

## BOOK I--THE PREPARATION OF HARMACHIS

### CHAPTER I

#### OF THE BIRTH OF HARMACHIS; THE PROPHECY OF THE HATHORS; AND THE SLAYING OF THE INNOCENT CHILD

By Osiris who sleeps at Abouthis, I write the truth.

I, Harmachis, Hereditary Priest of the Temple, reared by the divine Sethi, aforetime a Pharaoh of Egypt, and now justified in Osiris and ruling in Amenti. I, Harmachis, by right Divine and by true descent of blood King of the Double Crown, and Pharaoh of the Upper and Lower Land.

I, Harmachis, who cast aside the opening flower of our hope, who turned from the glorious path, who forgot the voice of God in hearkening to the voice of woman. I, Harmachis, the fallen, in whom are gathered up all woes as waters are gathered in a desert well, who have tasted of every shame, who through betrayal have betrayed, who in losing the glory that is here have lost the glory which is to be, who am utterly undone--I write, and, by Him who sleeps at Abouthis, I write the truth.

O Egypt!--dear land of Khem, whose black soil nourished up my mortal part--land that I have betrayed--O Osiris!--Isis!--Horus!--ye Gods of Egypt whom I have betrayed!--O ye temples whose pylons strike the sky, whose faith I have betrayed!--O Royal blood of the Pharaohs of old, that

yet runs within these withered veins--whose virtue I have betrayed!--O Invisible Essence of all Good! and O Fate, whose balance rested on my hand--hear me; and, to the day of utter doom, bear me witness that I write the truth.

Even while I write, beyond the fertile fields, the Nile is running red, as though with blood. Before me the sunlight beats upon the far Arabian hills, and falls upon the piles of Abouthis. Still the priests make orison within the temples at Abouthis that know me no more; still the sacrifice is offered, and the stony roofs echo back the people's prayers. Still from this lone cell within my prison-tower, I, the Word of Shame, watch thy fluttering banners, Abouthis, flaunting from thy pylon walls, and hear the chants as the long procession winds from sanctuary to sanctuary.

Abouthis, lost Abouthis! my heart goes out toward thee! For the day comes when the desert sands shall fill thy secret places! Thy Gods are doomed, O Abouthis! New Faiths shall make a mock of all thy Holies, and Centurion shall call upon Centurion across thy fortress-walls. I weep--I weep tears of blood: for mine is the sin that brought about these evils and mine for ever is their shame.

Behold, it is written hereafter.

Here in Abouthis I was born, I, Harmachis, and my father, the justified in Osiris, was High Priest of the Temple of Sethi. And on that same day of my birth Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt, was born also. I passed my youth in yonder fields watching the baser people at their labours and going in and out at will among the great courts of the temples. Of my mother I knew naught, for she died when I yet hung at the breast. But before she died in the reign of Ptolemy Aulêtes, who is named the Piper, so did the old wife, Atoua, told me, my mother took a golden uræus, the snake symbol of our Royalty of Egypt, from a coffer of ivory and laid it on my brow. And those who saw her do this believed that she was distraught of the Divinity, and in her madness foreshadowed that the day of the Macedonian Lagidæ was ended, and that Egypt's sceptre should pass again to the hand of Egypt's true and Royal race. But when my father, the old High Priest Amenemhat, whose only child I was, she who was his wife before my mother having been, for what crime I know not, cursed with barrenness by Sekhet: I say when my father came in and saw what the dying woman had done, he lifted up his hands towards the vault of heaven and adored the Invisible, because of the sign that had been sent. And as he adored, the Hathors[\*] filled my dying mother with the Spirit of Prophecy, and she rose in strength from the couch and prostrated herself thrice before the cradle where I lay asleep, the Royal asp upon my brow, crying aloud:

[\*] The Egyptian Parcæ or Fates.--Editor.

"Hail to thee, fruit of my womb! Hail to thee, Royal child! Hail to

thee, Pharaoh that shalt be! Hail to thee, God that shalt purge the land, Divine seed of Nekt-nebf, the descended from Isis. Keep thee pure, and thou shalt rule and deliver Egypt and not be broken. But if thou dost fail in thy hour of trial, then may the curse of all the Gods of Egypt rest upon thee, and the curse of thy Royal forefathers, the justified, who ruled the land before thee from the age of Horus. Then in life mayst thou be wretched, and after death may Osiris refuse thee, and the judges of Amenti give judgment against thee, and Set and Sekhet torment thee, till such time as thy sin is purged, and the Gods of Egypt, called by strange names, are once more worshipped in the Temples of Egypt, and the staff of the Oppressor is broken, and the footsteps of the Foreigner are swept clean, and the thing is accomplished as thou in thy weakness shalt cause it to be done."

When she had spoken thus, the Spirit of Prophecy went out of her, and she fell dead across the cradle where I slept, so that I awoke with a cry.

But my father, Amenemhat, the High Priest, trembled, and was very fearful, both because of the words which had been said by the Spirit of the Hathors through the mouth of my mother, and because what had been uttered was treason against Ptolemy. For he knew that, if the matter should come to the ears of Ptolemy, Pharaoh would send his guards to destroy the life of the child concerning whom such things were prophesied. Therefore, my father shut the doors, and caused all those who stood by to swear upon the holy symbol of his office, and by the name of the Divine Three, and by the Soul of her who lay dead upon the

stones beside them, that nothing of what they had seen and heard should pass their lips.

Now among the company was the old wife, Atoua, who had been the nurse of my mother, and loved her well; and in these days, though I know not how it had been in the past, nor how it shall be in the future, there is no oath that can bind a woman's tongue. And so it came about that by-and-by, when the matter had become homely in her mind, and her fear had fallen from her, she spoke of the prophecy to her daughter, who nursed me at the breast now that my mother was dead. She did this as they walked together in the desert carrying food to the husband of the daughter, who was a sculptor, and shaped effigies of the holy Gods in the tombs that are fashioned in the rock--telling the daughter, my nurse, how great must be her care and love toward the child that should one day be Pharaoh, and drive the Ptolemies from Egypt. But the daughter, my nurse, was so filled with wonder at what she heard that she could not keep the tale locked within her breast, and in the night she awoke her husband, and, in her turn, whispered it to him, and thereby compassed her own destruction, and the destruction of her child, my foster-brother. For the man told his friend, and the friend was a spy of Ptolemy's, and thus the tale came to Pharaoh's ears.

Now, Pharaoh was much troubled thereat, for though when he was full of wine he would make a mock of the God of the Egyptians, and swear that the Roman Senate was the only God to whom he bowed the knee, yet in his heart he was terribly afraid, as I have learned from one who was his physician. For when he was alone at night he would scream and cry aloud

to the great Serapis, who indeed is no true God, and to other Gods, fearing lest he should be murdered and his soul handed over to the tormentors. Also, when he felt his throne tremble under him, he would send large presents to the temples, asking a message from the oracles, and more especially from the oracle that is at Philæ. Therefore, when it came to his ears that the wife of the High Priest of the great and ancient Temple of Abouthis had been filled with the Spirit of Prophecy before she died, and foretold that her son should be Pharaoh, he was much afraid, and summoning some trusty guards--who, being Greeks, did not fear to do sacrilege--he despatched them by boat up the Nile, with orders to come to Abouthis and cut off the head of the child of the High Priest and bring it to him in a basket.

But, as it chanced, the boat in which the guards came was of deep draught, and, the time of their coming being at the lowest ebb of the river, it struck and remained fast upon a bank of mud that is opposite the mouth of the road running across the plains to Abouthis, and, as the north wind was blowing very fiercely, it was like to sink. Thereon the guards of Pharaoh called out to the common people, who laboured at lifting water along the banks of the river, to come with boats and take them off; but, seeing that they were Greeks of Alexandria, the people would not, for the Egyptians do not love the Greeks. Then the guards cried that they were on Pharaoh's business, and still the people would not, asking what was their business. Whereon a eunuch among them who had made himself drunk in his fear, told them that they came to slay the child of Amenemhat, the High Priest, of whom it was prophesied that he should be Pharaoh and sweep the Greeks from Egypt. And then the people

feared to stand longer in doubt, but brought boats, not knowing what might be meant by the man's words. But there was one amongst them--a farmer and an overseer of canals--who was a kinsman of my mother's and had been present when she prophesied; and he turned and ran swiftly for three parts of an hour, till he came to where I lay in the house that is without the north wall of the great Temple. Now, as it chanced, my father was away in that part of the Place of Tombs which is to the left of the large fortress, and Pharaoh's guards, mounted on asses, were hard upon us. Then the messenger cried to the old wife, Atoua, whose tongue had brought about the evil, and told how the soldiers drew near to slay me. And they looked at each other, not knowing what to do; for, had they hid me, the guards would not have stayed their search till I was found. But the man, gazing through the doorway, saw a little child at play:

"Woman," he said, "whose is that child?"

"It is my grandchild," she answered, "the foster-brother of the Prince Harmachis; the child to whose mother we owe this evil case."

"Woman," he said, "thou knowest thy duty, do it!" and he again pointed at the child. "I command thee, by the Holy Name!"

Atoua trembled exceedingly, because the child was of her own blood; but, nevertheless, she took the boy and washed him and set a robe of silk upon him, and laid him on my cradle. And me she took and smeared with mud to make my fair skin darker, and, drawing my garment from me, set me to play in the dirt of the yard, which I did right gladly.

Then the man hid himself, and presently the soldiers rode up and asked of the old wife if this were the dwelling of the High Priest Amenemhat? And she told them yea, and, bidding them enter, offered them honey and milk, for they were thirsty.

When they had drunk, the eunuch who was with them asked if that were the son of Amenemhat who lay in the cradle; and she said "Yea--yea," and began to tell the guards how he would be great, for it had been prophesied of him that he should one day rule them all.

But the Greek guards laughed, and one of them, seizing the child, smote off his head with a sword; and the eunuch drew forth the signet of Pharaoh as warrant for the deed and showed it to the old wife, Atoua, bidding her tell the High Priest that his son should be King without a head.

And as they went one of their number saw me playing in the dirt and called out that there was more breeding in yonder brat than in the Prince Harmachis; and for a moment they wavered, thinking to slay me also, but in the end they passed on, bearing the head of my foster-brother, for they loved not to murder little children.

After a while, the mother of the dead child returned from the market-place, and when she found what had been done, she and her husband would have killed Atoua the old wife, her mother, and given me up to the soldiers of Pharaoh. But my father came in also and learned the truth,



and he caused the man and his wife to be seized by night and hidden away in the dark places of the temple, so that none saw them more.

But I would to-day that it had been the will of the Gods that I had been slain of the soldiers and not the innocent child.

Thereafter it was given out that the High Priest Amenemhat had taken me to be as a son to him in the place of that Harmachis who was slain of Pharaoh.