CLEOPATRA.

Being an Account of the Fall and Vengeance of Harmachis, the Royal Egyptian,

AS SET FORTH BY HIS OWN HAND.

By H. Rider Haggard,

Author of "King Solomon's Mines," "She," "Allan Quatermain," Etc., Etc., Etc.

"Ah! so—so!" she said, dryly, and still laughing like a rippling brook. "Yes, surely, the slave women who keep chambers own such toys as this, of the very finest silk, worth twice its weight in gold, and broidered, too, in many colors. Why, myself I should not shame to wear it! Of a truth it seems familiar to my sight." And she threw it around her neck and smoothed the ends with her white hand. "But there, 'tis a thing unlucky in thine eyes that the scarf of thy beloved should rest upon my poor breast. Take it, Harmachis; take it and hide it in thy bosom, nigh thy heart, indeed!"

I took the accursed thing, and muttering what I may not write, stepped on to the giddy platform whence I watched the stars. Then crushing it into a ball, I threw it to the winds of heaven.

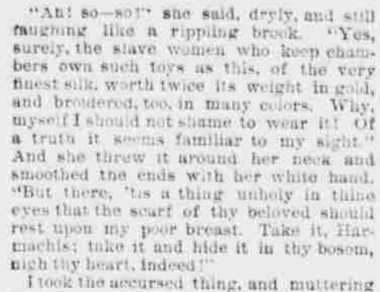
Thereat the lovely Queen laughed once more.

"Nay, think now," she cried. "What would the lady say could she see her love-gage thus cast to all the world? Mayhap, Harmachis, thou wouldst deal thus with my wreath also? See, the roses fade; cast it off," and, stooping, she took up the wreath and gave it to me.

For a moment, so vexed was I, I had a mind to take her at her word and send the wreath to join the kerchief. But I thought better of it.

"Nay," I said more softly, "it is a Queen's gift, and I will keep it," and as I spoke, methought I saw the curtain shake. Often since have I sorrowed over those simple words.

"Gracious thanks be to the King of Love for this small mercy," she answered, looking at me strangely. "Now, enough of wit; come forth upon this balcony—tell me of the mystery of those stars of thine. For ever did I love the stars, that are so pure and bright and cold, and so far away from



AND WHILE I SPOKE,

all our fevered troubling. There would I wish to dwell, rocked on the dark bosom of the night, and losing the little sense of self as I gazed forever on the countenance of yon sweet-eyed space. Nay—who can tell, Harmachis?—perhaps those very stars partake even of our substance, and, linked to us by Nature's invisible chain, do, indeed, draw our destiny with them as they roll. What says the Greek fable of him who became a star? Perchance it hath truth, for yonder tiny sparks may be the souls of men, but grown more purely bright and placed in happy rest to illume the turmoil of their mother earth. Or are they lamps hung high in the heavenly vault that night by night some Godhead, whose ways are darkness, touches with his immortal fire, so that they leap out in answering flame? Give me somewhat of thy wisdom and open these wonders to me, O my servant, for I have little knowledge. Yet my heart is large, and I fain would fill it, for I have the wit could I but find the teacher."

Therein, being right glad to find footing on a safer shore, and marveling somewhat to learn that Cleopatra had a place for lofty thoughts, I spoke and told her willingly such things as are lawful. I told her how the sky is a liquid mass pressing round the earth and resting on the elastic pillars of the air, and how above is the heavenly ocean Nout, wherein the planets float like ships as they rush upon their radiant way. Many things I told her, and among them how through the certain, never-ceasing movement of the orbs of light the planet that was called Donaou (Venus) when she showed as the morning star, became the planet Bonou when she came as the sweet Star of Eve. [The motion of the planets appears to have been familiar to the Egyptians]. And, while I stood and spoke watching the stars, she sat, her hands clasped upon her knee, and watched my face.

"Ah!" she broke in at length, "and so Venus is to be seen both in the morning and the evening sky. Well, of a truth, she is everywhere, though best she loves the night. But thou lovest not that I should use these Latin names to thee. Come, we will talk in the ancient tongue of Knem, which I know right well; the first, mark thou, of all the Lagidæ am I who know it. And now," she went on, speaking in mine own tongue, but with a little foreign accent that did but make her talk more sweet, "enough of stars, for, when all is said, they are but fickle things, and perchance may even now be storing up an evil hour for thee or me, or for us both together. Not but what I love to hear thee speak of them, for then thy face doth lose that gloomy cloud of thought wherewith thou drapest it and grows quick and human. Harmachis, thou art too young for such a solemn trade; methinks that I must find thee a better. Youth comes but once; why waste it in these musings? Time is it to think when we can no longer act. Tell me how old art thou, Harmachis?"

"I am six and twenty years, O Queen," I answered, "for I was born in the first month of Shomou, in the summer season, and on the third day of the month."

"Why, we are of an age even to a day," she cried, "for I, too, have six and twenty years, and I, too, was born on the third day of the first month of Shomou. Well, this may we say—those who begot us need have no shame. For if I be the fairest woman in Egypt, methinks, Harmachis, that there is in Egypt no man more fair and strong than thou, aye, or more learned. Born on the same day, why, 'tis manifest that we were destined to stand together, I as the Queen, and thou, perchance, Harmachis, as one of the chief pillars of my throne, and thus to work each other's weal."

"Or, perchance, each other's woe," I answered, looking up; for her sweet speeches stung my ears, and brought more color to my face than I loved that she should see therein.

"Nay, never talk of woe. Be seated here by me, Harmachis, and let us talk, not as Queen and subject, but as friend to friend. Thou wast angered with me at the feast to-night—was it not so?—in that I mocked thee with yonder wreath? Nay, 'twas but a jest. Didst thou know how heavy is the task of monarchs, and how wearisome are their hours, thou wouldst not be wroth because I lit my dullness with a jest. Oh, they weary me, those princes and those nobles, and those stiff-necked, pompous Romans. To my face they vow themselves my slaves, and behind my back they mock me and proclaim me the servant of their triumvirate, or their empire, or their republic, as the wheel of fortune turns, and each rises on its round! There is never a man among them—nothing but fools, parasites and puppets—never a man since with their cowardly daggers they slew that Cæsar whom all the world in arms was not strong enough to tame. And I must play off one against the other, if, may be, by so doing I can keep Egypt from their grip. And for reward, what? Why, this is my reward: that all men speak ill of me and—I know it—my subjects hate me! Yea, I believe that woman though I be, they would murder me could they find a means!" And she paused, covering her eyes with her hand, and it was well, for her words pierced me so that I shrank there upon the seat beside her.

"They think ill of me, I know it; and call me wanton, who have never stepped aside save once, when I loved the greatest man of all the world, and at the touch of love my passion flamed indeed, but burnt with a hallowed flame. These ribald Alexandrians do swear that I poisoned Ptolemy, my brother—whom, most unnaturally, the Roman Senate would have forced on me, his sister, as a husband! but it is false; he sickened and died of fever. And even so they say that I would slay Arsinoe, my sister—who, indeed, would slay me!—but that, too, is false! Though she will have none of me, I love my sister. Yea, they all think ill of me without a cause; even thou dost think ill of me, Harmachis. Oh, Harmachis, before thou judgest, think what a thing is envy!—that foul sickness of the mind which makes the jaundiced eye of pettiness to see all things distraught—to read evil written on the open face of good, and find impurity in the whitest virgin's soul. Think what a thing it is, Harmachis, to be set on high above the gaping crowd of knaves who hate thee for thy fortune and thy wit; who gnash their teeth and shoot the arrows of their lies from the cover of their own obscureness, whence they have no wings to soar; and whose hearts' quest it is to drag down thy nobility to the level of the groundling and the fool!

"Be not, then, ready to think evil of the great, whose every word and act is searched for error by a million angry eyes, and whose most tiny fault is trumpeted by a thousand throats, till the world shakes with the echoes of their sin! Say not: 'Tis thus, 'tis certainly thus'—say, rather: 'Nay, may it not be otherwise? Have we heard aright? Did she this thing of her own will?' Judge gently, O Harmachis, as wert thou me thou wouldst be judged. Remember that a Queen is never free. She is, indeed, but the point and instrument of those forces politic, wherewith are graven the iron books of history. O, Harmachis! be thou my friend—my friend and counsellor!—my friend whom I can trust indeed!—for here, in this crowded court, I am more utterly alone than any soul that breathes about the corridors. But *thee* I trust; there is faith written in those quiet eyes, and I am minded to lift thee high. Harmachis, I can no longer bear my solitude of mind—I must find one with whom I may commune and speak that which lies within my heart. I have faults, I know it; but I am not all unworthy of thy faith, for there is good grain among the evil seed. Say, Harmachis, wilt thou take pity on my loneliness and befriend me who have lovers, courtiers, slaves, dependents, more thick than I can count, but never one single friend?" and she leaned toward me, touching me lightly, and gazed on me with her wonderful blue eyes.

I was overcome; thinking of the morrow night, shame and sorrow smote me. *I*, her friend!—*I*, whose assassin dagger lay against my breast! I bent my head, and a sob or a groan, I know not which, burst from the agony of my heart.

But Cleopatra, thinking only that I was moved beyond myself by the surprise of her graciousness, smiled sweetly, and said:

"It grows late. To-morrow night, when thou bringest the auguries, will we speak again, O my friend Harmachis, and thou shalt answer me." And she gave me her hand to kiss. Scarce knowing what I did, I kissed it, and in another moment she was gone.

But I stood in the chamber, gazing after her like one asleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

OF THE WORDS AND JEALOUSY OF CHARMION; OF THE LAUGHTER OF HARMACHIS; OF THE MAKING READY FOR THE DEED OF BLOOD; AND OF THE MESSAGE OF THE OLD WIFE, ATOUA.

STOOD still, plunged in thought. Then, by hazard, as it were, I took up the wreath of roses and looked thereon. How long I stood so I know not, but when next I lifted my eyes they fell upon the form of Charmion, whom, indeed, I had altogether forgotten. And though at the moment I thought but little of it, I noted vaguely that she was flushed as though with anger, and that she beat her foot upon the floor.

"Oh, is it thou, Charmion," I said. "What ails thee? Art thou cramped with standing so long within thy hiding place? Why didst thou not slip hence when Cleopatra led me to the balcony?"

"Where is my kerchief?" she asked, shooting an angry glance at me. "I let fall my broidered kerchief."

"The kerchief! Why, didst thou not see? Cleopatra twitted me about it, and I flung it from the balcony."

"Yea, I saw," answered the girl, "I saw but too well. Thou didst fling away my kerchief, but the wreath of roses—that thou wouldst not fling away. It was 'a Queen's gift,' forsooth, and therefore, the Royal Harmachis, the Priest of Isis, the chosen of the Gods, the crowned Pharaoh wed to the weal of Khem, cherished it and saved it. But my kerchief, stung by the laughter of that light Queen, he cast away!"

"What meanest thou?" I asked, astonished at her bitter tone. "I read not thy riddles."

"What mean I?" she answered, tossing up her head, and showing the white curves of her throat. "Nay, I mean naught or all, take it as thou wilt. Wouldst know what I mean, Harmachis, my cousin and my Lord?" she went on in a hard, low voice. "Behold, I will tell thee—thou art in danger of the great offense. This Cleopatra hath cast her fatal wiles about thee, and thou goest near to loving her, Harmachis—to loving her whom to-morrow thou must slay! Ay, stand and stare at that wreath within thy hand—the wreath thou couldst not send to join my kerchief—sure Cleopatra wore it but to-night! The perfume of the hair of Cæsar's mistress—Cæsar's and others'—yet mingles with the odor of its roses! Now, prithee, Harmachis, how far didst thou carry the matter on yonder balcony?—for in that hole where I lay hid I could not hear or see. 'Tis a sweet spot for lovers, is it not?—ay, and a sweet night, too! Venus is surely in the right ascension!"

And all of this she said so quietly and in so soft and modest a way, though her words were not modest, and yet so bitterly, that every syllable cut me to the heart, and angered me till I could find no speech.

"Of a truth thou hast a wise economy," she went on, seeing her advantage; "to-night thou dost kiss the lips that to-morrow thou shalt still forever! 'Tis frugal dealing with the occasion of the moment; aye, worthy and honorable dealing!"

Then at last I broke forth. "Girl!" I cried, "how darest thou speak thus to me? Mindest thou who and what I am that thou looseth thy peevish gibes upon me?"

"I mind what it behooves thee to be," she answered quick. "What thou art, that I mind not now. Surely thou knowest alone—thou and Cleopatra!"

"What meanest thou?" I said. "Am I to blame if the Queen—"

"The Queen! What have we here? Pharaoh owns a Queen!"

"—Cleopatra wills to come hither of a night and talk—"

"Of stars, Harmachis—surely of stars and roses, and naught beside!"

After that I know not what I said; for, troubled as I was, the girl's bitter tongue and quiet way drove me well-nigh to madness. But this I know: I spoke so fiercely that she cowered before me as she had cowered before my uncle Sepa, when he ratted her because of her Grecian garb. And as she wept then, so she wept now, only more passionately and with sobs.

At length I ceased, half ashamed, but still angry and smarting sorely. For even while she wept she could find a tongue to answer with—and a woman's shafts are sharp.

"Thou shouldst not speak to me thus!" she sobbed; "it's cruel—it is unmanly! But I forgot thou art a priest, not a man—except, mayhap, for Cleopatra!"

"What right hast thou?" I said. "What canst thou mean?"

"What right have I?" she asked, looking up, her dark eyes all aflood with tears that ran down her sweet face like the dew of morning down a lily's heart. "What right have I? O Harmachis! art thou blind? Dost thou not know by what right I speak thus to thee? Then must I tell thee! Well, 'tis the fashion in Alexandria! By that first and holy right of woman—by the right of the great love I bear thee, and which, it seems, thou hast no eyes to see—by the right of my glory and my shame. O, be not wroth with me, Harmachis, nor set me down as light, because the truth has at last burst from me; for I am not so. I am what thou wilt make me. I am the wax within the molder's hands, and as thou dost fashion me so shall I be. There breathes within me now a breath of glory blowing across the waters of my soul, that can waft me to ends more noble than ever I have dreamed afore, if thou wilt be my pilot and my guide. But if I lose thee, then lose I all that holds me from my worse self—and let shipwreck come! Thou knowest me not, Harmachis! thou canst not see how big a spirit struggles within this frail form of mine! To thee I am a girl, clever, wayward, shallow. But I am more! Show me thy loftiest thought and I will match it, the deepest puzzle of thy mind and I will make it clear. Of one blood are we, and love can ravel up our little difference and make us grow one indeed. One end we have, one land we love, one vow binds us both. Take me to thy heart, Harmachis, and set me by thee on the Double Throne, and I swear that I will lift thee higher than ever man has climbed. Reject me, and beware lest I pull thee down! And now, putting aside the cold delicacy of custom, stung thereto by what I saw of the arts of that lovely living falsehood, Cleopatra, which for pastime she doth practice on thy folly, I have spoken out my heart, and answer thou!" And she clasped her hands, and, drawing one pace nearer, gazed all trembling on my face.

For a moment I stood struck dumb, for the magic of her voice and the power of her speech, despite myself, had stirred me like the rush of music. Had I loved the woman doubtless she might have fired me with her flame; but I loved her not, and I could not play at passion. And so thought came, and with thought that laughing mood which is ever apt to fasten upon nerves strained to the point of breaking. In a flash, as it were, I bethought me of the way in which she had that very night forced the wreath of roses on my head. I thought of the kerchief and how I had flung it forth. I thought of Charmion in the little chamber watching what she held to be the arts of Cleopatra, and of her bitter speeches. Lastly, I thought of what my uncle Sepa would say of her could he see her now, and of the strange and tangled skein wherewith I was enmeshed. I laughed aloud—the fool's laughter—that was my knell of ruin!

She turned whiter yet—white as the dead—and on her face there grew a look that checked my foolish mirth. "Thou findest, then, Harmachis," she said, in a low, choked voice, and dropping the level of her eyes—"thou findest cause of merriment in what I have said."

"Nay," I answered, "nay, Charmion; forgive me if I laughed. 'Twas rather a laugh of despair; for what am I to say to thee? Thou hast spoken high words of all thou mightest be; is it left for me to tell thee what thou art?"

She shrank, and I paused.

"Speak," she said.

"Thou knowest—none so well—what I am and what my mission is; thou knowest—none so well—that I am sworn to Isis, and may, by law divine, have naught to do with thee."

"Ay," she broke in, in her low voice and with her eyes still fixed upon the ground; "ay, and I know that thy vows are broken in spirit, if not in form—broken like wreaths of clouds—for, Harmachis, *thou lovest Cleopatra!*"

"It is a lie!" I cried. "Thou wanton girl, who wouldst seduce me from my duty and put me to an open shame!—who, led by passion or ambition, or the love of evil, hast not shamed to break the barriers of thy sex and speak as thou hast spoken—beware lest thou go too far! And if thou wilt have an answer, here it is, put straightly as thy question. Charmion, outside the matter of my duty and my vows, thou art naught to me!—nor, for all thy tender glances, will my heart beat one pulse more fast! Hardly art thou now my friend—for, of a truth, I scarce can trust thee. But, once more, beware! To me thou mayest do thy worst; but if thou dost dare to lift a finger against our cause, that day thou diest! And now is this play done?"

And as, wild with anger, I spoke thus, she shrank back, and yet further back, till at length she rested against the wall, her eyes covered with her hand. But when I ceased she dropped her hand, glancing up, and her face was the face of a statue, wherein the great eyes glowed like embers, and round them was a ring of purple shadow.

"Not altogether done," she said gently; "the arena must yet be sanded!" This she said having reference to the covering up of the blood stains at the gladiatorial shows with fine white sand. "Well," she went on, "waste not thine anger on a thing so vile. I have thrown my throw and I have lost. Væ victis!—ah! Væ victis! Wilt thou not lend me the dagger in thy robe, that here and now I may end my shame? No? Then one word more, Most Royal Harmachis: If thou canst, forget my folly; but, at the least, have no fear from me. I am now, as ever, thy servant and the servant of our cause. Farewell!"

And she went, leaning her hand against the wall. But I, passing to my chamber, flung myself upon my couch and groaned in bitterness of spirit. Alas! we shape our plans, and by slow degrees build up our house of Hope, never counting on the guests that time shall bring to lodge therein. For who can guard against—the Unforeseen.

At length I slept, and evil were my dreams. When I woke the light of the day which should see the red fulfillment of the plot was streaming through the casement, and the birds sang merrily among the garden palms. I woke, and as I woke the sense of trouble pressed in upon me, for I remembered that before this day was gathered to the past I must dip my hands in blood—even in the blood of Cleopatra, who trusted me! Why could I not hate her as I should? There had been a time when I had looked on this act of vengeance with somewhat of a righteous glow of zeal. And now—and now, why, I would frankly give my royal birthright to be free from its necessity! But, alas! I knew that there was no escape. I must drain the cup or be for ever cast away. I felt the eyes of Egypt watching me, and the eyes of Egypt's Gods. I prayed to my Mother Isis to give me strength to do this deed, and prayed as I had never prayed before; and, O wonder! no answer came. Nay, how was this? What then had loosed the link between us that, for the first time, the Goddess deigned no reply to her chosen servant? Could it be that I had sinned in heart against her? What had Charmion said—that I loved Cleopatra? Was this sickness love? Nay, a thousand times nay!—'twas but the revolt of Nature against a deed of treachery and blood. The Goddess did but try my strength, or perchance she also turned her holy countenance from blood.

I rose filled with despair, and went about my work like a man without a soul. I conned the fatal lists and noted all the plans—ay, in my brain I gathered up the very words of that proclamation of my Royalty which on the morrow I should issue to the startled world.

"Citizens of Alexandria and dwellers in the land of Egypt," it began, "Cleopatra, the Macedonian, hath, by the command of the Gods, suffered justice for her crimes—" All these and other things I did, but I did them as a man without a soul—as a man moved by a force from without and not from within. And so the minutes wore away. In the third hour of the afternoon I went, as by appointment fixed, to the house where lodged my uncle Sepa—that same house to which some three months gone I had been brought when, for the first time, I entered Alexandria. And here I found assembled in secret conclave the leaders of the revolt in the city, to the number of seven. When I had entered and the doors were barred, they prostrated themselves and cried: "Hail Pharaoh!" But I bade them rise, saying that not yet was I Pharaoh, for the chicken was still in the egg.

"Yea, Prince," said my uncle, "but his beak shows through. Not in vain hath Egypt brooded all these years; an thou fail not with that dagger-stroke of thine—and now canst thou fail?—naught can now stop our course to victory!"

"It is on the knees of the Gods," I answered.

"Nay," he said, "the gods have placed the issue in the hands of a mortal—in thy hands, O Harmachis!—and there is it safe. See; here are the last lists. Thirty-one thousand men who bear arms are sworn to rise when the tidings come to them. Within five days every citadel in Egypt will be in our hands, and then what have we to fear? From Rome but little, for her hands are full; and, besides, we will make alliance with the Triumvirate, and, if need be, buy them off. For of money there is plenty in the land, and if more be wanted thou, Harmachis, knowest where 'tis stored against the need of Khem, and outside the Roman's reach of arm. Who is there to harm us? There is none. Perchance, in this turbulent city, there may be a struggle, and a counter plot to bring Arsinoe to Egypt and set her on the throne. Therefore must Alexandria be severely dealt with—aye, even to destruction, if need be. And for Arsinoe, those go forth to-morrow on the news of the Queen's death who shall slay her secretly."

"There remains the lad Cæsarion," I said. "Rome might claim through Cæsar's son, and the child of Cleopatra inherits Cleopatra's rights. Herein is a double danger."

"Fear not," said my uncle; "to-morrow Cæsarion joins those who begat him in Amenti. I have made provision. The Ptolemies must be stamped out, so that no shoot shall ever spring from that root blasted by Heaven's vengeance."

"Is there no other means?" I asked sadly. "My heart is sick at the promise of this red rain of blood. Well I know the child; he hath Cleopatra's fire and beauty and great Cæsar's wit. 'Twas shame to murder him."

"Nay, be not so chicken-hearted, Harmachis," said my uncle, sternly. "What ails thee, then? If the lad is thus, the more reason that he should die. Wouldst thou nurse up a young lion to tear thee from the throne?"

"Be it so," I answered, sighing. "At least he is spared much, and will go hence innocent of evil. And now for the plans."

Long we sat taking counsel, till at length, in face of the great emergency and our high emprise, I felt something of the spirit of former days flow back into my heart. At the last all was ordered, and so ordered that it could scarce miscarry, for it was fixed that if by any chance I could not come to slay Cleopatra on this night, then should the plot hang in the scale until the morrow, when the deed should be done upon occasion. For the death of Cleopatra was the signal. These matters being finished, once more we stood and, our hands upon the sacred symbol, swore the oath that may not be written. And then my uncle kissed me with tears of hope and joy standing in his keen black eyes. He blessed me, saying that gladly would he give his life, ay, and a hundred lives if they were his, if he might but live to see Egypt once more a nation, and me, Harmachis, the descendant of its royal and ancient blood, seated on the Throne. For of a truth was he a patriot indeed, asking nothing for himself, and giving all things to his cause. And I kissed him in turn, and thus we parted. Nor in the flesh did I ever see him more who hath earned the rest that as yet is denied to me.

So I went, and, there being yet time, walked swiftly from place to place in the great city, taking note of the positions of the gates and of the places where our forces must be gathered. At length I came to that quay where I had landed and saw a vessel sailing for the open sea. I looked, and in my heaviness of heart I longed to be aboard of her, to be borne by her white wings to some far shore where I might live obscure, and, forgotten, die. Also I saw another vessel that had dropped down the Nile, from whose deck the passengers were streaming. For a moment I stood watching them, idly wondering if they were from Aboutis, when suddenly I heard a familiar voice beside me.

"*La! La!*" said the voice. "Why, what a city is this for an old woman to seek her fortune in! And how shall I find those to whom I am known? As well look for a rush in the papyrus-roll. Begone! thou knave, and let my basket of simples lie, or, by the Gods, I'll doctor thee therewith!"

I turned, wondering, and found myself face to face with my foster-nurse, Atoua. She knew me instantly, for I saw her start, but in the presence of the people checked her surprise.

"Good Sir," she whined, lifting up her withered countenance toward me, and at the same time making the secret sign, "by thy dress thou shouldst be an astronomer, and I was specially told to avoid astronomers as a pack of lying tricksters who worship their own star only. And, therefore, acting on the principle of contraries, which is law to us women, I speak to thee. For surely in this Alexandria, where all things are upside down, the astronomers may be the honest men, since the rest are clearly knaves." And then, being by now out of earshot of the press, "Royal Harmachis, I am come charged with a message to thee from thy father Amenemhat."

"Is he well?" I asked.

"Yea, he is well, though waiting; for the moment tries him sorely."

"And his message?"

"It is this: He sends greeting to thee, and with it warning that a great danger threatens thee, though he can not read it. These are his words: 'Be steadfast and prosper.'"

I bowed my head and the words struck a new chill of fear into my soul.

"When is the time?" she asked.

"This very night. Where goest thou?"

"To the house of the honorable Sepa, Priest of On. Canst thou guide me thither?"

"Nay, I may not stay; nor is it wise that I should be seen with thee. Hold!" And I called a porter who was idling on the quay, and giving him a piece of money, bade him guide the old wife to the house.

"Farewell," she whispered—"farewell till to-morrow. Be steadfast and prosper!"

Then I turned and went my way through the crowded streets, wherein the people made place for me, the astronomer of Cleopatra, for my fame had spread abroad.

And even as I went my footsteps seemed to beat: *Be steadfast! Be steadfast! Be steadfast!* till at last it was as though the very ground cried out its very warning to me.

CHAPTER XIV.

OF THE VAILED WORDS OF CHARMION; OF THE PASSING OF HARMACHIS INTO THE PRESENCE OF CLEOPATRA; OVERTHROW OF HARMACHIS.

WAS night, and I sat alone within my chamber, waiting the moment when, as it was agreed, Charmion should summon me to pass down to Cleopatra. Alone I sat, and there before me lay the dagger that was to pierce her. Long and keen it was, and the handle was formed of a sphinx of solid gold. Alone I sat, questioning the future; but no answer came. At length I looked up, and behold! Charmion stood before me—Charmion, no longer gay and bright, but pale of face and hollow-eyed.

"Royal Harmachis," she said, "Cleopatra summons thee presently, to declare to her the voices of the stars."

So the hour had fallen!

"It is well, Charmion," I answered. "Are all things in order?"

"Yea, my Lord; all things are in order; well primed with wine, Paulus guards the gates, the eunuchs are withdrawn save one, the legionaries sleep, and already Sepa and his force lie hid without. Naught has been neglected, and no lamb skipping at the shamble doors can be more innocent of its doom than is Queen Cleopatra."

"It is well," I said again; "let us be going." And rising, I placed the dagger in the bosom of my robe. Taking a cup of wine that stood near I drank deep of it, for food had I scarce tasted all that day.

"One word," she said hurriedly, "for it is not yet time; last night—ah, last night!" and her bosom heaved—"I dreamed a dream that haunts me strangely, and perchance thou also didst dream a dream. 'Twas all a dream and 'tis forgotten; is it not so, my Lord?"

"Yea, yea," I said; "why troublest thou me thus at such an hour?"

"Nay, I know not; but to-night, Harmachis, Fate is in labor of a great event, and in her painful throes mayhap she'll crush me in her grip—me or thee, or the twain of us, Harmachis. And if that be so—well, I would hear from thee before 'tis done, that 'twas naught but a dream, and that dream forgot—"

"Yea, 'tis all a dream," I said, idly; "thou and I, and the solid earth, and this heavy night of terror—ay, and this keen-pointed knife—what are these but dreams, and with what face shall the waking come?"

"So, now thou fallest in my humor, Royal Harmachis. As thou sayest, we dream; and while we dream yet can the vision change. For wonderful are the fantasies of dreams, seeing that they have no stability, but vary like the vaprous edge of sunset clouds, building now this thing and now that, being now dark and heavy and now alight with splendor. Therefore, before we wake to-morrow, tell me one word. Is that vision of last night, wherein I *seemed* to be quite ashamed, and thou didst *seem* to laugh upon my shame, a fixed fantasy, or can it, perchance, yet change its countenance? For, remember, when that waking comes, the vagaries of our sleep will be more unalterable and more enduring than are the pyramids. Then will they be gathered into that changeless region of the past where all things, great and small—ay, even dreams, Harmachis—are, each in its own semblance, frozen into stone and built within the Tomb of Time immortal."

"Nay, Charmion," I replied. "I grieve if I did pain thee; but o'er that vision comes no change. I said what was in my heart, and there's an end. Thou art my cousin and my friend; more I can never be to thee."

"'Tis well—'tis very well," she said; "let it be forgot. And now on from dream—to dream." And she smiled with such a smile as I had never seen her wear before; 'twas sadder and more fateful than any stamp that grief can set upon the brow.

For—though, being blinded by my own folly and the trouble at my heart, I knew it not—with that smile, for Charmion the Egyptian died the happiness of youth, fled the hope of love, and burst asunder the holy links of duty. With that smile did she consecrate herself to evil, did she renounce her country and her Gods, and trample on her oath. Ay, that smile marks the spot where the stream of history changed its course. For had I never seen it on her face, Octavianus had not bestridden the world and Egypt had once more been free and great.

And yet 'twas but a woman's smile!

"Why lookest thou thus strangely, girl?" I asked.

"In dreams we smile," she answered. "And now 'tis time; follow thou me. Be firm and prosper, Royal Harmachis!" And bending forward, she took my hand and kissed it. Then, with one strange look, she turned and led the way down the stair through the empty halls.

In the chamber that is called the Alabaster Hall, of which the roof is upborne by

FAR AWAY STOOD CHARMION.

columns of black marble, we stayed. For beyond was the private chamber of Cleopatra, even the same wherein I had seen her sleeping.

"Abide thou here," she said, "while I tell Cleopatra of thy coming," and she glided from my side.

For long I stood, mayhap in all for half an hour, counting my own heart beats and, as in a dream, striving to gather up my strength to that which lay before me.

At length came Charmion back, her head held low and walking heavily.

"Cleopatra waits thee," she said, "pass on, there is no guard."

"Where do I meet thee when what must be done is done?" I asked, hoarsely.

"Thou meetest me here, and then to Paulus. Be firm and prosper. Fare thee well."

And so I went; but at the curtain I turned suddenly, and there in the midst of that lonely lamp-lit hall I saw a strange sight. Far away, in such a fashion that the light struck full upon her, stood Charmion, her head thrown back, her white arms outstretched as though to clasp, and on her girlish face a stamp of anguished passion so terrible to behold that indeed I can not tell it! For she believed that I, whom she loved, was passing to my death, and this was her last farewell to me.

But of this matter I knew naught; so with another passing pang of wonder I drew aside the curtains, gained the doorway and stood within Cleopatra's chamber. And there, upon a silken couch at the far end of the perfumed chamber, clad in wonderful white attire, rested Cleopatra. In her hand was a jeweled fan of ostrich plumes, wherewith she gently fanned herself, and by her side was her harp of ivory, and a little table whereon were figs and goblets and a flask of ruby-colored wine. Slowly I drew near through the soft, dim light to where in all her glowing beauty lay the wonder of the world. And, indeed, never have I seen her look so fair as she did upon that fatal night. Couched in her amber cushions she seemed to shine as a star on the twilight's glow. From her hair and robes came perfume, from her lips fell music, and in her heavenly eyes all lights changed and gathered as in the ominous opal's disk.

And this was the woman whom I must slay!

Slowly I drew near, bowing as I came; but she took no head. She lay there, and the jeweled fan vibrated to and fro like the bright wing of some hovering bird.

At length I stood before her, and she glanced up, the ostrich plumes pressed against her breast as though to hide its beauty.

"What! friend, art thou come?" she said. "'Tis well; for I grew lonely here. Nay, 'tis a weary world! We know so many faces, and so few there are whom we love to see again. Well, stand not there so mute, but be seated." And she pointed with her fan to a carven chair that was placed nigh to her feet.

Once more I bowed and took the seat.

"I have obeyed the Queen's desire," I said, "and with much care and skill worked out the lessons of the stars; and here is the record of my labor. If the Queen permits I will expound it to her." And I rose, in order that I might pass round the couch and, as she read, stab her in the back.

"Nay, Harmachis," she said quietly, and with a slow and lovely smile. "Bide thou where thou art, and give me the writing. By Serapis! thy face is too comely for me to wish to lose the sight of it!"

Checked in this my design, I could do naught but hand her the papyrus, thinking to myself that as she read I would arise suddenly and plunge the dagger to her heart. She took it, and, as she did so, touched my hand. Then she made pretense to read. But no word did she read, for I saw that her eyes were fixed upon me over the edge of the scroll.

"Why placest thou thy hand within thy robe?" she asked presently; for, indeed, I clutched the dagger's hilt. "Is thy heart stirred?"

"Yea, O Queen," I said, "it beats high."

She gave no answer, but once more made pretense to read, and the while she watched me.

I took counsel with myself. How should I do the hateful deed? If I flung myself upon her now she would see me and scream and struggle. Nay, I must wait a chance.

"The auguries are favorable, then, Harmachis?" she said at length, though this she must have guessed at.

"Yes, O Queen," I answered.

"'Tis well," and she cast the writing on the marble. "The ships shall sail. For, good or bad, I am weary of weighing chances."

(TO BE CONTINUED.

The Minnie Moore has laid off forty-four men out of eighty-one who were working in the mine. It is not known whether this is a permanent reduction in the working force or not.

Fred W. Fuhrmann, purser on the steamer Oceanic, who shot himself on board the vessel, died the next day. Despondency over the death of his wife is stated to have been the cause of the shooting.

The annual statement of the Southern Pacific Railroad Company for the year 1889 shows a small increase in earnings, among other causes being the construction of new lines. A decrease of the surplus to $1,344,000 against $2,589,000 is also shown.

A bank at Dallas, Texas, recently shipped two packages, one containing $15,000 in gold and the other $35,000 in bills, to the Commercial National bank of St. Louis. The gold was received, but the bills were not. The bank notified the express company, and an investigation was made, which resulted in the knowledge that F. A. Walton, money clerk in the Dallas Pacific Express office, had abstracted the money. He is missing, with a week's start of the officers.