

The Bride of the Nile — Volume 01 eBook

The Bride of the Nile — Volume 01 by Georg Ebers

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Page 1

PREFACE.

The "Bride of the Nile" needs no preface. For the professional student I may observe that I have relied on the authority of de Goeje in adhering to my own original opinion that the word Mukaukas is not to be regarded as a name but as a title, since the Arab writers to which I have made reference apply it to the responsible representatives of the Byzantine Emperor in antagonism to the Moslem power. I was unfortunately unable to make further use of Karabacek's researches as to the Mukaukas.

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

&nb
sp; *GeorgEbers.*
October 1st, 1886.

CHAPTER I.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“What?” said the Egyptian, and his eye flashed wrathfully. “What?— They dismember the divine person of the Saviour and attribute to it two distinct natures. And then!—All

the Greeks settled here, and encouraged by the protection of the emperor, treated us, the owners of the land, like slaves, till your nation came to put an end to their oppression. They drove us by force into their churches, and every true-born Egyptian was punished as a rebel and a leper. They mocked at us and persecuted us for our faith in the one divine nature of our Lord.”

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

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

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

“Christians?” echoed the guide with a contemptuous shrug. “They may regard themselves as Christians; but I, with every one else great and small in this land, am of opinion that they have no right whatever to call themselves our fellow-believers and Christians. They all are and shall be for ever accursed with their hundreds—nay thousands of devilish heresies, by which they degrade our God and Redeemer to the level of that idol on the stone pillar. Half a cow and half a man! Why, what rational being, I ask you, could pray to such a mongrel thing? We Jacobites or Monophysites or whatever they choose to call us will not yield a jot or tittle of the divine nature of our Lord and Saviour; and if the old faith must die out, I will turn Moslem and be converted to your One Omnipotent God; for before I confess the heresies of the Melchites I will be hewn in pieces, and my wife and children with me. Who knows what may be coming to pass? And there are many advantages in going over to your side: for the power is in your hands, and long may you keep it! We have got to be ruled by strangers; and who would not rather pay small tribute to the wise and healthy Khalif at Medina than a heavy one to the sickly imperial brood of Melchites at Constantinople. The Mukaukas George, to be sure, is not a bad sort of man, and as he so soon gave up all idea of resisting you he was no doubt of my opinion. Regarding you as just and pious folks, as our next neighbors, and perhaps even of our own race and blood, he preferred you—my brother told me so—to those Byzantine heretics, flayers of men and thirsting for blood, but yet, the Mukaukas is as good a Christian as breathes.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, yes, indeed," said the guide. "My brother, a priest, and the head of one of our great schools, was his tutor, and he never met such a clever head as Orion's, he tells

me. He learnt everything without any trouble and at the same time worked as hard as a poor man's son. We may expect him to win fame and honor—so Marcus says—for his parents and for the city of Memphis: but for my part, I can see the shady side, and I tell you the women will turn his head and bring him to a bad end. He is handsome, taller even than the old man in his best days, and he knows how to make the most of himself when he meets a pretty face—and pretty faces are always to be met in his path . . .”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“A very handsome property!” said the Arab.

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

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

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

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

“Orion, Sir,” replied the guide.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER II.

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

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

Amru, the Khaliff's general and representative, was there building his new capital. For this the temples of the old gods were used as quarries, and they supplied not only finely-squared blocks of the most durable stone, but also myriads of Greek columns of

every order, which had only to be ferried over and set up again on the other shore; for the Arabs disdained nothing in the way of materials, and made indiscriminate use of blocks and pillars in their own sanctuaries, whether they took them from heathen temples or Christian churches.

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

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

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

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

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

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

this is ours—is yours and mine—so long as we have eyes and heart to enjoy and be uplifted by it!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

So he remounted his ass to fetch the physician, while old Haschim, leaning on the Masdakite's arm, betook himself to a bench by the river. There he sat gazing

thoughtfully at the starry sky, and his companion dreamed of home and of buying a meadow, even without the price of the gorgeous hanging, of building a house, and of choosing a pretty little wife to manage it. Should she be fair or dark? He would rather she should be fair.

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

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

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

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

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

A few handsomely-dressed slaves, who must have come with the vehicle by the road, now went on board the boat to carry their invalid lord to his chariot; and it then became apparent that the seat in which he reclined was provided with arms by which it could be lifted and moved. A burly negro took this at the back, but just as another was stooping to lift it in front Orion pushed him away and took his place, raised the

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couch with his father on it, and carried him across the landing-stage between the deck and the shore, past Haschim to the chariot. The young man did the work of bearer with cheerful ease, and looked affectionately at his father while he shouted to the ladies—for only his mother and the physician accompanied the invalid after carefully wrapping him in shawls—to get out of the barge and wait for him. Then he went forward, lighted by the torches which were carried before them.

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

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

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

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

Alas! Poor little heiress of Susannah’s wealth! How different was his demeanor to this beautiful damsel from his treatment of that little thing! His eyes rested on her face in rapture, his speech failed him now and again as he addressed her, and what he said must be sometimes grave and captivating and sometimes witty, for not she alone but the little maid’s governess listened to him eagerly, and when the fair one laughed it was in particularly sweet, clear tones. There was something so lofty in her mien that this frank expression of contentment was almost startling; like a breath of perfume from some gorgeous flower which seems created to rejoice the eye only. And she, to whom all that Orion had to say was addressed, listened to him not only with deep attention, but in a way which showed the merchant that she cared even more for the speaker than for what he was so eager in expressing. If this maiden wedded the governor’s son, they would indeed be a pair! Taus, the innkeeper’s wife, now came out, a buxom and vigorous Egyptian woman of middle age, carrying some of the puffs for which she was famous, and which she had just made

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with her own hands. She also served them with milk, grapes and other fruit, her eyes sparkling with delight and gratified ambition; for the son of the great Mukaukas, the pride of the city, who in former years had often been her visitor, and not only for the sake of her cakes, in water parties with his gay companions—mostly Greek officers who now were all dead and gone or exiles from the country—now did her the honor to come here so soon after his return. Her facile tongue knew no pause as she told him that she and her husband had gone forth with the rest to welcome him at the triumphal arch near Menes' Gate, and Emau with them, and the little one. Yes, Emau was married now, and had called her first child Orion. And when the young man asked Dame Taus whether Emau was as charming as ever and as like her mother as she used to be, she shook her finger at him and asked in her turn, as she pointed towards the young lady, whether the fickle bird at whose departure so many had sighed, was to be caged at last, and whether yon fair lady....

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

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

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

The merchant soon gained this information, for the guide on his return could give it him. She was Paula, the daughter of Thomas, the famous Greek general who had defended the city of Damascus so long and so bravely against the armies of Islam. She was Mukaukas George's niece, but her fortune was small; she was a poor relation of the family, and after her father's disappearance—for his body had never been found—she had been received into the governor's house out of pity and charity—she, a Melchite! The interpreter had little to say in her favor, by reason of her sect; and though he could find no flaw

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

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

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

CHAPTER III.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then his mother waxed wroth and exclaimed: "I must beg you to reserve your mirth for a more fitting season and for laughable things. I am very much in earnest when I say: The girl is a sweet, good little creature and will be a faithful and loving wife to you, under

God. Or have you left your heart in Constantinople? Has the Senator Justinus' fair relation. —But nonsense! You can hardly suppose that that volatile Greek girl..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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CHAPTER IV.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He looked like a man weary unto death, and still living only because fate had denied him the grace to die. Indeed, he had often been taken for dead by his family when he had dipped too freely into a certain little blood-stone box to take too many of the white opium-pills, one of which he placed between his colorless lips at long intervals, even during his game of draughts.

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER V.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

of her soul; she ended with a hard laugh, and waved her hand round her head as though to disperse a swarm of gadflies.

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What a woman!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

for mine and thine or for other possessions, ever since the days of Cain and Abel, it is always and everywhere the same.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I had thought of asking five hundred thousand drachmae,” said the dealer. “Four hundred thousand drachmae, and it is yours.”

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

“Four hundred thousand,” repeated the merchant coolly. “Your father wished to know the lowest price, and I am asking no more than is right. The rubies and garnets in these grapes, the pearls in the myrtle blossoms, the turquoises in the forget-me-nots, the diamonds hanging as dew on the grass, the emeralds which give brilliancy to the green leaves—this one especially, which is an immense stone—alone are worth more.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And this—our piece?" asked Orion.

"This," replied the merchant, with a pleasant glance at the young man, "was the very middle of the hanging. On the left you see the judgment at the bridge of Chinvat. The damned were not represented, but only the winged, Fravashi, Genii who, as the Persians believe, dwell one with each mortal as his guardian angel through life, united to him but separable. They were depicted in stormy pursuit of the damned—the miscreant followers of Angramainjus, the evil Spirit, of whom you must imagine a vast multitude fleeing before them. The souls in bliss, the pure and faithful servants of the Persian divinity Auramazda, enter with songs of triumph into the flower-decked pleasure-garden, while at their feet the spirits were shown of those who were neither altogether cursed nor altogether blessed, vanishing in humble silence into a dusky grove. The pure enjoyed the gifts of paradise in peace and contentment.—All this was



explained to me by a priest of the Fire-worshippers. Here, you see, is a huge bunch of grapes which one of the happy ones is about to pluck; the hand is uninjured—the arm unfortunately is cut through; but here is a splendid fragment of the wreath of fruit and flowers which framed the whole. That emerald forming a bud—how much do you think it is worth?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Abandon to the young the things we ourselves used most to enjoy
Spoilt to begin with by their mothers, and then all the women
Talk of the wolf and you see his tail
Temples of the old gods were used as quarries
Women are indeed the rock ahead in this young fellow's life

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