

Joshua — Volume 1 eBook

Joshua — Volume 1 by Georg Ebers

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Page 1

PREFACE.

Last winter I resolved to complete this book, and while giving it the form in which it now goes forth into the world, I was constantly reminded of the dear friend to whom I intended to dedicate it. Now I am permitted to offer it only to the manes of Gustav Baur; for a few months ago death snatched him from us.

Every one who was allowed to be on terms of intimacy with this man feels his departure from earth as an unspeakably heavy loss, not only because his sunny, cheerful nature and brilliant intellect brightened the souls of his friends; not only because he poured generously from the overflowing cornucopia of his rich knowledge precious gifts to those with whom he stood in intellectual relations, but above all because of the loving heart which beamed through his clear eyes, and enabled him to share the joys and sorrows of others, and enter into their thoughts and feelings.

To my life's end I shall not forget that during the last few years, himself physically disabled and overburdened by the duties imposed by the office of professor and counsellor of the Consistory, he so often found his way to me, a still greater invalid. The hours he then permitted me to spend in animated conversation with him are among those which, according to old Horace, whom he knew so thoroughly and loved so well, must be numbered among the 'good ones'. I have done so, and whenever I gratefully recall them, in my ear rings my friend's question:

"What of the story of the Exodus?"

After I had told him that in the midst of the desert, while following the traces of the departing Hebrews, the idea had occurred to me of treating their wanderings in the form of a romance, he expressed his approval in the eager, enthusiastic manner natural to him. When I finally entered farther into the details of the sketch outlined on the back of a camel, he never ceased to encourage me, though he thoroughly understood my scruples and fully appreciated the difficulties which attended the fulfilment of my task.

So in a certain degree this book is his, and the inability to offer it to the living man and hear his acute judgment is one of the griefs which render it hard to reconcile oneself to the advancing years which in other respects bring many a joy.

Himself one of the most renowned, acute and learned students and interpreters of the Bible, he was perfectly familiar with the critical works the last five years have brought to light in the domain of Old Testament criticism. He had taken a firm stand against the views of the younger school, who seek to banish the Exodus of the Jews from the province of history and represent it as a later production of the myth-making popular mind; a theory we both believed untenable. One of his remarks on this subject has lingered in my memory and ran nearly as follows:



“If the events recorded in the Second Book of Moses—which I believe are true—really never occurred, then nowhere and at no period has a historical event of equally momentous result taken place. For thousands of years the story of the Exodus has lived in the minds of numberless people as something actual, and it still retains its vitality. Therefore it belongs to history no less certainly than the French Revolution and its consequences.”

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Notwithstanding such encouragement, for a long series of years I lacked courage to finish the story of the Exodus until last winter an unexpected appeal from abroad induced me to resume it. After this I worked uninterruptedly with fresh zeal and I may say renewed pleasure at the perilous yet fascinating task until its completion.

The locality of the romance, the scenery as we say of the drama, I have copied as faithfully as possible from the landscapes I beheld in Goshen and on the Sinai peninsula. It will agree with the conception of many of the readers of "Joshua."

The case will be different with those portions of the story which I have interwoven upon the ground of ancient Egyptian records. They will surprise the laymen; for few have probably asked themselves how the events related in the Bible from the standpoint of the Jews affected the Egyptians, and what political conditions existed in the realm of Pharaoh when the Hebrews left it. I have endeavored to represent these relations with the utmost fidelity to the testimony of the monuments. For the description of the Hebrews, which is mentioned in the Scriptures, the Bible itself offers the best authority. The character of the "Pharaoh of the Exodus" I also copied from the Biblical narrative, and the portraits of the weak King Menephtah, which have been preserved, harmonize admirably with it. What we have learned of later times induced me to weave into the romance the conspiracy of Siptah, the accession to the throne of Seti II., and the person of the Syrian Aarsu who, according to the London Papyrus Harris I., after Siptah had become king, seized the government.

The Naville excavations have fixed the location of Pithom-Succoth beyond question, and have also brought to light the fortified store-house of Pithom (Succoth) mentioned in the Bible; and as the scripture says the Hebrews rested in this place and thence moved farther on, it must be supposed that they overpowered the garrison of the strong building and seized the contents of the spacious granaries, which are in existence at the present day.

In my "Egypt and the Books of Moses" which appeared in 1868, I stated that the Biblical Etham was the same as the Egyptian Chetam, that is, the line of fortresses which protected the isthmus of Suez from the attacks of the nations of the East, and my statement has long since found universal acceptance. Through it, the turning back of the Hebrews before Etham is intelligible.

The mount where the laws were given I believe was the majestic Serbal, not the Sinai of the monks; the reasons for which I explained fully in my work "Through Goshen to Sinai." I have also—in the same volume—attempted to show that the halting-place of the tribes called in the Bible "Dophkah" was the deserted mines of the modern Wadi Maghara.



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By the aid of the mental and external experiences of the characters, whose acts have in part been freely guided by the author's imagination, he has endeavored to bring nearer to the sympathizing reader the human side of the mighty destiny of the nation which it was incumbent on him to describe. If he has succeeded in doing so, without belittling the magnificent Biblical narrative, he has accomplished his desire; if he has failed, he must content himself with the remembrance of the pleasure and mental exaltation he experienced during the creation of this work.

Tutzing on the Starnberger See,
September 20th, 1889.

Georg Ebers.

JOSHUA.

CHAPTER I.

"Go down, grandfather: I will watch."

But the old man to whom the entreaty was addressed shook his shaven head.

"Yet you can get no rest here....."

"And the stars? And the tumult below? Who can think of rest in hours like these? Throw my cloak around me! Rest—on such a night of horror!"

"You are shivering. And how your hand and the instrument are shaking."

"Then support my arm."

The youth dutifully obeyed the request; but in a short time he exclaimed: "Vain, all is vain; star after star is shrouded by the murky clouds. Alas, hear the wailing from the city. Ah, it rises from our own house too. I am so anxious, grandfather, feel how my head burns! Come down, perhaps they need help."

"Their fate is in the hands of the gods—my place is here.

"But there—there! Look northward across the lake. No, farther to the west. They are coming from the city of the dead."

"Oh, grandfather! Father—there!" cried the youth, a grandson of the astrologer of Amon-Ra, to whom he was lending his aid. They were standing in the observatory of



the temple of this god in Tanis, the Pharaoh's capital in the north of the land of Goshen. He moved away, depriving the old man of the support of his shoulder, as he continued: "There, there! Is the sea sweeping over the land? Have the clouds dropped on the earth to heave to and fro? Oh, grandfather, look yonder! May the Immortals have pity on us! The under-world is yawning, and the giant serpent Apep has come forth from the realm of the dead. It is moving past the temple. I see, I hear it. The great Hebrew's menace is approaching fulfilment. Our race will be effaced from the earth. The serpent! Its head is turned toward the southeast. It will devour the sun when it rises in the morning."

The old man's eyes followed the youth's finger, and he, too, perceived a huge, dark mass, whose outlines blended with the dusky night, come surging through the gloom; he, too, heard, with a thrill of terror, the monster's loud roar.



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Both stood straining their eyes and ears to pierce the darkness; but instead of gazing upward the star-reader's eye was bent upon the city, the distant sea, and the level plain. Deep silence, yet no peace reigned above them: the high wind now piled the dark clouds into shapeless masses, anon severed that grey veil and drove the torn fragments far asunder. The moon was invisible to mortal eyes, but the clouds were toying with the bright Southern stars, sometimes hiding them, sometimes affording a free course for their beams. Sky and earth alike showed a constant interchange of pallid light and intense darkness. Sometimes the sheen of the heavenly bodies flashed brightly from sea and bay, the smooth granite surfaces of the obelisks in the precincts of the temple, and the gilded copper roof of the airy royal palace, anon sea and river, the sails in the harbor, the sanctuaries, the streets of the city, and the palm-grown plain which surrounded it vanished in gloom. Eye and ear failed to retain the impression of the objects they sought to discern; for sometimes the silence was so profound that all life, far and near, seemed hushed and dead, then a shrill shriek of anguish pierced the silence of the night, followed at longer or shorter intervals by the loud roar the youthful priest had mistaken for the voice of the serpent of the nether-world, and to which grandfather and grandson listened with increasing suspense.

The dark shape, whose incessant motion could be clearly perceived whenever the starlight broke through the clouds, appeared first near the city of the dead and the strangers' quarter. Both the youth and the old man had been seized with terror, but the latter was the first to regain his self-control, and his keen eye, trained to watch the stars, speedily discovered that it was not a single giant form emerging from the city of the dead upon the plain, but a multitude of moving shapes that seemed to be swaying hither and thither over the meadow lands. The bellowing and bleating, too, did not proceed from one special place, but came now nearer and now farther away. Sometimes it seemed to issue from the bowels of the earth, and at others to float from some airy height.

Fresh horror seized upon the old man. Grasping his grandson's right hand in his, he pointed with his left to the necropolis, exclaiming in tremulous tones: "The dead are too great a multitude. The under-world is overflowing, as the river does when its bed is not wide enough for the waters from the south. How they swarm and surge and roll onward! How they scatter and sway to and fro. They are the souls of the thousands whom grim death has snatched away, laden with the curse of the Hebrew, unburied, unshielded from corruption, to descend the rounds of the ladder leading to the eternal world."



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“Yes, yes, those are their wandering ghosts,” shrieked the youth in absolute faith, snatching his hand from the grey-beard’s grasp and striking his burning brow, exclaiming, almost incapable of speech in his horror: “Ay, those are the souls of the damned. The wind has swept them into the sea, whose waters cast them forth again upon the land, but the sacred earth spurns them and flings them into the air. The pure ether of Shu hurls them back to the ground and now—oh look, listen—they are seeking the way to the wilderness.”

“To the fire!” cried the old astrologer. “Purify them, ye flames; cleanse them, water.”

The youth joined his grandfather’s form of exorcism, and while still chanting together, the trap-door leading to this observatory on the top of the highest gate of the temple was opened, and a priest of inferior rank called: “Cease thy toil. Who cares to question the stars when the light of life is departing from all the denizens of earth!”

The old man listened silently till the priest, in faltering accents, added that the astrologer’s wife had sent him, then he stammered:

“Hora? Has my son, too, been stricken?”

The messenger bent his head, and the two listeners wept bitterly, for the astrologer had lost his first-born son and the youth a beloved father.

But as the lad, shivering with the chill of fever, sank ill and powerless on the old man’s breast, the latter hastily released himself from his embrace and hurried to the trap-door. Though the priest had announced himself to be the herald of death, a father’s heart needs more than the mere words of another ere resigning all hope of the life of his child.

Down the stone stairs, through the lofty halls and wide courts of the temple he hurried, closely followed by the youth, though his trembling limbs could scarcely support his fevered body. The blow that had fallen upon his own little circle had made the old man forget the awful vision which perchance menaced the whole universe with destruction; but his grandson could not banish the sight and, when he had passed the fore-court and was approaching the outermost pylons his imagination, under the tension of anxiety and grief, made the shadows of the obelisks appear to be dancing, while the two stone statues of King Rameses, on the corner pillars of the lofty gate, beat time with the crook they held in their hands.

Then the fever struck the youth to the ground. His face was distorted by the convulsions which tossed his limbs to and fro, and the old man, failing on his knees, strove to protect the beautiful head, covered with clustering curls, from striking the stone flags, moaning under his breath “Now fate has overtaken him too.”

Then calming himself, he shouted again and again for help, but in vain. At last, as he lowered his tones to seek comfort in prayer, he heard the sound of voices in the avenue of sphinxes beyond the pylons, and fresh hope animated his heart.

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Who was coming at so late an hour?

Loud wails of grief blended with the songs of the priests, the clinking and tinkling of the metal sistrums, shaken by the holy women in the service of the god, and the measured tread of men praying as they marched in the procession which was approaching the temple.

Faithful to the habits of a long life, the astrologer raised his eyes and, after a glance at the double row of granite pillars, the colossal statues and obelisks in the fore-court, fixed them on the starlit skies. Even amid his grief a bitter smile hovered around his sunken lips; to-night the gods themselves were deprived of the honors which were their due.

For on this, the first night after the new moon in the month of Pharmuthi, the sanctuary in bygone years was always adorned with flowers. As soon as the darkness of this moonless night passed away, the high festival of the spring equinox and the harvest celebration would begin.

A grand procession in honor of the great goddess Neith, of Rennut, who bestows the blessings of the fields, and of Horus at whose sign the seeds begin to germinate, passed, in accordance with the rules prescribed by the Book of the Divine Birth of the Sun, through the city to the river and harbor; but to-day the silence of death reigned throughout the sanctuary, whose courts at this hour were usually thronged with men, women, and children, bringing offerings to lay on the very spot where death's finger had now touched his grandson's heart.

A flood of light streamed into the vast space, hitherto but dimly illumined by a few lamps. Could the throng be so frenzied as to imagine that the joyous festival might be celebrated, spite of the unspeakable horrors of the night.

Yet, the evening before, the council of priests had resolved that, on account of the rage of the merciless pestilence, the temple should not be adorned nor the procession be marshalled. In the afternoon many whose houses had been visited by the plague had remained absent, and now while he, the astrologer, had been watching the course of the stars, the pest had made its way into this sanctuary, else why had it been forsaken by the watchers and the other astrologers who had entered with him at sunset, and whose duty it was to watch through the night?

He again turned with tender solicitude to the sufferer, but instantly started to his feet, for the gates were flung wide open and the light of torches and lanterns streamed into the court. A swift glance at the sky told him that it was a little after midnight, yet his fears seemed to have been true—the priests were crowding into the temples to prepare for the harvest festival to-morrow.

But he was wrong. When had they ever entered the sanctuary for this purpose in orderly procession, solemnly chanting hymns? Nor was the train composed only of servants of the deity. The population had joined them, for the shrill lamentations of women and wild cries of despair, such as he had never heard before in all his long life within these sacred walls, blended in the solemn litany.



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Or were his senses playing him false? Was the groaning throng of restless spirits which his grandson had pointed out to him from the observatory, pouring into the sanctuary of the gods?

New horror seized upon him; with arms flung upward to bid the specters avault he muttered the exorcism against the wiles of evil spirits. But he soon let his hands fall again; for among the throng he noted some of his friends who yesterday, at least, had still walked among living men. First, the tall form of the second prophet of the god, then the women consecrated to the service of Amon-Ra, the singers and the holy fathers and, when he perceived behind the singers, astrologers, and pastophori his own brother-in-law, whose house had yesterday been spared by the plague, he summoned fresh courage and spoke to him. But his voice was smothered by the shouts of the advancing multitude.

The courtyard was now lighted, but each individual was so engrossed by his own sorrows that no one noticed the old astrologer. Tearing the cloak from his shivering limbs to make a pillow for the lad's tossing head, he heard, while tending him with fatherly affection, fierce imprecations on the Hebrews who had brought this woe on Pharaoh and his people, mingling with the chants and shouts of the approaching crowd and, recurring again and again, the name of Prince Rameses, the heir to the throne, while the tone in which it was uttered, the formulas of lamentation associated with it, announced the tidings that the eyes of the monarch's first-born son were closed in death.

The astrologer gazed at his grandson's wan features with increasing anxiety, and even while the wailing for the prince rose louder and louder a slight touch of gratification stirred his soul at the thought of the impartial justice Death metes out alike to the sovereign on his throne and the beggar by the roadside. He now realized what had brought the noisy multitude to the temple!

With as much swiftness as his aged limbs would permit, he hastened forward to meet the mourners; but ere he reached them he saw the gate-keeper and his wife come out of their house, carrying between them on a mat the dead body of a boy. The husband held one end, his fragile little wife the other, and the gigantic warder was forced to stoop low to keep the rigid form in a horizontal position and not let it slip toward the woman. Three children, preceded by a little girl carrying a lantern, closed the mournful procession.

Perhaps no one would have noticed the group, had not the gate-keeper's little wife shrieked so wildly and piteously that no one could help hearing her lamentations. The second prophet of Amon, and then his companions, turned toward them. The procession halted, and as some of the priests approached the corpse the gate-keeper shouted loudly: "Away, away from the plague! It has stricken our first-born son."

The wife meantime had snatched the lantern from her little girl's hand and casting its light full on the dead boy's rigid face, she screamed:



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“The god hath suffered it to happen. Ay, he permitted the horror to enter beneath his own roof. Not his will, but the curse of the stranger rules us and our lives. Look, this was our first-born son, and the plague has also stricken two of the temple-servants. One already lies dead in our room, and there lies Kamus, grandson of the astrologer Rameri. We heard the old man call, and saw what was happening; but who can prop another’s house when his own is falling? Take heed while there is time; for the gods have opened their own sanctuaries to the horror. If the whole world crumbles into ruin, I shall neither marvel nor grieve. My lord priests, I am only a poor lowly woman, but am I not right when I ask: Do our gods sleep, or has some one paralyzed them, or what are they doing that they leave us and our children in the power of the base Hebrew brood?”

“Overthrow them! Down with the foreigners! Death to the sorcerer Mesu, —[Mesu is the Egyptian name of Moses]—hurl him into the sea.” Such were the imprecations that followed the woman’s curse, as an echo follows a shout, and the aged astrologer’s brother-in-law Hornecht, captain of the archers, whose hot blood seethed in his veins at the sight of the dying form of his beloved nephew, waved his short sword, crying frantically: “Let all men who have hearts follow me. Upon them! A life for a life! Ten Hebrews for each Egyptian whom the sorcerer has slain!”

As a flock rushes into a fire when the ram leads the way, the warrior’s summons fired the throng. Women forced themselves in front of the men, pressing after him into the gateway, and when the servants of the temple lingered to await the verdict of the prophet of Amon, the latter drew his stately figure to its full height, and said calmly: “Let all who wear priestly garments remain and pray with me. The populace is heaven’s instrument to mete out vengeance. We will remain here to pray for their success.”

CHAPTER II.

Bai, the second prophet of Amon, who acted as the representative of the aged and feeble chief-prophet and high-priest Rui, went into the holy of holies, the throng of inferior servants of the divinity pursued their various duties, and the frenzied mob rushed through the streets of the city towards the distant Hebrew quarter.

As the flood, pouring into the valley, sweeps everything before it, the people, rushing to seek vengeance, forced every one they met to join them. No Egyptian from whom death had snatched a loved one failed to follow the swelling torrent, which increased till hundreds became thousands. Men, women, and children, freedmen and slaves, winged by the ardent longing to bring death and destruction on the hated Hebrews, darted to the remote quarter where they dwelt.

How the workman had grasped a hatchet, the housewife an axe, they themselves scarcely knew. They were dashing forward to deal death and ruin and had had no occasion to search for weapons—they had been close at hand.

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The first to feel the weight of their vengeance must be Nun, an aged Hebrew, rich in herds, loved and esteemed by many an Egyptian whom he had benefitted—but when hate and revenge speak, gratitude shrinks timidly into the background.

His property, like the houses and hovels of his people, was in the strangers' quarter, west of Tanis, and lay nearest to the streets inhabited by the Egyptians themselves.

Usually at this hour herds of cattle and flocks of sheep were being watered or driven to pasture and the great yard before his house was filled with cattle, servants of both sexes, carts, and agricultural implements. The owner usually overlooked the departure of the flocks and herds, and the mob had marked him and his family for the first victims of their fury.

The swiftest of the avengers had now reached his extensive farm-buildings, among them Hornecht, captain of the archers, brother-in-law of the old astrologer. House and barns were brightly illumined by the first light of the young day. A stalwart smith kicked violently on the stout door; but the unbolted sides yielded so easily that he was forced to cling to the door-post to save himself from falling. Others, Hornecht among them, pressed past him into the yard. What did this mean?

Had some new spell been displayed to attest the power of the Hebrew leader Mesu, who had brought such terrible plagues on the land,—and of his God.

The yard was absolutely empty. The stalls contained a few dead cattle and sheep, killed because they had been crippled in some way, while a lame lamb limped off at sight of the mob. The carts and wagons, too, had vanished. The lowing, bleating throng which the priests had imagined to be the souls of the damned was the Hebrew host, departing by night from their old home with all their flocks under the guidance of Moses.

The captain of the archers dropped his sword, and a spectator might have believed that the sight was a pleasant surprise to him; but his neighbor, a clerk from the king's treasure-house, gazed around the empty space with the disappointed air of a man who has been defrauded.

The flood of schemes and passions, which had surged so high during the night, ebbed under the clear light of day. Even the soldier's quickly awakened wrath had long since subsided into composure. The populace might have wreaked their utmost fury on the other Hebrews, but not upon Nun, whose son, Hosea, had been his comrade in arms, one of the most distinguished leaders in the army, and an intimate family friend. Had he thought of him and foreseen that his father's dwelling would be first attacked, he would never have headed the mob in their pursuit of vengeance; nay, he bitterly repented having forgotten the deliberate judgment which befitted his years.



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While many of the throng began to plunder and destroy Nun's deserted home, men and women came to report that not a soul was to be found in any of the neighboring dwellings. Others told of cats cowering on the deserted hearthstones, of slaughtered cattle and shattered furniture; but at last the furious avengers dragged out a Hebrew with his family and a half-witted grey-haired woman found hidden among some straw. The crone, amid imbecile laughter, said her people had made themselves hoarse calling her, but Meliela was too wise to walk on and on as they meant to do; besides her feet were too tender, and she had not even a pair of shoes.

The man, a frightfully ugly Jew, whom few of his own race would have pitied, protested, sometimes with a humility akin to fawning, sometimes with the insolence which was a trait of his character, that he had nothing to do with the god of lies in whose name the seducer Moses had led away his people to ruin; he himself, his wife, and his child had always been on friendly terms with the Egyptians. Indeed, many knew him, he was a money-lender and when the rest of his nation had set forth on their pilgrimage, he had concealed himself, hoping to pursue his dishonest calling and sustain no loss.

Some of his debtors, however, were among the infuriated populace, though even without their presence he was a doomed man; for he was the first person on whom the excited mob could show that they were resolved upon revenge. Rushing upon him with savage yells, the lifeless bodies of the luckless wretch and his family were soon strewn over the ground. Nobody knew who had done this first bloody deed; too many had dashed forward at once.

Not a few others who had remained in the houses and huts also fell victims to the people's thirst for vengeance, though many had time to escape, and while streams of blood were flowing, axes were wielded, and walls and doors were battered down with beams and posts to efface the abodes of the detested race from the earth.

The burning embers brought by some frantic women were extinguished and trampled out; the more prudent warned them of the peril that would menace their own homes and the whole city of Tanis, if the strangers' quarter should be fired.

So the Hebrews' dwellings escaped the flames; but as the sun mounted higher dense clouds of white dust shrouded the abodes they had forsaken, and where, only yesterday, thousands of people had possessed happy homes and numerous herds had quenched their thirst in fresh waters, the glowing soil was covered with rubbish and stone, shattered beams, and broken woodwork. Dogs and cats left behind by their owners wandered among the ruins and were joined by women and children who lived in the beggars' hovels on the edge of the necropolis close by, and now, holding their hands over their mouths, searched amid the stifling dust and rubbish for any household utensil or food which might have been left by the fugitives and overlooked by the mob.

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During the afternoon Fai, the second prophet of Amon, was carried past the ruined quarter. He did not come to gloat over the spectacle of destruction, it was his nearest way from the necropolis to his home. Yet a satisfied smile hovered around his stern mouth as he noticed how thoroughly the people had performed their work. His own purpose, it is true, had not been fulfilled, the leader of the fugitives had escaped their vengeance, but hate, though never sated, can yet be gratified. Even the smallest pangs of an enemy are a satisfaction, and the priest had just come from the grieving Pharaoh. He had not succeeded in releasing him entirely from the bonds of the Hebrew magician, but he had loosened them.

The resolute, ambitious man, by no means wont to hold converse with himself, had repeated over and over again, while sitting alone in the sanctuary reflecting on what had occurred and what yet remained to be done, these little words, and the words were: "Bless me too!"

Pharaoh had uttered them, and the entreaty had been addressed neither to old Rui, the chief priest, nor to himself, the only persons who could possess the privilege of blessing the monarch, nay—but to the most atrocious wretch that breathed, to the foreigner the Hebrew, Mesu, whom he hated more than any other man on earth.

"Bless me too!" The pious entreaty, which wells so trustingly from the human heart in the hour of anguish, had pierced his soul like a dagger. It had seemed as if such a petition, uttered by the royal lips to such a man, had broken the crozier in the hand of the whole body of Egyptian priests, stripped the panther-skin from their shoulders, and branded with shame the whole people whom he loved.

He knew full well that Moses was one of the wisest sages who had ever graduated from the Egyptian schools, knew that Pharaoh was completely under the thrall of this man who had grown up in the royal household and been a friend of his father Rameses the Great. He had seen the monarch pardon deeds committed by Moses which would have cost the life of any other mortal, though he were the highest noble in the land—and what must the Hebrew be to Pharaoh, the sun-god incarnate on the throne of the world, when standing by the death-bed of his own son, he could yield to the impulse to uplift his hands to him and cry "Bless me too!"

He had told himself all these things, maturely considered them, yet he would not yield to the might of the strangers. The destruction of this man and all his race was in his eyes the holiest, most urgent duty—to accomplish which he would not shrink even from assailing the throne. Nay, in his eyes Pharaoh Menephtah's shameful entreaty: "Bless me too!" had deprived him of all the rights of sovereignty.



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Moses had murdered Pharaoh's first-born son, but he and the aged chief-priest of Amon held the weal or woe of the dead prince's soul in their hands,—a weapon sharp and strong, for he knew the monarch's weak and vacillating heart. If the high-priest of Amon—the only man whose authority surpassed his own—did not thwart him by some of the unaccountable whims of age, it would be the merest trifle to force Pharaoh to yield; but any concession made to-day would be withdrawn to-morrow, should the Hebrew succeed in coming between the irresolute monarch and his Egyptian advisers. This very day the unworthy son of the great Rameses had covered his face and trembled like a timid fawn at the bare mention of the sorcerer's name, and to-morrow he might curse him and pronounce a death sentence upon him. Perhaps he might be induced to do this, and on the following one he would recall him and again sue for his blessing.

Down with such monarchs! Let the feeble reed on the throne be hurled into the dust! Already he had chosen a successor from among the princes of the blood, and when the time was ripe—when Rui, the high-priest of Amon, had passed the limits of life decreed by the gods to mortals and closed his eyes in death, he, Bai, would occupy his place, a new life for Egypt, and Moses and his race would commence would perish.

While the prophet was absorbed in these reflections a pair of ravens fluttered around his head and, croaking loudly, alighted on the dusty ruins of one of the shattered houses. He involuntarily glanced around him and noted that they had perched on the corpse of a murdered Hebrew, lying half concealed amid the rubbish. A smile which the priests of lower rank who surrounded his litter knew not how to interpret, flitted over his shrewd, defiant countenance.

CHAPTER III.

Hornecht, commander of the archers, was among the prophet's companions. Indeed they were on terms of intimacy, for the soldier was a leader amid the nobles who had conspired to dethrone Pharaoh.

As they approached Nun's ruined dwelling, the prophet pointed to the wreck and said: "The former owner of this abode is the only Hebrew I would gladly spare. He was a man of genuine worth, and his son, Hosea. . . ."

"Will be one of us," the captain interrupted. "There are few better men in Pharaoh's army, and," he added, lowering his voice, "I rely on him when the decisive hour comes."

"We will discuss that before fewer witnesses," replied Bai. "But I am greatly indebted to him. During the Libyan war—you are aware of the fact—I fell into the hands of the enemy, and Hosea, at the head of his little troop, rescued me from the savage hordes." Sinking his tones, he went on in his most instructive manner, as though apologizing for the mischief wrought: "Such is the course of earthly affairs! Where a whole body of



men merit punishment, the innocent must suffer with the guilty. Under such circumstances the gods themselves cannot separate the individual from the multitude; nay, even the innocent animals share the penalty. Look at the flocks of doves fluttering around the ruins; they are seeking their cotes in vain. And the cat with her kittens yonder. Go and take them, Beki; it is our duty to save the sacred animals from starving to death.”

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And this man, who had just been planning the destruction of so many of his fellow-mortals, was so warmly interested in kindly caring for the senseless beasts, that he stopped his litter and watched his servants catch the cats.

This was less quickly accomplished than he had hoped; for one had taken refuge in the nearest cellar, whose opening was too narrow for the men to follow. The youngest, a slender Nubian, undertook the task; but he had scarcely approached the hole when he started back, calling: "There is a human being there who seems to be alive. Yes, he is raising his hand. It is a boy or a youth, and assuredly no slave; his head is covered with long waving locks, and—a sunbeam is shining into the cellar—I can see a broad gold circlet on his arm."

"Perhaps it is one of Nun's kindred, who has been forgotten," said Hornecht, and Bai eagerly added:

"It is an interposition from the gods! Their sacred animals have pointed out the way by which I can render a service to the man to whom I am so much indebted. Try to get in, Beki, and bring the youth out."

Meanwhile the Nubian had removed the stone whose fall had choked the opening, and soon after he lifted toward his companions a motionless young form which they brought into the open air and bore to a well whose cool water speedily restored consciousness.

As he regained his senses, he rubbed his eyes, gazed around him bewildered, as if uncertain where he was, then his head drooped as though overwhelmed with grief and horror, revealing that the locks at the back were matted together with black clots of dried blood.

The prophet had the deep wound, inflicted on the lad by a falling stone, washed at the well and, after it had been bandaged, summoned him to his own litter, which was protected from the sun.

The young Hebrew, bringing a message, had arrived at the house of his grandfather Nun, before sunrise, after a long night walk from Pithom, called by the Hebrews Succoth, but finding it deserted had lain down in one of the rooms to rest a while. Roused by the shouts of the infuriated mob, he had heard the curses on his race which rang through the whole quarter and fled to the cellar. The roof, which had injured him in its fall, proved his deliverance; for the clouds of dust which had concealed everything as it came down hid him from the sight of the rioters.

The prophet looked at him intently and, though the youth was unwashed, wan, and disfigured by the bloody bandage round his head, he saw that the lad he had recalled to life was a handsome, well-grown boy just nearing manhood.



His sympathy was roused, and his stern glance softened as he asked kindly whence he came and what had brought him to Tanis; for the rescued youth's features gave no clue to his race. He might readily have declared himself an Egyptian, but he frankly admitted that he was a grandson of Nun. He had just attained his eighteenth year, his name was Ephraim, like that of his forefather, the son of Joseph, and he had come to visit his grandfather. The words expressed steadfast self-respect and pride in his illustrious ancestry.

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He delayed a short time ere answering the question whether he brought a message; but soon collected his thoughts and, looking the prophet fearlessly in the face, replied:

“Whoever you may be, I have been taught to speak the truth, so I will tell you that I have another relative in Tanis, Hosea, the son of Nun, a chief in Pharaoh’s army, for whom I have a message.”

“And I will tell you,” the priest replied, “that it was for the sake of this very Hosea I tarried here and ordered my servants to bring you out of the ruined house. I owe him a debt of gratitude, and though most of your nation have committed deeds worthy of the harshest punishment, for the sake of his worth you shall remain among us free and unharmed.”

The boy raised his eyes to the priest with a proud, fiery glance, but ere he could find words, Bai went on with encouraging kindness.

“I believe I can read in your face, my lad, that you have come to seek admittance to Pharaoh’s army under your uncle Hosea. Your figure is well-suited to the trade of war, and you surely are not wanting in courage.”

A smile of flattered vanity rested on Ephraim’s lips, and toying with the broad gold bracelet on his arm, perhaps unconsciously, he replied with eagerness:

“Ay, my lord, I have often proved my courage in the hunting field; but at home we have plenty of sheep and cattle, which even now I call my own, and it seems to me a more enviable lot to wander freely and rule the shepherds than to obey the commands of others.”

“Aha!” said the priest. “Perhaps Hosea may instil different and better views. To rule—a lofty ambition for youth. The misfortune is that we who have attained it are but servants whose burdens grow heavier with the increasing number of those who obey us. You understand me, Hornecht, and you, my lad, will comprehend my meaning later, when you become the palm-tree the promise of your youth foretells. But we are losing time. Who sent you to Hosea?”

The youth cast down his eyes irresolutely, but when the prophet broke the silence with the query: “And what has become of the frankness you were taught?” he responded promptly and resolutely:

“I came for the sake of a woman whom you know not.”

“A woman?” the prophet repeated, casting an enquiring glance at Hornecht. “When a bold warrior and a fair woman seek each other, the Hathors”—[The Egyptian goddesses of love, who are frequently represented with cords in their hands,]—are apt to appear and use the binding cords; but it does not befit a servant of the divinity to witness such



goings on, so I forbear farther questioning. Take charge of the lad, captain, and aid him to deliver his message to Hosea. The only doubt is whether he is in the city.”

“No,” the soldier answered, “but he is expected with thousands of his men at the armory to-day.”

“Then may the Hathors, who are partial to love messengers, bring these two together to-morrow at latest,” said the priest.

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But the lad indignantly retorted: "I am the bearer of no love message."

The prophet, pleased with the bold rejoinder, answered pleasantly: "I had forgotten that I was accosting a young shepherd-prince." Then he added in graver tones: "When you have found Hosea, greet him from me and tell him that Bai, the second prophet of Amon sought to discharge a part of the debt of gratitude he owed for his release from the hands of the Libyans by extending his protection to you, his nephew. Perhaps, my brave boy, you do not know that you have escaped as if by a miracle a double peril; the savage populace would no more have spared your life than would the stifling dust of the falling houses. Remember this, and tell Hosea also from me, Bai, that I am sure when he beholds the woe wrought by the magic arts of one of your race on the house of Pharaoh, to which he vowed fealty, and with it on this city and the whole country, he will tear himself with abhorrence from his kindred. They have fled like cowards, after dealing the sorest blows, robbing of their dearest possessions those among whom they dwelt in peace, whose protection they enjoyed, and who for long years have given them work and ample food. All this they have done and, if I know him aright, he will turn his back upon men who have committed such crimes. Tell him also that this has been voluntarily done by the Hebrew officers and men under the command of the Syrian Aarsu. This very morning—Hosea will have heard the news from other sources—they offered sacrifices not only to Baal and Seth, their own gods, whom so many of you were ready to serve ere the accursed sorcerer, Mesu, seduced you, but also to Father Amon and the sacred nine of our eternal deities. If he will do the same, we will rise hand in hand to the highest place, of that he may be sure—and well he merits it. The obligation still due him I shall gratefully discharge in other ways, which must for the present remain secret. But you may tell your uncle now from me that I shall find means to protect Nun, his noble father, when the vengeance of the gods and of Pharaoh falls upon the rest of your race. Already—tell him this also—the sword is whetted, and a pitiless judgment is impending. Bid him ask himself what fugitive shepherds can do against the power of the army among whose ablest leaders he is numbered. Is your father still alive, my son?"

"No, he was borne to his last resting-place long ago," replied the youth in a faltering voice.

Was the fever of his wound attacking him? Or did the shame of belonging to a race capable of acts so base overwhelm the young heart? Or did the lad cling to his kindred, and was it wrath and resentment at hearing them so bitterly reviled which made his color vary from red to pale and roused such a tumult in his soul that he was scarcely capable of speech? No matter! This lad was certainly no suitable bearer of the message the prophet desired to send to his uncle, and Bai beckoned to Hornecht to come with him under the shadow of a broad-limbed sycamore-tree.

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The point was to secure Hosea's services in the army at any cost, so he laid his hand on his friend's shoulder, saying:

"You know that it was my wife who won you and others over to our cause. She serves us better and more eagerly than many a man, and while I appreciate your daughter's beauty, she never tires of lauding the winning charm of her innocence."

"And Kasana is to take part in the plot?" cried the soldier angrily.

"Not as an active worker, like my wife,—certainly not."

"She would be ill-suited to such a task," replied the other in a calmer tone, "she is scarcely more than a child."

"Yet through her aid we might bring to our cause a man whose good-will seems to me priceless."

"You mean Hosea?" asked the captain, his brow darkening again, but the prophet added:

"And if I do? Is he still a real Hebrew? Can you deem it unworthy the daughter of a distinguished warrior to bestow her hand on a man who, if our plans prosper, will be commander-in-chief of all the troops in the land?"

"No, my lord!" cried Hornecht. "But one of my motives for rebelling against Pharaoh and upholding Siptah is that the king's mother was a foreigner, while our own blood courses through Siptah's veins. The mother decides the race to which a man belongs, and Hosea's mother was a Hebrew woman. He is my friend, I value his talents; Kasana likes him. . . ."

"Yet you desire a more distinguished son-in-law?" interrupted his companion. "How is our arduous enterprise to prosper, if those who are to peril their lives for its success consider the first sacrifice too great? You say that your daughter favors Hosea?"

"Yes, she did care for him," the soldier answered; "yes, he was her heart's desire. But I compelled her to obey me, and now that she is a widow, am I to give her to the man whom—the gods alone know with how much difficulty—I forced her to resign? When was such an act heard of in Egypt?"

"Ever since the men and women who dwell by the Nile have submitted, for the sake of a great cause, to demands opposed to their wishes," replied the priest.

"Consider all this, and remember that Hosea's ancestress—he boasted of it in your own presence—was an Egyptian, the daughter of a man of my own class."



“How many generations have passed to the tomb since?”

“No matter! It brings us into closer relations with him. That must suffice. Farewell until this evening. Meanwhile, will you extend your hospitality to Hosea’s nephew and commend him to your fair daughter’s nursing; he seems in sore need of care.”

CHAPTER IV.

The house of Hornecht, like nearly every other dwelling in the city, was the scene of the deepest mourning. The men had shaved their hair, and the women had put dust on their foreheads. The archer’s wife had died long before, but his daughter and her women received him with waving veils and loud lamentations; for the astrologer, his brother-in-law, had lost both his first-born son and his grandson, and the plague had snatched its victims from the homes of many a friend.



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But the senseless youth soon demanded all the care the women could bestow, and after bathing him and binding a healing ointment on the dangerous wound in his head, strong wine and food were placed before him, after which, refreshed and strengthened, he obeyed the summons of the daughter of his host.

The dust-covered, worn-out fellow was transformed into a handsome youth. His perfumed hair fell in long curling locks from beneath the fresh white bandage, and gold-bordered Egyptian robes from the wardrobe of Kasana's dead husband covered his pliant bronzed limbs. He seemed pleased with the finery of his garments, which exhaled a subtle odor of spikenard new to his senses; for the eyes in his handsome face sparkled brilliantly.

It was many a day since the captain's daughter, herself a woman of unusual beauty and charm, had seen a handsomer youth. Within the year she had married a man she did not love. Kasana had returned a widow to her father's house, which lacked a mistress, and the great wealth bequeathed to her, at her husband's death, made it possible for her to bring into the soldier's unpretending home the luxury and ease which to her had now become a second nature.

Her father, a stern man prone to sudden fits of passion, now yielded absolutely to her will. Formerly he had pitilessly enforced his own, compelling the girl of fifteen to wed a man many years her senior. This had been done because he perceived that Kasana had given her young heart to Hosea, the soldier, and he deemed it beneath his dignity to receive the Hebrew, who at that time held no prominent position in the army, as his son-in-law. An Egyptian girl had no choice save to accept the husband chosen by her father and Kasana submitted, though she shed so many bitter tears that the archer rejoiced when, in obedience to his will, she had wedded an unloved husband.

But even as a widow Kasana's heart clung to the Hebrew. When the army was in the field her anxiety was ceaseless; day and night were spent in restlessness and watching. When news came from the troops she asked only about Hosea, and her father with deep annoyance attributed to her love for the Hebrew her rejection of suitor after suitor. As a widow she had a right to the bestowal of her own hand, and the tender, gentle-natured woman astonished Hornecht by the resolute decision displayed, not alone to him and lovers of her own rank, but to Prince Siptah, whose cause the captain had espoused as his own.

To-day Kasana expressed her delight at the Hebrew's return with such entire frankness and absence of reserve that the quick-tempered man rushed out of the house lest he might be tempted into some thoughtless act or word. His young guest was left to the care of his daughter and her nurse.



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How deeply the lad's sensitive nature was impressed by the airy rooms, the open verandas supported by many pillars, the brilliant hues of the painting, the artistic household utensils, the soft cushions, and the sweet perfume everywhere! All these things were novel and strange to the son of a herdsman who had always lived within the grey walls of a spacious, but absolutely plain abode, and spent months together in canvas tents among shepherds and flocks, nay was more accustomed to be in the open air than under any shelter! He felt as though some wizard had borne him into a higher and more beautiful world, where he was entirely at home in his magnificent garb, with his perfumed curls and limbs fresh from the bath. True, the whole earth was fair, even out in the pastures among the flocks or round the fire in front of the tent in the cool of the evening, when the shepherds sang, the hunters told tales of daring exploits, and the stars sparkled brightly overhead.

But all these pleasures were preceded by weary, hateful labor; here it was a delight merely to see and to breathe and, when the curtains parted and the young widow, giving him a friendly greeting, made him sit down opposite to her, sometimes questioning him and sometimes listening with earnest sympathy to his replies, he almost imagined his senses had failed him as they had done under the ruins of the fallen house, and he was enjoying the sweetest of dreams. The feeling that threatened to stifle him and frequently interrupted the flow of words was the rapture bestowed upon him by great Aschera, the companion of Baal, of whom the Phoenician traders who supplied the shepherds with many good things had told him such marvels, and whom the stern Miriam forbade him ever to name at home.

His family had instilled into his young heart hatred of the Egyptians as the oppressors of his race, but could they be so wicked, could he detest a people among whom were creatures like this lovely, gentle woman, who gazed into his eyes so softly, so tenderly, whose voice fell on his ear like harmonious music, and whose glance made his blood course so swiftly that he could scarce endure it and pressed his hand upon his heart to quiet its wild pulsation.

Kasana sat opposite to him on a seat covered with a panther-skin, drawing the fine wool from the distaff. He had pleased her and she had received him kindly because he was related to the man whom she had loved from childhood. She imagined that she could trace a resemblance between him and Hosea, though the youth lacked the grave earnestness of the man to whom she had yielded her young heart, she knew not why nor when, though he had never sought her love.

A lotus blossom rested among her dark waving curls, and its stem fell in a graceful curve on her bent neck, round which clustered a mass of soft locks. When she lifted her eyes to his, he felt as though two springs had opened to pour floods of bliss into his young breast, and he had already clasped in greeting the dainty hand which held the yarn.



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She now questioned him about Hosea and the woman who had sent the message, whether she was young and fair and whether any tie of love bound her to his uncle.

Ephraim laughed merrily. She who had sent him was so grave and earnest that the bare thought of her being capable of any tender emotion wakened his mirth. As to her beauty, he had never asked himself the question.

The young widow interpreted the laugh as the reply she most desired and, much relieved, laid aside the spindle and invited Ephraim to go into the garden.

How fragrant and full of bloom it was, how well-kept were the beds, the paths, the arbors, and the pond.

His unpretending home adjoined a dreary yard, wholly unadorned and filled with pens for sheep and cattle. Yet he knew that at some future day he would be owner of great possessions, for he was the sole child and heir of a wealthy father and his mother was the daughter of the rich Nun. The men servants had told him this more than once, and it angered him to see that his own home was scarcely better than Hornecht's slave-quarters, to which Kasana had called his attention.

During their stroll through the garden Ephraim was asked to help her cull the flowers and, when the basket he carried was filled, she invited him to sit with her in a bower and aid her to twine the wreaths. These were intended for the dear departed. Her uncle and a beloved cousin—who bore some resemblance to Ephraim—had been snatched away the night before by the plague which his people had brought upon Tanis.

From the street which adjoined the garden-wall they heard the wails of women lamenting the dead or bearing a corpse to the tomb. Once, when the cries of woe rose more loudly and clearly than ever, Kasana gently reproached him for all that the people of Tanis had suffered through the Hebrews, and asked if he could deny that the Egyptians had good reason to hate a race which had brought such anguish upon them.

It was hard for Ephraim to find a fitting answer; he had been told that the God of his race had punished the Egyptians to rescue his own people from shame and bondage, and he could neither condemn nor scorn the men of his own blood. So he kept silence that he might neither speak falsely nor blaspheme; but Kasana allowed him no peace, and he at last replied that aught which caused her sorrow was grief to him, but his people had no power over life and health, and when a Hebrew was ill, he often sent for an Egyptian physician. What had occurred was doubtless the will of the great God of his fathers, whose power far surpassed the might of any other deity. He himself was a Hebrew, yet she would surely believe his assurance that he was guiltless of the plague and would gladly recall her uncle and cousin to life, had he the power to do so. For her sake he would undertake the most difficult enterprise.

She smiled kindly and replied:



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“My poor boy! If I see any guilt in you, it is only that you are one of a race which knows no ruth, no patience. Our beloved, hapless dead! They must even lose the lamentations of their kindred; for the house where they rest is plague-stricken and no one is permitted to enter.”

She silently wiped her eyes and went on arranging her garlands, but tear after tear coursed down her cheeks.

Ephraim knew not what to say, and mutely handed her the leaves and blossoms. Whenever his hand touched hers a thrill ran through his veins. His head and the wound began to ache, and he sometimes felt a slight chill. He knew that the fever was increasing, as it had done once before when he nearly lost his life in the red disease; but he was ashamed to own it and battled bravely against his pain.

When the sun was nearing the horizon Hornecht entered the garden. He had already seen Hosea, and though heartily glad to greet his old friend once more, it had vexed him that the soldier's first enquiry was for his daughter. He did not withhold this from the young widow, but his flashing eyes betrayed the displeasure with which he delivered the Hebrew's message. Then, turning to Ephraim, he told him that Hosea and his men would encamp outside of the city, pitching their tents, on account of the pestilence, between Tanis and the sea. They would soon march by. His uncle sent Ephraim word that he must seek him in his tent.

When he noticed that the youth was aiding his daughter to weave the garlands, he smiled, and said:

“Only this morning this young fellow declared his intention of remaining free and a ruler all his life. Now he has taken service with you, Kasana. You need not blush, young friend. If either your mistress or your uncle can persuade you to join us and embrace the noblest trade—that of the soldier—so much the better for you. Look at me! I've wielded the bow more than forty years and still rejoice in my profession. I must obey, it is true, but it is also my privilege to command, and the thousands who obey me are not sheep and cattle, but brave men. Consider the matter again. He would make a splendid leader of the archers. What say you, Kasana?”

“Certainly,” replied the young widow. And she was about to say more, but the regular tramp of approaching troops was heard on the other side of the garden-wall. A slight flush crimsoned Kasana's cheeks, her eyes sparkled with a light that startled Ephraim and, regardless of her father or her guest, she darted past the pond, across paths and flower-beds, to a grassy bank beside the wall, whence she gazed eagerly toward the road and the armed host which soon marched by.

Hosea, in full armor, headed his men. As he passed Hornecht's garden he turned his grave head, and seeing Kasana lowered his battle-axe in friendly salutation.



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Ephraim had followed the captain of the archers, who pointed out the youth's uncle, saying: "Shining armor would become you also, and when drums are beating, pipes squeaking shrilly, and banners waving, a man marches as lightly as if he had wings. Today the martial music is hushed by the terrible woe brought upon us by that Hebrew villain. True, Hosea is one of his race yet, though I cannot forget that fact, I must admit that he is a genuine soldier, a model for the rising generation. Tell him what I think of him on this score. Now bid farewell to Kasana quickly and follow the men; the little side-door in the wall is open." He turned towards the house as he spoke, and Ephraim held out his hand to bid the young widow farewell.

She clasped it, but hurriedly withdrew her own, exclaiming anxiously: "How burning hot your hand is! You have a fever!"

"No, no," faltered the youth, but even while speaking he fell upon his knees and the veil of unconsciousness descended upon the sufferer's soul, which had been the prey of so many conflicting emotions.

Kasana was alarmed, but speedily regained her composure and began to cool his brow and head by bathing them with water from the neighboring pond. Yes, in his boyhood the man she loved must have resembled this youth. Her heart throbbed more quickly and, while supporting his head in her hands, she gently kissed him.

She supposed him to be unconscious, but the refreshing water had already dispelled the brief swoon, and he felt the caress with a thrill of rapture. But he kept his eyes closed, and would gladly have lain for a life-time with his head pillowed on her breast in the hope that her lips might once more meet his. But instead of kissing him a second time she called loudly for aid. He raised himself, gave one wild, ardent look into her face and, ere she could stay him, rushed like a strong man to the garden gate, flung it open, and followed the troops. He soon overtook the rear ranks, passed on in advance of the others, and at last reached their leader's side and, calling his uncle by name, gave his own. Hosea, in his joy and astonishment, held out his arms, but ere Ephraim could fall upon his breast, he again lost consciousness, and stalwart soldiers bore the senseless lad into the tent the quartermaster had already pitched on a dune by the sea.

CHAPTER V.

It was midnight. A fire was blazing in front of Hosea's tent, and he sat alone before it, gazing mournfully now into the flames and anon over the distant country. Inside the canvas walls Ephraim was lying on his uncle's camp-bed.

The surgeon who attended the soldiers had bandaged the youth's wounds, given him an invigorating cordial, and commanded him to keep still; for the violence with which the fever had attacked the lad alarmed him.



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But in spite of the leech's prescription Ephraim continued restless. Sometimes Kasana's image rose before his eyes, increasing the fever of his over-heated blood, sometimes he recalled the counsel to become a warrior like his uncle. The advice seemed wise—at least he tried to persuade himself that it was—because it promised honor and fame, but in reality he wished to follow it because it would bring her for whom his soul yearned nearer to him.

Then his pride rose as he remembered the insults which she and her father had heaped on those to whom by every tie of blood and affection, he belonged. His hand clenched as he thought of the ruined home of his grandfather, whom he had ever regarded one of the noblest of men. Nor was his message forgotten. Miriam had repeated it again and again, and his clear memory retained every syllable, for he had unweariedly iterated it to himself during his solitary walk to Tanis. He was striving to do the same thing now but, ere he could finish, his mind always reverted to thoughts of Kasana. The leech had told Hosea to forbid the sufferer to talk and, when the youth attempted to deliver his message, the uncle ordered him to keep silence. Then the soldier arranged his pillow with a mother's tenderness, gave him his medicine, and kissed him on the forehead. At last he took his seat by the fire before the tent and only rose to give Ephraim a drink when he saw by the stars that an hour had passed.

The flames illumined Hosea's bronzed features, revealing the countenance of a man who had confronted many a peril and vanquished all by steadfast perseverance and wise consideration. His black eyes had an imperious look, and his full, firmly-compressed lips suggested a quick temper and, still more, the iron will of a resolute man. His broad-shouldered form leaned against some lances thrust crosswise into the earth, and when he passed his strong hand through his thick black locks or smoothed his dark beard, and his eyes sparkled with ire, it was evident that his soul was stirred by conflicting emotions and that he stood on the threshold of a great resolve. The lion was resting, but when he starts up, let his foes beware!

His soldiers had often compared their fearless, resolute leader, with his luxuriant hair, to the king of beasts, and as he now shook his fist, while the muscles of his bronzed arm swelled as though they would burst the gold armband that encircled them, and his eyes flashed fire, his awe-inspiring mien did not invite approach.

Westward, the direction toward which his eyes were turned, lay the necropolis and the ruined strangers' quarter. But a few hours ago he had led his troops through the ruins around which the ravens were circling and past his father's devastated home.

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Silently, as duty required, he marched on. Not until he halted to seek quarters for the soldiers did he hear from Hornecht, the captain of the archers, what had happened during the night. He listened silently, without the quiver of an eye-lash, or a word of questioning, until his men had pitched their tents. He had but just gone to rest when a Hebrew maiden, spite of the menaces of the guard, made her way in to implore him, in the name of Eliab, one of the oldest slaves of his family, to go with her to the old man, her grandfather. The latter, whose weakness prevented journeying, had been left behind, and directly after the departure of the Hebrews he and his wife had been carried on an ass to the little but near the harbor, which generous Nun, his master, had bestowed on the faithful slave.

The grand-daughter had been left to care for the feeble pair, and now the old servant's heart yearned for one more sight of his lord's first-born son whom, when a child, he had carried in his arms. He had charged the girl to tell Hosea that Nun had promised his people that his son would abandon the Egyptians and cleave to his own race. The tribe of Ephraim, nay the whole Hebrew nation had hailed these tidings with the utmost joy. Eliab would give him fuller details; she herself had been well nigh dazed with weeping and anxiety. He would earn the richest blessings if he would only follow her.

The soldier realized at once that he must fulfil this desire, but he was obliged to defer his visit to the old slave until the next morning. The messenger, however, even in her haste, had told him many incidents she had seen herself or heard from others.

At last she left him. He rekindled the fire and, so long as the flames burned brightly, his gaze was bent with a gloomy, thoughtful expression upon the west. Not till they had devoured the fuel and merely flickered with a faint bluish light around the charred embers did he fix his eyes on the whirling sparks. And the longer he did so, the deeper, the more unconquerable became the conflict in his soul, whose every energy, but yesterday, had been bent upon a single glorious goal.

The war against the Libyan rebels had detained him eighteen months from his home, and he had seen ten crescent moons grow full since any news had reached him of his kindred. A few weeks before he had been ordered to return, and when to-day he approached nearer and nearer to the obelisks towering above Tanis, the city of Rameses, his heart had pulsed with as much joy and hopefulness as if the man of thirty were once more a boy.



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Within a few short hours he should again see his beloved, noble father, who had needed great deliberation and much persuasion from Hosea's mother—long since dead—ere he would permit his son to follow the bent of his inclinations and enter upon a military life in Pharaoh's army. He had anticipated that very day surprising him with the news that he had been promoted above men many years his seniors and of Egyptian lineage. Instead of the slights Nun had dreaded, Hosea's gallant bearing, courage and, as he modestly added, good-fortune had gained him promotion, yet he had remained a Hebrew. When he felt the necessity of offering to some god sacrifices and prayer, he had bowed before Seth, to whose temple Nun had led him when a child, and whom in those days all the people in Goshen in whose veins flowed Semitic blood had worshipped. But he also owed allegiance to another god, not the God of his fathers, but the deity revered by all the Egyptians who had been initiated. He remained unknown to the masses, who could not have understood him; yet he was adored not only by the adepts but by the majority of those who had obtained high positions in civil or military life—whether they were servants of the divinity or not—and Hosea, the initiated and the stranger, knew him also. Everybody understood when allusion was made to “the God,” the “Sum of All,” the “Creator of Himself,” and the “Great One.” Hymns extolled him, inscriptions on the monuments, which all could read, spoke of him, the one God, who manifested himself to the world, pervaded the universe, and existed throughout creation not alone as the vital spark animates the human organism, but as himself the sum of creation, the world with its perpetual growth, decay, and renewal, obeying the laws he had himself ordained. His spirit, existing in every form of nature, dwelt also in man, and wherever a mortal gazed he could discern the rule of the “One.” Nothing could be imagined without him, therefore he was one like the God of Israel. Nothing could be created nor happen on earth apart from him, therefore, like Jehovah, he was omnipotent. Hosea had long regarded both as alike in spirit, varying only in name. Whoever adored one was a servant of the other, so the warrior could have entered his father's presence with a clear conscience, and told him that although in the service of the king he had remained loyal to the God of his nation.

Another thought had made his heart pulse faster and more joyously as he saw in the distance the pylons and obelisks of Tanis; for on countless marches through the silent wilderness and in many a lonely camp he had beheld in imagination a virgin of his own race, whom he had known as a singular child, stirred by marvellous thoughts, and whom, just before leading his troops to the Libyan war, he had again met, now a dignified maiden of stern and unapproachable beauty. She had journeyed from Succoth to Tanis to attend his mother's funeral, and her image had been



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deeply imprinted on his heart, as his—he ventured to hope—on hers. She had since become a prophetess, who heard the voice of her God. While the other maidens of his people were kept in strict seclusion, she was free to come and go at will, even among men, and spite of her hate of the Egyptians and of Hosea's rank among them, she did not deny that it was grief to part and that she would never cease thinking of him. His future wife must be as strong, as earnest, as himself. Miriam was both, and quite eclipsed a younger and brighter vision which he had once conjured before his memory with joy.

He loved children, and a lovelier girl than Kasana he had never met, either in Egypt or in alien lands. The interest with which the fair daughter of his companion-in-arms watched his deeds and his destiny, the modest yet ardent devotion afterwards displayed by the much sought-after young widow, who coldly repelled all other suitors, had been a delight to him in times of peace. Prior to her marriage he had thought of her as the future mistress of his home, but her wedding another, and Hornecht's oft-repeated declaration that he would never give his child to a foreigner, had hurt his pride and cooled his passion. Then he met Miriam and was fired with an ardent desire to make her his wife. Still, on the homeward march the thought of seeing Kasana again had been a pleasant one. It was fortunate he no longer wished to wed Hornecht's daughter; it could have led to naught save trouble. Both Hebrews and Egyptians held it to be an abomination to eat at the same board, or use the same seats or knives. Though he himself was treated by his comrades as one of themselves, and had often heard Kasana's father speak kindly of his kindred, yet "strangers" were hateful in the eyes of the captain of the archers, and of all free Egyptians.

He had found in Miriam the noblest of women. He hoped that Kasana might make another happy. To him she would ever be the charming child from whom we expect nothing save the delight of her presence.

He had come to ask from her, as a tried friend ever ready for leal service, a joyous glance. From Miriam he would ask herself, with all her majesty and beauty, for he had borne the solitude of the camp long enough, and now that on his return no mother's arms opened to welcome him, he felt for the first time the desolation of a single life. He longed to enjoy the time of peace when, after dangers and privations of every kind, he could lay aside his weapons. It was his duty to lead a wife home to his father's hearth and to provide against the extinction of the noble race of which he was the sole representative. Ephraim was the son of his sister.

Filled with the happiest thoughts, he had advanced toward Tannis and, on reaching the goal of all his hopes and wishes, found it lying before him like a ripening grain-field devastated by hail and swarms of locusts.



As if in derision, fate led him first to the Hebrew quarter. A heap of dusty ruins marked the site of the house where he had spent his childhood, and for which his heart had longed; and where his loved ones had watched his departure, beggars were now greedily searching for plunder among the debris.



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The first man to greet him in Tanis was Kasana's father. Instead of a friendly glance from her eyes, he had received from him tidings that pierced his inmost heart. He had expected to bring home a wife, and the house where she was to reign as mistress was razed to the ground. The father, for whose blessing he longed, and who was to have been gladdened by his advancement, had journeyed far away and must henceforward be the foe of the sovereign to whom he owed his prosperity.

He had been proud of rising, despite his origin, to place and power. Now he would be able, as leader of a great host, to show the prowess of which he was capable. His inventive brain had never lacked schemes which, if executed by his superiors, would have had good results; now he could fulfil them according to his own will, and instead of the tool become the guiding power.

These reflections had awakened a keen sense of exultation in his breast and winged his steps on his homeward march and, now that he had reached the goal, so long desired, must he turn back to join the shepherds and builders to whom—it now seemed a sore misfortune—he belonged by the accident of birth and ancestry, though, denial was futile, he felt as utterly alien to the Hebrews as he was to the Libyans whom he had confronted on the battle-field. In almost every pursuit he valued, he had nothing in common with his people. He had believed he might truthfully answer yes to his father's enquiry whether he had returned a Hebrew, yet he now felt it would be only a reluctant and half-hearted assent.

He clung with his whole soul to the standards beneath which he had gone to battle and might now himself lead to victory. Was it possible to wrench his heart from them, renounce what his own deeds had won? Yet Eliab's granddaughter had told him that the Hebrews expected him to leave the army and join them. A message from his father must soon reach him— and among the Hebrews a son never opposed a parent's command.

There was still another to whom implicit obedience was due, Pharaoh, to whom he had solemnly vowed loyal service, sworn to follow his summons without hesitation or demur, through fire and water, by day and night.

How often he had branded the soldier who deserted to the foe or rebelled against the orders of his commander as a base scoundrel and villain, and by his orders many a renegade from his standard had died a shameful death on the gallows under his own eyes. Was he now to commit the deed for which he had despised and killed others? His prompt decision was known throughout the army, how quickly in the most difficult situations he could resolve upon the right course and carry it into action; but during this dark and lonely hour of the night he seemed to himself a mere swaying reed, and felt as helpless as a forsaken orphan.



Wrath against himself preyed upon him, and when he thrust a spear into the flames, scattering the embers and sending a shower of bright sparks upward, it was rage at his own wavering will that guided his hand.



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Had recent events imposed upon him the virile duty of vengeance, doubt and hesitation would have vanished and his father's summons would have spurred him on to action; but who had been the heaviest sufferers here? Surely it was the Egyptians whom Moses' curse had robbed of thousands of beloved lives, while the Hebrews had escaped their revenge by flight. His wrath had been kindled by the destruction of the Hebrews' houses, but he saw no sufficient cause for a bloody revenge, when he remembered the unspeakable anguish inflicted upon Pharaoh and his subjects by the men of his own race.

Nay; he had nothing to avenge; he seemed to himself like a man who beholds his father and mother in mortal peril, owns that he cannot save both, yet knows that while staking his life to rescue one he must leave the other to perish. If he obeyed the summons of his people, he would lose his honor, which he had kept as untarnished as his brazen helm, and with it the highest goal of his life; if he remained loyal to Pharaoh and his oath, he must betray his own race, have all his future days darkened by his father's curse, and resign the brightest dream he cherished; for Miriam was a true child of her people and he would be blest indeed if her lofty soul could be as ardent in love as it was bitter in hate.

Stately and beautiful, but with gloomy eyes and hand upraised in warning, her image rose before his mental vision as he sat gazing over the smouldering fire out into the darkness. And now the pride of his manhood rebelled, and it seemed base cowardice to cast aside, from dread of a woman's wrath and censure, all that a warrior held most dear.

"Nay, nay," he murmured, and the scale containing duty, love, and filial obedience suddenly kicked the beam. He was what he was—the leader of ten thousand men in Pharaoh's army. He had vowed fealty to him—and to none other. Let his people fly from the Egyptian yoke, if they desired. He, Hosea, scorned flight. Bondage had sorely oppressed them, but the highest in the land had received him as an equal and held him worthy of the loftiest honor. To repay them with treachery and desertion was foreign to his nature and, drawing a long breath, he sprang to his feet with the conviction that he had chosen aright. A fair woman and the weak yearning of a loving heart should not make him a recreant to grave duties and the loftiest purposes of his life.

"I will stay!" cried a loud voice in his breast. "Father is wise and kind, and when he learns the reasons for my choice he will approve them and bless, instead of cursing me. I will write to him, and the boy Miriam sent me shall be the messenger."

A call from the tent startled him and when, springing up, he glanced at the stars, he found that he had forgotten his duty to the suffering lad and hurried to his couch.

Ephraim was sitting up in his bed, watching for him, and exclaimed: “I have been waiting a long, long time to see you. So many thoughts crowd my brain and, above all, Miriam’s message. I can get no rest until I have delivered it—so listen now.”



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Hosea nodded assent and, after drinking the healing potion handed to him, Ephraim began:

“Miriam the daughter of Amram and Jochebed greets the son of Nun the Ephraimite. Thy name is Hosea, ‘the Help,’ and the Lord our God hath chosen thee to be the helper of His people. But henceforward, by His command, thou shalt be called Joshua,— [Jehoshua, he who helps Jehova]— the help of Jehovah; for through Miriam’s lips the God of her fathers, who is the God of thy fathers likewise, bids thee be the sword and buckler of thy people. In Him dwells all power, and he promises to steel thine arm that He may smite the foe.”

Ephraim had begun in a low voice, but gradually his tones grew more resonant and the last words rang loudly and solemnly through the stillness of the night.

Thus had Miriam uttered them, laying her hands on the lad’s head and gazing earnestly into his face with eyes deep and dark as night, and while repeating them he had felt as though some secret power were constraining him to shout them aloud to Hosea, just as he had heard them from the lips of the prophetess. Then, with a sigh of relief, he turned his face toward the canvas wall of the tent, saying quietly:

“Now I will go to sleep.”

But Hosea laid his hand on his shoulder, exclaiming imperiously: “Say it again.”

The youth obeyed, but this time he repeated the words in a low, careless tone, then saying beseechingly:

“Let me rest now,” put his hand under his cheek and closed his eyes.

Hosea let him have his way, carefully applied a fresh bandage to his burning head, extinguished the light, and flung more fuel on the smouldering fire outside; but the alert, resolute man performed every act as if in a dream. At last he sat down, and propping his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, stared alternately, now into vacancy, and anon into the flames.

Who was this God who summoned him through Miriam’s lips to be, under His guidance, the sword and shield of His people?

He was to be known by a new name, and in the minds of the Egyptians the name was everything “Honor to the name of Pharaoh,” not “Honor to Tharaoh” was spoken and written. And if henceforward he was to be called Joshua, the behest involved casting aside his former self, and becoming a new man.

The will of the God of his fathers announced to him by Miriam meant no less a thing than the command to transform himself from the Egyptian his life had made him, into



the Hebrew he had been when a lad. He must learn to act and feel like an Israelite! Miriam's summons called him back to his people. The God of his race, through her, commanded him to fulfil his father's expectations. Instead of the Egyptian troops whom he must forsake, he was in future to lead the men of his own blood forth to battle! This was the meaning of her bidding, and when the noble virgin and prophetess who addressed

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him, asserted that God Himself spoke through her lips, it was no idle boast, she was really obeying the will of the Most High. And now the image of the woman whom he had ventured to love, rose in unapproachable majesty before him. Many things which he had heard in his childhood concerning the God of Abraham, and His promises returned to his mind, and the scale which hitherto had been the heavier, rose higher and higher. The resolve just matured, now seemed uncertain, and he again confronted the terrible conflict he had believed was overpast.

How loud, how potent was the call he heard! Ringing in his ears, it disturbed the clearness and serenity of his mind, and instead of calmly reflecting on the matter, memories of his boyhood, which he had imagined were buried long ago, raised their voices, and incoherent flashes of thought darted through his brain.

Sometimes he felt impelled to turn in prayer to the God who summoned him, but whenever he attempted to calm himself and uplift his heart and eyes to Him, he remembered the oath he must break, the soldiers he must abandon to lead, instead of well-disciplined, brave, obedient bands of brothers-in-arms, a wretched rabble of cowardly slaves, and rude, obstinate shepherds, accustomed to the heavy yoke of bondage.

The third hour after midnight had come, the guards had been relieved, and Hosea thought he might now permit himself a few hours repose. He would think all these things over again by daylight with his usual clear judgment, which he strove in vain to obtain now. But when he entered the tent and heard Ephraim's regular breathing, he fancied that the boy's solemn message was again echoing in his ears. Startled, he was in the act of repeating it himself, when loud voices in violent altercation among the sentinels disturbed the stillness of the night.

The interruption was welcome, and he hurried to the outposts.

CHAPTER VI.

Hogla, the old slave's granddaughter, had come to beseech Hosea to go with her at once to her grandfather, who had suddenly broken down, and who feeling the approach of death could not perish without having once more seen and blessed him.

The warrior told her to wait and, after assuring himself that Ephraim was sleeping quietly, ordered a trusty man to watch beside his bed and went away with Hogla.

The girl walked before him, carrying a small lantern, and as its light fell on her face and figure, he saw how unlovely she was, for the hard toil of slavery had bowed the poor



thing's back before its time. Her voice had the harsh accents frequently heard in the tones of women whose strength has been pitilessly tasked; but her words were kind and tender, and Hosea forgot her appearance when she told him that her lover had gone with the departing tribes, yet she had remained with her grandparents because she could not bring herself to leave the old couple alone. Because she had no beauty no man had sought her for his wife till Assir came, who did not care for her looks because he toiled industriously, like herself, and expected her to add to his savings. He would gladly have stayed with her, but his father had commanded him to go forth, so there was no choice for them save to obey and part forever.

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The words were simple and the accents harsh, yet they pierced the heart of the man who was preparing to follow his own path in opposition to his father's will.

As they approached the harbor and Hosea saw the embankments, and the vast fortified storehouses built by his own people, he remembered the ragged laborers whom he had so often beheld crouching before the Egyptian overseers or fighting savagely among themselves. He had heard, too, that they shrunk from no lies, no fraud to escape their toil, and how difficult was the task of compelling them to obey and fulfil their duty.

The most repulsive forms among these luckless hordes rose distinctly before his vision, and the thought that it might henceforward be his destiny to command such a wretched rabble seemed to him ignominy which the lowest of his brave officers, the leader of but fifty men, would seek to avoid. True, Pharaoh's armies contained many a Hebrew mercenary who had won renown for bravery and endurance; but these men were the sons of owners of herds or people who had once been shepherds. The toiling slaves, whose clay huts could be upset by a kick, formed the majority of those to whom he was required to return.

Resolute in his purpose to remain loyal to the oath which bound him to the Egyptian standard, yet moved to the very depths of his heart, he entered the slave's little hut, and his anger rose when he saw old Eliab sitting up, mixing some wine and water with his own hands. So he had been summoned from his nephew's sick-bed, and robbed of his night's rest, on a false pretence, in order that a slave, in his eyes scarcely entitled to rank as a man, might have his way. Here he himself experienced a specimen of the selfish craft of which the Egyptians accused his people, and which certainly did not attract him, Hosea, to them. But the anger of the just, keen sighted-man quickly subsided at the sight of the girl's unfeigned joy in her grandfather's speedy recovery. Besides he soon learned from the old man's aged wife that, shortly after Hogla's departure, she remembered the wine they had, and as soon as he swallowed the first draught her husband, whom she had believed had one foot in the grave, grew better and better. Now he was mixing some more of God's gift to strengthen himself occasionally by a sip.

Here Eliab interrupted her to say that they owed this and many more valuable things to the goodness of Nun, Hosea's father, who had given them, besides their little hut, wine, meal for bread, a milch cow, and also an ass, so that he could often ride out into the fresh air. He had likewise left them their granddaughter and some pieces of silver, so that they could look forward without fear to the end of their days, especially as they had behind the house a bit of ground, where Hogla meant to raise radishes, onions, and leeks for their own table. But the best gift of all was the written document making them and the girl free forever. Ay, Nun was a true master and father to his people, and the blessing of Jehovah had followed his gifts; for soon after the departure of the Hebrews, he and his wife had been brought hither unmolested by the aid of Assir, Hogla's lover.

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“We old people shall die here,” Eliab’s wife added. But Assir promised Hogla that he would come back for her when she had discharged her filial duties to the end.

Then, turning to her granddaughter, she said encouragingly: “And we cannot live much longer now.”

Hogla raised her blue gown to wipe the tears from her eyes, exclaiming

“May it be a long, long time yet. I am young and can wait.”

Hosea heard the words, and again it seemed as though the poor, forsaken, unlovely girl was giving him a lesson.

He had listened patiently to the freed slaves’ talk, but his time was limited and he now asked whether Eliab had summoned him for any special purpose.

“Ay,” he replied; “I was obliged to send, not only to still the yearning of my old heart, but because my lord Nun commanded me to do so.”

“Thou hast attained a grand and noble manhood, and hast now become the hope of Israel. Thy father promised the slaves and freedmen of his household that after his death, thou wouldst be heir, lord and master. His words were full of thy praise, and great rejoicing hailed his statement that thou wouldst follow the departing Hebrews. And my lord deigned to command me to tell thee, if thou should’st return ere his messenger arrived, that Nun, thy father, expected his son. Whithersoever thy nation may wander, thou art to follow. Toward sunrise, or at latest by the noon-tide hour, the tribes will tarry to rest at Succoth. He will conceal in the hollow sycamore that stands in front of Amminadab’s house a letter which will inform thee whither they will next turn their steps. His blessing and that of our God will attend thy every step.”

As Eliab uttered the last words, Hosea bowed his head as if inviting invisible hands to be laid upon it. Then he thanked the old man and asked, in subdued tones, whether all the Hebrews had willingly obeyed the summons to leave house and lands.

His aged wife clasped her hands, exclaiming: “Oh no, my lord, certainly not. What wailing and weeping filled the air before their departure! Many refused to go, others fled, or sought some hiding-place. But all resistance was futile. In the house of our neighbor Deuel—you know him—his young wife had just given birth to their first son. How was she to fare on the journey? She wept bitterly and her husband uttered fierce curses, but it was all in vain. She was put in a cart with her babe, and as the arrangements went on, both submitted like all the rest—even Phineas who crept into a pigeon-house with his wife and five children, and crooked grave-haunting Kusaja. Do you remember her? Adonai! She had seen father, mother, husband, and three noble sons, all that the Lord had given her to love, borne to the tomb. They lay side by side in

our burying ground, and every morning and evening she went there and, sitting on a log of wood which she had rolled close to the gravestones,

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moved her lips constantly, not in prayer—no, I have listened often when she did not know I was near—no; she talked to the dead, as though they could hear her in the sepulchre, and understand her words like those who walk alive beneath the sun. She is near seventy, and for thrice seven years she has gone by the name of grave-haunting Kusaja. It was in sooth a foolish thing to do; yet perhaps that was why she found it all the harder to give it up, and go she would not, but hid herself among the bushes. When Ahieser, the overseer, dragged her out, her wailing made one's heart sore, yet when the time for departure came, the longing to go seized upon her also, and she found it as hard to resist as the others.”

“What had happened to the poor creatures, what possessed them?” asked Hosea, interrupting the old wife’s speech; for in imagination he again beheld the people he must lead, if he valued his father’s blessing as the most priceless boon the world could offer, and beheld them in all their wretchedness.

The startled dame, fearing that she had offended her master’s first-born son, the great and powerful chieftain, stammered:

“What possessed them, my lord? Ah, well—I am but a poor lowly slave-woman; yet, my lord, had you but seen it...”

“Well, even then?” interrupted the warrior in harsh, impatient tones, for this was the first time he had ever found himself compelled to act against his desires and belief.

Eliab tried to come to the assistance of the terrified woman, saying timidly

“Ah, my lord, no tongue can relate, no human mind can picture it. It came from the Almighty and, if I could describe how great was its influence on the souls of the people.....”

“Try,” Hosea broke in, “but my time is brief. So they were compelled to depart, and set forth reluctantly on their wanderings. Even the Egyptians have long known that they obeyed the bidding of Moses and Aaron as the sheep follow the shepherd. Have those who brought the terrible pestilence on so many guiltless human beings also wrought the miracle of blinding the minds of you and of your wife?”

The old man stretched out his hands to the soldier, and answered in a troubled voice and a tone of the most humble entreaty:

“Oh, my lord, you are my master’s first-born son, the greatest and loftiest of your race, if it is your pleasure you can trample me into the dust like a beetle, yet I must lift up my voice and say: ‘You have heard false tales!’ You were away in foreign lands when mighty things were done in our midst, and far from Zoan,—[The Hebrew name for Tanis]



—as I hear, when the exodus took place. Any son of our people who witnessed it would rather his tongue should wither than mock at the marvels the Lord permitted him to behold. Ah, if you had patience to suffer me to tell the tale. . . .”

“Speak on!” cried Hosea, astonished at the old man’s solemn fervor. Eliab thanked him with an ardent glance, exclaiming:



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“Oh, would that Aaron, or Eleasar, or my lord your father were here in my stead, or would that Jehovah would bestow on me the might of their eloquence! But be it as it is! True, I imagine I can again see and hear everything as though it were happening once more before my eyes, but how am I to describe it? How can such things be given in words? Yet, with God’s assistance, I will try.”

Here he paused and Hosea, noticing that the old man’s hands and lips were trembling, gave him the cup of wine, and Eliab gratefully quaffed it to the dregs. Then, half-closing his eyes, he began his story and his wrinkled features grew sharper as he went on:

“My wife has already told you what occurred after the people learned the command that had been issued. We, too, were among those who lost courage and murmured. But last night, all who belonged to the household of Nun— and also the shepherds, the slaves, and the poor—were summoned to a feast, and there was abundance of roast lamb, fresh, unleavened bread, and wine, more than usual at the harvest festival, which began that night, and which you, my lord, have often attended in your boyhood. We sat rejoicing, and our lord, your father, comforted us, and told us of the God of our fathers and the wonders He had wrought for them. It was now His will that we should go forth from this land where we had suffered contempt and bondage. This was no sacrifice like that of Abraham when, at the command of the Most High, he had whetted his knife to shed the blood of his son Isaac, though it would be hard for many of us to quit a home that had grown dear to us and forego many a familiar custom. But it will be a great happiness for us all. For, he said, we were not to journey forth to an unknown country, but to a beautiful region which God Himself had set apart for us. He had promised us, instead of this place of bondage, a new and delightful home where we should dwell free men, amid fruitful fields and rich pastures, which would supply food to every man and his family and make all hearts rejoice. Just as laborers must work hard to earn high wages, we must endure a brief period of want and suffering to gain for ourselves and for our children the beautiful new home which the Lord had promised. God’s own land it must be, for it was a gift of the Most High.

“Having spoken thus, he blessed us all and promised that thou, too, wouldst shake the dust from off thy feet, and join us to fight for our cause with a strong arm as a trained soldier and a dutiful son.

“Shouts of joy rang forth and, when we assembled in the market-place and found that all the bondmen had escaped from the overseers, many gained fresh courage. Then Aaron stepped into our midst, stood upon the auctioneer’s bench, and told us with his own lips all that we had heard from my master Nun at the festival. The words he uttered sounded sometimes like pealing thunder, and anon like the sweet



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melody of lutes, and every one felt that the Lord our God Himself was speaking through him; for even the most rebellious were so deeply moved that they no longer complained and murmured. And when he finally announced to the throng that no erring mortal, but the Lord our God Himself would be our leader, and described the wonders of the land whose gates He would open unto us, and where we might live, trammelled by no bondage, as free and happy men, owing no obedience to any ruler save the God of our fathers and those whom we ourselves chose for our leaders, every man present felt as though he were drunk with sweet wine, and, instead of faring forth across a barren wilderness to an unknown goal, was on the way to a great festal banquet, prepared by the Most High Himself. Even those who had not heard Aaron's words were inspired with wondrous faith; men and women behaved even more joyously and noisily than usual at the harvest festival, for every heart was overflowing with genuine gratitude.

"The old people caught the universal spirit! Your grandfather Elishama, bowed by the weight of his hundred years, who, as you know, has long sat bent and silent in his corner, straightened his drooping form, and with sparkling eyes poured forth a flood of eloquent words. The spirit of the Lord had descended upon him and upon us all. I myself felt as though the vigor of youth had returned to mind and body, and when I passed the throngs who were preparing to set forth, I saw the young mother Elisheba in her litter. Her face was as radiant as on her marriage morn, and she was pressing her nursling to her breast, and rejoicing over his happy fate in growing up in freedom in the Promised Land. Her spouse, Deuel, who had poured forth such bitter imprecations, now waved his staff, kissed his wife and child with tears of joy, and shouted with delight like a vintager at the harvest season, when jars and wine skins are too few to hold the blessing. Old grave-haunting Kusaja, who had been dragged away from the sepulchre of her kindred, was sitting in a cart with other infirm folk, waving her veil and joining in the hymn of praise Elkanah and Abiasaph, the sons of Korah, had begun. So they went forth; we who were left behind fell into each other's arms, uncertain whether the tears we shed streamed from our eyes for grief or for sheer joy at seeing the throng of our loved ones so full of hope and gladness.

"So it came to pass.

"As soon as the pitch torches borne at the head of the procession, which seemed to me to shine more brightly than the lamps lighted by the Egyptians on the gates of the temple of the great goddess Neith, had vanished in the darkness, we set out, that we might not delay Assir too long, and while passing through the streets, which resounded with the wailing of the citizens, we softly sang the hymn of the sons of Korah, and great joy and peace filled our hearts, for we knew that the Lord our God would defend and guide His people."



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The old man paused, but his wife and Hogla, who had listened with sparkling eyes, leaned one on the other and, without any prompting, began the hymn of praise of the sons of Korah, the old woman's faint voice mingling with touching fervor with the tones of the girl, whose harsh notes thrilled with the loftiest enthusiasm.

Hosea felt that it would be criminal to interrupt the outpouring of these earnest hearts, but Eliab soon stopped them and gazed with evident anxiety into the stern face of his lord's first-born son.

Had Hosea understood him?

Did this warrior, who served under Pharaoh's banner, realize how entirely the Lord God Himself had ruled the souls of his people at their departure.

Had the life among the Egyptians so estranged him from his people and his God, rendered him so degenerate, that he would bid defiance to the wishes and commands of his own father?

Was the man on whom the Hebrews' highest hopes were fixed a renegade, forever lost to his people?

He received no verbal answer to these mute questions, but when Hosea grasped his callous right hand in both his own and pressed it as he would have clasped a friend's, when he bade him farewell with tearful eyes, murmuring: "You shall hear from me!" he felt that he knew enough and, overwhelmed with passionate delight, he pressed kiss after kiss upon the warrior's arms and clothing.

CHAPTER VII.

Hosea returned to the camp with drooping head. The conflict in his soul was at an end. He now knew what duty required. He must obey his father's summons.

And the God of his race!

The old man's tale had given new life to the memories of his childhood, and he now knew that He was not the same God as the Seth of the Asiatics in Lower Egypt, nor the "One" and the "Sum of All" of the adepts.

The prayers he had uttered ere he fell asleep, the history of the creation of the world, which he could never hear sufficiently often, because it showed so clearly the gradual development of everything on earth and in heaven until man came to possess and enjoy all, the story of Abraham and Isaac, of Jacob, Esau, and his own ancestor, Joseph—how gladly he had listened to these tales as they fell from the lips of the gentle woman



who had given him life, and from those of his nurse, and his grandfather Elishama. Yet he imagined that they had faded from his memory long ago.

But in old Eliab's hovel he could have repeated the stories word for word, and he now knew that there was indeed one invisible, omnipotent God, who had preferred his race above all others, and had promised to make them a mighty people.

The truths concealed by the Egyptians under the greatest mystery were the common property of his race. Every beggar, every slave might raise his hands in supplication to the one invisible God who had revealed Himself unto Abraham.



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Shrewd Egyptians, who had divined His existence and shrouded His image with monstrous shapes, born of their own thoughts and imaginations, had drawn a thick veil over Him, hidden Him from the masses. Among the Hebrews alone did He really live and display His power in all its mighty, heart-stirring grandeur.

He was not nature, with whom the initiated in the temples confounded Him. No, the God of his fathers was far above all created things and the whole visible universe, far above man, His last, most perfect work, whom He had formed in His own image; and every living creature was subject to His will. The Mightiest of Kings, He ruled the universe with stern justice, and though He withdrew Himself from the sight and understanding of man, His image, He was nevertheless a living, thinking, moving Being, though His span of existence was eternity, His mind omniscience, His sphere of sovereignty infinitude.

And this God had made Himself the leader of His people! There was no warrior who could venture to cope with His might. If the spirit of prophecy had not deceived Miriam, and the Lord had indeed commanded Hosea to wield His sword, how dared he resist, what higher position could earth offer? And his people? The rabble of whom he had thought so scornfully, what a transformation seemed to have been wrought in them by the power of the Most High, since he had listened to old Eliab's tale! Now he longed to be their leader, and midway to the camp he paused on a sand-hill, whence he could see the limitless expanse of the sea shimmering under the sheen of the twinkling stars of heaven, and for the first time in many a long, long year, he raised his arms and eyes to the God whom he had found once more.

He began with a little prayer his mother had taught him; then he cried out to the Almighty as to a powerful counselor, imploring him with fervent zeal to point out the way in which he should walk without being disobedient to Him or to his father, or breaking the oath he had sworn to Pharaoh and becoming a dishonored man in the eyes of those to whom he owed so great a debt of gratitude.

"Thy chosen people praise Thee as the God of Truth, Who dost punish those who forswear their oaths," he prayed. "How canst Thou command me to be faithless and break the vow that I have made. Whatever I am, whatever I may accomplish, belongs to Thee, Oh Mighty Lord, and I am ready to devote my blood, my life to my people. But rather than render me a dishonored and perjured man, take me away from earth and commit the work which Thou hast chosen Thy servant to perform, to the hands of one who is bound by no solemn oath."

So he prayed, and it seemed as if he clasped in his embrace a long-lost friend. Then he walked on in silence through the vanishing dusk, and when the first grey light of morning dawned, the flood of feeling ebbed, and the clear-headed warrior regained his calmness of thought.



He had vowed to do nothing against the will of his father or his God, but he was no less firmly resolved to be neither perjurer nor renegade. His duty was clear and plain. He must leave Pharaoh's service, first telling his superiors that, as a dutiful son, he must obey his father's commands, and share his fate and that of his people.



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Yet he did not conceal from himself that his request might be refused, that he might be detained by force, nay, perchance, if he insisted on carrying out his purpose with unshaken will, he might be menaced with death, or if the worst should come, even delivered over to the executioner. But if this should be his doom, if his purpose cost him his life, he would still have done what was right, and his comrades, whose esteem he valued, could still think of him as a brave brother-in-arms. Nor would his father and Miriam be angry with him, nay, they would mourn the faithful son, the upright man, who chose death rather than dishonor.

Calm and resolute, he gave the pass-word with haughty bearing to the sentinel and entered his tent. Ephraim was still lying on his couch, smiling as if under the thrall of pleasant dreams. Hosea threw himself on a mat beside him to seek strength for the hard duties of the coming day. Soon his eyes closed, too, and, after an hour's sound sleep, he woke without being roused and called for his holiday attire, his helmet, and the gilt coat-of-mail he wore at great festivals or in the presence of Egypt's king.

Meantime Ephraim, too, awoke, looked with mingled curiosity and delight at his uncle, who stood before him in all the splendor of his manhood and glittering panoply of war, and exclaimed:

"It must be a proud feeling to wear such garments and lead thousands to battle."

Hosea shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"Obey thy God, give no man, from the loftiest to the lowliest, a right to regard you save with respect, and you can hold your head as high as the proudest warrior who ever wore purple robe and golden armor."

"But you have done great deeds among the Egyptians," Ephraim continued. "They hold you in high regard; even captain Homecht and his daughter, Kasana."

"Do they?" asked the soldier smiling, and then bid his nephew keep quiet; for his brow, though less fevered than the night before, was still burning.

"Don't go into the open air until the leech has seen you," Hosea added, "and wait here till my return."

"Shall you be absent long?" asked the lad.

Hosea paused for a moment, lost in thought then, with a kindly glance at him answered, gravely "Whoever serves a master knows not how long he may be detained." Then, changing his tone, he continued less earnestly. "To-day—this morning—perchance I may finish my business speedily and return in a few hours. If not, if I do not come back to you this evening or early to-morrow morning, then....." he laid his hand on the lad's shoulder as he spoke "then go home at your utmost speed. When you reach Succoth, if



the people have gone before your coming, you will find in the hollow sycamore before Amminadab's house a letter which will tell you whither they have turned their steps. When you overtake them, give my greetings to my father, to my grandfather Elishama, and to Miriam. Tell



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them that Hosea will be mindful of the commands of his God and of his father. In future he will call himself Joshua—Joshua, do you hear? Tell this to Miriam first. Finally, tell them that if I remain behind and am not suffered to follow them, as I would like to, that the Most High has made a different disposal of His servant and has broken the sword which He had chosen, ere He used it. Do you understand me, boy?”

Ephraim nodded, and answered:

“You mean that death alone can stay you from obeying the summons of God, and your father’s command.”

“Ay, that was my meaning,” replied the chief. “If they ask why I did not slip away from Pharaoh and escape his power, say that Hosea desired to enter on his new office as a true man, unstained by perjury or, if it is the will of God, to die one. Now repeat the message.”

Ephraim obeyed; his uncle’s remarks must have sunk deep into his soul; for he neither forgot nor altered a single word. But scarcely had he performed the task of repetition when, with impetuous earnestness, he grasped Hosea’s hand and besought him to tell him whether he had any cause to fear for his life.

The warrior clasped him affectionately in his arms and answered that he hoped he had entrusted this message to him only to have it forgotten. “Perhaps,” he added, “they will strive to keep me by force, but by God’s help I shall soon be with you again, and we will ride to Succoth together.”

With these words he hurried out, unheeding the questions his nephew called after him; for he had heard the rattle of wheels outside. Two chariots, drawn by mettled steeds, rapidly approached the tent and stopped directly before the entrance.

CHAPTER VIII.

The men who stepped from the chariots were old acquaintances of Hosea. They were the head chamberlain and one of the king’s chief scribes, come to summon him to the Sublime Porte.

[Palace of the king. The name of Pharaoh means “the Sublime Porte.”]

No hesitation nor escape was possible, and Hosea, feeling more surprise than anxiety, entered the second chariot with the chief scribe. Both officials wore mourning robes, and instead of the white ostrich plume, the insignia of office, black ones waved over the



temples of both. The horses and runners of the two-wheeled chariots were also decked with all the emblems of the deepest woe. And yet the monarch's messengers seemed cheerful rather than depressed; for the eagle they were to bear to Pharaoh was ready to obey his behest, and they had feared that they would find his eyrie abandoned.

Swift as the wind the long-limbed bays of royal breed bore the light vehicles over the uneven sandy road and the smooth highway toward the palace.

Ephraim, with the curiosity of youth, had gone out of the tent to view a scene so novel to his eyes. The soldiers were pleased by the Pharaoh's sending his own carriage for their commander, and the lad's vanity was flattered to see his uncle drive away in such state. But he was not permitted the pleasure of watching him long; dense clouds of dust soon hid the vehicles.



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The scorching desert wind which, during the Spring months, so often blows through the valley of the Nile, had risen, and though the bright blue sky which had been visible by night and day was still cloudless, it was veiled by a whitish mist.

The sun, a motionless ball, glared down on the heads of men like a blind man's eye. The burning heat it diffused seemed to have consumed its rays, which to-day were invisible. The eye protected by the mist could gaze at it undazzled, yet its scorching power was undiminished. The light breeze, which usually fanned the brow in the morning, touched it now like the hot breath of a ravaging beast of prey. Loaded with the fine scorching sand borne from the desert, it transformed the pleasure of breathing into a painful torture. The air of an Egyptian March morning, which was wont to be so balmy, now oppressed both man and beast, choking their lungs and seeming to weigh upon them like a burden destroying all joy in life.

The higher the pale rayless globe mounted into the sky, the greyer became the fog, the more densely and swiftly blew the sand-clouds from the desert.

Ephraim was still standing in front of the tent, gazing at the spot where Pharaoh's chariots had disappeared. His knees trembled, but he attributed it to the wind sent by Seth-Typhon, at whose blowing even the strongest felt an invisible burden clinging to their feet.

Hosea had gone, but he might come back in a few hours, then he, Ephraim, would be obliged to go with him to Succoth, and the bright dreams and hopes which yesterday had bestowed and whose magical charms were heightened by his fevered brain, would be lost to him forever.

During the night he had firmly resolved to enter Pharaoh's army, that he might remain near Tanis and Kasana; but though he had only half comprehended Hosea's message, he could plainly discern that he intended to turn his back upon Egypt and his high position and meant to take Ephraim with him, should he make his escape. So he must renounce his longing to see Kasana once more. But this thought was unbearable and an inward voice whispered that, having neither father nor mother, he was free to act according to his own will. His guardian, his dead father's brother, in whose household he had grown up, had died not long before, and no new guardian had been named because the lad was now past childhood. He was destined at some future day to be one of the chiefs of his proud tribe and until yesterday he had desired no better fate.

He had obeyed the impulse of his heart when, with the pride of a shepherd prince, he had refused the priest's suggestion that he should become one of Pharaoh's soldiers, but he now told himself that he had been childish and foolish to reject a thing of which he was ignorant, nay, which had ever been intentionally represented to him in a false and hateful light in order to bind him more firmly to his own people.

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The Egyptians had always been described as detestable enemies and oppressors, yet how enchanting everything seemed in the house of the first Egyptian warrior he had entered.

And Kasana!

What must she think of him, if he left Tanis without a word of greeting, of farewell. Must it not grieve and wound him to remain in her memory a clumsy peasant shepherd? Nay, it would be positively dishonest not to return the costly raiment she had lent him. Gratitude was reckoned among the Hebrews also as the first duty of noble hearts. He would be worthy of hate his whole life long, if he did not seek her once more!

But there was need of haste. When Hosea returned, he must find him ready for departure.

He at once began to bind his sandals on his feet, but he did it slowly, and could not understand why the task seemed so hard to-day.

He passed through the camp unmolested. The pylons and obelisks before the temples, which appeared to quiver in the heated air, marked the direction he was to pursue, and he soon reached the broad road which led to the market-place—a panting merchant whose ass was bearing skins of wine to the troops, told him the way.

Dense clouds of dust lay on the road and whirled around him, the sun beat fiercely down on his bare head, his wound began to ache again, the fine sand which filled the air entered his eyes and mouth and stung his face and bare limbs like burning needles. He was tortured by thirst and was often compelled to stop, his feet grew so heavy. At last he reached a well dug for travelers by a pious Egyptian, and though it was adorned with the image of a god and Miriam had taught him that this was an abomination from which he should turn aside, he drank again and again, thinking he had never tasted aught so refreshing.

The fear of losing consciousness, as he had done the day before, passed away and, though his feet were still heavy, he walked rapidly toward the alluring goal. But soon his strength again deserted him, the sweat poured from his brow, his wound began to throb and beat, and he felt as though his skull was compressed by an iron circle. His keen eyes, too, failed, for the objects he tried to see blended with the dust of the road, the horizon reeled up and down before his eyes, and he felt as though the hard pavement had turned to a yielding bog under his feet.

Yet he took little heed of all these things, for never before had such bright visions filled his mind. His thoughts grew marvellously vivid, and image after image rose before the wide eyes of his soul, not at his own behest, but as if summoned by a secret will outside of his consciousness. Now he fancied that he was lying at Kasana's feet, resting his



head on her lap while he gazed upward into her lovely face— anon he saw Hosea standing before him in his glittering armor, as he had beheld him a short time ago, only his garb was still more gorgeous and, instead of the dim light in the tent, a ruddy glow like that of fire surrounded him. Then the finest oxen and rams in his herds passed before him and sentences from the messages he had learned darted through his mind; nay he sometimes imagined that they were being shouted to him aloud. But ere he could grasp their import, some new dazzling vision or loud rushing noise seemed to fill his mental eye and ear.

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He pressed onward, staggering like a drunken man, with drops of sweat standing on his brow and with parched mouth. Sometimes he unconsciously raised his hand to wipe the dust from his burning eyes, but he cared little that he saw very indistinctly what was passing around him, for there could be nothing more beautiful than what he beheld with his inward vision.

True, he was often aware that he was suffering intensely, and he longed to throw himself exhausted on the ground, but a strange sense of happiness sustained him. At last he was seized with the delusion that his head was swelling and growing till it attained the size of the head of the colossus he had seen the day before in front of a temple gate, then it rose to the height of the palm-trees by the road-side, and finally it reached the mist shrouding the firmament, then far above it. Then it suddenly seemed as though this head of his was as large as the whole world, and he pressed his hands on his temples to clasp his brow; for his neck and shoulders were too weak to support the weight of so enormous a head and, mastered by this strange delusion, he shrieked aloud, his shaking knees gave way, and he fell unconscious in the dust.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Hate, though never sated, can yet be gratified
Omnipotent God, who had preferred his race above all others
When hate and revenge speak, gratitude shrinks timidly
Who can prop another's house when his own is falling

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