

Joshua — Volume 5 eBook

Joshua — Volume 5 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER XXIV.

The prisoners of state who were being transported to the mines made slow progress. Even the experienced captain of the guards had never had a more toilsome trip or one more full of annoyances, obstacles, and mishaps.

One of his moles, Ephraim, had escaped; he had lost his faithful hounds, and after his troop had been terrified and drenched by a storm such as scarcely occurred in these desert regions once in five years, a second had burst the next evening—the one which brought destruction on Pharaoh's army—and this had been still more violent and lasting.

The storm had delayed the march and, after the last cloud-burst, several convicts and guards had been attacked by fever owing to their wet night-quarters in the open air. The Egyptian asses, too, who were unused to rain, had suffered and some of the best had been left on the road.

Finally they had been obliged to bury two dead prisoners, and place three who were dangerously ill on the remaining asses; and the other prisoners were laden with the stores hitherto carried by the beasts of burden. This was the first time such a thing had happened during the leader's service of five and twenty years, and he expected severe reproofs.

All these things exerted a baneful influence on the disposition of the man, who was usually reputed one of the kindest-hearted of his companions in office; and Joshua, the accomplice of the bold lad whose flight was associated with the other vexations, suffered most sorely from his ill-humor.

Perhaps the irritated man would have dealt more gently with him, had he complained like the man behind him, or burst into fierce oaths like his yoke-mate, who made threatening allusions to the future when his sister-in-law would be in high favor with Pharaoh and know how to repay those who ill-treated her dear relative.

But Hosea had resolved to bear whatever the rude fellow and his mates chose to inflict with the same equanimity that he endured the scorching sun which, ever since he had served in the army, had tortured him during many a march through the desert, and his steadfast, manly character helped him keep this determination.

If the captain of the gang loaded him with extra heavy burdens, he summoned all the strength of his muscles and tottered forward without a word of complaint until his knees trembled under him; then the captain would rush to him, throw several packages from his shoulders, and exclaim that he understood his spite; he was only trying to be left on the road, to get him into fresh difficulties; but he would not allow himself to be robbed of the lives of the men who were needed in the mines.

Once the captain inflicted a wound that bled severely; but he instantly made every effort to cure it, gave him wine to restore his strength, and delayed the march half a day to permit him to rest.

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He had not forgotten Prince Siptah's promise of a rich reward to any one who brought him tidings of Hosea's death, but this was the very reason that induced the honest-hearted man to watch carefully over his prisoner's life; for the consciousness of having violated his duty for the sake of reaping any advantage would have robbed him of all pleasure in food and drink, as well as of the sound sleep which were his greatest blessings.

So though the Hebrew prisoner was tortured, it was never beyond the limits of the endurable, and he had the pleasure of rendering, by his own great strength, many a service to his weaker companions.

He had commended his fate to the God who had summoned him to His service; but he was well aware that he must not rest content with mere pious confidence, and therefore thought by day and night of escape. But the chain that bound him to his companions in suffering was too firmly forged, and was so carefully examined and hammered every morning and evening, that the attempt to escape would only have plunged him into greater misery.

The prisoners had at first marched through a hilly region, then climbed upward, with a long mountain chain in view, and finally reached a desert country from which truncated sandstone cones rose singly from the rocky ground.

On the fifth evening they encamped near a large mountain which Nature seemed to have piled up from flat layers of stone and, as the sun of the sixth day rose, they turned into a side valley leading to the mines in the province of Bech.

During the first few days they had been overtaken by a messenger from the king's silver-house; but on the other hand they had met several little bands bearing to Egypt malachite, turquoise, and copper, as well as the green glass made at the mines.

Among those whom they met at the entrance of the cross-valley into which they turned on the last morning was a married couple on their way homeward, after having received a pardon from the king. The captain of the guards pointed them out to encourage his exhausted moles, but the spectacle produced the opposite effect; for the tangled locks of the man, who had scarcely passed his thirtieth year, were grey, his tall figure was bowed and emaciated, and his naked back was covered with scars and bleeding wales; the wife, who had shared his misery, was blind. She sat cowering on an ass, in the dull torpor of insanity, and though the passing of the convicts made a startling interruption to the silence of the wilderness, and her hearing had remained keen, she paid no heed, but continued to stare indifferently into vacancy.

The sight of the hapless pair placed Hosea's own terrible future before him as if in a mirror, and for the first time he groaned aloud and covered his face with his hands.

The captain of the guards perceived this and, touched by the horror of the man whose resolution had hitherto seemed peerless, called to him:

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"They don't all come home like that, no indeed!"

"Because they are even worse off," he thought. "But the poor wights needn't know it beforehand. The next time I come this way I'll ask for Hosea; I shall want to know what has become of this bull of a man. The strongest and the most resolute succumb the most quickly."

Then, like a driver urging an unharnessed team forward, he swung the lash over the prisoners, but without touching them, and pointing to a column of smoke which rose behind a cliff at the right of the road, he exclaimed:

"There are the smelting furnaces! We shall reach our destination at noon. There will be no lack of fire to cook lentils, and doubtless you may have a bit of mutton, too; for we celebrate to-day the birth of the good god, the son of the sun; may life, health, and prosperity be his!"

For the next half-hour their road led between lofty cliffs through the dry bed of a river, down which, after the last rains, a deep mountain torrent had poured to the valley; but now only a few pools still remained.

After the melancholy procession had passed around a steep mountain whose summit was crowned with a small Egyptian temple of Hathor and a number of monuments, it approached a bend in the valley which led to the ravine where the mines were located.

Flags, hoisted in honor of Pharaoh's birth-day, were waving from tall masts before the gates of the little temple on the mountain; and when loud shouts, uproar, and clashing greeted the travellers in the valley of the mines, which was wont to be so silent, the captain of the guards thought that the prisoners' greatest festival was being celebrated in an unusually noisy way and communicated this conjecture to the other guards who had paused to listen.

Then the party pressed forward without delay, but no one raised his head; the noon-day sun blazed so fiercely, and the dazzling walls of the ravine sent forth a reflected glow as fierce as if they were striving to surpass the heat of the neighboring smelting furnaces.

Spite of the nearness of the goal the prisoners tottered forward as if asleep, only one held his breath in the intensity of suspense.

As the battle-charger in the plough arches his neck, and expands his nostrils, while his eyes flash fire, so Joshua's bowed figure, spite of the sack that burdened his shoulders, straightened itself, and his sparkling eyes were turned toward the spot whence came the sounds the captain of the guards had mistaken for the loud tumult of festal mirth.

He, Joshua, knew better. Never could he mistake the roar echoing there; it was the war-cry of Egyptian soldiers, the blast of the trumpet summoning the warriors, the clank of weapons, and the battle-shouts of hostile hordes.

Ready for prompt action, he bent toward his yokemate, and whispered imperiously:

“The hour of deliverance is at hand. Take heed, and obey me blindly.”

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Strong excitement overpowered his companion also, and Hosea had scarcely glanced into the side-valley ere he bade him hold himself in readiness.

The first look into the ravine had showed him, on the summit of a cliff, a venerable face framed in snowy locks—his father's. He would have recognized him among thousands and at a far greater distance! But from the beloved grey head he turned a swift glance at the guide, who had stopped in speechless horror, and supposing that a mutiny had broken out among the prisoners, with swift presence of mind shouted hoarsely to the other guards:

"Keep behind the convicts and cut down every one who attempts to escape!"

But scarcely had his subordinates hurried to the end of the train, ere Joshua whispered to his companion:

"At him!"

As he spoke the Hebrew, who, with his yoke-mate, headed the procession, attacked the astonished leader, and ere he was aware of it, Joshua seized his right arm, the other his left.

The strong man, whose powers were doubled by his rage, struggled furiously to escape, but Joshua and his companion held him in an iron grasp.

A single rapid glance had showed the chief the path he must take to join his people. True, it led past a small band of Egyptian bow-men, who were discharging their arrows at the Hebrews on the opposite cliff, but the enemy would not venture to fire at him and his companion; for the powerful figure of the captain of the guards, clearly recognizable by his dress and weapons, shielded them both.

"Lift the chain with your right hand," whispered Joshua, "I will hold our living buckler. We must ascend the cliff crab-fashion."

His companion obeyed, and as they advanced within bow-shot of the enemy—moving sometimes backward, sometimes sideways—they held the Egyptian before them and with the ringing shout: "The son of Nun is returning to his father and to his people!" Joshua step by step drew nearer to the Hebrew combatants.

Not one of the Egyptians who knew the captain of the prisoners' guard had ventured to send an arrow at the escaping prisoners. While the fettered pair were ascending the cliff backward, Joshua heard his name shouted in joyous accents, and directly after Ephraim, with a band of youthful warriors, came rushing down the height toward him.

To his astonishment Joshua saw the huge shield, sword, or battle-axe of an Egyptian heavily-armed soldier in the hands of each of these sons of his people, but the shepherd's sling and the bag of round stones also hung from many girdles.

Ephraim led his companions and, before greeting his uncle, formed them into two ranks like a double wall between Joshua and the hostile bow-men.

Then he gave himself up to the delight of meeting, and a second glad greeting soon followed; for old Nun, protected by the tall Egyptian shields which the sea had washed ashore, had been guided to the projecting rock in whose shelter strong hands were filing the fetters from Joshua and his companion, while Ephraim, with several others, bound the captain.

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The unfortunate man had given up all attempt at resistance and submitted to everything as if utterly crushed. He only asked permission to wipe his eyes ere his arms were bound behind his back; for tear after tear was falling on the grey beard of the warder who, outwitted and overpowered, no longer felt capable of discharging the duties of his office.

Nun clasped to his heart with passionate fervor the rescued son whom he had already mourned as lost. Then, releasing him, he stepped back and never wearied of feasting his eyes on him and hearing him repeat that, faithful to his God, he had consecrated himself to the service of his people.

But it was for a brief period only that they gave themselves up to the bliss of this happy meeting; the battle asserted its rights, and its direction fell, as a matter of course, to Joshua.

He had learned with grateful joy, yet not wholly untinged with melancholy, of the fate which had overtaken the brave army among whose leaders he had long proudly numbered himself, and also heard that another body of armed shepherds, under the command of Hur, Miriam's husband, had attacked the turquoise mines of Dophkah, which situated a little farther toward the south, could be reached in a few hours. If they conquered, they were to join the young followers of Ephraim before sunset.

The latter was burning with eagerness to rush upon the Egyptians, but the more prudent Joshua, who had scanned the foe, though he did not doubt that they must succumb to the fiery shepherds, who were far superior to them in numbers, was anxious to shed as little blood as possible in this conflict, which was waged on his account, so he bade Ephraim cut a palm from the nearest tree, ordered a shield to be handed to him and then, waving the branch as an omen of peace, yet cautiously protecting himself, advanced alone to meet the foe.

The main body were drawn up in front of the mines and, familiar with the signal which requested negotiations, asked their commander for an interview.

The latter was ready to grant it, but first desired to know the contents of a letter which had just been handed to him and must contain evil tidings. This was evident from the messenger's looks and the few words which, though broken, were pregnant with meaning, that he had whispered to his countryman.

While some of Pharaoh's warriors offered refreshments to the exhausted, dust-covered runner, and listened with every token of horror to the tidings he hoarsely gasped, the commander of the troops read the letter.

His features darkened and, when he had finished, he clenched the papyrus fiercely; for it had announced tidings no less momentous than the destruction of the army, the death

of Pharaoh Menephtah, and the coronation of his oldest surviving son as Seti II., after the attempt of Prince Siptah to seize the throne had been frustrated. The latter had fled to the marshy region of the Delta, and Aarsu, the Syrian,

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after abandoning him and supporting the new king, had been raised to the chief command of all the mercenaries. Bai, the high-priest and chief-judge, had been deprived of his rank and banished by Seti II. Siptah's confederates had been taken to the Ethiopian gold mines instead of to the copper mines. It was also stated that many women belonging to the House of the Separated had been strangled; and Siptah's mother had undoubtedly met the same fate. Every soldier who could be spared from the mines was to set off at once for Tanis, where veterans were needed for the new legions.

This news exerted a powerful influence; for after Joshua had told the commander that he was aware of the destruction of the Egyptian army and expected reinforcements which had been sent to capture Dophkah to arrive within a few hours, the Egyptian changed his imperious tone and endeavored merely to obtain favorable conditions for retreat. He was but too well aware of the weakness of the garrison of the turquoise mines and knew that he could expect no aid from home. Besides, the mediator inspired him with confidence; therefore, after many evasions and threats, he expressed himself satisfied with the assurance that the garrison, accompanied by the beasts of burden and necessary provisions, should be allowed to depart unharmed. This, however, was not to be done until after they had laid down their arms and showed the Hebrews all the galleries where the prisoners were at work.

The young Hebrews, who twice outnumbered the Egyptians, at once set about disarming them; and many an old warrior's eyes grew dim, many a man broke his lance or snapped his arrows amid execrations and curses, while some grey-beards who had formerly served under Joshua and recognized him, raised their clenched fists and upbraided him as a traitor.

The dregs of the army were sent for this duty in the wilderness and most of the men bore in their faces the impress of corruption and brutality. Those in authority on the Nile knew how to choose soldiers whose duty it was to exercise pitiless severity against the defenceless.

At last the mines were opened and Joshua himself seized a lamp and pressed forward into the hot galleries where the naked prisoners of state, loaded with fetters, were hewing the copper ore from the walls.

Already he could hear in the distance the picks, whose heads were shaped like a swallow's tail, bite the hard rock. Then he distinguished the piteous wails of tortured men and women; for cruel overseers had followed them into the mine and were urging the slow to greater haste.

To-day, Pharaoh's birthday, they had been driven to the temple of Hathor on the summit of the neighboring height, to pray for the king who had plunged them into the deepest misery, and they would have been released from labor until the next morning, had not the unexpected attack induced the commander to force them back into the mines. Therefore to-day the women, who were usually obliged merely to crush and sift the ores needed to make glass and dyes, were compelled to labor in the galleries.

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When the convicts heard Joshua's shouts and footsteps, which echoed from the bare cliffs, they were afraid that some fresh misfortune was impending, and wailing and lamentations arose in all directions. But the deliverer soon reached the first convicts, and the glad tidings that he had come to save them from their misery speedily extended to the inmost depths of the mines.

Wild exultation filled the galleries which were wont to witness only sorrowful moans and burning tears; yet loud cries for help, piteous wailings, groans, and the death-rattle reached Joshua's ear; for a hot-blooded man had rushed upon the overseer most hated and felled him with his pick-axe. His example quickly inflamed the others' thirst for vengeance and, ere it could be prevented, the same fate overtook the other officials. But they had defended themselves and the corpse of many a prisoner strewed the ground beside their tormentors.

Obedying Joshua's call, the liberated multitude at last emerged into the light of day. Savage and fierce were the outcries which blended in sinister discord with the rattling of the chains they dragged after them. Even the most fearless among the Hebrews shrank in horror as they beheld the throng of hapless sufferers in the full radiance of the sunlight; for the dazzled, reddened eyes of the unfortunate sufferers,—many of whom had formerly enjoyed in their own homes or at the king's court every earthly blessing; who had been tender mothers and fathers, rejoiced in doing good, and shared all the blessings of the civilization of a richly gifted people,—these dazzled eyes which at first glittered through tears caused by the swift transition from the darkness of the mines to the glare of the noon-day sun, soon sparkled as fiercely and greedily as those of starving owls.

At first, overwhelmed by the singular change in their destiny, they struggled for composure and did not resist the Hebrews, who, at Joshua's signal, began to file the fetters from their ankles; but when they perceived the disarmed soldiers and overseers who, guarded by Ephraim and his companions, were ranged at the base of a cliff, a strange excitement overpowered them. Amid shrieks and yells which no name can designate, no words describe, they broke from those who were trying to remove their fetters and, though no glance or word had been exchanged between them, obeyed the same terrible impulse, and unheeding the chains that burdened them, rushed upon the defenceless Egyptians. Before the Hebrews could prevent it, each threw himself upon the one who had inflicted the worst suffering upon him; and here might be seen an emaciated man clutching the throat of his stronger foe, yonder a band of nude women horribly disfigured by want and neglect, rush upon the man who had most rudely insulted, beaten, and abused them, and with teeth and nails wreak upon him their long repressed fury.

It seemed as though the flood-tide of hate had burst its dam and, unfettered, was demanding its victims.

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There was a horrible scene of attack and defence, a ferocious, bloody conflict on foot and amid the red sand of the desert, shrieks, yells, and howls pierced the ear; nay, it was difficult to distinguish individuals in this motley confusion of men and women, animated on the one side by the wildest passion, a yearning for vengeance amounting to blood-thirstiness, and on the other by the dread of death and the necessity for self-defence.

Only a few of the prisoners had succeeded in controlling themselves; but they, too, shouted irritating words to their fellows, reviled the Egyptians in violent excitement, and shook their clenched fists at the disarmed foe.

The fury with which the liberated serfs rushed upon their tormentors was as unprecedented as the cruelties they had suffered.

But Joshua had deprived the Egyptians of their weapons, and they were therefore under his protection.

So he commanded his men to separate the combatants, if possible without bloodshed; but the task was no easy one, and many new and horrible deeds were committed. At last, however, it was accomplished, and they now perceived how terribly rage had increased the strength of the exhausted and feeble sufferers; for though no weapons had been used in the conflict a number of corpses strewed the spot, and most of the guards were bleeding from terrible wounds.

After quiet had been restored, Joshua asked the wounded commander for the list of prisoners, but he pointed to the clerk of the mines, whom none of the convicts had assailed. He had been their physician and treated them kindly-an elderly man, he had himself undergone sore trials and, knowing the pain of suffering, was ready to alleviate the pangs of others.

He willingly read aloud the names of the prisoners, among which were several Hebrew ones, and after each individual had responded, many declared themselves ready to join the wandering tribes.

When the disarmed soldiers and guards at last set out on their way home, the captain of the band that had escorted Joshua and his companions left the other Egyptians, and with drooping head and embarrassed mien approached old Nun and his son, and begged permission to go with them; for he could expect no favor at home and there was no God in Egypt so mighty as theirs. It had not escaped his notice that Hosea, who had once been a chief in the Egyptian service, had raised his hands in the sorest straits to this God, and never had he witnessed the same degree of resolution that he possessed. Now he also knew that this same mighty God had buried Pharaoh's powerful army in the sea to save His people. Such a God was acceptable to his heart, and he desired nothing better than to remain henceforward with those who served Him.

Joshua willingly allowed him to join the Hebrews. Then it appeared that there were fifteen of the latter among the liberated prisoners and, to Ephraim's special delight, Reuben, the husband of poor melancholy Milcah, who clung so closely to Miriam. His reserved, laconic disposition had stood him in good stead, and the arduous forced labor seemed to have inflicted little injury on his robust frame.

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The exultation of victory, the joy of success, had taken full possession of Ephraim and his youthful band; but when the sun set and there was still no sign of Hur and his band, Nun and his followers were seized with anxiety.

Ephraim had already proposed to go with some of his companions in quest of tidings, when a messenger announced that Hur's men had lost courage at the sight of the well-fortified Egyptian citadel. Their leader, it is true, had urged them to the assault, but his band had shrunk from the peril and, unless Nun and his men brought aid, they would return with their mission unfulfilled.

It was therefore resolved to go to the assistance of the timorous. With joyous confidence they marched forward and, during the journey through the cool night, Ephraim and Nun described to Joshua how they had found Kasana and how she had died. What she had desired to communicate to the man she loved was now made known to him, and the warrior listened with deep emotion and remained silent and thoughtful until they reached Dophkah, the valley of the turquoise mines, from whose center rose the fortress which contained the prisoners.

Hur and his men had remained concealed in a side-valley, and after Joshua had divided the Hebrew force into several bodies and assigned to each a certain task, he gave at dawn the signal for the assault.

After a brief struggle the little garrison was overpowered and the fortress taken. The disarmed Egyptians, like their companions at the copper mines, were sent home. The prisoners were released and the lepers, whose quarters were in a side-valley beyond the mines—among them were those who at Joshua's bidding had been brought here—were allowed to follow the conquerors at a certain distance.

What Hur, Miriam's husband, could not accomplish, Joshua had done, and ere the young soldiers departed with Ephraim, old Nun assembled them to offer thanks to the Lord. The men under Hur's command also joined in the prayer and wherever Joshua appeared Ephraim's companions greeted him with cheers.

"Hail to our chief!" often rang on the air, as they marched forward: "Hail to him whom the Most High Himself has chosen for His sword! We will gladly follow him; for through him God leads us to victory."

Hur's men also joined in these shouts, and he did not forbid them; nay, after the storming of the fortress, he had thanked Joshua and expressed his pleasure in his liberation.

At the departure, the younger man had stepped back to let the older one precede him; but Hur had entreated grey-haired Nun, who was greatly his senior, to take the head of the procession, though after the deliverance of the people on the shore of the Red Sea

he had himself been appointed by Moses and the elders to the chief command of the Hebrew soldiers.

The road led first through a level mountain valley, then it crossed the pass known as the "Sword-point ", which was the only means of communication between the mines and the Red Sea.

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The rocky landscape was wild and desolate, and the path to be climbed steep. Joshua's old father, who had grown up on the flat plains of Goshen and was unaccustomed to climbing mountains, was borne amid the joyous acclamations of the others, in the arms of his son and grandson, to the summit of the pass; but Miriam's husband who, at the head of his men, followed the division of Ephraim's companions, heard the shouts of the youths yet moved with drooping head and eyes bent on the ground.

At the summit they were to rest and wait for the people who were to be led through the wilderness of Sin to Dophkah.

The victors gazed from the top of the pass in search of the travellers; but as yet no sign of them appeared. But when they looked back along the mountain path whence they had come a different spectacle presented itself, a scene so grand, so marvellous, that it attracted every eye as though by a magic spell; for at their feet lay a circular valley, surrounded by lofty cliffs, mountain ridges, peaks, and summits, which here white as chalk, yonder raven-black, here grey and brown, yonder red and green, appeared to grow upward from the sand toward the azure sky of the wilderness, steeped in dazzling light, and unshadowed by the tiniest cloudlet.

All that the eye beheld was naked and bare, silent and lifeless. On the slopes of the many-colored rocks, which surrounded the sandy valley, grew no blade of grass nor smallest plant. Neither bird, worm, nor beetle stirred in these silent tracts, hostile to all life. Here the eye discerned no cultivation,—nothing that recalled human existence. God seemed to have created for Himself alone these vast tracts which were of service to no living creature. Whoever penetrated into this wilderness entered a spot which the Most High had perchance chosen for a place of rest and retreat, like the silent, inaccessible Holy of Holies of the temple.

The young men had gazed mutely at the wonderful scene at their feet. Now they prepared to encamp and showed themselves diligent in serving old Nun, whom they sincerely loved. Resting among them under a hastily erected canopy he related, with sparkling eyes, the deeds his son had performed.

Meanwhile Joshua and Hur were still standing at the top of the pass, the former gazing silently down into the dreary, rocky valley, which overarched by the blue dome of the sky, surrounded by the mountain pillars and columns from God's own workshop, opened before him as the mightiest of temples.

The old man had long gazed gloomily at the ground, but he suddenly interrupted the silence and said:

"In Succoth I erected a heap of stones and called upon the Lord to be a witness between us. But in this spot, amid this silence, it seems to me that without memorial or

sign we are sure of His presence.” Here he drew his figure to a greater height and continued: “And I now raise mine eyes to Thee, Adonai, and address my humble words to Thee, Jehovah, Thou God of Abraham and of our fathers, that Thou mayst a second time be a witness between me and this man whom Thou Thyself didst summon to Thy service, that he might be Thy sword.”

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He had uttered these words with eyes and hands uplifted, then turning to the other, he said with solemn earnestness:

“So I ask thee Hosea, son of Nun, dost thou remember the vow which thou and I made before the stones in Succoth?”

“I do,” was the reply. “And in sore disaster and great peril I perceived what the Most High desired of me, and am resolved to devote to Him all the strength of body and soul with which He has endowed me, to Him alone, and to His people, who are also mine. Henceforward I will be called Joshua.... nor will I seek service with the Egyptians or any foreign king; for the Lord our God through the lips of thy wife bestowed this name upon me.”

Then Hur, with solemn earnestness, broke in: “That is what I expected to hear and as, in this place also, the Most High is a witness between me and thee and hears this conversation, let the vow I made in His presence be here fulfilled. The heads of the tribes and Moses, the servant of the Lord, appointed me to the command of the fighting-men of our people. But now thou dost call thyself Joshua, and hast vowed to serve no other than the Lord our God. I am well aware thou canst accomplish far greater things as commander of an army than I, who have grown grey in driving herds, or than any other Hebrew, by whatever name he is known, so I will fulfil the vow sworn at Succoth. I will ask Moses, the servant of the Lord, and the elders to confide to thee the office of commander. In their hands will I place the decision and, because I feel that the Most High beholds my heart, let me confess that I have thought of thee with secret rancor. Yet, for the welfare of the people, I will forget what lies between us and offer thee my hand.”

With these words he held out his hand to Joshua and the latter, grasping it, replied with generous candor:

“Thy words are manly and mine shall be also. For the sake of the people and the cause we both serve, I will accept thy offer. Yet since thou hast summoned the Most High as a witness and He hears me, I, too, will not withhold one iota of the truth. The Lord Himself has summoned me to the office of commander of the fighting-men which thou dost desire to commit to me. It was done through Miriam, thy wife, and is my due. Yet I recognize thy willingness to yield thy dignity to me as a praiseworthy deed, since I know how hard it is for a man to resign power, especially in favor of a younger one whom he does not love. Thou hast done this, and I am grateful. I, too, have thought of thee with secret rancor; for through thee I lost another possession harder for a man to renounce than office: the love of woman.”

The hot blood mounted into Hur's cheeks, as he exclaimed:

“Miriam! I did not force her into marriage; nay I did not even purchase her, according to the custom of our fathers, with the bridal dowry—she became my wife of her own free will.”

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"I know it," replied Joshua quietly, "yet there was one man who had yearned to make her his longer and more ardently than thou, and the fire of jealousy burned fiercely in his heart. But have no anxiety; for wert thou now to give her a letter of divorce and lead her to me that I might open my arms and tent to receive her, I would exclaim:

"Why hast thou done this thing to thyself and to me? For a short time ago I learned what woman's love is, and that I was mistaken when I believed Miriam shared the ardor of my heart. Besides, during the march with fetters on my feet, in the heaviest misfortune, I vowed to devote all the strength and energy of soul and body to the welfare of our people. Nor shall the love of woman turn me from the great duty I have taken upon myself. As for thy wife, I shall treat her as a stranger unless, as a prophetess, she summons me to announce a new message from the Lord."

With these words he held out his hand to his companion and, as Hur grasped it, loud voices were heard from the fighting-men, for messengers were climbing the mountain, who, shouting and beckoning, pointed to the vast cloud of dust that preceded the march of the tribes.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Hebrews came nearer and nearer, and many of the young combatants hastened to meet them. These were not the joyous bands, who had joined triumphantly in Miriam's song of praise, no, they tottered toward the mountain slowly, with drooping heads. They were obliged to scale the pass from the steeper side, and how the bearers sighed; how piteously the women and children wailed, how fiercely the drivers swore as they urged the beasts of burden up the narrow, rugged path; how hoarsely sounded the voices of the half fainting men as they braced their shoulders against the carts to aid the beasts of burden.

These thousands who, but a few short days before, had so gratefully felt the saving mercy of the Lord, seemed to Joshua, who stood watching their approach, like a defeated army.

But the path they had followed from their last encampment, the harbor by the Red Sea, was rugged, arid, and to them, who had grown up among the fruitful plains of Lower Egypt, toilsome and full of terror.

It had led through the midst of the bare rocky landscape, and their eyes, accustomed to distant horizons and luxuriant green foliage, met narrow boundaries and a barren wilderness.

Since passing through the Gate of Baba, they had beheld on their way through the valley of the same name and their subsequent pilgrimage through the wilderness of Sin,

nothing save valleys with steep precipices on either side. A lofty mountain of the hue of death had towered, black and terrible, above the reddish-brown slopes, which seemed to the wanderers like the work of human hands, for the strata of stones rose at regular intervals. One might have supposed that the giant

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builders whose hands had toiled here in the service of the Sculptor of the world had been summoned away ere they had completed the task, which in this wilderness had no searching eye to fear and seemed destined for the service of no living creature. Grey and brown granite cliffs and ridges rose on both sides of the path, and in the sand which covered it lay heaps of small bits of red porphyry and coal-black stones that seemed as if they had been broken by the blows of a hammer and resembled the dross from which metal had been melted. Greenish masses of rock, most peculiar in form, surrounded the narrow, cliff circled mountain valleys, which opened into one another. The ascending path pierced them; and often the Hebrews, as they entered, feared that the lofty cliffs in the distance would compel them to return. Then murmurs and lamentations arose, but the mode of egress soon appeared and led to another rock-valley.

On departing from the harbor at the Red Sea they had often found thorny gum acacias and an aromatic desert plant, which the animals relished; but the farther they entered the rocky wilderness, the more scorching and arid the sand became, and at last the eye sought in vain for herbs and trees.

At Elim fresh springs and shade-giving palms were found, and at the Red Sea there were well-filled cisterns; but here at the camp in the wilderness of Sin nothing had been discovered to quench the thirst, and at noon it seemed as though an army of spiteful demons had banished every inch of shade cast by the cliffs; for every part of the valleys and ravines blazed and glowed, and nowhere was there the slightest protection from the scorching sun.

The last water brought with them had been distributed among the human beings and animals, and when the procession started in the morning not a drop could be found to quench their increasing thirst.

Then the old doubting rancor and rebelliousness took possession of the multitude. Curses directed against Moses and the elders, who had led them from the comfort of well-watered Egypt to this misery, never ceased; but when they climbed the pass of the "Swordpoint" their parched throats had become too dry for oaths and invectives.

Messengers from old Nun, Ephraim, and Hur had already informed the approaching throngs that the young men had gained a victory and liberated Joshua and the other captives; but their discouragement had become so great that even this good news made little change, and only a flitting smile on the bearded lips of the men, or a sudden flash of the old light in the dark eyes of the women appeared.

Miriam, accompanied by melancholy Milcah, had remained with her companions instead of, as usual, calling upon the women to thank the Most High.

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Reuben, the husband of her sorrowful ward whom fear of disappointment still deterred from yielding to his newly-awakened hopes, was a quiet, reticent man, so the first messenger did not know whether he was among the liberated prisoners. But great excitement overpowered Milcah and, when Miriam bade her be patient, she hurried from one playmate to another assailing them with urgent questions. When even the last could give her no information concerning the husband she had loved and lost, she burst into loud sobs and fled back to the prophetess. But she received little consolation, for the woman who was expecting to greet her own husband as a conqueror and see the rescued friend of her childhood, was absent-minded and troubled, as if some heavy burden oppressed her soul.

Moses had left the tribes as soon as he learned that the attack upon the mines had succeeded and Joshua was rescued; for it had been reported that the warlike Amalekites, who dwelt in the oasis at the foot of Mt. Sinai, were preparing to resist the Hebrews' passage through their well-watered tract in the wilderness with its wealth of palms. Accompanied by a few picked men he set off across the mountains in quest of tidings, expecting to join his people between Alush and Rephidim in the valley before the oasis.

Abidan, the head of the tribe of Benjamin, with Hur and Nun, the princes of Judah and Ephraim after their return from the mines—were to represent him and his companions.

As the people approached the steep pass Hur, with more of the rescued prisoners, came to meet them, and hurrying in advance of all the rest was young Reuben, Milcah's lost husband. She had recognized him in the distance as he rushed down the mountain and, spite of Miriam's protest, darted into the midst of the tribe of Simeon which marched in front of hers.

The sight of their meeting cheered many a troubled spirit and when at last, clinging closely to each other, they hurried to Miriam and the latter beheld the face of her charge, it seemed as though a miracle had been wrought; for the pale lily had become in the hue of her cheeks a blooming rose. Her lips, too, which she had but rarely and timidly opened for a question or an answer, were in constant motion; for how much she desired to know, how many questions she had to ask the silent husband who had endured such terrible suffering.

They were a handsome, happy pair, and it seemed to them as if, instead of passing naked rocks over barren desert paths, they were journeying through a vernal landscape where springs were gushing and birds carolling their songs.

Miriam, who had done everything in her power to sustain the grieving wife, was also cheered by the sight of her happiness. But every trace of joyous sympathy soon vanished from her features; for while Reuben and Milcah, as if borne on wings, seemed scarcely to touch the soil of the wilderness, she moved forward with drooping head,

oppressed by the thought that it was her own fault that no like happiness could bloom for her in this hour.

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She told herself that she had made a sore sacrifice, worthy of the highest reward and pleasing in the sight of God, when she refused to obey the voice of her heart, yet she could not banish from her memory the dying Egyptian who had denied her right to be numbered among those who loved Hosea, the woman who for his sake had met so early a death.

She, Miriam, lived, yet she had killed the most fervent desire of her soul; duty forbade her thinking with ardent longing of him who lingered up yonder, devoted to the cause of his people and the God of his fathers, a free, noble man, perhaps the future leader of the warriors of her race, and if Moses so appointed, next to him the first and greatest of all the Hebrews, but lost, forever lost to her.

Had she on that fateful night obeyed the yearning of her woman's heart and not the demands of the vocation which placed her far above all other women, he would long since have clasped her in his arms, as quiet Reuben embraced his poor, feeble Milcah, now so joyous as she walked stoutly at his side.

What thoughts were these?

She must drive them back to the inmost recesses of her heart, seek to crush them; for it was a sin for her to long so ardently to meet another. She wished for her husband's presence, as a saviour from herself and the forbidden desires of this terrible hour.

Hur, the prince of the tribe of Judah, was her husband, not the former Egyptian, the liberated captive. What had she to ask from the Ephraimite, whom she had forever refused?

Why should it hurt her that the liberated prisoner did not seek her; why did she secretly cherish the foolish hope that momentous duties detained him?

She scarcely saw or heard what was passing around her, and Milcah's grateful greeting to her husband first informed her that Hur was approaching.

He had waved his hand to her while still afar, but he came alone, without Hosea or Joshua, she cared not what the rescued man called himself; and it angered her to feel that this hurt her, nay, pierced her to the heart. Yet she esteemed her elderly husband and it was not difficult for her to give him a cordial welcome.

He answered her greeting joyously and tenderly; but when she pointed to the re-united pair and extolled him as victor and deliverer of Reuben and so many hapless men, he frankly owned that he had no right to this praise, it was the due of "Joshua," whom she herself had summoned in the name of the Most High to command the warriors of the people.

Miriam turned pale and, in spite of the steepness of the road, pressed her husband with questions. When she heard that Joshua was resting on the heights with his father and the young men and refreshing themselves with wine, and that Hur had promised to resign voluntarily, if Moses desired to entrust the command to him, her heavy eye-brows contracted in a gloomy frown beneath her broad forehead and, with curt severity, she exclaimed:

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"You are my lord, and it is not seemly for me to oppose you, not even if you forget your own wife so far that you give place to the man who once ventured to raise his eyes to her."

"He no longer cares for you," Hur eagerly interrupted; "nay, were I to give you a letter of divorce, he would no longer desire to possess you."

"Would he not?" asked Miriam with a forced smile. "Do you owe this information to him?"

"He has devoted himself, body and soul, to the welfare of the people and renounces the love of woman," replied Hur. But his wife exclaimed:

"Renunciation is easy, where desire would bring nothing save fresh rejection and shame. Not to him who, in the hour of the utmost peril, sought aid from the Egyptians is the honor of the chief command of the warriors due, but rather to you, who led the tribes to the first victory at the store-house in Succoth and to whom the Lord Himself, through Moses His servant, confided the command."

Hur looked anxiously at the woman for whom a late, fervent love had fired his heart, and seeing her glowing cheeks and hurried breathing, knew not whether to attribute these symptoms to the steep ascent or to the passionate ambition of her aspiring soul, which she now transferred to him, her husband.

That she held him in so much higher esteem than the younger hero, whose return he had dreaded, pleased him, but he had grown grey in the strict fulfilment of duty, and would not deviate from what he considered right. His mere hints had been commands to the wife of his youth whom he had borne to the grave a few years before, and as yet he had encountered no opposition from Miriam. That Joshua was best fitted to command the fighting-men of the people was unquestionable, so he answered, with panting breath, for the ascent taxed his strength also:

"Your good opinion is an honor and a pleasure to me; but even should Moses and the elders confer the chief command upon me, remember the heap of stones at Succoth and my vow. I have ever been mindful of and shall keep it."

Miriam looked angrily aside, and said nothing more till they had reached the summit of the pass.

The victorious youths were greeting their approaching kindred with loud shouts.

The joy of meeting, the provisions captured, and the drink which, though sparingly distributed, was divided among the greatest sufferers, raised the drooping courage of the exhausted wayfarers; and the thirsting Hebrews shortened the rest at the summit of the pass in order to reach Dophkah more quickly. They had heard from Joshua that



they would find there not only ruined cisterns, but also a hidden spring whose existence had been revealed to him by the ex-captain of the prisoners' guards.

The way led down the mountain. "Haste" was the watchword of the fainting Hebrews on their way to a well; and thus, soon after sunset, they reached the valley of the turquoise mines, where they encamped around the hill crowned by the ruined fortress and burned store-houses of Dophkah.

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The spring in an acacia grove dedicated to the goddess Hathor was speedily found, and fire after fire was quickly lighted. The wavering hearts which, in the desert of Sin, had been on the verge of despair were again filled with the anticipation of life, hope, and grateful faith. The beautiful acacias, it is true, had been felled to afford easier access to the spring whose refreshing waters had effected this wonderful change.

At the summit of the pass Joshua and Miriam had met again, but found time only for a hasty greeting. In the camp they were brought into closer relations.

Joshua had appeared among the people with his father. The heir of the princely old man who was held in such high esteem received joyous greetings from all sides, and his counsel to form a vanguard of the youthful warriors, a rear-guard of the older ones, and send out chosen bands of the former on reconnoitering expeditions was readily adopted.

He had a right to say that he was familiar with everything pertaining to the guidance and defence of a large army. God Himself had entrusted him with the chief command, and Moses, by sending him the monition to be strong and steadfast, had confirmed the office. Hur, too, who now possessed it, was willing to transfer it to him, and this man's promise was inviolable, though he had omitted to repeat it in the presence of the elders. Joshua was treated as if he held the chief command, and he himself felt his own authority supreme.

After the assembly dispersed, Hur had invited him, spite of the late hour, to go to his tent and the warrior accompanied him, for he desired to talk with Miriam. He would show her, in her husband's presence, that he had found the path which she had so zealously pointed out to him.

In the presence of another's wife the tender emotions of a Hebrew were silent. Hur's consort must be made aware that he, Joshua, no longer cherished any love for her. Even in his solitary hours, he had wholly ceased to think of her.

He confessed that she was a noble, a majestic woman, but the very memory of this grandeur now sent a chill through his veins.

Her actions, too, appeared in a new light. Nay, when at the summit of the pass she had greeted him with a cold smile, he felt convinced that they were utterly estranged from one another, and this feeling grew stronger and stronger beside the blazing fire in the stately tent of the chief, where they met a second time.

The rescued Reuben and his wife Milcah had deserted Miriam long before and, during her lonely waiting, many thoughts had passed through her mind which she meant to impress upon the man to whom she had granted so much that its memory now weighed on her heart like a crime.



We are most ready to be angry with those to whom we have been unjust, and this woman regarded the gift of her love as something so great, so precious, that it behooved even the man whom she had rejected never to cease to remember it with gratitude. But Joshua had boasted that he no longer desired, even were she offered to him, the woman whom he had once so fervently loved and clasped in his embrace. Nay, he had confirmed this assertion by leisurely waiting, without seeking her.

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At last he came, and in company with her husband, who was ready to cede his place to him.

But she was present, ready to watch with open eyes for the welfare of the too generous Hur.

The elderly man, to whose fate she had linked her own, and whose faithful devotion touched her, should be defrauded by no rival of the position which was his due, and which he must retain, if only because she rebelled against being the wife of a man who could no longer claim next to her brothers the highest rank in the tribes.

Never before had the much-courted woman, who had full faith in her gift of prophesy, felt so bitter, sore, and irritated. She did not admit it even to herself, yet it seemed as if the hatred of the Egyptians with which Moses had inspired her, and which was now futile, had found a new purpose and was directed against the only man whom she had ever loved.

But a true woman can always show kindness to everyone whom she does not scorn, so though she blushed deeply at the sight of the man whose kiss she had returned, she received him cordially, and with sympathetic questions.

Meanwhile, however, she addressed him by his former name Hosea, and when he perceived it was intentional, he asked if she had forgotten that it was she herself who, as the confidante of the Most High, had commanded him henceforward to call himself "Joshua."

Her features grew sharper with anxiety as she replied that her memory was good but he reminded her of a time which she would prefer to forget. He had himself forfeited the name the Lord had given him by preferring the favor of the Egyptians to the help which God had promised. Faithful to the old custom, she would continue to call him "Hosea."

The honest-hearted soldier had not expected such hostility, but he maintained a tolerable degree of composure and answered quietly that he would rarely afford her an opportunity to address him by this or any other name. Those who were his friends readily adopted that of Joshua.

Miriam replied that she, too, would be ready to do so if her husband approved and he himself insisted upon it; for the name was only a garment. Of course offices and honors were another matter.

When Joshua then declared that he still believed God Himself had summoned him, through the lips of His prophetess, to command the Hebrew soldiers and that he would admit the right of no one save Moses to deprive him of his claim to this office, Hur assented and held out his hand to him.

Then Miriam dropped the restraint she had hitherto imposed on herself and, with defiant eagerness, continued:

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"There I am of a different opinion. You did not obey the summons of the Most High. Can you deny this? And when the Omnipresent One found you at the feet of Pharaoh, instead of at the head of His people, He deprived you of the office with which He had entrusted you. He, the mightiest of generals, summoned the tempest and the waves, and they swallowed up the foe. So perished those who were your friends till their heavy fetters made you realize their true disposition toward you and your race. But I, meanwhile, was extolling the mercy of the Most High, and the people joined in my hymn of praise. On that very day the Lord summoned another to command the fighting-men in your stead, and that other, as you know, is my husband. If Hur has never learned the art of war, God will surely guide his arm, and it is He and none other who bestows victory.

"My husband—hear it again—is the sole commander of the hosts and if, in the abundance of his generosity, he has forgotten it, he will retain his office when he remembers whose hand chose him, and when I, his wife, raise my voice and recall it to his memory."

Joshua turned to go, in order to end the painful discussion, but Hur detained him, protesting that he was deeply incensed by his wife's unseemly interference in the affairs of men, and that he insisted on his promise. "A woman's disapproving words were blown away by the wind. It would be Moses' duty to declare whom Jehovah had chosen to be commander."

While making this reply Hur had gazed at his wife with stern dignity, as if admonishing discretion, and the look seemed to have effected its purpose; for Miriam had alternately flushed and paled as she listened; nay, she even detained the guest by beckoning him with a trembling hand to approach, as though she desired to soothe him.

"Let me say one thing more," she began, drawing a long breath, "that you may not misunderstand my meaning. I call everyone our friend who devotes himself to the cause of the people, and how self-sacrificingly you intend to do this, Hur has informed me. It was your confidence in Pharaoh's favor that parted us—therefore I know how to prize your firm and decisive breach with the Egyptians, but I did not correctly estimate the full grandeur of this deed until I learned that not only long custom, but other bonds, united you to the foe."

"What is the meaning of these words?" replied Joshua, convinced that she had just fitted to the bowstring another shaft intended to wound him. But Miriam, unheeding the question, calmly continued with a defiant keenness of glance that contradicted her measured speech:

"After the Lord's guidance had delivered us from the enemy, the Red Sea washed ashore the most beautiful woman we have seen for a long time. I bandaged the wound

a Hebrew woman dealt her and she acknowledged that her heart was filled with love for you, and that on her dying bed she regarded you as the idol of her soul.”

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Joshua, thoroughly incensed, exclaimed: "If this is the whole truth, wife of Hur, my father has given me a false report; for according to what I heard from him, the hapless woman made her last confession only in the presence of those who love me; not in yours. And she was right to shun you—you would never have understood her."

Here he saw a smile of superiority hover around Miriam's lips; but he repelled it, as he went on:

"Ah, your intellect is tenfold keener than poor Kasana's ever was. But your heart, which was open to the Most High, had no room for love. It will grow old and cease to beat without having learned the feeling. And, spite of your flashing eyes, I will tell you you are more than a woman, you are a prophetess. I cannot boast of gifts so lofty. I am merely a plain man, who understands the art of fighting better than that of foretelling the future. Yet I can see what is to come. You will foster the hatred of me that glows in your breast, and will also implant it in your husband's heart and zealously strive to fan it there. And I know why. The fiery ambition which consumes you will not suffer you to be the wife of a man who is second to any other. You refuse to call me by the name I owe to you. But if hatred and arrogance do not stifle in your breast the one feeling that still unites us—love for our people, the day will come when you will voluntarily approach and, unasked, by the free impulse of your heart, call me 'Joshua.'"

With these words he took leave of Miriam and her husband by a short wave of the hand, and vanished in the darkness of the night.

Hur gazed gloomily after him in silence until the footsteps of the belated guest had died away in the sleeping camp; then the ill-repressed wrath of the grave man, who had hitherto regarded his young wife with tender admiration, knew no bounds.

With two long strides he stood directly before her as she gazed with a troubled look into the fire, her face even paler than his own. His voice had lost its metallic harmony, and sounded shrill and sharp as he exclaimed:

"I had the courage to woo a maiden who supposed herself to be nearer to God than other women, and now that she has become my wife she makes me atone for such presumption."

"Atone?" escaped Miriam's livid lips, and a defiant glance blazed at him from her black eyes. But, undismayed, he continued, grasping her hand with so firm a pressure that it hurt her:

"Aye, you make me atone for it!—Shame on me, if I permit this disgraceful hour to be followed by similar ones."

Miriam strove to wrest her hand from his clasp, but he would not release it, and went on:

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"I sought you, that you might be the pride of my house. I expected to sow honor, and I reap disgrace; for what could be more humiliating to a man than to have a wife who rules him, who presumes to wound with hostile words the heart of the friend who is protected by the laws of hospitality? A woman of different mould, a simple-hearted, upright wife, who looked at her husband's past life, instead of planning how to increase his greatness, that she might share it with him, need not have had me shout into her ears that Hur has garnered honors and dignities enough, during his long existence, to be able to spare a portion of them without any loss of esteem. It is not the man who holds the chief command, but the one who shows the most self-sacrificing love for the people that is greatest in the eyes of Jehovah. You desire a high place, you seek to be honored by the multitude as one who is summoned by the Lord. I shall not forbid it, so long as you do not forget what the duty of a wife commands. You owe me love also; for you vowed to give it on your marriage day; but the human heart can bestow only what it possesses, and Hosea is right when he says that love, which is warm itself and warms others, is a feeling alien to your cold nature."

With these words he turned his back upon her and went to the dark portion of the tent, while Miriam remained standing by the fire, whose flickering light illumined her beautiful, pallid face.

With clenched teeth and hands pressed on her heaving bosom, she stood gazing at the spot where he had disappeared.

Her grey-haired husband had confronted her in the full consciousness of his dignity, a noble man worthy of reverence, a true, princely chief of his tribe, and infinitely her superior. His every word had pierced her bosom like the thrust of a lance. The power of truth had given each its full emphasis and held up to Miriam a mirror that showed her an image from which she shrank.

Now she longed to rush after him and beg him to restore the love with which he had hitherto surrounded her—and which the lonely woman had gratefully felt.

She knew that she could reciprocate his costly gift; for how ardently she longed to have one kind, forgiving word from his lips.

Her soul seemed withered, parched, torpid, like a corn-field on which a poisonous mildew has fallen; yet it had once been green and blooming.

She thought of the tilled fields in Goshen which, after having borne an abundant harvest, remained arid and bare till the moisture of the river came to soften the soil and quicken the seed which it had received. So it had been with her soul, only she had flung the ripening grain into the fire and, with blasphemous hand, erected a dam between the fructifying moisture and the dry earth.

But there was still time!

She knew that he erred in one respect; she knew she was like all other women, capable of yearning with ardent passion for the man she loved. It depended solely on herself to make him feel this in her arms.

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Now, it is true, he was justified in thinking her harsh and unfeeling, for where love had once blossomed in her soul, a spring of bitterness now gushed forth poisoning all it touched.

Was this the vengeance of the heart whose ardent wishes she had heroically slain?

God had disdained her sorest sacrifice; this it was impossible to doubt; for His majesty was no longer revealed to her in visions that exalted the heart, and she was scarcely entitled to call herself His prophetess. This sacrifice had led her, the truth-loving woman, into falsehood and plunged her who, in the consciousness of seeking the right path lived at peace with herself, into torturing unrest. Since that great and difficult deed she, who had once been full of hope, had obtained nothing for which she longed. She, who recognized no woman as her superior, had been obliged to yield in shame her place to a poor dying Egyptian. She had been kindly disposed toward all who were of her blood, and were devoted to the sacred cause of her people, and now her hostile bitterness had wounded one of the best and noblest. The poorest bondman's wife rejoiced to bind more and more closely the husband who had once loved her—she had wickedly estranged hers.

Seeking protection she had approached his hearthstone shivering, but she had found it warmer than she had hoped, and his generosity and love fell upon her wounded soul like balm. True, he could not restore what she had lost, but he could give a welcome compensation.

Ah, he no longer believed her capable of a tender emotion, yet she needed love in order to live, and no sacrifice seemed to her too hard to regain his. But pride was also a condition of her very existence, and whenever she prepared to humbly open her heart to her husband, the fear of humiliating herself overpowered her, and she stood as though spell-bound till the blazing wood at her feet fell into smoking embers and darkness surrounded her.

Then a strange anxiety stole over her.

Two bats, which had come from the mines and circled round the fire darted past her like ghosts. Everything urged her back to the tent, to her husband, and with hasty resolution she entered the spacious room lighted by a lamp. But it was empty, and the female slave who received her said that Hur would spend the time until the departure of the people with his son and grandson.

A keen pang pierced her heart, and she lay down to rest with a sense of helplessness and shame which she had not felt since her childhood.



A few hours after the camp was astir and when her husband, in the grey dawn of morning, entered the tent with a curt greeting, pride again raised its head and her reply sounded cold and formal.

He did not come alone; his son Uri was with him.

But he looked graver than was his wont; for the men of Judah had assembled early and adjured him not to give up the chief command to any man who belonged to another tribe.

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This had been unexpected. He had referred them to Moses' decision, and his desire that it might be adverse to him was intensified, as his young wife's self-reliant glance stirred fresh wrath in his soul.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Early the following morning the people resumed their march with fresh vigor and renewed courage; but the little spring which, by digging, had at last been forced to flow was completely exhausted.

However, its refusal to bestow a supply of water to take with them was of no consequence; they expected to find another well at Alush.

The sun had risen in radiant majesty in a cloudless sky. The light showed its awakening power on the hearts of men, and the rocks and the yellow sand of the road sparkled like the blue vault above. The pure, light, spicy air of the desert, cooled by the freshness of the night, expanded the breasts of the wayfarers, and walking became a pleasure.

The men showed greater confidence, and the eyes of the women sparkled more brightly than they had done for a long time; for the Lord had again showed the people that He remembered them in their need; and fathers and mothers gazed proudly at the sons who had conquered the foe. Most of the tribes had greeted in the band of prisoners some one who had long been given up as lost, and it was a welcome duty to make amends for the injuries the terrible forced labor had inflicted. There was special rejoicing, not only among the Ephraimites, but everywhere, over the return of Joshua, as all, save the men of the tribe of Judah, now called him, remembering the cheering promise the name conveyed.

The youths who under his command had put the Egyptians to rout, told their relatives what manner of man the son of Nun was, how he thought of everything and assigned to each one the place for which he was best suited. His eye kindled the battle spirit in every one on whom it fell, and the foe retreated at his mere war-cry.

Those who spoke of old Nun and his grandson also did so with sparkling eyes. The tribe of Ephraim, whose lofty pretensions had been a source of much vexation, was willingly allowed precedence on this march, and only the men of Judah were heard to grumble. Doubtless there was reason for dissatisfaction; for Hur, the prince of their tribe, and his young wife walked as if oppressed by a heavy burden; whoever asked them anything would have been wiser to have chosen another hour.

So long as the sun's rays were oblique, there was still a little shade at the edge of the sandstone rocks which bordered the road on both sides or towered aloft in the center; and as the sons of Korah began a song of praise, young and old joined in, and most

gladly and gratefully of all Milcah, now no longer pale, and Reuben, her happy, liberated husband.

The children picked up golden-yellow bitter apples, which having fallen from the withered vines, lay by the wayside as if they had dropped from the sky, and brought them to their parents. But they were bitter as gall and a morose old man of the tribe of Zebulun, who nevertheless kept their firm shells to hold ointment, said:

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"These are a symbol of to-day. It looks pleasant now; but when the sun mounts higher and we find no water, we shall taste the bitterness."

His prediction was verified only too soon; for as the road which, after leaving the sandstone region, began to lead upward through a rocky landscape which resembled walls of red brick and grey stone, grew steeper, the sun rose higher and higher and the heat of the day hourly increased.

Never had the sun sent sharper arrows upon the travellers, and pitiless was their fall upon bare heads and shoulders.

Here an old man, yonder a younger one, sank prostrate under its scorching blaze or, supported by his friends, staggered on raving with his hand pressed to his brow like a drunken man. The blistered skin peeled from the hands and faces of men and women, and there was not one whose palate and tongue were not parched by the heat, or whose vigorous strength and newly-awakened courage it did not impair.

The cattle moved forward with drooping heads and dragging feet or rolled on the ground till the shepherds' lash compelled them to summon their failing powers.

At noon the people were permitted to rest, but there was not a hand's breadth of shade where they sought repose. Whoever lay down in the noonday heat found fresh tortures instead of relief. The sufferers themselves urged a fresh start for the spring at Alush.

Hitherto each day, after the sun had begun its course toward the west through the cloudless sky of the desert, the heat had diminished, and ere the approach of twilight a fresher breeze had fanned the brow; but to-day the rocks retained the glow of noonday for many hours, until a light cool breeze blew from sea at the west. At the same time the vanguard which, by Joshua's orders, preceded the travellers, halted, and the whole train stopped.

Men, women, and children fixed their eyes and waved hands, staves, and crutches toward the same spot, where the gaze was spell-bound by a wondrous spectacle never beheld before.

A cry of astonishment and admiration echoed from the parched weary lips, which had long since ceased to utter question or answer; and it soon rang from rank to rank, from tribe to tribe, to the very lepers at the end of the procession and the rear-guard which followed it. One touched another, and whispered a name familiar to every one, that of the sacred mountain where the Lord had promised Moses to "bring them unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey."

No one had told the weary travellers, yet all knew that for the first time they beheld Horeb and the peak of Sinai, the most sacred summit of this granite range.

Though a mountain, it was also the throne of the omnipotent God of their fathers.

The holy mountain itself seemed at this hour to be on fire like the bush whence He had spoken to His chosen servant. Its summit, divided into seven peaks, towered majestically aloft in the distance, dominating the heights and valleys far and near, glowing before the people like a giant ruby, irradiated by the light of a conflagration which was consuming the world.

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No eye had ever beheld a similar spectacle. Then the sun sank lower and lower, till it set in the sea concealed behind the mountains. The glowing ruby was transformed into a dark amethyst, and at last assumed the deep hue of a violet; but the eyes of the people continued to dwell on the sacred scenes as though spell-bound. Nay, when the day-star had completely disappeared, and its reflection gilded a long cloud with shining edges, their eyes dilated still more, for a man of the tribe of Benjamin, overwhelmed by the grandeur of the spectacle, beheld in it the floating gold-bordered mantle of Jehovah, and the neighbors to whom he showed it, believed him, and shared his pious excitement.

This inspiring sight had made the Hebrews for a short time forget thirst and weariness. But the highest exaltation was soon to be transformed into the deepest discouragement; for when night closed in and Alush was reached after a short march it appeared that the desert tribe which dwelt there, ere striking their tents the day before, had filled the brackish spring with pebbles and rubbish.

Everything fit to drink which had been brought with them had been consumed at Dophkah, and the exhausted spring at the mines had afforded no water to fill the skins. Thirst not only parched their palates but began to fever their bowels. Their dry throats refused to receive the solid food of which there was no lack. Scenes that could not fail to rouse both ruth and anger were seen and heard on all sides.

Here men and women raved and swore, wailed and moaned, yonder they gave themselves up to dull despair. Others, whose crying children shrieked for water, had gone to the choked spring and were quarrelling around a little spot on the ground, whence they hoped to collect a few drops of the precious fluid in a shallow dish. The cattle, too, lowed so mournfully and beseechingly that it pierced the shepherds' hearts like a reproach.

Few took the trouble to pitch a tent. The night was so warm, and the sooner they pressed forward the better, for Moses had promised to join them a few leagues hence. He alone could aid, it was his duty to protect man and beast from perishing.

If the God who had promised them such splendid gifts left them to die in the wilderness with their cattle, the man to whose guidance they had committed themselves was a cheat; and the God whose might and mercy he never ceased extolling was more false and powerless than the idols with heads of human beings and animals, to whom they had prayed in Egypt.

Threats, too, were loudly uttered amid curses and blasphemies. Wherever Aaron, who had returned to the people, appeared and addressed them, clenched fists were stretched toward him.

Miriam, too, by her husband's bidding, was compelled to desist from comforting the women with soothing words, after a mother whose infant was expiring at her dry breast, picked up a stone and others followed her example.

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Old Nun and his son found more attentive hearers. Both agreed that Joshua must fight, no matter in what position Moses placed him; but Hur himself led him to the warriors, who joyously greeted him.

Both the old man and the younger one understood how to infuse confidence. They told them of the well-watered oasis of the Amalekites, which was not far distant, and pointed to the weapons in their hands, with which the Lord Himself had furnished them. Joshua assured them that they greatly outnumbered the warriors of the desert tribe. If the young men bore themselves as bravely as they had done at the copper mines and at Dophkah, with God's aid the victory would be theirs.

After midnight Joshua, having taken counsel with the elders, ordered the trumpets which summoned the fighting-men to be sounded. Under the bright starry sky he reviewed them, divided them into bands, gave to each a fitting leader, and impressed upon them the importance of the orders they were to obey.

They had assembled torpidly, half dead with thirst, but the new occupation to which their sturdy commander urged them, the hope of victory, and the great value of the prize: a piece of land at the foot of the sacred mountain, rich in springs and palm-trees, wonderfully strengthened their lost energy.

Ephraim was among them animating others by his tireless vigor. But when the ex-chief of the Egyptians—whom the Lord had already convinced that He considered him worthy of the aid his name promised—adjured them to rely on God's omnipotence, his words produced a very different effect from those uttered by Aaron whose monitions they had heard daily since their departure.

When Joshua had spoken, many youthful lips, though parched with thirst, shouted enthusiastically:

"Hail to the chief! You are our captain; we will obey no other."

But he now explained gravely and resolutely that the obedience he exacted from them he intended to practise rigidly himself. He would willingly take the last place in the ranks, if such was the command of Moses.

The stars were still shining brightly in a cloudless sky when the sound of the horns warned the people to set out on their march. Meanwhile the vanguard had been sent forward to inform Moses of the condition of the tribes, and after the review was over, Ephraim followed them.

During the march Joshua kept the warriors together as closely as though an attack might be expected; profiting meanwhile by every moment to give the men and their

captains instructions for the coming battle, to inspect them, and range their ranks in closer order. Thus he kept them and their attention on the alert till the stars paled.

Opposition or complaint was rare among the warriors, but the murmurs, curses, and threats grew all the louder among those who bore no weapons. Even before the grey dawn of morning the thirsting men, whose knees trembled with weakness, and who beheld close before their eyes the suffering of their wives and children, shouted more and more frequently:

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"On to Moses! We'll stone him when we find him!"

Many, with loud imprecations and flashing eyes, picked up bits of rock along the road, and the fury of the multitude at last expressed itself so fiercely and passionately that Hur took counsel with the well-disposed among the elders, and then hurried forward with the fighting-men of Judah to protect Moses, in case of extremity, from the rebels by force of arms.

Joshua was commissioned to detain the bands of rioters who, amid threats and curses, were striving to force their way past the warriors.

When the sun at last rose with dazzling splendor, the march had become a pitiful creeping and tottering onward. Even the soldiers moved as though they were paralysed. Only when the rebels tried to press onward, they did their duty and forced them back with swords and lances.

On both sides of the valley through which the Hebrews were passing towered lofty cliffs of grey granite, which glittered and flashed marvellously when the slanting sunbeams struck the bits of quartz thickly imbedded in the primeval rock.

At noon the heat could not fail to be scorching again between the bare precipices which in many places jutted very near one another; but the coolness of the morning still lingered. The cattle at least found some refreshment; for many a bush of the juicy, fragrant betharan—[*Cantolina fragrantissima*—]afforded them food, and the shepherd-lads lifted their short frocks, filled the aprons thus made with them and, spite of their own exhaustion, held them up to the hungry mouths of the animals.

They had passed an hour in this way, when a loud shout of joy suddenly rang out, passing from the vanguard through rank after rank till it reached the last roan in the rear.

No one had heard in words to what event it was due, yet every one knew that it meant nothing else than the discovery of fresh water.

Ephraim now returned to confirm the glad tidings, and what an effect it produced upon the discouraged hearts!

They straightened their bent figures and struggled onward with redoubled speed, as if they had already drained the water jar in long draughts. The bands of fighting-men put no farther obstacles in their way, and joyously greeted those who crowded past them.

But the swiftly flowing throng was soon dammed; for the spot which afforded refreshment detained the front ranks, which blocked the whole procession as thoroughly as a wall or moat.

The multitude became a mighty mob that filled the valley. At last men and women, with joyous faces, appeared bearing full jars and pails in their hands and on their heads, beckoning gaily to their friends, shouting words of cheer, and trying to force their way through the crowd to their relatives; but many had the precious liquid torn from them by force ere they reached their destination.

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Joshua and his band had forced their way to the vicinity of the spring, to maintain order among the greedy drawers of water. But they were obliged to have patience for a time, for the strong men of the tribe of Judah, with whom Hur had led the way in advance of all the rest, were still swinging their axes and straining at the levers hastily prepared from the trunks of the thorny acacias to move huge blocks out of the way and widen the passage to the flow of water that was gushing from several clefts in the rock.

At first the spring had lost itself in a heap of moss-covered granite blocks and afterwards in the earth; but now the overflow and trickling away of the precious fluid had been stopped and a reservoir formed whence the cattle also could drink.

Whoever had already succeeded in filling a jar had obtained the water from the overflow which had escaped through the quickly-made dam. Now the men appointed to guard the camp were keeping every one back to give the water in the large new reservoir into which it flowed in surprising abundance, time to grow clear.

In the presence of the gift of God for which they had so passionately shouted, it was easy to be patient. They had discovered the treasure and only needed to preserve it. No word of discontent, murmuring, or reviling was heard; nay, many looked with shame and humiliation at the new gift of the Most High.

Loud, gladsome shouts and words echoed from the distance; but the man of God, who knew better than any one else, the valleys and rocks, pastures and springs of the Horeb region and had again obtained so great a blessing for the people, had retired into a neighboring ravine; he was seeking refuge from the thanks and greetings which rose with increasing enthusiasm from ever widening circles, and above all peace and calmness for his own deeply agitated soul.

Soon fervent hymns of praise to the Lord sounded from the midst of the refreshed, reinvigorated bands overflowing with ardent gratitude, who had never encamped richer in hope and joyous confidence.

Songs, merry laughter, jests, and glad shouts accompanied the pitching of every tent, and the camp sprung up as quickly as if it had been conjured from the earth by some magic spell.

The eyes of the young men sparkled with eagerness for the fray, and many a head of cattle was slaughtered to make the meal a festal banquet. Mothers who had done their duty in the camp, leading their children by the hand went to the spring and showed them the spot where Moses' staff had pointed out to his people the water gushing from the clefts in the granite. Many men also stood with hands and eyes uplifted around the place where Jehovah had shown Himself so merciful to His people; among them many a rebel who had stooped for the bit of rock with which he meant to stone the trusted servant of God. No one doubted that a new and great miracle had been performed.

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Old people enjoined the young never to forget this day and this drink, and a grandmother sprinkled her grandchildren's brows at the edge of the spring with water to secure for them divine protection throughout their future lives.

Hope, gratitude, and warm confidence reigned wherever the gaze was turned, even fear of the warlike sons of Amalek had vanished; for what evil could befall those who trusted to the favor of such an Omnipotent Defender.

One tent alone, the stateliest of all, that of the prince of the tribe of Judah, did not share the joy of the others.

Miriam sat alone among her women, after having silently served the meal to the men who were overflowing with grateful enthusiasm; she had learned from Reuben, Milcah's husband, that Moses had given to Joshua in the presence of all the elders, the office of commander-in-chief. Hur, her husband, she had heard farther, had joyfully yielded the guidance of the warriors to the son of Nun.

This time the prophetess had held aloof from the people's hymns of praise. When Milcah and her women had urged her to accompany them to the spring, she had commanded the petitioners to go alone. She was expecting her husband and wished to greet him alone; she must show him that she desired his forgiveness. But he did not return home; for after the council of the elders had separated, he helped the new commander to marshal the soldiers and did so as an assistant, subordinate to Hosea, who owed to her his summons and the name of Joshua.

Her servants, who had returned, were now drawing threads from the distaff: but this humble toil was distasteful to her, and while she let her hands rest and gazed idly into vacancy, the hours dragged slowly along, while she felt her resolution of meekly approaching her husband become weaker and weaker. She longed to pray for strength to bow before the man who was her lord and master; but the prophetess, who was accustomed to fervent pleading, could not find inspiration. Whenever she succeeded in collecting her thoughts and uplifting her heart, she was disturbed. Each fresh report that reached her from the camp increased her displeasure. When evening at last closed in, a messenger arrived and told her not to prepare the supper which, however, had long stood ready. Hur, his son, and grandson had accepted the invitation of Nun and Joshua.

It was a hard task for her to restrain her tears. But had she permitted them to flow uncontrolled, they would have been those of wrath and insulted womanly dignity, not of grief and longing.

During the hours of the evening watch soldiers marched past, and from troop after troop cheers for Joshua reached her.

Even when the words “strong and steadfast!” were heard, they recalled the man who had once been dear to her, and whom now—she freely admitted it—she hated. The men of his own tribe only had honored her husband with a cheer. Was this fitting gratitude for the generosity with which he had divested himself, for the sake of the younger man, of a dignity that belonged to him alone? To see her husband thus slighted pierced her to the heart and caused her more pain than Hur’s leaving her, his newly-wedded wife, to solitude.

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The supper before the tent of the Ephraimites lasted a long time. Miriam sent her women to rest before midnight, and lay down to await Hur's return and to confess to him all that had wounded and angered her, everything for which she longed.

She thought it would be an easy matter to keep awake while suffering such mental anguish. But the great fatigues and excitements of the last few days asserted their rights, and in the midst of a prayer for humility and her husband's love sleep overpowered her. At last, at the time of the first morning watch, just as day was dawning, the sound of trumpets announcing peril close at hand, startled her from sleep.

She rose hurriedly and glancing at her husband's couch found it empty. But it had been used, and on the sandy soil—for mats had been spread only in the living room of the tent—she saw close beside her own bed the prints of Hur's footsteps.

So he had stood close by it and perhaps, while she was sleeping, gazed yearningly into her face.

Ay, this had really happened; her old female slave told her so unasked. After she had roused Hur, she had seen him hold the light cautiously so that it illumined Miriam's face and then stoop over her a long time as if to kiss her.

This was good news, and so rejoiced the solitary woman that she forgot the formality which was peculiar to her and pressed her lips to the wrinkled brow of the crooked little crone who had served her parents. Then she had her hair arranged, donned the light-blue festal robe Hur had given her, and hurried out to bid him farewell.

Meanwhile the troops had formed in battle array.

The tents were being struck and for a long time Miriam vainly sought her husband. At last she found him; but he was engaged in earnest conversation with Joshua, and when she saw the latter a chill ran through the prophetess' blood, and she could not bring herself to approach the men.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A severe struggle was impending; for as the spies reported, the Amalekites had been joined by other desert tribes. Nevertheless the Hebrew troops were twice their number. But how greatly inferior in warlike skill were Joshua's bands to the foes habituated to battle and attack.

The enemy was advancing from the south, from the oasis at the foot of the sacred mountain, which was the ancient home of their race, their supporter, the fair object of their love, their all, well worthy that they should shed their last drop of blood in her defence.

Joshua, now recognized by Moses and the whole Hebrew people as the commander of the fighting-men, led his new-formed troops to the widest portion of the valley, which permitted him to derive more advantage from the superior number of his force.

He ordered the camp to be broken up and again pitched in a narrower spot on the plain of Rephidim at the northern end of the battle-field, where it would be easier to defend the tents. The command of this camp and the soldiers left for its protection he confided to his cautious father.

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He had wished to leave Moses and the older princes of the tribes within the precincts of the well-guarded camp, but the great leader of the people had anticipated him and, with Hur and Aaron, had climbed a granite cliff from whose lofty summit the battle could be witnessed. So the combatants saw Moses and his two companions on the peak dominating the valley, and knew that the trusted servant of the Most High would not cease to commend their cause to Him and pray for their success and deliverance.

But every private soldier in the army, every woman and old man in the camp knew how to find the God of their fathers in this hour of peril, and the war-cry Joshua had chosen: "Jehovah our standard!" bound the hearts of the warriors to the Ruler of Battles, and reminded the most despairing and untrained Hebrew that he could take no step and deal no blow which the Lord did not guide.

The trumpets and horns of the Hebrews sounded louder and louder; for the Amalekites were pressing into the plain which was to be the scene of the battle.

It was a strange place of conflict, which the experienced soldier would never have selected voluntarily; for it was enclosed on both sides by lofty, steep, grey granite cliffs. If the enemy conquered, the camp would be lost, and the aids the art of war afforded must be used within the smallest conceivable space.

To make a circuit round the foe or attack him unexpectedly in the flank seemed impossible; but the rocks themselves were made to serve Joshua; for he had commanded his skilful slingers and trained archers to climb the precipices to a moderate height and wait for the signal when they were to mingle in the battle.

At the first glance Joshua perceived that he had not overestimated the foe; for those who began the fray were bearded men with bronzed, keen, manly features, whose black eyes blazed with the zest of battle and fierce hatred of the enemy.

Like their grey-haired, scarred leader, all were slenderly formed and lithe of limb. They swung, like trained warriors, the brazen sickle-shaped sword, the curved shield of heavy wood, or the lance decked below its point with a bunch of camel's hair. The war-cry rang loud, fierce, and defiant, from the steadfast breasts of these sons of the desert, who must either conquer or lose their dearest possession.

The first assault was met by Joshua at the head of men, whom he had armed with the heavy shields and lances of the Egyptians; incited by their brave leader they resisted a long time—while the narrow entrance to the battle field prevented the savage foe from using his full strength.

But when the foe on foot retreated, and a band of warriors mounted on swift dromedaries dashed upon the Hebrews many were terrified by the strange aspect of the huge unwieldy beasts, known to them only by report.

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With loud outcries they flung down their shields and fled. Wherever a gap appeared in the ranks the rider of a dromedary urged it in, striking downward with his long keen weapon at the foe. The shepherds, unused to such assaults, thought only of securing their own safety, and many turned to fly; for sudden terror seized them as they beheld the flaming eyes or heard the shrill, fierce shriek of one of the infuriated Amalekite women, who had entered the battle to fire the courage of their husbands and terrify the foe. Clinging with the left hand to leather thongs that hung from the saddles, they allowed themselves to be dragged along by the hump-backed beasts wherever they were guided. Hatred seemed to have steeled the weak women's hearts against the fear of death, pity, and feminine dread; and the furious yells of these Megaerae destroyed the courage of many of the braver Hebrews.

But scarcely did Joshua see his men yield than, profiting by the disaster, he commanded them to retreat still farther and give the foe admittance to the valley; for he told himself that he could turn the superior number of his forces to better account as soon as it was possible to press the enemy in front and on both sides at the same time, and allow the slingers and bowmen to take part in the fray.

Ephraim and his bravest comrades, who surrounded him as messengers, were now despatched to the northern end of the valley to inform the captains of the troops stationed there of Joshua's intention and command them to advance.

The swift-footed shepherd lads darted off as nimbly as gazelles, and it was soon evident that the commander had adopted the right course for, as soon as the Amalekites reached the center of the valley, they were attacked on all sides, and many who boldly rushed forward fell on the sand while still waving sword or lance, struck by the round stones or keen arrows discharged by the slingers and archers stationed on the cliffs.

Meanwhile Moses, with Aaron and Hur, remained on the cliff overlooking the battle-field.

Thence the former watched the conflict in which, grown grey in the arts of peace, he shared only with his heart and soul.

No movement, no uplifted or lowered sword of friend or foe escaped his watchful gaze; but when the attack began and the commander, with wise purpose, left the way to the heart of his army open to the enemy, Hur exclaimed to the grey-haired man of God:

"The lofty intellect of my wife and your sister perceived the right course. The son of Nun is unworthy of the summons of the Most High. What strategy! Our force is superior, yet the foe is pressing unimpeded into the midst of the army. Our troops are dividing as the waters of the Red Sea parted at God's command, and apparently by their leader's order."

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“To swallow up the Amalekites as the waves of the sea engulfed the Egyptians,” was Moses’ answer. Then, stretching his arms toward heaven, he cried: “Look down, Jehovah, upon Thy people who are in fresh need. Steel the arm and sharpen the eyes of him whom Thou didst choose for Thy sword! Lend him the help Thou didst promise, when Thou didst name him Joshua! And if it is no longer Thy will that he who shows himself strong and steadfast, as beseems Thy captain, should lead our forces to the battle, place Thyself, with the hosts of Heaven, at the head of Thy people, that they may crush their foes.”

Thus the man of God prayed with arms uplifted, never ceasing to beseech and appeal to God, whose lofty will guided his own, and soon Aaron whispered that their foes were sore beset and the Hebrews’ courage was showing itself in magnificent guise.

Joshua was now here, now there, and the ranks of the enemy were already thinning, while the numbers of the Hebrews seemed increasing.

Hur confirmed these words, adding that the tireless zeal and heroic scorn of death displayed by the son of Nun could not be denied. He had just felled one of the fiercest Amalekites with his battle-axe.

Then Moses uttered a sigh of relief, let his arms fall, and eagerly watched the farther progress of the battle, which was surging, raging and roaring beneath him.

Meanwhile the sun had reached its zenith and shone with scorching fire upon the combatants. The grey granite walls of the valley exhaled fiercer and fiercer heat and drops of perspiration had long been pouring from the burning brows of the three men on the cliff. How the noon-tide heat must burden those who were fighting and struggling below; how the bleeding wounds of those who had fallen in the dust must burn!

Moses felt all this as if he were himself compelled to endure it; for his immovably steadfast soul was rich in compassion, and he had taken into his heart, as a father does his child, the people of his own blood for whom he lived and labored, prayed and planned.

The wounds of the Hebrews pained him, yet his heart throbbed with joyous pride, when he beheld how those whose cowardly submission had so powerfully stirred his wrath a short time before, had learned to act on the defensive and offensive; and saw one youthful band after another shouting: “Jehovah our standard!” rush upon the enemy.

In Joshua’s proud, heroic figure he beheld the descendants of his people as he had imagined and desired them, and now he no longer doubted that the Lord Himself had summoned the son of Nun to the chief command. His eye had rarely beamed as brightly as in this hour.

But what was that?

A cry of alarm escaped the lips of Aaron, and Hur rose and gazed northward in anxious suspense for thence, where the tents of the people stood, fresh war-cries rose, blended with loud, piteous shrieks which seemed to be uttered, not only by men, but by women and children.

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The camp had been attacked.

Long before the commencement of the battle a band of Amalekites had separated from the others and made their way to it through a path in the mountains with which they were familiar.

Hur thought of his young wife, while before Aaron's mind rose Elisheba, his faithful spouse, his children and grandchildren; and both, with imploring eyes, mutely entreated Moses to dismiss them to hasten to aid their dear ones; but the stern leader refused and detained them.

Then, drawing his figure to its full height, Moses again raised his hands and eyes to Heaven, appealing to the Most High with fervent warmth, and never ceasing in his prayers, which became more and more ardent as time passed on, for the vantage gained by the soldiers seemed lost. Each new glance at the battle-field, everything his companions told him, while his soul, dwelling with the Lord, had rendered him blind to the scene at his feet, increased the burden of his anxieties.

Joshua, at the head of a strong detachment, had retreated from the battle, accompanied by Bezaleel, Hur's grandson, Aholiab, his most beloved comrade, the youthful Ephraim, and Reuben, Milcah's husband.

Hur's eyes had followed them, while his heart was full of blessings; for they had evidently quitted the battle to save the camp. With straining ears he listened to the sounds from the north, as if suspecting how nearly he was affected by the broken cries and moans borne by the wind from the tents.

Old Nun had defended himself against the Amalekite troop that assailed the camp, and fought valiantly; but when he perceived that the men whom Joshua had placed under his command could no longer hold out against the attack of the enemy, he sent to ask for aid; Joshua instantly entrusted the farther guidance of the battle to the second head of the tribe of Judah, Naashon, and Uri the son of Hur, who had distinguished himself by courage and discretion and hastened, with other picked men, to his father's relief.

He had not lost a moment, yet the conflict was decided when he appeared on the scene of action; for when he approached the camp the Amalekites had already broken through his father's troops, cut it off from them, and rushed in.

Joshua first saved the brave old man from the foe; then the next thing was to drive the sons of the desert from the tents and, in so doing, there was a fierce hand to hand struggle of man against man, and as he himself could be in only one place he was forced to leave the young men to shift for themselves.

Here, too, he raised the war-cry: "Jehovah our standard!" and rushed upon the tent of Hur,—which the enemy had seized first and where the battle raged most fiercely.

Many, corpses already strewed the ground at its entrance, and furious Amalekites were still struggling with a band of Hebrews; but wild shrieks of terror rang from within its walls.

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Joshua dashed across the threshold as if his feet were winged and beheld a scene which filled even the fearless man with horror; for at the left of the spacious floor Hebrews and Amalekites rolled fighting on the blood-stained mats, while at the right he saw Miriam and several of her women whose hands had been bound by the foe.

The men had desired to bear them away as a costly prize; but an Amalekite woman, frantic with rage and jealousy and thirsting for revenge, wished to devote the foreign women to a fiery death; fanning the embers upon the hearth she had brought them, with the help of the veil torn from Miriam's head, to a bright blaze.

A terrible uproar filled the spacious enclosure, when Joshua sprang into the tent.

Here furious men were fighting, yonder the female servants of the prophetess were shrieking loudly or, as they saw the approaching warrior, screaming for help and rescue.

Their mistress, deadly pale, knelt before the hostile chief whose wife had threatened her with death by fire. She gazed at her preserver as if she beheld a ghost that had just risen from the earth and what now happened remained imprinted on Miriam's memory as a series of bloody, horrible, disconnected, yet superb visions.

In the first place the Amalekite chieftain who had bound her was a strangely heroic figure.

The bronzed warrior, with his bold hooked nose, black beard, and fiery eyes, looked like an eagle of his own mountains. But another was soon to cope with him, and that other the man who had been dear to her heart.

She had often compared him to a lion, but never had he seemed more akin to the king of the wilderness.

Both were mighty and terrible men. No one could have predicted which would be the victor and which the vanquished; but she was permitted to watch their conflict, and already the hot-blooded son of the desert had raised his war-cry and rushed upon the more prudent Hebrew.

Every child knows that life cannot continue if the heart ceases to throb for a minute; yet Miriam felt that her own stood still as if benumbed and turned to stone, when the lion was in danger of succumbing to the eagle, and when the latter's glittering knife flashed, and she saw the blood gushing from the other's shoulder.

But the frozen heart had now begun to beat again, nay it pulsed faster than ever; for suddenly the leonine warrior, toward whom she had just felt such bitter hatred, had again become, as if by a miracle, the friend of her youth. With blast of trumpets and clash of cymbals love had again set forth to enter, with triumphant joy, the soul which had of late been so desolate, so impoverished. All that separated her from him was

suddenly forgotten and buried, and never was a more fervent appeal addressed to the Most High than during the brief prayer for him which rose from her heart at that moment. And the swiftness with which the petition was granted equalled its ardor; for the eagle had fallen and lowered its pinions beneath the superior might of the lion.

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Then darkness veiled Miriam's eyes and she felt as if in a dream Ephraim sever the ropes around her wrists.

Soon after she regained her full consciousness, and now beheld at her feet the bleeding form of the conquered chieftain; while on the other side of the tent the floor was strewn with dead and wounded men, Hebrews and Amalekites, among them many of her husband's slaves. But beside the fallen men stood erect, and exulting in victory, the stalwart warriors of her people, among them the venerable form of Nun, and Joshua, whose father was binding up his wounds.

To do this she felt was her duty and hers only, and a deep sense of shame, a burning grief took possession of her as she remembered how she had sinned against this man.

She knew not how she who had caused him such deep suffering could atone for it, how she could repay what she owed him.

Her whole heart was overflowing with longing for one kind word from his mouth, and she approached him on her knees across the blood-stained floor; but the lips of the prophetess, usually so eloquent, seemed paralyzed and could not find the right language till at last from her burdened breast the cry escaped in loud imploring accents:

"Joshua, oh, Joshua! I have sinned heavily against you and will atone for it all my life; but do not disdain my gratitude! Do not cast it from you and, if you can, forgive me."

She had been unable to say more; then—never would she forget it—burning tears had gushed from her eyes and he had raised her from the floor with irresistible strength, yet as gently as a mother touches her fallen child, and from his lips mild, gentle words, full of forgiveness, echoed in her ears. The very touch of his right hand had assured her that he was no longer angry.

She still felt the pressure of his hand, and heard his assurance that from no lips would he more gladly hear the name of Joshua than from hers.

With the war-cry "Jehovah our standard!" he at last turned his back upon her; for a long time its clear tones and the enthusiastic shouts of his soldiers echoed in her ears.

Finally everything around her had lapsed into silence and she only knew that never had she shed such bitter, burning tears as in this hour. And she made two solemn vows in the presence of the God who had summoned her to be His prophetess. Meanwhile both the men whom they concerned were surrounded by the tumult of battle.

One had again led his troops from the rescued camp against the foe; the other was watching with the leader of the people the surging to and fro of the ever-increasing fury of the conflict.



Joshua found his people in sore stress. Here they were yielding, yonder they were still feebly resisting the onslaught of the sons of the desert; but Hur gazed with increasing and redoubled anxiety at the progress of the battle; for in the camp he beheld wife and grandson, and below his son, in mortal peril.

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His paternal heart ached as he saw Uri retreat, then as he pressed forward again and repelled the foe by a well-directed assault, it throbbed joyously, and he would gladly have shouted words of praise.

But whose ear would have been sharp enough to distinguish the voice of a single man amid the clash of arms and war-cries, the shrieks of women, the wails of the wounded, the discordant grunting of the camels, the blasts of horns and trumpets mingling below?

Now the foremost band of the Amalekites had forced itself like a wedge into the rear ranks of the Hebrews.

If the former succeeded in opening a way for those behind and joined the division which was attacking the camp, the battle was lost, and the destruction of the people sealed; for a body of Amalekites who had not mingled in the fray were still stationed at the southern entrance of the valley, apparently for the purpose of defending the oasis against the foe in case of need.

A fresh surprise followed.

The sons of the desert had fought their way forward so far that the missiles of the slingers and bowmen could scarcely reach them. If these men were not to be idle, it was needful that they should be summoned to the battle-field.

Hur had long since shouted to Uri to remember them and use their aid again; but now the figure of a youth suddenly appeared approaching from the direction of the camp as nimbly as a mountain goat, by climbing and leaping from one rock to another.

As soon as he reached the first ones he spoke to them, and made signs to the next, who passed the message on, and at last they all climbed down into the valley, scaled the western cliff to the height of several men, and suddenly vanished as though the rock had swallowed them.

The youth whom the slingers and archers had followed was Ephraim.

A black shadow on the cliff where he had disappeared with the others must be the opening of a ravine, through which they were doubtless to be guided to the men who had followed Joshua to the succor of the camp.

Such was the belief, not only of Hur but of Aaron, and the former again began to doubt Joshua's fitness for the Lord's call; for what benefited those in the tents weakened the army whose command devolved upon his son Uri and his associate in office Naashon. The battle around the camp had already lasted for hours and Moses had not ceased to pray with hands uplifted toward heaven, when the Amalekites succeeded in gaining a considerable vantage.

Then the leader of the Hebrews summoned his strength for a new and more earnest appeal to the Most High; but the exhausted man's knees tottered and his wearied arms fell. But his soul had retained its energy, his heart the desire not to cease pleading to the Ruler of Battles.

Moses was unwilling to remain inactive during this conflict and his weapon was prayer.

Like a child who will not cease urging its mother until she grants what it unselfishly beseeches for its brothers and sisters, he clung imploring to the Omnipotent One, who had hitherto proved Himself a father to him and to his people and wonderfully preserved them from the greatest perils.

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But his physical strength was exhausted, so he summoned his companions who pushed forward a rock on which he seated himself, in order to assail the heart of the Most High with fresh prayers.

There he sat and though his wearied limbs refused their service, his soul was obedient and rose with all its fire to the Ruler of the destinies of men.

But his arms grew more and more paralysed, and at last fell as if weighted with lead; for years it had become a necessity to him to stretch them heavenward when he appealed with all his fervor to God on high.

This his companions knew, and they fancied they perceived that whenever the great leader's hands fell the sons of Amalek gained a fresh advantage.

Therefore they eagerly supported his arms, one at the right side, the other at the left, and though the mighty man could no longer lift his voice in intelligible words, though his giant frame reeled to and fro, and though more than once it seemed to him as if the stone which supported him, the valley and the whole earth rocked, still his hands and eyes remained uplifted. Not a moment did he cease to call upon the Most High till suddenly loud shouts of victory, which echoed clearly from the rocky sides of the valley, rose from the direction of the camp.

Joshua had again appeared on the battle-field and, at the head of his warriors, rushed with resistless energy upon the foe.

The battle now assumed a new aspect.

The result was still uncertain, and Moses could not cease uplifting his heart and arms to heaven, but at last, at last this long final struggle came to an end. The ranks of the Amalekites wavered and finally, scattered and disheartened, dashed toward the southern entrance of the valley whence they had come.

There also cries were heard and from a thousand lips rang the glad shout: "Jehovah our standard! Victory!" and again "Victory!"

Then the man of God removed his arms from the supporting shoulders of his companions, swung them aloft freely and with renewed and wonderfully invigorated strength shouted:

"I thank Thee, my God and my Lord! Jehovah our standard! The people are saved!"

Then darkness veiled the eyes of the exhausted man. But a little later he again opened them and saw Ephraim, with the slingers and bowmen, attack the body of Amalekites at the southern entrance of the valley, while Joshua drove the main army of the sons of the desert toward their retreating comrades.



Joshua had heard through some captives of a ravine which enabled good climbers to reach a defile which led to the southern end of the battle-field; and Ephraim, obedient to his command, had gone with the slingers and bowmen along this difficult path to assail in the rear the last band of foemen who were still capable of offering resistance.

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Pressed, harassed from two sides, and disheartened, the sons of Amalek gave up the conflict and now the Hebrews beheld how these sons of the desert, who had grown up in this mountain region, understood how to use their feet; for at a sign from their leader they spurred the dromedaries and flew away like leaves blown by the wind. Rough mountain heights which seemed inaccessible to human beings they scaled on their hands and feet like nimble lizards; many others escaped through the ravine which the captured slaves had betrayed to Joshua.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The larger portion of the Amalekites had perished or lay wounded on the battle-field. Joshua knew that the other desert tribes, according to their custom, would abandon their defeated companions and return to their own homes.

Yet it seemed probable that despair would give the routed warriors courage not to let their oasis fall into the hands of the Hebrews without striking a blow.

But Joshua's warriors were too much exhausted for it to be possible to lead them onward at once.

He himself was bleeding from several slight wounds, and the exertions of the last few days were making themselves felt even on his hardened frame.

Besides the sun, which when the battle began had just risen, was already sinking to rest and should it prove necessary to force an entrance into the oasis it was not advisable to fight in darkness.

What he and still more his brave warriors needed was rest until the grey dawn of early morning.

He saw around him only glad faces, radiant with proud self-reliance, and as he commanded the troops to disband, in order to celebrate the victory in the camp with their relatives, each body that filed slowly and wearily past him burst into cheers as fresh and resonant as though they had forgotten the exhaustion which so short a time before had bowed every head and burdened every foot.

"Hail to Joshua! Hail to the victor!" still echoed from the cliffs after the last band had disappeared from his gaze. But far more distinctly the words with which Moses had thanked him rang in his soul. They were:

"Thou hast proved thyself a true sword of the Most High, strong and steadfast. So long as the Lord is thy help and Jehovah is our standard, we need fear no foes."

He fancied he still felt on his brow and hair the kiss of the mighty man of God who had clasped him to his breast in the presence of all the people, and it was no small thing to master the excitement which the close of this momentous day awakened in him.

A strong desire to regain perfect self-possession ere he again mingled in the jubilant throng and met his father, who shared every lofty emotion that stirred his own soul, detained him on the battle-field.

It was a scene where dread and horror reigned; for all save himself who lingered there were held by death or severe wounds.

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The ravens which had followed the wanderers hovered above the corpses and already ventured to swoop nearer to the richly-spread banquet. The scent of blood had lured the beasts of prey from the mountains and dens in the rocks and their roaring and greedy growling were heard in all directions.

As darkness followed dusk lights began to flit over the blood-soaked ground. These were to aid the slaves and those who missed a relative to distinguish friend from foe, the wounded from the dead; and many a groan from the breast of some sorely-wounded man mingled with the croaking of the sable birds, and the howls of the hungry jackals and hyenas, foxes and panthers.

But Joshua was familiar with the horrors of the battle-field and did not heed them.

Leaning against a rock, he saw the same stars rise which had shone upon him before the tent in the camp at Tanis, when in the sorest conflict with himself he confronted the most difficult decision of his life.

A month had passed since then, yet that brief span of time had witnessed an unprecedented transformation of his whole inner and outward life.

What had seemed to him grand, lofty, and worthy of the exertion of all his strength on that night when he sat before the tent where lay the delirious Ephraim, to-day lay far behind him as idle and worthless.

He no longer cared for the honors, dignities and riches which the will of the whimsical, weak king of a foreign people could bestow upon him. What to him was the well-ordered and disciplined army, among whose leaders he had numbered himself with such joyous pride?

He could scarcely realize that there had been a time when he aspired to nothing higher than to command more and still more thousands of Egyptians, when his heart had swelled at the bestowal of a new title or glittering badge of honor by those whom he held most unworthy of his esteem.

From the Egyptians he had expected everything, from his own people nothing.

That very night before his tent the great mass of the men of his own blood had been repulsive to him as pitiful slaves languishing in dishonorable, servile toil. Even the better classes he had arrogantly patronized; for they were but shepherds and as such contemptible to the Egyptians, whose opinions he shared.

His own father was also the owner of herds and, though he held him in high esteem, it was in spite of his position and only because his whole character commanded reverence; because the superb old man's fiery vigor won love from every one, and above all from him, his grateful son.

He had never ceased to gladly acknowledge his kinship to him, but in other respects he had striven to so bear himself among his brothers-in-arms that they should forget his origin and regard him in everything as one of themselves. His ancestress Asenath, the wife of Joseph, had been an Egyptian and he had boasted of the fact.

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And now,—to-day?

He would have made any one feel the weight of his wrath who reproached him with being an Egyptian; and what at the last new moon he would only too willingly have cast aside and concealed, as though it were a disgrace, made him on the night of the next new moon whose stars were just beginning to shine, raise his head with joyous pride.

What a lofty emotion it was to feel himself with just complacency the man he really was!

His life and deeds as an Egyptian chief now seemed like a perpetual lie, a constant desertion of his ideal.

His truthful nature exulted in the consciousness that the base denial and concealment of his birth was at an end.

With joyous gratitude he felt that he was one of the people whom the Most High preferred to all others, that he belonged to a community, whose humblest members, nay even the children, could raise their hands in prayer to the God whom the loftiest minds among the Egyptians surrounded with the barriers of secrecy, because they considered their people too feeble and dull of intellect to stand before His mighty grandeur and comprehend it.

And this one sole God, before whom all the whole motley world of Egyptian divinities sank into insignificance, had chosen him, the son of Nun, from among the thousands of his race to be the champion and defender of His chosen people and bestowed on him a name that assured him of His aid.

No man, he thought, had ever had a loftier aim than, obedient to his God and under His protection, to devote his blood and life to the service of his own people. His black eyes sparkled more brightly and joyously as he thought of it. His heart seemed too small to contain all the love with which he wished to make amends to his brothers for his sins against them in former years.

True, he had lost to another a grand and noble woman whom he had hoped to make his own; but this did not in the least sadden the joyous enthusiasm of his soul; for he had long ceased to desire her as his wife, high as her image still stood in his mind. He now thought of her with quiet gratitude only; for he willingly admitted that his new life had begun on the decisive night when Miriam set him the example of sacrificing everything, even the dearest object of love, to God and the people.

Miriam's sins against him were effaced from his memory; for he was wont to forget what he had forgiven. Now he felt only the grandeur of what he owed her. Like a magnificent tree, towering skyward on the frontier of two hostile countries, she stood between his

past and his present life. Though love was buried, he and Miriam could never cease to walk hand in hand over the same road toward the same destination.

As he again surveyed the events of the past, he could truly say that under his leadership pitiful bondmen had speedily become brave warriors. In the field they had been willing and obedient and, after the victory, behaved with manliness. And they could not fail to improve with each fresh success. To-day it seemed to him not only desirable, but quite possible, to win in battle at their head a land which they could love and where, in freedom and prosperity, they could become the able men he desired to make them.

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Amid the horrors of the battle-field in the moonless night joy as bright as day entered his heart and with the low exclamation: "God and my people!" and a grateful glance upward to the starry firmament he left the corpse-strewn valley of death like a conqueror walking over palms and flowers scattered by a grateful people on the path of victory.

CONCLUSION.

There was an active stir in the camp.

Fires surrounded by groups of happy human beings were burning in front of the tents, and many a beast was slain, here as a thank-offering, yonder for the festal supper.

Wherever Joshua appeared glad cheers greeted him; but he did not find his father, for the latter had accepted an invitation from Hur, so it was before the prince of Judah's tent that the son embraced the old man, who was radiant with grateful joy.

Ere Joshua sat down Hur beckoned him aside, ordered a slave who had just killed a calf to divide it into two pieces and pointing to it, said:

"You have accomplished great deeds for the people and for me, son of Nun, and my life is too short for the gratitude which is your due from my wife and myself. If you can forget the bitter words which clouded our peace at Dophkah—and you say you have done so—let us in future keep together like brothers and stand by each other in joy and grief, in need and peril. The chief command henceforth belongs to you alone, Joshua, and to no other, and this is a source of joy to the whole people, above all to my wife and to me. So if you share my wish to form a brotherhood, walk with me, according to the custom of our fathers, between the halves of this slaughtered animal."

Joshua willingly accepted this invitation, and Miriam was the first to join in the loud acclamations of approval commenced by the grey-haired Nun. She did so with eager zeal; for it was she who had inspired her husband, before whom she had humbled herself, and whose love she now once more possessed, with the idea of inviting Joshua to the alliance both had now concluded.

This had not been difficult for her; for the two vows she had made after the son of Nun, whom she now gladly called "Joshua," had saved her from the hand of the foe were already approaching fulfilment, and she felt that she had resolved upon them in a happy hour.

The new and pleasant sensation of being a woman, like any other woman, lent her whole nature a gentleness hitherto foreign to it, and this retained the love of the husband whose full value she had learned to know during the sad time in which he had shut his heart against her.

In the self-same hour which made Hur and Joshua brothers, a pair of faithful lovers who had been sundered by sacred duties were once more united; for while the friends were still feasting before the tent of Hur, three of the people asked permission to speak to Nun, their master. These were the old freedwoman, who had remained in Tanis, her granddaughter Hogla and Assir, the latter's betrothed husband, from whom the girl had parted to nurse her grandparents.

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Hoary Eliab had soon died, and the grandmother and Hogla—the former on the old man's ass—had followed the Hebrews amid unspeakable difficulties.

Nun welcomed the faithful couple with joy and gave Hogla to Assir for his wife.

So this blood-stained day had brought blessings to many, yet it was to end with a shrill discord.

While the fires in the camp were burning, loud voices were heard, and during the whole journey not an evening had passed without strife and sanguinary quarrels.

Wounds and fatal blows had often been given when an offended man revenged himself on his enemy, or a dishonest one seized the property of others or denied the obligations he had sworn to fulfil.

In such cases it had been difficult to restore peace and call the criminals to account; for the refractory refused to recognize any one as judge. Whoever felt himself injured banded with others, and strove to obtain justice by force.

On that festal evening Hur and his guests at first failed to notice the uproar to which every one was accustomed. But when close at hand, amid the fiercest yells, a bright glare of light arose, the chiefs began to fear for the safety of the camp, and rising to put an end to the disturbance, they became witnesses of a scene which filled some with wrath and horror, and the others with grief.

The rapture of victory had intoxicated the multitude.

They longed to express their gratitude to the deity, and in vivid remembrance of the cruel worship of their home, a band of Phoenicians among the strangers had kindled a huge fire to their Moloch and were in the act of hurling into the flames several Amalekite captives as the most welcome sacrifice to their god.

Close beside it the Israelites had erected on a tall wooden pillar a clay image of the Egyptian god Seth, which one of his Hebrew worshippers had brought with him to protect himself and his family.

Directly after their return to the camp Aaron had assembled the people to sing hymns of praise and offer prayers of thanksgiving; but to many the necessity of beholding, in the old-fashioned way, an image of the god to whom they were to uplift their souls, had been so strong that the mere sight of the clay idol had sufficed to bring them to their knees, and turn them from the true God.

At the sight of the servants of Moloch, who were already binding the human victims to hurl them into the flames, Joshua was seized with wrath and, when the deluded men resisted, he ordered the trumpets to be sounded and with his young men who blindly

obeyed him and were by no means friendly to the strangers, drove them back, without bloodshed, to their quarters in the camp.

The impressive warnings of old Nun, Hur, and Naashon diverted the Hebrews from the crime which ingratitude made doubly culpable. Yet many of the latter found it hard to control themselves when the fiery old man shattered the idol which was dear to them, and had it not been for the love cherished for him, his son, and his grandson, and the respect due his snow-white hair, many a hand would doubtless have been raised against him.

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Moses had retired to a solitary place, as was his wont after every great danger from which the mercy of the Most High brought deliverance, and tears filled Miriam's eyes as she thought of the grief which the tidings of such apostasy and ingratitude would cause her noble brother.

A gloomy shadow had also darkened Joshua's joyous confidence. He lay sleepless on the mat in his father's tent, reviewing the past.

His warrior-soul was elevated by the thought that a single, omnipotent, never-erring Power guided the universe and the lives of men and exacted implicit obedience from the whole creation. Every glance at nature and life showed him that everything depended upon One infinitely great and powerful Being, at whose sign all creatures rose, moved, or sank to rest.

To him, the chief of a little army, his God was the highest and most far-sighted of rulers, the only One, who was always certain of victory.

What a crime it was to offend such a Lord and repay His benefits with apostasy!

Yet the people had committed before his eyes this heinous sin and, as he recalled to mind the events which had compelled him to interpose, the question arose how they were to be protected from the wrath of the Most High, how the eyes of the dull multitude could be opened to His wonderful grandeur, which expanded the heart and the soul.

But he found no answer, saw no expedient, when he reflected upon the lawlessness and rebellion in the camp, which threatened to be fatal to his people.

He had succeeded in making his soldiers obedient. As soon as the trumpets summoned them, and he himself in full armor appeared at the head of his men, they yielded their own obstinate wills to his. Was there then nothing that could keep them, during peaceful daily life, within the bounds which in Egypt secured the existence of the meanest and weakest human beings and protected them from the attacks of those who were bolder and stronger?

Amid such reflections he remained awake until early morning; when the stars set, he started up, ordered the trumpets to be sounded, and as on the preceding days, the new-made troops assembled without opposition and in full force.

He was soon marching at their head through the narrow, rocky valley, and after moving silently an hour through the gloom the warriors enjoyed the refreshing coolness which precedes the young day.

Then the grey light of early dawn glimmered in the east, the sky began to brighten, and in the glowing splendor of the blushing morning rose solemnly in giant majesty the form of the sacred mountain.

Close at hand and distinctly visible it towered before the Hebrews with its brown masses of rock, cliffs, and chasms, while above the seven peaks of its summit hovered a pair of eagles on whose broad pinions the young day cast a shimmering golden glow.

A thrill of pious awe made the whole band halt as they had before Alush, and every man, from the first rank to the last, in mute devotion raised his hands to pray.

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Then they moved on with hearts uplifted, and one shouted joyously to another as some pretty dark birds flew twittering toward them, a sign of the neighborhood of fresh water.

They had scarcely marched half an hour longer when they beheld the bluish-green foliage of tamarisk bushes and the towering palm-trees; at last, the most welcome of all sounds in the wilderness fell on their listening ears—the ripple of flowing water.

This cheered their hearts, and the majestic spectacle of Mount Sinai, whose heaven-touching summit was now concealed by a veil of blue mist, filled with devout amazement the souls of the men who had grown up on the flat plains of Goshen.

[The mountain known at the present day as Serbal, not the Sinai of the monks which in our opinion was first declared in the reign of Justinian to be the mount whence the laws were given. The detailed reasons for our opinion that Serbal is the Sinai of the Scriptures, which Lepsius expressed before its and others share with us may be found in our works: "Durch Gosen zum Sinai, aus dem Wanderbuch and der Bibliothek." 2 Aufl. Leipzig. 1882. Wilh. Engelmann.]

They pressed cautiously forward; for the remainder of the defeated Amalekites might be lying in ambush. But no foe was seen or heard, and the Hebrews found some tokens of the thirst for vengeance of the sons of the wilderness in their ruined houses, the superb palm-trees felled, and little gardens destroyed. It was necessary now to remove from the road the slender trunks with their huge leafy crowns, that they might not impede the progress of the people; and, when this work was done, Joshua ascended through a ravine which led to the brook in the valley, up to the first terrace of the mountain, that he might gaze around him far and near for a view of the enemy.

The steep pathway led past masses of red granite, intersected by veins of greenish diorite, until he reached a level plateau high above the oasis, where, beside a clear spring, green bushes and delicate mountain flowers adorned the barren wilderness.

Here he intended to rest and, as he gazed around him, he perceived in the shadow of an overhanging cliff a man's tall figure.

It was Moses.

The flight of his thoughts had rapt him so far away from the present and his surroundings, that he did not perceive Joshua's approach, and the latter was restrained by respectful awe from approaching the man of God.

He waited patiently till the latter raised his bearded face and greeted him with friendly dignity.



Then they gazed together at the oasis and the desolate stony valleys of the mountain region at their feet. The emerald waters of a small portion of the Red Sea, which washed the western slope of the mountain, also glittered beneath them.

Meanwhile they talked of the people and the greatness and omnipotence of the God who had so wonderfully guided them, and as they looked northward, they beheld the endlessly long stream of Hebrews, which, following the curves of the rocky valley, was surging slowly toward the oasis.

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Then Joshua opened his heart to the man of God and told him the questions he had asked himself during the past sleepless night, and to which he had found no answer. The latter listened quietly, and in deep, faltering tones answered in broken sentences:

“The lawlessness in the camp—ay, it is ruining the people! But the Lord placed the power to destroy it in our hands. Woe betide him who resists. They must feel this power, which is as sublime as yonder mountain, as immovable as its solid rock.”

Then Moses’ wrathful words ceased.

After both had gazed silently into vacancy a long time, Joshua broke the silence by asking:

“And what is the name of this power?”

Loudly and firmly from the bearded lips of the man of God rang the words;

“The law!”

He pointed with his staff to the summit of the mountain.

Then, waving his hand to his companion, he left him. Joshua completed his search for the foe and saw on the yellow sands of the valley dark figures moving to and fro.

They were the remnants of the defeated Amalekite bands seeking new abodes.

He watched them a short time and, after convincing himself that they were quitting the oasis, he thoughtfully returned to the valley.

“The law!” he repeated again and again.

Ay, that was what the wandering tribes lacked. It was doubtless reserved for its severity to transform the hordes which had escaped bondage into a people worthy of the God who preferred them above the other nations of the earth.

Here the chief’s reflections were interrupted; for human voices, the lowing and bleating of herds, the barking of dogs, and the heavy blows of hammers rose to his ears from the oasis.

They were pitching the tents, a work of peace, for which no one needed him.

Lying down in the shadow of a thick tamarisk bush, above which a tall palm towered proudly, he stretched his limbs comfortably to rest in the assurance that the people were now provided for, in war by his good sword, in peace by the Law. This was much, it renewed his hopes; yet, no, no—it was not all, could not be the final goal. The longer

he reflected, the more profoundly he felt that this was not enough to satisfy him concerning those below, whom he cherished in his heart as if they were brothers and sisters. His broad brow again clouded, and roused from his repose by fresh doubts, he gently shook his head.

No, again no! The Law could not afford to those who were so dear to him everything that he desired for them. Something else was needed to make their future as dignified and beautiful as he had beheld it before his mind's eye on his journey to the mines.

But what was it, what name did this other need bear?

He began to rack his brain to discover it, and while, with closed lids, he permitted his thoughts to rove to the other nations whom he had known in war and peace, in order to seek among them the one thing his own people lacked, sleep overpowered him and a dream showed him Miriam and a lovely girl, who looked like Kasana as she had so often rushed to meet him when a sweet, innocent child, followed by the white lamb which Nun had given to his favorite many years before.

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Both figures offered him a gift and asked him to choose one or the other. Miriam's hand held a heavy gold tablet, at whose top was written in flaming letters: "The Law!" and which she offered with stern severity. The child extended one of the beautifully-curved palm-leaves which he had often waved as a messenger of peace.

The sight of the tablet filled him with pious awe, the palm-branch waved a friendly greeting and he quickly grasped it. But scarcely was it in his hand ere the figure of the prophetess melted into the air like mist, which the morning breeze blows away. In painful astonishment he now gazed at the spot where she had stood, and surprised and troubled by his strange choice, though he felt that he had made the right one, he asked the child what her gift imported to him and to the people.

She waved her hand to him, pointed into the distance, and uttered three words whose gentle musical sound sank deep into his heart. Yet hard as he strove to catch their purport, he did not succeed, and when he asked the child to explain them the sound of his own voice roused him and he returned to the camp, disappointed and thoughtful.

Afterwards he often tried to remember these words, but always in vain. All his great powers, both mental and physical, he continued to devote to the people; but his nephew Ephraim, as a powerful prince of his tribe, who well deserved the high honors he enjoyed in after years, founded a home of his own, where old Nun watched the growth of great-grand-children, who promised a long perpetuation of his noble race.

Everyone is familiar with Joshua's later life, so rich in action, and how he won in battle a new home for his people.

There in the Promised Land many centuries later was born, in Bethlehem, another Jehoshua who bestowed on all mankind what the son of Nun had vainly sought for the Hebrew nation.

The three words uttered by the child's lips which the chief had been unable to comprehend were:

"Love, Mercy, Redemption!"

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Asenath, the wife of Joseph, had been an Egyptian
Most ready to be angry with those to whom we have been unjust
Pleasant sensation of being a woman, like any other woman
Woman's disapproving words were blown away by the wind

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