

THE BRIDE OF THE NILE - COMPLETE

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Thin-skinned, like all up-starts in authority

THE BRIDE OF THE NILE

By Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER XVII.

Paula passed a fearful night in the small, frightfully hot prison-cell in which she and Betta were shut up. She could not sleep, and when once she succeeded in closing her eyes she was roused by the yells and clanking chains of the captives in the common prison and the heavy step of another sufferer who paced the room overhead, even more restless than herself.

Poor fellow-victim! Was it a tortured conscience that drove him hither and thither, or was he as innocent as she was, and was it longing, love, and anxiety that bereft him of sleep?

He was no vulgar criminal. There was no room for those in this part of the building; and at midnight, when the noise in the large hall was suddenly silenced, soft sounds of the lute came down to her from his cell, and only a master could strike the strings with such skill.

She cared nothing for the stranger; but she was grateful for his gift of music, for it diverted her thoughts from herself, and she listened with growing interest. Glad of an excuse for rising from her hard, hot bed, she sprang up and placed herself close to the one window, an opening barred with iron. But then the music ceased and a conversation began between the warder and her fellow-prisoner.

What voice was that? Did she deceive herself, or hear rightly?

Her heart stood still while she listened; and now every doubt was silenced: It was Orion, and none other, whom she heard speaking in the

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room above. Then the warder spoke his name; they were talking of her deceased uncle; and now, as if in obedience to some sign, they lowered their voices. She heard whispering but could not distinguish what was said. At length parting words were uttered in louder tones, the door of the cell was locked and the prisoner approached his window.

At this she pressed her face close to the heated iron bars, looked upwards, listened a moment and, as nothing was stirring, she said, first softly, and then rather louder: "Orion, Orion!"

And, from above, her name was spoken in reply. She greeted him and asked how and when he had come hither; but he interrupted her at the first words with a decisive: "Silence!" adding in a moment, "Look out!"

She listened in expectancy; the minutes crept on at a snail's pace to a full half hour before he at last said: "Now!" And, in a few moments, she held in her hand a written scroll that he let down to her by a lutestring weighted with a scrap of wood.

She had neither light nor fire, and the night was moonless. So she called up "Dark!" and immediately added, as he had done: "Look out."

She then tied to the string the two best roses of those Pulcheria had brought her, and at her glad "Now!" they floated up.

He expressed his thanks in a few low chords overflowing with yearning and passion; then all was still, for the warder had forbidden him to sing or play at night and he dared not risk losing the man's favor.

Paula laid down again with Orion's letter in her hand, and when she felt slumber stealing upon her, she pushed it under her pillow and ere long was sleeping on it. When they both woke, soon after sunrise, they had been dreaming of each other and gladly hailed the return of day.

How furious Orion had felt when the prison door closed upon him! He longed to wrench the iron bars from the window and kick down or force the door; and there is no more humiliating and enraging feeling for a man than that of finding himself shut up like a wild beast, cut off from the world to which he belongs and which he needs, both to give him all that makes life worth having, and to receive such good as he can do and give.

Yesterday their dungeon had seemed a foretaste of hell, they had each been on the verge of despair; to-day what different feelings animated them! Orion had been the victim of blow on blow from Fate—Paula had looked forward to his return with an anxious and aching heart; to-day how calm were their souls, though both stood in peril of death.

The legend tells us that St. Cecilia, who was led away to the rack from her marriage feast, even in the midst of the torments of martyrdom, listened in ecstasy to heavenly music and sweet echoes of the organ; and

how many have had the same experience! In the extremity of anguish and danger they find greater joys than in the midst of splendor, ease and the intoxicating pleasures of life; for what we call happiness is the constant guest of those who have within reach that for which their souls most ardently long, irrespective of place and outward circumstances.

So these two in their prison were what they had not been for a long time: full of heartfelt bliss; Paula with his letter, which he had begun at the Kadi's house, and in which he poured out his whole soul to her; Orion in the possession of her roses, on which he feasted his eyes and heart, and which lay before him while he wrote the following lines, which the kindhearted warder willingly transmitted to her:

Lo! As night in its gloom and horror fell on my prison,
Methought the sun sank black, dark forever in death.

I drew thy roses up, and behold! from their crimson petals
Beamed a glory of light, a glow as of sunshine and day!

Love! Love is the star that rose with those fragrant flowers;
Rose, as Phoebus' car comes up from the tossing waves.

Is not the ardent flame of a heart that burns with passion
Like the sparkling glow-worm hid in the heart of the rose?

While it yet was day, and we breathed in freedom and gladness,
While the sun still shone, that light seemed small and dim;

But now, when night has fallen, sinister, dark, portentous,
Its kindly ray beams forth to raise our drooping souls.

As seeds in the womb of earth break from the brooding darkness,
Or as the soul soars free, heaven-seeking from the grave,

So the hopeless soil of a dungeon blossoms to rapture,
Blooms with roses of Love, more sweet than the wildling rose!

And when had Paula ever felt happier than at the moment when this offering from her lover, this humble prison-flower, first reached her.

Old Betta could not hear the verses too often, and cried with joy, not at the poem, but at the wonderful change it had produced in her darling. Paula was now the radiant being that she had been at home on the Lebanon; and when she appeared before the assembled judges in the hall of justice they gazed at her in amazement, for never had a woman on her trial for life or death stood in their presence with eyes so full of happiness. And yet she was in evil straits. The just and clement Kadi, himself the loving father of daughters, felt a pang at his heart as he noted the delusive confidence which so evidently filled the soul of this noble

maiden.

Yes, she was in evil straits: a crushing piece of evidence was in their hands, and the constitution of the court—which was in strict conformity with the law must in itself be unfavorable to her. Her case was to be tried by an equal number of Egyptians and of Arabs. The Moslems were included because by her co-operation, Arabs had been slain; while Paula, as a Christian and a resident in Memphis, came under the jurisdiction of the Egyptians.

The Kadi presided, and experience had taught him that the Jacobite members of the bench of judges kept the sentence of death in their sleeves when the accused was of the Melchite confession. What had especially prejudiced them against this beautiful creature he knew not; but he easily discovered that they were hostile to the accused, and if they should utter the verdict "guilty", and only two Arabs should echo it, the girl's fate was sealed.

And what was the declaration which that whiterobed old man among the witnesses desired to make—the venerable and learned Horapollo? The glances he cast at Paula augured her no good.

It was so oppressively, so insufferably hot in the hall! Each one felt the crushing influence, and in spite of the importance of the occasion, the proceedings every now and then came to a stand-still and then were hurried on again with unseemly haste.

The prisoner herself seemed happily to be quite fresh and not affected by the sultriness of the day. It had cost her small effort to adhere to her statement that she had had no share in the escape of the sisters, when catechised by the ruffianly negro; but she found it hard to defy Othman's benevolent questioning. However, there was no choice, and she succeeded in proving that she had never quitted Memphis nor the house of Rufinus at the time when the Arab warriors met their death between Athribis and Doomiat. The Kadi endeavored to turn this to account for her advantage and Obada, who had found much to whisper over with his grey-headed neighbor on the bench reserved for witnesses, let him talk; but no sooner had he ended than the Vekeel rose and laid before the judges the note he had found in Orion's room.

It was undoubtedly in the young man's handwriting and addressed to Paula, and the final words: "But do not misunderstand me. Your noble, and only too well-founded desire to lend succor to your fellow-believers would have sufficed...." could not fail to make a deep impression. When the Kadi questioned Paula, however, she replied with perfect truth that this document was absolutely unknown to her; at the same time she did not deny that the sisters of St. Cecilia, who were of her own confession, had always had her warmest wishes, and that she had hoped they might succeed in asserting their rights in opposition to the patriarch.

The deceased Mukaukas, and the Jacobite members of the town-council even, had shared these feelings and the Arabs had never interfered with the pious sicknurses.

The calm conciseness with which she made these statements had a favorable effect, on her Moslem judges especially, and the Kadi began to have some hopes for her; he desired that Orion should be called as being best able to account for the meaning of the letter he had written but never sent.

On this the young man appeared, and though he and Paula did their utmost to preserve a suitable demeanor, every one could see the violent agitation they felt at meeting each other in such a situation. Horapollo never took his eyes off Orion, whom he now saw for the first time, and his features put on a darkening and menacing expression.

The young man acknowledged that he had written the letter in question, but he and Paula alike referred it to the danger with which the sisterhood had long been threatened from the patriarch's hostility. The assistance which, in that document, he had refused he would have afforded readily and zealously at a later and fit season, and he could have counted on the aid of the Arab governor Amru, who, as he would himself confirm, shared the views of the Mukaukas George as to the nuns' rights.

At this the old sage murmured loud enough to be heard: "Clever, very clever!" and the Vekeel laughed aloud, exclaiming:

"I call that a cunning way of lengthening your days! Be on your guard, my lords. These two are partners in the game and are intimately allied. I have proof of that in my own hands. That youngster takes as good care of the damsel's fortune as though it were his own already, and what is more. . . ."

Here Paula broke in. She did not know what the malicious man was going to say, but it was something insulting beyond a doubt. And there stood Orion, just as she had pictured him in moments of tender remembrance; she felt his eye resting on her in ecstasy. To go up to him, to tell him all she was feeling in this critical struggle for life or death, seemed impossible; but as the Vekeel began to disclose to their judges matters which concerned only herself and her lover, every impulse prompted her to interpose and, in this fateful hour, to do her friend such service as she once, like a coward, had shrank from. So with eager emotion, her eyes flashing, she interrupted the negro "Stop!" she cried, "you are wasting words and trouble. What you are trying to prove by subtlety I am proud and glad to declare. Hear it, all of you. The son of the Mukaukas is my betrothed!"

At the same time her eye sought to meet Orion's. And thus, in the very extremity of danger, they enjoyed a solemn moment of the purest, deepest happiness. Paula's eyes were moist with grateful tenderness, when Orion exclaimed:

"You have heard from her own lips what makes the greatest bliss of my life. The noble daughter of Thomas is my promised bride!"

There was a murmur among the Jacobite judges. 'Till this moment several of them, oppressed by the heat, had sat dreaming with their heads sunk on their breasts, but now they were suddenly as wide-awake and alert as though a jet of cold water had been turned on to them, and one cried out: "And your father, young man? You have forgotten him in a hurry! What would he have said to such a disgrace to his blood as your marriage to a Melchite, the daughter of those who caused your two brothers to be murdered? Oh! if the dead could. . . ."

"He blessed our union on his death-bed," Orion put in.

"Did he, indeed?" asked another Jacobite with sarcastic scorn. "Then the patriarch was in the right when he refused to let the priests follow his corpse. That I should live to be witness to such crimes!"

But such words fell on the ears of the enraptured pair like the chirping of crickets. They felt, they cared for nothing but what this blissful moment had brought them, and never suspected that Paula's glad avowal had sealed her death-warrant.

The wrath of the Jacobite faction now hastened the end. The prosecutor, an Arab, now represented how many Moslems had lost their lives in the affair of the nuns, and once more read Orion's letter. His Christian colleagues tried to prove that this document could only refer to the flight, so ingeniously plotted, of the sisters; and now something quite new and unlooked-for occurred, which gave a fresh turn to the proceedings: the old man interrupted the Kadi to make a statement. At this Paula's confidence rose again for the last speaker had somewhat shaken it. She felt sure that the tried friend and adoptive father of her faithful Philippus would take her part.

But what was this?

The old man seemed to measure her height in a glance which struck to her heart with its fierce enmity, and then he said deliberately:

"On the morning of the nuns' flight the accused, Paula, went to the convent and there tolled the bell. Contradict me if you can, proud prefect's daughter; but I warn you beforehand, that in that case, I shall be compelled to bring forward fresh charges."

At this the horror-stricken girl pictured to herself the widow and daughter of Rufinus at her side on the condemned bench before the judges, and felt that denial would drag her friends to destruction with her; with quivering lips she confirmed the old man's statement.

"And why did you toll the bell?" asked the Kadi.

"To help them," replied Paula. "They are my fellow-believers, and I love them."

"She was the originator of the treasonable and bloody scheme," cried the Vekeel, "and did it for no other purpose than to cheat us, the rulers of this country."

The Kadi however signed to him to be silent and bid the Jacobite counsel for the accused speak next. He had seen her early in the day, and came forward in the Egyptian manner with a written defence in his hand; but it was a dull formal performance and produced no effect; though the Kadi did his utmost to give prominence to every point that might help to justify her, she was pronounced guilty.

Still, could her crime be held worthy of death? It was amply proved that she had had a hand in the rescue of the nuns; but it was no less clear that she had been far enough away from the sisters and their defenders when the struggle with the Arabs took place. And she was a woman, and how pardonable it seemed in a pious maiden that she should help the fellow-believers whom she loved to evade persecution.

All this Othman pointed out in eloquent words, repeatedly and sternly silencing the Vekeel when he sought to argue in favor of the sentence of death; and the humane persuasiveness of the lenient judge won the hearts of most of the Moslems.

Paula's appearance had a powerful effect, too, and not less the circumstance that their noblest and bravest foe had been the father of the accused.

When at length it was put to the vote the extraordinary result was that all her fellow Christians—the Jacobites—without exception demanded her death, while of the infidels on the judges' bench only one supported this severe meed of punishment.

Sentence was pronounced, and as the Vekeel Obada passed close to Orion—who was led back to his cell pale and hardly master of himself—he said, mocking him in broken Greek: "It will be your turn to-morrow, Son of the Mukaukas!"

Orion's lips framed the retort: "And yours, too, some day, Son of a Slave!"—but Paula was standing opposite, and to avoid infuriating her foe he was able to do what he never could have done else: to let the Vekeel and Horapollo pass on without a word in reply.

As soon as the door was closed on this couple, Othman nodded approvingly at Orion and said:

"Rightly and wisely done, my friend! The eagle should never forget that he must not use his pinions in a cage as he does between the desert and the sky."

He signed to the guards to lead him away, and stood apart while the young man looked and waived an adieu to his betrothed.

Finally the Kadi went up to Paula, whose heroic composure as she heard the sentence of death had filled him with admiration.

"The court has decided against you, noble maiden," he said. "But its verdict can be overruled by the clemency of our Sovereign Lord the Khaliff and the mercy of God the compassionate. Do you pray to Him—I and a few friends will appeal to the Khaliff."

He disclaimed her gratitude, and when she, too, had been led away he added, in the figurative language of his nation, to the friends who were waiting for him:

"My heart aches! To have to pronounce such a verdict oppressed me like a load; but to have an Obada for a fellow Moslem and be bound to obey him—there is no heavier lot on earth!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

The mysterious old sage had no sooner left the judgment-hall with the Vekeel than he begged for a private interview. Obada did not hesitate to turn the keeper of the prison, with his wife and infant, out of his room, and there he listened while Horapollo informed him of the fate to which he destined the condemned girl. The old man's scheme certainly found favor with the Negro; still, it seemed to him in many respects so daring that, but for an equivalent service which Horapollo was in a position to offer Obada, he would scarcely have succeeded in obtaining his consent.

All the Vekeel aimed at was to make it very certain that Orion had had a hand in the flight of the nuns, and chance had placed a document in the old man's hands which seemed to set this beyond a doubt.

He had effected his removal to the widow's dwelling in the cool hours of early morning. He had taken with him, in the first instance, only the most valuable and important of his manuscripts, and as he was placing these in a small desk—the very same which Rufinus had left for Paula's use—Horapollo found in it the note which the youth had hastily written when, after waiting in vain for Paula as she sat with little Mary, he had at last been obliged to depart and take leave of Amru. This wax-tablet, on which the writing was much defaced and partly illegible, could not

fail to convince the judges of Orion's guilt, and the production of this piece of evidence enabled the old man to extort Obada's consent to his proposal as to the mode of Paula's death. When they finally left the warder's room, the Negro once more turned to the keeper of the prison and told him with a snort, as he pointed to his pretty wife and the child at her breast, that they should all three die if he allowed Orion to quit his cell for so much as an instant.

He then swung himself on to his horse, while Horapollo rode off to the Curia to desire the president of the council to call a meeting for that evening; then he betook himself to his new quarters.

There he found his room carefully shaded, and as cool as was possible in such heat. The floor had been sprinkled with water, flowers stood wherever there was room for them, and all his properties in scrolls and other matters had found places in chests or on shelves. There was not a speck of dust to be seen, and a sweet pervading perfume greeted his sensitive nostrils.

What a good exchange he had made! He rubbed his withered hands with satisfaction as he seated himself in his accustomed chair, and when Mary came to call him to dinner, it was a pleasure to him to jest with her.

Pulcheria must lead him through the viridarium into the dining-room; he enjoyed his meal, and his cross, wrinkled old face lighted up amazingly as he glanced round at his feminine associates; only Eudoxia was absent, confined to her room by some slight ailment. He had something pleasant to say to each; he frankly compared his former circumstances with his present position, without disguising his heartfelt thankfulness; then, with a merry glance at Pulcheria, he described how delightful it would be when Philippus should come home to make the party complete—a true and perfect star: for every Egyptian star must have five rays. The ancients had never painted one otherwise nor graven it in stone; nay, they had used it as the symbol for the number five.

At this Mary exclaimed: "But then I hope—I hope we shall make a six-rayed star; for by that time poor Paula may be with us again!"

"God grant it!" sighed Dame Joanna. Pulcheria, however, asked the old man what was wrong with him, for his face had suddenly clouded. His cheerfulness had vanished, his tufted eyebrows were raised, and his pinched lips seemed unwilling to part, when at length he reluctantly said:

"Nothing—nothing is wrong... At the same time; once for all—I loathe that name."

"Paula?" cried the child in astonishment. "Oh! but if you knew. . ."

"I know more than enough," interrupted the old man. "I love you all—

all; my old heart expands as I sit in your midst; I am comfortable here, I feel kindly towards you, I am grateful to you; every little attention you show me does me good; for it comes from your hearts: if I could repay you soon and abundantly—I should grow young again with joy. You may believe me, as I can see indeed that you do. And yet,” and again his brows went up, ”and yet, when I hear that name, and when you try to win me over to that woman, or if you should even go so far as to assail my ears with her praises—then, much as it would grieve me, I would go back again to the place where I came from.”

”Why, Horapollo, what are you saying?” cried Joanna, much distressed.

”I say,” the old man went on, ”I say that in her everything is concentrated which I most hate and condemn in her class. I say that she bears in her bosom a cold and treacherous heart; that she blights my days and my nights; in short, that I would rather be condemned to live under the same roof with clammy reptiles and cold-blooded snakes than. . .”

”Than with her, with Paula?” Mary broke in. The eager little thing sprang to her feet, her eyes flashed lightnings and her voice quivered with rage, as she exclaimed: ”And you not only say it but mean it? Is it possible?”

”Not only possible, but positive, sweetheart,” replied the old man, putting out his hand to take hers, but she shrank back, exclaiming vehemently:

”I will not be your sweetheart, if you speak so of her! A man as old as you are ought to be just. You do not know her at all, and what you say about her heart. . .”

”Gently, gently, child,” the widow put in; and Horapollo answered with peculiar emphasis.

”That heart, my little whirlwind!—it would be well for us all if we could forget it, forget it for good or for evil. She has been tried to-day, and that heart is sentenced to cease beating.”

”Sentenced! Merciful Heaven!” shrieked Pulcheria, and as she started up her mother cried out:

”For God’s sake do not jest about such things, it is a sin.—Is it true?—Is it possible? Those wretches, those... I see in your face it is true; they have condemned Paula.”

”As you say,” replied Horapollo calmly. ”The girl is to be executed.”

”And you only tell us now?” wept Pulcheria, while Mary broke out:

"And yet you have been able to jest and laugh, and you—I hate you! And if you were not such a helpless, old, old man. . ." But here Joanna again silenced the child, and she asked between her sobs:

"Executed?—Will they cut off her head? And is there no mercy for her who was as far away from that luckless fight as we were—for her, a girl, and the daughter of Thomas?"

To which the old man replied:

"Wait a while, only wait! Heaven has perhaps chosen her for great ends. She may be destined to save a whole country and nation from destruction by her death. It is even possible. . ."

"Speak out plainly; you make me shudder with your oracular hints," cried the widow; but he only shrugged his shoulders and said coolly:

"What we foresee is not yet known. Heaven alone can decide in such a case. It will be well for us all—for me, for her, for Pulcheria, and even our absent Philip, if the divinity selects her as its instrument. But who can see into darkness? If it is any comfort to you, Joanna, I can inform you that the soft-hearted Kadi and his Arab colleagues, out of sheer hatred of the Vekeel, who is immeasurably their superior in talent and strength of will, will do everything in their power..."
"To save her?" exclaimed the widow.

"To-morrow they will hold council and decide whether to send a messenger to Medina to implore pardon for her," Horapollo went on with a horrible smile. "The day after they will discuss who the messenger is to be, and before he can reach Arabia fate will have overtaken the prisoner. The Vekeel Obada moves faster than they do, and the power lies in his hands so long as Amru is absent from Egypt. He, they say, perfectly dotes on the Mukaukas' son, and for his sake—who knows? Paula as his betrothed."

"His betrothed?"

"He called her by that name before the judges, and congratulated himself on his promised bride."

"Paula and Orion!" cried Pulcheria, jubilant in the midst of her tears, and clapping her hands for joy.

"A pair indeed!" said the old man. "You may well rejoice, my girl! Feeble hearts as you all are, respect the experience of the aged, and bless Fate if it should lame the horse of the Kadi's messenger!—However, you will not listen to anything oracular, so it will be better to talk of something else."

"No, no," cried Joanna. "What can we think of but her and her fate? Oh, Horapollo, I do not know you in this mood. What has that poor soul

done to you, persecuted as she is by the hardest fate—that noble creature who is so dear to us all? And do you forget that the judges who have sentenced her will now proceed to enquire what Rufinus, and we all of us. . .”

”What you had to do with that mad scheme of rescue?” interrupted Horapollo. ”I will make it my business to prevent that. So long as this old brain is able to think, and this mouth to speak, not a hair of your heads shall be hurt.”

”We are grateful to you,” said Joanna. ”But, if you have such power, set to work—you know how dear Paula is to us all, how highly your friend Philip esteems her—use your power to save her.”

”I have no power, and refuse to have any,” retorted the old man harshly.”

”But Horapollo, Horapollo!—Come here, children!—We were to find in you a second father—so you promised. Then prove that those were no empty words, and be entreated by us.”

The old man drew a deep breath; he rose to his feet with such vigor as he could command, a bright, sharply-defined patch of color tinged each pale cheek, and he exclaimed in husky tones:

”Not another word! No attempt to move me, not a cry of lamentation! Enough, and a thousand times too much, of that already. You have heard me, and I now say again—me or Paula, Paula or me. Come what may in the future, if you cannot so far control yourselves as never to mention her in my presence, I—no, I do not swear, but when I have said a thing I keep to it—I will go back to my old den and drag out life the richer by a disappointment—or die, as my ruling goddess shall please.”

With this he left the room, and little Mary raised her clenched right fist and shook it after him, exclaiming: ”Then let him go, hard-hearted, unjust, old scarecrow! Oh, if only I were a man!” And she burst out crying aloud. Heedless of the widow’s reproof, she went on quite beside herself: ”Oh, there is no one more wicked than he is, Dame Joanna! He wants to see her die, he wishes her to be dead; I know it, he even wishes it! Did you hear him, Pul, he would be glad if the messenger’s horse went lame before he could save her? And now she is my Orion’s betrothed—I always meant them for each other—and they want to kill him, too, but they shall not, if there is still a God of justice in heaven! Oh if I—if I. . .” Her voice failed her, choked with sobs. When she had somewhat recovered she implored Pulcheria and her mother to take her to see Paula, and as they shared her wish they prepared to start for the prison before it should grow dark.

The nearer they went to the market-place, which they must cross, the more crowded were the streets. Every one was going the same way; the throng almost carried the women with it; yet, from the market came, as it were,

a contrary torrent of shouts and shrieks from a myriad of human throats. Dame Joanna was terrified in the press by the uproarious doings in the market, and she would gladly have turned back with the girls, or have made her way through by-streets, but the tide bore her on, and it would have been easier to swim against a swollen mountain stream than to return home. Thus they soon reached the square, but there they were brought to a standstill in the crush.

The widow's terrors now increased. It was dreadful to be kept fast with the young people in such a mob. Pulcheria clung closely to her, and when she bid Mary take her hand the child, who thoroughly enjoyed the adventure, exclaimed: "Only look, Mother Joanna, there is our Rustem. He is taller than any one."

"If only he were by our side!" sighed the widow. At this the little girl snatched away her hand, made her way with the nimbleness of a squirrel through the mass of men, and soon had reached the Masdakite. Rustem had not yet quitted Memphis, for the first caravan, which he and his little wife were to join, was not to start for a few days. The worthy Persian and Mary were very good friends; as soon as he heard that his benefactress was alarmed he pushed his way to her, with the child, and the widow breathed more freely when he offered to remain near her and protect her.

Meanwhile the yelling and shouting were louder than ever. Every face, every eye was turned to the Curia, in the evident expectation of something great and strange taking place there.

"What is it?" asked Mary, pulling at Rustem's coat. The giant said nothing, but he stooped, and to her delight, a moment later she had her feet on his arms, which he folded across his chest, and was settling herself on his broad shoulder whence she could survey men and things as from a tower. Joanna laid her hand in some tremor on the child's little feet, but Mary called down to her: "Mother-Pulcheria-I am quite sure our old Horapollo's white ass is standing in front of the Curia, and they are putting a garland round the beast's neck-a garland of olive."

At this moment the blare of a tuba rang out from the Senate-house across the square, through the suffocatingly hot, quivering air; a sudden silence fell and spread till, when a man opened his mouth to shout or to speak, a neighbor gave him a shove and bid him hold his tongue. At this the widow held Mary's ankles more tightly, asking, while she wiped the drops from her brow:

"What is going on?" and the child answered quickly, never taking her eyes off the scene:

"Look, look up at the balcony of the Curia; there stands the chief of the Senate-Alexander the dyer of purple-he often used to come to see my grandfather, and grandmother could not bear his wife. And by his side-

do you not see who the man is close by him?

"It is old Horapollo. He is taking the laurel-crown off his wig!—Alexander is going to speak."

She was interrupted by another trumpet call, and immediately after a loud, manly voice was heard from the Curia, while the silence was so profound that even the widow and her daughter lost very little of the speech which followed:

"Fellow-citizens, Memphites, and comrades in misfortune," the president began in slow, ringing tones, "you know what the sufferings are which we all share. There is not a woe that has not befallen us, and even worse loom before us."

The crowd expressed their agreement by a fearful outcry, but they were reduced to silence by the sound of the tuba, and the speaker went on:

"We, the Senate, the fathers of the city, whom you have entrusted with the care of your persons and your welfare. . ."

At this point he was interrupted by wild yells, and cries could be distinguished of: "Then take care of us—do your duty!"

"Money bags!"

"Keep your pledge!"

"Save us from destruction!"

The trumpet call, however, again silenced them, and the speaker went on, almost beside himself with vehement excitement.

"Hearken! Do not interrupt me! The dearth and misery fall on our heads as much as on yours. My own wife and son died of the plague last night!"

At this only a low murmur ran through the crowd, and it died away of its own accord as the dignified old man on the balcony wiped his eyes and went on:

"If there is a single man among you who can prove us guilty of neglect—a man, woman, or child—let him accuse us before God, before our new ruler the Khaliff, and yourselves, the citizens of Memphis; but not now, my fellow-sufferers, not now! At this time cease your cries and lamentations; now when rescue is in sight. Listen to me, and let us know what you feel with regard to the last and uttermost means of deliverance which I now come to propose to you."

"Silence! Hear him! Down with the noisy ones!" was heard on all sides, and the orator went on:

"We, as Christians, in the first instance addressed ourselves to our Father in Heaven, to our one and only divine Redeemer, and to His Holy Church to aid us; and I ask you: Has there been any lack of prayers, processions, pilgrimages, and pious gifts? No, no, my beloved fellow-citizens! Each one be my witness—certainly not! But Heaven has remained blind and deaf and dumb in sight of our need, yea as though paralyzed. And yet no; not indeed paralyzed, for it has been powerful and swift to move only to heap new woes upon us. Not a thing that human foresight and prudence could devise or execute has remained untried.

"The time-honored arts of the magicians, sorcerers, and diviners, which aforetime have often availed to break the powers of evil spirits, have proved no less delusive and ineffectual. So then we remembered our glorious forefathers and ancestors, and we recollected that a man lives in our midst who knew many things which we others have lost sight of in the lapse of years. He has made the wisdom of our forefathers his own in the course of a long life of laborious days and nights. He has the key to the writing and the secrets of the ancients, and he has communicated to us the means of deliverance to which they resorted, when they suffered from such afflictions as have befallen us in these dreadful days; and this venerable man at my side, the wise and truthful Horapollo, will acquaint us with it. You see the antique scrolls in his hand: They teach us the wonders it wrought in times past."

"Here the speaker was interrupted by a cry of: "Hail Horapollo, the Deliverer!" and thousands took it up and expressed their satisfaction and gratitude by loud shouting.

The old man bowed modestly, pointed to his narrow chest and toothless mouth and then to the head of the Council as the man who had undertaken to transmit his opinion to the populace; so Alexander went on:

"Great favors, my friends and fellow-citizens, must be purchased by great gifts. The ancients knew this, and when the river—on which, as we know only too well, the weal or woe of this land solely depends—refused to rise, and its low ebb brought evils of many kinds upon its banks, they offered in sacrifice the thing they deemed most noble of all the earth has to show a pure and beautiful maiden.

"It is just as we expected: you are horrified! I hear your murmur, I see your horror-stricken faces; how can a Christian fail to be shocked at the thought of such a victim? But is it indeed so extraordinary? Have we ever wholly given up everything of the kind? Which of us does not entreat Saint Orion, either at home or under the guidance of the priests in church, whenever he craves a gift from our splendid river; and this very year as usual, on the Night of Dropping, did we not cast into the waters a little box containing a human finger.

[So late as in the XIV. century after Christ the Egyptian Christians

still threw a small casket containing a human finger into the Nile to induce it to rise. This is confirmed by the trustworthy Makrizi.]

”This lesser offering takes the place of the greater and more precious sacrifice of the heathen; it has been offered, and its necessity has never at any time been questioned; even the severest and holiest luminaries of the Church—Antonius and Athanasius, Theophilus and Cyrillus had nothing to say against it, and year after year it has been thrown into the waters under their very eyes.

”A finger in a box! What a miserable exchange for the fairest and purest that God has allowed to move on earth among men. Can we wonder if the Almighty has at last disdained and rejected the wretched substitute, and claims once more for His Nile that which was formerly given? But where is the mother, where is the father, you will ask, who, in our selfish days, is so penetrated with love for his country, his province, his native town, that he will dedicate his virgin daughter to perish in the waters for the common good? What daughter of our nation is ready of her own free will to die for the salvation of others?

”But be not afraid. Have no fears for the growing maiden, the very apple of your eye, in your women’s rooms. Fear not for your granddaughters, sisters, playfellows and betrothed: From the earliest ages a stringent law forbade the sacrifice of Egyptian blood; strangers were to perish, or those who worshipped other gods than those in Egypt.

”The same law, citizens and fellow-believers, is incumbent on us. And mark me well, all of you! Would it not seem as though Fate desired to help us to bring to our blessed Nile the offering which for so many centuries has been withheld? The river claims it; and, as if by a miracle, it has been brought to our hand. For a crime which does not taint her purity our judges have to-day condemned to death a beautiful and spotless maiden—a stranger, and at the same time a Greek and a heretic Melchite.

”This stirs you, this fills your souls with joyful thankfulness; I see it! Then make ready for thy bridal, noble stream, Benefactor of our land and nation! The virgin, the bride that thou hast longed for, we deck for thee, we lead to thine embrace—she shall be Thine!

”And you, Memphites, citizens and fellow-sufferers,” and the orator leaned far over the parapet towards the crowd, ”when I ask you for your suffrages, when I appeal to you in the name of the senate, and of this venerable sage....”

But here he was interrupted by the triumphant shout of the assembled multitude; a thousand voices went up in a mighty, heaven-rending cry:

”To the Nile with her—the maiden to the Nile!”

"Marry the Melchite to the river! Bring wreaths for the bride of the Nile, bring flowers for her marriage."

"Let us abide by the teaching of our fathers!"

"Hail to the councillor! Hail to the sage, Horapollo! Hail to our chief Senator!"

These were the glad and enthusiastic shouts that rose in loud confusion; and it was only on the north side, where the money-changers' tables now stood deserted-for gold and silver had long since been placed in safety—that a sinister murmur of dissent was heard. The little girl in the Persian's arms had long since been breathing hard and deep. She thought she knew whom that fiend up there had his eye upon for his cursed heathen sacrifice; and as Mary bent down to Dame Joanna to see whether she shared her hideous suspicion, she perceived that her eyes and Pulcheria's were full of tears.—That was enough; she asked no questions, for a new act in the drama claimed her attention.

Close to the money-changer's stalls a hand was lifted on high, holding a crucifix, and the child could see it steadily progressing through the crowd towards the Curia. Every one made way for the sacred symbol and the bearer of it; and to Mary's fancy the throng parted on each side of the advancing image of the Redeemer, as the waters of the Red Sea had parted at the approach of the people of God. The murmurs in that part of the square grew louder; the acclamations of the populace waxed fainter; every voice seemed to fail, and presently a frail figure in bishop's robes, small but rigidly dignified, was seen to mount the steps and finally disappear within the portals of the Curia.

The turmoil sank like an ebbing wave to a low, enquiring mutter, and even this died away when the diminutive personage, who looked the taller, however, for the crucifix which he still held, came out on the balcony, approached the parapet, and stretched forth the arm that held the image above the heads of the foremost rows of the people.

At this Horapollo stepped up to Alexander, his eyes flashing with rage, and demanded that the intruder should be forbidden to speak; but the commanding eye of the new-comer rested on the dyer, who bowed his head and allowed him to proceed. Nor did one of the senators dare to hinder him, for every one recognized him as the zealous, learned, and determined priest who had, since yesterday, filled the place of the deceased bishop.

Their new pastor began, addressing his flock in as loud a voice as he could command:

"Look on this Cross and hearken to its minister! You languish for the blessing of Christ, and you follow after heathen abominations. The superstitious triumph, through which I have struggled to reach you, will

be turned to howls of anguish if you stop your ears and are deaf to the words of salvation.

"Yea, you may murmur! You will not reduce me to silence, for Truth speaks in me and can never be dumb. I say to each of you that knows it not: The staff of the departed Plotinus has been placed in my hands. I would fain bear it with gentleness and mercy; but, if I must, I will wield it as a sword and a scourge till your wounds bleed and your bruises ache.

"Behold in my right hand the image of your Redeemer! I hold it up as a wall between you and the heathen abomination which you hail with joy in your blindness.

"Ye are accursed and apostate. Lift up your hearts, and look at Him who died on the cross to save you. Verily He will not let him perish who believeth in Him; but you! where is your faith? Because it is night ye lament and cry: 'The Light is dead!' Because ye are sick ye say: 'The physician cannot heal!'

"What are these blasphemies that I hear: 'The Lord and His Church are powerless! Magic, enchantments, and heathen abominations may save us.' –But, inasmuch as ye trust not in the true Saviour and Redeemer, but in heathen wickedness, magic, and enchantments, punishment shall be heaped on punishment; and so it will be,–I see it coming–till ye are choked in the mud and seek with groans the only Hand that is able to save.

"That whereby the blinded sons of men hope to escape from the evil, that, and that only, is the source of their sufferings and I stand here to stay that spring and dig a channel for its overflow.

"Children of Moloch ye try to be and I hope to make you Christians again. But the maiden whom your fury would cast into the abyss of the river is under the merciful protection of the supreme Church, for the death of her body will bring death to your souls. Saint Orion turns from you with horror! Away from the hapless victim! Away, I say, with your accursed desires and sacrilegious hands!"

"And sit with them in our laps and wring them in prayer till they ache, while want and the plague snatch away those that are left!" interrupted the old man's voice, thin and feeble, but audible at a considerable distance, and from the market-place thousands proclaimed their approval by loud shouts.

The president of the senate had listened with a penitent mien and bowed head, but now he recovered his presence of mind and exclaimed indignantly:

"The people die, the town and country are going to ruin, plague and horrors rise up from the river. Show us some other way of escape,

or let us trust to our forefathers and try this last means.”

But the little man drew himself up more stiffly, pointed with his left hand to the crucifix, and cried with unmoved composure:

”Believe, hope, and pray!”

”Perhaps you think that no evil is come upon us!” cried Alexander. ”You, to be sure, have seen no wife with glazing eyes, no child struggling for breath. . . .” And a fresh tumult came up from below, wilder and louder than ever. Each one whose home or beasts had been blighted by death, whose gardens and fields had perished of drought, whose dates had dropped one by one from the trees, lifted up his voice and shrieked:

”The victim, the victim!”

”To the river with the maiden!”

”All hail to our deliverer, the wise Horapollo!” But others shouted against them:

”Let us remain Christians! Hail to Bishop John!”

”Think of our souls!”

The prelate made an effort once more to rivet the attention of the populace, and failing in this he turned to the senators and the trumpeters, whom at length he succeeded in persuading to blow again and again, and more loudly through their brazen tuba. But the call produced no effect, for in the market square groups had formed on opposite sides, and blows and wrestling threatened to end in a sanguinary street-riot.

The women succeeded in getting away from the scene of action under the protection of the Masdakite, before the Arab cavalry rode across to separate the combatants; but in the Curia Bishop John explained to the Fathers that he would make every effort to prevent this inhuman and unchristian sacrifice of a young girl, even though she was a Melchite and under sentence of death. This very day a carrier pigeon should be dispatched to the patriarch in Upper Egypt, and bring back his decision.

When, on this, Horapollo replied that the Khaliff’s representative here had signified his consent to the proceedings, and that even against the will of the clergy the misery of the people must be put an end to, the Bishop broke out vehemently and threatened all who had first suggested this hideous scheme with the anathema of the Church. But Horapollo retorted again with flaming eloquence, the desperate Senators took his part, and the Bishop left the Curia in the highest wrath.

CHAPTER XIX.

Few things could be more intolerable to the gentle and retiring widow than such a riot of the people. The unchained passion, the tumult, and all the vulgar accessories that surrounded her there grieved her tender nature; all through the old man's speech she had felt nothing but the desire to escape, but as soon as she had acquired the certainty that Paula was the hapless being whom her terrible house-mate was preparing to hand over to the superstition of the mob, she thought no more of getting home, but waited in the crush till at length she and the two children could be conducted by Rustem to the prison, though the way thither was through the most crowded streets.

Had the nameless horrors that hung over Paula already found their way to her ears through the prisonwalls, or might it yet be her privilege to be able to prepare the girl for the worst, and to comfort the victim who must already have been driven to the verge of desperation by the sentence of death?

On the previous day the chief warder had acceded without demur to her wish to see Paula, for the Kadi had enjoined him to show her and Orion all possible courtesy, but the Vekeel's threats made him now refuse to admit Dame Joanna. However, while he was talking with her, his infant son stretched out his arms to Pulcheria, who had played with him the day before in her sweet way, and she now took him up and kissed him, thus bringing a kindly feeling to three hearts at once; and most of all to that of the child's mother who immediately interested herself for them, and persuaded her husband to oblige them once more.

Pretty Emau had always waited on the mirthful Orion, under the palms by her father's inn, more gladly than on most other guests; and her husband who, after the manner of the Egyptians, was docile to his better half though till now he had not been quite free from jealousy, was even more ready to serve his benefactor's son since hearing that he was betrothed to the fair Paula.

There was a great uproar in the large common prison to-day, as usual when the judges had passed sentence of death on any criminal, and the women shuddered as the miserable wretches hallooed and bellowed. Many a shriek came up, of which it was hard to say whether it was the expression of wild defiance or of bitter jesting, and no more suitable accompaniment could be conceived to this terrific riot than the clank of chains.

When the women reached Paula's cell their hearts throbbed painfully, for within the door which the warder unlocked anguish and despair must dwell.

The prisoner was standing at the window, pressing her brow against the iron bars and listening to the lute played by her lover, which sounded,

amid the turmoil of the other prisoners, like a bell above the roar of thunder and the storm. By the bed sat Betta on a low stool, asleep with the distaff in her lap; and neither she nor her mistress heeded the entrance of the visitors. A miserable lamp lighted the squalid room.

Mary would have flown to her friend, but Joanna held her back and called Paula tenderly by name in a low voice. But Paula did not hear; her soul was no doubt absorbed in anguish and the terror of death. The widow now raised her voice, and the ill-fated girl turned round; then, with a little cry of joy, she hastened to meet the faithful creatures who could find her even in prison, and clasped first the widow, then Pulcheria, then the child in a tender embrace. Joanna put her hands fondly round her face to kiss it, and to see how far fear and affliction had altered her lovely features, and a faint cry of astonishment escaped her, for she was looking, not at a grief and terror-stricken face, but a glad and calm one, and a pair of large eyes looked brightly and gratefully into hers.

Had she not been told then what was hanging over her? Nay—for she at once asked whether they had heard that she was condemned to die. And she went on to tell them how things had gone with her at her trial, and how her good Philip's friend and foster-father had suddenly and inexplicably become her bitterest foe.

At this the others could not check their tears; it was Paula who had to comfort and soothe them, by telling them that she had found a paternal friend in the Kadi who had promised to intercede for her with the Khaliff.

Dame Joanna could scarcely take it all in. This girl and her heroic demeanor, in the face of such disaster, seemed to her miraculous. Her trust was beautiful; but how easily might it be deceived! how insecure was the ground in which she had cast the anchor of hope.

Even little Mary seemed more troubled than her friend, and threw herself sobbing on her bosom. And Paula returned her fondness, and tried to mollify Pulcheria as to the disgraceful conduct of their old housemate, and smiled kindly at the widow when she asked where she had found such composure in the face of so much misfortune, saying that it was from her example that she had learnt resignation to the worst that could befall her. Even in this dark hour she found more to be thankful for than to lament over; indeed, it had brought her a glorious joy. And this for the first time reminded Joanna and the girls that she was now betrothed, and again she was clasped in their loving arms.

Just then the warder rapped; Paula rose thoughtfully, and exclaimed in a low voice: "I have something to send to Orion that I dare not entrust to a stranger: but now, now I have you, my Mary, and you shall take it to him."

As she spoke she took out the emerald, gave it to the little girl, and

charged her to deliver it to her uncle as soon as they should be alone together. In the little note which she had wrapped around it she implored her lover to regard it as his own property, and to use it to satisfy the claims of the Church.

The man was easily induced to take Mary to her uncle; and how happily she ran on before him up to Orion's cell, how great was his joy at seeing her again, how gratefully he pressed the emerald to his lips! But when she exclaimed that her prophecy had been fulfilled, and that Paula, was now his, his brow was knit as he replied, with gloomy regret, that though he had won the woman he loved, it was only to lose her again.

"But the Kadi is your friend and will gain pardon from the Khaliff!" cried the child.

"But then another enemy suddenly starts up: Horapollo!"

"Oh, our old man!" and the child ground her teeth. "If you did but know, Orion!—And to think that I must live under the same roof with him!"

"You!" asked the young man.

"Yes, I. And Pulcheria, and Mother Joanna," and Mary went on to tell him how the old man had come to live with them and Orion could guess from various indications that she was concealing some important fact; so he pressed her to keep nothing from him, till the child could not at last evade telling him all she had seen and heard.

At this he lost all caution and self-control. Quite beside himself he called aloud the name of his beloved, invoking in passionate tones the return of the Governor Amru, the only man who could help them in this crisis. His sole hope was in him. He had shown himself a real father to him, and had set him a difficult but a noble task.

"Into which you have plunged over head and ears!" cried the child.

"I thought it all out while on my journey," replied Orion. "I tried yesterday to write out a first sketch of it, but I lacked what I most wanted: maps and lists. Nilus had put them all up together; I was to have taken them with me on the voyage with the nuns, and I ordered that they should be carried to the house of Rufinus. . . ."

"That they should come to us?" interrupted the child with sparkling eyes. "Oh, they are all there! I saw the documents myself, when the chest was cleared out for old Horapollo, and to-morrow, quite early to-morrow, you shall have them." Orion kissed her brow with glad haste; then, striking the wall of his cell with his fist, he waited till something had been withdrawn with a grating sound on the other side, and exclaimed:

"Good news, Nilus! The plans and lists are found: I shall have them to-morrow!"

"That is well!" replied the treasurer's thin voice from the adjoining room. "We shall need something to comfort us! A prisoner has just been brought in for having attacked an Arab horseman in a riot in the market square. He tells me some dreadful news."

"Concerning my betrothed?"

"Alas! yes, my lord."

"Then I know it already," replied the young man; and after exchanging a few words with his master with reference to the old man's atrocious proposal, Nilus went on:

"My prison-mate tells me, too, that while he was in custody in the guard-house the Arabs were speaking of a messenger from the governor announcing his arrival at Medina, and also that he intended making only a short stay there. So we may expect his return before long."

"Then he will have started long before the Kadi's messenger can have arrived and laid the petition for pardon before the Khaliff!—We have no hope but in Amru; if only we could send information to him on his way..."

"He would certainly not tarry in Upper Egypt, but hasten his journey, or send on a plenipotentiary," said the voice on the other side of the wall. "If we had but a trusty man to despatch! Our people are scattered to the four winds, and to hunt them up now. . . ."

At this Mary's childish tones broke in with: "I can find a messenger."

"You? What are you thinking of, child?" said Orion. She did not heed his remonstrance, but went on eagerly, quite sure of her own meaning:

"He shall be told everything, everything! Ought he to know what I heard about your share in the flight of the sisters?"

"No, no; on no account!" cried Nilus and his master both at once; and Mary understood that her proposition was accepted. She clapped her hands, and exclaimed full of enterprise and with glowing cheeks:

"The messenger shall start to-morrow; rely on me. I can do it as well as the greatest. And now tell me exactly the road he is to take. To make sure, write the names of the stages on my little tablet.—But wait, I must rub it smooth."

"What is this on the wax?" asked Orion. "A large heart with squares all over it.—And that means?"

"Oh! mere nonsense," said the child somewhat abashed. "It was only to show how my heart was divided among the persons I love. A whole half of it belongs to Paula, this quarter is yours; but there, there, there," and at each word she prodded the wax with the stylus, "that is where I had kept a little corner for old Horapollo. He had better not come in my way again!"

Her nimble fingers smoothed the wax, and over the effaced heart—a child's whim—Orion wrote things on which the lives of two human beings depended. He did so with sincere confidence in his little ally's adroitness and fidelity. Early next morning she was to receive a letter to be conveyed to Amru by the messengers.

"But a rapid journey costs money, and Amru always chooses the road by the mountains and Berenice," observed the treasurer. "If we put together our last gold pieces they will hardly suffice."

"Keep them, you will want them here," said the little girl. "And yet—there are my pearls, to be sure, and my mother's jewels—at the same time. . . ."

"You ought never to part from such things, you heart of gold!" cried Orion.

"Oh yes, yes! What do I want with them? But Dame Joanna has my mother's things in her keeping."

"And you are afraid to ask her for them?" asked the young man. He appealed to Nilus, and when the treasurer had calculated the cost, Orion took off a costly sapphire ring, which he gave to Mary, charging her to hand it to Joanna. Gamaliel, the Jew, would lend her as much as she would require on this gem. Mary joyfully took possession of the ring; but presently, when the warder appeared to fetch her, her satisfaction suddenly turned to no less vehement grief, and she took leave of Orion as if they were parting for ever.

In the passage leading to Paula's cell the man suddenly stood still: some one was approaching up the stairs.—If it should be the black Vekeel, and he should find visitors in the prison at so late an hour!

But no. Two lamps were borne in front of the new-comers, and by their light the warder recognized John, the new Bishop of Memphis, who had often been here before now to console prisoners.

He had come to-night prompted by his desire to see the condemned Melchite. Mary's dress and demeanor betrayed at once that she could not belong to any official employed here; and, as soon as he had learnt who

she was, he whispered to his companion, an aged deacon who always accompanied him when he visited a female prisoner: "We find her here!" And when he had ascertained with whom the child had come hither at so late an hour, he turned again to his colleague and added in a low voice:

"The wife and daughter of Rufinus! Just so: I have long had my eye on these Greeks. In church once or twice every year!—Melchites in disguise! Allied with this Melchite! And this is the school in which the Mukaukas' granddaughter is growing up! An abominable trick! Benjamin judged rightly, as he always did!" Then, in a subdued voice, he asked:

"Shall we take her away with us at once?" But, as the deacon made objections, he hastily replied: "You are right; for the present it is enough that we know where she is to be found."

The warder meanwhile had opened Paula's cell; before the bishop went in he spoke a few kind words to the child, asking her whether she did not long to see her mother; and when Mary replied: "Very often!" he stroked her hair with his bony hand and said:

"So I thought.—You have a pretty name, child, and you, like your mother, will perhaps ere long dedicate your life to the Blessed among women, whose name you bear." And, holding the little girl by the hand, he entered the cell. While Paula looked in amazement at the prelate who came so late a visitor, Joanna and Pulcheria recognized him as the brave ecclesiastic who had so valiantly opposed the old sage and the misled populace, and they bowed with deep reverence. This the bishop observed, and came to the conclusion that these Greeks perhaps after all belonged to his Church. At any rate, the child might safely be left in their care a few days longer.

After he had exchanged a few cordial words with them the widow prepared to withdraw, and was about to take leave when he went up to her and announced that he would pay her a visit the next day or the day after; that he wished to speak with her of matters involving the happiness of one who was dear to them both, and Dame Joanna, believing that he referred to Paula, whispered:

"She has no idea as yet of the terrible fate the people have in store for her. If possible, spare her the fearful truth before she sleeps this night."

"If possible," repeated the prelate. Then, as Mary kissed his hand before leaving, he drew her to him and said: "Like the Infant Christ, every Christian child is the Mother's. You, Mary, are chosen before thousands! The Lord took your father to himself as a martyr; your mother has dedicated herself to Heaven. Your road is marked out for you, child, reflect on this. To-morrow-no, the day after, I will see you and guide you in the new path."

At these words Joanna turned pale. She now understood what the bishop's purpose was in calling on her. At the bottom of the stairs, she threw her arms round the child and asked her in a low voice: "Do you pine for the cloister—do you wish to go away from us like your mother, to think of nothing but saving your soul, to live a nun in the holy seclusion which Pulcheria has described to you so often?"

But this the child positively denied; and as Joanna's head drooped anxiously and sadly, Mary looked up brightly and exclaimed: "Never fear, Mother dear! Things will have altered greatly by the day after tomorrow. Let the bishop come! I shall be a match for him!—Oh! you do not know me yet. I have been like a lamb among you through all this misfortune and serious trouble; but there is something more in me than that. You will be quite astonished!"

"Nay, nay. Remain what you are," the widow said.

"Always and ever full of love for you and Pul. But I am a grand and trusted person now! I have something very important to do for Orion to-morrow. Something—Rustem will go with me.—Important, very important, Mother Joanna. But what it is I must not tell—not even you!"

Here she was interrupted, for the heavy prison door opened for their exit.

It was many hours before it was again unlocked to let out the bishop, so long was he detained talking to Paula in her cell.

To his enquiry as to whether she was an orthodox Greek, or as the common people called it, a Melchite, she replied that she was the latter; adding that, if he had come with a view to perverting her from the confession of her forefathers, his visit was thrown away; at the same time she revered him as a Christian and a priest; as a learned man, and the friend whom her deceased uncle had esteemed above every other minister of his confession; she was gladly ready to disclose to him all that lay on her soul in the face of death. He looked into the pure, calm face; and though, at her first declaration, he had felt prompted to threaten her with the hideous end which he had but just done his utmost to avert, he now remembered the Greek widow's request and bound himself to keep silence.

He allowed her to talk till midnight, giving him the whole history of all she had known of joy and sorrow in the course of her young life; his keen insight searched her soul, his pious heart rose to meet the strength and courage of hers; and when he quitted her, as he walked home with the deacon, the first words with which he broke a long silence were:

"While you were asleep, God vouchsafed me an edifying hour through that heretic child of earth."

CHAPTER XX.

When the door in the tall prison-wall was closed behind the women, Joanna made her way through streets still sultry under the silence of the night, Rustem following with the child.

The giant's good heart was devoted to Mary, and he often passed his huge hand over his eyes while she told him all that the scene they had witnessed meant, and the fearful end that threatened Paula. He broke in now and again, giving utterance to his grief and wrath in strange, natural sounds; for he looked up to his beautiful sick nurse as to a superior being, and Mandane, too, had often remarked that they could never forget all that the noble maiden had done for them.

"If only," Rustem cried at length, clenching his powerful fist, "If only I could—they should see. . . ." and the child looked up with shrewd, imploring eyes, exclaiming eagerly:

"But you could, Rustem, you could!"

"I?" asked Rustem in surprise, and he shook his head doubtfully.

"Yes, you, Rustem; you of all men. We were talking over something in the prison, and if only you were ready and willing to help us in the matter."

"Willing!" laughed the worthy fellow striking his heart; and he went on in his strangely-broken Greek, which was, however, quite intelligible: "I would give hair and skin for the noble lady. You have only to speak out."

The child clung to the big man with both hands and drew him to her saying: "We knew you had a grateful heart. But you see. . ." and she interrupted herself to ask in an altered voice:

"Do you believe in a God? or stay—do you know what a sacred oath is? Can you swear solemnly? Yes, yes. . ." and drawing herself up as tall as possible she went on very seriously: "Swear by your bride Mandane—as truly as you believe that she loves you. . ."

"But, sweet soul..."

"Swear that you will never betray to a living soul what I am going to say—not even to Mother Joanna and Pulcheria; no, nor even to your Mandane, unless you find you cannot help it and she gives her sacred word..."

"What is it? You quite frighten me! What am I to swear?"

"Not to reveal what I am now going to tell you."

"Yes, yes, little Mistress; I can promise you that." Mary sighed, a long-drawn "Ah ...!" and told him that a trustworthy messenger must be found to go forth to meet Amru, so as to be in time to save Paula. Then came the question whether he knew the road over the hills from Babylon to the ancient town of Berenice; and when he replied that he had lately travelled that way, and that it was the shortest road to the sea for Djidda and Medina, she repeated her satisfied "Ah!" took his hand, and went on with coaxing but emphatic entreaty while she played with his big fingers: "And now, best and kindest Rustem, in all Memphis there is but one really trusty messenger; but he, you see, is betrothed, and so he would rather get married and go home with his bride than help us to save the life of poor Paula."

"The cur!" growled the Persian.

At this Mary laughed out: "Yes, the cur!" and went on gaily: "But you are abusing yourself, you stupid Rustem. You, you are the messenger I mean, the only faithful and trustworthy one far or near. You, you must meet the governor...."

"I!" said the man, and he stood still with amazement; but Mary pulled him onward, saying: "But come on, or the others will notice something.— Yes, you, you must...."

"But child, child," interrupted Rustem lamentably,

"I must go back to my master; and you see, common right and justice...."

"You do not choose to leave your sweetheart; not even if the kind creature who watched over you day and night should die for it—die the most cruel and horrible death! You were ready enough to call that other, as you supposed, a cur—that other whom no one nursed till he was well again; but as for yourself. . . ."

"Have patience then! Hear me, little Mistress!" Rustem broke in again, and pulled away his hand. "I am quite willing to wait and Mandane must just submit. But one man is not good for all tasks. To ride, or guide a train of merchandise, to keep the cameldrivers in order, to pitch a camp—all that I can do; but to parley with grand folks, to go straight up to such a man as the great chief Amru with prayers and supplications—all that, you see, sweetheart—even if it were to save my own father, that would be...."

"But who asks you to do all that?" said the child. "You may stand as mute as a fish: it will be your companion's business to do the talking."

"There is to be another one then? But, great Masdak! I hope that will be enough at any rate!"

"Why will you constantly interrupt me?" the little girl put in. "Listen first and raise objections after wards. The second messenger—now open your ears wide—it is I, I myself;—but if you stand still again, you will really betray me. The long and short of it is, that as surely as I mean to save Paula, I mean to go forth to meet Amru, and if you refuse to go with me I will set out alone and try whether Gibbus the hunchback..."

Rustem had needed some time to collect his senses after this stupendous surprise, but now he exclaimed: "You—you—to Berenice, and over the mountains. . . ."

"Yes, over the mountains," she repeated, "and if need be, through the clouds."

"But such a thing was never heard of, never heard of on this earth!" the Persian remonstrated. "A girl, a little lady like you—a messenger, and all alone with a clumsy fellow like me. No, no, no!"

"And again no, and a hundred times over no!" cried the child merrily. "The little lady will stop at home and you will take a boy with you—a boy called Marius, not Mary."

"A boy! But I thought.—It is enough to puzzle one...."

"A boy who is a girl and a boy in one," laughed Mary. "But if you must have it in plain words: I shall dress up as a boy to go with you; to-morrow when we set out you will see, you will take me for my own brother."

"Your own brother! With a little face like yours! Then the most impossible things will become possible," cried Rustem laughing, and he looked down good humoredly at the little girl. But suddenly the preposterousness of her scheme rose again before his mind, and he exclaimed half-frantically: "But then my master!—It will not do—It will never do!"

"It is for his sake that you will do us this service," said Mary confidently. "He is Paula's friend and protector; and when he hears what you have done for her he will praise you, while if you leave us in the lurch I am quite sure. . . ."

"Well?"

"That he will say: 'I thought Rustem was a shrewder man and had a better heart.'"

"You really think he will say that?"

"As surely as our house stands before us!—Well, we have no time for any more discussion, so it is settled: we start together. Let me find you in the garden early to-morrow morning. You must tell your Mandane that you are called away by important business."

"And Dame Joanna?" asked the Persian, and his voice was grave and anxious as he went on: "The thing I like least, child, is that you should not ask her, and take her into your confidence."

"But she will hear all about it, only not immediately," replied Mary. "And the day after to-morrow, when she knows what I have gone off for and that you are with me, she will praise us and bless us; yes, she will, as surely as I hope that the Almighty will succor us in our journey!"

At these words, which evidently came from the very depths of her heart, the Masdakite's resistance altogether gave way—just in time, for their walk was at an end, and they both felt as though the long distance had been covered by quite a few steps. They had passed close to several groups of noisy and quarrelsome citizens, and many a funeral train had borne the plague-stricken dead to the grave by torchlight under their very eyes, but they had heeded none of these things.

It was not till they reached the garden-gate that they observed what was going on around them. There they found the gardener and all the household, anxiously watching for the return of their belated mistress. Eudoxia too was waiting for them with some alarm. In the house they were met by Horapollo, but Joanna and Pulcheria returned his greeting with a cold bow, while Mary purposely turned her back on him. The old man shrugged his shoulders with regretful annoyance, and in the solitude of his own room he muttered to himself:

"Oh, that woman! She will be the ruin even of the peaceful days I hoped to enjoy during the short remainder of my life!"

The widow and her daughter for some time sat talking of Mary. She had bid them good-night as devotedly and tenderly as though they were parting for life. Poor child! She had forebodings of the terrible fate to which the bishop, and perhaps her own mother had predestined her.

But Mary did not look as if she were going to meet misfortune; Eudoxia, who slept by her side, was rejoiced on the contrary at seeing her so gay; only she was surprised to see the child, who usually fell asleep as soon as her little head was on the pillow, lying awake so long this evening. The elderly Greek, who suffered from a variety of little ailments and always went to sleep late, could not help watching the little girl's movements.

What was that? Between midnight and dawn Mary sprang from her bed,

threw

on her clothes, and stole into the next room with the night-lamp in her hand. Presently a brighter light shone through the door-way. She must have lighted a lamp,-and presently, hearing the door of the sitting-room opened, Eudoxia rose and noiselessly watched her. Mary immediately returned, carrying a boy's clothes-a suit, in point of fact, which Pulcheria and Eudoxia had lately been making as a Sunday garb-for the lame gardener's boy. The child smilingly tried on the little blue tunic; then, after tossing the clothes into a chest, she sat down at the table to write. But she seemed to have set herself some hard task; for now she looked down at the papyrus and rubbed her forehead, and now she gazed thoughtfully into vacancy. She had written a few sentences when she started up, called Eudoxia by name, and went towards the sleeping-room.

Eudoxia went forward to meet her; Mary threw herself into her arms, and before her governess could ask any questions she told her that she had been chosen to accomplish a great and important action. She had been intending to wake her, to make her her confidant and to ask her advice.

How sweet and genuine it all sounded, and how charmingly confused she seemed in spite of the ardent zeal that inspired her!

Eudoxia's heart went forth to her; the words of reproof died on her lips, and for the first time she felt as though the orphaned child were her own; as though their joy and grief were one; as though she, who all her life long had thought only of herself and her own advantage, and who had regarded her care of Mary as a mere return in kind for a salary and home, were ready and willing to sacrifice herself and her last coin for this child. So, when the little girl now threw her arms round Eudoxia's neck, imploring her not to betray her, but, on the contrary, to help her in the good work which aimed at nothing less than the rescue of Paula and Orion-the imperilled victims of Fate, her dry eyes sparkled through tears; she kissed Mary's burning cheeks once more and called her her own dear, dear little daughter. This gave the child courage; with tragical dignity, which brought a smile to the governess' lips, she took Eudoxia's bible from the desk, and said, fixing her beseeching gaze on the Greek's face:

"Swear!-nay, you must be quite grave, for nothing can be more solemn-swear not to tell a soul, not even Mother Joanna, what I want to confess to you."

Eudoxia promised, but she would take no oath. "Yea, yea, and nay, nay," was the oath of the Christian by the law of the Lord; but Mary clung to her, stroked her thin cheeks, and at last declared she could not say a word unless Eudoxia yielded. In such an hour the Greek could not resist this tender coaxing; she allowed Mary to take possession of her hand and lay it on the Bible; and when once this was done Eudoxia gave way, and with much head shaking repeated the oath that her pupil dictated, though much against her will.

After this the governess threw herself on the divan, as if exhausted and shocked at her own weakness; and the little girl took advantage of her victory, seating herself at her feet, and telling her all she knew about Paula and the perils that threatened her and Orion; and she was artful enough to give special prominence to Orion's danger, having long since observed how high he stood in Eudoxia's good graces. So far Eudoxia had not ceased stroking her hair, while she assented to everything that was said; but when she heard that Mary proposed to undertake the embassy to Amru herself, she started to her feet in horror, and declared most positively that she would never, never consent to such rashness, to such fatal folly.

Mary now brought to bear her utmost resources of persuasion and flattery. There was no other fit messenger to be found, and the lives of Orion and Paula were at stake. Was a ride across the mountains such a tremendous matter after all? How well she knew how to manage a beast, and how little she suffered from the heat! Had she not ridden more than once from Memphis to their estates by the seaboard? And faithful Rustem would be always with her, and the road over the mountains was the safest in all the country, with frequent stations for the accommodation of travellers. Then, if they found Amru, she could give a more complete report than any other living soul.

But Eudoxia was not to be shaken; though she admitted that Mary's project was not so entirely crazy as it had at first appeared.

At this the little girl began again; after reminding Eudoxia once more of her oath, she went on to tell her of the doom she herself hoped to escape by setting out on her errand. She told Eudoxia of her meeting with the bishop, and that even Joanna was uneasy as to her future fate. Ah! that life within walls under lock and key seemed to her so frightful—and she pictured her terrors, her love of freedom and of a busy, useful, active life among men and her friends, and her hope that the great general, Amru, would defend her against every one if once she could place herself under his protection—painting it all so vividly, so passionately, and so pathetically, that the governess was softened.

She clasped her hands over her eyes, which were streaming with tears, and exclaimed: "It is horrible, unheard-of—still, perhaps it is the best thing to do. Well, go to meet the governor,—ride off, ride off!"

And when the sweet, warm-hearted, joyous creature clang round her neck she was glad of her own weakness: this fair, fresh, and blooming bud of humanity should not pine in confinement and seclusion; she should find and give happiness, to her own joy and that of all good souls, and unfold to a full and perfect flower. And Eudoxia knew the widow well; she knew that Joanna would by-and-by understand why she helped the child to escape the greatest peril that can hang over a human soul: that of living in perpetual conflict with itself in the effort to become something totally different from what, by natural gifts and inclinations, it is

intended to be.

With a sigh of anguish Eudoxia reflected what she herself, forced by cruel fate and lacking freedom and pleasurable ease, had become, from an ardent and generous young creature; and she, the narrow-hearted teacher, could make allowances for the strange, adventurous yearning of a child, where a larger souled woman might have derided, and blamed and repressed it.

When it was daylight Eudoxia fulfilled the offices she commonly left to the maid: she arranged Mary's hair, talking to her and listening the while, as though in this night the child had developed into a woman. Then she went into the garden with her, and hardly let her out of her sight.

At breakfast Joanna and Pulcheria wondered at her singular behavior, but it did not displease them, and Marv was radiant with contentment.

The widow made no objection to allowing the child to go into the city to execute her uncle's mysterious commission. Rustem was with her; and whatever it was that made the child so happy must certainly be right and unobjectionable. Orion's maps and lists were sent to the prison early in the day, and before the child set out with her stalwart escort Gibbus had returned with the prisoner's letter to the Arab governor.

On their way it was agreed that Mary should join Rustem at dusk at the riverside inn of Nesptah. In these clays of famine and death beasts of burthen of every description were easily procurable, as well as attendants and guides; and the Masdakite, who was experienced in such matters, thought it best to purchase none but swift dromedaries and to carry only a light tent for the "little mistress!"

At the door of Gamaliel's shop Mary bid him wait; the jovial goldsmith welcomed her with genuine pleasure....

What had befallen the house of the Mukaukas! Fire had destroyed the dwelling-place of justice, like the Egyptian cities to whom the prophet had announced a similar fate a thousand years since.

Gamaliel knew in what peril Orion stood, and the fate that hung over the noble maiden who had once given him the costliest of gems, and afterwards entrusted to him a portion of her fortune.

To see any member of his patron's family alive and well rejoiced his heart. He asked Mary one sympathizing question after another, and his wife wanted to give her some of her good apricot tarts; but the little girl begged Gamaliel to grant her at once a private interview, so the jeweller led her into his little work-shop, bidding her trust him entirely, for whatever a grandchild of Mukaukas George might ask of him it was granted beforehand.

Blushing with confusion she took Orion's ring out of its wrapper, offered it to the Jew, and desired him to give her whatever was right.

She looked enquiringly into his face with her bright eyes, in full confidence that the kind-hearted man would at once pay her down gold coins and to spare; but he did not even take the ring out of her hand. He merely glanced at it, and said gravely:

"Nay, my little maid, we do not do business with children."

"But I want the money, Gamaliel," she urged. "I must have it."

"Must?" he repeated with a smile. "Well, must is a nail that drives through wood, no doubt; but if it hits iron it is apt to bend. Not that I am so hard as that; but money, money, money! And whose money do you mean, little maid? If you want money of mine to spend in bread, or in cakes, which is more likely, I will shut my eyes and put my hand boldly into my wallet; but, if I am not mistaken, you are well provided for by Rufinus the Greek, in whose house there is no lack of anything; and I have a nice round sum in my own keeping which your grandfather placed in my hands at interest two years since, with a remark that it was a legacy to you from your godmother, and the papers stand in your name; so your necessity looks very like what other folks would call ease."

"Necessity! I am in no necessity," Mary broke in. "But I want the money all the same; and if I have some of my own, and you perhaps have it there in your box, give me as much of it as I want."

"As much as you want?" laughed the jeweller. "Not so fast, little maid. Before such matters can be settled here in Egypt we must have plenty of time, and papyrus and ink, a grand law court, sixteen witnesses, a Kyrios. . ."

"Well then, buy the ring! You are such a good, kind man Gamaliel. Just to please me. Why, you yourself do not really think that I want to buy cakes!"

"No. But in these hard times, when so many are starving, a soft heart may be moved to other follies."

"No indeed! Do buy the ring; and if you will do me this favor. . ."

"Old Gamaliel will be both a rogue and a simpleton!—Have you forgotten the emerald? I bought that, and a pretty piece of business that was! I can have nothing to say to the ring, my little maid." Mary withdrew her hand, and the grief and disappointment expressed by her large, tearful eyes were so bitter and touching, that the Jew paused, and then went on seriously and heartily:

"I would sooner give my own old head to be an anvil than distress you, sweet child; and Adonai! I do not mean to say—why should I—that you should ever leave old Gamaliel without money. He has plenty, and though he is always ready to take, he is ready to give, too, when it is meet and fitting. I cannot buy the ring, to be sure, but do not be down-hearted and look me well in the face, little maid. It is much to ask, and I have handsomer things in my stores, but if you see anything in it that gives you confidence, speak out and whisper to the man of whom even your grandfather had some good opinion: 'I want so much, and what is more—how did you put it?—what is more, I must have it.'"

Mary did see something in the Jew's merry round face that inspired her with trust, and in her childlike belief in the sanctity of an oath she made a third person—a believer too, in a third form of religion—swear not to betray her secret, only marvelling that the administering of the oath, in which she had now had some practice, should be so easy. Even grown-up people will sometimes buy another's dearest secret for a light asseveration. And when she had thus ensured the Israelite's silence, she confided to him that she was charged by Orion to send out a messenger to meet Amru, that he and Paula might be reprieved in time. The goldsmith listened attentively, and even before she had ended he was busying himself with an iron chest built into the wall, and interrupted her to ask! "How much?"

She named the sum that Nilus had suggested, and hardly had she finished her story when the Jew, who kept the trick by which he opened the chest a secret even from his wife, exclaimed:

"Now, go and look out of the window, you wonder among envoys and money-borrowers, and if you see nothing in the courtyard, then fancy to yourself that a man is standing there who looks like old Gamaliel, and who puts his hand on your head and gives you a good kiss. And you may fancy him, too, as saying to himself: 'God in Heaven! if only my little daughter, my Ruth may be such another as little Mary, grandchild of the just Mukaukas!'"

And as he spoke, the vivacious but stout man, who had dropped on his knees, rose panting, left the lid of his strong box open, hurried up to the child, who had been standing at the window all the while, and bending over her from behind pressed a kiss on her curly head, saying with a laugh: "There, little pickpocket, that is my interest. But look out still, till I call you again." He nimbly trotted back on his short little legs, wiping his eyes; took from the strong box a little bag of gold, which contained rather more than the desired sum, locked the chest again, looking at Mary with a mixture of suspicion and hearty approbation; then at last he called her to him. He emptied the money-bag before her, counted out the sum she needed, put the remainder of the coins into his girdle, and handed the bag to the little girl requesting her to count his "advance", back into it, while he, with a cunning smile, quitted the room.

He presently returned and she had finished her task, but she timidly observed: "One gold piece is wanting." At this he clasped his hands over his breast and raised his eyes to Heaven exclaiming: "My God! what a child. There is the solidus, child; and you may take my word for it as a man of experience: whatever you undertake will prosper. You know what you are about; and when you are grown up and a suitor comes he will go to a good market. And now sign your name here. You are not of age, to be sure, and the receipt is worth no more than any other note scribbled with ink—however, it is according to rule."

Mary took the pen, but she first hastily glanced through what Gamaliel had written; the Jew broke out in fresh enthusiasm:

"A girl—a mere child! And she reads, and considers, and makes all sure before she will sign! God bless thee, Child!—And here come the tarts, and you can taste them before... Just Heaven! a mere child, and such important business!"

THE BRIDE OF THE NILE

By Georg Ebers

Volume 12.

CHAPTER XXI.

While Rustem, to whom Mary had entrusted the jeweller's gold, was making his preparations for their journey with all the care of a practised guide, and while Mary was comforting her governess and Mandane, to whom she explained that Rustem's journey was to save Paula's life, a fresh trial was going forward in the Court of Justice.

This time Orion was the accused. He had scarcely begun to study the maps and lists he required for his undertaking when he was bidden to appear before his judges.

The members composing the Court were the same as yesterday. Among the witnesses were Paula and the new bishop, as well as Gamaliel, who had been sent for soon after Mary had left him.

The prosecutor accused the son of the Mukaukas of having made away, in defiance of the patriarch's injunction, with a costly emerald bequeathed to the Church by his father.

Orion had determined to conduct his own defence; he recapitulated

everything that he had told the prelate in self-justification in his father's private room, and then added, that to put a speedy end to this odious affair he was now prepared to restore the stone, and he placed it at the disposal of his judges. He handed Paula's emerald to the Kadi who presented it to the bishop. John, however, did not seem satisfied; he referred to the written testimony of the widow Susannah, who had been present when the deceased Mukaukas had designated all the jewels in the Persian hanging as included in his gift to the Church. This was in Orion's presence so he was still under suspicion of a fraud; and it was difficult to determine whether the fine gem now lying on the table before them were indeed the same to which the Church laid claim.

All this was urged with excessive vehemence and bore the stamp of a hostile purpose.

Obedience and conviction alike prompted the zealous prelate to this demeanor, for the same carrier-pigeon which had brought from the patriarch his appointment to the bishopric required him to insist on Orion's punishment, for he was a thorn in the flesh of the Jacobite church, a tainted sheep who might infect the rest of the flock. If the young man should offer an emerald it was therefore to be closely examined, to see whether it were the original stone or a substitute.

On these grounds the bishop had expressed his doubts, and though they gave rise to an indignant murmur among the judges, the Kadi so far admitted the prelate's suspicions as to explain that last evening a letter had reached him from his uncle at Djidda, Haschim the merchant, in which mention was made of the emerald. His son happened to have weighed that stone, without his knowledge, before he started for Egypt, and Othman had here a note of its exact weight. The Jew Gamaliel had been desired to attend with his balances, and could at once use them to satisfy the bishop.

The jeweller immediately proceeded to do so, and old Horapollo, who was an expert in such matters, went close up to him, and watched him narrowly.

It was in feverish anxiety, and more eagerly than any other bystander, that Paula and Orion kept their eyes fixed on the Jew's hands and lips; after weighing it once, he did so a second time. Old Horapollo himself weighed it a third time, with a keen eye though his hands trembled a little; all three experiments gave the same result: this gem was heavier by a few grains of doura than that which the merchant's son had weighed, and yet the Jew declared that there was no purer, clearer, or finer emerald in the world than this.

Orion breathed more freely, and the question arose among the judges as to whether the young Arab might have failed in precision, or an exchange had in fact been effected. This was difficult to imagine, since in that case the accused would have given himself the loss, and the Church the

advantage.

The bishop, an honest man, now said that the patriarch's suspicions had certainly led him too far in this instance, and after this he spoke no more.

All through this enquiry the Vekeel had kept silence, but the defiant gaze, assured of triumph, which he fixed on Paula and Orion alternately, augured the worst.

When the prosecutor next accused the young man of complicity in the much discussed escape of the nuns Orion again asserted his innocence, pointing out that during the fatal contest between the Arabs and the champions of the sisters, he had been with the Arab governor, as Amru himself could testify. By an act of unparalleled despotism, he had been deprived of his estates and his freedom on mere false suspicion, and he put his trust in the first instance in a just sentence from his judges and, failing that, he threw himself on the protection and satisfaction of his sovereign lord the Khaliff.

As he spoke his eyes flashed flames at the Vekeel; but the negro still preserved his self-control, and this doubled the alarm of those who wished the youth well.

It was clear from all this that Obada felt sure that he had the noose well around his victim's neck, and why he thought so, soon became evident; for Orion had hardly finished his defence when he rose, and with a malicious grin, handed to the Kadi the little tablet given him yesterday by old Horapollo, describing it as a document addressed to Paula and desiring the Kadi to examine it. The heat had effaced much of what had been written on the wax, but most of the words could still be deciphered. The venerable Horapollo had already made them out, and was quite ready to read to the judges all that the accused—who by his own account, was a spotless dove—had written in his innocence and truthfulness for his fair one. He signed to the old man and helped him as he rose with difficulty, but the Kadi begged him to wait, made himself acquainted with the contents of the letter by the help of the interpreter, and when the man had, with much pains, fulfilled his task, he turned, not to Horapollo, but to Obada, and asked whence this document had come.

"From Paula's desk," replied the Vekeel. "My old friend found it there." He pointed to Horapollo, who confirmed his statement by a nod of assent.

The Kadi rose, went up to the girl, whose cheeks were pale with indignation, and asked whether she recognized the tablets as her property; Paula, after convincing herself, replied with a flaming glance of scorn and aversion at Horapollo: "Yes, my lord. It is mine. That base old man has taken it with atrocious meanness from among my things." For an instant her voice failed her; then, turning to the judges, she

exclaimed:

"If there is one among you to whom helplessness and innocence are sacred and malice and cunning odious, I beg him to go to Rufinus' wife, over whose threshold this man has crept like a ferret into a dovecote, for no other end but to tread hospitable kindness in the dust, to rifle her home and make use of whatever might serve his vile purpose—to go, I say, and warn the lonely woman against this treacherous spy and thief."

At this the old man, gasping and inarticulate, raised his withered arm; the Christian judges whispered together, but at cross-purposes, while the Jew fidgeted his round little person on the bench, drumming incessantly with his fingers on his breast, and trying to meet Orion's or Paula's eye and to make her understand that he was the man who would warn Joanna. But a thump from the Vekeel's fist, that came down on his shoulder unawares, reduced him to sitting still; and while he sat rubbing the place with subdued sounds of pain, not daring to reproach the all-powerful negro for his violence, the Kadi gave the tablets to Horapollo and bid him read the letter.

But the terrible accusation cast at him by the hated Patrician maiden, ascribing his removal to Rufinus house to a motive which, in truth, had been far from his, had so enraged and agitated him that his old lungs, at all times feeble, refused their office. This woman had done him a fresh wrong, for he had gone to live with the widow from the kindest impulse; only an accident had thrown this document in his way. And yet it would not fail to be reported to Joanna in the course of the day that he had gone to her house as a spy, and there would be an end to the pleasant life of which he had dreamed—nay, even Philippus might perhaps quarrel with him.

And all, all through this woman.

He could not utter a word but, as he sank back on the seat, a glance so full of hatred, so dark with malignant fury, fell on Paula that she shuddered, and told herself that this man was ready to die himself if only he could drag her down too.

The interpreter now began to read Orion's letter and to translate it for the Arabs; and while he blundered through it, declaring that not a letter could be plainly made out, she recovered her self-control and, before the interpreter had done his task, a gleam as of sunshine lighted up her pure features. Some great, lofty, and rapturous thought must have flashed through her brain, and it was evident that she had seized it and was feeding on it.

Orion, sitting opposite to her, noticed this; still, he did not understand what her beseeching gaze had to say to him, what it asked of him as she pressed her hand on her breast, and looked into his eyes with such urgent entreaty that it went to his very heart.

The interpreter ceased; but what he had read had had a great effect on the judges. The Kadi's benevolent face expressed extreme apprehension, and the contents of the letter were indeed such as to cause it. It ran as follows:

"After waiting for you a long time in vain, I must at last make up my mind to go; and how much I still had to say to you. A written farewell."

Here a few lines were effaced, and then came the fatal and quite legible conclusion:

"How far otherwise I had dreamed of ending this day, which has been for the most part spent in preparations for the flight of the Sisters; and I have found a pleasure in doing all that lay in my power for those kind and innocent, unjustly persecuted nuns. We must hope for the best for them; and for ourselves we must look to-morrow for an undisturbed interview and a parting which may leave us memories on which we can live for a long time. The noble governor Amru is, among the Arabs, such another as he whom we mourn was among the Egyptians . . ." Here the letter ended; not quite three lines were wanting to conclude it.

The Kadi held the tablets for a few minutes in his hand; then looking up again at the assembly, who were waiting in great suspense, he began: "Even if the accused was not one of those who raised their hands in mutiny against our armed troops, it is nevertheless indisputable, after what has just been read, that he not only knew of the escape of the nuns, but aided them to the utmost.—When did you receive this communication, noble maiden?"

At this Paula clasped her hands tightly and replied with a slightly bent head and her eyes fixed on the ground.

"When did I receive it?—Never; for I wrote it myself. The writing is mine."

"Yours?" said the Kadi in amazement. "It is from me to Orion," replied Paula.

"From you to him? How then comes it in your desk?"

"In a very simple way," she explained, still looking down. "After writing the letter to my betrothed I threw it in with the other tablets as soon as I had no need for it; for he himself came, and there was no necessity for his reading what could be better said by word of mouth."

As she spoke a peculiar smile passed over her lips and a loud murmur ran through the room. Orion looked first at the girl and then at the Kadi in growing bewilderment; but the Negro started up, struck his fist on the

table, making it shake, and roared out:

"An atrocious fabrication! Which of you can allow yourself to be taken in by a woman's guile?" Horapollo, who had recovered himself by this time, laughed hoarsely and maliciously; the judges looked at each other much puzzled; but when the Vekeel went on raging the Kadi interrupted him, and desired that Orion might speak, for he had twice tried to make himself heard. Now, with scarlet cheeks and a choking utterance, he said:

"No, Othman—no, no indeed, my lords. Do not believe her. Not she, but I—I wrote the letter that. . . ."

But Paula broke in:

"He? Do you not feel that all he wants is to save me, and so he takes my guilt on himself? It is his generosity, his love for me! Do not, do not believe him! Do not allow yourselves to be deceived by him."

"I? No, it is she, it is she," Orion again asserted; but, before he could say more, Paula declared with a flashing glance that it was a poor sort of love which sacrificed itself out of false generosity. And as, at the same time, she again pressed her hand to her bosom with pathetic entreaty, he was suddenly silent, and casting his eyes up to heaven, he sank back on the prisoners' bench, deeply affected.

Paula joyfully went on:

"He has thought better of it, and given up his crazy attempt to take my guilt on himself. You see, Othman, you all see, worthy men.—Let me atone for what I did to help the poor nuns."

"Have your way!" shrieked the old man; but the Negro cried out:

"A hellish tissue of lies, an unheard-of deception! But in spite of the shield a woman holds before you, I have my foot on your neck, treacherous wretch! Is it credible—I ask you, judges—that a finished letter should be found, after weeks had elapsed, in the hands of the writer and not those of the person to whom it was addressed?"

The Kadi shrugged his shoulders and replied with calm dignity:

"Consider, Obada, that we are condemning this damsel on the evidence of a letter which was found in possession, not of the person to whom it was addressed, but of the writer. This document gave rise to no doubts in your mind. The judge should mete out equal measure to all, Obada."

The aptness of these words, spoken in a dogmatic tone, aroused the approval of the Arabs, and the Jew could not restrain himself from exclaiming: "Capital!" but no sooner had it escaped him than he shrank

as quick as lightning out of the Vekeel's reach; and Obada hardly heard him, for he did not allow himself to be interrupted by the Kadi but went on to explain in wrathful words what a disgrace it was to them, as men and judges, to have dust cast in their eyes by a woman, and allow themselves to be mollified by the arts of a pair of love-stricken fools; and how desirable it must be in the eyes of every Moslem to guard the security of life and bring the severest punishment on the instigator of a sanguinary revolt against the champions of the Khaliff's power.

His eloquent and stormy address was not without effect; still, the Christians, who ascribed every form of evil to the Melchite girl, would have been satisfied with her death and have been ready to forgive the son of the Mukaukas this crime—supposing him to have committed it. And it was after the judges had agreed that it was impossible to decide by whom the letter on the tablet had been written, and there had been a great deal of argument on both sides, that the real discussion began.

It was long before the assembly could agree, and all the while Orion sat now looking as though he had already been condemned to a cruel death, and now exchanging glances with Paula, while he pressed his hand to his heart as though to keep it from bursting. He perfectly understood her, and her magnanimity upheld him. He had indeed persuaded himself to accept her self-sacrifice, but he was fully determined that if she must die he would follow her to the grave. "Non dolet,"—[It does not hurt]—Arria cried to her lover Paetus, as she thrust the knife into her heart that she might die before him; and the words rang in his ear; but he said to himself that Paula would very likely be pardoned, and that then he would be free and have a whole lifetime in which to thank her.

At last—at last. The Kadi announced the verdict: It was impossible to find Orion worthy of death, and equally so to give up all belief in his guilt; the court therefore declared itself inadequate to pronounce a sentence, and left it to be decided by the Khaliff or by his representative in Egypt, Amru. The court only went so far as to rule that the prisoner was to be kept in close confinement, so that he might be within reach of the hand of justice, if the supreme decision should be "guilty!"

When the Kadi said that the matter was to be referred to the Khaliff or his representative, the Vekeel cried out:

"I—I am Omar's vicar!" but a disapproving murmur from the judges, as with one voice, rejected his pretensions, and at a proposal of the Kadi it was resolved that the young man should be protected against any arbitrary attack on the part of the Vekeel by a double guard; for many grave accusations against Obada were already on their way to Medina. The negro quitted the court, mad with rage, and concocting fresh indictments against Paula with the old man.

When Paula returned to her cell old Betta thought that she must have been

pardoned; for how glad, how proud, how full of spirit she entered it!
The worst peril was diverted from her lover, and she and her love had saved him!

She gave herself up for lost; but whatever fate might have in store for her, life lay open before him; he would have time to prove his splendid powers, and that he would do so, as she would have him do it, she felt certain.

She had not ended telling her nurse of the judges' decision, when the warder announced the Kadi. In a minute or two he made his appearance; she expressed her thanks, and he warmly assured her that he regarded the disgrace of being perhaps a beguiled judge as a favor of Fortune; then he turned the conversation on the real object of his visit.

In the letter, he began, which he had received the evening before from his uncle Haschim, there was a great deal about her. She had quite won the old merchant's heart, and the enquiries for her father which he had set on foot....

Here she interrupted him saying: "Oh, my lord; is the wish, the prayer of my life to be granted?"

"Your father, the noble Thomas, before whom even the Moslem bows, has been. . . ." and then Othman went on to tell her that the hero of Damascus had in fact retired to Sinai and had been living there as a hermit. But she must not indulge in premature rejoicing, for the messengers had found him ill, consumed by disease arising from his wounded lungs, and almost at death's door. His days were numbered....

"And I, I am a prisoner," groaned the girl. "Held fast, helpless, robbed of all means of flying to his arms!"

He again bid her be calm, and went on to tell her: in his soft, composed manner, that two days since a Nabathæan had come to him and had asked him, as the chief administrator of justice in Egypt, whether an old foe of the Moslems, a general who had fought in the service of the emperor and the cross against the Khaliff and the crescent, and who was now sick, weary, and broken, might venture on Egyptian soil without fear of being seized by the Arab authorities; and when he, Othman, had learnt that this man was no other than Thomas, the hero of Damascus, he had promised him his life and freedom, promised them gladly, as he felt assured his sovereign the Khaliff would desire.

So this very day her father had reached Fostat, and the Kadi had received him as a guest into his house. Thomas, indeed, stood on the brink of the grave; but he was inspirited and sustained by the hope of seeing his daughter. It had been falsely reported to him that she had perished in the massacre at Abyla and he had already mourned her fate.

It was now his duty to fulfil the wish of a dying man, and he had ordered the prison servants to prepare the room adjoining Paula's cell with furniture which was on the way from his house. The door between the two would be opened for her.

"And I shall see him again, have him again to live with—to close his eyes, perhaps to die with him!" cried Paula; and, seizing the good man's hand, she kissed it gratefully.

The Moslem's eyes filled with tears as he bid her not to thank him, but God the All-merciful; and before the sun went down the head of the doomed daughter was resting on the breast of the weary hero who was so near his end, though his unimpaired mind and tender heart rejoiced in their reunion as fully and deeply as did his beloved and only child. A new and unutterable joy came to Paula in the gloom of her prison; and that same day the warder carried a letter from her to Orion, conveying her father's greetings; and, as he read the fervent blessing, he felt as though an invisible hand had released him for ever from the curse his own father had laid upon him. A wonderful glad sense of peace came over him with power and pleasure in work, and he gave his brains and pen no rest till morning was growing grey.

CHAPTER XXII.

Horapollo made his way home to his new quarters from the court of justice with knit and gloomy brows. As he passed Susannah's garden hedge he saw a knot of people gathered together and pointing out furtively to the handsome residence beyond.

They, like a hundred other groups he had passed, hailed him with words of welcome, thanks, and encouragement and, as he bowed to them slightly, his eyes followed the direction of their terrified gaze and he started; above the great garden gates hung the black tablet; a warning that looked like a mark of disgrace, crying out to the passer-by: "Avoid this threshold! Here rages the destroying pestilence!"

The old man had a horror of everything that might remind him of death, and a cold shiver ran through him. To live so near to a focus of the disease was most alarming and dangerous! How had it invaded this, the healthiest part of the town, which the last raging epidemic had spared?

An officer of the town-council, whom he called to him, told him that two slaves, father and son, whose duty it was to take charge of the baths in the widow's house, had been first attacked, but they had been carried quietly away in the night to the new tents for the sick; to-day, however, the widow herself had fallen ill. To prevent the spread of the

infection, the plot of ground was now guarded on all sides.

"Be strict, be sharp; not a rat must creep out !" cried the old man as he rode on.

He was later than he had been yesterday; supper must be ready. After a short rest he was preparing to join the family at their meal, washing and dressing with the help of his servant, when a lame slave-girl came into his room and placed a tray covered with steaming dishes on the low table by the divan.

What was the meaning of this? Before he could ask, he was informed that for the future the women wished to eat by themselves; he would be served in his own room.

At this a bright patch of red colored his cheeks; after brief reflection he cried to his servant. "My ass!" and added to the girl: "Where is your mistress?"

"In the viridarium with Gamaliel the goldsmith; but they are going to supper immediately."

"And without their guest? I understand!" muttered the old man, taking up his hat and marching past the maid out of the room. In the hall he met Gamaliel, to whom a slave-girl was handing his stick. Horapollo could guess that the Jew had come only to warn the women against him and, without vouchsafing him a glance, he went into the dining-room. There he found Pulchena and Mary kneeling in tears by the side of Joanna, who was weeping too.

He guessed for whom were these lamentations, and prompted by the wish to prove the falsity of the accusation that charged him with having entered the house as a spy, he spoke to the widow. She shuddered as he entered, and she now pointed to the door with an outstretched finger; when he nevertheless stood still and was about to make his defence, she interrupted him loudly and urgently: "No, no, my lord! This house is henceforth closed against you! You yourself have broken every tie that bound us! Do not any longer disturb our peace! Go back to the place you came from."

At this the old man made one more attempt to speak; but the widow rose, and saying: "Come, my children," she hastily withdrew with the girls into the adjoining room, and closed the door.

Horapollo was left alone on the threshold.

Old as he was, in all his life he had never suffered such an insult; but he did not lay it to the score of those who had shown him the door, but to the already long one of the Syrian girl; as he rode back to his own home on his white ass, he stopped several times to speak to the passers-

by.

During the following day or two he heeded not the heat of the weather, nor his own need of rest for his body, and quiet occupation for his mind; morning, noon and night he was riding about the streets stirring up the people, and setting forth in insinuating speeches that they must perish miserably if they rejected the only means of deliverance which he had pointed out to them. He was present at every meeting of the Senate, and his inflammatory eloquence kept the town council on his side, and nullified the efforts of the bishop, while he pressed them to fix the day of the marriage of the Nile with his bride.

He knew the Egyptians and their passion for the intoxicating joys of a splendid ceremonial. This festival: the wedding of the Bride of the Nile to her mighty and unresting spouse, on whom the weal or woe of the land depended, was to be as a flowery oasis in the waste of dearth and desolation. He recalled every detail of the reminiscences of his childhood as to the processions in Honor of Isis, and the festivals dedicated to her and her triad; every record of his own experience and that of former generations; all he had read in books of the great pilgrimages and dramas of heathen Egypt—and he described it all in his speeches, painted it in glowing colors to the Senate and the mob, and counselled the authorities to reproduce it all with unparalleled splendor on the occasion of this marriage.

Every man in whose veins flowed Egyptian blood listened to him attentively, took pleasure in his projects, and was quite ready to do his utmost to enhance the glories of this ceremonial, in which every one was to take part either active or passive. Thousands were ruined, but there was yet enough and to spare for this marriage feast, and the Senate did not hesitate to raise a fresh loan.

"Destruction or Deliverance!" was the watch-word Horapollo had given the Memphites. If everything came to ruin their hoarded talents would be lost too; if, on the other hand, the sacrifice produced its result, if the Nile should bless its children with renewed prosperity, what need the town or country care for a few thousand drachmae more or less?

So the day was fixed!

Not quite two weeks after Paula's trial, on the day of Saint Serapis the miraculous, saving, auspicious ceremonial was to take place. And how glowing was the picture given of the Bride's beauty by the old man, and by the judges and officials who had seen her! How brightly old Horapollo's eyes would flash with hate as he described it! The eyes of love could not be more radiant.

All that this patrician hussy had done to aggrieve him—she should expiate it all, and his triumph meant woe, not only to that one woman, but to the Christian faith which he hated!

Bishop John, however, had not been idle meanwhile. Immediately after his interference with the popular vote he had despatched a letter by a carrier-pigeon to the patriarch in Upper Egypt, and Benjamin's reply would no doubt give him powers for still more vigorous measures. In church, before the Senate, and even in the highways, he and his clergy did their utmost to combat the atrocious project of the authorities and the populace, but the zeal which was stirred up by old Horapollo soon broke into brighter flames than the conservatism, orthodoxy and breadth of view which the ecclesiastics did their utmost to fan. The wind blew with equal force from both quarters, but on one side it blew on smoldering fuel, and on the other on overflowing and flaming stores. Famine and despair had undermined faith, and weakened discipline; even the mightiest weapons of the Church—Cursing and blessing—were powerless. A floating beam was held out to sinking men, and they would no longer wait for the life-boat that was approaching to rescue them, with strong hands at the oars and a trusty pilot at the helm.

Horapollo went no more to the widow's home. A few hours after she had shown him the door, his slaves came and fetched away the various things he had carried there with him. His body servant at the same time brought a large sealed phial and a letter to Dame Joanna, as follows:

"It is wrong to judge a man without hearing his defence. This you have done; but I owe you no grudge. Philippus, on his return, will perhaps pick up the ends of the tie and join again what you have this day cut. I send you a portion of the remedy he left with me at parting to use against the plague in case of need. Its good effects have been tested within the last few days. May the sickness which has fallen on your neighbors, spare you and yours."

Joanna was much pleased with this letter but, when she had read it aloud, little Mary exclaimed:

"If any one should fall ill he shall not take a drop of that mixture! I tell you he only wants to poison us!"

Joanna, however, maintained that the old man was not bad hearted in spite of his unaccountable hatred of Paula; and Pulcheria declared that it must be so, if only because Philip esteemed him so highly. If only he were here, everything would have been different and have turned out well.

Mary remained with the mother and daughter till it grew dark; her chatter always led them back to Paula; and when, in the afternoon, the Nabathæan messenger came to them, and told them from their captive friend that he had brought her father home to her, the women once more began to hope, and Mary could allow herself to give free expression to her fond love before she quitted them, without exciting their suspicions.

At length she said she must go to her lessons with Eudoxia; she had a

hard task before her and they must think of her and wish her good success. She threw her arms first round the widow's neck and then round Pulcheria's; and, as the tears would start to her eyes, she asked them if she were not indeed a silly childish thing—but they were to think of her all the same and never to forget her.

She met the governess in her own room; Eudoxia cut off the fine, soft curls, shedding her first tears over them; and those tears flowed faster as she placed round Mary's neck a little reliquary containing a lock from the sheep-skin of St. John the Baptist, which had belonged to her own mother. It was very dear and sacred to her, and she had never before parted from it, but now it was to protect the child and bring her happiness—great happiness.

Had it brought her such happiness?—Not much, in truth; and yet she believed in the saving and beneficent influence of the relic.

At last Mary stood before her with short hair and in a boy's dress; and what a sweet and lovely little fellow it was; Eudoxia could not weary of looking at him. But Mary was too pretty, too frail for a boy; and Eudoxia advised her to pull her broad travelling hat low over her eyes as soon as she came in sight of men, or else to darken her color.

Gamaliel, who had in fact come to warn Dame Joanna against Horapollo, had kept them informed of the progress of this day's sitting, and Paula's conduct to save her lover had increased Mary's admiration for her. When she should confront Amru she could answer him on every head, so she felt equipped at all points as she stole through the garden with Eudoxia, and down to the quay.

When she had passed the gateway she once more kissed her hand to the house she loved and its inmates; then, pointing with a sigh to the neighboring garden, she said:

"Poor Katharina! she is a prisoner now.—Do you know, Eudoxia, I am still very fond of her, and when I think that she may take the plague, and die but no!—Tell Mother Joanna and Pulcheria to be kind to her. To-morrow, after breakfast, give them my letter; and this evening, if they get anxious, you can only quiet them by saying you know all and that it is of no use to fret about me. You will set it all right and not allow them to grieve."

As they passed a Jacobite chapel that stood open, she begged Eudoxia to wait for her and fell on her knees before the crucifix. In a few minutes she came out again, bright and invigorated and, as they passed the last houses in the town, she exclaimed:

"Is it not wicked, Eudoxia? I am leaving those I love dearly, very dearly, and yet I feel as glad as a bird escaping from its cage. Good Heaven! Only to think of the ride by night through the desert and over

the hills, a swift beast under me, and over my head no ceiling but the blue sky and countless stars! Onward and still onward to a glorious end, left entirely to myself and entrusted with an important task like a grownup person! Is it not splendid? And by God's help—and if I find the governor and succeed in touching his heart.... Now, confess, Eudoxia, can there be a happier girl in the whole wide world?"

They found the Masdakite at Nesptah's inn with some capital dromedaries and the necessary drivers and attendants. The Greek governess gave her pupil much good advice, and added her "maternal" blessing with her whole heart. Rustem lifted the child on to the dromedary, carefully settling her in the saddle, and the little caravan set out. Mary waved repeated adieux to her old governess and newly-found friend, and Eudoxia was still gazing after her long after she had vanished in the darkness.

Then she made her way home, at first weeping silently with bowed head, but afterwards tearless, upright, and with a confident step. She was in unusually good spirits, her heart beat higher than it had done for years; she felt uplifted by the sense of relief from a burthensome duty, and of freedom to act independently on the dictates of her own intelligence. She would assert herself, she would show the others that she had acted rightly; and when at supper-time Mary was missing, and had not returned even at bed-time, there was much to do to soothe and comfort them, and much misconstruction to endure; but she took it all patiently, and it was a consolation to her to bear such annoyance for her little favorite.

Next morning, when she had delivered Mary's letter to Dame Joanna, her love and endurance were put to still severer proof; indeed, the meek-tempered widow allowed herself to be carried away to such an outbreak as hitherto would undoubtedly have led Eudoxia to request her dismissal, with sharp recrimination; but she took it all calmly.

It was not till noon-day—when the bishop made his appearance to carry the child off to the convent, and was highly wrathful at Mary's disappearance, threatening the widow, and declaring that he would search the whole country through for the little girl and find her at last, that Eudoxia felt that the moment of her triumph had come. She quietly allowed the bishop to depart, and then only did she send her last and best shaft at Joanna by informing her that she had in fact encouraged the child in her exploit on purpose to save her from the cloister. Her newly-found motherly feeling made her eloquent, and with a result that she had almost ceased to hope for: the warm-hearted little woman, who had hurt her with such cruel words, threw her arms round Eudoxia's tall, meagre figure, put up her face to kiss her, called her a brave, clever girl, and begged her forgiveness for all she had said and done the day before.

So, when the Greek went to bed, she felt as if her life had turned backwards and she had grown more like the happy young creature she had once been with her sisters in her parents' house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Paula now understood what hung over her. It is Bishop John who had told her, as gently as he could, and with every assurance that he still clung to the hope that he could stop the hideous heathen abomination; but even without this she would certainly have known what was impending, for large crowds of people gathered every day under the prisonwalls, and loud cries reached her, demanding to see the "Bride of the Nile."

Now and again shouts of "Hail!" came up to her; but when the demented creatures had shrieked themselves hoarse, and in vain, they would abuse her vilely. The cry for the "Bride" never ceased from morning till night, and the head warder of the prison was glad that the bishop had relieved him of the task of explaining to Paula the meaning of the fateful word, whose significance she had repeatedly asked him.

At first this fresh and terrible peril had startled and shaken her; but she did her utmost to cling to the hope held out by the bishop so as to appear calm, and as far as possible cheerful, in her sick father's presence. And in this she succeeded so long as it was day; but at night she was a prey to agonizing terrors. Then, in fancy she saw herself surrounded by a raging mob, dragged to the river and cast into a watery grave before a thousand eyes. Then, prayer was of no avail, nor any resolve or effort; not the tender messages that constantly reached her from Orion, nor the songs he would sing for her in the brief moments of leisure he allowed himself; not the bishop's words of comfort, nor the visits of those she loved. The warder would admit her friends as often as he was able; and among those who found their way to her cell were the Senator Justinus and his wife.

By great good fortune Martina had quitted Susannah's house as soon as the two slaves had fallen ill and she had heard that the physician pronounced them to be sickening of the plague. She had returned to her rooms in the inn kept by Sostratus, but her nephew Narses had remained with Katharina and her mother. He was indeed intending to follow her with Heliodora; but, by the time they were ready to set out, Susannah, too, had fallen a victim to the pestilence and the authorities had forbidden all egress from her house.

Heliodora might have succeeded in leaving in time, alone; but she would not abandon her unfortunate brother-in-law; for he never felt easy but in her presence, would allow no one else to wait on him, and would take neither food nor drink unless they were offered him by her. Besides this, the cavalry officer, once so stalwart, had in his weakness become pathetically like her lost husband, and she knew that Narses had been the

first to love her, and that it was only for his brother's sake that he had concealed his passion. Her motherly instincts found an outlet in the care of the half-crushed, but not hopelessly lost man; and the desire to drag him back to life kept her busy day and night, and made her regard everything else as trivial and of secondary importance. Her life had once more found a purpose; her efforts were for an attainable end, and she devoted herself to him body and soul.

Her uncle had told her that Orion was bound to Paula by a supreme passion.—This had been a painful blow, but the Syrian girl had impressed her; she looked up to her, and it soothed her wounded self-esteem to reflect that she had lost her lover to no inferior woman. Though her longing for him still surged up in many a silent hour, she felt it an injustice, a stint of love to her invalid charge.

So far as Katharina was concerned, next to her mother, Heliadora was the object of her deepest anxiety. The least word of complaint from either terrified her; and if Susannah sank on the divan exhausted by the heat, or Heliadora had a headache after watching through the night by the sick man, the girl would turn pale, her heart would beat painfully, she would paint them in fancy stricken by the plague, with burning brows and the horrible, fatal spots on their foreheads and cheeks; and whenever these alarms pressed on the young criminal she felt the ominous weight on the top of her head where the dead bishop's hand had rested.

The senator's wife had so completely changed in her demeanor to the water-wagtail, since Paula's imprisonment, that to Katharina she was as a living reproach, so she had no regret at seeing the worthy pair depart. But scarcely had they left when misfortune took their place as an unbidden guest.

The slave whose duty it was to heat the baths had reserved a portion of the infected garments that had been given to him to burn; his son had helped him, and Katharina's nurse, the mother of her foster-brother Anubis, had come into direct contact with her immediately after her return from the soothsayer's and from the bishop's. All three had caught the disease. They had all three been removed to the hospital tents—the slave and the nurse as corpses.

But had the fearful infection been taken away with them? If not, it would be the turn next of those whom she herself had pushed into the arms of the fell monster: First Heliadora, and then her mother! And she, rightfully, ought to have fallen before them; and if the pestilence should seize her and death should drag her down into the grave it would be showing her mercy. She was still so young, and yet she hated life. It had nothing in store for her but humiliation and disappointment, arrows which, sent from the prison, pierced her to the heart, and a torturing fear which never gave her any peace, day or night.

When the physician came to transport the sick to the hospital in the

desert, he mentioned incidentally that the judges had condemned Paula to death, and that the populace and senate, in spite of the new bishop's prohibition, had determined to cast her into the river in accordance with an ancient custom. Orion's fate was not to be decided till the following day; but it would hardly be to his advantage in the eyes of his Jacobite judges, that his betrothed was this Syrian Melchite.

At this Katharina was forced to support herself against her mother's arm-chair to save herself from sinking on her knees; with tingling cheeks she questioned the leech till he lost all patience and turned away much annoyed at such excessive feminine curiosity.

Yes! "The other" was his betrothed before all the world; but only to die! The blood rushed through her veins in a hot tide at the thought; she could have laughed aloud and fallen on the neck of every one she met. What she felt was hideous; malignant spite possessed her; but it gave her rapture—delicious rapture—a flower of hell, but with splendid petals and intoxicating perfume. But its splendor dazzled her and its fragrance presently sickened her. Sheer horror of herself came over her, and yet she could have shouted with joy each time that the thought flashed through her brain: "The other must die!"

Her mother feared that her daughter, too, was about to fall ill, her eyes glowed so strangely and she was so restless and nervously excitable.

Since Heliadora had taken the overwhelming news of Orion's betrothal to Paula with astonishing though sorrowful calmness, to the hot-blooded girl she was nothing, nobody, utterly unworthy of her notice.

To spite her she had committed a crime as like murder as one snake is like another, and imperilled her own mother's life! It was enough to drive her to despair, to make her scourge herself with rods!

When Susannah kissed her at parting for the night she complained of a slight sore throat and of her lips, which she fancied must be swollen. Katharina detained her, questioned her with a trembling voice, put the lamp close to her, and held her breath while she examined her face, her neck, and her arms for the dreadful spots. But none were to be seen and her mother laughed at her terrors, called her a dutiful, anxious child, and warned her not to be too full of fears, as they were supposed to invite the disease.

All night the girl could not sleep. Her malicious triumph was past; nothing but painful thoughts and grewsome images haunted her while awake, and pursued her more persistently when she dozed. By dawn of day her alarm for her mother was so great that she sprang out of bed and went to her room; Susannah was sleeping so soundly that she did not even hear her. Much relieved Katharina crept back to bed; but in the morning the worst had happened: Susannah could no longer leave her bed; she was feverish, and on her lips, the very lips which had kissed her child's

infected hair, there were indeed, between her nose and mouth, the first terrible, unmistakable spots.

The leech came and confirmed the fact.—The house was closed and barred.

The physician and Susannah, who was still in full possession of her senses, wished and insisted that Katharina should withdraw to the gardener's house, but she refused with defiant obstinacy, saying she would rather die with her mother than leave her.

Quite beside herself she threw herself on the sick woman, and kissed the spots on her mouth to divert the poison into her own blood; but the physician angrily pulled her away, and the sufferer reproved her with tears in her eyes which spoke her fervent affection.

She was now allowed to nurse her mother. Two nuns came to her assistance, and said, not only to the rich widow but behind her back, that they had never seen so devoted and loving a daughter. Even Bishop John, who did not shrink from entering the houses of the sick to give them spiritual consolation, praised Katharina's conduct; and he, who had hitherto regarded the water-wagtail as no more than a bright, restless child, treated her with respect, talked to her as to a grown-up person, and answered her questions—which for the most part referred to Paula—gravely and fully.

The prelate, who was full of admiration for Thomas' daughter, told Katharina how, to save her lover, she had taken a crime upon herself which deprived her of every claim to mercy. The Syrian girl was only a Melchite, but to take another's guilt, out of love, was treading indeed in the footsteps of Christ, if ever anything was. At this Katharina shrugged her shoulders, as though to say: "Do you think so much of that? Could not I gladly have done the same?"

The priest saw this and admonished her kindly to be on her guard against spiritual pride, though she had indeed earned the right to believe herself capable of the sternest devotion, and did not cease to set an example of filial and Christian love.

He departed; and Katharina, to whom every word in praise of her behavior to her mother, whom her sin had brought to her death-bed, was a torturing mockery, felt that she had deceived one more worthy soul. She did not, to be sure, deserve to be charged with spiritual pride; for in this silent chamber, where death stood on the threshold, she thought over all the horrible things she had done, and told herself repeatedly that she was the chief and most vile of sinners.

Many times she felt impelled to confide in another soul, to invite a pitying eye to behold and share her inward suffering.

To the bishop above all, the most venerable priest she knew, she would

most readily have confessed everything and have submitted to any penance, however severe, at his hands, but shame held her back; and even more did another more urgent consideration. The prelate, she knew, would demand of her that she should forsake her old life, root out from her soul the old feelings and desires, and begin a new existence; but for this the time had not yet come: her love was still an indispensable condition of life, and her hatred was even more dear to her. When Paula's terrible doom should indeed have overtaken her, and Katharina, her heart full of those old feelings, had gloated over it; when she should have been able to prove to Orion that her love was no less great and strong and self-sacrificing than that of Thomas' daughter; when she should have compelled him—as she would and must—to acknowledge that he had cruelly misprized her and sinned against her; then, and not till then, would she make peace with herself, with the Church, and with her Saviour. Nay, if need be, she would take the veil and mourn away the rest of her young life as a penitent, in a convent or a solitary rock-cell. But now—when Paula, his betrothed, had done this great thing for him—to perish now, with her love unseen, unknown, uncared for, perhaps forgotten by him, to retire into herself and vanish from his ken—that was too much for human nature! Sooner would she be lost forever; body and soul in everlasting perdition, a prey to Satan and hell—in which she believed as firmly as in her own existence.

So she went on nursing her mother, saw the red spots spread over the sick woman's whole body—watched the fever that increased from day to day, from hour to hour; listened with a mixture of horror and gladness—at which she herself shuddered, though she fed her heart on it—to the reports of the preparations for the sacrifice of the Bride of the Nile, and to all the bishop could tell her of Paula, and her dying father, and Orion. She trembled for little Mary, who had disappeared from the neighboring garden, till she heard that the child had fled to escape the cloister; each day she learnt that Heliodora, who had moved to the gardener's house with her invalid, had as yet escaped the pestilence; while in the prayers, which even now she never failed to offer up morning and evening, she implored the Almighty and her patron saints to rescue the young widow, to save her from causing the death of her own mother, and to forgive her for having indirectly caused that of worthy old Rufinus, who had always been so good to her, and of so many innocent creatures by her treachery.

Thus the terrible days and nights of anguish passed by; and the captives whom the girl's sins had brought to prison were happier than she, in spite of the doom that threatened them.

The fate of his betrothed tortured Orion more than a hundred aching wounds. Paula's terrible end was fast approaching, and his brain burned at the mere thought. Now, as he was told by the warder, by the bishop, and by Justinus, the day after to-morrow was fixed for the bridal of his betrothed. In two days the bride, decked by base and mocking hands for an atrocious and accursed farce, would be wreathed and wedded, not to

him, the bridegroom whom she loved, but to the Nile—the insensible, death-dealing element. He rushed up and down his cell like a madman, and tore his lute-strings when he tried to soothe his soul with music; but then a calm, well-intentioned voice would come from the adjoining room, exhorting him not to lose hope, to trust in God, not to forget his duty and the task before him. And Orion would control himself resolutely, pull himself together, and throw himself into his work again.

Day and night were alike to him. The senator had provided him with a lamp and oil. When he was wearied out, he allowed himself no longer sleep on his hard couch than human nature imperatively demanded; and as soon as he had shaken it off he again became absorbed in maps and lists, plied his pen, thought, sketched, calculated, and reflected. Then, if a doubt arose in his mind or he could not trust his own memory and judgment, he knocked at the wall, and his shrewd and experienced friend was at all times ready to help him to the best of his knowledge and opinion. The senator went to Arsinoe for him, to gain information as to the seaboard from the archives preserved there; and so the work went forward, approaching its end, strengthening and raising his sinking spirit, bringing him the pleasures of success, and enabling him not unfrequently to forget for hours that which otherwise might have brought the bravest to despair.

The warder, the senator or his worthy wife, Dame Joanna or Eudoxia—who twice had the pleasure of accompanying her—each time they visited him had some message or note to carry to Paula, telling her how far his work had progressed; and to her it was a consolation and heartfelt joy to be able to follow him in his labors. And many a token of his love, esteem, and admiration gave her courage, when even her brave heart began to quail.

Ah! It was not alone her terror of a horrible death that tortured her soul. Her father, whom she considered it her greatest joy in life to have found again, was fading beyond all hope under her loving hands. His poor wounded lungs refused its service. It was with great difficulty that he could swallow a few drops of wine and mouthfuls of food; and in these last days his clear mind had lain as it were under a shroud—perhaps it was happier so, as she told herself and as her friends said to comfort her.

He, too, had heard the cries of: "Hail to the Bride of the Nile!"

"Bring out the Bride!"

"Away with the Bride of the Nile!" Though he had no suspicion of their meaning, they had haunted his thoughts incessantly during the last few days; and the terrible, strange words had seemed to charm his fancy, for to Paula's distress he would murmur them to himself tenderly or thoughtfully as the case might be.

Many times the idea occurred to her that she might put an end to her life before the worst should befall, before she became a spectacle for a whole nation, to be jeered at and made a delightful and exciting show to rouse their cruelty or their compassion. But dared she do it? Dared she defy the Most High, the Lord in whom she put her trust, into whose hand she commended herself in a thousand dumb but fervent prayers.

No. To the very last she would trust and hope. And wonderful to say! Each time she had reached the very limits of her powers of endurance, feeling she could certainly bear no more and must succumb, something came to her to revive her faith or her courage: a message would be brought her from Orion, or Dame Joanna or Pulcheria came to see her; the bishop sought an interview, or her father's mind rallied and he could speak to her in beautiful and stimulating words. Often the warder would announce the senator and his wife, and their vigorous and healthy minds always hit on the very thing she needed. Martina, particularly, with her subtle motherly instinct, always understood whatever was agitating her; and once she showed her a letter from Heliadora, in which she spoke of the calmness she had won through nursing their dear invalid, and said how thankful she was to see the reward of her care and toil. Narses was already quite another man, and she could know no higher task than that of reconciling the hapless man to life, nay, of making it dear to him again. She no longer thought of Orion but as she might of a beautiful song she once had heard in a delightful hour.

Thus time passed, even for the imprisoned maiden, till only two nights remained before St. Serapis' day when the fearful marriage was to be solemnized.

It was evening when the bishop came to visit Paula. He regarded it as his duty to tell her that the execution of her sentence was fixed for the day after to-morrow. He should hope and believe till the last, but his own power over the misguided mob was gone from him. In any case, and if the worst should befall, he would be at her side to protect her by the dignity of his office. He had come now, so as to give her time to prepare her self in every respect. The care of her noble father till his last hour on earth he would take upon himself as a dear and sacred duty.

Though she had believed herself surely prepared long since for the worst, this news fell on her like a thunderbolt. What lay before her seemed so monstrous, so unexampled, that it was impossible that she ever could look forward to it firmly and calmly.

For a long time she could not help clinging desperately to her faithful Betta, and it was only by degrees that she so far recovered herself as to be able to speak to the bishop, and thank him. He, however, could only lament his inability to earn her fullest gratitude, for the patriarch's reply to his complaint of those who promised rescue to the people by the instrumentality of a heathen abomination—a document on which he had founded his highest hopes for her—had had a different result from that

which he had expected. The patriarch, to be sure, condemned the abominable sacrifice, but he did it in a way which lacked the force necessary to terrify and discourage the misled mob. However, he would try what effect it might have on the people, and a number of scribes were at work to make copies of it in the course of the night. These would be sent to the Senators next morning, posted up in the market-place and public buildings, and distributed to the people; but he feared all this would have no effect.

"Then help me to prepare for death," said Paula gloomily. "You are not a priest of my confession, but no church has a more worthy minister. If you can absolve me in the name of your Redeemer, mine will pardon me. We look at Him, it is true, with different eyes, but He is the Saviour of us both, nevertheless." A contradictory reply struggled for utterance in the strict Jacobite's mind, but at such a moment he felt he must repress it; he only answered:

"Speak, daughter, I am listening."

And she poured forth all her soul, as though he had been a priest of her own creed, and his eyes grew moist as he heard this confession of a pure and loving heart, yearning for all that was highest and best. He promised her the mercy of the Redeemer, and when he had ended with "Amen," and blessed her, he looked down at the ground for some minutes and presently said, "Follow me, Child."

"Whither?" she asked in surprise; for she thought that her last hour had already come, and that he was about to lead her away to the place of execution, or to her watery, ever-flowing tomb; but he smiled as he replied: "No, child. To-day I have only the pleasing duty of blessing your betrothal before God; if only you will promise not to estrange your husband from the faith of his fathers—for what will not a man sacrifice to win the love of a woman.—You promise? Then I will take you to your Orion."

He rapped on the door of the cell, and when the warder had opened it he whispered his orders; Paula followed him silently and with blushing cheeks, and in a few minutes she was clasped to her lover's breast while, for the first time—and perhaps the last—their lips met in a kiss.

The prelate gave them a few minutes together; when he had blessed them both and solemnized their betrothal, he led her back to her cell. However, she had hardly time to thank him out of the fulness of her overflowing heart, when a town-watchman came to fetch him to see Susannah; her last hour was at hand, if not already past. John at once went with the messenger, and Paula drew a deep breath as she saw him depart. Then she threw herself on to her nurse's shoulders, crying:

"Now, come what may! Nothing can divide us; not even death!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

The bishop was too late. He found the widow Susannah a corpse; standing at the head of the bed was little Katharina, as pale as death, speechless, tearless, utterly annihilated. He kindly tried to cheer her, and to speak words of comfort; but she pushed him away, tore herself from him, and before he could stop her, she had fled out of the room.

Poor child! He had seen many a loving daughter mourning for her mother, but never such grief as this. Here, thought he, were two human souls all in all to each other, and hence this overwhelming sorrow.

Katharina had escaped to her own room, had thrown herself on the couch—cowering so close that no one entering the room would have taken the undistinguishable heap for a human being, a grown up, passionately suffering girl.

It was very hot, and yet a cold shiver ran through her slender frame. Was she now attacked by the pestilence? No; it would be too merciful of Fate to take such pity on her woes.

The mother was dead, dragged to the grave by her own daughter. The disease had first shown itself on her lips; and how many times had the physician expressed his surprise at the plague having broken out in this healthy quarter of the town, and in a house kept so scrupulously clean. She knew at whose bidding the avenging angel had entered there, and whose criminal guile had trifled with him. The words "murdered your mother" haunted her, and she remembered the law of the ancients which refused to prescribe a punishment for the killing of parents, because they considered such a monstrous deed impossible.

A scornful smile curled her lip. Laws! Principles! Was there one that she had not defied? She had contemned God, meddled with magic, borne false witness, committed murder—and as to the one law with promise, which, if Philippus was right, was exactly the same in the code of her forefathers as on the tables of Moses, how had she kept that? Her own mother was no more, and by her act!

All through this frightful retrospect she had never ceased to shiver and, as this was becoming unendurable, she took to walking up and down and seeking excuses for her sinful doings: It was not her mother, but Heliodora whom she had wished to kill; why had malicious Fate....?

Here she was interrupted, for the young widow, who had heard the sad news, sought her out to comfort her and offer her services. She spoke to the girl with real affection; but her sweet, low tones reminded Katharina of that evening after the old bishop's death; and when Heliodora put out her arm to draw her to her, she shrank from her,

begging her in a dry, hoarse voice, not to touch her for her clothes were infected. She wanted no comfort; all she asked was to be left alone—quite alone—nothing more. The words were hard and unkind, and as the door closed on the young woman Katharina's eyes glared after her.

Why had this doom passed over Heliadora's head and demanded the sacrifice of one whose loss she could never cease to mourn?

This brought her mother vividly to her mind. She flew back to her death-bed and fell on her knees—but even there she could not bear to stay long, so she wandered into the garden and visited every spot where she and her mother had been together. But there were such strange crackings in the shrubs, and the trees and bushes cast such uncanny shadows that she hailed daybreak as a deliverance.

She was on her way back to the house when her foster-brother Anubis came limping to meet her. Poor fellow! She had made a cripple of him, too, and his mother had died through her fault.

The lad spoke to her, giving expression to his sympathy, and she accepted it; but she said such strange things, and answered him so utterly at random, that he began to fear that grief had turned her brain. She went on to ask him point-blank how much money she now had, and as he happened to know approximately, he could tell her; she clasped her hands, for how could any one human being who was not a king possess such enormous wealth! Finally she enquired whether he knew how a will should be drawn up, and that, too, he answered affirmatively.

She made him describe it all, and then he added that the signature must be made valid by those of two witnesses; but she, he added, was too young to be thinking of making her will.

"Why?" said she. "Is Paula much older than I am?"

"And the day after to-morrow," the boy went on, "she is to be cast into the Nile. All the people call her the Bride of the Nile."

At this that hideous, malignant smile again curled her lips, but she hastily suppressed it and walked straight on into the house. At the door he timidly asked her whether he might once more look on his mistress; but she was obliged to forbid it for fear of infection. However, he proudly replied: "What you do not fear, has no terrors for me," and he followed her to the side of the bed where the corpse now lay washed and in fine array; and when he saw Katharina kiss the dead woman's hand he, too, as soon as she looked away, pressed his lips on the place hers had touched. Then he sat down by the bed and remained there till she sent him away.

Before noon the bishop arrived to perform the last rites. He found the body surrounded by beautiful flowers. Katharina had been out in the garden again and had cut all the rarest and finest; and though she had

allowed the gardener to carry the basket for her, she would not have him help her in gathering them. The feeling that she was doing something for her mother had been a comfort to her; still, by day everything about her seemed even more intolerable than by night. Everything looked so large, so coarse, so insistent, so menacing, and reminded her at every step of some injustice or some deed of which she was ashamed. Every eye, she fancied, must see through her; and now and then it seemed as though the pillars of the great banqueting-hall, where her mother still lay, were tottering, and the ceiling about to fall in and crush her.

She answered the bishop's questions absently and often quite at random, and the old man supposed that she was stunned by her great sorrow; so to give her thoughts a new direction he began telling her about Paula, and believing that Katharina was fond of her, he confided to her that he had taken Paula, the day before, to Orion's cell, and consecrated their betrothal.

At this her face was convulsed in a manner that alarmed the bishop; a fearful tumult raged in her soul, her bosom rose and fell spasmodically, and all she could utter was the question: "But they will sacrifice her all the same?"

The bishop thought he understood. She was horror stricken by the idea of the sudden, cruel end that hung over the young bride, and he replied sadly; "I shall not be able to restrain the wretches; still, no means shall remain untried. The patriarch's rescript, condemning this mad crime, shall be made public to-day, and I will read and expound it at the Curia, and try to give it keener emphasis.—Would you like to read it?"

As she eagerly assented, the prelate signed to the acolyte who had waited on him with the holy vessels, and he produced from a packet a written sheet which he handed to Katharina. As soon as she was alone she read the patriarch's epistle; at first superficially, then more carefully, and at last in deep attention and growing interest, stirred by it to strange thoughts, till at length her eyes flashed and her breath came fast, as though this paper referred to herself, and could seal her fate for life.

When the bearers came in to fetch away the body she was still sitting there, gazing as if spell-bound at the papyrus; but she sprang up, shook herself, and then bid farewell to the cold rigid form of the mother on whose warm heart she had so often rested, and to whom she had been the dearest thing on earth—and even then the solace of tears was denied her.

She no longer suffered the deep remorse that had tormented her; for she felt now that her intercourse with her last mother had not been put an end to by death; that after a short parting they would meet again—soon perhaps, perhaps even to-morrow—meet for a fulness of speech, an outpouring of the heart, a revelation of all the past more open and unreserved than could ever be between mortal beings, even between mother and daughter. And when she who was sleeping there, blind, deaf, and

senseless, should awake again, up there, with eyes clearer than those of men below, and the ears and senses of a spiritual being to see and hear and judge all she had known and done, all she had felt and made others feel—then, she told herself, her mother might perhaps blame her and punish her more than she had ever done on earth, but she would also clasp her more closely to her heart and comfort her more earnestly.

She whispered gently in her ear as if she were still alive: "Wait awhile, only wait: I shall come soon and tell you everything!"

And then she kissed her so passionately and recklessly that the nuns were shocked and dragged her away, ordering the bearers to close the coffin. They obeyed, and when the wooden lid fell over the sleeping form, shutting it in with a slam, and hiding it from the girl's sight, the barrier gave way which had hitherto restrained her tears and she began to weep bitterly; now, too, the feeling that she had indeed lost her mother took complete possession of her—the sense of being an orphan and alone, quite alone in the wide world.

She saw and heard no more of what took place round the beloved dead; for when she took her hands from her face streaming with tears, the house of the rich widow no longer sheltered its mistress; her remains had been borne away to the nearest mortuary. The law forbade its being any longer kept within doors, but did not allow of its being buried till night fell. The child might not follow her own mother to the cemetery.

With a drooping head Katharina withdrew to her room and there stood looking out into the garden. It all was hers now; she was mistress of it all and of much besides, as free and unfettered to command as hitherto she had been over the birds, her little dog, or the jewels that lay on her toilet-table. She could make hundreds happy with a word, a wave of the hand—but not herself. She had never felt so grown-up, independent, womanly, nay powerful, and at the same time so unutterably wretched and helpless as she felt in this hour.

What did she care for all these vanities? They could not suffice to check one sigh of disappointed yearning.

She had parted from her mother with a promise; the fervent longing that filled her soul was never still; and now the patriarch's letter had given her a hint as to how she might fulfil the one and silence the other. She hastily took the document up again, and read it through once more.

Its instructions were precise to stop the proceedings of the misguided Memphites with stern promptitude. It explained that the death of the Christ Jesus, who shed His blood to redeem the world, had satisfied the need for a human victim. Throughout the wide realms which the Cross overshadowed with blessing human sacrifice must therefore be accounted a useless and accursed abomination. It went on to point out how the heathen had devised their gods in the image of weak, sinful, earthly

beings, and chosen victims in accordance with this idea. "But our God," it said, "is as high above men as the Spirit is above the flesh, and the sacrifice He demands is not of the flesh, but of the spirit. Will He not turn away in wrath and sorrow from the blinded Christians of Memphis who, in their straits, feel and are about to act like the cruel and foolish heathen? They take for their victim a heretic and a stranger, deeming that that will diminish the abomination in the eyes of the Lord; but it moves Him to loathing all the same, for no human blood may stain the pure and sacred altars of our mild faith, which gives life and not death.

"Ask your blind and misguided flock, my brother: Can the Father of Love feel joy at the sight of one of His children, even an erring one, suffocated in the waters to the honor of the Most High, while struggling, and cursing her executioners?

"If, indeed, there were a pure maiden, possessed with the blessed intoxication of the love of God, who was ready to follow the example of Him who redeemed man by His death, to fling herself into the waters while she cried to Heaven with her dying breath: 'Take me and my innocence as an offering, O Lord! Release my people from their extremity!'—that would be a victim indeed; and perchance, the Lord might say: 'I will accept it; but the will alone is enough. No child of mine may cast away the life that I have lent her as the most sacred and precious of gifts.'"

The letter ended with pious exhortations to the community.

Then a maiden who should voluntarily sacrifice herself in the river to save the people in their need would be a victim pleasing in the sight of the Lord—so said the Man of God, through whose mouth the Most High spoke. And this opinion, this hint, was to Katharina like a distaff from which she spun a lengthening thread to warp to the loom and weave from it a tangible tissue.

She would be the maiden whom the patriarch had imagined—the real, true Bride of the Nile, inspired to cast off her young life to save her people in their need. In this there was expiation such as Heaven might accept; this would release her from the burthen of life that weighed upon her, and would reunite her to her mother; in this way she could show her lover and the bishop and all the world the immensity of her self-sacrifice, which was in nothing behind that of "the other"—the much-vaunted daughter of Thomas! She would do the great deed before Paula's eyes, in sight of all the people. But Orion must know whose image she bore in her heart and for whose sake she made that leap from blooming life into a watery grave.

Oh! it was wonderful, splendid! Would she not thus compel him inevitably to remember her whenever he should think of Paula? Yes, she would force him to allow her image to dwell in his soul, inseparable from that "other;" and would not such an unparalleled act add such height to her figure, that it would be equal to that of her Syrian rival in the

estimation of all men—even in his?

She now began to long for the supreme moment. Her vain little heart laughed in anticipation of the delight of being seen, praised and admired by all. Tomorrow she, her little self, would tower above all the world; and the more she felt the oppressive heat of the scorching day, the more delicious it seemed to look forward to finding rest from the torments of life in the cool element.

She saw no difficulties in the way of her achievement; she was mistress now, and her slaves and servants must obey her orders. At the same time she remembered, too, to protect her large possessions from falling into the hands of relations for whom she did not care; with a firm hand she drew up a will in which she bequeathed part of her fortune to her uncle Chrysippus, small portions to her foster-brother Anubis, and to Rufinus' widow, to whom she owed reparation for great wrong; then the larger half, and she owned many millions, she bequeathed to her dear friend Orion, whom she freely forgave, and who, she hoped, would see that even in the little "water-wagtail" there had been room for some greatness. She begged him also to take her house, since she had not been altogether guiltless of the destruction of the home of his fathers.

The condition she attached to this bequest showed the same keen, alert spirit that had guided her through life.

She knew that the patriarch's indignation might be fatal to the young man, so to serve as a mediator, and at the same time to ensure for herself the prayers of the Church, which she desired, she enjoined Orion to bestow the greater part of his inheritance on the patriarch for the Church and for benevolent purposes. But not at once, not for ten years, and in instalments of which Orion himself was to determine the proportion. In the event of his dying within the next three years all his claims were to be transferred to her uncle Chrysippus. She added a request to the Church, to which she belonged with her whole heart, that every year on her saint's day and her mother's they should be prayed for in every church in the land. A chapel was to be erected on the scene of her self-immolation, and if the patriarch thought her worthy of the honor, it was to bear the name of the Chapel of Susannah and Katharina.

She gave all her slaves their freedom and devised legacies to all the officials of her household.

As she sat for long hours of serious meditation, drawing up this last will, she smiled frequently with satisfaction. Then she copied it out fair, and finally called the physician and all the free servants in the house to witness her signature.

Though no one had suspected the "water-wagtail" of such forethought, it was no matter of surprise that the young heiress, shut up in the plague-stricken house, should dispose of her estates, and before night-fall the

physician brought Alexander, the chief of the Senate, to the garden gate by her desire, and there they spoke to each other without opening it. He was an old friend of her father's, and since the death of the Mukaukas, had been her guardian; he now agreed to stand as her Kyrios, and as such he ratified her will and the signature, though she would not allow him to read the document.

Finally she went to the slaves quarters, from whence a few more sufferers had been removed to the Necropolis, and desired her boatman to get the holiday barge in readiness early in the morning, as she purposed seeing the ceremonial from the river. She gave particular orders to the gardener as to how it was to be decorated, and what flowers he was to cut for her personal adornment.

She went to bed far less excited than she had been the night before, and before she had ended her evening prayer, slumber overtook her weary brain.

When she awoke at sunrise, the large and splendid boat, which her father had had built at great cost in Alexandria, was manned and ready to put out. No one interfered to prevent her embarking with Anubis and a few female servants, for all the guards who had surrounded the house till yesterday had been withdrawn to do duty at the great ceremonial of the marriage and sacrifice, since a popular tumult was not unlikely to arise.

CHAPTER XXV.

A great number of persons had collected during the night on the quay near Nesptah's inn. The crowd was increasing every minute, and in spite of the intense heat, not a Memphite could bear to stop within doors, Men, women and children were flocking to the scene of the festival; they came in thousands from the neighboring towns, hamlets and villages, to witness the unprecedented sacrifice which was to put an end to the misery of the land. Who had ever heard of such a marriage? What a privilege, what a happiness, to be so fortunate as to see it!

The senate had not been idle and had done all in their power to surround it with magnificence and to enable as many as possible to enjoy the pageant, which had been planned with a lavish hand and liberal munificence.

Round the cove by Nesptah's inn a semi-circular wooden stand had been constructed, on which thousands found seats or standing-room. Stalls furnished with hangings were erected in the middle of the tribune for the authorities and their families as well as for the leading Arab officials, and arm-chairs were placed in them for the Vekeel, for the Kadi, for

the head of the senate, for old Horapollo and also for the Christian priesthood, though it was well known that they would not be present at the ceremony.

The lower classes, who could not afford to pay for admission to these seats, had established themselves on the banks of the river; wandering dealers had followed them, and wherever the crowd was densest they had displayed their wares—light refreshments or solid food—on two-wheeled trucks, or on little carpets spread on the ground. In the tribune itself the cries of the water-sellers were incessant as they offered filtered Nile water and fruit syrups for sale.

The parched tops of the palms, where turtle doves, lapwings and sparrow-hawks were wont to perch, were crowded with the vagabond boys of the town, who whiled away the time by pulling the withered and diseased dates from the great clumps and flinging them down on the bystanders below, till the guard took aim at them with their arrows and stopped the game.

The centre of attraction to all eyes was a wooden platform or pontoon, built far out into the stream; from thence the bride was to be flung into the watery embrace of the expectant bridegroom. Here the masters of the ceremonies had put forth their best efforts, and it was magnificently decorated with hangings and handkerchiefs, palm-leaves and flags; with heavy garlands of tamarisk and willow, mingled with bright blossoms of the lotos and mallow, lilies and roses; with devices emblematic of the province, and other gilt ornaments. Only the furthest end of it was unadorned and without even a railing, that there might be nothing to intercept the view of the "marriage."

Three hours before noon none were absent but those whose places were secured, and ere long curiosity brought them also to the spot. The town-watch found it required all their efforts to keep the front ranks of the people from being pushed into the river by those behind; indeed, this accident could not be everywhere guarded against; but, thanks to the shallow state of the water, no one was the worse. But the cries of those who were in danger nevertheless drowned the music of the bands performing on raised platforms and the shouts of applause which rose on all sides to hail Horapollo—who was here, there, everywhere on his white ass as brisk as a lad—or to greet some leading official.

And now and again loud cries of anguish were heard, or the closely-packed throng parted with exclamations of horror. A citizen had had a sunstroke, or had been seized by the plague. Then the fugitives dragged others away with them; screaming mothers trying to save their little ones from the crush on one hand and the contagion on the other, upsetting one dealer's truck, smashing the eggs and cakes of another. A whole party were pushed into a deep but half-dried up water-course; the guardians of the peace flourished their staves, yelling and making their victims yell in their efforts to restore order—but all this hardly affected the vast body of spectators, and suddenly peace reigned, the

confusion subsided, the shrieks were silenced. Those who were doomed might fall or die, be crushed or plague-stricken. Trumpet calls and singing were heard approaching from the town: the procession, the Bridal procession was coming! Not a man but would have perished rather than be deprived of seeing a single act of this stupendous drama.

Those Arabs—what fools they were! Besides the Vekeel only three of their magnates were present, and those men whom no one knew. Even the Kadi was nowhere to be seen; and he must have forbidden the Moslem women to come, for not a single veiled beauty of the harem was visible. Not one Egyptian woman would have failed to appear if the plague had not kept so many imprisoned in their houses. Such a thing would never be seen again; this day's doings would be a tale to tell to future great-grandchildren!

The music and singing came nearer and nearer; and it did not indeed sound as if it were escorting a hapless creature to a fearful end. Blast after blast rang out from the trumpets, filling the air with festive defiance; cheerful bridal songs came nearer and nearer to the listeners, the shrill chorus of boys and maidens sounding above the deeper and stronger chant of youths and men of all ages; flutes piped a gay invitation to gladness; the dull roar of drums muttered like the distant waves in time to a march, broken by the clang of cymbals and the tinkle of bells hung around tambourines held high by girlish hands which struck, rattled and waved them above their flowing curls; lute players discoursed sweet music on the strings; and as this vast tide of mingled tones came closer, behind it there was still more music and more song.

To the ear the procession seemed endless, and the eye soon confirmed the impression.

All were listening, gazing, watching to see the Bride and her escort. Every eye seemed compelled to turn in the same direction; and presently there came: first the trumpeters on spirited horses, and these ranged themselves on each side of the road by the shore leading to the scene of the "marriage." In front of them the choir of women took their stand to the left and, on the right, the men who had marched after them. All alike were arrayed in light sea-green garments, and loaded with lotos-flowers. The women's hair, twined with white blossoms, flowed over their shoulders; the men carried bunches of papyrus and reeds;—they represented river gods that had risen from the stream.

Then came boys and bearded men, in white robes, with panther-skins on their shoulders, as the heathen priests had been wont to wear them. They were headed by two old men with long white beards, one holding a silver cup and the other a golden one, ready to fling them into the waves as a first offering, according to the practise of their forefathers, as Horapollo had described and ordered it. These went on to the pontoon, to its farthest end, and took their place on one side of the platform whence the Bride was to be cast into the river. Behind them came a large troop

of flute-players and drummers, followed by fifty maidens holding tambourines, and fifty men all dressed and carrying emblems as followers of Dionysus, or Osiris-Bacchus, who had been worshipped here in the time of the Romans; with these came the drunken Silenus, goathoofed Satyrs and Pan, with his reed-pipes, all riding grey asses strangely bedaubed with yellow.

Then followed giraffes, elephants, ostriches, antelopes, gazelles; even some tamed lions and panthers were led past the wondering crowd; for this had been done in the famous procession in honor of the second Ptolemy, described by Callixenus of Rhodes.

Next came a large car drawn by twelve black horses, and on it a symbolical group of Famine and Pestilence overthrown; they were surrounded by shrieking black children, with pointed wings on their shoulders and horns on their foreheads, bound to stakes to represent the hosts of hell—a performance which they tried to make at once ghastly and droll.

On another car the Goddess of the Inundation was to be seen. She sat amid sheaves, fruits, and garlands of vine; while round her were groups of children with apples and corn, pomegranates and bunches of dates, wine-jars and cups in their hands.

Presently there appeared in a large shell, as though lounging in a bath, the goddess of health; she was drawn by eight snow-white horses, and held in one hand a golden goblet and in the other a caduceus. After her came the river-god Nile, the bridegroom of the marriage, studied from the famous statue carried away from Alexandria by the Romans: a splendid and mighty bearded man, resting against an urn. Sixteen naked children—the sixteen ells that the river must rise for its overflow to bless the land—played round his herculean form, and a bridal wreath of lotos-flowers crowned his flowing locks. This car, which was decorated with crocodiles, sheaves, dates, grapes, and shells, was hailed with shouts of enthusiasm; it was escorted by old men in the costume of the heathen priesthood.

Behind this came more music and singers, with a troop of young men and maidens led by lute-players singing. These too were dressed as the genie, and nymphs of the river and were the groomsmen and bridesmaids in attendance on the betrothed.

The longer the procession lasted and the nearer the looked-for victim approached, the more eagerly attent were the gazing multitude.

When this group of youths and maidens had gone by, there was hardly a sound to be heard in the tribune and among the crowd. No one felt the fierce heat of the sun, no one heeded the thirst that parched every tongue; all eyes were bent in one direction; only the black Vekeel, whose colossal form towered up where he stood, occasionally sent a sinister and

anxious glance towards the town. He expected to see smoke rising from the quarter near the prison, and suddenly his lips parted and he displayed his dazzlingly white teeth in a scornful laugh. That which he looked for had come to pass; the little grey cloud which he discerned grew blacker, and then, in the heart of it, rose a crimson glow which did not take its color from the sun. But of all those thousands he was the only one who looked behind him and observed it.

The bride's attendants had by this time taken their station on the pontoon; here came another band of youths with panther skins on their shoulders; and now—at last, at last—a car came swaying along, drawn by eight coal-black oxen dressed with green ostrich-feathers and water-plants.

The car was shaded by a tall canopy, supported by four poles, against which leaned four men in the robes of the heathen priesthood; this awning was lavishly decorated with wreaths of lotos and reeds, and fenced about with papyrus, bulrushes, tall grasses and blossoming river-weeds. Beneath it sat the queen of the festival—the Bride of the Nile.

Robed in white and closely veiled, she was quite motionless. Her long, thick brown hair fell over her shoulders; at her feet lay a wreath, and rare rose-colored lotos-flowers were strewn on the car.

The bishop had been sitting at her side, the first Christian priest, certainly, of all the swarms of monks and ecclesiastics in Memphis, who had ever appeared at such a scene of heathen abomination. He was now standing, looking down at the crowd with a deeply knit brow and menacing gaze. What good had come of the penitential sermons in all the churches, of his and his vicar's warnings and threats? In spite of all remonstrance he had mounted the car with the condemned victim, after administering the last consolations to her soul. It might cost him his life, but he would keep his promise.

In her hand Paula held two roses: one was Orion's last greeting delivered by Martina; the other Pulcheria had brought her early in the morning. Yesterday, in a lucid moment, her dying father had given her his fondest blessing, little knowing what hung over her; to-day he had not come to himself, and had neither noticed nor returned her parting kiss. Quite unconscious, he had been moved from the prison out of doors and to the house of Rufinus. Dame Joanna would not forego the privilege of giving him a resting-place and taking care of him till the end.

Orion's last note was placed in Paula's hands just before she set out; it informed her that his task was now successfully ended. He had been told that it was to-morrow, and not to-day, that the hideous act would be accomplished; and it was a consolation to her to know that he was spared the agony of following her in fancy in her fearful progress.

She had allowed the women who came to clothe her in bridal array to

perform their task; among them was Emau, the chief warder's wife, and her overflowing compassion had done Paula good. But even in the prison-yard she had felt it unendurable to exhibit herself decked in her bridal wreaths to the gaping multitude; she had torn them from her and thrown them on the ground.

How long—how interminably long—had the road to the river appeared; but she had never raised her eyes to look at the curious crowd, never ceased lifting up her heart in prayer; and when her proud blood boiled, or despair had almost taken possession of her, she had grasped the bishop's hand and he had never wearied of encouraging her and exhorting her to cling to love and faith, and not even yet abandon all hope.

Thus they at last reached the pontoon at whose further end life would begin for her in another world. The shouts of the crowd were as loud, as triumphant, as expectant as ever; music and singing mingled with the roar of thousands of spectators; she allowed herself to be lifted from the car as though she were stunned, and followed the young men and maidens who formed the bridal train, and in alternate choruses sang the finest nuptial song of Sappho the fair Lesbian.

The bishop now made an attempt to address the people, but he was soon reduced to silence. So he once more joined Paula, and hand in hand they went on to the pier.

All she had in her of strength, pride, and heroic courage she summoned to her aid to enable her to walk these last few paces with her head erect, and without tottering; she had gone half way along the wooden structure, with a mien as lofty and majestic as though she were marching to command the obedience of the mob, when hoofs came thundering after her on the boards.

Old Horapollo, on his white ass, had overtaken her and stopped her on her road. Breathless, bathed in perspiration, scornful and triumphant, he desired her to remove her veil, and ordered the bishop to leave her and give up his place to the man who represented Father Nile—a gigantic farrier who followed him, somewhat embarrassed in his costume, but very ready to perform his part to the end.

The priest and Paula, however, refused to obey. At this the old man tore the veil from her face and signed to the Nile-God; he stepped forward and assumed his rights, after bowing respectfully to the prelate—who was forced to make way—and then led the Bride to the end of the platform. Here the two elders who had headed the procession in honor of Bacchus, cast the gold cups as offerings into the river, and then a lawyer, in the costume of a heathen priest, proceeded to expound, in a well-set speech, the meaning of this betrothal and sacrifice. He took Paula's hand to place in that of the farrier, who made ready to cast her into the river for which he stood proxy.

But an obstacle intervened before he could do so. A large and splendid barge had drawn up close to the platform, and shouts were heard from the tribune and from the mob which had till now looked on in breathless suspense and profound silence:

"Susannah's barge!"

"Look at the Nile, look at the river!"

"It is the water-wagtail—Philammon's rich heiress!"

"A pretty sight!"

"Another Bride—a second Bride!"

And the gaze of the multitude was now, as one eye, fixed on Katharina.

Susannah's handsome barge had been passing up and down near the platform for the last hour, and the guards on duty had several times desired that it was to be kept at a distance from the scene of the "marriage;" but in vain; and they in their little boats were not strong enough to take active measures against the larger vessel manned by fifty rowers. It had now steered quite close to the pontoon, and the splendid gilding and carving, the tall deck-house supported on silver pillars, and the crimson embroidered sails would have been a gorgeous feast for the eye, but that the black flag floating from the mast gave it a melancholy and gloomy aspect.

Within the cabin Katharina had made her waiting-women dress her in white and deck her with white flowers—myrtle, roses and lotos; but she vouchsafed no reply to their anxious enquiries.

The maid who fastened the flowers on her bosom could feel her mistress's heart beating under her hand, and the lotos-blossoms which drooped from her shoulder rose and fell as though they were already rocking on the waves of the Nile. Her lips, too, never ceased moving, and her cheeks were as pale as death.

"What is she going to do?" her attendants asked each other.

Her mother dead only yesterday, and now she chose to be present at this ceremonial, desiring the steersman to run close to the platform and keep near to it, where all the world could see her. But she evidently wished to display herself to the people in all her finery and be admired, for she presently went up on the roof of the deck-house. And she looked lovely, as lovely as a guileless angel, as she mounted the steps with childlike diffidence—timidly, but with wide open eyes, as though something grand was awaiting her there—something she had long yearned

for with her whole heart.

Anubis had to help her up the last steps, for her knees gave way; but once at the top she sent him down again to remain below with the others, as she wished to be alone. The lad was accustomed to obey; and Katharina now stepped on a seat close to the side of the boat, turned to Paula, whom she was now rapidly approaching, and held out to her and the bishop two tall lily-stems covered with splendid blossoms. At the very moment when the farrier was measuring by eye the distance between the platform and the barge, and had judged it impossible to cast the Bride into the stream till the vessel had moved on, Katharina cried out:

"Reverend Father John—and all of you! Take me, me and not the daughter of Thomas! It is I, not she—I am the true Bride of the Nile. Of my own free will—hear me, John!—of my own free will I am ready to give my life for my hapless land and the misery of the people, and the patriarch said that such a sacrifice as mine would be acceptable to Heaven. Farewell! Pray for me!—Lord have mercy upon me! Mother, dear Mother, I am coming to you!"

Then she called to the steersman: "Put out from the platform!" and as soon as a few strokes of the oars had carried the barge into the deeper channel she stepped nimbly on to the edge of the bulwark, dropped the lilies into the river, and then with a smile, her head gracefully bent on one side and her skirt modestly held round her, she slipped into the water.

The waves closed over her; but she was a good swimmer and could not help coming once to the surface. Her expression was that of a bather enjoying the cool fresh water that laved and gurgled round her. Perhaps the wild storm of applause, the mingled cries of horror, compassion and thanksgiving that went up from the assembled thousands once more reached her ear—but she dived head foremost to rise no more.

The "River-God," a good-hearted man, who in his daily life could never have let a fellow-creature drown under his very eyes, forgot his part, released Paula, and sprang after Katharina, as did Anubis and a few boatmen; but they could not reach her, and the boy, who found swimming difficult with his crippled leg followed the girl to whom his young heart was wholly devoted to a watery death.

Her speech had reached no ears but those to whom it was addressed; but before she was lost in the waters Bishop John turned to the people, took Paula's hand—and she felt free once more when her terrible bridegroom had deserted her—and holding up the Crucifix which hung at his girdle he shouted loudly:

"Behold the desires of our holy Father Benjamin, by whom God himself speaks to you, have met with fulfilment. A pure and noble Jacobite maiden, of her own free and beautiful impulse, has sacrificed herself

after the example of the Saviour, for the sufferings of her nation, before your eyes. This one," and he drew Paula to him, "this one is free; the Nile has had his victim!"

But almost before he had done speaking—before the people could proclaim their vote—Horapollo had rushed at him and interrupted him. He had dismounted from his ass during the earlier part of the proceedings, and, not to let his prey escape, he now came between Paula and the bishop, grasped her dress and cried to the chorus of youths:

"Come on—at once! One of you take the part of the Nile-God—into the river with the Bride!" The bishop however forced himself between the speaker and the girl to protect her. But Horapollo flew into a fury and rushed at the prelate to snatch away the image of the Saviour, while John exclaimed in a voice of ominous thunder: "Anathema!"

This word of fear roused the Christian blood in the Egyptians; the sacrilegious attempt stirred the zeal which they had proved in many a struggle, and which had only been kept under by an effort during these times of trouble: the leader of the choir dragged the old man away and took part with the bishop. Others followed his example, while several, on the contrary, sided with old Horapollo who clung tightly to Paula, preferring to die himself rather than allow her to escape his hatred and vengeance.

At this moment the clang of bells was heard from the town with a terrific and unaccountable uproar, and a young man was seen forcing his way through the throng, a naked sword in his hand, and in spite of his torn garments, his wild hair, and his blackened face, he was at once recognized as Orion. Every one made way for him, for he rushed on like a madman; as he reached the pontoon and took in at a glance what was going forward there, he sprang past the mummers with mighty leaps to the platform, pushing aside sundry groups of fighting champions; and before the principal actors were aware of his presence, he had snatched Paula from the old man's clutch, and called her by her name. She sank on his breast half-fainting with terror, surprise and unspeakable rapture, and he clasped her to him with his left arm, while the flashing sword in his right hand and his flaming looks warned all bystanders that it would be as wise to attack a lioness defending her young as to defy this desperate man, who was prepared to face death with the woman he loved.

His push had sent Horapollo tottering to some distance; and when the old man had pulled himself together, to throw himself once more on his victim, he found himself the centre of a fight. A wild troop had followed Orion and beset the struggling mob, whom they presently drove over the edge of the pontoon into the river, and with them Horapollo. Most of these saved themselves by swimming, but the old man sank, and nothing more was seen of him but his clenched fist, which rose in menace for some minutes above the waters.

Meanwhile the Vekeel had become aware of what was going forward on the platform; he leaped in fury from his seat to restore order, intending to seize Orion whom he fancied he had seen, or, if necessary to cut him down with his own hand.

But a vast multitude stopped his progress, for a fearful horde of released prisoners with Orion at their head had come rushing down to the scene of the festival yelling: "Fire! the prison is burning, the town is in flames!"

Every one who could run fled at once to Memphis to save his house, his possessions and those dear to him. Like a flock of doves scared by the scream of a hawk, like autumn leaves driven before the wind, the multitude dispersed. They hurried back to the town in wild tumult and inextricable confusion, jumping into the festal cars, cutting loose the horses from that of the goddess of health, to mount them and ride home, overthrowing everything that stood in their way and dragging back the Vekeel who was striving, sword in hand, to get to the pontoon.

The smoke and flames of the city were rising every moment, and acted like magic in spurring the flying crowd to reach their homes in time. But, before Obada had succeeded in his efforts, the pushing throng were once more brought to a standstill; horses were heard approaching. Dense masses of dust hid them and their riders; but it was certainly an armed troop that was coming clattering onwards, for flashing gleams were seen here and there through the dull clouds that shrouded them, the reflection of the sun's bright rays from polished and glittering helmets, breast-plates, and sabres.

Now they were visible even where the Vekeel was. Foremost rode the Kadi, and just as he came up with Obada he sprang from the saddle on to the wooden structure, and with a loud cry of: "Free-saved!" in which all the joy of his heart found utterance, he stretched out both his hands to Paula, who was advancing towards the shore clinging closely to Orion.

Othman did not observe the Vekeel, who was but a few paces distant. The words "Free!" "Saved!" from the supreme judge, gave the negro to understand that a pardon must have arrived for his youthful foe, and this of course implied the condemnation of his own proceedings. All his hopes were wrecked, for this meant that Omar still ruled and that the attempt on the Khaliff's life had failed. Dismissal, punishment or death must be his doom, when Amru should return. Still, he would not succumb till the instrument of his ruin had preceded him to the grave. Taking the Kadi by surprise he thrust him aside, and prepared to deal a fearful blow that should fell Orion before he himself should fall. But the captain of the body-guard, who had followed Othman, had watched his movements: Swift as lightning he rose in his saddle and swung his cimeter, which cut deep into the Vekeel's neck. With a hideous curse Obada let his arm drop, and fell struggling for his last breath at the feet of the newly united couple.

The populace afterwards declared that his blood was not red like that of other men, but black like his skin and his soul. They had good cause to curse his memory, for his villainy had reduced more than half Memphis to ashes that day, and brought the city to beggary.

He had hired two venial wretches to set fire to the prison while the festival was proceeding, with a view to suffocating Orion in his cell; but the gang were detected and all the prisoners were released in time. Thus the young man had been able to reach the scene of the ceremonial at the head of his fellow-captives. The fire, however, had gained the upper hand in the deserted town. It had spread from house to house along the sun-scorched streets, and next day nothing remained of the city of the Pyramids but the road along the shore, and a few wretched alleys. The ancient Capital of the Pharaohs was reduced to a village, and the houseless residents moved across to the eastern bank, to people as Moslems the newly-founded town of Fostat, or sought a home on Christian territory.

Among the houses that had escaped was that of Rufinus, and thither the Kadi escorted Orion and Paula. It was to serve as their prison till the return of Amru, and there they spent delightful days in the society of their friends, and there Thomas was so happy as to clasp his children to his heart once more, and bless them before he died.

A few minutes before the Kadi had reached the scene of the festival two carrier pigeons had arrived, each bearing the Arab governor's commands that the sacrifice of Paula was at any rate to be stopped, and her life spared till his return. He also reserved the right of deciding Orion's fate.

Mary and Rustem had met Amru at Berenice, on the Egyptian coast of the Red Sea. This decaying sea-port was connected with Medina by a pigeon-post, and in reply to his viceroy's enquiry with reference to the victim about to be offered by the despairing Egyptians to the Nile, Omar had sent a reply which had been immediately forwarded to the Kadi.

The burning of their town had brought new and fearful suffering on the stricken Memphites, and notwithstanding Katharina's death the Nile still did not rise. The Kadi therefore once more summoned a meeting of all the inhabitants from both sides of the river, three days after the interrupted marriage-festival. It was held under the palms by Nesptah's inn, and there he proclaimed to the multitude, Moslem and Christian, by means of the Arab herald and Egyptian interpreter, what the Khaliff commanded him to declare, namely: that God, the One, the All-merciful, scorned human sacrifice. In this firm conviction he, Omar, would beseech Allah the Compassionate, and he sent a letter which was to be cast into the river in his name.

And this letter was addressed:

”To the River of Egypt.” And its contents were as follows:

”If thou, O River, flowest of thyself, then swell not; but if it be God, the One, the Compassionate, that maketh thee to flow, then we entreat the All-merciful that he will bid thee rise!”

”That which is not of God,” wrote Amru in the letter which enclosed Omar’s, ”what shall it profit men? But all things created are by Him, and so is your noble river. The Most High will hearken to Omar’s prayers and ours, and I therefore command that all of you—Moslems, Christians, and Jews, shall gather together in the Mosque on the other side of the Nile which I have built to the glory of the All-merciful, and that you there lift up your souls in one great common prayer, to the end that God may hear you and take pity on your sufferings!”

And the Kadi bid all the people to go across the Nile and they obeyed his bidding. Bishop John called on his clergy and marched at their head, leading the Christians; the priests and elders of the Jews led their people next to the Jacobites; and side by side with these the Moslems gathered in the magnificent pillared sanctuary of Amru, where the three congregations of different creeds lifted up, their hearts and eyes and voices to the pitying Father in Heaven.

And this very Mosque of Amru has more than once been the scene of the same sublime spectacle; even within the lifetime and before the eyes of the narrator of this tale have Moslems, Christians, and Jews united there in one pious prayer, which must have been acceptable indeed in the ears of the Lord.

Not long after the letter from the Khaliff Omar had been cast into the Nile, and the prayer of the united assembly had gone up to Heaven from the Mosque of Amru, a pigeon came in announcing a sudden rise in the waters at the cataracts; and after some still anxious but hopeful days of patience, the Nile swelled higher and yet higher, overflowed its banks, and gave the laborer a right to look forward to a rich harvest; and then, when a heavy storm of rain had laid the choking dust, the plague, too, disappeared.

Just when the river was beginning to rise perceptibly Amru returned; bringing in his train little Mary and Rustem, Philippus the leech and Haschim, who had joined the governor’s caravan at Djidda.

In the course of their journey they received news of all that had been happening at Memphis, and when the travellers were approaching their last night-quarters, and the Pyramids were already in sight, the governor said to little Mary:

”What do you say little one? Do we not owe the Memphites the treat of a splendid marriage festival?”

"No, my lord, two," replied the child.

"How is that?" laughed Amru, "You are too young and do not count yet, and I know no other maiden in Memphis whose wedding I should care to provide for."

"But there is a man towards whom you feel most kindly, and who lives as lonely as a recluse. I should like to see him married, and at the same time as Orion and Paula. I mean our good friend Philippus."

"The physician? And is he still unwed?" asked Amru in surprise; for no Moslem of the leech's age and position could remain unmarried without exposing himself to the contempt of his fellow-believers. "He is a widower then!"

"No," replied Mary. "He has never yet found a wife to suit him; but I know one created on purpose for him by God himself!"

"You little Khatbe!"—[A professional go-between]—cried the governor. "Well, settle the matter, and it shall be no fault of mine if the second wedding lacks magnificence."

"And we will have a third!" interrupted the child, clapping her hands and laughing. "My worthy escort Rustem...."

"The colossus! Why, child, to you all things are possible! Have you found a wife for him too?"

"No, he found Mandane for himself without my help."

"It is the same thing!" cried the governor jovially. "I will provide for her. But that must satisfy you, or else all those unbelievers whom we are settling here will drive us Moslem Arabs out of the land."

The great man had often held such discourse as this with the child since she had entered his tent at Berenice, there to lay before him the case of the couple she loved, and for whom she had taken on herself great risk and hardship; she had pleaded so eloquently, so kindly, and with such fervent and pathetic words, that Amru had at once made up his mind to grant her everything that lay in his power. Mary had done him a service, too, by bringing him the information she could give him, for it enabled him to avert perils which threatened the interests of the Crescent, and also to save the children of two men he honored—the son of the Mukaukas, and the daughter of Thomas—from imminent danger.

He found, on his return home, that the Vekeel's crimes far exceeded his worst fears. Obada's proceedings had begun to undermine that respect for Arab rule and Moslem justice which Amru had done his utmost to secure. It was only by a miracle that Orion had escaped his plots, for he had

three times sent assassins to the prison, and it was entirely owing to the watchful care of pretty Emau's husband that the youth had been able to save himself in the fire. Obada had done all this to clear out of his path the hated man whose statements and impeachments might ruin him. The wretch had met a less ignominious death than his judges would have granted him. The wealth found hoarded in his dwelling was sent to Medina; and even Orion was forced to see the vast sums of which the Negro had plundered his treasury, appropriated by the Arabs. The Arab governor thought it only right to inflict this penalty for the share he had taken in the rescue of the nuns; and the young man submitted willingly to a punishment which restored him and his bride to freedom, and enabled Amru to apply a larger proportion of the revenues of his native land for its own benefit.

The Khaliff Omar, however, never received these moneys, which constituted far more than half of Orion's patrimony. The Prophet's truest friend, the wise and powerful ruler, fell by the assassin's hand, and the world now learnt that the Vekeel had been one of the chief conspirators and had been spurred on to the rashest extremes by his confidence of success.

Amru received the son of the Mukaukas as a father might; after examining the result of his labors he found it far superior to his own efforts in the same direction, and he charged Orion to carry out the new division of the country, which he confirmed excepting in a few details.

Perform your duty and do your utmost in the future to go on as you have begun!" cried Amru; and the young man replied:

"In this bitter and yet happy interval I have become clear on many points."

"And may I ask on what?" asked the governor. "I would gladly hear."

"I have discovered, my lord," replied Orion, "that there is no such thing as happiness or unhappiness in the sense men give to the words. Life appears to each of us as we ourselves paint it. Hard times which come into our lives from outside are often no more than a brief night from which a brighter day presently dawns—or the stab of a surgeon's knife, which makes us sounder than before. What men call grief is, times without number, a path to greater ease; whereas the ordinary happiness of mankind flows, swiftly as running waters, down from that delightful sense of ease. Like a ship, which, when her rudder is lost, is more likely to ride out the storm on the high seas than near the sheltering coast, so a man who has lost himself may easily recover himself and his true happiness in the wildest turmoil of life, but rarely and with difficulty if his existence runs calmly on. All other blessings are comparatively worthless if we are not upheld by the consciousness of fulfilling the task of life in faithful earnest, and of cheerfully dealing with the problems it sets before us. The lost one was found as soon as he placed his whole being and faculties at the service of a higher duty, with God

in his heart and before his eyes. I have learnt from my own experience, and from Paula's good friends, to strive untiringly after what is right, and to find my own weal in that of others.

"The sense of lost liberty is hard to bear; but leave me love, and give me room and opportunity to prove my best powers in the service of the community, even in a prison—and though I cannot be perfectly happy, for that is impossible without freedom—I will be far happier than such an idle and useless spendthrift of time and abilities as I used to be among the dissipations of the capital."

"Then enjoy the consciousness of duty well performed, with liberty and love," replied the governor. "And believe me, my friend, your father in Paradise will no more grudge you all that is loveliest and best than I do. You are on the road where every curse is turned to blessing."

The three marriages which Amru had promised to provide for, were celebrated with due splendor.

That of Orion and Paula was a day never to be forgotten by the gay world of Memphis. Bishop John performed the ceremony, and the young couple at once took possession of the beautiful house left them by Katharina, the real Bride of the Nile. If it could have been granted to her to read Paula's and Orion's hearts, and see how they held her in remembrance, she would have found that to them she was no longer the childish water-wagtail, and that they knew how to value the sacrifice of her young life.

Their first beloved guest, who went with them to their new home, was little Mary, and she remained their dearest companion till she married happily. The governess, Eudoxia, to whom also Orion offered an asylum, accompanied Mary to her own delightful home; and there at last Mary closed her old friend's eyes, after the good woman had brought up her little ones, not like a hireling but as a true mother.

The Patriarch Benjamin, too, who was led by many considerations—and not least by Katharina's will to remain on good terms with the son of the Mukaukas, was a visitor to the youthful pair. Neither he nor the Church ever had reason to repent his alliance with Orion; and when Paula presented her husband with a son, the prelate offered to be his sponsor, and named him George after his grandfather.

Orion's son, too, inherited the office of Mukaukas, when he came to man's estate, from his father who was appointed to it, but under a new Arab title, shortly after his marriage.

Ere long, however, Orion, as the highest Christian authority in his native land, had to change his place of residence and leave Memphis, which was doomed to ruin, for Alexandria. From thence his power extended over the whole Nile-valley, and he devoted himself to his charge with so much zeal, fidelity, justice, and prudence, that his name was remembered

with veneration and affection by generations long after.

Paula was the pride and joy of his life, and they lived together in devoted union to an advanced age. He regarded it as one of the duties of his life, to care for the woman who had made him what he was from a lost and reprobate creature, and to fill every day of her life with joy. When he built his palace at Alexandria, he graced it with the inscription that had been engraved on Thomas' ring: "God hath set the sweat of man's brow before virtue."

Philippus and his Pulcheria also found a new home in Alexandria. He had no long wooing to do; for when, on his return, the girl of whom he had thought constantly during his long journeying, met him for the first time in her mother's house and held out both her hands with trustful warmth of welcome, he clasped her to him and would not release her till Joanna had given them her maternal blessing. The widow lived in the leech's house with her children and grandchildren, and often visited her husband's grave. At length she was laid to rest by him and his soft-hearted mother, in the cemetery of Alexandria.

Rustem, made a rich man by Orion, became a famous breeder of horses and camels in his own country, while Mandane ruled mildly but prudently over his possessions—which he never shared with others, though he remained a Masdakite till he died. The first daughter his wife bore him was named Mary, and the first boy Haschim; but she would not agree to Rustem's proposal that the second should be called Orion; she preferred to give him the name of Rufinus, and his successors were Rustem and Philippus.

The senator and his wife were only too glad to quit Egypt. Martina, however, had the satisfaction of assisting at the marriage of her dear Heliodora on the shores of the Nile; not, indeed, to her "Great Sesostris," but to her nephew Narses, who by the young widow's devoted care was restored, if not to perfect vigor, at any rate to very enduring good health.

Paula's wedding gift to her was the great emerald, which had meanwhile been brought back again to Memphis. Justinus and Martina always remained on terms of cordial friendship with the young Mukaukas and his wife: Nilus lived long after to perform his duties with industry and judgment; and whenever Haschim came to Alexandria there was a contest between Orion and Philippus, for neither would yield him to the other. But Philip could no longer envy his former rival the wife he had won. He had not, indeed, ceased to admire her; but at the same time he would say: "My comfortable little Pulcheria has not her match; our rooms would be too small for Paula, but they suit my golden-haired girl best."

He remained unselfishly devoted to his work till the end, and, when he saw Orion wearing himself out in energetic toil, he would often say: "He knows now what life demands, and acts accordingly; and that is why he grows no older, and his laugh is as winning and gay as ever. It is an

honor to be called friend by a woman who like the Bride of the Nile. saved herself from certain death, and a man who, like the young Mukaukas, has freed himself from the heaviest of all curses.”

To this day the Bride of the Nile is not forgotten. Before the river begins to rise on the Night of Dropping the inhabitants of the town of Cairo, which grew up after the ruin of Memphis, on the eastern shore by the side of Fostat, erect a figure of clay, representing a maiden form, which they call Aroosa or the Bride.