely turned her back on him. The old man shrugged his shoulders with regretful annoyance, and in the solitude of his own room he muttered to himself:

"Oh, that woman! She will be the ruin even of the peaceful days I hoped to enjoy during the short remainder of my life!"

The widow and her daughter for some time sat talking of Mary. She had bid them good-night as devotedly and tenderly as though they were parting for life. Poor child! She had forebodings of the terrible fate to which the bishop, and perhaps her own mother had predestined her.

But Mary did not look as if she were going to meet misfortune; Eudoxia, who slept by her side, was rejoiced on the contrary at seeing her so gay; only she was surprised to see the child, who usually fell asleep as soon as her little head was on the pillow, lying awake so long this evening. The elderly Greek, who suffered from a variety of little ailments and always went to sleep late, could not help watching the little girl's movements.

What was that? Between midnight and dawn Mary sprang from her bed, threw on her clothes, and stole into the next room with the night-lamp in her hand. Presently a brighter light shone through the door-way. She must have lighted a lamp,--and presently, hearing the door of the sitting-room opened, Eudoxia rose and noiselessly watched her. Mary immediately returned, carrying a boy's clothes--a suit, in point of fact, which Pulcheria and Eudoxia had lately been making as a Sunday garb--for the lame gardener's boy. The child smilingly tried on the little blue tunic; then, after tossing the clothes into a chest, she sat down at the table to write. But she seemed to have set herself some hard task;

for now she looked down at the papyrus and rubbed her forehead, and now she gazed thoughtfully into vacancy. She had written a few sentences when she started up, called Eudoxia by name, and went towards the sleeping-room.

Eudoxia went forward to meet her; Mary threw herself into her arms, and before her governess could ask any questions she told her that she had been chosen to accomplish a great and important action. She had been intending to wake her, to make her her confidant and to ask her advice.

How sweet and genuine it all sounded, and how charmingly confused she seemed in spite of the ardent zeal that inspired her!

Eudoxia's heart went forth to her; the words of reproof died on her lips, and for the first time she felt as though the orphaned child were her own; as though their joy and grief were one; as though she, who all her life long had thought only of herself and her own advantage, and who had regarded her care of Mary as a mere return in kind for a salary and home, were ready and willing to sacrifice herself and her last coin for this child. So, when the little girl now threw her arms round Eudoxia's neck, imploring her not to betray her, but, on the contrary, to help her in the good work which aimed at nothing less than the rescue of Paula and Orion--the imperilled victims of Fate, her dry eyes sparkled through tears; she kissed Mary's burning cheeks once more and called her her own dear, dear little daughter. This gave the child courage; with tragical dignity, which brought a smile to the governess' lips, she took Eudoxia's bible from the desk, and said, fixing her beseeching gaze on the Greek's face:

"Swear!--nay, you must be quite grave, for nothing can be more solemn--swear not to tell a soul, not even Mother Joanna, what I want to confess to you."

Eudoxia promised, but she would take no oath. "Yea, yea, and nay, nay," was the oath of the Christian by the law of the Lord; but Mary clung to her, stroked her thin cheeks, and at last declared she could not say a word unless Eudoxia yielded. In such an hour the Greek could not resist this tender coaxing; she allowed Mary to take possession of her hand and lay it on the Bible; and when once this was done Eudoxia gave way, and with much head shaking repeated the oath that her pupil dictated, though much against her will.

After this the governess threw herself on the divan, as if exhausted and shocked at her own weakness; and the little girl took advantage of her victory, seating herself at her feet, and telling her all she knew about Paula and the perils that threatened her and Orion; and she was artful enough to give special prominence to Orion's danger, having long since observed how high he stood in Eudoxia's good graces. So far Eudoxia had not ceased stroking her hair, while she assented to everything that was said; but when she heard that Mary proposed to undertake the embassy to Amru herself, she started to her feet in horror, and declared most positively that she would never, never consent to such rashness, to such fatal folly.

Mary now brought to bear her utmost resources of persuasion and flattery. There was no other fit messenger to be found, and the lives of Orion and Paula were at stake. Was a ride across the mountains such a tremendous matter after all? How well she knew how to manage a beast, and how little she suffered from the heat! Had she not ridden more than once from Memphis to their estates by the seaboard? And faithful Rustem would be always with her, and the road over the mountains was the safest in all the country, with frequent stations for the accommodation of travellers. Then, if they found Amru, she could give a more complete report than any other living soul.

But Eudoxia was not to be shaken; though she admitted that Mary's project was not so entirely crazy as it had at first appeared.

At this the little girl began again; after reminding Eudoxia once more of her oath, she went on to tell her of the doom she herself hoped to escape by setting out on her errand. She told Eudoxia of her meeting with the bishop, and that even Joanna was uneasy as to her future fate. Ah! that life within walls under lock and key seemed to her so frightful--and she pictured her terrors, her love of freedom and of a busy, useful, active life among men and her friends, and her hope that the great general, Amru, would defend her against every one if once she could place herself under his protection--painting it all so vividly, so passionately, and so pathetically, that the governess was softened.

She clasped her hands over her eyes, which were streaming with tears, and exclaimed: "It is horrible, unheard-of--still, perhaps it is the best thing to do. Well, go to meet the governor,--ride off, ride off!"

And when the sweet, warm-hearted, joyous creature clang round her neck she was glad of her own weakness: this fair, fresh, and blooming bud of humanity should not pine in confinement and seclusion; she should find and give happiness, to her own joy and that of all good souls, and unfold to a full and perfect flower. And Eudoxia knew the widow well; she knew that Joanna would by-and-by understand why she helped the child to escape the greatest peril that can hang over a human soul: that of living in perpetual conflict with itself in the effort to become something totally different from what, by natural gifts and inclinations, it is intended to be.

With a sigh of anguish Eudoxia reflected what she herself, forced by cruel fate and lacking freedom and pleasurable ease, had become, from an ardent and generous young creature; and she, the narrow-hearted teacher, could make allowances for the strange, adventurous yearning of a child, where a larger souled woman might have derided, and blamed and repressed it.

When it was daylight Eudoxia fulfilled the offices she commonly left to the maid: she arranged Mary's hair, talking to her and listening to the while, as though in this night the child had developed into a woman. Then she went into the garden with her, and hardly let her out of her sight.

At breakfast Joanna and Pulcheria wondered at her singular behavior, but it did not displease them, and Marv was radiant with contentment.

The widow made no objection to allowing the child to go into the city to execute her uncle's mysterious commission. Rustem was with her; and whatever it was that made the child so happy must certainly be right and unobjectionable. Orion's maps and lists were sent to the prison early in the day, and before the child set out with her stalwart escort Gibbus had returned with the prisoner's letter to the Arab governor.

On their way it was agreed that Mary should join Rustem at dusk at the riverside inn of Nesptah. In these clays of famine and death beasts of burthen of every description were easily procurable, as well as attendants and guides; and the Masdakite, who was experienced in such matters, thought it best to purchase none but swift dromedaries and to carry only a light tent for the "little mistress!"

At the door of Gamaliel's shop Mary bid him wait; the jovial goldsmith welcomed her with genuine pleasure....

What had befallen the house of the Mukaukas! Fire had destroyed the dwelling-place of justice, like the Egyptian cities to whom the prophet had announced a similar fate a thousand years since.

Gamaliel knew in what peril Orion stood, and the fate that hung over the noble maiden who had once given him the costliest of gems, and afterwards entrusted to him a portion of her fortune.

To see any member of his patron's family alive and well rejoiced his heart. He asked Mary one sympathizing question after another, and his wife wanted to give her some of her good apricot tarts; but the little girl begged Gamaliel to grant her at once a private interview, so the jeweller led her into his little work-shop, bidding her trust him entirely, for whatever a grandchild of Mukaukas George might ask of him it was granted beforehand.

Blushing with confusion she took Orion's ring out of its wrapper, offered it to the Jew, and desired him to give her whatever was right.

She looked enquiringly into his face with her bright eyes, in full confidence that the kind-hearted man would at once pay her down gold coins and to spare; but he did not even take the ring out of her hand. He merely glanced at it, and said gravely:

"Nay, my little maid, we do not do business with children."

"But I want the money, Gamaliel," she urged. "I must have it."

"Must?" he repeated with a smile. "Well, must is a nail that drives through wood, no doubt; but if it hits iron it is apt to bend. Not that I am so hard as that; but money, money, money! And whose money do you mean, little maid? If you want money of mine to spend in bread, or in cakes, which is more likely, I will shut my eyes and put my hand boldly into my wallet; but, if I am not mistaken, you are well provided for by Rufinus the Greek, in whose house there is no lack of anything; and I have a nice round sum in my own keeping which your grandfather placed in my hands at interest two years since, with a remark that it was a legacy to you from your godmother, and the papers stand in your name; so your necessity looks very like what other folks would call ease."

"Necessity! I am in no necessity," Mary broke in. "But I want the money all the same; and if I have some of my own, and you perhaps have it there in your box, give me as much of it as I want."

"As much as you want?" laughed the jeweller. "Not so fast, little maid. Before such matters can be settled here in Egypt we must have plenty of time, and papyrus and ink, a grand law court, sixteen witnesses, a Kyrios..."

"Well then, buy the ring! You are such a good, kind man Gamaliel. Just to please me. Why, you yourself do not really think that I want to buy cakes!"

"No. But in these hard times, when so many are starving, a soft heart may be moved to other follies."

"No indeed! Do buy the ring; and if you will do me this favor..."

"Old Gamaliel will be both a rogue and a simpleton!--Have you forgotten the emerald? I bought that, and a pretty piece of business that was! I can have nothing to say to the ring, my little maid." Mary withdrew her hand, and the grief and disappointment expressed by her large, tearful eyes were so bitter and touching, that the Jew paused, and then went on seriously and heartily:

"I would sooner give my own old head to be an anvil than distress you, sweet child; and Adonai! I do not mean to say--why should I--that you should ever leave old Gamaliel without money. He has plenty, and though he is always ready to take, he is ready to give, too, when it is meet and fitting. I cannot buy the ring, to be sure, but do not be down-hearted and look me well in the face, little maid. It is much to ask, and I have handsomer things in my stores, but if you see anything in it that gives you confidence, speak out and whisper to the man of whom even your grandfather had some good opinion: 'I want so much, and what is more--how did you put it?--what is more, I must have it.'"

Mary did see something in the Jew's merry round face that inspired her with trust, and in her childlike belief in the

sanctity of an oath she made a third person--a believer too, in a third form of religion--swear not to betray her secret, only marvelling that the administering of the oath, in which she had now had some practice, should be so easy. Even grown-up people will sometimes buy another's dearest secret for a light asseveration. And when she had thus ensured the Israelite's silence, she confided to him that she was charged by Orion to send out a messenger to meet Amru, that he and Paula might be reprieved in time. The goldsmith listened attentively, and even before she had ended he was busying himself with an iron chest built into the wall, and interrupted her to ask! "How much?"

She named the sum that Nilus had suggested, and hardly had she finished her story when the Jew, who kept the trick by which he opened the chest a secret even from his wife, exclaimed:

"Now, go and look out of the window, you wonder among envoys and money-borrowers, and if you see nothing in the courtyard, then fancy to yourself that a man is standing there who looks like old Gamaliel, and who puts his hand on your head and gives you a good kiss. And you may fancy him, too, as saying to himself: 'God in Heaven! if only my little daughter, my Ruth may be such another as little Mary, grandchild of the just Mukaukas!'"

And as he spoke, the vivacious but stout man, who had dropped on his knees, rose panting, left the lid of his strong box open, hurried up to the child, who had been standing at the window all the while, and bending over her from behind pressed a kiss on her curly head, saying with a laugh: "There, little pickpocket, that is my interest. But look out still, till I call you again." He nimbly trotted back on his short little legs, wiping his eyes; took from the strong box a little bag of gold, which contained rather more than the desired sum, locked the chest again, looking at Mary with a mixture of suspicion and hearty approbation; then at last he called her to him. He emptied the money-bag before her, counted out the sum she needed, put the remainder of the coins into his girdle, and handed the bag to the little girl requesting her to count his "advance", back into it, while he, with a cunning smile, quitted the room.

He presently returned and she had finished her task, but she timidly observed: "One gold piece is wanting." At this he clasped his hands over his breast and raised his eyes to Heaven exclaiming: "My God! what a child. There is the solidus, child; and you may take my word for it as a man of experience: whatever you undertake will prosper. You know what you are about; and when you are grown up and a suitor comes he will go to a good market. And now sign your name here. You are not of age, to be sure, and the receipt is worth no more than any other note scribbled with ink--however, it is according to rule."

Mary took the pen, but she first hastily glanced through what Gamaliel had written; the Jew broke out in fresh enthusiasm:

"A girl--a mere child! And she reads, and considers, and makes all sure before she will sign! God bless thee, Child!--And here come the tarts, and you can taste them before.... Just Heaven! a mere child, and such important business!"

CHAPTER XXI.

While Rustem, to whom Mary had entrusted the jeweller's gold, was making his preparations for their journey with all the care of a practised guide, and while Mary was comforting her governess and Mandane, to whom she explained that Rustem's journey was to save Paula's life, a fresh trial was going forward in the Court of Justice.

This time Orion was the accused. He had scarcely begun to study the maps and lists he required for his undertaking when he was bidden to appear before his judges.

The members composing the Court were the same as yesterday. Among the witnesses were Paula and the new bishop, as well as Gamaliel, who had been sent for soon after Mary had left him.

The prosecutor accused the son of the Mukaukas of having made away, in defiance of the patriarch's injunction, with a costly emerald bequeathed to the Church by his father.

Orion had determined to conduct his own defence; he recapitulated everything that he had told the prelate in self-justification in his father's private room, and then added, that to put a speedy end to this odious affair he was now prepared to restore the stone, and he placed it at the disposal of his judges. He handed Paula's emerald to the Kadi who presented it to the bishop. John, however, did not seem satisfied; he referred to the written testimony of the widow Susannah, who had been present when the deceased Mukaukas had designated all the jewels in the Persian hanging as included in his gift to the Church. This was in Orion's presence so he was still under suspicion of a fraud; and it was difficult to determine whether the fine gem now lying on the table before them were indeed the same to which the Church laid claim.

All this was urged with excessive vehemence and bore the stamp of a hostile purpose.

Obedience and conviction alike prompted the zealous prelate to this demeanor, for the same carrier-pigeon which had brought from the patriarch his appointment to the bishopric required him to insist on Orion's punishment, for he was a thorn in the flesh of the Jacobite church, a tainted sheep who might infect the rest of the flock. If the young man should offer an emerald it was therefore to be closely examined, to see whether it were the original stone or a substitute.

On these grounds the bishop had expressed his doubts, and though they gave rise to an indignant murmur among the judges, the Kadi so far admitted the prelate's suspicions as to explain that last evening a letter had reached him from his uncle at Djidda, Haschim the merchant, in which mention was made of the emerald. His son happened to have weighed that stone, without his knowledge, before he started for Egypt, and Othman had here a note of its exact weight. The Jew Gamaliel had been desired to attend with his balances, and could at once use them to satisfy the bishop.

The jeweller immediately proceeded to do so, and old Horapollo, who was an expert in such matters, went close up to him, and watched him narrowly.

It was in feverish anxiety, and more eagerly than any other bystander, that Paula and Orion kept their eyes fixed on the Jew's hands and lips; after weighing it once, he did so a second time. Old Horapollo himself weighed it a third time, with a keen eye though his hands trembled a little; all three experiments gave the same result: this gem was heavier by a few grains of doura than that which the merchant's son had weighed, and yet the Jew declared that there was no purer, clearer, or finer emerald in the world than this.

Orion breathed more freely, and the question arose among the judges as to whether the young Arab might have failed in precision, or an exchange had in fact been effected. This was difficult to imagine, since in that case the accused would have given himself the loss, and the Church the advantage.

The bishop, an honest man, now said that the patriarch's suspicions had certainly led him too far in this instance, and after this he spoke no more.

All through this enquiry the Vêkeel had kept silence, but the defiant gaze, assured of triumph, which he fixed on Paula and Orion alternately, augured the worst.

When the prosecutor next accused the young man of complicity in the much discussed escape of the nuns Orion again asserted his innocence, pointing out that during the fatal contest between the Arabs and the champions of the sisters, he had been with the Arab governor, as Amru himself could testify. By an act of unparalleled despotism, he had been deprived of his estates and his freedom on mere false suspicion, and he put his trust in the first instance in a just sentence from his judges and, failing that, he threw himself on the protection and satisfaction of his sovereign lord the Khaliff.

As he spoke his eyes flashed flames at the Vêkeel; but the negro still preserved his self-control, and this doubled the alarm of those who wished the youth well.

It was clear from all this that Obada felt sure that he had the noose well around his victim's neck, and why he thought so, soon became evident; for Orion had hardly finished his defence when he rose, and with a malicious grin, handed to the Kadi the little tablet given him yesterday by old Horapollo, describing it as a document addressed to Paula and

desiring the Kadi to examine it. The heat had effaced much of what had been written on the wax, but most of the words could still be deciphered. The venerable Horapollo had already made them out, and was quite ready to read to the judges all that the accused--who by his own account, was a spotless dove--had written in his innocence and truthfulness for his fair one. He signed to the old man and helped him as he rose with difficulty, but the Kadi begged him to wait, made himself acquainted with the contents of the letter by the help of the interpreter, and when the man had, with much pains, fulfilled his task, he turned, not to Horapollo, but to Obada, and asked whence this document had come.

"From Paula's desk," replied the Vêkeel. "My old friend found it there." He pointed to Horapollo, who confirmed his statement by a nod of assent.

The Kadi rose, went up to the girl, whose cheeks were pale with indignation, and asked whether she recognized the tablets as her property; Paula, after convincing herself, replied with a flaming glance of scorn and aversion at Horapollo: "Yes, my lord. It is mine. That base old man has taken it with atrocious meanness from among my things." For an instant her voice failed her; then, turning to the judges, she exclaimed:

"If there is one among you to whom helplessness and innocence are sacred and malice and cunning odious, I beg him to go to Rufinus' wife, over whose threshold this man has crept like a ferret into a dovecote, for no other end but to tread hospitable kindness in the dust, to rifle her home and make use of whatever might serve his vile purpose--to go, I say, and warn the lonely woman against this treacherous spy and thief."

At this the old man, gasping and inarticulate, raised his withered arm; the Christian judges whispered together, but at cross-purposes, while the Jew fidgeted his round little person on the bench, drumming incessantly with his fingers on his breast, and trying to meet Orion's or Paula's eye and to make her understand that he was the man who would warn Joanna. But a thump from the Vêkeel's fist, that came down on his shoulder unawares, reduced him to sitting still; and while he sat rubbing the place with subdued sounds of pain, not daring to reproach the all-powerful negro for his violence, the Kadi gave the tablets to Horapollo and bid him read the letter.

But the terrible accusation cast at him by the hated Patrician maiden, ascribing his removal to Rufinus house to a motive which, in truth, had been far from his, had so enraged and agitated him that his old lungs, at all times feeble, refused their office. This woman had done him a fresh wrong, for he had gone to live with the widow from the kindest impulse; only an accident had thrown this document in his way. And yet it would not fail to be reported to Joanna in the course of the day that he had gone to her house as a spy, and there would be an end to the pleasant life of which he had dreamed--nay, even Philippus might perhaps quarrel with him.

And all, all through this woman.

He could not utter a word but, as he sank back on the seat, a glance so full of hatred, so dark with malignant fury, fell on Paula that she shuddered, and told herself that this man was ready to die himself if only he could drag her down too.

The interpreter now began to read Orion's letter and to translate it for the Arabs; and while he blundered through it, declaring that not a letter could be plainly made out, she recovered her self-control and, before the interpreter had done his task, a gleam as of sunshine lighted up her pure features. Some great, lofty, and rapturous thought must have flashed through her brain, and it was evident that she had seized it and was feeding on it.

Orion, sitting opposite to her, noticed this; still, he did not understand what her beseeching gaze had to say to him, what it asked of him as she pressed her hand on her breast, and looked into his eyes with such urgent entreaty that it went to his very heart.

The interpreter ceased; but what he had read had had a great effect on the judges. The Kadi's benevolent face expressed extreme apprehension, and the contents of the letter were indeed such as to cause it. It ran as follows:

"After waiting for you a long time in vain, I must at last make up my mind to go; and how much I still had to say to you. A written farewell."

Here a few lines were effaced, and then came the--fatal and quite legible conclusion:

"How far otherwise I had dreamed of ending this day, which has been for the most part spent in preparations for the flight of the Sisters; and I have found a pleasure in doing all that lay in my power for those kind and innocent, unjustly persecuted nuns. We must hope for the best for them; and for ourselves we must look to-morrow for an undisturbed interview and a parting which may leave us memories on which we can live for a long time. The noble governor Amru is, among the Arabs, such another as he whom we mourn was among the Egyptians..." Here the letter ended; not quite three lines were wanting to conclude it.

The Kadi held the tablets for a few minutes in his hand; then looking up again at the assembly, who were waiting in great suspense, he began: "Even if the accused was not one of those who raised their hands in mutiny against our armed troops, it is nevertheless indisputable, after what has just been read, that he not only knew of the escape of the nuns, but aided them to the utmost.--When did you receive this communication, noble maiden?"

At this Paula clasped her hands tightly and replied with a slightly bent head and her eyes fixed on the ground.

"When did I receive it?--Never; for I wrote it myself. The writing is mine."

"Yours?" said the Kadi in amazement. "It is from me to Orion," replied Paula.

"From you to him? How then comes it in your desk?"

"In a very simple way," she explained, still looking down. "After writing the letter to my betrothed I threw it in with the other tablets as soon as I had no need for it; for he himself came, and there was no necessity for his reading what could be better said by word of mouth."

As she spoke a peculiar smile passed over her lips and a loud murmur ran through the room. Orion looked first at the girl and then at the Kadi in growing bewilderment; but the Negro started up, struck his fist on the table, making it shake, and roared out:

"An atrocious fabrication! Which of you can allow yourself to be taken in by a woman's guile?" Horapollo, who had recovered himself by this time, laughed hoarsely and maliciously; the judges looked at each other much puzzled; but when the Vêkeel went on raging the Kadi interrupted him, and desired that Orion might speak, for he had twice tried to make himself heard. Now, with scarlet cheeks and a choking utterance, he said:

"No, Othman--no, no indeed, my lords. Do not believe her. Not she, but I--I wrote the letter that...."

But Paula broke in:

"He? Do you not feel that all he wants is to save me, and so he takes my guilt on himself? It is his generosity, his love for me! Do not, do not believe him! Do not allow yourselves to be deceived by him."

"I? No, it is she, it is she," Orion again asserted; but, before he could say more, Paula declared with a flashing glance that it was a poor sort of love which sacrificed itself out of false generosity. And as, at the same time, she again pressed her hand to her bosom with pathetic entreaty, he was suddenly silent, and casting his eyes up to heaven, he sank back on the prisoners' bench, deeply affected.

Paula joyfully went on:

"He has thought better of it, and given up his crazy attempt to take my guilt on himself. You see, Othman, you all see, worthy men.--Let me atone for what I did to help the poor nuns."

"Have your way!" shrieked the old man; but the Negro cried out:

"A hellish tissue of lies, an unheard-of deception! But in spite of the shield a woman holds before you, I have my foot on your neck, treacherous wretch! Is it credible--I ask you, judges--that a finished letter should be found, after weeks had elapsed, in the hands of the writer and not those of the person to whom it was addressed?"

The Kadi shrugged his shoulders and replied with calm dignity:

"Consider, Obada, that we are condemning this damsel on the evidence of a letter which was found in possession, not of the person to whom it was addressed, but of the writer. This document gave rise to no doubts in your mind. The judge should mete out equal measure to all, Obada."

The aptness of these words, spoken in a dogmatic tone, aroused the approval of the Arabs, and the Jew could not restrain himself from exclaiming: "Capital!" but no sooner had it escaped him than he shrank as quick as lightning out of the Vêkeel's reach; and Obada hardly heard him, for he did not allow himself to be interrupted by the Kadi but went on to explain in wrathful words what a disgrace it was to them, as men and judges, to have dust cast in their eyes by a woman, and allow themselves to be molified by the arts of a pair of love-stricken fools; and how desirable it must be in the eyes of every Moslem to guard the security of life and bring the severest punishment on the instigator of a sanguinary revolt against the champions of the Khaliff's power.

His eloquent and stormy address was not without effect; still, the Christians, who ascribed every form of evil to the Melchite girl, would have been satisfied with her death and have been ready to forgive the son of the Mukaukas this crime--supposing him to have committed it. And it was after the judges had agreed that it was impossible to decide by whom the letter on the tablet had been written, and there had been a great deal of argument on both sides, that the real discussion began.

It was long before the assembly could agree, and all the while Orion sat now looking as though he had already been condemned to a cruel death, and now exchanging glances with Paula, while he pressed his hand to his heart as though to keep it from bursting. He perfectly understood her, and her magnanimity upheld him. He had indeed persuaded himself to accept her self-sacrifice, but he was fully determined that if she must die he would follow her to the grave. "Non dolet,"--[It does not hurt]--Arria cried to her lover Paetus, as she thrust the knife into her heart that she might die before him; and the words rang in his ear; but he said to himself that Paula would very likely be pardoned, and that then he would be free and have a whole lifetime in which to thank her.

At last--at last. The Kadi announced the verdict: It was impossible to find Orion worthy of death, and equally so to give up all belief in his guilt; the court therefore declared itself inadequate to pronounce a sentence, and left it to be decided by the Khaliff or by his representative in Egypt, Amru. The court only went so far as to rule that the prisoner was to be kept in close confinement, so that he might be within reach of the hand of justice, if the supreme decision should be "guilty!"

When the Kadi said that the matter was to be referred to the Khaliff or his representative, the Vekel cried out:

"I--I am Omar's vicar!" but a disapproving murmur from the judges, as with one voice, rejected his pretensions, and at a proposal of the Kadi it was resolved that the young man should be protected against any arbitrary attack on the part of the Vekel by a double guard; for many grave accusations against Obada were already on their way to Medina. The negro quitted the court, mad with rage, and concocting fresh indictments against Paula with the old man.

When Paula returned to her cell old Betta thought that she must have been pardoned; for how glad, how proud, how full of spirit she entered it! The worst peril was diverted from her lover, and she and her love had saved him!

She gave herself up for lost; but whatever fate might have in store for her, life lay open before him; he would have time to prove his splendid powers, and that he would do so, as she would have him do it, she felt certain.

She had not ended telling her nurse of the judges' decision, when the warder announced the Kadi. In a minute or two he made his appearance; she expressed her thanks, and he warmly assured her that he regarded the disgrace of being perhaps a beguiled judge as a favor of Fortune; then he turned the conversation on the real object of his visit.

In the letter, he began, which he had received the evening before from his uncle Haschim, there was a great deal about her. She had quite won the old merchant's heart, and the enquiries for her father which he had set on foot....

Here she interrupted him saying: "Oh, my lord; is the wish, the prayer of my life to be granted?"

"Your father, the noble Thomas, before whom even the Moslem bows, has been..." and then Othman went on to tell her that the hero of Damascus had in fact retired to Sinai and had been living there as a hermit. But she must not indulge in premature rejoicing, for the messengers had found him ill, consumed by disease arising from his wounded lungs, and almost at death's door. His days were numbered....

"And I, I am a prisoner," groaned the girl. "Held fast, helpless, robbed of all means of flying to his arms!"

He again bid her be calm, and went on to tell her: in his soft, composed manner, that two days since a Nabathæan had come to him and had asked him, as the chief administrator of justice in Egypt, whether an old foe of the Moslems, a general who had fought in the service of the emperor and the cross against the Khaliff and the crescent, and who was now sick, weary, and broken, might venture on Egyptian soil without fear of being seized by the Arab authorities; and when he, Othman, had learnt that this man was no other than Thomas, the hero of Damascus, he had promised him his life and freedom, promised them gladly, as he felt assured his sovereign the Khaliff would desire.

So this very day her father had reached Fostat, and the Kadi had received him as a guest into his house. Thomas, indeed, stood on the brink of the grave; but he was inspirited and sustained by the hope of seeing his daughter. It had been falsely reported to him that she had perished in the massacre at Abyla and he had already mourned her fate.

It was now his duty to fulfil the wish of a dying man, and he had ordered the prison servants to prepare the room adjoining Paula's cell with furniture which was on the way from his house. The door between the two would be opened for her.

"And I shall see him again, have him again to live with--to close his eyes, perhaps to die with him!" cried Paula; and, seizing the good man's hand, she kissed it gratefully.

The Moslem's eyes filled with tears as he bid her not to thank him, but God the All-merciful; and before the sun went down the head of the doomed daughter was resting on the breast of the weary hero who was so near his end, though his unimpaired mind and tender heart rejoiced in their reunion as fully and deeply as did his beloved and only child. A new and unutterable joy came to Paula in the gloom of her prison; and that same day the warder carried a letter from her to Orion, conveying her father's greetings; and, as he read the fervent blessing, he felt as though an invisible hand had released him for ever from the curse his own father had laid upon him. A wonderful glad sense of peace came over him with power and pleasure in work, and he gave his brains and pen no rest till morning was growing grey.

CHAPTER XXII.

Horapollo made his way home to his new quarters from the court of justice with knit and gloomy brows. As he passed Susannah's garden hedge he saw a knot of people gathered together and pointing out furtively to the handsome residence beyond.

They, like a hundred other groups he had passed, hailed him with words of welcome, thanks, and encouragement and, as he bowed to them slightly, his eyes followed the direction of their terrified gaze and he started; above the great garden gates hung the black tablet; a warning that looked like a mark of disgrace, crying out to the passer-by: "Avoid this threshold! Here rages the destroying pestilence!"

The old man had a horror of everything that might remind him of death, and a cold shiver ran through him. To live so near to a focus of the disease was most alarming and dangerous! How had it invaded this, the healthiest part of the town, which the last raging epidemic had spared?

An officer of the town-council, whom he called to him, told him that two slaves, father and son, whose duty it was to take charge of the baths in the widow's house, had been first attacked, but they had been carried quietly away in the night to the new tents for the sick; to-day, however, the widow herself had fallen ill. To prevent the spread of the infection, the plot of ground was now guarded on all sides.

"Be strict, be sharp; not a rat must creep out!" cried the old man as he rode on.

He was later than he had been yesterday; supper must be ready. After a short rest he was preparing to join the family at their meal, washing and dressing with the help of his servant, when a lame slave-girl came into his room and placed a tray covered with steaming dishes on the low table by the divan.

What was the meaning of this? Before he could ask, he was informed that for the future the women wished to eat by themselves; he would be served in his own room.

At this a bright patch of red colored his cheeks; after brief reflection he cried to his servant. "My ass!" and added to the girl: "Where is your mistress?"

"In the viridarium with Gamaliel the goldsmith; but they are going to supper immediately."

"And without their guest? I understand!" muttered the old man, taking up his hat and marching past the maid out of the room. In the hall he met Gamaliel, to whom a slave-girl was handing his stick. Horapollo could guess that the Jew had come only to warn the women against him and, without vouchsafing him a glance, he went into the dining-room. There he found Pulchena and Mary kneeling in tears by the side of Joanna, who was weeping too.

He guessed for whom were these lamentations, and prompted by the wish to prove the falsity of the accusation that charged him with having entered the house as a spy, he spoke to the widow. She shuddered as he entered, and she now pointed to the door with an outstretched finger; when he nevertheless stood still and was about to make his defence, she interrupted him loudly and urgently: "No, no, my lord! This house is henceforth closed against you! You yourself have broken every tie that bound us! Do not any longer disturb our peace! Go back to the place you came from."

At this the old man made one more attempt to speak; but the widow rose, and saying: "Come, my children," she hastily withdrew with the girls into the adjoining room, and closed the door.

Horapollo was left alone on the threshold.

Old as he was, in all his life he had never suffered such an insult; but he did not lay it to the score of those who had shown him the door, but to the already long one of the Syrian girl; as he rode back to his own home on his white ass, he stopped several times to speak to the passers-by.

During the following day or two he heeded not the heat of the weather, nor his own need of rest for his body, and quiet occupation for his mind; morning, noon and night he was riding about the streets stirring up the people, and setting forth in insinuating speeches that they must perish miserably if they rejected the only means of deliverance which he had pointed out to them. He was present at every meeting of the Senate, and his inflammatory eloquence kept the town council on his side, and nullified the efforts of the bishop, while he pressed them to fix the day of the marriage of the Nile with his bride.

He knew the Egyptians and their passion for the intoxicating joys of a splendid ceremonial. This festival: the wedding of the Bride of the Nile to her mighty and unresting spouse, on whom the weal or woe of the land depended, was to be as a flowery oasis in the waste of dearth and desolation. He recalled every detail of the reminiscences of his childhood as to the processions in Honor of Isis, and the festivals dedicated to her and her triad; every record of his own experience and that of former generations; all he had read in books of the great pilgrimages and dramas of heathen Egypt--and he described it all in his speeches, painted it in glowing colors to the Senate and the mob, and counselled the authorities to reproduce it all with unparalleled splendor on the occasion of this marriage.

Every man in whose veins flowed Egyptian blood listened to him attentively, took pleasure in his projects, and was

quite ready to do his utmost to enhance the glories of this ceremonial, in which every one was to take part either active or passive. Thousands were ruined, but there was yet enough and to spare for this marriage feast, and the Senate did not hesitate to raise a fresh loan.

"Destruction or Deliverance!" was the watch-word Horapollo had given the Memphites. If everything came to ruin their hoarded talents would be lost too; if, on the other hand, the sacrifice produced its result, if the Nile should bless its children with renewed prosperity, what need the town or country care for a few thousand drachmae more or less?

So the day was fixed!

Not quite two weeks after Paula's trial, on the day of Saint Serapis the miraculous, saving, auspicious ceremonial was to take place. And how glowing was the picture given of the Bride's beauty by the old man, and by the judges and officials who had seen her! How brightly old Horapollo's eyes would flash with hate as he described it! The eyes of love could not be more radiant.

All that this patrician hussy had done to aggrieve him--she should expiate it all, and his triumph meant woe, not only to that one woman, but to the Christian faith which he hated!

Bishop John, however, had not been idle meanwhile. Immediately after his interference with the popular vote he had despatched a letter by a carrier-pigeon to the patriarch in Upper Egypt, and Benjamin's reply would no doubt give him powers for still more vigorous measures. In church, before the Senate, and even in the highways, he and his clergy did their utmost to combat the atrocious project of the authorities and the populace, but the zeal which was stirred up by old Horapollo soon broke into brighter flames than the conservatism, orthodoxy and breadth of view which the ecclesiastics did their utmost to fan. The wind blew with equal force from both quarters, but on one side it blew on smoldering fuel, and on the other on overflowing and flaming stores. Famine and despair had undermined faith, and weakened discipline; even the mightiest weapons of the Church--Cursing and blessing--were powerless. A floating beam was held out to sinking men, and they would no longer wait for the life-boat that was approaching to rescue them, with strong hands at the oars and a trusty pilot at the helm.

Horapollo went no more to the widow's home. A few hours after she had shown him the door, his slaves came and fetched away the various things he had carried there with him. His body servant at the same time brought a large sealed phial and a letter to Dame Joanna, as follows:

"It is wrong to judge a man without hearing his defence. This you have done; but I owe you no grudge. Philippus, on his return, will perhaps pick up the ends of the tie and join again what you have this day cut. I send you a portion of the remedy he left with me at parting to use against the plague in case of need. Its good effects have been tested within the last few days. May the sickness which has fallen on your neighbors, spare you and yours."

Joanna was much pleased with this letter but, when she had read it aloud, little Mary exclaimed:

"If any one should fall ill he shall not take a drop of that mixture! I tell you he only wants to poison us!"

Joanna, however, maintained that the old man was not bad hearted in spite of his unaccountable hatred of Paula; and Pulcheria declared that it must be so, if only because Philip esteemed him so highly. If only he were here, everything would have been different and have turned out well.

Mary remained with the mother and daughter till it grew dark; her chatter always led them back to Paula; and when, in the afternoon, the Nabathæan messenger came to them, and told them from their captive friend that he had brought her father home to her, the women once more began to hope, and Mary could allow herself to give free expression to her fond love before she quitted them, without exciting their suspicions.

At length she said she must go to her lessons with Eudoxia; she had a hard task before her and they must think of her and wish her good success. She threw her arms first round the widow's neck and then round Pulcheria's; and, as the tears would start to her eyes, she asked them if she were not indeed a silly childish thing--but they were to think of her all the same and never to forget her.

She met the governess in her own room; Eudoxia cut off the fine, soft curls, shedding her first tears over them; and those tears flowed faster as she placed round Mary's neck a little reliquary containing a lock from the sheep-skin of St. John the Baptist, which had belonged to her own mother. It was very dear and sacred to her, and she had never before parted from it, but now it was to protect the child and bring her happiness--great happiness.

Had it brought her such happiness?--Not much, in truth; and yet she believed in the saving and beneficent influence of the relic.

At last Mary stood before her with short hair and in a boy's dress; and what a sweet and lovely little fellow it was; Eudoxia could not weary of looking at him. But Mary was too pretty, too frail for a boy; and Eudoxia advised her to pull her broad travelling hat low over her eyes as soon as she came in sight of men, or else to darken her color.

Gamaliel, who had in fact come to warn Dame Joanna against Horapollo, had kept them informed of the progress of this day's sitting, and Paula's conduct to save her lover had increased Mary's admiration for her. When she should confront Amru she could answer him on every head, so she felt equipped at all points as she stole through the garden with Eudoxia, and down to the quay.

When she had passed the gateway she once more kissed her hand to the house she loved and its inmates; then, pointing with a sigh to the neighboring garden, she said:

"Poor Katharina! she is a prisoner now.--Do you know, Eudoxia, I am still very fond of her, and when I think that she may take the plague, and die but no!--Tell Mother Joanna and Pulcheria to be kind to her. To-morrow, after breakfast, give them my letter; and this evening, if they get anxious, you can only quiet them by saying you know all and that it is of no use to fret about me. You will set it all right and not allow them to grieve."

As they passed a Jacobite chapel that stood open, she begged Eudoxia to wait for her and fell on her knees before the crucifix. In a few minutes she came out again, bright and invigorated and, as they passed the last houses in the town, she exclaimed:

"Is it not wicked, Eudoxia? I am leaving those I love dearly, very dearly, and yet I feel as glad as a bird escaping from its cage. Good Heaven! Only to think of the ride by night through the desert and over the hills, a swift beast under me, and over my head no ceiling but the blue sky and countless stars! Onward and still onward to a glorious end, left entirely to myself and entrusted with an important task like a grownup person! Is it not splendid? And by God's help--and if I find the governor and succeed in touching his heart.... Now, confess, Eudoxia, can there be a happier girl in the whole wide world?"

They found the Masdakite at Nesptah's inn with some capital dromedaries and the necessary drivers and attendants. The Greek governess gave her pupil much good advice, and added her "maternal" blessing with her whole heart. Rustem lifted the child on to the dromedary, carefully settling her in the saddle, and the little caravan set out. Mary waved repeated adieux to her old governess and newly-found friend, and Eudoxia was still gazing after her long after she had vanished in the darkness.

Then she made her way home, at first weeping silently with bowed head, but afterwards tearless, upright, and with a confident step. She was in unusually good spirits, her heart beat higher than it had done for years; she felt uplifted by the sense of relief from a burthensome duty, and of freedom to act independently on the dictates of her own intelligence. She would assert herself, she would show the others that she had acted rightly; and when at supper-time Mary was missing, and had not returned even at bed-time, there was much to do to soothe and comfort them, and much misconstruction to endure; but she took it all patiently, and it was a consolation to her to bear such annoyance for her little favorite.

Next morning, when she had delivered Mary's letter to Dame Joanna, her love and endurance were put to still severer proof; indeed, the meek-tempered widow allowed herself to be carried away to such an outbreak as hitherto would undoubtedly have led Eudoxia to request her dismissal, with sharp recrimination; but she took it all calmly.

It was not till noon-day--when the bishop made his appearance to carry the child off to the convent, and was highly wrathful at Mary's disappearance, threatening the widow, and declaring that he would search the whole country through for the little girl and find her at last, that Eudoxia felt that the moment of her triumph had come. She quietly allowed the bishop to depart, and then only did she send her last and best shaft at Joanna by informing her that she had in fact encouraged the child in her exploit on purpose to save her from the cloister. Her newly-found motherly feeling made her eloquent, and with a result that she had almost ceased to hope for: the warm-hearted little woman, who had hurt her with such cruel words, threw her arms round Eudoxia's tall, meagre figure, put up her face to kiss her, called her a brave, clever girl, and begged her forgiveness for all she had said and done the day before.

So, when the Greek went to bed, she felt as if her life had turned backwards and she had grown more like the happy young creature she had once been with her sisters in her parents' house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Paula now understood what hung over her. It is Bishop John who had told her, as gently as he could, and with every assurance that he still clung to the hope that he could stop the hideous heathen abomination; but even without this she would certainly have known what was impending, for large crowds of people gathered every day under the prisonwalls, and loud cries reached her, demanding to see the "Bride of the Nile."

Now and again shouts of "Hail!" came up to her; but when the demented creatures had shrieked themselves hoarse, and in vain, they would abuse her vilely. The cry for the "Bride" never ceased from morning till night, and the head warden of the prison was glad that the bishop had relieved him of the task of explaining to Paula the meaning of the fateful word, whose significance she had repeatedly asked him.

At first this fresh and terrible peril had startled and shaken her; but she did her utmost to cling to the hope held out by the bishop so as to appear calm, and as far as possible cheerful, in her sick father's presence. And in this she succeeded so long as it was day; but at night she was a prey to agonizing terrors. Then, in fancy she saw herself surrounded by a raging mob, dragged to the river and cast into a watery grave before a thousand eyes. Then, prayer was of no avail, nor any resolve or effort; not the tender messages that constantly reached her from Orion, nor the songs he would sing for her in the brief moments of leisure he allowed himself; not the bishop's words of comfort, nor the visits of those she loved. The warden would admit her friends as often as he was able; and among those who found their way to her cell were the Senator Justinus and his wife.

By great good fortune Martina had quitted Susannah's house as soon as the two slaves had fallen ill and she had heard that the physician pronounced them to be sickening of the plague. She had returned to her rooms in the inn kept by Sostratus, but her nephew Narses had remained with Katharina and her mother. He was indeed intending to follow her with Heliodora; but, by the time they were ready to set out, Susannah, too, had fallen a victim to the pestilence and the authorities had forbidden all egress from her house.

Heliodora might have succeeded in leaving in time, alone; but she would not abandon her unfortunate brother-in-law; for he never felt easy but in her presence, would allow no one else to wait on him, and would take neither food nor drink unless they were offered him by her. Besides this, the cavalry officer, once so stalwart, had in his weakness become pathetically like her lost husband, and she knew that Narses had been the first to love her, and that it was only for his brother's sake that he had concealed his passion. Her motherly instincts found an outlet in the care of the half-crushed, but not hopelessly lost man; and the desire to drag him back to life kept her busy day and night, and made her regard everything else as trivial and of secondary importance. Her life had once more found a purpose; her efforts were for an attainable end, and she devoted herself to him body and soul.

Her uncle had told her that Orion was bound to Paula by a supreme passion.--This had been a painful blow, but the Syrian girl had impressed her; she looked up to her, and it soothed her wounded self-esteem to reflect that she had lost her lover to no inferior woman. Though her longing for him still surged up in many a silent hour, she felt it an injustice, a stint of love to her invalid charge.

So far as Katharina was concerned, next to her mother, Heliodora was the object of her deepest anxiety. The least word of complaint from either terrified her; and if Susannah sank on the divan exhausted by the heat, or Heliodora had a headache after watching through the night by the sick man, the girl would turn pale, her heart would beat painfully, she would paint them in fancy stricken by the plague, with burning brows and the horrible, fatal spots on their foreheads and cheeks; and whenever these alarms pressed on the young criminal she felt the ominous weight on the top of her head where the dead bishop's hand had rested.

The senator's wife had so completely changed in her demeanor to the water-wagtail, since Paula's imprisonment, that to Katharina she was as a living reproach, so she had no regret at seeing the worthy pair depart. But scarcely had they left when misfortune took their place as an unbidden guest.

The slave whose duty it was to heat the baths had reserved a portion of the infected garments that had been given to him to burn; his son had helped him, and Katharina's nurse, the mother of her foster-brother Anubis, had come into direct contact with her immediately after her return from the soothsayer's and from the bishop's. All three had caught the disease. They had all three been removed to the hospital tents--the slave and the nurse as corpses.

But had the fearful infection been taken away with them? If not, it would be the turn next of those whom she herself had pushed into the arms of the fell monster: First Heliodora, and then her mother! And she, rightfully, ought to have fallen before them; and if the pestilence should seize her and death should drag her down into the grave it would be showing her mercy. She was still so young, and yet she hated life. It had nothing in store for her but humiliation and disappointment, arrows which, sent from the prison, pierced her to the heart, and a torturing fear which never gave her any peace, day or night.

When the physician came to transport the sick to the hospital in the desert, he mentioned incidentally that the judges had condemned Paula to death, and that the populace and senate, in spite of the new bishop's prohibition, had

determined to cast her into the river in accordance with an ancient custom. Orion's fate was not to be decided till the following day; but it would hardly be to his advantage in the eyes of his Jacobite judges, that his betrothed was this Syrian Melchite.

At this Katharina was forced to support herself against her mother's arm-chair to save herself from sinking on her knees; with tingling cheeks she questioned the leech till he lost all patience and turned away much annoyed at such excessive feminine curiosity.

Yes! "The other" was his betrothed before all the world; but only to die! The blood rushed through her veins in a hot tide at the thought; she could have laughed aloud and fallen on the neck of every one she met. What she felt was hideous; malignant spite possessed her; but it gave her rapture--delicious rapture--a flower of hell, but with splendid petals and intoxicating perfume. But its splendor dazzled her and its fragrance presently sickened her. Sheer horror of herself came over her, and yet she could have shouted with joy each time that the thought flashed through her brain: "The other must die!"

Her mother feared that her daughter, too, was about to fall ill, her eyes glowed so strangely and she was so restless and nervously excitable.

Since Heliodora had taken the overwhelming news of Orion's betrothal to Paula with astonishing though sorrowful calmness, to the hot-blooded girl she was nothing, nobody, utterly unworthy of her notice.

To spite her she had committed a crime as like murder as one snake is like another, and imperilled her own mother's life! It was enough to drive her to despair, to make her scourge herself with rods!

When Susannah kissed her at parting for the night she complained of a slight sore throat and of her lips, which she fancied must be swollen. Katharina detained her, questioned her with a trembling voice, put the lamp close to her, and held her breath while she examined her face, her neck, and her arms for the dreadful spots. But none were to be seen and her mother laughed at her terrors, called her a dutiful, anxious child, and warned her not to be too full of fears, as they were supposed to invite the disease.

All night the girl could not sleep. Her malicious triumph was past; nothing but painful thoughts and grewsome images haunted her while awake, and pursued her more persistently when she dozed. By dawn of day her alarm for her mother was so great that she sprang out of bed and went to her room; Susannah was sleeping so soundly that she did not even hear her. Much relieved Katharina crept back to bed; but in the morning the worst had happened: Susannah could no longer leave her bed; she was feverish, and on her lips, the very lips which had kissed her child's infected hair, there were indeed, between her nose and mouth, the first terrible, unmistakable spots.

The leech came and confirmed the fact.--The house was closed and barred.

The physician and Susannah, who was still in full possession of her senses, wished and insisted that Katharina should withdraw to the gardener's house, but she refused with defiant obstinacy, saying she would rather die with her mother than leave her.

Quite beside herself she threw herself on the sick woman, and kissed the spots on her mouth to divert the poison into her own blood; but the physician angrily pulled her away, and the sufferer reproved her with tears in her eyes which spoke her fervent affection.

She was now allowed to nurse her mother. Two nuns came to her assistance, and said, not only to the rich widow but behind her back, that they had never seen so devoted and loving a daughter. Even Bishop John, who did not shrink from entering the houses of the sick to give them spiritual consolation, praised Katharina's conduct; and he, who had hitherto regarded the water-wagtail as no more than a bright, restless child, treated her with respect, talked to her as to a grown-up person, and answered her questions--which for the most part referred to Paula--gravely and fully.

The prelate, who was full of admiration for Thomas' daughter, told Katharina how, to save her lover, she had taken a crime upon herself which deprived her of every claim to mercy. The Syrian girl was only a Melchite, but to take another's guilt, out of love, was treading indeed in the footsteps of Christ, if ever anything was. At this Katharina shrugged her shoulders, as though to say: "Do you think so much of that? Could not I gladly have done the same?"

The priest saw this and admonished her kindly to be on her guard against spiritual pride, though she had indeed earned the right to believe herself capable of the sternest devotion, and did not cease to set an example of filial and Christian love.

He departed; and Katharina, to whom every word in praise of her behavior to her mother, whom her sin had brought to her death-bed, was a torturing mockery, felt that she had deceived one more worthy soul. She did not, to be sure, deserve to be charged with spiritual pride; for in this silent chamber, where death stood on the threshold, she thought over all the horrible things she had done, and told herself repeatedly that she was the chief and most vile of sinners.

Many times she felt impelled to confide in another soul, to invite a pitying eye to behold and share her inward suffering.

To the bishop above all, the most venerable priest she knew, she would most readily have confessed everything and have submitted to any penance, however severe, at his hands, but shame held her back; and even more did another

more urgent consideration. The prelate, she knew, would demand of her that she should forsake her old life, root out from her soul the old feelings and desires, and begin a new existence; but for this the time had not yet come: her love was still an indispensable condition of life, and her hatred was even more dear to her. When Paula's terrible doom should indeed have overtaken her, and Katharina, her heart full of those old feelings, had gloated over it; when she should have been able to prove to Orion that her love was no less great and strong and self-sacrificing than that of Thomas' daughter; when she should have compelled him--as she would and must--to acknowledge that he had cruelly misprized her and sinned against her; then, and not till then, would she make peace with herself, with the Church, and with her Saviour. Nay, if need be, she would take the veil and mourn away the rest of her young life as a penitent, in a convent or a solitary rock-cell. But now--when Paula, his betrothed, had done this great thing for him--to perish now, with her love unseen, unknown, uncared for, perhaps forgotten by him, to retire into herself and vanish from his ken--that was too much for human nature! Sooner would she be lost forever; body and soul in everlasting perdition, a prey to Satan and hell--in which she believed as firmly as in her own existence.

So she went on nursing her mother, saw the red spots spread over the sick woman's whole body--watched the fever that increased from day to day, from hour to hour; listened with a mixture of horror and gladness--at which she herself shuddered, though she fed her heart on it--to the reports of the preparations for the sacrifice of the Bride of the Nile, and to all the bishop could tell her of Paula, and her dying father, and Orion. She trembled for little Mary, who had disappeared from the neighboring garden, till she heard that the child had fled to escape the cloister; each day she learnt that Heliodora, who had moved to the gardener's house with her invalid, had as yet escaped the pestilence; while in the prayers, which even now she never failed to offer up morning and evening, she implored the Almighty and her patron saints to rescue the young widow, to save her from causing the death of her own mother, and to forgive her for having indirectly caused that of worthy old Rufinus, who had always been so good to her, and of so many innocent creatures by her treachery.

Thus the terrible days and nights of anguish passed by; and the captives whom the girl's sins had brought to prison were happier than she, in spite of the doom that threatened them.

The fate of his betrothed tortured Orion more than a hundred aching wounds. Paula's terrible end was fast approaching, and his brain burned at the mere thought. Now, as he was told by the warder, by the bishop, and by Justinus, the day after to-morrow was fixed for the bridal of his betrothed. In two days the bride, decked by base and mocking hands for an atrocious and accursed farce, would be wreathed and wedded, not to him, the bridegroom whom she loved, but to the Nile--the insensible, death-dealing element. He rushed up and down his cell like a madman, and tore his lute-strings when he tried to soothe his soul with music; but then a calm, well-intentioned voice would come from the adjoining room, exhorting him not to lose hope, to trust in God, not to forget his duty and the task before him. And Orion would control himself resolutely, pull himself together, and throw himself into his work again.

Day and night were alike to him. The senator had provided him with a lamp and oil. When he was wearied out, he allowed himself no longer sleep on his hard couch than human nature imperatively demanded; and as soon as he had shaken it off he again became absorbed in maps and lists, plied his pen, thought, sketched, calculated, and reflected. Then, if a doubt arose in his mind or he could not trust his own memory and judgment, he knocked at the wall, and his shrewd and experienced friend was at all times ready to help him to the best of his knowledge and opinion. The senator went to Arsinoe for him, to gain information as to the seaboard from the archives preserved there; and so the work went forward, approaching its end, strengthening and raising his sinking spirit, bringing him the pleasures of success, and enabling him not unfrequently to forget for hours that which otherwise might have brought the bravest to despair.

The warder, the senator or his worthy wife, Dame Joanna or Eudoxia--who twice had the pleasure of accompanying her--each time they visited him had some message or note to carry to Paula, telling her how far his work had progressed; and to her it was a consolation and heartfelt joy to be able to follow him in his labors. And many a token of his love, esteem, and admiration gave her courage, when even her brave heart began to quail.

Ah! It was not alone her terror of a horrible death that tortured her soul. Her father, whom she considered it her greatest joy in life to have found again, was fading beyond all hope under her loving hands. His poor wounded lungs refused its service. It was with great difficulty that he could swallow a few drops of wine and mouthfuls of food; and in these last days his clear mind had lain as it were under a shroud--perhaps it was happier so, as she told herself and as her friends said to comfort her.

He, too, had heard the cries of: "Hail to the Bride of the Nile!"

"Bring out the Bride!"

"Away with the Bride of the Nile!" Though he had no suspicion of their meaning, they had haunted his thoughts incessantly during the last few days; and the terrible, strange words had seemed to charm his fancy, for to Paula's distress he would murmur them to himself tenderly or thoughtfully as the case might be.

Many times the idea occurred to her that she might put an end to her life before the worst should befall, before she became a spectacle for a whole nation, to be jeered at and made a delightful and exciting show to rouse their cruelty or their compassion. But dared she do it? Dared she defy the Most High, the Lord in whom she put her trust, into whose

hand she commended herself in a thousand dumb but fervent prayers.

No. To the very last she would trust and hope. And wonderful to say! Each time she had reached the very limits of her powers of endurance, feeling she could certainly bear no more and must succumb, something came to her to revive her faith or her courage: a message would be brought her from Orion, or Dame Joanna or Pulcheria came to see her; the bishop sought an interview, or her father's mind rallied and he could speak to her in beautiful and stimulating words. Often the warder would announce the senator and his wife, and their vigorous and healthy minds always hit on the very thing she needed. Martina, particularly, with her subtle motherly instinct, always understood whatever was agitating her; and once she showed her a letter from Heliodora, in which she spoke of the calmness she had won through nursing their dear invalid, and said how thankful she was to see the reward of her care and toil. Narses was already quite another man, and she could know no higher task than that of reconciling the hapless man to life, nay, of making it dear to him again. She no longer thought of Orion but as she might of a beautiful song she once had heard in a delightful hour.

Thus time passed, even for the imprisoned maiden, till only two nights remained before St. Serapis' day when the fearful marriage was to be solemnized.

It was evening when the bishop came to visit Paula. He regarded it as his duty to tell her that the execution of her sentence was fixed for the day after to-morrow. He should hope and believe till the last, but his own power over the misguided mob was gone from him. In any case, and if the worst should befall, he would be at her side to protect her by the dignity of his office. He had come now, so as to give her time to prepare her self in every respect. The care of her noble father till his last hour on earth he would take upon himself as a dear and sacred duty.

Though she had believed herself surely prepared long since for the worst, this news fell on her like a thunderbolt. What lay before her seemed so monstrous, so unexampled, that it was impossible that she ever could look forward to it firmly and calmly.

For a long time she could not help clinging desperately to her faithful Betta, and it was only by degrees that she so far recovered herself as to be able to speak to the bishop, and thank him. He, however, could only lament his inability to earn her fullest gratitude, for the patriarch's reply to his complaint of those who promised rescue to the people by the instrumentality of a heathen abomination--a document on which he had founded his highest hopes for her--had had a different result from that which he had expected. The patriarch, to be sure, condemned the abominable sacrifice, but he did it in a way which lacked the force necessary to terrify and discourage the misled mob. However, he would try what effect it might have on the people, and a number of scribes were at work to make copies of it in the course of the night. These would be sent to the Senators next morning, posted up in the market-place and public buildings, and distributed to the people; but he feared all this would have no effect.

"Then help me to prepare for death," said Paula gloomily. "You are not a priest of my confession, but no church has a more worthy minister. If you can absolve me in the name of your Redeemer, mine will pardon me. We look at Him, it is true, with different eyes, but He is the Saviour of us both, nevertheless." A contradictory reply struggled for utterance in the strict Jacobite's mind, but at such a moment he felt he must repress it; he only answered:

"Speak, daughter, I am listening."

And she poured forth all her soul, as though he had been a priest of her own creed, and his eyes grew moist as he heard this confession of a pure and loving heart, yearning for all that was highest and best. He promised her the mercy of the Redeemer, and when he had ended with "Amen," and blessed her, he looked down at the ground for some minutes and presently said, "Follow me, Child."

"Whither?" she asked in surprise; for she thought that her last hour had already come, and that he was about to lead her away to the place of execution, or to her watery, ever-flowing tomb; but he smiled as he replied: "No, child. To-day I have only the pleasing duty of blessing your betrothal before God; if only you will promise not to estrange your husband from the faith of his fathers--for what will not a man sacrifice to win the love of a woman.--You promise? Then I will take you to your Orion."

He rapped on the door of the cell, and when the warder had opened it he whispered his orders; Paula followed him silently and with blushing cheeks, and in a few minutes she was clasped to her lover's breast while, for the first time--and perhaps the last--their lips met in a kiss.

The prelate gave them a few minutes together; when he had blessed them both and solemnized their betrothal, he led her back to her cell. However, she had hardly time to thank him out of the fulness of her overflowing heart, when a town-watchman came to fetch him to see Susannah; her last hour was at hand, if not already past. John at once went with the messenger, and Paula drew a deep breath as she saw him depart. Then she threw herself on to her nurse's shoulders, crying:

"Now, come what may! Nothing can divide us; not even death!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

The bishop was too late. He found the widow Susannah a corpse; standing at the head of the bed was little Katharina, as pale as death, speechless, tearless, utterly annihilated. He kindly tried to cheer her, and to speak words of comfort; but she pushed him away, tore herself from him, and before he could stop her, she had fled out of the room.

Poor child! He had seen many a loving daughter mourning for her mother, but never such grief as this. Here, thought he, were two human souls all in all to each other, and hence this overwhelming sorrow.

Katharina had escaped to her own room, had thrown herself on the couch--cowering so close that no one entering the room would have taken the undistinguishable heap for a human being, a grown up, passionately suffering girl.

It was very hot, and yet a cold shiver ran through her slender frame. Was she now attacked by the pestilence? No; it would be too merciful of Fate to take such pity on her woes.

The mother was dead, dragged to the grave by her own daughter. The disease had first shown itself on her lips; and how many times had the physician expressed his surprise at the plague having broken out in this healthy quarter of the town, and in a house kept so scrupulously clean. She knew at whose bidding the avenging angel had entered there, and whose criminal guile had trifled with him. The words "murdered your mother" haunted her, and she remembered the law of the ancients which refused to prescribe a punishment for the killing of parents, because they considered such a monstrous deed impossible.

A scornful smile curled her lip. Laws! Principles! Was there one that she had not defied? She had contemned God, meddled with magic, borne false witness, committed murder--and as to the one law with promise, which, if Philippus was right, was exactly the same in the code of her forefathers as on the tables of Moses, how had she kept that? Her own mother was no more, and by her act!

All through this frightful retrospect she had never ceased to shiver and, as this was becoming unendurable, she took to walking up and down and seeking excuses for her sinful doings: It was not her mother, but Heliodora whom she had wished to kill; why had malicious Fate...?

Here she was interrupted, for the young widow, who had heard the sad news, sought her out to comfort her and offer her services. She spoke to the girl with real affection; but her sweet, low tones reminded Katharina of that evening after the old bishop's death; and when Heliodora put out her arm to draw her to her, she shrank from her, begging her in a dry, hoarse voice, not to touch her for her clothes were infected. She wanted no comfort; all she asked was to be left alone--quite alone--nothing more. The words were hard and unkind, and as the door closed on the young woman Katharina's eyes glared after her.

Why had this doom passed over Heliodora's head and demanded the sacrifice of one whose loss she could never cease to mourn?

This brought her mother vividly to her mind. She flew back to her death-bed and fell on her knees--but even there she could not bear to stay long, so she wandered into the garden and visited every spot where she and her mother had been together. But there were such strange crackings in the shrubs, and the trees and bushes cast such uncanny shadows that she hailed daybreak as a deliverance.

She was on her way back to the house when her foster-brother Anubis came limping to meet her. Poor fellow! She had made a cripple of him, too, and his mother had died through her fault.

The lad spoke to her, giving expression to his sympathy, and she accepted it; but she said such strange things, and answered him so utterly at random, that he began to fear that grief had turned her brain. She went on to ask him point-blank how much money she now had, and as he happened to know approximately, he could tell her; she clasped her hands, for how could any one human being who was not a king possess such enormous wealth! Finally she enquired whether he knew how a will should be drawn up, and that, too, he answered affirmatively.

She made him describe it all, and then he added that the signature must be made valid by those of two witnesses; but she, he added, was too young to be thinking of making her will.

"Why?" said she. "Is Paula much older than I am?"

"And the day after to-morrow," the boy went on, "she is to be cast into the Nile. All the people call her the Bride of the Nile."

At this that hideous, malignant smile again curled her lips, but she hastily suppressed it and walked straight on into the house. At the door he timidly asked her whether he might once more look on his mistress; but she was obliged to forbid it for fear of infection. However, he proudly replied: "What you do not fear, has no terrors for me," and he followed her to the side of the bed where the corpse now lay washed and in fine array; and when he saw Katharina kiss the dead woman's hand he, too, as soon as she looked away, pressed his lips on the place hers had touched. Then he sat down by the bed and remained there till she sent him away.

Before noon the bishop arrived to perform the last rites. He found the body surrounded by beautiful flowers.

Katharina had been out in the garden again and had cut all the rarest and finest; and though she had allowed the gardener to carry the basket for her, she would not have him help her in gathering them. The feeling that she was doing something for her mother had been a comfort to her; still, by day everything about her seemed even more intolerable than by night. Everything looked so large, so coarse, so insistent, so menacing, and reminded her at every step of some injustice or some deed of which she was ashamed. Every eye, she fancied, must see through her; and now and then it seemed as though the pillars of the great banqueting-hall, where her mother still lay, were tottering, and the ceiling about to fall in and crush her.

She answered the bishop's questions absently and often quite at random, and the old man supposed that she was stunned by her great sorrow; so to give her thoughts a new direction he began telling her about Paula, and believing that Katharina was fond of her, he confided to her that he had taken Paula, the day before, to Orion's cell, and consecrated their betrothal.

At this her face was convulsed in a manner that alarmed the bishop; a fearful tumult raged in her soul, her bosom rose and fell spasmodically, and all she could utter was the question: "But they will sacrifice her all the same?"

The bishop thought he understood. She was horror stricken by the idea of the sudden, cruel end that hung over the young bride, and he replied sadly; "I shall not be able to restrain the wretches; still, no means shall remain untried. The patriarch's rescript, condemning this mad crime, shall be made public to-day, and I will read and expound it at the Curia, and try to give it keener emphasis.--Would you like to read it?"

As she eagerly assented, the prelate signed to the acolyte who had waited on him with the holy vessels, and he produced from a packet a written sheet which he handed to Katharina. As soon as she was alone she read the patriarch's epistle; at first superficially, then more carefully, and at last in deep attention and growing interest, stirred by it to strange thoughts, till at length her eyes flashed and her breath came fast, as though this paper referred to herself, and could seal her fate for life.

When the bearers came in to fetch away the body she was still sitting there, gazing as if spell-bound at the papyrus; but she sprang up, shook herself, and then bid farewell to the cold rigid form of the mother on whose warm heart she had so often rested, and to whom she had been the dearest thing on earth--and even then the solace of tears was denied her.

She no longer suffered the deep remorse that had tormented her; for she felt now that her intercourse with her last mother had not been put an end to by death; that after a short parting they would meet again--soon perhaps, perhaps even to-morrow--meet for a fulness of speech, an outpouring of the heart, a revelation of all the past more open and unreserved than could ever be between mortal beings, even between mother and daughter. And when she who was sleeping there, blind, deaf, and senseless, should awake again, up there, with eyes clearer than those of men below, and the ears and senses of a spiritual being to see and hear and judge all she had known and done, all she had felt and made others feel--then, she told herself, her mother might perhaps blame her and punish her more than she had ever done on earth, but she would also clasp her more closely to her heart and comfort her more earnestly.

She whispered gently in her ear as if she were still alive: "Wait awhile, only wait: I shall come soon and tell you everything!"

And then she kissed her so passionately and recklessly that the nuns were shocked and dragged her away, ordering the bearers to close the coffin. They obeyed, and when the wooden lid fell over the sleeping form, shutting it in with a slam, and hiding it from the girl's sight, the barrier gave way which had hitherto restrained her tears and she began to weep bitterly; now, too, the feeling that she had indeed lost her mother took complete possession of her--the sense of being an orphan and alone, quite alone in the wide world.

She saw and heard no more of what took place round the beloved dead; for when she took her hands from her face streaming with tears, the house of the rich widow no longer sheltered its mistress; her remains had been borne away to the nearest mortuary. The law forbade its being any longer kept within doors, but did not allow of its being buried till night fell. The child might not follow her own mother to the cemetery.

With a drooping head Katharina withdrew to her room and there stood looking out into the garden. It all was hers now; she was mistress of it all and of much besides, as free and unfettered to command as hitherto she had been over the birds, her little dog, or the jewels that lay on her toilet-table. She could make hundreds happy with a word, a wave of the hand--but not herself. She had never felt so grown-up, independent, womanly, nay powerful, and at the same time so unutterably wretched and helpless as she felt in this hour.

What did she care for all these vanities? They could not suffice to check one sigh of disappointed yearning.

She had parted from her mother with a promise; the fervent longing that filled her soul was never still; and now the patriarch's letter had given her a hint as to how she might fulfil the one and silence the other. She hastily took the document up again, and read it through once more.

Its instructions were precise to stop the proceedings of the misguided Memphites with stern promptitude. It explained that the death of the Christ Jesus, who shed His blood to redeem the world, had satisfied the need for a

human victim. Throughout the wide realms which the Cross overshadowed with blessing human sacrifice must therefore be accounted a useless and accursed abomination. It went on to point out how the heathen had devised their gods in the image of weak, sinful, earthly beings, and chosen victims in accordance with this idea. "But our God," it said, "is as high above men as the Spirit is above the flesh, and the sacrifice He demands is not of the flesh, but of the spirit. Will He not turn away in wrath and sorrow from the blinded Christians of Memphis who, in their straits, feel and are about to act like the cruel and foolish heathen? They take for their victim a heretic and a stranger, deeming that that will diminish the abomination in the eyes of the Lord; but it moves Him to loathing all the same, for no human blood may stain the pure and sacred altars of our mild faith, which gives life and not death.

"Ask your blind and misguided flock, my brother: Can the Father of Love feel joy at the sight of one of His children, even an erring one, suffocated in the waters to the honor of the Most High, while struggling, and cursing her executioners?

"If, indeed, there were a pure maiden, possessed with the blessed intoxication of the love of God, who was ready to follow the example of Him who redeemed man by His death, to fling herself into the waters while she cried to Heaven with her dying breath: 'Take me and my innocence as an offering, O Lord! Release my people from their extremity!'--that would be a victim indeed; and perchance, the Lord might say: 'I will accept it; but the will alone is enough. No child of mine may cast away the life that I have lent her as the most sacred and precious of gifts.'"

The letter ended with pious exhortations to the community.

Then a maiden who should voluntarily sacrifice herself in the river to save the people in their need would be a victim pleasing in the sight of the Lord--so said the Man of God, through whose mouth the Most High spoke. And this opinion, this hint, was to Katharina like a distaff from which she spun a lengthening thread to warp to the loom and weave from it a tangible tissue.

She would be the maiden whom the patriarch had imagined--the real, true Bride of the Nile, inspired to cast off her young life to save her people in their need. In this there was expiation such as Heaven might accept; this would release her from the burthen of life that weighed upon her, and would reunite her to her mother; in this way she could show her lover and the bishop and all the world the immensity of her self-sacrifice, which was in nothing behind that of "the other"--the much-vaunted daughter of Thomas! She would do the great deed before Paula's eyes, in sight of all the people. But Orion must know whose image she bore in her heart and for whose sake she made that leap from blooming life into a watery grave.

Oh! it was wonderful, splendid! Would she not thus compel him inevitably to remember her whenever he should think of Paula? Yes, she would force him to allow her image to dwell in his soul, inseparable from that "other;" and would not such an unparalleled act add such height to her figure, that it would be equal to that of her Syrian rival in the estimation of all men--even in his?

She now began to long for the supreme moment. Her vain little heart laughed in anticipation of the delight of being seen, praised and admired by all. Tomorrow she, her little self, would tower above all the world; and the more she felt the oppressive heat of the scorching day, the more delicious it seemed to look forward to finding rest from the torments of life in the cool element.

She saw no difficulties in the way of her achievement; she was mistress now, and her slaves and servants must obey her orders. At the same time she remembered, too, to protect her large possessions from falling into the hands of relations for whom she did not care; with a firm hand she drew up a will in which she bequeathed part of her fortune to her uncle Chrysippus, small portions to her foster-brother Anubis, and to Rufinus' widow, to whom she owed reparation for great wrong; then the larger half, and she owned many millions, she bequeathed to her dear friend Orion, whom she freely forgave, and who, she hoped, would see that even in the little "water-wagtail" there had been room for some greatness. She begged him also to take her house, since she had not been altogether guiltless of the destruction of the home of his fathers.

The condition she attached to this bequest showed the same keen, alert spirit that had guided her through life.

She knew that the patriarch's indignation might be fatal to the young man, so to serve as a mediator, and at the same time to ensure for herself the prayers of the Church, which she desired, she enjoined Orion to bestow the greater part of his inheritance on the patriarch for the Church and for benevolent purposes. But not at once, not for ten years, and in instalments of which Orion himself was to determine the proportion. In the event of his dying within the next three years all his claims were to be transferred to her uncle Chrysippus. She added a request to the Church, to which she belonged with her whole heart, that every year on her saint's day and her mother's they should be prayed for in every church in the land. A chapel was to be erected on the scene of her self-immolation, and if the patriarch thought her worthy of the honor, it was to bear the name of the Chapel of Susannah and Katharina.

She gave all her slaves their freedom and devised legacies to all the officials of her household.

As she sat for long hours of serious meditation, drawing up this last will, she smiled frequently with satisfaction. Then she copied it out fair, and finally called the physician and all the free servants in the house to witness her

signature.

Though no one had suspected the "water-wagtail" of such forethought, it was no matter of surprise that the young heiress, shut up in the plague-stricken house, should dispose of her estates, and before night-fall the physician brought Alexander, the chief of the Senate, to the garden gate by her desire, and there they spoke to each other without opening it. He was an old friend of her father's, and since the death of the Mukaukas, had been her guardian; he now agreed to stand as her Kyrios, and as such he ratified her will and the signature, though she would not allow him to read the document.

Finally she went to the slaves quarters, from whence a few more sufferers had been removed to the Necropolis, and desired her boatman to get the holiday barge in readiness early in the morning, as she purposed seeing the ceremonial from the river. She gave particular orders to the gardener as to how it was to be decorated, and what flowers he was to cut for her personal adornment.

She went to bed far less excited than she had been the night before, and before she had ended her evening prayer, slumber overtook her weary brain.

When she awoke at sunrise, the large and splendid boat, which her father had had built at great cost in Alexandria, was manned and ready to put out. No one interfered to prevent her embarking with Anubis and a few female servants, for all the guards who had surrounded the house till yesterday had been withdrawn to do duty at the great ceremonial of the marriage and sacrifice, since a popular tumult was not unlikely to arise.

CHAPTER XXV.

A great number of persons had collected during the night on the quay near Nesptah's inn. The crowd was increasing every minute, and in spite of the intense heat, not a Memphite could bear to stop within doors. Men, women and children were flocking to the scene of the festival; they came in thousands from the neighboring towns, hamlets and villages, to witness the unprecedented sacrifice which was to put an end to the misery of the land. Who had ever heard of such a marriage? What a privilege, what a happiness, to be so fortunate as to see it!

The senate had not been idle and had done all in their power to surround it with magnificence and to enable as many as possible to enjoy the pageant, which had been planned with a lavish hand and liberal munificence.

Round the cove by Nesptah's inn a semi-circular wooden stand had been constructed, on which thousands found seats or standing-room. Stalls furnished with hangings were erected in the middle of the tribune for the authorities and their families as well as for the leading Arab officials, and arm-chairs were placed in them for the Vêkeel, for the Kadi, for the head of the senate, for old Horapollo and also for the Christian priesthood, though it was well known that they would not be present at the ceremony.

The lower classes, who could not afford to pay for admission to these seats, had established themselves on the banks of the river; wandering dealers had followed them, and wherever the crowd was densest they had displayed their wares--light refreshments or solid food--on two-wheeled trucks, or on little carpets spread on the ground. In the tribune itself the cries of the water-sellers were incessant as they offered filtered Nile water and fruit syrups for sale.

The parched tops of the palms, where turtle doves, lapwings and sparrow-hawks were wont to perch, were crowded with the vagabond boys of the town, who whiled away the time by pulling the withered and diseased dates from the great clumps and flinging them down on the bystanders below, till the guard took aim at them with their arrows and stopped the game.

The centre of attraction to all eyes was a wooden platform or pontoon, built far out into the stream; from thence the bride was to be flung into the watery embrace of the expectant bridegroom. Here the masters of the ceremonies had put forth their best efforts, and it was magnificently decorated with hangings and handkerchiefs, palm-leaves and flags; with heavy garlands of tamarisk and willow, mingled with bright blossoms of the lotos and mallow, lilies and roses; with devices emblematic of the province, and other gilt ornaments. Only the furthest end of it was unadorned and without even a railing, that there might be nothing to intercept the view of the "marriage."

Three hours before noon none were absent but those whose places were secured, and ere long curiosity brought them also to the spot. The town-watch found it required all their efforts to keep the front ranks of the people from being pushed into the river by those behind; indeed, this accident could not be everywhere guarded against; but, thanks to the shallow state of the water, no one was the worse. But the cries of those who were in danger nevertheless drowned the music of the bands performing on raised platforms and the shouts of applause which rose on all sides to hail Horapollo--who was here, there, everywhere on his white ass as brisk as a lad--or to greet some leading official.

And now and again loud cries of anguish were heard, or the closely-packed throng parted with exclamations of horror. A citizen had had a sunstroke, or had been seized by the plague. Then the fugitives dragged others away with them; screaming mothers trying to save their little ones from the crush on one hand and the contagion on the other, oversetting one dealer's truck, smashing the eggs and cakes of another. A whole party were pushed into a deep but half-dried up water-course; the guardians of the peace flourished their staves, yelling and making their victims yell in their efforts to restore order--but all this hardly affected the vast body of spectators, and suddenly peace reigned, the confusion subsided, the shrieks were silenced. Those who were doomed might fall or die, be crushed or plague-stricken. Trumpet calls and singing were heard approaching from the town: the procession, the Bridal procession was coming! Not a man but would have perished rather than be deprived of seeing a single act of this stupendous drama.

Those Arabs--what fools they were! Besides the Vêkeel only three of their magnates were present, and those men whom no one knew. Even the Kadi was nowhere to be seen; and he must have forbidden the Moslem women to come, for not a single veiled beauty of the harem was visible. Not one Egyptian woman would have failed to appear if the plague had not kept so many imprisoned in their houses. Such a thing would never be seen again; this day's doings would be a tale to tell to future great-grandchildren!

The music and singing came nearer and nearer; and it did not indeed sound as if it were escorting a hapless creature to a fearful end. Blast after blast rang out from the trumpets, filling the air with festive defiance; cheerful bridal songs came nearer and nearer to the listeners, the shrill chorus of boys and maidens sounding above the deeper and stronger chant of youths and men of all ages; flutes piped a gay invitation to gladness; the dull roar of drums muttered like the distant waves in time to a march, broken by the clang of cymbals and the tinkle of bells hung around tambourines held high by girlish hands which struck, rattled and waved them above their flowing curls; lute players discoursed sweet music on the strings; and as this vast tide of mingled tones came closer, behind it there was still more music and more song.

To the ear the procession seemed endless, and the eye soon confirmed the impression.

All were listening, gazing, watching to see the Bride and her escort. Every eye seemed compelled to turn in the same direction; and presently there came: first the trumpeters on spirited horses, and these ranged themselves on each side of the road by the shore leading to the scene of the "marriage." In front of them the choir of women took their stand to the left and, on the right, the men who had marched after them. All alike were arrayed in light sea-green garments, and loaded with lotos-flowers. The women's hair, twined with white blossoms, flowed over their shoulders; the men carried bunches of papyrus and reeds;--they represented river gods that had risen from the stream.

Then came boys and bearded men, in white robes, with panther-skins on their shoulders, as the heathen priests had been wont to wear them. They were headed by two old men with long white beards, one holding a silver cup and the other a golden one, ready to fling them into the waves as a first offering, according to the practise of their forefathers, as Horapollo had described and ordered it. These went on to the pontoon, to its farthest end, and took their place on one side of the platform whence the Bride was to be cast into the river. Behind them came a large troop of flute-players and drummers, followed by fifty maidens holding tambourines, and fifty men all dressed and carrying emblems as followers of Dionysus, or Osiris-Bacchus, who had been worshipped here in the time of the Romans; with these came the drunken Silenus, goathoofed Satyrs and Pan, with his reed-pipes, all riding grey asses strangely bedaubed with yellow.

Then followed giraffes, elephants, ostriches, antelopes, gazelles; even some tamed lions and panthers were led past the wondering crowd; for this had been done in the famous procession in honor of the second Ptolemy, described by Callixenus of Rhodes.

Next came a large car drawn by twelve black horses, and on it a symbolical group of Famine and Pestilence overthrown; they were surrounded by shrieking black children, with pointed wings on their shoulders and horns on their foreheads, bound to stakes to represent the hosts of hell--a performance which they tried to make at once ghastly and droll.

On another car the Goddess of the Inundation was to be seen. She sat amid sheaves, fruits, and garlands of vine; while round her were groups of children with apples and corn, pomegranates and bunches of dates, wine-jars and cups in their hands.

Presently there appeared in a large shell, as though lounging in a bath, the goddess of health; she was drawn by eight snow-white horses, and held in one hand a golden goblet and in the other a caduceus. After her came the river-god Nile, the bridegroom of the marriage, studied from the famous statue carried away from Alexandria by the Romans: a splendid and mighty bearded man, resting against an urn. Sixteen naked children--the sixteen ells that the river must rise for its overflow to bless the land--played round his herculean form, and a bridal wreath of lotos-flowers crowned his flowing locks. This car, which was decorated with crocodiles, sheaves, dates, grapes, and shells, was hailed with shouts of enthusiasm; it was escorted by old men in the costume of the heathen priesthood.

Behind this came more music and singers, with a troop of young men and maidens led by lute-players singing. These too were dressed as the genie, and nymphs of the river and were the groomsmen and bridesmaids in attendance on the betrothed.

The longer the procession lasted and the nearer the looked-for victim approached, the more eagerly attent were the gazing multitude.

When this group of youths and maidens had gone by, there was hardly a sound to be heard in the tribune and among the crowd. No one felt the fierce heat of the sun, no one heeded the thirst that parched every tongue; all eyes were bent in one direction; only the black Vekeel, whose colossal form towered up where he stood, occasionally sent a sinister and anxious glance towards the town. He expected to see smoke rising from the quarter near the prison, and suddenly his lips parted and he displayed his dazzlingly white teeth in a scornful laugh. That which he looked for had come to pass; the little grey cloud which he discerned grew blacker, and then, in the heart of it, rose a crimson glow which did not take its color from the sun. But of all those thousands he was the only one who looked behind him and observed it.

The bride's attendants had by this time taken their station on the pontoon; here came another band of youths with panther skins on their shoulders; and now--at last, at last--a car came swaying along, drawn by eight coal-black oxen dressed with green ostrich-feathers and water-plants.

The car was shaded by a tall canopy, supported by four poles, against which leaned four men in the robes of the heathen priesthood; this awning was lavishly decorated with wreaths of lotos and reeds, and fenced about with papyrus, bulrushes, tall grasses and blossoming river-weeds. Beneath it sat the queen of the festival--the Bride of the Nile.

Robed in white and closely veiled, she was quite motionless. Her long, thick brown hair fell over her shoulders; at her feet lay a wreath, and rare rose-colored lotos-flowers were strewn on the car.

The bishop had been sitting at her side, the first Christian priest, certainly, of all the swarms of monks and

ecclesiastics in Memphis, who had ever appeared at such a scene of heathen abomination. He was now standing, looking down at the crowd with a deeply knit brow and menacing gaze. What good had come of the penitential sermons in all the churches, of his and his vicar's warnings and threats? In spite of all remonstrance he had mounted the car with the condemned victim, after administering the last consolations to her soul. It might cost him his life, but he would keep his promise.

In her hand Paula held two roses: one was Orion's last greeting delivered by Martina; the other Pulcheria had brought her early in the morning. Yesterday, in a lucid moment, her dying father had given her his fondest blessing, little knowing what hung over her; to-day he had not come to himself, and had neither noticed nor returned her parting kiss. Quite unconscious, he had been moved from the prison out of doors and to the house of Rufinus. Dame Joanna would not forego the privilege of giving him a resting-place and taking care of him till the end.

Orion's last note was placed in Paula's hands just before she set out; it informed her that his task was now successfully ended. He had been told that it was to-morrow, and not to-day, that the hideous act would be accomplished; and it was a consolation to her to know that he was spared the agony of following her in fancy in her fearful progress.

She had allowed the women who came to clothe her in bridal array to perform their task; among them was Emau, the chief warder's wife, and her overflowing compassion had done Paula good. But even in the prison-yard she had felt it unendurable to exhibit herself decked in her bridal wreaths to the gaping multitude; she had torn them from her and thrown them on the ground.

How long--how interminably long--had the road to the river appeared; but she had never raised her eyes to look at the curious crowd, never ceased lifting up her heart in prayer; and when her proud blood boiled, or despair had almost taken possession of her, she had grasped the bishop's hand and he had never wearied of encouraging her and exhorting her to cling to love and faith, and not even yet abandon all hope.

Thus they at last reached the pontoon at whose further end life would begin for her in another world. The shouts of the crowd were as loud, as triumphant, as expectant as ever; music and singing mingled with the roar of thousands of spectators; she allowed herself to be lifted from the car as though she were stunned, and followed the young men and maidens who formed the bridal train, and in alternate choruses sang the finest nuptial song of Sappho the fair Lesbian.

The bishop now made an attempt to address the people, but he was soon reduced to silence. So he once more joined Paula, and hand in hand they went on to the pier.

All she had in her of strength, pride, and heroic courage she summoned to her aid to enable her to walk these last few paces with her head erect, and without tottering; she had gone half way along the wooden structure, with a mien as lofty and majestic as though she were marching to command the obedience of the mob, when hoofs came thundering after her on the boards.

Old Horapollo, on his white ass, had overtaken her and stopped her on her road. Breathless, bathed in perspiration, scornful and triumphant, he desired her to remove her veil, and ordered the bishop to leave her and give up his place to the man who represented Father Nile--a gigantic farrier who followed him, somewhat embarrassed in his costume, but very ready to perform his part to the end.

The priest and Paula, however, refused to obey. At this the old man tore the veil from her face and signed to the Nile-God; he stepped forward and assumed his rights, after bowing respectfully to the prelate--who was forced to make way--and then led the Bride to the end of the platform. Here the two elders who had headed the procession in honor of Bacchus, cast the gold cups as offerings into the river, and then a lawyer, in the costume of a heathen priest, proceeded to expound, in a well-set speech, the meaning of this betrothal and sacrifice. He took Paula's hand to place in that of the farrier, who made ready to cast her into the river for which he stood proxy.

But an obstacle intervened before he could do so. A large and splendid barge had drawn up close to the platform, and shouts were heard from the tribune and from the mob which had till now looked on in breathless suspense and profound silence:

"Susannah's barge!"

"Look at the Nile, look at the river!"

"It is the water-wagtail--Philammon's rich heiress!"

"A pretty sight!"

"Another Bride--a second Bride!"

And the gaze of the multitude was now, as one eye, fixed on Katharina.

Susannah's handsome barge had been passing up and down near the platform for the last hour, and the guards on duty had several times desired that it was to be kept at a distance from the scene of the "marriage;" but in vain; and they in their little boats were not strong enough to take active measures against the larger vessel manned by fifty rowers. It had now steered quite close to the pontoon, and the splendid gilding and carving, the tall deck-house

supported on silver pillars, and the crimson embroidered sails would have been a gorgeous feast for the eye, but that the black flag floating from the mast gave it a melancholy and gloomy aspect.

Within the cabin Katharina had made her waiting-women dress her in white and deck her with white flowers-myrtle, roses and lotos; but she vouchsafed no reply to their anxious enquiries.

The maid who fastened the flowers on her bosom could feel her mistress's heart beating under her hand, and the lotos-blossoms which drooped from her shoulder rose and fell as though they were already rocking on the waves of the Nile. Her lips, too, never ceased moving, and her cheeks were as pale as death.

"What is she going to do?" her attendants asked each other.

Her mother dead only yesterday, and now she chose to be present at this ceremonial, desiring the steersman to run close to the platform and keep near to it, where all the world could see her. But she evidently wished to display herself to the people in all her finery and be admired, for she presently went up on the roof of the deck-house. And she looked lovely, as lovely as a guileless angel, as she mounted the steps with childlike diffidence-timidly, but with wide open eyes, as though something grand was awaiting her there--something she had long yearned for with her whole heart.

Anubis had to help her up the last steps, for her knees gave way; but once at the top she sent him down again to remain below with the others, as she wished to be alone. The lad was accustomed to obey; and Katharina now stepped on a seat close to the side of the boat, turned to Paula, whom she was now rapidly approaching, and held out to her and the bishop two tall lily-stems covered with splendid blossoms. At the very moment when the farrier was measuring by eye the distance between the platform and the barge, and had judged it impossible to cast the Bride into the stream till the vessel had moved on, Katharina cried out:

"Reverend Father John--and all of you! Take me, me and not the daughter of Thomas! It is I, not she--I am the true Bride of the Nile. Of my own free will--hear me, John!--of my own free will I am ready to give my life for my hapless land and the misery of the people, and the patriarch said that such a sacrifice as mine would be acceptable to Heaven. Farewell! Pray for me!--Lord have mercy upon me! Mother, dear Mother, I am coming to you!"

Then she called to the steersman: "Put out from the platform!" and as soon as a few strokes of the oars had carried the barge into the deeper channel she stepped nimbly on to the edge of the bulwark, dropped the lilies into the river, and then with a smile, her head gracefully bent on one side and her skirt modestly held round her, she slipped into the water.

The waves closed over her; but she was a good swimmer and could not help coming once to the surface. Her expression was that of a bather enjoying the cool fresh water that laved and gurgled round her. Perhaps the wild storm of applause, the mingled cries of horror, compassion and thanksgiving that went up from the assembled thousands once more reached her ear--but she dived head foremost to rise no more.

The "River-God," a good-hearted man, who in his daily life could never have let a fellow-creature drown under his very eyes, forgot his part, released Paula, and sprang after Katharina, as did Anubis and a few boatmen; but they could not reach her, and the boy, who found swimming difficult with his crippled leg followed the girl to whom his young heart was wholly devoted to a watery death.

Her speech had reached no ears but those to whom it was addressed; but before she was lost in the waters Bishop John turned to the people, took Paula's hand--and she felt free once more when her terrible bridegroom had deserted her--and holding up the Crucifix which hung at his girdle he shouted loudly:

"Behold the desires of our holy Father Benjamin, by whom God himself speaks to you, have met with fulfilment. A pure and noble Jacobite maiden, of her own free and beautiful impulse, has sacrificed herself after the example of the Saviour, for the sufferings of her nation, before your eyes. This one," and he drew Paula to him, "this one is free; the Nile has had his victim!"

But almost before he had done speaking--before the people could proclaim their vote--Horapollo had rushed at him and interrupted him. He had dismounted from his ass during the earlier part of the proceedings, and, not to let his prey escape, he now came between Paula and the bishop, grasped her dress and cried to the chorus of youths:

"Come on--at once! One of you take the part of the Nile-God--into the river with the Bride!" The bishop however forced himself between the speaker and the girl to protect her. But Horapollo flew into a fury and rushed at the prelate to snatch away the image of the Saviour, while John exclaimed in a voice of ominous thunder: "Anathema!"

This word of fear roused the Christian blood in the Egyptians; the sacrilegious attempt stirred the zeal which they had proved in many a struggle, and which had only been kept under by an effort during these times of trouble: the leader of the choir dragged the old man away and took part with the bishop. Others followed his example, while several, on the contrary, sided with old Horapollo who clung tightly to Paula, preferring to die himself rather than allow her to escape his hatred and vengeance.

At this moment the clang of bells was heard from the town with a terrific and unaccountable uproar, and a young man was seen forcing his way through the throng, a naked sword in his hand, and in spite of his torn garments, his wild hair, and his blackened face, he was at once recognized as Orion. Every one made way for him, for he rushed on like a

madman; as he reached the pontoon and took in at a glance what was going forward there, he sprang past the mummers with mighty leaps to the platform, pushing aside sundry groups of fighting champions; and before the principal actors were aware of his presence, he had snatched Paula from the old man's clutch, and called her by her name. She sank on his breast half-fainting with terror, surprise and unspeakable rapture, and he clasped her to him with his left arm, while the flashing sword in his right hand and his flaming looks warned all bystanders that it would be as wise to attack a lioness defending her young as to defy this desperate man, who was prepared to face death with the woman he loved.

His push had sent Horapollo tottering to some distance; and when the old man had pulled himself together, to throw himself once more on his victim, he found himself the centre of a fight. A wild troop had followed Orion and beset the struggling mob, whom they presently drove over the edge of the pontoon into the river, and with them Horapollo. Most of these saved themselves by swimming, but the old man sank, and nothing more was seen of him but his clenched fist, which rose in menace for some minutes above the waters.

Meanwhile the Vêkeel had become aware of what was going forward on the platform; he leaped in fury from his seat to restore order, intending to seize Orion whom he fancied he had seen, or, if necessary to cut him down with his own hand.

But a vast multitude stopped his progress, for a fearful horde of released prisoners with Orion at their head had come rushing down to the scene of the festival yelling: "Fire! the prison is burning, the town is in flames!"

Every one who could run fled at once to Memphis to save his house, his possessions and those dear to him. Like a flock of doves scared by the scream of a hawk, like autumn leaves driven before the wind, the multitude dispersed. They hurried back to the town in wild tumult and inextricable confusion, jumping into the festal cars, cutting loose the horses from that of the goddess of health, to mount them and ride home, overthrowing everything that stood in their way and dragging back the Vêkeel who was striving, sword in hand, to get to the pontoon.

The smoke and flames of the city were rising every moment, and acted like magic in spurring the flying crowd to reach their homes in time. But, before Obada had succeeded in his efforts, the pushing throng were once more brought to a standstill; horses were heard approaching. Dense masses of dust hid them and their riders; but it was certainly an armed troop that was coming clattering onwards, for flashing gleams were seen here and there through the dull clouds that shrouded them, the reflection of the sun's bright rays from polished and glittering helmets, breast-plates, and sabres.

Now they were visible even where the Vêkeel was. Foremost rode the Kadi, and just as he came up with Obada he sprang from the saddle on to the wooden structure, and with a loud cry of: "Free-saved!" in which all the joy of his heart found utterance, he stretched out both his hands to Paula, who was advancing towards the shore clinging closely to Orion.

Othman did not observe the Vêkeel, who was but a few paces distant. The words "Free!" "Saved!" from the supreme judge, gave the negro to understand that a pardon must have arrived for his youthful foe, and this of course implied the condemnation of his own proceedings. All his hopes were wrecked, for this meant that Omar still ruled and that the attempt on the Khaliff's life had failed. Dismissal, punishment or death must be his doom, when Amru should return. Still, he would not succumb till the instrument of his ruin had preceded him to the grave. Taking the Kadi by surprise he thrust him aside, and prepared to deal a fearful blow that should fell Orion before he himself should fall. But the captain of the body-guard, who had followed Othman, had watched his movements: Swift as lightning he rose in his saddle and swung his cimeter, which cut deep into the Vêkeel's neck. With a hideous curse Obada let his arm drop, and fell struggling for his last breath at the feet of the newly united couple.

The populace afterwards declared that his blood was not red like that of other men, but black like his skin and his soul. They had good cause to curse his memory, for his villainy had reduced more than half Memphis to ashes that day, and brought the city to beggary.

He had hired two venial wretches to set fire to the prison while the festival was proceeding, with a view to suffocating Orion in his cell; but the gang were detected and all the prisoners were released in time. Thus the young man had been able to reach the scene of the ceremonial at the head of his fellow-captives. The fire, however, had gained the upper hand in the deserted town. It had spread from house to house along the sun-scorched streets, and next day nothing remained of the city of the Pyramids but the road along the shore, and a few wretched alleys. The ancient Capital of the Pharaohs was reduced to a village, and the houseless residents moved across to the eastern bank, to people as Moslems the newly-founded town of Fostat, or sought a home on Christian territory.

Among the houses that had escaped was that of Rufinus, and thither the Kadi escorted Orion and Paula. It was to serve as their prison till the return of Amru, and there they spent delightful days in the society of their friends, and there Thomas was so happy as to clasp his children to his heart once more, and bless them before he died.

A few minutes before the Kadi had reached the scene of the festival two carrier pigeons had arrived, each bearing the Arab governor's commands that the sacrifice of Paula was at any rate to be stopped, and her life spared till his return. He also reserved the right of deciding Orion's fate.

Mary and Rustem had met Amru at Berenice, on the Egyptian coast of the Red Sea. This decaying sea-port was connected with Medina by a pigeon-post, and in reply to his viceroy's enquiry with reference to the victim about to be offered by the despairing Egyptians to the Nile, Omar had sent a reply which had been immediately forwarded to the Kadi.

The burning of their town had brought new and fearful suffering on the stricken Memphites, and notwithstanding Katharina's death the Nile still did not rise. The Kadi therefore once more summoned a meeting of all the inhabitants from both sides of the river, three days after the interrupted marriage-festival. It was held under the palms by Nesptah's inn, and there he proclaimed to the multitude, Moslem and Christian, by means of the Arab herald and Egyptian interpreter, what the Khaliff commanded him to declare, namely: that God, the One, the All-merciful, scorned human sacrifice. In this firm conviction he, Omar, would beseech Allah the Compassionate, and he sent a letter which was to be cast into the river in his name.

And this letter was addressed:

"To the River of Egypt." And its contents were as follows:

"If thou, O River, flowest of thyself, then swell not; but if it be God, the One, the Compassionate, that maketh thee to flow, then we entreat the All-merciful that he will bid thee rise!"

"That which is not of God," wrote Amru in the letter which enclosed Omar's, "what shall it profit men? But all things created are by Him, and so is your noble river. The Most High will hearken to Omar's prayers and ours, and I therefore command that all of you--Moslems, Christians, and Jews, shall gather together in the Mosque on the other side of the Nile which I have built to the glory of the All-merciful, and that you there lift up your souls in one great common prayer, to the end that God may hear you and take pity on your sufferings!"

And the Kadi bid all the people to go across the Nile and they obeyed his bidding. Bishop John called on his clergy and marched at their head, leading the Christians; the priests and elders of the Jews led their people next to the Jacobites; and side by side with these the Moslems gathered in the magnificent pillared sanctuary of Amru, where the three congregations of different creeds lifted up, their hearts and eyes and voices to the pitying Father in Heaven.

And this very Mosque of Amru has more than once been the scene of the same sublime spectacle; even within the lifetime and before the eyes of the narrator of this tale have Moslems, Christians, and Jews united there in one pious prayer, which must have been acceptable indeed in the ears of the Lord.

Not long after the letter from the Khaliff Omar had been cast into the Nile, and the prayer of the united assembly had gone up to Heaven from the Mosque of Amru, a pigeon came in announcing a sudden rise in the waters at the cataracts; and after some still anxious but hopeful days of patience, the Nile swelled higher and yet higher, overflowed its banks, and gave the laborer a right to look forward to a rich harvest; and then, when a heavy storm of rain had laid the choking dust, the plague, too, disappeared.

Just when the river was beginning to rise perceptibly Amru returned; bringing in his train little Mary and Rustem, Philippus the leech and Haschim, who had joined the governor's caravan at Djidda.

In the course of their journey they received news of all that had been happening at Memphis, and when the travellers were approaching their last night-quarters, and the Pyramids were already in sight, the governor said to little Mary:

"What do you say little one? Do we not owe the Memphites the treat of a splendid marriage festival?"

"No, my lord, two," replied the child.

"How is that?" laughed Amru, "You are too young and do not count yet, and I know no other maiden in Memphis whose wedding I should care to provide for."

"But there is a man towards whom you feel most kindly, and who lives as lonely as a recluse. I should like to see him married, and at the same time as Orion and Paula. I mean our good friend Philippus."

"The physician? And is he still unwed?" asked Amru in surprise; for no Moslem of the leech's age and position could remain unmarried without exposing himself to the contempt of his fellow-believers. "He is a widower then!"

"No," replied Mary. "He has never yet found a wife to suit him; but I know one created on purpose for him by God himself!"

"You little Khatbe!"--[A professional go-between]--cried the governor. "Well, settle the matter, and it shall be no fault of mine if the second wedding lacks magnificence."

"And we will have a third!" interrupted the child, clapping her hands and laughing. "My worthy escort Rustem..."

"The colossus! Why, child, to you all things are possible! Have you found a wife for him too?"

"No, he found Mandane for himself without my help."

"It is the same thing!" cried the governor jovially. "I will provide for her. But that must satisfy you, or else all those unbelievers whom we are settling here will drive us Moslem Arabs out of the land."

The great man had often held such discourse as this with the child since she had entered his tent at Berenice, there to lay before him the case of the couple she loved, and for whom she had taken on herself great risk and hardship; she had pleaded so eloquently, so kindly, and with such fervent and pathetic words, that Amru had at once made up his mind to grant her everything that lay in his power. Mary had done him a service, too, by bringing him the information she could give him, for it enabled him to avert perils which threatened the interests of the Crescent, and also to save the children of two men he honored--the son of the Mukaukas, and the daughter of Thomas--from imminent danger.

He found, on his return home, that the Vekel's crimes far exceeded his worst fears. Obada's proceedings had begun to undermine that respect for Arab rule and Moslem justice which Amru had done his utmost to secure. It was only by a miracle that Orion had escaped his plots, for he had three times sent assassins to the prison, and it was entirely owing to the watchful care of pretty Emau's husband that the youth had been able to save himself in the fire. Obada had done all this to clear out of his path the hated man whose statements and impeachments might ruin him. The wretch had met a less ignominious death than his judges would have granted him. The wealth found hoarded in his dwelling was sent to Medina; and even Orion was forced to see the vast sums of which the Negro had plundered his treasury, appropriated by the Arabs. The Arab governor thought it only right to inflict this penalty for the share he had taken in the rescue of the nuns; and the young man submitted willingly to a punishment which restored him and his bride to freedom, and enabled Amru to apply a larger proportion of the revenues of his native land for its own benefit.

The Khaliff Omar, however, never received these moneys, which constituted far more than half of Orion's patrimony. The Prophet's truest friend, the wise and powerful ruler, fell by the assassin's hand, and the world now learnt that the Vekel had been one of the chief conspirators and had been spurred on to the rashest extremes by his confidence of success.

Amru received the son of the Mukaukas as a father might; after examining the result of his labors he found it far superior to his own efforts in the same direction, and he charged Orion to carry out the new division of the country, which he confirmed excepting in a few details.

"Perform your duty and do your utmost in the future to go on as you have begun!" cried Amru; and the young man replied:

"In this bitter and yet happy interval I have become clear on many points."

"And may I ask on what?" asked the governor. "I would gladly hear."

"I have discovered, my lord," replied Orion, "that there is no such thing as happiness or unhappiness in the sense men give to the words. Life appears to each of us as we ourselves paint it. Hard times which come into our lives from outside are often no more than a brief night from which a brighter day presently dawns--or the stab of a surgeon's knife, which makes us sounder than before. What men call grief is, times without number, a path to greater ease; whereas the ordinary happiness of mankind flows, swiftly as running waters, down from that delightful sense of ease. Like a ship, which, when her rudder is lost, is more likely to ride out the storm on the high seas than near the sheltering coast, so a man who has lost himself may easily recover himself and his true happiness in the wildest turmoil of life, but rarely and with difficulty if his existence runs calmly on. All other blessings are comparatively worthless if we are not upheld by the consciousness of fulfilling the task of life in faithful earnest, and of cheerfully dealing with the problems it sets before us. The lost one was found as soon as he placed his whole being and faculties at the service of a higher duty, with God in his heart and before his eyes. I have learnt from my own experience, and from Paula's good friends, to strive untiringly after what is right, and to find my own weal in that of others.

"The sense of lost liberty is hard to bear; but leave me love, and give me room and opportunity to prove my best powers in the service of the community, even in a prison--and though I cannot be perfectly happy, for that is impossible without freedom--I will be far happier than such an idle and useless spendthrift of time and abilities as I used to be among the dissipations of the capital."

"Then enjoy the consciousness of duty well performed, with liberty and love," replied the governor. "And believe me, my friend, your father in Paradise will no more grudge you all that is loveliest and best than I do. You are on the road where every curse is turned to blessing."

The three marriages which Amru had promised to provide for, were celebrated with due splendor.

That of Orion and Paula was a day never to be forgotten by the gay world of Memphis. Bishop John performed the ceremony, and the young couple at once took possession of the beautiful house left them by Katharina, the real Bride of the Nile. If it could have been granted to her to read Paula's and Orion's hearts, and see how they held her in remembrance, she would have found that to them she was no longer the childish water-wagtail, and that they knew how to value the sacrifice of her young life.

Their first beloved guest, who went with them to their new home, was little Mary, and she remained their dearest companion till she married happily. The governess, Eudoxia, to whom also Orion offered an asylum, accompanied Mary to her own delightful home; and there at last Mary closed her old friend's eyes, after the good woman had brought up her little ones, not like a hireling but as a true mother.

The Patriarch Benjamin, too, who was led by many considerations--and not least by Katharina's will to remain on good terms with the son of the Mukaukas, was a visitor to the youthful pair. Neither he nor the Church ever had reason to repent his alliance with Orion; and when Paula presented her husband with a son, the prelate offered to be his sponsor, and named him George after his grandfather.

Orion's son, too, inherited the office of Mukaukas, when he came to man's estate, from his father who was appointed to it, but under a new Arab title, shortly after his marriage.

Ere long, however, Orion, as the highest Christian authority in his native land, had to change his place of residence and leave Memphis, which was doomed to ruin, for Alexandria. From thence his power extended over the whole Nile-valley, and he devoted himself to his charge with so much zeal, fidelity, justice, and prudence, that his name was remembered with veneration and affection by generations long after.

Paula was the pride and joy of his life, and they lived together in devoted union to an advanced age. He regarded it as one of the duties of his life, to care for the woman who had made him what he was from a lost and reprobate creature, and to fill every day of her life with joy. When he built his palace at Alexandria, he graced it with the inscription that had been engraved on Thomas' ring: "God hath set the sweat of man's brow before virtue."

Philippus and his Pulcheria also found a new home in Alexandria. He had no long wooing to do; for when, on his return, the girl of whom he had thought constantly during his long journeying, met him for the first time in her mother's house and held out both her hands with trustful warmth of welcome, he clasped her to him and would not release her till Joanna had given them her maternal blessing. The widow lived in the leech's house with her children and grandchildren, and often visited her husband's grave. At length she was laid to rest by him and his soft-hearted mother, in the cemetery of Alexandria.

Rustem, made a rich man by Orion, became a famous breeder of horses and camels in his own country, while Mandane ruled mildly but prudently over his possessions--which he never shared with others, though he remained a Masdakite till he died. The first daughter his wife bore him was named Mary, and the first boy Haschim; but she would not agree to Rustem's proposal that the second should be called Orion; she preferred to give him the name of Rufinus, and his successors were Rustem and Philippus.

The senator and his wife were only too glad to quit Egypt. Martina, however, had the satisfaction of assisting at the marriage of her dear Heliodora on the shores of the Nile; not, indeed, to her "Great Sesostris," but to her nephew Narses, who by the young widow's devoted care was restored, if not to perfect vigor, at any rate to very enduring good health.

Paula's wedding gift to her was the great emerald, which had meanwhile been brought back again to Memphis. Justinus and Martina always remained on terms of cordial friendship with the young Mukaukas and his wife: Nilus lived long after to perform his duties with industry and judgment; and whenever Haschim came to Alexandria there was a contest between Orion and Philippus, for neither would yield him to the other. But Philip could no longer envy his former rival the wife he had won. He had not, indeed, ceased to admire her; but at the same time he would say: "My comfortable little Pulcheria has not her match; our rooms would be too small for Paula, but they suit my golden-haired girl best."

He remained unselfishly devoted to his work till the end, and, when he saw Orion wearing himself out in energetic toil, he would often say: "He knows now what life demands, and acts accordingly; and that is why he grows no older, and his laugh is as winning and gay as ever. It is an honor to be called friend by a woman who like the Bride of the Nile, saved herself from certain death, and a man who, like the young Mukaukas, has freed himself from the heaviest of all curses."

To this day the Bride of the Nile is not forgotten. Before the river begins to rise on the Night of Dropping the inhabitants of the town of Cairo, which grew up after the ruin of Memphis, on the eastern shore by the side of Fostat, erect a figure of clay, representing a maiden form, which they call Aroosa or the Bride.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

*A knot can often be untied by daylight
Abandon to the young the things we ourselves used most to enjoy
Ancient custom, to have her ears cut off
Caught the infection and had to laugh whether she would or no
Gave them a claim on your person and also on your sorrows
Hatred and love are the opposite ends of the same rod
He was made to be plundered
How could they find so much pleasure in such folly*

In whom some good quality or other may not be discovered
Life is not a banquet
Life is a function, a ministry, a duty
Love has two faces: tender devotion and bitter aversion
Of two evils it is wise to choose the lesser
Old age no longer forgets; it is youth that has a short memory
Prepared for the worst; then you are armed against failure
Sea-port was connected with Medina by a pigeon-post
Self-interest and egoism which drive him into the cave
So hard is it to forego the right of hating
Spoilt to begin with by their mothers, and then all the women
Talk of the wolf and you see his tail
Temples of the old gods were used as quarries
The man who avoids his kind and lives in solitude
Thin-skinned, like all up-starts in authority
Those who will not listen must feel
Use their physical helplessness as a defence
Who can hope to win love that gives none
Who can take pleasure in always seeing a gloomy face?
Women are indeed the rock ahead in this young fellow's life
You have a habit of only looking backwards