

An Egyptian Princess, Volume 6.

Georg Ebers

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AN EGYPTIAN PRINCESS, Part 2.

By Georg Ebers

Volume 6.

CHAPTER I.

The principal steward of the banquet went forward to meet the guests as they entered, and, assisted by other noble staff-bearers (chamberlains and masters of the ceremonies), led them to their appointed places.

When they were all seated, a flourish of trumpets announced that the king was near. As he entered the hall every one rose, and the multitude received him with a thundering shout of "Victory to the king!" again and again repeated.

The way to his seat was marked by a purple Sardian carpet, only to be trodden by himself and Kassandane. His blind mother, led by Croesus, went first and took her seat at the head of the table, on a throne somewhat higher than the golden chair for Cambyses, which stood by it. The king's lawful wives sat on his left hand; Nitetis next to him, then Atossa, and by her side the pale, plainly-dressed Phaedime; next to this last wife of Cambyses sat Boges, the eunuch. Then came the high-priest Oropastes, some of the principal Magi, the satraps of various provinces (among them the Jew Belteshazzar), and a number of Persians, Medes and eunuchs, all holding high offices under the crown.

Bartja sat at the king's right hand, and after him Croesus, Hystaspes, Gobryas, Araspes, and others of the Achaemenidae, according to their rank and age. Of the concubines, the greater number sat at the foot of the table; some stood opposite to Cambyses, and enlivened the banquet by songs and music. A number of eunuchs stood behind them, whose duty it was to see that they did not raise their eyes towards the men.

Cambyses' first glance was bestowed on Nitetis; she sat by him in all the splendor and dignity of a queen, but looking very, very pale in her new purple robes.

Their eyes met, and Cambyses felt that such a look could only come from one who loved him very dearly. But his own love told him that something had troubled her. There was a sad seriousness about her mouth, and a slight cloud, which only he could see, seemed to veil the usually calm, clear and cheerful expression of her eyes. "I will ask her afterwards what has happened," thought he, "but it will not do to let my subjects see how much I love this girl."

He kissed his mother, sister, brother and his nearest relations on the forehead--said a short prayer thanking the gods for their mercies and entreating a happy new year for himself and the Persians--named the immense sum he intended to present to his countrymen on this day, and then called on the staff bearers to bring the petitioners before his face, who hoped to obtain some reasonable request from the king on this day of grace.

As every petitioner had been obliged to lay his request before the principal staff bearer the day before, in order to ascertain whether it was admissible, they all received satisfactory answers. The petitions of the women had been enquired into by the eunuchs in the same manner, and they too were now conducted before their lord and master by Boges, Kassandane alone remaining seated.

The long procession was opened by Nitetis and Atossa, and the two princesses were immediately followed by Phaedime and another beauty. The latter was magnificently dressed and had been paired with Phaedime by Boges, in order to make the almost poverty-stricken simplicity of the fallen favorite more apparent.

Intaphernes and Otanes looked as annoyed as Boges had expected, on seeing their grandchild and daughter so pale, and in such miserable array, in the midst of all this splendor and magnificence.

Cambyses had had experience of Phaedime's former extravagance in matters of dress, and, when he saw her standing before him so plainly dressed and so pale, looked both angry and astonished. His brow darkened, and as she bent low before him, he asked her in an angry and tyrannical tone: "What is the meaning of this beggarly dress at my table, on the day set apart in my honor? Have you forgotten, that in our country it is the custom never to appear unadorned before the king? Verily, if it were not my birthday, and if I did not owe you some consideration as the daughter of our dearest kinsman, I should order the eunuchs to take you back to the harem, that you might have time to think over your conduct in solitude."

These words rendered the mortified woman's task much easier.... She began to weep loud and bitterly, raising her hands and eyes to her angry lord in such a beseeching manner that his anger was changed into compassion, and he raised her from the ground with the question: "Have you a petition to ask of me?"

"What can I find to wish for, now that the sun of my life has withdrawn his light?" was her faltering answer, hindered by sobs.

Cambyses shrugged his shoulders, and asked again "Is there nothing then that you wish for? I used to be able to dry your tears with presents; ask me for some golden comfort to-day."

"Phaedime has nothing left to wish for now. For whom can she put on jewels when her king, her husband, withdraws the light of his countenance?"

"Then I can do nothing for you," exclaimed Cambyses, turning away angrily from the kneeling woman. Boges had been quite right in advising Phaedime to paint herself with white, for underneath the pale color her cheeks were burning with shame and anger. But, in spite of all, she controlled her passionate feelings, made the same deep obeisance to Nitetis as to the queen-mother, and allowed her tears to flow fast and freely in sight

of all the Achaemenidae.

Otanes and Intaphernes could scarcely suppress their indignation at seeing their daughter and grandchild thus humbled, and many an Achaemenidae looked on, feeling deep sympathy with the unhappy Phaedime and a hidden grudge against the favored, beautiful stranger.

The formalities were at last at an end and the feast began. Just before the king, in a golden basket, and gracefully bordered round with other fruits, lay a gigantic pomegranate, as large as a child's head.

Cambyses noticed it now for the first time, examined its enormous size and rare beauty with the eye of a connoisseur, and said: "Who grew this wonderful pomegranate?"

"Thy servant Oropastes," answered the chief of the Magi, with a low obeisance. "For many years I have studied the art of gardening, and have ventured to lay this, the most beautiful fruit of my labors, at the feet of my king."

"I owe you thanks," cried the king: "My friends, this pomegranate will assist me in the choice of a governor at home when we go out to war, for, by Mithras, the man who can cherish and foster a little tree so carefully will do greater things than these. What a splendid fruit! Surely it's like was never seen before. I thank you again, Oropastes, and as the thanks of a king must never consist of empty words alone, I name you at once vicegerent of my entire kingdom, in case of war. For we shall not dream away our time much longer in this idle rest, my friends. A Persian gets low-spirited without the joys of war."

A murmur of applause ran through the ranks of the Achaemenidae and fresh shouts of "Victory to the king" resounded through the hall. Their anger on account of the humiliation of a woman was quickly forgotten; thoughts of coming battles, undying renown and conqueror's laurels to be won by deeds of arms, and recollections of their former mighty deeds raised the spirits of the revellers.

The king himself was more moderate than usual to-day, but he encouraged his guests to drink, enjoying their noisy merriment and overflowing mirth; taking, however, far more pleasure still in the fascinating beauty of the Egyptian Princess, who sat at his side, paler than usual, and thoroughly exhausted by the exertions of the morning and the unaccustomed weight of the high tiara. He had never felt so happy as on this day. What indeed could he wish for more than he already possessed? Had not the gods given him every thing that a man could desire? and, over and above all this, had not they flung into his lap the precious gift of love? His usual inflexibility seemed to have changed into benevolence, and his stern severity into good-nature, as he turned to his brother Bartja with the words: "Come brother, have you forgotten my promise? Don't you know that to-day you are sure of gaining the dearest wish of your heart from me? That's right, drain the goblet, and take courage! but do not ask anything small, for I am in the mood to give largely to-day. Ah, it is a secret! come nearer then. I am really curious to know what the most fortunate youth in my entire kingdom can long for so much, that he blushes like a girl when his wish is spoken of."

Bartja, whose cheeks were really glowing from agitation, bent his head close to his brother's ear, and whispered shortly the story of his love. Sappho's father had helped to defend his native town Phocaea against the

hosts of Cyrus, and this fact the boy cleverly brought forward, speaking of the girl he loved as the daughter of a Greek warrior of noble birth. In so saying he spoke the truth, but at the same time he suppressed the facts that this very father had acquired great riches by mercantile undertakings.

[The Persians were forbidden by law to contract debts, because debtors were necessarily led to say much that was untrue. Herod. I. For this reason they held all money transactions in contempt, such occupations being also very uncongenial to their military tastes. They despised commerce and abandoned it to the conquered nations.]

He then told his brother how charming, cultivated and loving his Sappho was, and was just going to call on Croesus for a confirmation of his words, when Cambyses interrupted him by kissing his forehead and saying: "You need say no more, brother; do what your heart bids you. I know the power of love too, and I will help you to gain our mother's consent." Bartja threw himself at his brother's feet, overcome with gratitude and joy, but Cambyses raised him kindly and, looking especially at Nitetis and Kassandane, exclaimed: "Listen, my dear ones, the stem of Cyrus is going to blossom afresh, for our brother Bartja has resolved to put an end to his single life, so displeasing to the gods.

[The Persians were commanded by their religion to marry, and the unmarried were held up to ridicule. Vendid. IV. Fargard. 130. The highest duty of man was to create and promote life, and to have many children was therefore considered praiseworthy. Herod. I. 136.]

In a few days the young lover will leave us for your country, Nitetis, and will bring back another jewel from the shores of the Nile to our mountain home."

"What is the matter, sister?" cried Atossa, before her brother had finished speaking. Nitetis had fainted, and Atossa was sprinkling her forehead with wine as she lay in her arms.

"What was it?" asked the blind Kassandane, when Nitetis had awakened to consciousness a few moments later.

"The joy--the happiness--Tachot," faltered Nitetis. Cambyses, as well as his sister, had sprung to the fainting girl's help. When she had recovered consciousness, he asked her to take some wine to revive her completely, gave her the cup with his own hand, and then went on at the point at which he had left off in his account: "Bartja is going to your own country, my wife--to Naukratis on the Nile--to fetch thence the granddaughter of a certain Rhodopis, and daughter of a noble warrior, a native of the brave town of Phocaea, as his wife."

"What was that?" cried the blind queen-mother.

"What is the matter with you?" exclaimed Atossa again, in an anxious, almost reproachful tone.

"Nitetis!" cried Croesus admonishingly. But the warning came too late; the cup which her royal lover had given her slipped from her hands and fell ringing on the floor. All eyes were fixed on the king's features in anxious suspense. He had sprung from his seat pale as death; his lips trembled and his fist was clenched. Nitetis looked up at her lover

imploringly, but he was afraid of meeting those wonderful, fascinating eyes, and turned his head away, saying in a hoarse voice: "Take the women back to their apartments, Boges. I have seen enough of them--let us begin our drinking-bout--good-night, my mother; take care how you nourish vipers with your heart's blood. Sleep well, Egyptian, and pray to the gods to give you a more equal power of dissembling your feelings. Tomorrow, my friends, we will go out hunting. Here, cup-bearer, give me some wine! fill the large goblet, but taste it well--yes, well--for to-day I am afraid of poison; to-day for the first time. Do you hear, Egyptian? I am afraid of poison! and every child knows--ah-ha--that all the poison, as well as the medicine comes from Egypt."

Nitetis left the hall,--she hardly knew how,--more staggering than walking. Boges accompanied her, telling the bearers to make haste.

When they reached the hanging-gardens he gave her up to the care of the eunuch in attendance, and took his leave, not respectfully as usual, but chuckling, rubbing his hands, and speaking in an intimate and confidential tone: "Dream about the handsome Bartja and his Egyptian lady-love, my white Nile-kitten! Haven't you any message for the beautiful boy, whose love-story frightened you so terribly? Think a little. Poor Boges will very gladly play the go-between; the poor despised Boges wishes you so well--the humble Boges will be so sorry when he sees the proud palm-tree from Sais cut down. Boges is a prophet; he foretells you a speedy return home to Egypt, or a quiet bed in the black earth in Babylon, and the kind Boges wishes you a peaceful sleep. Farewell, my broken flower, my gay, bright viper, wounded by its own sting, my pretty fir-cone, fallen from the tall pine-tree!"

"How dare you speak in this impudent manner?" said the indignant princess.

"Thank you," answered the wretch, smiling.

"I shall complain of your conduct," threatened Nitetis.

"You are very amiable," answered Boges. "Go out of my sight," she cried.

"I will obey your kind and gentle hints;" he answered softly, as if whispering words of love into her ear. She started back in disgust and fear at these scornful words; she saw how full of terror they were for her, turned her back on him and went quickly into the house, but his voice rang after her: "Don't forget my lovely queen, think of me now and then; for everything that happens in the next few days will be a keepsake from the poor despised Boges."

As soon as she had disappeared he changed his tone, and commanded the sentries in the severest and most tyrannical manner, to keep a strict watch over the hanging-gardens. "Certain death," said he, "to whichever of you allows any one but myself to enter these gardens. No one, remember--no one--and least of all messengers from the queen-mother, Atossa or any of the great people, may venture to set foot on these steps. If Croesus or Oropastes should wish to speak to the Egyptian Princess, refuse them decidedly. Do you understand? I repeat it, whoever is begged or bribed into disobedience will not see the light of to-morrow's sun. Nobody may enter these gardens without express permission from my own mouth. I think you know me. Here, take these gold staters, your work will be heavier now; but remember, I swear by Plithras not to spare one of you who is careless or disobedient."

The men made a due obeisance and determined to obey; they knew that Boges' threats were never meant in joke, and fancied something great must be coming to pass, as the stingy eunuch never spent his staters without good reason.

Boges was carried back to the banqueting-hall in the same litter, which had brought Nitetis away.

The king's wives had left, but the concubines were all standing in their appointed place, singing their monotonous songs, though quite unheard by the uproarious men.

The drinkers had already long forgotten the fainting woman. The uproar and confusion rose with every fresh wine-cup. They forgot the dignity of the place where they were assembled, and the presence of their mighty ruler.

They shouted in their drunken joy; warriors embraced one another with a tenderness only excited by wine, here and there a novice was carried away in the arms of a pair of sturdy attendants, while an old hand at the work would seize a wine-jug instead of a goblet, and drain it at a draught amid the cheers of the lookers-on.

The king sat on at the head of the table, pale as death, staring into the wine-cup as if unconscious of what was going on around him. But at the sight of his brother his fist clenched.

He would neither speak to him, nor answer his questions. The longer he sat there gazing into vacancy, the firmer became his conviction that Nitetis had deceived him,—that she had pretended to love him while her heart really belonged to Bartja. How shamefully they had made sport of him! How deeply rooted must have been the faithlessness of this clever hypocrite, if the mere news that his brother loved some one else could not only destroy all her powers of dissimulation, but actually deprive her of consciousness!

When Nitetis left the hall, Otanes, the father of Phaedime had called out: "The Egyptian women seem to take great interest in the love-affairs of their brothers-in-law. The Persian women are not so generous with their feelings; they keep them for their husbands."

Cambyzes was too proud to let it be seen that he had heard these words; like the ostrich, he feigned deafness and blindness in order not to seem aware of the looks and murmurs of his guests, which all went to prove that he had been deceived.

Bartja could have had no share in her perfidy; she had loved this handsome youth, and perhaps all the more because she had not been able to hope for a return of her love. If he had had the slightest suspicion of his brother, he would have killed him on the spot. Bartja was certainly innocent of any share in the deception and in his brother's misery, but still he was the cause of all; so the old grudge, which had only just been allowed to slumber, woke again; and, as a relapse is always more dangerous than the original illness, the newly-roused anger was more violent than what he had formerly felt.

He thought and thought, but he could not devise a fitting punishment for this false woman. Her death would not content his vengeance, she must

suffer something worse than mere death!

Should he send her back to Egypt, disgraced and shamed? Oh, no! she loved her country, and she would be received by her parents with open arms. Should he, after she had confessed her guilt, (for he was determined to force a confession from her) shut her up in a solitary dungeon? or should he deliver her over to Boges, to be the servant of his concubines? Yes! now he had hit upon the right punishment. Thus the faithless creature should be disciplined, and the hypocrite, who had dared to make sport of him--the All-powerful--forced to atone for her crimes.

Then he said to himself: "Bartja must not stay here; fire and water have more in common than we two--he always fortunate and happy, and I so miserable. Some day or other his descendants will divide my treasures, and wear my crown; but as yet I am king, and I will show that I am."

The thought of his proud, powerful position flashed through him like lightning. He woke from his dreams into new life, flung his golden goblet far into the hall, so that the wine flew round like rain, and cried: "We have had enough of this idle talk and useless noise. Let us hold a council of war, drunken as we are, and consider what answer we ought to give the Massagetæ. Hystaspes, you are the eldest, give us your opinion first."

[Herod. I. 134. The Persians deliberated and resolved when they were intoxicated, and when they were sober reconsidered their determinations. Tacitus tells the same of the old Germans. Germ, c. 22.]

Hystaspes, the father of Darius, was an old man. He answered: "It seems to me, that the messengers of this wandering tribe have left us no choice. We cannot go to war against desert wastes; but as our host is already under arms and our swords have lain long in their scabbards, war we must have. We only want a few good enemies, and I know no easier work than to make them."

At these words the Persians broke into loud shouts of delight; but Croesus only waited till the noise had ceased to say: "Hystaspes, you and I are both old men; but you are a thorough Persian and fancy you can only be happy in battle and bloodshed. You are now obliged to lean for support on the staff, which used to be the badge of your rank as commander, and yet you speak like a hot-blooded boy. I agree with you that enemies are easy enough to find, but only fools go out to look for them. The man who tries to make enemies is like a wretch who mutilates his own body. If the enemies are there, let us go out to meet them like wise men who wish to look misfortune boldly in the face; but let us never try to begin an unjust war, hateful to the gods. We will wait until wrong has been done us, and then go to victory or death, conscious that we have right on our side."

The old man was interrupted by a low murmur of applause, drowned however quickly by cries of "Hystaspes is right! let us look for an enemy!"

It was now the turn of the envoy Prexaspes to speak, and he answered laughing: "Let us follow the advice of both these noble old men. We will do as Croesus bids us and not go out to seek an enemy, but at the same time we will follow Hystaspes' advice by raising our claims and pronouncing every one our enemy, who does not cheerfully consent to

become a member of the kingdom founded by our great father Cyrus. For instance, we will ask the Indians if they would feel proud to obey your sceptre, Cambyses. If they answer no, it is a sign that they do not love us, and whoever does not love us, must be our enemy."

"That won't do," cried Zopyrus. "We must have war at any price."

"I vote for Croesus," said Gobryas. "And I too," said the noble Artabazus.

"We are for Hystaspes," shouted the warrior Araspes, the old Intaphernes, and some more of Cyrus's old companions-in-arms.

"War we must have at any price," roared the general Megabyzus, the father of Zopyrus, striking the table so sharply with his heavy fist, that the golden vessels rang again, and some goblets even fell; "but not with the Massagetac--not with a flying foe."

"There must be no war with the Massagetæ," said the high-priest Oropastes. "The gods themselves have avenged Cyrus's death upon them."

Cambyses sat for some moments, quietly and coldly watching the unrestrained enthusiasm of his warriors, and then, rising from his seat, thundered out the words: "Silence, and listen to your king!"

The words worked like magic on this multitude of drunken men. Even those who were most under the influence of wine, listened to their king in a kind of unconscious obedience. He lowered his voice and went on: "I did not ask whether you wished for peace or war--I know that every Persian prefers the labor of war to an inglorious idleness--but I wished to know what answer you would give the Massagetan warriors. Do you consider that the soul of my father--of the man to whom you owe all your greatness--has been sufficiently avenged?"

A dull murmur in the affirmative, interrupted by some violent voices in the negative, was the answer. The king then asked a second question: "Shall we accept the conditions proposed by their envoys, and grant peace to this nation, already so scourged and desolated by the gods?" To this they all agreed eagerly.

"That is what I wished to know," continued Cambyses. "To-morrow, when we are sober, we will follow the old custom and reconsider what has been resolved on during our intoxication. Drink on, all of you, as long as the night lasts. To-morrow, at the last crow of the sacred bird Parodar, I shall expect you to meet me for the chase, at the gate of the temple of Bel."

So saying, the king left the hall, followed by a thundering "Victory to the king!" Boges had slipped out quietly before him. In the forecourt he found one of the gardener's boys from the hanging-gardens.

"What do you want here?" asked Boges. "I have something for the prince Bartja."

"For Bartja? Has he asked your master to send him some seeds or slips?"

The boy shook his sunburnt head and smiled roguishly.

"Some one else sent you then?" said Boges becoming more attentive.

"Yes, some one else."

"Ah! the Egyptian has sent a message to her brother-in-law?"

"Who told you that?"

"Nitetis spoke to me about it. Here, give me what you have; I will give it to Bartja at once."

"I was not to give it to any one but the prince himself."

"Give it to me; it will be safer in my hands than in yours."

"I dare not."

"Obey me at once, or--"

At this moment the king came up. Bogen thought a moment, and then called in a loud voice to the whip-bearers on duty at the palace-gate, to take the astonished boy up.

"What is the matter here?" asked Cambyses.

"This fellow," answered the eunuch, "has had the audacity to make his way into the palace with a message from your consort Nitetis to Bartja."

At sight of the king, the boy had fallen on his knees, touching the ground with his forehead.

Cambyses looked at him and turned deadly pale. Then, turning to the eunuch, he asked: "What does the Egyptian Princess wish from my brother?"

"The boy declares that he has orders to give up what has been entrusted to him to no one but Bartja." On hearing this the boy looked imploringly up at the king, and held out a little papyrus roll.

Cambyses snatched it out of his hand, but the next moment stamped furiously on the ground at seeing that the letter was written in Greek, which he could not read.

He collected himself, however, and, with an awful look, asked the boy who had given him the letter. "The Egyptian lady's waiting-woman Mandane," he answered; "the Magian's daughter."

"For my brother Bartja?"

"She said I was to give the letter to the handsome prince, before the banquet, with a greeting from her mistress Nitetis, and I was to tell him . . ."

Here the king stamped so furiously, that the boy was frightened and could only stammer: "Before the banquet the prince was walking with you, so I could not speak to him, and now I am waiting for him here, for Mandane promised to give me a piece of gold if I did what she told me cleverly."

"And that you have not done," thundered the king, fancying himself shamefully deceived. "No, indeed you have not. Here, guards, seize this fellow!"

The boy begged and prayed, but all in vain; the whip-bearers seized him quick as thought, and Cambyses, who went off at once to his own apartments, was soon out of reach of his whining entreaties for mercy.

Boges followed his master, rubbing his fat hands, and laughing quietly to himself.

The king's attendants began their work of disrobing him, but he told them angrily to leave him at once. As soon as they were gone, he called Boges and said in a low voice: "From this time forward the hanging-gardens and the Egyptian are under your control. Watch her carefully! If a single human being or a message reaches her without my knowledge, your life will be the forfeit."

"But if Kassandane or Atossa should send to her?"

"Turn the messengers away, and send word that every attempt to see or communicate with Nitetis will be regarded by me as a personal offence."

"May I ask a favor for myself, O King?"

"The time is not well chosen for asking favors."

"I feel ill. Permit some one else to take charge of the hanging-gardens for to-morrow only."

"No!--now leave me."

"I am in a burning fever and have lost consciousness three times during the day--if when I am in that state any one should . . ."

But who could take your place?"

"The Lydian captain of the eunuchs, Kandaules. He is true as gold, and inflexibly severe. One day of rest would restore me to health. Have mercy, O King!"

"No one is so badly served as the king himself. Kandaules may take your place to-morrow, but give him the strictest orders, and say that the slightest neglect will put his life in danger.--Now depart."

"Yet one word, my King: to-morrow night the rare blue lily in the hanging-gardens will open. Hystaspes, Intaphernes, Gobyras, Croesus and Oropastes, the greatest horticulturists at your court, would very much like to see it. May they be allowed to visit the gardens for a few minutes? Kandaules shall see that they enter into no communication with the Egyptian."

"Kandaules must keep his eyes open, if he cares for his own life.--Go!"

Boges made a deep obeisance and left the king's apartment. He threw a few gold pieces to the slaves who bore the torches before him. He was so very happy. Every thing had succeeded beyond his expectations:--the fate of Nitetis was as good as decided, and he held the life of Kandaules, his hated colleague, in his own hands.

Cambyses spent the night in pacing up and down his apartment. By cock-crow he had decided that Nitetis should be forced to confess her guilt,

and then be sent into the great harem to wait on the concubines. Bartja, the destroyer of his happiness, should set off at once for Egypt, and on his return become the satrap of some distant provinces. He did not wish to incur the guilt of a brother's murder, but he knew his own temper too well not to fear that in a moment of sudden anger, he might kill one he hated so much, and therefore wished to remove him out of the reach of his passion.

Two hours after the sun had risen, Cambyses was riding on his fiery steed, far in front of a countless train of followers armed with shields, swords, lances, bows and lassos, in pursuit of the game which was to be found in the immense preserves near Babylon, and was to be started from its lair by more than a thousand dogs.

[The same immense trains of followers of course accompanied the kings on their hunting expeditions, as on their journeys. As the Persian nobility were very fond of hunting, their boys were taught this sport at an early age. According to Strabo, kings themselves boasted of having been mighty hunters in the inscriptions on their tombs. A relief has been found in the ruins of Persepolis, on which the king is strangling a lion with his right arm, but this is supposed to have a historical, not a symbolical meaning. Similar representations occur on Assyrian monuments. Izdubar strangling a lion and fighting with a lion (relief at Khorsabad) is admirably copied in Delitzsch's edition of G. Smith's Chaldean Genesis. Layard discovered some representations of hunting-scenes during his excavations; as, for instance, stags and wild boars among the reeds; and the Greeks often mention the immense troops of followers on horse and foot who attended the kings of Persia when they went hunting. According to Xenophon, *Cyrop.* I. 2. II. 4. every hunter was obliged to be armed with a bow and arrows, two lances, sword and shield. In Firdusi's *Book of Kings* we read that the lasso was also a favorite weapon. Hawking was well known to the Persians more than 900 years ago. *Book of Kings* XVIII. p. 495. The boomerang was used in catching birds as well by the Persians as by the ancient Egyptians and the present savage tribes of New Holland.]

CHAPTER II.

The hunt was over. Waggon full of game, amongst which were several enormous wild boars killed by the king's own hand, were driven home behind the sports men. At the palace-gates the latter dispersed to their several abodes, in order to exchange the simple Persian leather hunting-costume for the splendid Median court-dress.

In the course of the day's sport Cambyses had (with difficulty restraining his agitation) given his brother the seemingly kind order to start the next day for Egypt in order to fetch Sappho and accompany her to Persia. At the same time he assigned him the revenues of Bactra, Rhagae and Sinope for the maintenance of his new household, and to his young wife, all the duties levied from her native town Phocaea, as pin-money.

Bartja thanked his generous brother with undisguised warmth, but Cambyses remained cold as ice, uttered a few farewell words, and then, riding off in pursuit of a wild ass, turned his back upon him.

On the way home from the chase the prince invited his bosom-friends Croesus, Darius, Zopyrus and Gyges to drink a parting-cup with him.

Croesus promised to join them later, as he had promised to visit the blue lily at the rising of the Tistarstar.

He had been to the hanging-gardens that morning early to visit Nitetis, but had been refused entrance by the guards, and the blue lily seemed now to offer him another chance of seeing and speaking to his beloved pupil. He wished for this very much, as he could not thoroughly understand her behavior the day before, and was uneasy at the strict watch set over her.

The young Achaemenidae sat cheerfully talking together in the twilight in a shady bower in the royal gardens, cool fountains plashing round them. Araspes, a Persian of high rank, who had been one of Cyrus's friends, had joined them, and did full justice to the prince's excellent wine.

"Fortunate Bartja!" cried the old bachelor, "going out to a golden country to fetch the woman you love; while I, miserable old fellow, am blamed by everybody, and totter to my grave without wife or children to weep for me and pray the gods to be merciful to my poor soul."

"Why think of such things?" cried Zopyrus, flourishing the wine-cup. "There's no woman so perfect that her husband does not, at least once a day, repent that he ever took a wife. Be merry, old friend, and remember that it's all your own fault. If you thought a wife would make you happy, why did not you do as I have done? I am only twenty-two years old and have five stately wives and a troop of the most beautiful slaves in my house."

Araspes smiled bitterly.

"And what hinders you from marrying now?" said Gyges. "You are a match for many a younger man in appearance, strength, courage and perseverance. You are one of the king's nearest relations too--I tell you, Araspes, you might have twenty young and beautiful wives."

"Look after your own affairs," answered Araspes. "In your place, I certainly should not have waited to marry till I was thirty."

"An oracle has forbidden my marrying."

"Folly? how can a sensible man care for what an oracle says? It is only by dreams, that the gods announce the future to men. I should have thought that your own father was example enough of the shameful way in which those lying priests deceive their best friends."

"That is a matter which you do not understand, Araspes."

"And never wish to, boy, for you only believe in oracles because you don't understand them, and in your short-sightedness call everything that is beyond your comprehension a miracle. And you place more confidence in anything that seems to you miraculous, than in the plain simple truth that lies before your face. An oracle deceived your father and plunged him into ruin, but the oracle is miraculous, and so you too, in perfect confidence, allow it to rob you of happiness!"

"That is blasphemy, Araspes. Are the gods to be blamed because we

misunderstand their words?"

"Certainly: for if they wished to benefit us they would give us, with the words, the necessary penetration for discovering their meaning. What good does a beautiful speech do me, if it is in a foreign language that I do not understand?"

"Leave off this useless discussion," said Darius, "and tell us instead, Araspes, how it is that, though you congratulate every man on becoming a bridegroom, you yourself have so long submitted to be blamed by the priests, slighted at all entertainments and festivals, and abused by the women, only because you choose to live and die a bachelor?"

Araspes looked down thoughtfully, then shook himself, took a long draught from the wine-cup, and said, "I have my reasons, friends, but I cannot tell them now."

"Tell them, tell them," was the answer.

"No, children, I cannot, indeed I cannot. This cup I drain to the health of the charming Sappho, and this second to your good fortune, my favorite, Darius."

"Thanks, Araspes!" exclaimed Bartja, joyfully raising his goblet to his lips.

"You mean well, I know," muttered Darius, looking down gloomily.

"What's this, you son of Hystaspes?" cried the old man, looking more narrowly at the serious face of the youth. "Dark looks like these don't sit well on a betrothed lover, who is to drink to the health of his dearest one. Is not Gobryas' little daughter the noblest of all the young Persian girls after Atossa? and isn't she beautiful?"

"Artystone has every talent and quality that a daughter of the Achaemenidae ought to possess," was Darius's answer, but his brow did not clear as he said the words.

"Well, if you want more than that, you must be very hard to please."

Darius raised his goblet and looked down into the wine.

"The boy is in love, as sure as my name is Araspes!" exclaimed the elder man.

"What a set of foolish fellows you are," broke in Zopyrus at this exclamation. "One of you has remained a bachelor in defiance of all Persian customs; another has been frightened out of marrying by an oracle; Bartja has determined to be content with only one wife; and Darius looks like a Destur chanting the funeral-service, because his father has told him to make himself happy with the most beautiful and aristocratic girl in Persia!"

"Zopyrus is right," cried Araspes. "Darius is ungrateful to fortune."

Bartja meanwhile kept his eyes fixed on the friend, who was thus blamed by the others. He saw that their jests annoyed him, and feeling his own great happiness doubly in that moment, pressed Darius's hand, saying: "I am so sorry that I cannot be present at your wedding. By the time I

come back, I hope you will be reconciled to your father's choice."

"Perhaps," said Darius, "I may be able to show a second and even a third wife by that time."

"Anahita" grant it!" exclaimed Zopyrus. "The Achaemenidae would soon become extinct, if every one were to follow such examples as Gyges and Araspes have set us. And your one wife, Bartja, is really not worth talking about. It is your duty to marry three wives at once, in order to keep up your father's family--the race of Cyrus."

"I hate our custom of marrying many wives," answered Bartja. "Through doing this, we make ourselves inferior to the women, for we expect them to remain faithful to us all our lives, and we, who are bound to respect truth and faithfulness above every thing else, swear inviolable love to one woman to-day, and to another to-morrow."

"Nonsense!" cried Zopyrus. "I'd rather lose my tongue than tell a lie to a man, but our wives are so awfully deceitful, that one has no choice but to pay them back in their own coin."

"The Greek women are different," said Bartja, "because they are differently treated. Sappho told me of one, I think her name was Penelope, who waited twenty years faithfully and lovingly for her husband, though every one believed he was dead, and she had fifty lovers a day at her house."

"My wives would not wait so long for me," said Zopyrus laughing. "To tell the truth, I don't think I should be sorry to find an empty house, if I came back after twenty years. For then I could take some new wives into my harem, young and beautiful, instead of the unfaithful ones, who, besides, would have grown old. But alas! every woman does not find some one to run away with her, and our women would rather have an absent husband than none at all."

"If your wives could hear what you are saying!" said Araspes.

"They would declare war with me at once, or, what is still worse, conclude a peace with one another."

"How would that be worse?"

"How? it is easy to see, that you have had no experience."

"Then let us into the secrets of your married life."

"With pleasure. You can easily fancy, that five wives in one house do not live quite so peacefully as five doves in a cage; mine at least carry on an uninterrupted, mortal warfare. But I have accustomed myself to that, and their sprightliness even amuses me. A year ago, however, they came to terms with one another, and this day of peace was the most miserable in my life."

"You are jesting."

"No, indeed, I am quite in earnest. The wretched eunuch who had to keep watch over the five, allowed them to see an old jewel-merchant from Tyre. Each of them chose a separate and expensive set of jewels. When I came home Sudabe came up and begged for money to pay for these ornaments. The

things were too dear, and I refused. Every one of the five then came and begged me separately for the money; I refused each of them point blank and went off to court. When I came back, there were all my wives weeping side by side, embracing one another and calling each other fellow-sufferers. These former enemies rose up against me with the most touching unanimity, and so overwhelmed me with revilings and threats that I left the room. They closed their doors against me. The next morning the lamentations of the evening before were continued. I fled once more and went hunting with the king, and when I came back, tired, hungry and half-frozen--for it was in spring, we were already at Ecbatana, and the snow was lying an ell deep on the Orontes--there was no fire on the hearth and nothing to eat. These noble creatures had entered into an alliance in order to punish me, had put out the fire, forbidden the cooks to do their duty and, which was worse than all--had kept the jewels! No sooner had I ordered the slaves to make a fire and prepare food, than the impudent jewel-dealer appeared and demanded his money. I refused again, passed another solitary night, and in the morning sacrificed ten talents for the sake of peace. Since that time harmony and peace among my beloved wives seems to me as much to be feared as the evil Divs themselves, and I see their little quarrels with the greatest pleasure."

"Poor Zopyrus!" cried Bartja.

"Why poor?" asked this five-fold husband. "I tell you I am much happier than you are. My wives are young and charming, and when they grow old, what is to hinder me from taking others, still handsomer, and who, by the side of the faded beauties, will be doubly charming. Ho! slave--bring some lamps. The sun has gone down, and the wine loses all its flavor when the table is not brightly lighted."

At this moment the voice of Darius, who had left the arbor and gone out into the garden, was heard calling: "Come and hear how beautifully the nightingale is singing."

"By Mithras, you son of Hystaspes, you must be in love," interrupted Araspes. "The flowery darts of love must have entered the heart of him, who leaves his wine to listen to the nightingale."

"You are right there, father," cried Bartja. "Philomel, as the Greeks call our Gulgul, is the lovers' bird among all nations, for love has given her her beautiful song. What beauty were you dreaming of, Darius, when you went out to listen to the nightingale?"

"I was not dreaming of any," answered he. "You know how fond I am of watching the stars, and the Tistar-star rose so splendidly to-night, that I left the wine to watch it. The nightingales were singing so loudly to one another, that if I had not wished to hear them I must have stopped my ears."

"You kept them wide open, however," said Araspes laughing. "Your enraptured exclamation proved that."

"Enough of this," cried Darius, to whom these jokes were getting wearisome. "I really must beg you to leave off making allusions to matters, which I do not care to hear spoken of."

"Imprudent fellow!" whispered the older man; "now you really have betrayed yourself. If you were not in love, you would have laughed instead of getting angry. Still I won't go on provoking you--tell me

what you have just been reading in the stars."

At these words Darius looked up again into the starry sky and fixed his eyes on a bright constellation hanging over the horizon. Zopyrus watched him and called out to his friends, "Something important must be happening up there. Darius, tell us what's going on in the heavens just now."

"Nothing good," answered the other. "Bartja, I have something to say to you alone."

"Why to me alone? Araspes always keeps his own counsel, and from the rest of you I never have any secrets."

"Still--"

"Speak out."

"No, I wish you would come into the garden with me."

Bartja nodded to the others, who were still sitting over their wine, laid his hand on Darius' shoulder and went out with him into the bright moonlight. As soon as they were alone, Darius seized both his friend's hands, and said: "To-day is the third time that things have happened in the heavens, which bode no good for you. Your evil star has approached your favorable constellation so nearly, that a mere novice in astrology could see some serious danger was at hand. Be on your guard, Bartja, and start for Egypt to-day; the stars tell me that the danger is here on the Euphrates, not abroad."

"Do you believe implicitly in the stars?"

"Implicitly. They never lie."

"Then it would be folly to try and avoid what they have foretold."

"Yes, no man can run away from his destiny; but that very destiny is like a fencing-master--his favorite pupils are those who have the courage and skill to parry his own blows. Start for Egypt to-day, Bartja."

"I cannot--I haven't taken leave of my mother and Atossa."

"Send them a farewell message, and tell Croesus to explain the reason of your starting so quickly."

"They would call me a coward."

"It is cowardly to yield to any mortal, but to go out of the way of one's fate is wisdom."

"You contradict yourself, Darius. What would the fencing-master say to a runaway-pupil?"

"He would rejoice in the stratagem, by which an isolated individual tried to escape a superior force."

"But the superior force must conquer at last.--What would be the use of my trying to put off a danger which, you say yourself, cannot be averted? If my tooth aches, I have it drawn at once, instead of tormenting and making myself miserable for weeks by putting off the painful operation as

a coward or a woman would, till the last moment. I can await this coming danger bravely, and the sooner it comes the better, for then I shall have it behind me."

"You do not know how serious it is."

"Are you afraid for my life?"

"No."

"Then tell me, what you are afraid of."

"That Egyptian priest with whom I used to study the stars, once cast your horoscope with me. He knew more about the heavens, than any man I ever saw. I learnt a great deal from him, and I will not hide from you that even then he drew my attention to dangers that threaten you now."

"And you did not tell me?"

"Why should I have made you uneasy beforehand? Now that your destiny is drawing near, I warn you."

"Thank you,--I will be careful. In former times I should not have listened to such a warning, but now that I love Sappho, I feel as if my life were not so much my own to do what I like with, as it used to be."

"I understand this feeling . . ."

"You understand it? Then Araspes was right? You don't deny?"

"A mere dream without any hope of fulfilment."

"But what woman could refuse you?"

"Refuse!"

"I don't understand you. Do you mean to say that you--the boldest sportsman, the strongest wrestler--the wisest of all the young Persians--that you, Darius, are afraid of a woman?"

"Bartja, may I tell you more, than I would tell even to my own father?"

"Yes."

"I love the daughter of Cyrus, your sister and the king's, Atossa."

"Have I understood you rightly? you love Atossa? Be praised for this, O ye pure Amescha cpenta! Now I shall never believe in your stars again, for instead of the danger with which they threatened me, here comes an unexpected happiness. Embrace me, my brother, and tell me the whole story, that I may see whether I can help you to turn this hopeless dream, as you call it, into a reality."

"You will remember that before our journey to Egypt, we went with the entire court from Ecbatana to Susa. I was in command of the division of the "Immortals" appointed to escort the carriages containing the king's mother and sister, and his wives. In going through the narrow pass which leads over the Orontes, the horses of your mother's carriage slipped. The yoke to which the horses were harnessed broke from the pole, and the

heavy, four-wheeled carriage fell over the precipice without obstruction.

[There was a yoke at the end of the shaft of a Persian carriage, which was fastened on to the backs of the horses and took the place of our horse-collar and pole-chain.]

On seeing it disappear, we were horrified and spurred our horses to the place as quickly as possible. We expected of course to see only fragments of the carriages and the dead bodies of its inmates, but the gods had taken them into their almighty protection, and there lay the carriage, with broken wheels, in the arms of two gigantic cypresses which had taken firm root in the fissures of the slate rocks, and whose dark tops reached up to the edge of the carriage-road.

"As quick as thought I sprang from my horse and scrambled down one of the cypresses. Your mother and sister stretched their arms to me, crying for help. The danger was frightful, for the sides of the carriage had been so shattered by the fall, that they threatened every moment to give way, in which case those inside it must inevitably have fallen into the black, unfathomable abyss which looked like an abode for the gloomy Divs, and stretched his jaws wide to crush its beautiful victims.

"I stood before the shattered carriage as it hung over the precipice ready to fall to pieces every moment, and then for the first time I met your sister's imploring look. From that moment I loved her, but at the time I was much too intent on saving them, to think of anything else, and had no idea what had taken place within me. I dragged the trembling women out of the carriage, and one minute later it rolled down the abyss crashing into a thousand pieces. I am a strong man, but I confess that all my strength was required to keep myself and the two women from falling over the precipice until ropes were thrown to us from above. Atossa hung round my neck, and Kassandane lay on my breast, supported by my left arm; with the right I fastened the rope round my waist, we were drawn up, and I found myself a few minutes later on the high-road--your mother and sister were saved.

"As soon as one of the Magi had bound up the wounds cut by the rope in my side, the king sent for me, gave me the chain I am now wearing and the revenues of an entire satrapy, and then took me to his mother and sister. They expressed their gratitude very warmly; Kassandane allowed me to kiss her forehead, and gave me all the jewels she had worn at the time of the accident, as a present for my future wife. Atossa took a ring from her finger, put it on mine and kissed my hand in the warmth of her emotion--you know how eager and excitable she is. Since that happy day--the happiest in my life--I have never seen your sister, till yesterday evening, when we sat opposite to each other at the banquet. Our eyes met. I saw nothing but Atossa, and I think she has not forgotten the man who saved her. Kassandane . . ."

"Oh, my mother would be delighted to have you for a son-in-law; I will answer for that. As to the king, your father must apply to him; he is our uncle and has a right to ask the hand of Cyrus's daughter for his son."

"But have you forgotten your father's dream? You know that Cambyses has always looked on me with suspicion since that time."

"Oh, that has been long forgotten. My father dreamt before his death that you had wings, and was misled by the soothsayers into the fancy that

you, though you were only eighteen then, would try to gain the crown. Cambyses thought of this dream too; but, when you saved my mother and sister, Croesus explained to him that this must have been its fulfilment, as no one but Darius or a winged eagle could possibly have possessed strength and dexterity enough to hang suspended over such an abyss."

"Yes, and I remember too that these words did not please your brother. He chooses to be the only eagle in Persia; but Croesus does not spare his vanity--"

"Where can Croesus be all this time?"

"In the hanging-gardens. My father and Gobryas have very likely detained him."

Just at that moment the voice of Zopyrus was heard exclaiming, "Well, I call that polite! Bartja invites us to a wine-party and leaves us sitting here without a host, while he talks secrets yonder."

"We are coming, we are coming," answered Bartja. Then taking the hand of Darius heartily, he said: "I am very glad that you love Atossa. I shall stay here till the day after to-morrow, let the stars threaten me with all the dangers in the world. To-morrow I will find out what Atossa feels, and when every thing is in the right track I shall go away, and leave my winged Darius to his own powers."

So saying Bartja went back into the arbor, and his friend began to watch the stars again. The longer he looked the sadder and more serious became his face, and when the Tistar-star set, he murmured, "Poor Bartja!" His friends called him, and he was on the point of returning to them, when he caught sight of a new star, and began to examine its position carefully. His serious looks gave way to a triumphant smile, his tall figure seemed to grow taller still, he pressed his hand on his heart and whispered: "Use your pinions, winged Darius; your star will be on your side," and then returned to his friends.

A few minutes after, Croesus came up to the arbor. The youths sprang from their seats to welcome the old man, but when he saw Bartja's face by the bright moonlight, he stood as if transfixed by a flash of lightning.

"What has happened, father?" asked Gyges, seizing his hand anxiously.

"Nothing, nothing," he stammered almost inaudibly, and pushing his son on one side, whispered in Bartja's ear: "Unhappy boy, you are still here? don't delay any longer,--fly at once! the whip-bearers are close at my heels, and I assure you that if you don't use the greatest speed, you will have to forfeit your double imprudence with your life."

"But Croesus, I have . . ."

"You have set at nought the law of the land and of the court, and, in appearance at least, have done great offence to your brother's honor...."

"You are speaking . . ."

"Fly, I tell you--fly at once; for if your visit to the hanging-gardens was ever so innocently meant, you are still in the greatest danger. You know Cambyses' violent temper so well; how could you so wickedly disobey his express command?"

"I don't understand."

"No excuses,--fly! don't you know that, Cambyses has long been jealous of you, and that your visit to the Egyptian to-night . . ."

"I have never once set foot in the hanging-gardens, since Nitetis has been here."

"Don't add a lie to your offence, I . . ."

"But I swear to you . . ."

"Do you wish to turn a thoughtless act into a crime by adding the guilt of perjury? The whip-bearers are coming, fly!"

"I shall remain here, and abide by my oath."

"You are infatuated! It is not an hour ago since I myself, Hystaspes, and others of the Achaemenidae saw you in the hanging-gardens . . ."

In his astonishment Bartja had, half involuntarily, allowed himself to be led away, but when he heard this he stood still, called his friends and said "Croesus says he met me an hour ago in the hanging-gardens, you know that since the sun set I have not been away from you. Give your testimony, that in this case an evil Div must have made sport of our friend and his companions."

"I swear to you, father," cried Gyges, "that Bartja has not left this garden for some hours."

"And we confirm the same," added Araspes, Zopyrus and Darius with one voice.

"You want to deceive me?" said Croesus getting very angry, and looking at each of them reproachfully: "Do you fancy that I am blind or mad? Do you think that your witness will outweigh the words of such men as Hystaspes, Gobryas, Artaphernes and the high priest, Oropastes? In spite of all your false testimony, which no amount of friendship can justify, Bartja will have to die unless he flies at once."

"May Angramainjus destroy me," said Araspes interrupting the old man, "if Bartja was in the hanging-gardens two hours ago!" and Gyges added:

"Don't call me your son any longer, if we have given false testimony."

Darius was beginning to appeal to the eternal stars, but Bartja put an end to this confusion of voices by saying in a decided tone: "A division of the bodyguard is coming into the garden. I am to be arrested; I cannot escape because I am innocent, and to fly would lay me open to suspicion. By the soul of my father, the blind eyes of my mother, and the pure light of the sun, Croesus, I swear that I am not lying."

"Am I to believe you, in spite of my own eyes which have never yet deceived me? But I will, boy, for I love you. I do not and I will not know whether you are innocent or guilty, but this I do know, you must fly, and fly at once. You know Cambyses. My carriage is waiting at the gate. Don't spare the horses, save yourself even if you drive them to death. The Soldiers seem to know what they have been sent to do; there

can be no question that they delay so long only in order to give their favorite time to escape. Fly, fly, or it is all over with you."

Darius, too, pushed his friend forward, exclaiming: "Fly, Bartja, and remember the warning that the heavens themselves wrote in the stars for you."

Bartja, however, stood silent, shook his handsome head, waved his friends back, and answered: "I never ran away yet, and I mean to hold my ground to-day. Cowardice is worse than death in my opinion, and I would rather suffer wrong at the hands of others than disgrace myself. There are the soldiers! Well met, Bischen. You've come to arrest me, haven't you? Wait one moment, till I have said good-bye to my friends."

Bischen, the officer he spoke to, was one of Cyrus's old captains; he had given Bartja his first lessons in shooting and throwing the spear, had fought by his side in the war with the Tapuri, and loved him as if he were his own son. He interrupted him, saying: "There is no need to take leave of your friends, for the king, who is raging like a madman, ordered me not only to arrest you, but every one else who might be with you."

And then he added in a low voice: "The king is beside himself with rage and threatens to have your life. You must fly. My men will do what I tell them blindfold; they will not pursue you; and I am so old that it would be little loss to Persia, if my head were the price of my disobedience."

"Thanks, thanks, my friend," said Bartja, giving him his hand; "but I cannot accept your offer, because I am innocent, and I know that though Cambyses is hasty, he is not unjust. Come friends, I think the king will give us a hearing to-day, late as it is."

CHAPTER III.

Two hours later Bartja and his friends were standing before the king. The gigantic man was seated on his golden throne; he was pale and his eyes looked sunken; two physicians stood waiting behind him with all kinds of instruments and vessels in their hands. Cambyses had, only a few minutes before, recovered consciousness, after lying for more than an hour in one of those awful fits, so destructive both to mind and body, which we call epileptic.

[The dangerous disease to which Herodotus says Cambyses had been subject from his birth, and which was called "sacred" by some, can scarcely be other than epilepsy. See Herod, III. 33.]

Since Nitetis' arrival he had been free from this illness; but it had seized him to-day with fearful violence, owing to the overpowering mental excitement he had gone through.

If he had met Bartja a few hours before, he would have killed him with his own hand; but though the epileptic fit had not subdued his anger it had at least so far quieted it, that he was in a condition to hear what was to be said on both sides.

At the right hand of the throne stood Hystaspes, Darius's grey-haired

father, Gobryas, his future father-in-law, the aged Intaphernes, the grandfather of that Phaedime whose place in the king's favor had been given to Nitetis, Oropastes the high-priest, Croesus, and behind them Boges, the chief of the eunuchs. At its left Bartja, whose hands were heavily fettered, Araspes, Darius, Zopyrus and Gyges. In the background stood some hundred officials and grandees.

After a long silence Cambyses raised his eyes, fixed a withering look on his fettered brother, and said in a dull hollow voice: "High-priest, tell us what awaits the man who deceives his brother, dishonors and offends his king, and darkens his own heart by black lies."

Oropastes came forward and answered: "As soon as such a one is proved guilty, a death full of torment awaits him in this world, and an awful sentence on the bridge Chinvat; for he has transgressed the highest commands, and, by committing three crimes, has forfeited the mercy of our law, which commands that his life shall be granted to the man who has sinned but once, even though he be only a slave."

[On the third day after death, at the rising of the bright sun, the souls are conducted by the Divs to the bridge Chinvat, where they are questioned as to their past lives and conduct. Vendid. Fargard. XIX. 93. On that spot the two supernatural powers fight for the soul.]

"Then Bartja has deserved death. Lead him away, guards, and strangle him! Take him away! Be silent, wretch! never will I listen to that smooth, hypocritical tongue again, or look at those treacherous eyes. They come from the Divs and delude every one with their wanton glances. Off with him, guards!"

Bischen, the captain, came up to obey the order, but in the same moment Croesus threw himself at the king's feet, touched the floor with his forehead, raised his hands and cried: "May thy days and years bring nought but happiness and prosperity; may Auramazda pour down all the blessings of this life upon thee, and the Amescha cpenta be the guardians of thy throne!

[The Amescha cpenta, "holy immortal ones," maybe compared to the archangels of the Hebrews. They surround the throne of Auramazda and symbolize the highest virtues. Later we find their number fixed at six.]

Do not close thine ear to the words of the aged, but remember that thy father Cyrus appointed me to be thy counsellor. Thou art about to slay thy brother; but I say unto thee, do not indulge anger; strive to control it. It is the duty of kings and of the wise, not to act without due enquiry. Beware of shedding a brother's blood; the smoke thereof will rise to heaven and become a cloud that must darken the days of the murderer, and at last cast down the lightnings of vengeance on his head. But I know that thou desirest justice, not murder. Act then as those who have to pronounce a sentence, and hear both sides before deciding. When this has been done, if the criminal is proved guilty and confesses his crime, the smoke of his blood will rise to heaven as a friendly shadow, instead of a darkening cloud, and thou wilt have earned the fame of a just judge instead of deserving the divine judgments."

Cambyses listened in silence, made a sign to Bischen to retire, and commanded Boges to repeat his accusation.

The eunuch made an obeisance, and began: "I was ill and obliged to leave the Egyptian and the Hanging-gardens in the care of my colleague Kandaules, who has paid for his negligence with his life. Finding myself better towards evening, I went up to the hanging-gardens to see if everything was in order there, and also to look at the rare flower which was to blossom in the night. The king, (Auramazda grant him victory!) had commanded that the Egyptian should be more strictly watched than usual, because she had dared to send the noble Bartja . . ."

"Be silent," interrupted the king, "and keep to the matter in hand."

"Just as the Tistar-star was rising, I came into the garden, and staid some time there with these noble Achaemenidae, the high-priest and the king Croesus, looking at the blue lily, which was marvellously beautiful. I then called my colleague Kandaules and asked him, in the presence of these noble witnesses, if everything was in order. He affirmed that this was the case and added, that he had just come from Nitetis, that she had wept the whole day, and neither tasted food nor drink. Feeling anxious lest my noble mistress should become worse, I commissioned Kandaules to fetch a physician, and was just on the point of leaving the noble Achaemenidae, in order in person to ascertain my mistress's state of health, when I saw in the moon-light the figure of a man. I was so ill and weak, that I could hardly stand and had no one near to help me, except the gardener.

"My men were on guard at the different entrances, some distance from us.

"I clapped my hands to call some of them, but, as they did not come, I went nearer to the house myself, under the protection of these noblemen. --The man was standing by the window of the Egyptian Princess's apartment, and uttered a low whistle when he heard us coming up. Another figure appeared directly--clearly recognizable in the bright moonlight--sprang out of the sleeping-room window and came towards us with her companion.

"I could hardly believe my eyes on discovering that the intruder was no other than the noble Bartja. A fig-tree concealed us from the fugitives, but we could distinctly see them, as they passed us at a distance of not more than four steps. While I was thinking whether I should be justified in arresting a son of Cyrus, Croesus called to Bartja, and the two figures suddenly disappeared behind a cypress. No one but your brother himself can possibly explain the strange way in which he disappeared. I went at once to search the house, and found the Egyptian lying unconscious on the couch in her sleeping-room."

Every one listened to this story in the greatest suspense. Cambyses ground his teeth and asked in a voice of great emotion: "Can you testify to the words of the eunuch, Hystaspes?"

"Yes."

"Why did you not lay hands on the offender?"

"We are soldiers, not policemen."

"Or rather you care for every knave more than for your king."

"We honor our king, and abhor the criminal just as we formerly loved the

innocent son of Cyrus."

"Did you recognize Bartja distinctly?"

"Yes."

"And you, Croesus, can you too give no other answer?"

"No! I fancied I saw your brother in the moonlight then, as clearly as I see him now; but I believe we must have been deceived by some remarkable likeness." Boges grew pale at these words; Cambyses, however, shook his head as if the idea did not please him, and said: "Whom am I to believe then, if the eyes of my best warriors fail them? and who would wish to be a judge, if testimony such as yours is not to be considered valid?"

"Evidence quite as weighty as ours, will prove that we must have been in error."

"Will any one dare to give evidence in favor of such an outrageous criminal?" asked Cambyses, springing up and stamping his foot.

"We will," "I," "we," shouted Araspes, Darius, Gyges and Zopyrus with one voice.

"Traitors, knaves!" cried the king. But as he caught sight of Croesus' warning eye fixed upon him, he lowered his voice, and said: "What have you to bring forward in favor of this fellow? Take care what you say, and consider well what punishment awaits perjurers."

"We know that well enough," said Araspes, "and yet we are ready to swear by Mithras, that we have not left Bartja or his garden one moment since we came back from hunting."

"As for me," said Darius, "I, the son of Hystaspes, have especially convincing evidence to give in favor of your brother's innocence; I watched the rising of the Tistar-star with him; and this, according to Boges, was the very star that shone on his flight."

Hystaspes gazed on his son in astonishment and doubt at hearing these words, and Cambyses turned a scrutinizing eye first on the one and then on the other party of these strange witnesses, who wished so much, and yet found it so impossible, to believe one another, himself unable to come to a decision.

Bartja, who till now had remained perfectly silent, looking down sadly at his chained hands, took advantage of the silence to say, making at the same time a deep obeisance: "May I be allowed to speak a few words, my King?"

"Speak!"

"From our father we learnt to strive after that which was pure and good only; so up to this time my life has been unstained. If you have ever known me take part in an evil deed, you have a right not to believe me, but if you find no fault in me then trust to what I say, and remember that a son of Cyrus would rather die than tell a lie. I confess that no judge was ever placed in such a perplexing position. The best men in your kingdom testify against one another, friend against friend, father against son. But I tell you that were the entire Persian nation to rise

up against you, and swear that Cambyses had committed this or that evil deed, and you were to say, 'I did not commit it,' I, Bartja, would give all Persia the lie and exclaim, 'Ye are all false witnesses; sooner could the sea cast up fire than a son of Cyrus allow his mouth to deal in lies.' No, Cambyses, you and I are so high-born that no one but yourself can bear evidence against me; and you can only be judged out of your own mouth."

Cambyses' looks grew a little milder on hearing these words, and his brother went on: "So I swear to you by Mithras, and by all pure spirits, that I am innocent. May my life become extinct and my race perish from off the earth, if I tell you a lie, when I say that I have not once set foot in the hanging-gardens since my return!"

Bartja's voice was so firm and his tone so full of assurance, as he uttered this oath that Cambyses ordered his chains to be loosened, and, after a few moments' thought, said: "I should like to believe you, for I cannot bear to imagine you the worst and most abandoned of men. Tomorrow we will summon the astrologers, soothsayers and priests. Perhaps they may be able to discover the truth. Can you see any light in this darkness, Oropastes?"

"Thy servant supposes, that a Div has taken upon him the form of Bartja, in order to ruin the king's brother and stain thine own royal soul with the blood of thy father's son."

Cambyses and every one present nodded their assent to this proposition, and the king was just going to offer his hand to Bartja, when a staff-bearer came in and gave the king a dagger. A eunuch had found it under the windows of Nitetis' sleeping-apartment.

Cambyses examined the weapon carefully. Its costly hilt was thickly set with rubies and turquoises. As he looked he turned pale, and dashed the dagger on the ground before Bartja with such violence, that the stones fell out of their setting.

"This is your dagger, you wretch!" he shrieked, seized by the same violent passion as before. "This very morning you used it to give the last thrust to the wild boar, that I had mortally wounded. Croesus, you ought to know it too, for my father brought it from your treasure-house at Sardis. At last you are really convicted, you liar!--you impostor! The Divs require no weapons, and such a dagger as this is not to be picked up everywhere. Ah, ha! you are feeling in your girdle! You may well turn pale; your dagger is gone!"

"Yes, it is gone. I must have lost it, and some enemy . . ."

"Seize him, Bischen, put on his fetters! Take him to prison--the traitor, the perjurer! He shall be strangled to-morrow. Death is the penalty of perjury. Your heads for theirs, you guards, if they escape. Not one word more will I hear; away with you, you perjured villains! Boges, go at once to the hanging-gardens and bring the Egyptian to me. Yet no, I won't see that serpent again. It is very near dawn now, and at noon she shall be flogged through the streets. Then I'll . . ."

But here he was stopped by another fit of epilepsy, and sank down on to the marble floor in convulsions. At this fearful moment Kassandane was led into the hall by the old general Megabyzus. The news of what had happened had found its way to her solitary apartments, and,

notwithstanding the hour, she had risen in order to try and discover the truth and warn her son against pronouncing a too hasty decision. She believed firmly that Bartja and Nitetis were innocent, though she could not explain to herself what had happened. Several times she had tried to put herself in communication with Nitetis, but without avail. At last she had been herself to the hanging-gardens, but the guards had actually had the hardihood to refuse her admission.

Croesus went at once to meet her, told her what had happened, suppressing as many painful details as possible, confirmed her in her belief of the innocence of the accused, and then took her to the bedside of the king.

The convulsions had not lasted long this time. He lay on his golden bed under purple silk coverlets, pale and exhausted. His blind mother seated herself at his side, Croesus and Oropastes took their station at the foot of the bed, and in another part of the room, four physicians discussed the patient's condition in low whispers.

[It was natural, that medicine should be carefully studied among a people who set such a high value upon life as did the Persians. Pliny indeed, (XXX. I.) maintains, that the whole of Zoroaster's religion was founded on the science of medicine, and it is true that there are a great many medical directions to be found in the Avesta. In the Vendidad, Farg. VII. there is a detailed list of medical fees. "The physician shall treat a priest for a pious blessing or spell, the master of a house for a small draught animal, etc., the lord of a district for a team of four oxen. If the physician cures the mistress of the house, a female ass shall be his fee, etc., etc." We read in the same Fargard, that the physician had to pass a kind of examination. If he had operated thrice successfully on bad men, on whose bodies he had been permitted to try his skill, he was pronounced "capable for ever." If, on the other hand, three evil Daevayacna (worshippers of the Divs) died under his hands, he was pronounced "incapable of healing for evermore."]

Kassandane was very gentle with her son; she begged him not to yield to passionate anger, and to remember what a sad effect every such outburst had on his health.

"Yes, mother, you are right," answered the king, smiling bitterly; "I see that I must get rid of everything that rouses my anger. The Egyptian must die, and my perfidious brother shall follow his mistress."

Kassandane used all her eloquence to convince him of the innocence of the accused, and to pacify his anger, but neither prayers, tears, nor her motherly exhortations, could in the least alter his resolution to rid himself of these murderers of his happiness and peace.

At last he interrupted her lamentations by saying: "I feel fearfully exhausted; I cannot bear these sobs and lamentations any longer. Nitetis has been proved guilty. A man was seen to leave her sleeping-apartment in the night, and that man was not a thief, but the handsomest man in Persia, and one to whom she had dared to send a letter yesterday evening."

"Do you know the contents of that letter?" asked Croesus, coming up to the bed.

"No; it was written in Greek. The faithless creature made use of

characters, which no one at this court can read."

"Will you permit me to translate the letter?" Cambyses pointed to a small ivory box in which the ominous piece of writing lay, saying: "There it is; read it; but do not hide or alter a single word, for to-morrow I shall have it read over again by one of the merchants from Sinope."

Croesus' hopes revived; he seemed to breathe again as he took the paper. But when he had read it over, his eyes filled with tears and he murmured: "The fable of Pandora is only too true; I dare not be angry any longer with those poets who have written severely against women. Alas, they are all false and faithless! O Kassandane, how the Gods deceive us! they grant us the gift of old age, only to strip us bare like trees in winter, and show us that all our fancied gold was dross and all our pleasant and refreshing drinks poison!"

Kassandane wept aloud and tore her costly robes; but Cambyses clenched his fist while Croesus was reading the following words:

"Nitetis, daughter of Amasis of Egypt, to Bartja, son of the great Cyrus:

"I have something important to tell you; I can tell it to no one but yourself. To-morrow I hope I shall meet you in your mother's apartments. It lies in your power to comfort a sad and loving heart, and to give it one happy moment before death. I have a great deal to tell you, and some very sad news; I repeat that I must see you soon."

The desperate laughter, which burst from her son cut his mother to the heart. She stooped down and was going to kiss him, but Cambyses resisted her caresses, saying: "It is rather a doubtful honor, mother, to be one of your favorites. Bartja did not wait to be sent for twice by that treacherous woman, and has disgraced himself by swearing falsely. His friends, the flower of our young men, have covered themselves with indelible infamy for his sake; and through him, your best beloved daughter . . . but no! Bartja had no share in the corruption of that fiend in Peri's form. Her life was made up of hypocrisy and deceit, and her death shall prove that I know how to punish. Now leave me, for I must be alone."

They had scarcely left the room, when he sprang up and paced backwards and forwards like a madman, till the first crow of the sacred bird Parodar. When the sun had risen, he threw himself on his bed again, and fell into a sleep that was like a swoon.

Meanwhile Bartja had written Sappho a farewell letter, and was sitting over the wine with his fellow-prisoners and their elder friend Araspes. "Let us be merry," said Zopyrus, "for I believe it will soon be up with all our merriment. I would lay my life, that we are all of us dead by to-morrow. Pity that men haven't got more than one neck; if we'd two, I would not mind wagering a gold piece or two on the chance of our remaining alive."

"Zopyrus is quite right," said Araspes; "we will make merry and keep our eyes open; who knows how soon they may be closed for ever?"

"No one need be sad who goes to his death as innocently as we do," said Gyges. "Here, cup-bearer, fill my goblet!"

"Ah! Bartja and Darius!" cried Zopyrus, seeing the two speaking in a

low voice together, "there you are at your secrets again. Come to us and pass the wine-cup. By Mithras, I can truly say I never wished for death, but now I quite look forward to the black Azis, because he is going to take us all together. Zopyrus would rather die with his friends, than live without them."

"But the great point is to try and explain what has really happened," said Darius.

"It's all the same to me," said Zopyrus, whether I die with or without an explanation, so long as I know I am innocent and have not deserved the punishment of perjury. Try and get us some golden goblets, Bischen; the wine has no flavor out of these miserable brass mugs. Cambyses surely would not wish us to suffer from poverty in our last hours, though he does forbid our fathers and friends to visit us."

"It's not the metal that the cup is made of," said Bartja, "but the wormwood of death, "that gives the wine its bitter taste."

"No, really, you're quite out there," exclaimed Zopyrus. "Why I had nearly forgotten that strangling generally causes death." As he said this, he touched Gyges and whispered: "Be as cheerful as you can! don't you see that it's very hard for Bartja to take leave of this world? What were you saying, Darius?"

"That I thought Oropastes' idea the only admissible one, that a Div had taken the likeness of Bartja and visited the Egyptian in order to ruin us."

"Folly! I don't believe in such things."

"But don't you remember the legend of the Div, who took the beautiful form of a minstrel and appeared before king Kawus?"

"Of course," cried Araspes. "Cyrus had this legend so often recited at the banquets, that I know it by heart."

"Kai Kawus hearkened to the words of the disguised Div and went to Masenderan, and was beaten there by the Divs and deprived of his eyesight."

"But," broke in Darius, "Rustem, the great hero, came and conquered Erscheng and the other bad spirits, freed the captives and restored sight to the blind, by dropping the blood of the slaughtered Divs into their eyes. And so it will be with us, my friends! We shall be set free, and the eyes of Cambyses and of our blind and infatuated fathers will be opened to see our innocence. Listen, Bischen; if we really should be executed, go to the Magi, the Chaldwans, and Nebenchari the Egyptian, and tell them they had better not study the stars any longer, for that those very stars had proved themselves liars and deceivers to Darius."

"Yes," interrupted Araspes, "I always said that dreams were the only real prophecies. Before Abradatas fell in the battle of Sardis, the peerless Panthea dreamt that she saw him pierced by a Lydian arrow."

"You cruel fellow!" exclaimed Zopyrus. "Why do you remind us, that it is much more glorious to die in battle than to have our necks wrung off"

"Quite right," answered the elder man; "I confess that I have seen many a

death, which I should prefer to our own,--indeed to life itself. Ah, boys, there was a time when things went better than they do now."

"Tell us something about those times."

"And tell us why you never married. It won't matter to you in the next world, if we do let out your secret."

"There's no secret; any of your own fathers could tell you what you want to hear from me. Listen then. When I was young, I used to amuse myself with women, but I laughed at the idea of love. It occurred, however, that Panthea, the most beautiful of all women, fell into our hands, and Cyrus gave her into my charge, because I had always boasted that my heart was invulnerable. I saw her everyday, and learnt, my friends, that love is stronger than a man's will. However, she refused all my offers, induced Cyrus to remove me from my office near her, and to accept her husband Abradatas as an ally. When her handsome husband went out to the war, this high-minded, faithful woman decked him out with all her own jewels and told him that the noble conduct of Cyrus, in treating her like a sister, when she was his captive, could only be repaid by the most devoted friendship and heroic courage. Abradatas agreed with her, fought for Cyrus like a lion, and fell. Panthea killed herself by his dead body. Her servants, on hearing of this, put an end to their own lives too at the grave of this best of mistresses. Cyrus shed tears over this noble pair, and had a stone set up to their memory, which you can see near Sardis. On it are the simple words: 'To Panthea, Abradatas, and the most faithful of servants.' You see, children, the man who had loved such a woman could never care for another."

The young men listened in silence, and remained some time after Araspes had finished, without uttering a word. At last Bartja raised his hands to heaven and cried: "O thou great Auramazda! why dost thou not grant us a glorious end like Abradatas? Why must we die a shameful death like murderers?"

As he said this Croesus came in, fettered and led by whip-bearers. The friends rushed to him with a storm of questions, and Bartja too went up to embrace the man who had been so long his tutor and guide. But the old man's cheerful face was severe and serious, and his eyes, generally so mild, had a gloomy, almost threatening, expression. He waved the prince coldly back, saying, in a voice which trembled with pain and reproach: "Let my hand go, you infatuated boy! you are not worth all the love I have hitherto felt for you. You have deceived your brother in a fourfold manner, duped your friends, betrayed that poor child who is waiting for you in Naukratis, and poisoned the heart of Amasis' unhappy daughter."

Bartja listened calmly till he heard the word "deceived"; then his hand clenched, and stamping his foot, he cried: "But for your age and infirmities, and the gratitude I owe you, old man, these slanderous words would be your last."

Croesus beard this outbreak of just indignation unmoved, and answered: "This foolish rage proves that you and Cambyses have the same blood in your veins. It would become you much better to repent of your crimes, and beg your old friend's forgiveness, instead of adding ingratitude to the unheard-of baseness of your other deeds."

At these words Bartja's anger gave way. His clenched hands sank down powerless at his side, and his cheeks became pale as death.

These signs of sorrow softened the old man's indignation. His love was strong enough to embrace the guilty as well as the innocent Bartja, and taking the young man's right hand in both his own, he looked at him as a father would who finds his son, wounded on the battle-field, and said: "Tell me, my poor, infatuated boy, how was it that your pure heart fell away so quickly to the evil powers?"

Bartja shuddered. The blood came back to his face, but these words cut him to the heart. For the first time in his life his belief in the justice of the gods forsook him.

He called himself the victim of a cruel, inexorable fate, and felt like a bunted animal driven to its last gasp and hearing the dogs and sportsmen fast coming nearer. He had a sensitive, childlike nature, which did not yet know how to meet the hard strokes of fate. His body and his physical courage had been hardened against bodily and physical enemies; but his teachers had never told him how to meet a hard lot in life; for Cambyses and Bartja seemed destined only to drink out of the cup of happiness and joy.

Zopyrus could not bear to see his friend in tears. He reproached the old man angrily with being unjust and severe. Gyges' looks were full of entreaty, and Araspes stationed himself between the old man and the youth, as if to ward off the blame of the elder from cutting deeper into the sad and grieved heart of the younger man. Darius, however, after having watched them for some time, came up with quiet deliberation to Croesus, and said: "You continue to distress and offend one another, and yet the accused does not seem to know with what offence he is charged, nor will the accuser hearken to his defence. Tell us, Croesus, by the friendship which has subsisted between us up to this clay, what has induced you to judge Bartja so harshly, when only a short time ago you believed in his innocence?"

The old man told at once what Darius desired to know--that he had seen a letter, written in Nitetis' own hand, in which she made a direct confession of her love to Bartja and asked him to meet her alone. The testimony of his own eyes and of the first men in the realm, nay, even the dagger found under Nitetis' windows, had not been able to convince him that his favorite was guilty; but this letter had gone like a burning flash into his heart and destroyed the last remnant of his belief in the virtue and purity of woman.

"I left the king," he concluded, "perfectly convinced that a sinful intimacy must subsist between your friend and the Egyptian Princess, whose heart I had believed to be a mirror for goodness and beauty alone. Can you find fault with me for blaming him who so shamefully stained this clear mirror, and with it his own not less spotless soul?"

"But how can I prove my innocence?" cried Bartja, wringing his hands. "If you loved me you would believe me; if you really cared for me....."

"My boy! in trying to save your life only a few minutes ago, I forfeited my own. When I heard that Cambyses had really resolved on your death, I hastened to him with a storm of entreaties; but these were of no avail, and then I was presumptuous enough to reproach him bitterly in his irritated state of mind. The weak thread of his patience broke, and in a fearful passion he commanded the guards to behead me at once. I was seized directly by Giv, one of the whip-bearers; but as the man is under

obligations to me, he granted me my life until this morning, and promised to conceal the postponement of the execution. I am glad, my sons, that I shall not outlive you, and shall die an innocent man by the side of the guilty."

These last words roused another storm of contradiction.

Again Darius remained calm and quiet in the midst of the tumult. He repeated once more the story of the whole evening exactly, to prove that it was impossible Bartja could have committed the crime laid to his charge. He then called on the accused himself to answer the charge of disloyalty and perfidy. Bartja rejected the idea of an understanding with Nitetis in such short, decided, and convincing words, and confirmed his assertion with such a fearful oath, that Croesus' persuasion of his guilt first wavered, then vanished, and when Bartja had ended, he drew a deep breath, like a man delivered from a heavy burden, and clasped him in his arms.

But with all their efforts they could come to no explanation of what had really happened. In one thing, however, they were all agreed: that Nitetis loved Bartja and had written the letter with a wrong intention.

"No one who saw her," cried Darius, "when Cambyses announced that Bartja had chosen a wife, could doubt for a moment that she was in love with him. When she let the goblet fall, I heard Phaedime's father say that the Egyptian women seemed to take a great interest in the affairs of their brothers-in-law."

While they were talking, the sun rose and shone pleasantly into the prisoners' room.

Bartja murmured Mithras means to make our parting difficult."

"No," answered Croesus, "he only means to light us kindly on our way into eternity."

CHAPTER IV.

The innocent originator of all this complicated misery had passed many a wretched hour since the birthday banquet. Since those harsh words with which Cambyses had sent her from the hall, not the smallest fragment of news had reached her concerning either her angry lover, or his mother and sister. Not a day had passed since her arrival in Babylon, that had not been spent with Kassandane and Atossa; but now, on her desiring to be carried to them, that she might explain her strange conduct, her new guard, Kandaules, forbade her abruptly to leave the house. She had thought that a free and full account of the contents of her letter from home, would clear up all these misunderstandings. She fancied she saw Cambyses holding out his hand as if to ask forgiveness for his hastiness and foolish jealousy. And then a joyful feeling stole into her mind as she remembered a sentence she had once heard Ibykus say: "As fever attacks a strong man more violently than one of weaker constitution; so a heart that loves strongly and deeply can be far more awfully tormented by jealousy, than one which has been only superficially seized by passion."

If this great connoisseur in love were right, Cambyses must love her

passionately, or his jealousy could not have caught fire so quickly and fearfully. Sad thoughts about her home, however, and dark forebodings of the future would mix with this confidence in Cambyses' love, and she could not shut them out. Mid-day came, the sun stood high and burning in the sky, but no news came from those she loved so well; and a feverish restlessness seized her which increased as night came on. In the twilight Boges came to her, and told her, with bitter scorn, that her letter to Bartja had come into the king's hands, and that the gardener's boy who brought it had been executed. The tortured nerves of the princess could not resist this fresh blow, and before Boges left, he carried the poor girl senseless into her sleeping-room, the door of which he barred carefully.

A few minutes later, two men, one old, the other young, came up through the trap-door which Boges had examined so carefully two days before. The old man remained outside, crouching against the palace wall; a hand was seen to beckon from the window: the youth obeyed the signal, swung himself over the ledge and into the room at a bound. Then words of love were exchanged, the names Gaumata and Mandane whispered softly, kisses and vows given and received. At last the old man clapped his hands. The youth obeyed, kissed and embraced Nitetis' waiting-maid once more, jumped out of the window into the garden, hurried past the admirers of the blue lily who were just coming up, slipped with his companion into the trap-door which had been kept open, closed it carefully, and vanished.

Mandane hurried to the room in which her mistress generally spent the evening. She was well acquainted with her habits and knew that every evening, when the stars had risen, Nitetis was accustomed to go to the window looking towards the Euphrates, and spend hours gazing into the river and over the plain; and that at that time she never needed her attendance. So she felt quite safe from fear of discovery in this quarter, and knowing she was under the protection of the chief of the eunuchs himself, could wait for her lover calmly.

But scarcely had she discovered that her mistress had fainted, when she heard the garden filling with people, a confused sound of men's and eunuchs' voices, and the notes of the trumpet used to summon the sentries. At first she was frightened and fancied her lover had been discovered, but Boges appearing and whispering: "He has escaped safely," she at once ordered the other attendants, whom she had banished to the women's apartments during her rendezvous, and who now came flocking back, to carry their mistress into her sleeping-room, and then began using all the remedies she knew of, to restore her to consciousness. Nitetis had scarcely opened her eyes when Boges came in, followed by two eunuchs, whom he ordered to load her delicate arms with fetters.

Nitetis submitted; she could not utter one word, not even when Boges called out as he was leaving the room: "Make yourself happy in your cage, my little imprisoned bird. They've just been telling your lord that a royal marten has been making merry in your dove-cote. Farewell, and think of the poor tormented Boges in this tremendous heat, when you feel the cool damp earth. Yes, my little bird, death teaches us to know our real friends, and so I won't have you buried in a coarse linen sack, but in a soft silk shawl. Farewell, my darling!"

The poor, heavily-afflicted girl trembled at these words, and when the eunuch was gone, begged Mandane to tell her what it all meant. The girl, instructed by Boges, said that Bartja had stolen secretly into the hanging-gardens, and had been seen by several of the Achaemenidae as he

was on the point of getting in at one of the windows. The king had been told of his brother's treachery, and people were afraid his jealousy might have fearful consequences. The frivolous girl shed abundant tears of penitence while she was telling the story, and Nitetis, fancying this a proof of sincere love and sympathy, felt cheered.

When it was over, however, she looked down at her fetters in despair, and it was long before she could think of her dreadful position quietly. Then she read her letter from home again, wrote the words, "I am innocent," and told the sobbing girl to give the little note containing them to the king's mother after her own death, together with her letter from home. After doing this she passed a wakeful night which seemed as if it would never end. She remembered that in her box of ointments there was a specific for improving the complexion, which, if swallowed in a sufficiently large quantity, would cause death. She had this poison brought to her, and resolved calmly and deliberately, to take her own life directly the executioner should draw near. From that moment she took pleasure in thinking of her last hour, and said to herself: "It is true he causes my death; but he does it out of love." Then she thought she would write to him, and confess all her love. He should not receive the letter until she was dead, that he might not think she had written it to save her life. The hope that this strong, inflexible man might perhaps shed tears over her last words of love filled her with intense pleasure.

In spite of her heavy fetters, she managed to write the following words: "Cambyses will not receive this letter until I am dead. It is to tell him that I love him more than the gods, the world, yes, more than my own young life. Kassandane and Atossa must think of me kindly. They will see from my mother's letter that I am innocent, and that it was only for my poor sister's sake that I asked to see Bartja. Boges has told me that my death has been resolved upon. When the executioner approaches, I shall kill myself. I commit this crime against myself, Cambyses, to save you from doing a disgraceful deed."

This note and her mother's she gave to the weeping Mandane, and begged her to give both to Cambyses when she was gone. She then fell on her knees and prayed to the gods of her fathers to forgive her for her apostasy from them.

Mandane begged her to remember her weakness and take some rest, but she answered: "I do not need any sleep, because, you know, I have such little waking-time still left me."

As she went on praying and singing her old Egyptian hymns, her heart returned more and more to the gods of her fathers, whom she had denied after such a short struggle. In almost all the prayers with which she was acquainted, there was a reference to the life after death. In the nether world, the kingdom of Osiris, where the forty-two judges of the dead pronounce sentence on the worth of the soul after it has been weighed by the goddess of truth and Thoth, who holds the office of writer in heaven, she could hope to meet her dear ones again, but only in case her unjustified soul were not obliged to enter on the career of transmigration through the bodies of different animals, and her body, to whom the soul had been entrusted, remained in a state of preservation. This, "if" filled her with a feverish restlessness. The doctrine that the well-being of the soul depended on the preservation of the earthly part of every human being left behind at death, had been impressed on her from childhood. She believed in this error, which had built pyramids and

excavated rocks, and trembled at the thought that, according to the Persian custom, her body would be thrown to the dogs and birds of prey, and so given up to the powers of destruction, that her soul must be deprived of every hope of eternal life. Then the thought came to her, should she prove unfaithful to the gods of her fathers again, and once more fall down before these new spirits of light, who gave the dead body over to the elements and only judged the soul? And so she raised her hands to the great and glorious sun, who with his golden sword-like rays was just dispersing the mists that hung over the Euphrates, and opened her lips to sing her newly-learnt hymns in praise of Mithras; but her voice failed her, instead of Mithras she could only see her own great Ra, the god she had so often worshipped in Egypt, and instead of a Magian hymn could only sing the one with which the Egyptian priests are accustomed to greet the rising sun.

This hymn brought comfort with it, and as she gazed on the young light, the rays of which were not yet strong enough to dazzle her, she thought of her childhood, and the tears gathered in her eyes. Then she looked down over the broad plain. There was the Euphrates with his yellow waves looking so like the Nile; the many villages, just as in her own home, peeping out from among luxuriant cornfields and plantations of fig-trees. To the west lay the royal hunting-park; she could see its tall cypresses and nut-trees miles away in the distance. The dew was glistening on every little leaf and blade of grass, and the birds sang deliciously in the shrubberies round her dwelling. Now and then a gentle breath of wind arose, carrying the sweet scent of the roses across to her, and playing in the tops of the slender, graceful palms which grew in numbers on the banks of the river and in the fields around.

She had so often admired these beautiful trees, and compared them to dancing-girls, as she watched the wind seizing their heavy tops and swaying the slender stems backwards and forwards. And she had often said to herself that here must be the home of the Phoenix, that wonderful bird from the land of palms, who, the priests said, came once in every five hundred years to the temple of Ra in Heliopolis and burnt himself in the sacred incense-flames, only to rise again from his own ashes more beautiful than before, and, after three days, to fly back again to his home in the East. While she was thinking of this bird, and wishing that she too might rise again from the ashes of her unhappiness to a new and still more glorious joy, a large bird with brilliant plumage rose out of the dark cypresses, which concealed the palace of the man she loved and who had made her so miserable, and flew towards her. It rose higher and higher, and at last settled on a palmtree close to her window. She had never seen such a bird before, and thought it could not possibly be a usual one, for a little gold chain was fastened to its foot, and its tail seemed made of sunbeams instead of feathers. It must be Benno, the bird of Ra! She fell on her knees again and sang with deep reverence the ancient hymn to the Phoenix, never once turning her eyes from the brilliant bird.

The bird listened to her singing, bending his little head with its waving plumes, wisely and inquisitively from side to side, and flew away directly she ceased. Nitetis looked after him with a smile. It was really only a bird of paradise that had broken the chain by which he had been fastened to a tree in the park, but to her he was the Phoenix. A strange certainty of deliverance filled her heart; she thought the god Ra had sent the bird to her, and that as a happy spirit she should take that form. So long as we are able to hope and wish, we can bear a great deal of sorrow; if the wished-for happiness does not come, anticipation is at

least prolonged and has its own peculiar sweetness. This feeling is of itself enough, and contains a kind of enjoyment which can take the place of reality. Though she was so weary, yet she lay down on her couch with fresh hopes, and fell into a dreamless sleep almost against her will, without having touched the poison.

The rising sun generally gives comfort to sad hearts who have passed the night in weeping, but to a guilty conscience, which longs for darkness, his pure light is an unwelcome guest. While Nitetis slept, Mandane lay awake, tormented by fearful remorse. How gladly she would have held back the sun which was bringing on the day of death to this kindest of mistresses, and have spent the rest of her own life in perpetual night, if only her yesterday's deed could but have been undone!

The good-natured, thoughtless girl called herself a wretched murderess unceasingly, resolved again and again to confess the whole truth and so to save Nitetis; but love of life and fear of death gained the victory over her weak heart every time. To confess was certain death, and she felt as if she had been made for life; she had so many hopes for the future, and the grave seemed so dreadful. She thought she could perhaps have confessed the whole truth, if perpetual imprisonment had been all she had to fear; but death! no, she could not resolve on that. And besides, would her confession really save the already condemned Nitetis?

Had she not sent a message to Bartja herself by that unfortunate gardener's boy? This secret correspondence had been discovered, and that was enough of itself to ruin Nitetis, even if she, Mandane, had done nothing in the matter. We are never so clever as when we have to find excuses for our own sins.

At sunrise, Mandane was kneeling by her mistress's couch, weeping bitterly and wondering that Nitetis could sleep so calmly.

Boges, the eunuch, had passed a sleepless night too, but a very happy one. His hated colleague, Kandaules, whom he had used as a substitute for himself, had been already executed, by the king's command, for negligence, and on the supposition that he had accepted a bribe; Nitetis was not only ruined, but certain to die a shameful death. The influence of the king's mother had suffered a severe shock; and lastly, he had the pleasure of knowing, not only that he had outwitted every one and succeeded in all his plans, but that through his favorite Phaedime he might hope once more to become the all-powerful favorite of former days. That sentence of death had been pronounced on Croesus and the young heroes, was by no means an unwelcome thought either, as they might have been instrumental in bringing his intrigues to light.

In the grey of the morning he left the king's apartment and went to Phaedime. The proud Persian had taken no rest. She was waiting for him with feverish anxiety, as a rumor of all that had happened had already reached the harem and penetrated to her apartments. She was lying on a purple couch in her dressing-room; a thin silken chemise and yellow slippers thickly sown with turquoises and pearls composed her entire dress. Twenty attendants were standing round her, but the moment she heard Boges she sent her slaves away, sprang up to meet him, and overwhelmed him with a stream of incoherent questions, all referring to her enemy Nitetis.

"Gently, gently, my little bird," said Boges, laying his hand on her shoulder. "If you can't make up your mind to be as quiet as a little

mouse while I tell my story, and not to ask one question, you won't hear a syllable of it to-day. Yes, indeed, my golden queen, I've so much to tell that I shall not have finished till to-morrow, if you are to interrupt me as often as you like. Ah, my little lamb, and I've still so much to do to-day. First I must be present at an Egyptian donkey-ride; secondly, I must witness an Egyptian execution . . . but I see I am anticipating my story; I must begin at the beginning. I'll allow you to cry, laugh and scream for joy as much as you will, but you're forbidden to ask a single question until I have finished. I think really I have deserved these caresses. There, now I am quite at my ease, and can begin. Once upon a time there was a great king in Persia, who had many wives, but he loved Phaedime better than the rest, and set her above all the others. One day the thought struck him that he would ask for the hand of the King of Egypt's daughter in marriage, and he sent a great embassy to Sais, with his own brother to do the wooing for him--"

"What nonsense!" cried Phaedime impatiently; "I want to know what has happened now."

"Patience, patience, my impetuous March wind. If you interrupt me again, I shall go away and tell my story to the trees. You really need not grudge me the pleasure of living my successes over again. While I tell this story, I feel as happy as a sculptor when he puts down his hammer and gazes at his finished work."

"No, no!" said Phaedime, interrupting him again. "I cannot listen now to what I know quite well already. I am dying of impatience, and every fresh report that the eunuchs and slave-girls bring makes it worse. I am in a perfect fever--I cannot wait. Ask whatever else you like, only deliver me from this awful suspense. Afterwards I will listen to you for days, if you wish."

Boges' smile at these words was one of great satisfaction; he rubbed his hands and answered: "When I was a child I had no greater pleasure than to watch a fish writhing on the hook; now I have got you, my splendid golden carp, at the end of my line, and I can't let you go until I have sated myself on your impatience."

Phaedime sprang up from the couch which she had shared with Boges, stamping her foot and behaving like a naughty child. This seemed to amuse the eunuch immensely; he rubbed his hands again and again, laughed till the tears ran down over his fat cheeks, emptied many a goblet of wine to the health of the tortured beauty, and then went on with his tale: "It had not escaped me that Cambyses sent his brother (who had brought Nitetis from Egypt), out to the war with the Tapuri purely from jealousy. That proud woman, who was to take no orders from me, seemed to care as little for the handsome, fair-haired boy as a Jew for pork, or an Egyptian for white beans. But still I resolved to nourish the king's jealousy, and use it as a means of rendering this impudent creature harmless, as she seemed likely to succeed in supplanting us both in his favor. It was long, however, before I could hit on a feasible plan.

"At last the new-year's festival arrived and all the priests in the kingdom assembled at Babylon. For eight days the city was full of rejoicing, feasting and merry-making. At court it was just the same, and so I had very little time to think of my plans. But just then, when I had hardly any hope of succeeding, the gracious Amescha cpenta sent a youth across my path, who seemed created by Angramainjus himself to suit my plan. Gaumata, the brother of Oropastes, came to Babylon to be

present at the great new-year's sacrifice. I saw him first in his brother's house, whither I had been sent on a message from the king, and his likeness to Bartja was so wonderful, that I almost fancied I was looking at an apparition. When I had finished my business with Oropastes the youth accompanied me to my carriage. I showed no signs of astonishment at this remarkable likeness, treated him however, with immense civility, and begged him to pay me a visit. He came the very same evening. I sent for my best wine, pressed him to drink, and experienced, not for the first time, that the juice of the vine has one quality which outweighs all the rest: it can turn even a silent man into a chatter-box. The youth confessed that the great attraction which had brought him to Babylon was, not the sacrifice, but a girl who held the office of upper attendant to the Egyptian Princess. He said he had loved her since he was a child; but his ambitious brother had higher views for him, and in order to get the lovely Mandane out of his way, had procured her this situation. At last he begged me to arrange an interview with her. I listened good-naturedly, made a few difficulties, and at last asked him to come the next day and see how matters were going on. He came, and I told him that it might be possible to manage it, but only if he would promise to do what I told him without a question. He agreed to everything, returned to Rhagae at my wish, and did not come to Babylon again until yesterday, when he arrived secretly at my house, where I concealed him. Meanwhile Bartja had returned from the war. The great point now was to excite the king's jealousy again, and ruin the Egyptian at one blow. I roused the indignation of your relations through your public humiliation, and so prepared the way for my plan. Events were wonderfully in my favor. You know how Nitetis behaved at the birthday banquet, but you do not know that that very evening she sent a gardener's boy to the palace with a note for Bartja. The silly fellow managed to get caught and was executed that very night, by command of the king, who was almost mad with rage; and I took care that Nitetis should be as entirely cut off from all communication with her friends, as if she lived in the nest of the Simurg. You know the rest."

"But how did Gaumata escape?"

"Through a trap-door, of which nobody knows but myself, and which stood wide open waiting for him. Everything turned out marvellously; I even succeeded in getting hold of a dagger which Bartja had lost while hunting, and in laying it under Nitetis' window. In order to get rid of the prince during these occurrences, and prevent him from meeting the king or any one else who might be important as a witness, I asked the Greek merchant Kolxus, who was then at Babylon with a cargo of Milesian cloth, and who is always willing to do me a favor, because I buy all the woollen stuffs required for the harem of him, to write a Greek letter, begging Bartja, in the name of her he loved best, to come alone to the first station outside the Euphrates gate at the rising of the Tistar-star. But I had a misfortune with this letter, for the messenger managed the matter clumsily. He declares that he delivered the letter to Bartja; but there can be no doubt that he gave it to some one else, probably to Gaumata, and I was not a little dismayed to hear that Bartja was sitting over the wine with his friends on that very evening. Still what had been done could not be undone, and I knew that the witness of men like your father, Hystaslies, Croesus and Intaphernes, would far outweigh anything that Darius, Gyges and Araspes could say. The former would testify against their friend, the latter for him. And so at last everything went as I would have had it. The young gentlemen are sentenced to death and Croesus, who as usual, presumed to speak impertinently to the king, will have lived his last hour by this time. As to the Egyptian Princess, the

secretary in chief has just been commanded to draw up the following order. Now listen and rejoice, my little dove! "Nitetis, the adulterous daughter of the King of Egypt, shall be punished for her hideous crimes according to the extreme rigor of the law, thus: She shall be set astride upon an ass and led through the streets of Babylon; and all men shall see that Cambyses knows how to punish a king's daughter, as severely as his magistrates would punish the meanest beggar.

--To Boges, chief of the eunuchs, is entrusted the execution of this order.

By command of King Cambyses. Ariabignes, chief of the Secretaries'

"I had scarcely placed these lines in the sleeve of my robe, when the king's mother, with her garments rent, and led by Atossa, pressed hastily into the hall. Weeping and lamentation followed; cries, reproaches, curses, entreaties and prayers; but the king remained firm, and I verily believe Kassandane and Atossa would have been sent after Croesus and Bartja into the other world, if fear of Cyrus's spirit had not prevented the son, even in this furious rage, from laying hands on his father's widow. Kassandane, however, did not say one word for Nitetis. She seems as fully convinced of her guilt as you and I can be. Neither have we anything to fear from the enamored Gaumata. I have hired three men to give him a cool bath in the Euphrates, before he gets back to Rhagae. Ah, ha! the fishes and worms will have a jolly time!"

Phaedime joined in Boges' laughter, bestowed on him all the flattering names which she had caught from his own smooth tongue, and in token of her gratitude, hung a heavy chain studded with jewels round his neck with her own beautiful arms.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Call everything that is beyond your comprehension a miracle
Never so clever as when we have to find excuses for our own sins
So long as we are able to hope and wish

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