

An Egyptian Princess — Volume 04 eBook

An Egyptian Princess — Volume 04 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER XI.

Three days before the time fixed for the departure of Nitetis, Rhodopis had invited a large number of guests to her house at Naukratis, amongst whom Croesus and Gyges were included.

The two lovers had agreed to meet in the garden, protected by the darkness and the old slave, while the guests were occupied at the banquet. Melitta, therefore, having convinced herself that the guests were thoroughly absorbed in conversation, opened the garden-gate, admitted the prince, brought Sappho to him, and then retired, promising to warn them of any intruder by clapping her hands.

"I shall only have you near me three days longer," whispered Sappho. "Do you know, sometimes it seems to me as if I had only seen you yesterday for the first time; but generally I feel as if you had belonged to me for a whole eternity, and I had loved you all my life."

"To me too it seems as if you had always been mine, for I cannot imagine how I could ever have existed without you. If only the parting were over and we were together again!"

"Oh, believe me, that will pass more quickly than you fancy. Of course it will seem long to wait—very long; but when it is over, and we are together again, I think it will seem as if we had never been parted. So it has been with me every day. How I have longed for the morning to come and bring you with it! but when it came and you were sitting by my side, I felt as if I had had you all the time and your hand had never left my head."

"And yet a strange feeling of fear comes over me, when I think of our parting hour."

"I do not fear it so very much. I know my heart will bleed when you say farewell, but I am sure you will come back and will not have forgotten me. Melitta wanted to enquire of the Oracle whether you would remain faithful; and to question an old woman who has just come from Phrygia and can conjure by night from drawn cords, with incense, styrax, moon-shaped cakes, and wild-briar leaves; but I would have none of this, for my heart knows better than the Pythia, the cords, or the smoke of sacrifice, that you will be true to me, and love me always."

"And your heart speaks the truth."

"But I have sometimes been afraid; and have blown into a poppy-leaf, and struck it, as the young girls here do. If it broke with a loud crack I was very happy, and cried, 'Ah! he will not forget!' but if the leaf tore without a sound I felt sad. I dare say I did this a hundred times, but generally the leaf gave the wished-for sound, and I had much oftener reason to be joyful than sad."

“May it be ever thus!”

“It must be! but dearest, do not speak so loudly; I see Knakias going down to the Nile for water and he will hear us.”

“Well, I will speak low. There, I will stroke back your silky hair and whisper in your ear ‘I love you.’ Could you understand?”

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"My grandmother says that it is easy to understand what we like to hear; but if you had just whispered, 'I hate you,' your eyes would have told me with a thousand glad voices that you loved me. Silent eyes are much more eloquent than all the tongues in the world."

"If I could only speak the beautiful Greek language as you do, I would.."

"Oh, I am so glad you cannot, for if you could tell me all you feel, I think you would not look into my eyes so lovingly. Words are nothing. Listen to the nightingale yonder! She never had the gift of speech and yet I think I can understand her."

"Will you confide her secret to me? I should like to know what Gulgul, as we Persians call the nightingale, has to talk about to her mate in the rose-bush. May you betray her secret?"

"I will whisper it softly. Philomel sings to her mate 'I love thee,' and he answers, (don't you hear him?), 'Itys, ito, itys.'"

"And what does that mean, 'Ito, ito?'"

"I accept it."

"And Itys?"

"Oh, that must be explained, to be rightly understood. Itys is a circle; and a circle, I was always taught, is the symbol of eternity, having neither beginning nor end; so the nightingale sings, 'I accept it for eternity.'"

"And if I say to you, 'I love thee?'"

"Then I shall answer gladly, like the sweet nightingale, 'I accept it for to-day, to-morrow, for all eternity!'"

"What a wonderful night it is! everything so still and silent; I do not even hear the nightingale now; she is sitting in the acacia-tree among the bunches of sweet blossoms. I can see the tops of the palm-trees in the Nile, and the moon's reflection between them, glistening like a white swan."

"Yes, her rays are over every living thing like silver fetters, and the whole world lies motionless beneath them like a captive woman. Happy as I feel now, yet I could not even laugh, and still less speak in a loud voice."

"Then whisper, or sing!"



“Yes, that is the best. Give me a lyre. Thank you. Now I will lean my head on your breast, and sing you a little, quiet, peaceful song. It was written by Alkman, the Lydian, who lived in Sparta, in praise of night and her stillness. You must listen though, for this low, sweet slumber-song must only leave the lips like a gentle wind. Do not kiss me any more, please, till I have finished; then I will ask you to thank me with a kiss:

“Now o’er the drowsy earth still night prevails,
Calm sleep the mountain tops and shady vales,
The rugged cliffs and hollow glens;

The wild beasts slumber in their dens;
The cattle on the bill. Deep in the sea
The countless finny race and monster brood
Tranquil repose. Even the busy bee
Forgets her daily toil. The silent wood
No more with noisy hum of insect rings;
And all the feathered tribe, by gentle sleep subdued,
Roost in the glade and hang their drooping wings.”

—Translation by Colonel Mure.

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"Now, dearest, where is my kiss?"

"I had forgotten it in listening, just as before I forgot to listen in kissing."

"You are too bad. But tell me, is not my song lovely?"

"Yes, beautiful, like everything else you sing."

"And the Greek poets write?"

"Yes, there you are right too, I admit."

"Are there no poets in Persia?"

"How can you ask such a question? How could a nation, who despised song, pretend to any nobility of feeling?"

"But you have some very bad customs."

"Well?"

"You take so many wives."

"My Sappho . . ."

"Do not misunderstand me. I love you so much, that I have no other wish than to see you happy and be allowed to be always with you. If, by taking me for your only wife, you would outrage the laws of your country, if you would thereby expose yourself to contempt, or even blame, (for who could dare to despise my Bartja!) then take other wives; but let me have you, for myself alone, at least two, or perhaps even three years. Will you promise this, Bartja?"

"I will."

"And then, when my time has passed, and you must yield to the customs of your country (for it will not be love that leads you to bring home a second wife), then let me be the first among your slaves. Oh! I have pictured that so delightfully to myself. When you go to war I shall set the tiara on your head, gird on the sword, and place the lance in your hand; and when you return a conqueror, I shall be the first to crown you with the wreath of victory. When you ride out to the chase, mine will be the duty of buckling on your spurs, and when you go to the banquet, of adorning and anointing you, winding the garlands of poplar and roses and twining them around your forehead and shoulders. If wounded, I will be your nurse; will never stir from your side if you are ill, and when I see you happy will retire, and feast my eyes from afar on your glory and happiness. Then

perchance you will call me to your side, and your kiss will say, 'I am content with my Sappho, I love her still.'"

"O Sappho, wert thou only my wife now!—to-day! The man who possesses such a treasure as I have in thee, will guard it carefully, but never care to seek for others which, by its side, can only show their miserable poverty. He who has once loved thee, can never love another: I know it is the custom in my country to have many wives, but this is only allowed; there is no law to enjoin it. My father had, it is true, a hundred female slaves, but only one real, true wife, our mother Kassandane."

"And I will be your Kassandane."

"No, my Sappho, for what you will be to me, no woman ever yet was to her husband."

"When shall you come to fetch me?"

"As soon as I can, and am permitted to do so."

"Then I ought to be able to wait patiently."

"And shall I ever hear from you?"

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"Oh, I shall write long, long letters, and charge every wind with loving messages for you."

"Yes, do so, my darling; and as to the letters, give them to the messenger who will bring Nitetis tidings from Egypt from time to time."

"Where shall I find him?"

"I will see that a man is stationed at Naukratis, to take charge of everything you send to him. All this I will settle with Melitta."

"Yes, we can trust her, she is prudent and faithful; but I have another friend, who is dearer to me than any one else excepting you, and who loves me too better than any one else does, but you—"

"You mean your grandmother Rhodopis."

"Yes, my faithful guardian and teacher."

"Ah, she is a noble woman. Croesus considers her the most excellent among women, and he has studied mankind as the physicians do plants and herbs. He knows that rank poison lies hidden in some, in others healing cordials, and often says that Rhodopis is like a rose which, while fading away herself, and dropping leaf after leaf, continues to shed perfume and quickening balsam for the sick and weak, and awaits in patience the wind which at last shall waft her from us."

"The gods grant that she may be with us for a long time yet! Dearest, will you grant me one great favor?"

"It is granted before I hear it."

"When you take me home, do not leave Rhodopis here. She must come with us. She is so kind and loves me so fervently, that what makes me happy will make her so too, and whatever is dear to me, will seem to her worthy of being loved."

"She shall be the first among our guests."

"Now I am quite happy and satisfied, for I am necessary to my grandmother; she could not live without her child. I laugh her cares and sorrows away, and when she is singing to me, or teaching me how to guide the style, or strike the lute, a clearer light beams from her brow, the furrows ploughed by grief disappear, her gentle eyes laugh, and she seems to forget the evil past in the happy present."

"Before we part, I will ask her whether she will follow us home."

“Oh, how glad that makes me! and do you know, the first days of our absence from each other do not seem so very dreadful to me. Now you are to be my husband, I may surely tell you everything that pains or pleases me, even when I dare not tell any one else, and so you must know, that, when you leave, we expect two little visitors; they are the children of the kind Phanes, whom your friend Gyges saved so nobly. I mean to be like a mother to the little creatures, and when they have been good I shall sing them a story of a prince, a brave hero, who took a simple maiden to be his wife; and when I describe the prince I shall have you in my mind, and though my little listeners will not guess it, I shall be describing you from head to foot. My prince shall be tall like you, shall have your golden curls and

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blue eyes, and your rich, royal dress shall adorn his noble figure. Your generous heart, your love of truth, and your beautiful reverence for the gods, your courage and heroism, in short, every thing that I love and honor in you, I shall give to the hero of my tale. How the children will listen! and when they cry, 'Oh, how we love the prince, how good and beautiful he must be! if we could only see him? then I shall press them close to my heart and kiss them as I kiss you now, and so they will have gained their wish, for as you are enthroned in my heart, you must be living within me and therefore near to them, and when they embrace me they will embrace you too."

"And I shall go to my little sister Atossa and tell her all I have seen on my journey, and when I speak of the Greeks, their grace, their glorious works of art, and their beautiful women, I shall describe the golden Aphrodite in your lovely likeness. I shall tell her of your virtue, your beauty and modesty, of your singing, which is so sweet that even the nightingale is silent in order to listen to it, of your love and tenderness. But all this I shall tell her belongs to the divine Cypris, and when she cries, 'O Aphrodite, could I but see thee!' I too shall kiss my sister."

"Hark, what was that? Melitta surely clapped her hands. Farewell, we must not stay! but we shall soon see each other again."

"One more kiss!"

"Farewell!"

Melitta had fallen asleep at her post, overcome by age and weariness. Her dreams were suddenly disturbed by a loud noise, and she clapped her hands directly to warn the lovers and call Sappho, as she perceived by the stars that the dawn was not far off.

As the two approached the house, they discovered that the noise which had awakened the old slave, proceeded from the guests, who were preparing for departure.

Urging her to make the greatest haste, Melitta pushed the frightened girl into the house, took her at once to her sleeping-room, and was beginning to undress her when Rhodopis entered.

"You are still up, Sappho?" she asked.

"What is this, my child?"

Melitta trembled and had a falsehood ready on her lips, but Sappho, throwing herself into her grandmother's arms, embraced her tenderly and told the whole story of her love.

Rhodopis turned pale, ordered Melitta to leave the chamber, and, placing herself in front of her grandchild, laid both hands on her shoulders and said earnestly, "Look into my eyes, Sappho. Canst thou look at me as happily and as innocently, as thou couldst before this Persian came to us?"

The girl raised her eyes at once with a joyful smile; then Rhodopis clasped her to her bosom, kissed her and continued: "Since thou wert a little child my constant effort has been to train thee to a noble maidenhood and guard thee from the approach of love. I had intended, in accordance with the customs of our country, to choose a fitting husband for thee shortly myself, to whose care I should have committed thee; but the gods willed differently.

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[The Spartans married for love, but the Athenians were accustomed to negotiate their marriages with the parents of the bride alone.]

Eros mocks all human efforts to resist or confine him; warm AEolian blood runs in thy veins and demands love; the passionate heart of thy Lesbian forefathers beats in thy breast.

[Charaxus, the grandfather of our heroine, and brother of the poetess Sappho, was, as a Lesbian, an AEolian Greek.]

What has happened cannot now be undone. Treasure these happy hours of a first, pure love; hold them fast in the chambers of memory, for to every human being there must come, sooner or later, a present so sad and desolate, that the beautiful past is all he has to live upon. Remember this handsome prince in silence, bid him farewell when he departs to his native country, but beware of hoping to see him again. The Persians are fickle and inconstant, lovers of everything new and foreign. The prince has been fascinated by thy sweetness and grace. He loves thee ardently now, but remember, he is young and handsome, courted by every one, and a Persian. Give him up that he may not abandon thee!"

"But how can I, grandmother? I have sworn to be faithful to him for ever."

"Oh, children! Ye play with eternity as if it were but a passing moment! I could blame thee for thus plighting thy troth, but I rejoice that thou regardest the oath as binding. I detest the blasphemous proverb: 'Zeus pays no heed to lovers' oaths.' Why should an oath touching the best and holiest feelings of humanity be regarded by the Deity, as inferior in importance to asseverations respecting the trifling questions of mine and thine? Keep thy promise then,—hold fast thy love, but prepare to renounce thy lover."

"Never, grandmother! could I ever have loved Bartja, if I had not trusted him? Just because he is a Persian and holds truth to be the highest virtue, I may venture to hope that he will remember his oath, and, notwithstanding those evil customs of the Asiatics, will take and keep me as his only wife."

"But if he should forget, thy youth will be passed in mourning, and with an embittered heart . . ."

"O, dear kind grandmother, pray do not speak of such dreadful things. If you knew him as well as I do, you would rejoice with me, and would tell me I was right to believe that the Nile may dry up and the Pyramids crumble into ruins, before my Bartja can ever deceive me!"

The girl spoke these words with such a joyful, perfect confidence, and her eyes, though filled with tears, were so brilliant with happiness and warmth of feeling, that Rhodopis' face grew cheerful too.

Sappho threw her arms again round her grandmother, told her every word that Bartja had said to her, and ended the long account by exclaiming: "Oh, grandmother, I am so happy, so very happy, and if you will come with us to Persia, I shall have nothing more to wish from the Immortals."

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"That will not last long," said Rhodopis. "The gods cast envious glances at the happiness of mortals; they measure our portion of evil with lavish hands, and give us but a scanty allowance of good. But now go to bed, my child, and let us pray together that all may end happily. I met thee this morning as a child, I part from thee to-night a woman; and, when thou art a wife, may thy kiss be as joyful as the one thou givest me now. To-morrow I will talk the matter over with Croesus. He must decide whether I dare allow thee to await the return of the Persian prince, or whether I must entreat thee to forget him and become the domestic wife of a Greek husband. Sleep well, my darling, thy grandmother will wake and watch for thee."

Sappho's happy fancies soon cradled her to sleep; but Rhodopis remained awake watching the day dawn, and the sun rise, her mind occupied with thoughts which brought smiles and frowns across her countenance in rapid succession.

The next morning she sent to Croesus, begging him to grant her an hour's interview, acquainted him with every particular she had heard from Sappho, and concluded her tale with these words: "I know not what demands may be made on the consort of a Persian king, but I can truly say that I believe Sappho to be worthy of the first monarch of the world. Her father was free and of noble birth, and I have heard that, by Persian law, the descent of a child is determined by the rank of the father only. In Egypt, too, the descendants of a female slave enjoy the same rights as those of a princess, if they owe their existence to the same father."

"I have listened to you in silence," answered Croesus, "and must confess, that, like yourself, I do not know in this moment whether to be glad or sorry for this attachment. Cambyses and Kassandane (the king's and Bartja's mother) wished to see the prince married before we left Persia, for the king has no children, and should he remain childless, the only hope for the family of Cyrus rests on Bartja, as the great founder of the Persian empire left but two sons,—Cambyses, and him who is now the suitor of your granddaughter. The latter is the hope and pride of the entire Persian nation, high and low; the darling of the people; generous, and noble, handsome, virtuous, and worthy of their love. It is indeed expected that the princes shall marry in their own family, the Achaemenidae; but the Persians have an unbounded predilection for everything foreign. Enchanted with the beauty of your granddaughter, and rendered indulgent by their partiality for Bartja, they would easily forgive this breach of an ancient custom. Indeed, if the king gives his approval, no objection on the part of his subjects can be entertained. The history of Iran too offers a sufficient number of examples, in which even slaves became the mothers of kings. The queen mother, whose position, in the eyes of the people, is nearly as high as that of the monarch himself, will do nothing to thwart

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the happiness of her youngest and favorite son. When she sees that he will not give up Sappho,—that his smiling face, in which she adores the image of her great husband Cyrus, becomes clouded, I verily believe she would be ready to sanction his taking even a Scythian woman to wife, if it could restore him to cheerfulness. Neither will Cambyses himself refuse his consent if his mother press the point at a right moment.”

“In that case every difficulty is set aside,” cried Rhodopis joyfully.

“It is not the marriage itself, but the time that must follow, which causes me uneasiness,” answered Croesus.

“Do you think then that Bartja . . . ?”

“From him I fear nothing. He has a pure heart, and has been so long proof against love, that now he has once yielded, he will love long and ardently.”

“What then do you fear?”

“You must remember that, though the charming wife of their favorite will be warmly received by all his friends of his own sex, there are thousands of idle women in the harems of the Persian nobles, who will endeavor, by every artifice and intrigue in their power, to injure the newly-risen star; and whose greatest joy it will be to ruin such an inexperienced child and make her unhappy.”

“You have a very bad opinion of the Persian women.”

“They are but women, and will naturally envy her, who has gained the husband they all desired either for themselves or for their daughters. In their monotonous life, devoid of occupation, envy easily becomes hatred, and the gratification of these evil passions is the only compensation which the poor creatures can obtain for the total absence of love and loss of freedom. I repeat, the more beautiful Sappho is, the more malicious they will feel towards her, and, even if Bartja should love her so fervently as not to take a second wife for two or three years, she will still have such heavy hours to encounter, that I really do not know whether I dare congratulate you on her apparently brilliant future.”

“That is quite my own feeling. A simple Greek would be more welcome to me than this son of a mighty monarch.”

In this moment Knakias brought Bartja into the room. He went to Rhodopis at once, besought her not to refuse him the hand of her granddaughter, spoke of his ardent love, and assured her that his happiness would be doubled, if she would consent to accompany them to Persia. Then turning to Croesus, he seized his hand and entreated

forgiveness for having so long concealed his great happiness from one who had been like a father to him, at the same time begging him to second his suit with Rhodopis.

The old man listened to the youth's passionate language with a smile, and said: "Ah, Bartja, how often have I warned thee against love! It is a scorching fire."

"But its flame is bright and beautiful."

"It causes pain."

"But such pain is sweet."

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"It leads the mind astray."

"But it strengthens the heart."

"Oh, this love!" cried Rhodopis. "Inspired by Eros, the boy speaks as if he had been all his life studying under an Attic orator!"

"And yet," answered Croesus, "these lovers are the most unteachable of pupils. Convince them as clearly as you will, that their passion is only another word for poison, fire, folly, death, they still cry, 'Tis sweet,' and will not be hindered in their course."

As he was speaking Sappho came in. A white festal robe, with wide sleeves, and borders of purple embroidery, fell in graceful folds round her delicate figure, and was confined at the waist by a golden girdle. Her hair was adorned with fresh roses, and on her bosom lay her lover's first gift, the flashing diamond star.

She came up modestly and gracefully, and made a low obeisance to the aged Croesus. His eyes rested long on the maidenly and lovely countenance, and the longer he gazed the kindlier became his gaze. For a moment he seemed to grow young again in the visions conjured up by memory, and involuntarily he went up to the young girl, kissed her affectionately on the forehead, and, taking her by the hand, led her to Bartja with the words: "Take her, thy wife she must be, if the entire race of the Achaemenidae were to conspire against us!"

"Have I no voice in the matter?" said Rhodopis, smiling through her tears.

On hearing these words, Bartja and Sappho each took one of her hands, and gazed entreatingly into her face. She rose to her full stature, and like a prophetess exclaimed: "Eros, who brought you to each other, Zeus and Apollo defend and protect you. I see you now like two fair roses on one stem, loving and happy in the spring of life. What summer, autumn and winter may have in store for you, lies hidden with the gods. May the shades of thy departed parents, Sappho, smile approvingly when these tidings of their child shall reach them in the nether world."

.....

Three days later a densely packed crowd was once more surging round the Sais landing-place. This time they had assembled to bid a last farewell to their king's daughter, and in this hour the people gave clear tokens that, in spite of all the efforts of the priestly caste, their hearts remained loyal to their monarch and his house. For when Amasis and Ladice embraced Nitetis for the last time with tears—when Tachot, in presence of all the inhabitants of Sais, following her sister down the broad flight of steps that led to the river, threw her arms round her neck once more and burst into sobs—

when at last the wind filled the sails of the royal boat and bore the princess, destined to be the great king's bride, from their sight, few eyes among that vast crowd remained dry.

The priests alone looked on at this sad scene with unmoved gravity and coldness; but when the south wind at last bore away the strangers who had robbed them of their princess, many a curse and execration followed from the Egyptians on the shore; Tachot alone stood weeping there and waving her veil to them. For whom were these tears? for the play-fellow of her youth, or for the handsome, beloved prince?

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Amasis embraced his wife and daughter in the eyes of all his people; and held up his little grandson, Prince Necho, to their gaze, the sight eliciting cries of joy on all sides. But Psamtik, the child's own father, stood by the while, tearless and motionless. The king appeared not to observe him, until Neithotep approached, and leading him to his father, joined their hands and called down the blessing of the gods upon the royal house.

At this the Egyptians fell on their knees with uplifted hands. Amasis clasped his son to his heart, and when the high-priest had concluded his prayer, the following colloquy between the latter and Amasis took place in low tones:

"Let peace be between us for our own and Egypt's sake!"

"Hast thou received Nebenchari's letter?"

"A Samian pirate-vessel is in pursuit of Phanes' trireme."

"Behold the child of thy predecessor Hophra, the rightful heiress of the Egyptian throne, departing unhindered to a distant land!"

"The works of the Greek temple now building in Memphis shall be discontinued."

"May Isis grant us peace, and may prosperity and happiness increase in our land!"

.....

The Greek colonists in Naukratis had prepared a feast to celebrate the departure of their protector's daughter.

Numerous animals had been slaughtered in sacrifice on the altars of the Greek divinities, and the Nile-boats were greeted with a loud cry of "Ailinos" on their arrival in the harbor.

A bridal wreath, composed of a hoop of gold wound round with scented violets, was presented to Nitetis by a troop of young girls in holiday dresses, the act of presentation being performed by Sappho, as the most beautiful among the maidens of Naukratis.

On accepting the gift Nitetis kissed her forehead in token of gratitude. The triremes were already waiting; she went on board, the rowers took their oars and began the Keleusma.

[The measure of the Keleusma was generally given by a flute-player, the Trieraules. AEschylus, Persians 403. Laert. Diog. IV. 22. In the Frogs of Aristophanes the

inhabitants of the marshes are made to sing the Keleusma, v. 205. The melody, to the measure of which the Greek boatmen usually timed their strokes.]

Ailinos rang across the water from a thousand voices. Bartja stood on the deck, and waved a last loving farewell to his betrothed; while Sappho prayed in silence to Aphrodite Euploia, the protectress of those who go down to the sea in ships. A tear rolled down her cheek, but around her lips played a smile of love and hope, though her old slave Melitta, who accompanied her to carry her parasol, was weeping as if her heart would break. On seeing, however, a few leaves fall from her darling's wreath, she forgot her tears for a moment and whispered softly: "Yes, dear heart, it is easy to see that you are in love; when the leaves fall from a maiden's wreath, 'tis a sure sign that her heart has been touched by Eros.

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CHAPTER XII.

Seven weeks after Nitetis had quitted her native country, a long train of equipages and horsemen was to be seen on the king's highway from the west to Babylon, moving steadily towards that gigantic city, whose towers might already be descried in the far distance.

[The great road called the "king's road," of which we shall have more to say, was made by Cyrus and carefully kept up by Darius.]

The principal object in this caravan was a richly-gilded, four-wheeled carriage, closed in at the sides by curtains, and above by a roof supported on wooden pillars. In this vehicle, called the Harmamaxa, resting on rich cushions of gold brocade, sat our Egyptian Princess.

[Harmamaxa—An Asiatic travelling carriage. The first mention of these is in Xenophon's Anabasis, where we find a queen travelling in such a vehicle. They were later adopted by the Romans and used for the same object.]

On either side rode her escort, viz.: the Persian princes and nobles whom we have already learnt to know during their visit to Egypt, Croesus and his son.

Behind these, a long train, consisting of fifty vehicles of different kinds and six hundred beasts of burden, stretched away into the distance, and the royal carriage was preceded by a troop of splendidly-mounted Persian cavalry.

The high-road followed the course of the Euphrates, passing through luxuriant fields of wheat, barley and sesame yielding fruit two, and sometimes even three, hundred-fold. Slender date-palms covered with golden fruit were scattered in every direction over the fields, which were thoroughly irrigated by means of canals and ditches.

It was winter, but the sun shone warm and bright from a cloudless sky. The mighty river swarmed with craft of all sizes, either transporting the products of Upper Armenia to the plains of Mesopotamia, or the wares of Greece and Asia Minor from Thapsakus to Babylon.

[Thapsakus—An important commercial town on the Euphrates, and the point of observation from which Eratosthenes took his measurements of the earth.]

Pumps and water-wheels poured refreshing streams over the thirsty land, and pretty villages ornamented the shores of the river. Indeed every object gave evidence that our caravan was approaching the metropolis of a carefully governed and civilized state.

Nitetis and her retinue now halted at a long brick house, roofed with asphalt, and surrounded by a grove of plane-trees.

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[Asphalte—Nearly all authorities, ancient as well as modern, report that bitumen, which is still plentifully found in the neighborhood of Babylon, was used by the Babylonians as mortar. See, besides the accounts of ancient writers, W. Vaux, 'Nineveh and Persepolis'. Burnt bitumen was used by Assyrians for cement in building.]

Here Croesus was lifted from his horse, and approaching the carriage, exclaimed: "Here we are at length at the last station! That high tower which you see on the horizon is the celebrated temple of Bel, next to the Pyramids, one of the most gigantic works ever constructed by human hands. Before sunset we shall have reached the brazen gates of Babylon. And now I would ask you to alight, and let me send your maidens into the house; for here you must put on Persian apparel, to appear well-pleasing in the eyes of Cambyses. In a few hours you will stand before your future husband. But you are pale! Permit your maidens to adorn your cheeks with a color that shall look like the excitement of joy. A first impression is often a final one, and this is especially true with regard to Cambyses. If, which I doubt not, you are pleasing in his eyes at first, then you have won his love for ever; but if you should displease him to-day he will never look kindly on you again, for he is rough and harsh. But take courage, my daughter, and above all, do not forget the advice I have given you." Nitetis dried her tears as she answered: "How can I ever thank you, O Croesus, my second father, my protector and adviser, for all your goodness? Oh, forsake me not in the days to come! and if the path of my life should lead through grief and care, be near to help and guide me as you did on the mountain-passes of this long and dangerous journey. A thousand times I thank thee, O my father!"

And, as she said these words, the young girl threw her arms around the old man's neck and kissed him tenderly.

On entering the court-yard, a tall stout man, followed by a train of Asiatic serving-maidens, came forward to meet them. This was Boges, the chief of the eunuchs, an important official at the Persian court. His beardless face wore a smile of fulsome sweetness; in his ears hung costly jewelled pendants; his neck, arms, legs and his effeminately long garments glittered all over with gold chains and rings, and his crisp, stiff curls, bound round by a purple fillet, streamed with powerful and penetrating perfumes.

Making a low and reverential obeisance before Nitetis, and holding, the while, his fat hands overloaded with rings before his mouth, he thus addressed her: "Cambyses, lord of the world, hath sent me to thee, O Queen, that I may refresh thy heart with the dew of his salutations. He sendeth thee likewise by me, even by me the lowest of his servants, Persian raiment, that thou, as becometh the consort of the mightiest of all rulers, mayest approach the gates of the Achaemenidae in Median garments. These women whom thou seest are thy handmaidens, and only await thy bidding to transform thee from an Egyptian jewel into a Persian pearl."

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The master of the caravansary then appeared, bearing, in token of welcome, a basket of fruits arranged with great taste.

Nitetis returned her thanks to both these men in kind and friendly words; then entering the house laid aside the dress and ornaments of her native land, weeping as she did so, allowed the strangers to unloose the plait of hair which hung down at the left side of her head, and was the distinctive mark of an Egyptian princess, and to array her in Median garments.

[In almost all the Egyptian pictures, the daughters and sons of the Pharaohs are represented with these locks of hair, plaited and reaching from the forehead to the neck. Rosellini, Mon. stor. II. 123. Lepsius, Denkmaler. The daughter of Rameses II. is drawn thus, and we have examples of the same in many other pictures.]

In the meantime, a repast had been commanded by the princes who accompanied her. Eager and agile attendants rushed to the baggage-waggons, fetching thence, in a few moments, seats, tables, and golden utensils of all kinds. The cooks vied with them and with each other, and as if by magic, in a short space of time a richly-adorned banquet for the hungry guests appeared, at which even the flowers were not wanting.

During the entire journey our travellers had lived in a similar luxury, as their beasts of burden carried every imaginable convenience, from tents of water-proof materials inwrought with gold, down to silver foot-stools; and in the vehicles which composed their train were not only bakers, cooks, cup-bearers and carvers, but perfumers, hair-dressers and weavers of garlands. Beside these conveniences, a well-fitted up caravansary, or inn, was to be found about every eighteen miles along the whole route, where disabled horses could be replaced, the plantations around which afforded a refreshing shelter from the noonday heat, or their hearths a refuge from the snow and cold on the mountain-passes.

The kingdom of Persia was indebted for these inns (similar to the post-stations of modern days) to Cyrus, who had endeavored to connect the widely-distant provinces of his immense dominions by a system of well-kept roads, and a regular postal service. At each of these stations the horseman carrying the letter-bag was relieved by a fresh man on a fresh steed, to whom the letters were transferred, and who, in his turn, darted off like the wind, to be again replaced at a similar distance by another rider. These couriers, called Angari, were considered the swiftest horsemen in the world.

[Herodotus V. 14. 49-52. Persian milestones are still to be found among the ruins of the old king's road, which led from Nineveh to Ecbatana. The Kurds call them keli-Shin (blue pillars).]

Just as the banqueters, amongst whom Bogen had taken his seat, were rising from table, the door opened, and a vision appeared, which drew prolonged exclamation of

surprise from all the Persians present. Nitetis, clad in the glorious apparel of a Median princess, proud in the consciousness of her triumphant beauty, and yet blushing like a young girl at the wondering admiration of her friends, stood before them.

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The attendants involuntarily fell on their faces before her, according to the custom of the Asiatics, and the noble Achaemenidae bowed low and reverentially; for it seemed as if Nitetis has laid aside all her former bashfulness and timidity with her simple Egyptian dress, and with the splendid silken garments of a Persian princess, flashing as they were with gold and jewels, had clothed herself in the majesty of a queen.

The deep reverence paid by all present seemed agreeable to her, and thanking her admiring friends by a gracious wave of the hand, she turned to the chief of the eunuchs and said in a kind tone but mingled with a touch of pride; "Thou hast performed thy mission well; I am content with the raiment and the slaves that thou hast provided and shall commend thy circumspection to the king, my husband. Receive this gold chain in the meanwhile, as a token of my gratitude."

The eunuch kissed the hem of her garment, and accepted the gift in silence. This man, hitherto omnipotent in his office, had never before encountered such pride in any of the women committed to his charge. Up to the present time all Cambyses' wives had been Asiatics, and, well aware of the unlimited power of the chief of the eunuchs, had used every means within their reach to secure his favor by flattery and submission.

Boges now made a second obeisance before Nitetis, of which, however, she took no notice, and turning to Croesus said: "Neither words nor gifts could ever suffice to express my gratitude to you, kindest of friends, for, if my future life at the court of Persia prove, I will not venture to say a happy, but even a peaceful one, it is to you alone that I shall owe it. Still, take this ring. It has never left my finger since I quitted Egypt, and it has a significance far beyond its outward worth. Pythagoras, the noblest of the Greeks, gave it to my mother, when he was tarrying in Egypt to learn the wisdom of our priests, and it was her parting gift to me. The number seven is engraved upon the simple stone. This indivisible number represents perfect health, both to soul and body for health is likewise one and indivisible.

[Seven, the "motherless" number, which has no factor below ten.]

The sickness of one member is the sickness of all; one evil thought, allowed to take up its abode within our heart, destroys the entire harmony of the soul. When you see this seven therefore, let it recall my heart's wish that you may ever enjoy undisturbed bodily health, and long retain that loving gentleness which has made you the most virtuous, and therefore the healthiest of men. No thanks, my father, for even if I could restore to Croesus all the treasures that he once possessed, I should still retrain his debtor. Gyges, to you I give this Lydian lyre; let its tones recall the giver to your memory. For you, Zopyrus, I have a golden chain; I have witnessed that you are the most faithful of friends; and we Egyptians are accustomed to place cords and bands in the hands of our lovely Hathor, the goddess of love and friendship, as symbols of her captivating and enchaining attributes. As Darius has studied the wisdom of Egypt and the signs of the

starry heavens, I beg him to take this circlet of gold, on which a skilful hand has traced the signs of the Zodiac.

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[Diodorus (l. 49.) tells, that in the tomb of Osymandyas (palace of Rameses II. at Thebes) there lay a circle of gold, one ell thick and 365 ells in circumference, containing a complete astronomical calendar. The circle of the zodiac from Dendera, which is now in Paris,—an astronomical ceiling painting, which was believed at the time of its discovery to be of great age, is not nearly so ancient as was supposed, dating only from the end of the Ptolemaic dynasty. Letronne was the first to estimate it correctly. See Lepsius, Chron. p.63. and Lauth, 'les zodiaques de Dendera'. Munich 1865.]

And lastly, to my dear brother-in-law Bartja I commit the most precious jewel in my possession—this amulet of blue stone. My sister Tachot hung it round my neck as I kissed her on the last night before we parted; she told me it could bring to its wearer the sweet bliss of love. And then, Bartja, she wept! I do not know of whom she was thinking in that moment, but I hope I am acting according to her wishes in giving you her precious jewel. Take it as a gift from Tachot, and sometimes call to mind our games in the Sais gardens.”

Thus far she had been speaking Greek, but now, addressing the attendants who remained standing in an attitude of deep reverence, she began in broken Persian: “Accept my thanks also. In Babylon you shall receive a thousand gold staters.” Then turning to Boges, she added: “Let this sum be distributed among the attendants at latest by the day after to-morrow. Take me to my carriage, Croesus.”

The old king hastened to do her bidding, and as he was leading her thither she pressed his arm and whispered gently, “Are you pleased with me, my father?”

“I tell you, girl,” the old man answered, “that no one but the king’s mother can ever be your equal at this court, for a true and queenly pride reigns on your brow, and you have the power of using small means to effect great ends. Believe me, the smallest gift, chosen and bestowed as you can choose and bestow, gives more pleasure to a noble mind than heaps of treasure merely cast down at his feet. The Persians are accustomed to present and receive costly gifts. They understand already how to enrich their friends, but you can teach them to impart a joy with every gift. How beautiful you are to-day! Are your cushions to your mind, or would you like a higher seat? But what is that? There are clouds of dust in the direction of the city. Cambyses is surely coming to meet you! Courage, my daughter. Above all try to meet his gaze and respond to it. Very few can bear the lightning glance of those eyes, but, if you can return it freely and fearlessly, you have conquered. Fear nothing, my child, and may Aphrodite adorn you with her most glorious beauty! My friends, we must start, I think the king himself is coming.” Nitetis sat erect in her splendid, gilded carriage; her hands were pressed on her throbbing heart. The clouds of dust came nearer and nearer, her eye caught the flash of weapons like lightning across a stormy sky. The clouds parted, she could see single figures for a moment, but soon lost them as the road wound behind some thickets and shrubs. Suddenly the troop of horsemen appeared in full gallop only a hundred paces before her, and distinctly visible.

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Her first impression was of a motley mass of steeds and men, glittering in purple, gold, silver and jewels. It consisted in reality of a troop of more than two hundred horsemen mounted on pure white Nicaean horses, whose bridles and saddle-cloths were covered with bells and bosses, feathers, fringes, and embroidery. Their leader rode a powerful coal-black charger, which even the strong will and hand of his rider could not always curb, though in the end his enormous strength proved him the man to tame even this fiery animal. This rider, beneath whose weight the powerful steed trembled and panted, wore a vesture of scarlet and white, thickly embroidered with eagles and falcons in silver.

[Curtius III. 3. Xenoph. Cyrap, VIII. 3. 7. Aeschylus, Persians 835. 836. The king's dress and ornaments were worth 12,000 talents, or L2,250,000 (estimate of 1880) according to Plutarch, Artaxerxes 24.]

The lower part of his dress was purple, and his boots of yellow leather. He wore a golden girdle; in this hung a short dagger-like sword, the hilt and scabbard of which were thickly studded with jewels. The remaining ornaments of his dress resembled those we have described as worn by Bartja, and the blue and white fillet of the Achaemenidae was bound around the tiara, which surmounted a mass of thick curls, black as ebony. The lower part of his face was concealed by an immense beard. His features were pale and immovable, but the eyes, (more intensely black, if possible, than either hair or beard), glowed with a fire that was rather scorching than warming. A deep, fiery-red scar, given by the sword of a Massagetan warrior, crossed his high forehead, arched nose and thin upper lip. His whole demeanor expressed great power and unbounded pride.

Nitetis' gaze was at once riveted by this man. She had never seen any one like him before, and he exercised a strange fascination over her. The expression of indomitable pride, worn by his features, seemed to her to represent a manly nature which the whole world, but she herself above all others, was created to serve. She felt afraid, and yet her true woman's heart longed to lean upon his strength as the vine upon the elm. She could not be quite sure whether she had thus pictured to herself the father of all evil, the fearful Seth, or the great god Ammon, the giver of light.

The deepest pallor and the brightest color flitted by turns across her lovely face, like the light and shadow when clouds pass swiftly over a sunny noonday sky. She had quite forgotten the advice of her fatherly old friend, and yet, when Cambyses brought his unruly, chafing steed to a stand by the side of her carriage, she gazed breathless into the fiery eyes of this man and felt at once that he was the king, though no one had told her so.

The stern face of this ruler of half the known world relaxed, as Nitetis, moved by an unaccountable impulse, continued to bear his piercing gaze. At last he waved his hand to her in token of welcome, and then rode on to her escort, who had alighted from their

horses and were awaiting him, some having cast themselves down in the dust, and others, after the Persian manner, standing in an attitude of deep reverence, their hands concealed in the wide sleeves of their robes.

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He sprang from his horse, an example which was followed at once by his entire suite. The attendants, with the speed of thought, spread a rich purple carpet on the highway, lest the foot of the king should come in contact with the dust of the earth, and then Cambyses proceeded to salute his friends and relations by offering them his mouth to kiss.

He shook Croesus by the right hand, commanding him to remount and accompany him to the carriage, as interpreter between himself and Nitetis.

In an instant his highest office-bearers were at hand to lift the king once more on to his horse, and at a single nod from their lord, the train was again in motion.

Cambyses and Croesus rode by the side of the carriage.

"She is beautiful, and pleases me well," began the king. "Interpret faithfully all her answers, for I understand only the Persian, Assyrian and Median tongues."

Nitetis caught and understood these words. A feeling of intense joy stole into her heart, and before Croesus could answer, she began softly in broken Persian and blushing deeply: "Blessed be the gods, who have caused me to find favor in thine eyes. I am not ignorant of the speech of my lord, for the noble Croesus has instructed me in the Persian language during our long journey. Forgive, if my sentences be broken and imperfect; the time was short, and my capacity only that of a poor and simple maiden."

[Diodorus tells us that Themistocles learnt the Persian language during the journey to Susa. We are not, therefore, requiring an impossibility of Nitetis.]

A smile passed over the usually serious mouth of Cambyses. His vanity was flattered by Nitetis' desire to win his approbation, and, accustomed as he was to see women grow up in idleness and ignorance, thinking of nothing but finery and intrigue, her persevering industry seemed to him both wonderful and praise worthy. So he answered with evident satisfaction: "I rejoice that we can speak without an interpreter. Persevere in learning the beautiful language of my forefathers. Croesus, who sits at my table, shall still remain your instructor."

"Your command confers happiness!" exclaimed the old man. "No more eager or thankful pupil could be found, than the daughter of Amasis."

"She justifies the ancient report of the wisdom of Egypt," answered the king, "and I can believe that she will quickly understand and receive into her soul the religious instructions of our Magi."

Nitetis dropped her earnest gaze. Her fears were being realized. She would be compelled to serve strange gods.

But her emotion passed unnoticed by Cambyzes, who went on speaking: "My mother Kassandane will tell you the duties expected from my wives. To-morrow I myself will lead you to her. The words, which you innocently chanced to hear, I now repeat; you please me well. Do nothing to alienate my affection. We will try to make our country agreeable, and, as your friend, I counsel you to treat Boges whom I sent as my forerunner, in a kind and friendly manner. As head over the house of the women, you will have to conform to his will in many things."

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"Though he be head over the house of the women," answered Nitetis, "surely your wife is bound to obey no other earthly will than yours. Your slightest look shall be for me a command; but remember that I am a king's daughter, that in my native land the weaker and the stronger sex have equal rights, and that the same pride reigns in my breast, which I see kindling in your eyes, my lord and king! My obedience to you, my husband and my ruler, shall be that of a slave, but I can never stoop to sue for the favor, or obey the orders of a venal servant, the most unmanly of his kind!"

Cambyses' wonder and satisfaction increased. He had never heard any woman speak in this way before, except his mother; the clever way in which Nitetis acknowledged, and laid stress on, his right to command her every act, was very flattering to his self-love, and her pride found an echo in his own haughty disposition. He nodded approvingly and answered: "You have spoken well. A separate dwelling shall be appointed you. I, and no one else, will prescribe your rules of life and conduct. This day the pleasant palace on the hanging-gardens shall be prepared for your reception."

"A thousand, thousand thanks," cried Nitetis. "You little know the blessing you are bestowing in this permission. Again and again I have begged your brother Bartja to repeat the story of these gardens, and the love of the king who raised that verdant and blooming hill, pleased us better than all the other glories of your vast domains."

"To-morrow," answered the king, "you can enter your new abode. But tell me now how my messengers pleased you and your countrymen."

"How can you ask? Who could know the noble Croesus without loving him? Who could fail to admire the beauty of the young heroes, your friends? They have all become dear to us, but your handsome brother Bartja especially, won all hearts. The Egyptians have no love for strangers, and yet the gaping crowd would burst into a murmur of admiration, when his beautiful face appeared among them."

At these words the king's brow darkened; he struck his horse so sharply that the creature reared, and then turning it quickly round he galloped to the front and soon reached the walls of Babylon.

.....

Though Nitetis had been brought up among the huge temples and palaces of Egypt, she was still astonished at the size and grandeur of this gigantic city.

Its walls seemed impregnable; they measured more than seventy-five feet —[Fifty ells. The Greek ell is equal to one foot and a half English.]— in height and their breadth was so great, that two chariots could conveniently drive abreast upon them. These mighty

defences were crowned and strengthened by two hundred and fifty high towers, and even these would have been insufficient, if Babylon had not been protected on one side by impassable morasses. The gigantic city lay on both shores of the Euphrates. It was more than forty miles in circumference, and its walls enclosed buildings surpassing in size and grandeur even the Pyramids and the temples of Thebes.

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[These numbers and measurements are taken partly from Herodotus, partly from Diodorus, Strabo and Arrian. And even the ruins of this giant city, writes Lavard, are such as to allow a very fair conclusion of its enormous size. Aristotle (Polit. III. I.) says Babylon's dimensions were not those of a city, but of a nation.]

The mighty gates of brass, through which the royal train entered the city, had opened wide to receive this noble company. This entrance was defended on each side by a strong tower, and before each of these towers lay, as warder, a gigantic winged bull carved in stone, with a human head, bearded and solemn. Nitetis gazed at these gates in astonishment, and then a joyful smile lighted up her face, as she looked up the long broad street so brightly and beautifully decorated to welcome her.

The moment they beheld the king and the gilded carriage, the multitude burst into loud shouts of joy, but when Bartja, the people's darling, came in sight, the shouts rose to thunder-peals and shrieks of delight, which seemed as if they would never end. It was long since the populace had seen Cambyzes, for in accordance with Median customs the king seldom appeared in public. Like the Deity, he was to govern invisibly, and his occasional appearance before the nation to be looked upon as a festival and occasion of rejoicing. Thus all Babylon had come out to-day to look upon their awful ruler and to welcome their favorite Bartja on his return. The windows were crowded with eager, curious women, who threw flowers before the approaching train, or poured sweet perfumes from above as they passed by. The pavement was thickly strewn with myrtle and palm branches, trees of different kinds had been placed before the house-doors, carpets and gay cloths hung from the windows, garlands of flowers were wreathed from house to house, fragrant odors of incense and sandal-wood perfumed the air, and the way was lined with thousands of gaping Babylonians dressed in white linen shirts, gaily-colored woollen petticoats and short cloaks, and carrying long staves headed with pomegranates, birds, or roses, of gold or silver.

The streets through which the procession moved were broad and straight, the houses on either side, built of brick, tall and handsome. Towering above every thing else, and visible from all points, rose the gigantic temple of Bel. Its colossal staircase, like a huge serpent, wound round and round the ever-diminishing series of stories composing the tower, until it reached the summit crowned by the sanctuary itself.

[This temple of Bel, which many consider may have been the tower of Babel of Genesis XI., is mentioned by Herodotus I. 181. 182. 183. Diodorus II. 8. 9. (Ktesias), Strabo 738 and many other ancient writers. The people living in its neighborhood now call the ruins Birs Nimrod, the castle of Nimrod. In the text we have reconstructed it as far as possible from

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the accounts of classical writers. The first story, which is still standing, in the midst of a heap of ruins, is 260 feet high. The walls surrounding the tower are said to be still clearly recognizable, and were 4000 feet long and 3000 broad.]

The procession approached the royal palace. This corresponded in its enormous size to the rest of the vast city. The walls surrounding it were covered with gaily-colored and glazed representations of strange figures made up of human beings, birds, quadrupeds and fishes; hunting-scenes, battles and solemn processions. By the side of the river towards the north, rose the hanging-gardens, and the smaller palace lay toward the east on the other bank of the Euphrates, connected with the larger one by the wondrous erection, a firm bridge of stone.

Our train passed on through the brazen gates of three of the walls surrounding the palace, and then halted. Nitetis was lifted from her carriage by bearers; she was at last in her new home, and soon after in the apartments of the women's house assigned to her temporary use.

Cambyzes, Bartja and their friends already known to us, were still standing in the gaily-carpeted court of the palace, surrounded by at least a hundred splendid dignitaries in magnificent dresses, when suddenly a sound of loud female voices was heard, and a lovely Persian girl richly dressed, her thick fair hair profusely wreathed with pearls, rushed into the court, pursued by several women older than herself. She ran up to the group of men; Cambyzes with a smile placed himself in her path, but the impetuous girl slipped adroitly past him, and in another moment was hanging on Bartja's neck, crying and laughing by turns.

The attendants in pursuit prostrated themselves at a respectful distance, but Cambyzes, on seeing the caresses lavished by the young girl on her newly-returned brother, cried: "For shame, Atossa! remember that since you began to wear ear-rings you have ceased to be a child!

[Ear-rings were given to the Persian girls in their fifteenth year, the marriageable age. Vendid. Farlard XIV. 66. At this age too boys as well as girls were obliged to wear the sacred cord, Kuctl or Kosti as a girdle; and were only allowed to unloose it in the night. The making of this cord is attended with many ceremonies, even among the Persians of our own day. Seventy-two threads must be employed, but black wool is prohibited.]

It is right that you should rejoice to see your brother again, but a king's daughter must never forget what is due to her rank, even in her greatest joy. Go back to your mother directly. I see your attendants waiting yonder. Go and tell them, that as this is a day of rejoicing I will allow your heedless conduct to pass unpunished, but the next time you appear unbidden in these apartments, which none may enter without permission, I shall tell Boges to keep you twelve days in confinement. Remember

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this, thoughtless child, and tell our mother, Bartja and I are coming to visit her. Now give me a kiss. You will not? We shall see, capricious little one!" And so saying the king sprang towards his refractory little sister, and seizing both her hands in one of his own, bent back her charming head with the other and kissed her in spite of her resistance. She screamed from the violence of his grasp, and ran away crying to her attendants, who took her back to her apartments.

When Atossa had disappeared, Bartja said; "You were too rough with the little one, Cambyses. She screamed with pain!"

Once more the king's face clouded, but suppressing the harsh words which trembled on his lips, he only answered, turning towards the house: "Let us come to our mother now; she begged me to bring you as soon as you arrived. The women, as usual, are all impatience. Nitetis told me your rosy cheeks and fair curls had bewitched the Egyptian women too. I would advise you to pray betimes to Mithras for eternal youth, and for his protection against the wrinkles of age!"

"Do you mean to imply by these words that I have no virtues which could make an old age beautiful?" asked Bartja.

"I explain my words to no one. Come."

"But I ask for an opportunity of proving, that I am inferior to none of my nation in manly qualities."

"For that matter, the shouts of the Babylonians today will have been proof enough, that deeds are not wanted from you, in order to win their admiration."

"Cambyses!"

"Now come! We are just on the eve of a war with the Massagetae; there you will have a good opportunity of proving what you are worth."

A few minutes later, and Bartja was in the arms of his blind mother. She had been waiting for her darling's arrival with a beating heart, and in the joy of hearing his voice once more, and of being able to lay her hands again on that beloved head, she forgot everything else—even her first-born son who stood by smiling bitterly, as he watched the rich and boundless stream of a mother's love flowing out to his younger brother.

Cambyses had been spoiled from his earliest infancy. Every wish had been fulfilled, every look regarded as a command; and thus he grew up totally unable to brook contradiction, giving way to the most violent anger if any of his subjects (and he knew no human beings who were not his subjects) dared to oppose him.

His father Cyrus, conqueror of half the world—the man whose genius had raised Persia from a small nation to the summit of earthly greatness—who had secured for himself the reverence and admiration of countless subjugated tribes—this great king was incapable of carrying out in his own small family-circle the system of education he had so successfully adopted towards entire countries. He could see nought else in Cambyses but the future king of Persia, and commanded his subjects to pay him an unquestioning obedience, entirely forgetful of the fact that he who is to govern well must begin by learning to obey.

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Cambyses had been the first-born son of Kassandane, the wife whom Cyrus had loved and married young; three daughters followed, and at last, fifteen years later, Bartja had come into the world. Their eldest son had already outgrown his parents' caresses, when this little child appeared to engross all their care and love. His gentle, affectionate and clinging nature made him the darling of both father and mother: Cambyses was treated with consideration by his parents, but their love was for Bartja. Cambyses was brave; he distinguished himself often in the field, but his disposition was haughty and imperious; men served him with fear and trembling, while Bartja, ever sociable and sympathizing, converted all his companions into loving friends. As to the mass of the people, they feared the king, and trembled when he drew near, notwithstanding the lavish manner in which he showered rich gifts around him; but they loved Bartja, and believed they saw in him the image of the great Cyrus the "Father of his people."

Cambyses knew well that all this love, so freely given to Bartja, was not to be bought. He did not hate his younger brother, but he felt annoyed that a youth who had as yet done nothing to distinguish himself, should be honored and revered as if he were already a hero and public benefactor. Whatever annoyed or displeased him he considered must be wrong; where he disapproved he did not spare his censures, and from his very childhood, Cambyses' reproofs had been dreaded even by the mighty.

The enthusiastic shouts of the populace, the overflowing love of his mother and sister, and above all, the warm encomiums expressed by Nitetis, had excited a jealousy which his pride had never allowed hitherto. Nitetis had taken his fancy in a remarkable degree. This daughter of a powerful monarch, like himself disdaining everything mean and inferior, had yet acknowledged him to be her superior, and to win his favor had not shrunk from the laborious task of mastering his native language. These qualities, added to her peculiar style of beauty, which excited his admiration from its rare novelty, half Egyptian half Greek, (her mother having been a Greek), had not failed to make a deep impression on him. But she had been liberal in her praise of Bartja; that was enough to disturb Cambyses' mind and prepare the way for jealousy.

As he and his brother were leaving the women's apartments, Cambyses adopted a hasty resolution and exclaimed: "You asked me just now for an opportunity of proving your courage. I will not refuse. The Tapuri have risen; I have sent troops to the frontier. Go to Rhagae, take the command and show what you are worth."

"Thanks, brother," cried Bartja. "May I take my friends, Darius, Gyges and Zopyrus with me?"

"That favor shall be granted too. I hope you will all do your duty bravely and promptly, that you may be back in three months to join the main army in the expedition of revenge on the Massagetae. It will take place in spring."

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"I will start to-morrow."

"Then farewell."

"If Auramazda should spare my life and I should return victorious, will you promise to grant me one favor?"

"Yes, I will."

"Now, then, I feel confident of victory, even if I should have to stand with a thousand men against ten thousand of the enemy." Bartja's eyes sparkled, he was thinking of Sappho.

"Well," answered his brother, "I shall be very glad if your actions bear out these glowing words. But stop; I have something more to say. You are now twenty years of age; you must marry. Roxana, daughter of the noble Hydarnes, is marriageable, and is said to be beautiful. Her birth makes her a fitting bride for you."

"Oh! brother, do not speak of marriage; I . . ." "You must marry, for I have no children."

"But you are still young; you will not remain childless. Besides, I do not say that I will never marry. Do not be angry, but just now, when I am to prove my courage, I would rather hear nothing about women."

"Well, then, you must marry Roxana when you return from the North. But I should advise you to take her with you to the field. A Persian generally fights better if he knows that, beside his most precious treasures, he has a beautiful woman in his tent to defend."

"Spare me this one command, my brother. I conjure thee, by the soul of our father, not to inflict on me a wife of whom I know nothing, and never wish to know. Give Roxana to Zopyrus, who is so fond of women, or to Darius or Bessus, who are related to her father Hydarnes. I cannot love her, and should be miserable . . ."

Cambyzes interrupted him with a laugh, exclaiming: "Did you learn these notions in Egypt, where it is the custom to be contented with one wife? In truth, I have long repented having sent a boy like you abroad. I am not accustomed to bear contradiction, and shall listen to no excuses after the war. This once I will allow you to go to the field without a wife. I will not force you to do what, in your opinion, might endanger your valor. But it seems to me that you have other and more secret reasons for refusing my brotherly proposal. If that is the case, I am sorry for you. However, for the present, you can depart, but after the war I will hear no remonstrances. You know me."

“Perhaps after the war I may ask for the very thing, which I am refusing now—but never for Roxana! It is just as unwise to try to make a man happy by force as it is wicked to compel him to be unhappy, and I thank you for granting my request.”

“Don’t try my powers of yielding too often!—How happy you look! I really believe you are in love with some one woman by whose side all the others have lost their charms.”

Bartja blushed to his temples, and seizing his brother’s hand, exclaimed: “Ask no further now, accept my thanks once more, and farewell. May I bid Nitetis farewell too, when I have taken leave of our mother and Atossa?”

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Cambyses bit his lip, looked searchingly into Bartja's face, and finding that the boy grew uneasy under his glance, exclaimed abruptly and angrily: "Your first business is to hasten to the Tapuri. My wife needs your care no longer; she has other protectors now." So saying he turned his back on his brother and passed on into the great hall, blazing with gold, purple and jewels, where the chiefs of the army, satraps, judges, treasurers, secretaries, counsellors, eunuchs, door-keepers, introducers of strangers, chamberlains, keepers of the wardrobe, dressers, cup-bearers, equerries, masters of the chase, physicians, eyes and ears of the king, ambassadors and plenipotentiaries of all descriptions—were in waiting for him.

[The "eyes and ears" of the king may be compared to our police- ministers. Darius may have borrowed the name from Egypt, where such titles as "the 2 eyes of the king for Upper Egypt, the 2 ears of the king for Lower Egypt" are to be found on the earlier monuments, for instance in the tomb of Amen en, heb at Abd el Qurnah. And in Herodotus II. 114. the boy Cyrus calls one of his playfellows "the eye of the king," Herod. (I, 100.)]

The king was preceded by heralds bearing staves, and followed by a host of fan, sedan and footstool-bearers, men carrying carpets, and secretaries who the moment he uttered a command, or even indicated a concession, a punishment or a reward, hastened to note it down and at once hand it over to the officials empowered to execute his decrees.

In the middle of the brilliantly-lighted hall stood a gilded table, which looked as if it must give way beneath the mass of gold and silver vessels, plates, cups and bowls which were arranged with great order upon it. The king's private table, the service on which was of immense worth and beauty, was placed in an apartment opening out of the large hall, and separated from it by purple hangings. These concealed him from the gaze of the revellers, but did not prevent their every movement from being watched by his eye. It was an object of the highest ambition to be one of those who ate at the king's table, and even he to whom a portion was sent might deem himself a highly-favored man.

As Cambyses entered the hall, nearly every one present prostrated themselves before him; his relations alone, distinguished by the blue and white fillet on the tiara, contented themselves with a deferential obeisance.

After the king had seated himself in his private apartment, the rest of the company took their places, and then a tremendous revel began. Animals, roasted whole, were placed on the table, and, when hunger was appeased, several courses of the rarest delicacies followed, celebrated in later times even among the Greeks under the name of "Persian dessert."

[Herodotus (I. 133.) writes that the Persians fancied the Greeks' hunger was never satisfied, because nothing special was brought to the table at the end of the meal.]

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Slaves then entered to remove the remains of the food. Others brought in immense jugs of wine, the king left his own apartment, took his seat at the head of the table, numerous cup-bearers filled the golden drinking-cups in the most graceful manner, first tasting the wine to prove that it was free from poison, and soon one of those drinking-bouts had begun under the best auspices, at which, a century or two later, Alexander the Great, forgot not only moderation but even friendship itself.

Cambyses was unwontedly silent. The suspicion had entered his mind, that Bartja loved Nitetis. Why had he, contrary to all custom, so decidedly refused to marry a noble and beautiful girl, when his brother's childlessness rendered marriage an evident and urgent duty for him? Why had he wished to see the Egyptian princess again before leaving Babylon? and blushed as he expressed that wish? and why had she, almost without being asked, praised him so warmly?

It is well that he is going, thought the king; at least he shall not rob me of her love. If he were not my brother I would send him to a place from whence none can return.

After midnight he broke up the banquet. Boges appeared to conduct him to the Harem, which he was accustomed to visit at this hour, when sufficiently sober.

"Phaedime awaits you with impatience," said the eunuch.

"Let her wait!" was the king's answer. "Have you given orders that the palace on the hanging-gardens shall be set in order?"

"It will be ready for occupation to-morrow."

"What apartments have been assigned to the Egyptian Princess?"

"Those formerly occupied by the second wife of your father Cyrus, the deceased Amytis."

"That is well. Nitetis is to be treated with the greatest respect, and to receive no commands even from yourself, but such as I give you for her."

Boges bowed low.

"See that no one, not even Croesus, has admission to her before my..... before I give further orders."

"Croesus was with her this evening."

"What may have been his business with my wife?"

"I do not know, for I do not understand the Greek language, but I heard the name of Bartja several times, and it seemed to me that the Egyptian had received sorrowful intelligence. She was looking very sad when I came, after Croesus had left, to inquire if she had any commands for me."

"May Ahriman blast thy tongue," muttered the king, and then turning his back on the eunuch he followed the torch-bearers and attendants, who were in waiting to disrobe him, to his own private apartments.

At noon on the following day, Bartja, accompanied by his friends and a troop of attendants, started on horseback for the frontier. Croesus went with the young warriors as far as the city gates, and as their last farewells and embraces were being exchanged, Bartja whispered to his old friend: "If the messenger from Egypt should have a letter for me in his bag, will you send it on?"

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"Shall you be able to decipher the Greek writing?"

"Gyges and love will help me!"

"When I told Nitetis of your departure she begged me to wish you farewell, and tell you not to forget Egypt."

"I am not likely to do that."

"The gods take thee into their care, my son. Be prudent, do not risk your life heedlessly, but remember that it is no longer only your own. Exercise the gentleness of a father towards the rebels; they did not rise in mere self-will, but to gain their freedom, the most precious possession of mankind. Remember, too, that to shew mercy is better than to shed blood; the sword killeth, but the favor of the ruler bringeth joy and happiness. Conclude the war as speedily as possible, for war is a perversion of nature; in peace the sons outlive the fathers, but in war the fathers live to mourn for their slain sons. Farewell, my young heroes, go forward and conquer!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Cambyzes passed a sleepless night. The feeling of jealousy, so totally new to him, increased his desire to possess Nitetis, but he dared not take her as his wife yet, as the Persian law forbade the king to marry a foreign wife, until she had become familiar with the customs of Iran and confessed herself a disciple of Zoroaster.

[Zoroaster, really Zarathustra or Zerethoschtro, was one of the `greatest among founders of new religions and lawgivers. His name signified "golden star" according to Anquetil du Perron. But this interpretation is as doubtful, as the many others which have been attempted. An appropriate one is given in the essay by Kern quoted below, from zara golden, and thwistra glittering; thus "the gold glittering one." It is uncertain whether he was born in Bactria, Media or Persia, Anquetil thinks in Urmi, a town in Aderbaijan. His father's name was Porosehasp, his mother's Dogdo, and his family boasted of royal descent. The time of his birth is very,—Spiegel says "hopelessly"—dark. Anquetil, and many other scholars would place it in the reign of Darius, a view which has been proved to be incorrect by Spiegel, Duncker and v. Schack in his introduction.]

According to this law a whole year must pass before Nitetis could become the wife of a Persian monarch? but what was the law to Cambyzes? In his eyes the law was embodied in his own person, and in his opinion three months would be amply sufficient to initiate Nitetis in the Magian mysteries, after which process she could become his bride.



To-day his other wives seemed hateful, even loathsome, to him. From Cambyses' earliest youth his house had been carefully provided with women. Beautiful girls from all parts of Asia, black-eyed Armenians, dazzlingly fair maidens from the Caucasus, delicate girls from the shores of the Ganges, luxurious Babylonian women, golden-haired Persians and the effeminate daughters of the Median plains; indeed many of the noblest Achaemenidae had given him their daughters in marriage.

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Phaedime, the daughter of Otanes, and niece of his own mother Kassandane, had been Cambyses' favorite wife hitherto, or at least the only one of whom it could be said that she was more to him than a purchased slave would have been. But even she, in his present sated and disgusted state of feeling, seemed vulgar and contemptible, especially when he thought of Nitetis.

The Egyptian seemed formed of nobler, better stuff than they all. They were flattering, coaxing girls; Nitetis was a queen. They humbled themselves in the dust at his feet; but when he thought of Nitetis, he beheld her erect, standing before him, on the same proud level as himself. He determined that from henceforth she should not only occupy Phaedime's place, but should be to him what Kassandane had been to his father Cyrus.

She was the only one of his wives who could assist him by her knowledge and advice; the others were all like children, ignorant, and caring for nothing but dress and finery: living only for petty intrigues and useless trifles. This Egyptian girl would be obliged to love him, for he would be her protector, her lord, her father and brother in this foreign land.

"She must," he said to himself, and to this despot to wish for a thing and to possess it seemed one and the same. "Bartja had better take care," he murmured, "or he shall know what fate awaits the man who dares to cross my path."

Nitetis too had passed a restless night.

The common apartment of the women was next to her own, and the noise and singing there had not ceased until nearly midnight. She could often distinguish the shrill voice of Boges joking and laughing with these women, who were under his charge. At last all was quiet in the wide palace halls and then her thoughts turned to her distant home and her poor sister Tachot, longing for her and for the beautiful Bartja, who, Croesus had told her, was going to-morrow to the war and possibly to death. At last she fell asleep, overcome by the fatigue of the journey and dreaming of her future husband. She saw him on his black charger. The foaming animal shied at Bartja who was lying in the road, threw his rider and dragged him into the Nile, whose waves became blood-red. In her terror she screamed for help; her cries were echoed back from the Pyramids in such loud and fearful tones that she awoke.

But hark! what could that be? That wailing, shrill cry which she had heard in her dream, —she could hear it still.

Hastily drawing aside the shutters from one of the openings which served as windows, she looked out. A large and beautiful garden, laid out with fountains and shady avenues, lay before her, glittering with the early dew.

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[The Persian gardens were celebrated throughout the old world, and seem to have been laid out much less stiffly than the Egyptian. Even the kings of Persia did not consider horticulture beneath their notice, and the highest among the Achaemenidae took an especial pleasure in laying out parks, called in Persian Paradieses. Their admiration for well-grown trees went so far, that Xerxes, finding on his way to Greece a singularly beautiful tree, hung ornaments of gold upon its branches. Firdusi, the great Persian epic poet, compares human beauty to the growth of the cypress, as the highest praise he can give. Indeed some trees were worshipped by the Persians; and as the tree of life in the Hebrew and Egyptian, so we find sacred trees in their Paradise.]

No sound was to be heard except the one which had alarmed her, and this too died away at last on the morning breeze. After a few minutes she heard cries and noise in the distance, then the great city awaking to its daily work, which soon settled down into a deep, dull murmur like the roaring of the sea.

Nitetis was by this time so thoroughly awakened from the effect of the fresh morning air, that she did not care to lie down again. She went once more to the window and perceived two figures coming out of the house. One she recognized as the eunuch Boges; he was talking to a beautiful Persian woman carelessly dressed. They approached her window. Nitetis hid herself behind the half-opened shutter and listened, for she fancied she heard her own name.

"The Egyptian is still asleep," said Boges. "She must be much fatigued by the journey. I see too that one of her windows is still firmly closed."

"Then tell me quickly," said the Persian. "Do you really think that this stranger's coming can injure me in any way?"

"Certainly, I do, my pretty one."

"But what leads you to suppose this?"

"She is only to obey the king's commands, not mine."

"Is that all?"

"No, my treasure. I know the king. I can read his features as the Magi read the sacred books."

"Then we must ruin her."

"More easily said than done, my little bird."

"Leave me alone! you are insolent."

“Well, but nobody can see us, and you know you can do nothing without my help.”

“Very well then, I don’t care. But tell me quickly what we can do.”

“Thanks, my sweet Phaedime. Well, for the present we must be patient and wait our time. That detestable hypocrite Croesus seems to have established himself as protector of the Egyptian; when he is away, we must set our snares.”

The speakers were by this time at such a distance, that Nitetis could not understand what they said. In silent indignation she closed the shutter, and called her maidens to dress her. She knew her enemies now—she knew that a thousand dangers surrounded her, and yet she felt proud and happy, for was she not chosen to be the real wife of Cambyses? Her own worth seemed clearer to her than ever before, from a comparison with these miserable creatures, and a wonderful certainty of ultimate victory stole into her heart, for Nitetis was a firm believer in the magic power of virtue.

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"What was that dreadful sound I heard so early?" she asked of her principal waiting-woman, who was arranging her hair.

"Do you mean the sounding brass, lady?"

"Scarcely two hours ago I was awakened by a strange and frightful sound."

"That was the sounding brass, lady. It is used to awaken the young sons of the Persian nobles, who are brought up at the gate of the king. You will soon become accustomed to it. We have long ceased even to hear it, and indeed on great festivals, when it is not sounded, we awake from the unaccustomed stillness. From the hanging-gardens you will be able to see how the boys are taken to bathe every morning, whatever the weather may be. The poor little ones are taken from their mothers when they are six years old, to be brought up with the other boys of their own rank under the king's eye."

"Are they to begin learning the luxurious manners of the court so early?"

"Oh no! the poor boys lead a terrible life. They are obliged to sleep on the hard ground, to rise before the sun. Their food is bread and water, with very little meat, and they are never allowed to taste wine or vegetables. Indeed at times they are deprived of food and drink for some days, simply to accustom them to privations. When the court is at Ecbatana or Pasargadae, and the weather is bitterly cold, they are sure to be taken out to bathe, and here in Susa, the hotter the sun, the longer and more difficult the marches they are compelled to take."

[The summer residences of the kings of Persia, where it is sometimes very cold. Ecbatana lies at the foot of the high Elburs (Orontes) range of mountains in the neighborhood of the modern Hamadan; Pasargadae not far from Rachmet in the highlands of Iran]

"And these boys, so simply and severely brought up, become in after life such luxurious men?"

"Yes, that is always the case. A meal that has been waited for is all the more relished when it comes. These boys see splendor and magnificence around them daily; they know how rich they are in reality, and yet have to suffer from hunger and privation. Who can wonder, if, when at last they gain their liberty, they plunge into the pleasures of life with a tenfold eagerness? But on the other hand, in time of war, or when going to the chase, they never murmur at hunger or thirst, spring with a laugh into the mud regardless of their thin boots and purple trousers, and sleep as soundly on a rock as on their beds of delicate Arabian wool. You must see the feats these boys perform, especially when the king is watching them! Cambyses will certainly take you if you ask him."



“I know those exercises already. In Egypt the girls as well as the boys are kept to such gymnastic exercises. My limbs were trained to flexibility by running, postures, and games with hoops and balls.

“How strange! Here, we women grow up just as we please, and are taught nothing but a little spinning and weaving. Is it true that most of the Egyptian women can read and write?”

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“Yes, nearly all.”

“By Mithras, you must be a clever people! Scarcely any of the Persians, except the Magi and the scribes, learn these difficult arts. The sons of the nobles are taught to speak the truth, to be courageous, obedient, and to reverence the gods; to hunt, ride, plant trees and discern between herbs; but whoever, like the noble Darius, wishes to learn the art of writing, must apply to the Magi. Women are forbidden to turn their minds to such studies.—Now your dress is complete. This string of pearls, which the king sent this morning, looks magnificent in your raven-black hair, but it is easy to see that you are not accustomed to the full silk trousers and high-heeled boots. If, however, you walk two or three times up and down the room you will surpass all the Persian ladies even in your walk!”

At this moment a knock was heard and Boges entered. He had come to conduct Nitetis to Kassandane’s apartments, where Cambyses was waiting for her.

The eunuch affected an abject humility, and poured forth a stream of flattering words, in which he likened the princess to the sun, the starry heavens, a pure fount of happiness, and a garden of roses. Nitetis deigned him not a word in reply, but followed, with a beating heart, to the queen’s apartment.

In order to keep out the noonday sun and produce a salutary half-light for the blind queen’s eyes, her windows were shaded by curtains of green Indian silk. The floor was covered with a thick Babylonian carpet, soft as moss under the foot. The walls were faced with a mosaic of ivory, tortoise-shell, gold, silver, malachite, lapis-lazuli, ebony and amber. The seats and couches were of gold covered with lions’ skins, and a table of silver stood by the side of the blind queen. Kassandane was seated in a costly arm-chair. She wore a robe of violet-blue, embroidered with silver, and over her snow-white hair lay a long veil of delicate lace, woven in Egypt, the ends of which were wound round her neck and tied in a large bow beneath her chin. She was between sixty and seventy years old; her face, framed, as it were, into a picture by the lace veil, was exquisitely symmetrical in its form, intellectual, kind and benevolent in its expression.

The blind eyes were closed, but those who gazed on her felt that, if open, they would shine with the gentle light of stars. Even when sitting, her attitude and height showed a tall and stately figure. Indeed her entire appearance was worthy the widow of the great and good Cyrus.

On a low seat at her feet, drawing long threads from a golden spindle, sat the queen’s youngest child Atossa, born to her late in life. Cambyses was standing before her, and behind, hardly visible in the dim light, Nebenchari, the Egyptian oculist.

As Nitetis entered, Cambyses came towards her and led her to his mother. The daughter of Amasis fell on her knees before this venerable woman, and kissed her hand with real affection.

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"Be welcome here!" exclaimed the blind queen, feeling her way to the young girl's head, on which she laid her hand, "I have heard much in your praise, and hope to gain in you a dear and loving daughter."

Nitetis kissed the gentle, delicate hand again, saying in a low voice: "O how I thank you for these words! Will you, the wife of the great Cyrus, permit me to call you mother? My tongue has been so long accustomed to this sweet word; and now after long weeks of silence, I tremble with joy at the thought that I may say 'my mother' once more! I will indeed try to deserve your love and kindness; and you—you will be to me all that your loving countenance seems to promise? Advise and teach me; let me find a refuge at your feet, if sometimes the longing for home becomes too strong, and my poor heart too weak to bear its grief or joy alone. Oh, be my mother! that one word includes all else!"

The blind queen felt the warm tears fall on her hand; she pressed her lips kindly on the weeping girl's forehead, and answered: "I can understand your feelings. My apartments shall be always open to you, my heart ready to welcome you here. Come when you will, and call me your mother with the same perfect confidence with which I, from my whole heart, name you my daughter. In a few months you will be my son's wife, and then the gods may grant you that gift, which, by implanting within you the feelings of a mother, will prevent you from feeling the need of one."

"May Ormuszd hear and give his blessing!" said Cambyses. "I rejoice, mother, that my wife pleases you, and I know that when once she becomes familiar with our manners and customs she will be happy here. If Nitetis pay due heed, our marriage can be celebrated in four months."

"But the law—" began his mother.

"I command—in four months, and should like to see him who dare raise an objection. Farewell! Nebenchari, use your best skill for the queen's eyes, and if my wife permit, you, as her countryman, may visit her to-morrow. Farewell! Bartja sends his parting greetings. He is on the road to the Tapuri."

Atossa wiped away a tear in silence, but Kassandane answered: "You would have done well to allow the boy to remain here a few months longer. Your commander, Megabyzus, could have subdued that small nation alone."

"Of that I have no doubt," replied the king, "but Bartja desired an opportunity of distinguishing himself in the field; and for that reason I sent him."

"Would he not gladly have waited until the war with the Massageta; where more glory might be gained?" asked the blind woman.

“Yes,” said Atossa, “and if he should fall in this war, you will have deprived him of the power of fulfilling his most sacred duty, of avenging the soul of our father!”

“Be silent!” cried Cambyses in an overbearing tone, “or I shall have to teach you what is becoming in women and children. Bartja is on far too good terms with fortune to fall in the war. He will live, I hope, to deserve the love which is now so freely flung into his lap like an alms.”

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“How canst thou speak thus?” cried Kassandane. “In what manly virtue is Bartja wanting? Is it his fault, that he has had no such opportunity of distinguishing himself in the field as thou hast had? You are the king and I am bound to respect your commands, but I blame my son for depriving his blind mother of the greatest joy left to her in her old age. Bartja would have gladly remained here until the Massagetan war, if your self-will had not determined otherwise.”

“And what I will is good!” exclaimed Cambyses interrupting his mother, and pale with anger, “I desire that this subject be not mentioned again.”

So saying, he left the room abruptly and went into the reception-hall, followed by the immense retinue which never quitted him, whithersoever he might direct his steps.

An hour passed, and still Nitetis and the lovely Atossa were sitting side by side, at the feet of the queen. The Persian women listened eagerly to all their new friend could tell them about Egypt and its wonders.

“Oh! how I should like to visit your home!” exclaimed Atossa. “It must be quite, quite different from Persia and everything else that I have seen yet. The fruitful shores of your great river, larger even than the Euphrates, the temples with their painted columns, those huge artificial mountains, the Pyramids, where the ancient kings be buried—it must all be wonderfully beautiful. But what pleases me best of all is your description of the entertainments, where men and women converse together as they like. The only meals we are allowed to take in the society of men are on New Year’s Day and the king’s birthday, and then we are forbidden to speak; indeed it is not thought right for us even to raise our eyes. How different it is with you! By Mithras! mother, I should like to be an Egyptian, for we poor creatures are in reality nothing but miserable slaves; and yet I feel that the great Cyrus was my father too, and that I am worth quite as much as most men. Do I not speak the truth? can I not obey as well as command? have I not the same thirst and longing for glory? could not I learn to ride, to string a bow, to fight and swim, if I were taught and inured to such exercises?”

The girl had sprung from her seat while speaking, her eyes flashed and she swung her spindle in the air, quite unconscious that in so doing she was breaking the thread and entangling the flax.

“Remember what is fitting,” reminded Kassandane. “A woman must submit with humility to her quiet destiny, and not aspire to imitate the deeds of men.”

“But there are women who lead the same lives as men,” cried Atossa. “There are the Amazons who live on the shores of the Thermodon in Themiscyra, and at Comana on the Iris; they have waged great wars, and even to this day wear men’s armor.”

“Who told you this?”

“My old nurse, Stephanion, whom my father brought a captive from Sinope to Pasargadae.”

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"But I can teach you better," said Nitetis. "It is true that in Themiscyra and Comana there are a number of women who wear soldier's armor; but they are only priestesses, and clothe themselves like the warlike goddess they serve, in order to present to the worshippers a manifestation of the divinity in human form. Croesus says that an army of Amazons has never existed, but that the Greeks, (always ready and able to turn anything into a beautiful myth), having seen these priestesses, at once transformed the armed virgins dedicated to the goddess into a nation of fighting women."

"Then they are liars!" exclaimed the disappointed girl.

"It is true, that the Greeks have not the same reverence for truth as you have," answered Nitetis, "but they do not call the men who invent these beautiful stories liars; they are called poets."

"Just as it is with ourselves," said Kassandane. "The poets, who sing the praises of my husband, have altered and adorned his early life in a marvellous manner; yet no one calls them liars. But tell me, my daughter, is it true that these Greeks are more beautiful than other men, and understand art better even than the Egyptians?"

"On that subject I should not venture to pronounce a judgment. There is such a great difference between the Greek and Egyptian works of art. When I went into our own gigantic temples to pray, I always felt as if I must prostrate myself in the dust before the greatness of the gods, and entreat them not to crush so insignificant a worm; but in the temple of Hera at Samos, I could only raise my hands to heaven in joyful thanksgiving, that the gods had made the earth so beautiful. In Egypt I always believed as I had been taught: 'Life is asleep; we shall not awake to our true existence in the kingdom of Osiris till the hour of death;' but in Greece I thought: 'I am born to live and to enjoy this cheerful, bright and blooming world.'"

"Ah! tell us something more about Greece," cried Atossa; "but first Nebenchari must put a fresh bandage on my mother's eyes."

The oculist, a tall, grave man in the white robes of an Egyptian priest, came forward to perform the necessary operation, and after being kindly greeted by Nitetis, withdrew once more silently into the background. At the same time a eunuch entered to enquire whether Croesus might be allowed to pay his respectful homage to the king's mother.

The aged king soon appeared, and was welcomed as the old and tried friend of the Persian royal family. Atossa, with her usual impetuosity, fell on the neck of the friend she had so sorely missed during his absence; the queen gave him her hand, and Nitetis met him like a loving daughter.

"I thank the gods, that I am permitted to see you again," said Croesus. "The young can look at life as a possession, as a thing understood and sure, but at my age every year

must be accepted as an undeserved gift from the gods, for which a man must be thankful.”

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"I could envy you for this happy view of life," sighed Kassandane. "My years are fewer than yours, and yet every new day seems to me a punishment sent by the Immortals."

"Can I be listening to the wife of the great Cyrus?" asked Croesus. "How long is it since courage and confidence left that brave heart? I tell you, you will recover sight, and once more thank the gods for a good old age. The man who recovers, after a serious illness, values health a hundred-fold more than before; and he who regains sight after blindness, must be an especial favorite of the gods. Imagine to yourself the delight of that first moment when your eyes behold once more the bright shining of the sun, the faces of your loved ones, the beauty of all created things, and tell me, would not that outweigh even a whole life of blindness and dark night? In the day of healing, even if that come in old age, a new life will begin and I shall hear you confess that my friend Solon was right."

"In what respect?" asked Atossa.

"In wishing that Mimnermos, the Colophonian poet, would correct the poem in which he has assigned sixty years as the limit of a happy life, and would change the sixty into eighty."

"Oh no!" exclaimed Kassandane. "Even were Mithras to restore my sight, such a long life would be dreadful. Without my husband I seem to myself like a wanderer in the desert, aimless and without a guide."

"Are your children then nothing to you, and this kingdom, of which you have watched the rise and growth?"

"No indeed! but my children need me no longer, and the ruler of this kingdom is too proud to listen to a woman's advice."

On hearing these words Atossa and Nitetis seized each one of the queen's hands, and Nitetis cried: "You ought to desire a long life for our sakes. What should we be without your help and protection?"

Kassandane smiled again, murmuring in a scarcely audible voice: "You are right, my children, you will stand in need of your mother."

"Now you are speaking once more like the wife of the great Cyrus," cried Croesus, kissing the robe of the blind woman. "Your presence will indeed be needed, who can say how soon? Cambyzes is like hard steel; sparks fly wherever he strikes. You can hinder these sparks from kindling a destroying fire among your loved ones, and this should be your duty. You alone can dare to admonish the king in the violence of his passion. He regards you as his equal, and, while despising the opinion of others, feels wounded by his mother's disapproval. Is it not then your duty to abide patiently as

mediator between the king, the kingdom and your loved ones, and so, by your own timely reproofs, to humble the pride of your son, that he may be spared that deeper humiliation which, if not thus averted, the gods will surely inflict.”

“You are right,” answered the blind woman, “but I feel only too well that my influence over him is but small. He has been so much accustomed to have his own will, that he will follow no advice, even if it come from his mother’s lips.”

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"But he must at least hear it," answered Croesus, "and that is much, for even if he refuse to obey, your counsels will, like divine voices, continue to make themselves heard within him, and will keep him back from many a sinful act. I will remain your ally in this matter; for, as Cambyses' dying father appointed me the counsellor of his son in word and deed, I venture occasionally a bold word to arrest his excesses. Ours is the only blame from which he shrinks: we alone can dare to speak our opinion to him. Let us courageously do our duty in this our office: you, moved by love to Persia and your son, and I by thankfulness to that great man to whom I owe life and freedom, and whose son Cambyses is. I know that you bemoan the manner in which he has been brought up; but such late repentance must be avoided like poison. For the errors of the wise the remedy is reparation, not regret; regret consumes the heart, but the effort to repair an error causes it to throb with a noble pride."

"In Egypt," said Nitetis, "regret is numbered among the forty-two deadly sins. One of our principal commandments is, 'Thou shalt not consume thine heart.'"

[In the Ritual of the Dead (indeed in almost every Papyrus of the Dead) we meet with a representation of the soul, whose heart is being weighed and judged. The speech made by the soul is called the negative justification, in which she assures the 42 judges of the dead, that she has not committed the 42 deadly sins which she enumerates. This justification is doubly interesting because it contains nearly the entire moral law of Moses, which last, apart from all national peculiarities and habits of mind, seems to contain the quintessence of human morality—and this we find ready paragraphed in our negative justification. Todtenbuch ed. Lepsius. 125. We cannot discuss this question philosophically here, but the law of Pythagoras, who borrowed so much from Egypt, and the contents of which are the same, speaks for our view. It is similar in form to the Egyptian.]

"There you remind me," said Croesus "that I have undertaken to arrange for your instruction in the Persian customs, religion and language. I had intended to withdraw to Barene, the town which I received as a gift from Cyrus, and there, in that most lovely mountain valley, to take my rest; but for your sake and for the king's, I will remain here and continue to give you instruction in the Persian tongue. Kassandane herself will initiate you in the customs peculiar to women at the Persian court, and Oropastes, the high-priest, has been ordered by the king to make you acquainted with the religion of Iran. He will be your spiritual, and I your secular guardian."

At these words Nitetis, who had been smiling happily, cast down her eyes and asked in a low voice: "Am I to become unfaithful to the gods of my fathers, who have never failed to hear my prayers? Can I, ought I to forget them?"

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“Yes,” said Kassandane decidedly, “thou canst, and it is thy bounden duty, for a wife ought to have no friends but those her husband calls such. The gods are a man’s earliest, mightiest and most faithful friends, and it therefore becomes thy duty, as a wife, to honor them, and to close thine heart against strange gods and superstitions, as thou wouldst close it against strange lovers.”

“And,” added Croesus, “we will not rob you of your deities; we will only give them to you under other names. As Truth remains eternally the same, whether called ‘maa’, as by the Egyptians, or ‘Aletheia’ as by the Greeks, so the essence of the Deity continues unchanged in all places and times. Listen, my daughter: I myself, while still king of Lydia, often sacrificed in sincere devotion to the Apollo of the Greeks, without a fear that in so doing I should offend the Lydian sun-god Sandon; the Ionians pay their worship to the Asiatic Cybele, and, now that I have become a Persian, I raise my hands adoringly to Mithras, Ormuzd and the lovely Anahita. Pythagoras too, whose teaching is not new to you, worships one god only, whom he calls Apollo; because, like the Greek sun-god, he is the source of light and of those harmonies which Pythagoras holds to be higher than all else. And lastly, Xenophanes of Colophon laughs at the many and divers gods of Homer and sets one single deity on high—the ceaselessly creative might of nature, whose essence consists of thought, reason and eternity.

[A celebrated freethinker, who indulged in bold and independent speculations, and suffered much persecution for his ridicule of the Homeric deities. He flourished at the time of our history and lived to a great age, far on into the fifth century. We have quoted some fragments of his writings above. He committed his speculations also to verse.]

“In this power everything has its rise, and it alone remains unchanged, while all created matter must be continually renewed and perfected. The ardent longing for some being above us, on whom we can lean when our own powers fail,—the wonderful instinct which desires a faithful friend to whom we can tell every joy and sorrow without fear of disclosure, the thankfulness with which we behold this beautiful world and all the rich blessings we have received—these are the feelings which we call piety— devotion.

“These you must hold fast; remembering, however, at the same time, that the world is ruled neither by the Egyptian, the Persian, nor the Greek divinities apart from each other, but that all these are one; and that one indivisible Deity, how different soever may be the names and characters under which He is represented, guides the fate of men and nations.”

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The two Persian women listened to the old man in amazement. Their unpractised powers were unable to follow the course of his thoughts. Nitetis, however, had understood him thoroughly, and answered: "My mother Ladice was the pupil of Pythagoras, and has told me something like this already; but the Egyptian priests consider such views to be sacrilegious, and call their originators despisers of the gods. So I tried to repress such thoughts; but now I will resist them no longer. What the good and wise Croesus believes cannot possibly be evil or impious! Let Oropastes come! I am ready to listen to his teaching. The god of Thebes, our Ammon, shall be transformed into Ormuzd,—Isis or Hathor, into Anahita, and those among our gods for whom I can find no likeness in the Persian religion, I shall designate by the name of 'the Deity.'"

Croesus smiled. He had fancied, knowing how obstinately the Egyptians clung to all they had received from tradition and education, that it would have been more difficult for Nitetis to give up the gods of her native land. He had forgotten that her mother was a Greek, and that the daughters of Amasis had studied the doctrines of Pythagoras. Neither was he aware how ardently Nitetis longed to please her proud lord and master. Even Amasis, who so revered the Samian philosopher, who had so often yielded to Hellenic influence, and who with good reason might be called a free-thinking Egyptian, would sooner have exchanged life for death, than his multiform gods for the one idea "Deity."

"You are a teachable pupil," said Croesus, laying his hand on her head, "and as a reward, you shall be allowed either to visit Kassandane, or to receive Atossa in the hanging-gardens, every morning, and every afternoon until sunset."

This joyful news was received with loud rejoicings by Atossa, and with a grateful smile by the Egyptian girl.

"And lastly," said Croesus, "I have brought some balls and hoops with me from Sais, that you may be able to amuse yourselves in Egyptian fashion."

"Balls?" asked Atossa in amazement; "what can we do with the heavy wooden things?"

"That need not trouble you," answered Croesus, laughing. "The balls I speak of are pretty little things made of the skins of fish filled with air, or of leather. A child of two years old can throw these, but you would find it no easy matter even to lift one of those wooden balls with which the Persian boys play. Are you content with me, Nitetis?"

[In Persia games with balls are still reckoned among the amusements of the men. One player drives a wooden ball to the other, as in the English game of cricket. Chardin (*Voyage en Perse*. III. p. 226.) saw the game played by 300 players.]

"How can I thank you enough, my father?"

“And now listen to my plan for the division of your time. In the morning you will visit Kassandane, chat with Atossa, and listen to the teaching of your noble mother.”

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Here the blind woman bent her head in approval. "Towards noon I shall come to teach you, and we can talk sometimes about Egypt and your loved ones there, but always in Persian. You would like this, would you not?"

Nitetis smiled.

"Every second day, Oropastes will be in attendance to initiate you in the Persian religion."

"I will take the greatest pains to comprehend him quickly."

"In the afternoon you can be with Atossa as long as you like. Does that please you too?"

"O Croesus!" cried the young girl and kissed the old man's hand.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

A first impression is often a final one
Assigned sixty years as the limit of a happy life
At my age every year must be accepted as an undeserved gift
Cambyses had been spoiled from his earliest infancy
Devoid of occupation, envy easily becomes hatred
Easy to understand what we like to hear
Eros mocks all human efforts to resist or confine him
Eyes are much more eloquent than all the tongues in the world
For the errors of the wise the remedy is reparation, not regret
Greeks have not the same reverence for truth
He who is to govern well must begin by learning to obey
In war the fathers live to mourn for their slain sons
Inn, was to be found about every eighteen miles
Lovers are the most unteachable of pupils
The beautiful past is all he has to live upon
The gods cast envious glances at the happiness of mortals
Unwise to try to make a man happy by force
War is a perversion of nature
Ye play with eternity as if it were but a passing moment
Zeus pays no heed to lovers' oaths

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