

CHAPTER IV

OF THE DEPARTURE OF HARMACHIS AND OF HIS MEETING WITH HIS UNCLE SEPA, THE HIGH PRIEST OF ANNU EL RA; OF HIS LIFE AT ANNU, AND OF THE WORDS OF SEPA

At the dawning of the next day I was awakened by a priest of the temple, who brought word to me to make ready for the journey of which my father had spoken, inasmuch as there was an occasion for me to pass down the river to Annu el Ra. Now this is the Heliopolis of the Greeks, whither I should go in the company of some priests of Ptah at Memphis who had come hither to Abouthis to lay the body of one of their great men in the tomb that had been prepared near the resting place of the blessed Osiris.

So I made ready, and the same evening, having received letters and embraced my father and those about the temple who were dear to me, I passed down the banks of Sihor, and we sailed with the south wind. As the pilot stood upon the prow and with a rod in his hand bade the sailor-men loosen the stakes by which the vessel was moored to the banks, the old wife, Atoua, hobbled up, her basket of simples in her hand, and, calling out farewell, threw a sandal after me for good chance, which sandal I kept for many years.

So we sailed, and for six days passed down the wonderful river, making fast each night at some convenient spot. But when I lost sight of the familiar things that I had seen day by day since I had eyes to see, and found myself alone among strange faces, I felt very sore at heart, and

would have wept had I not been ashamed. And of all the wonderful things I saw I will not write here, for, though they were new to me, have they not been known to men since such time as the Gods ruled in Egypt? But the priests who were with me showed me no little honour and expounded to me what were the things I saw.

On the morning of the seventh day we came to Memphis, the city of the White Hall. Here, for three days I rested from my journey and was entertained of the priests of the wonderful Temple of Ptah the Creator, and shown the beauties of the great and marvellous city. Also I was led in secret by the High Priest and two others into the holy presence of the God Apis, the Ptah who deigns to dwell among men in the form of a bull. The God was black, and on his forehead there was a white square, on his back was a white mark shaped like an eagle, beneath his tongue was the likeness of a scarabæus, in his tail were double hairs, and a plate of pure gold hung between his horns. I entered the place of the God and worshipped, while the High Priest and those with him stood aside, watching earnestly. And when I had worshipped, saying the words which had been told me, the God knelt, and lay down before me. Then the High Priest and those with him, who, as I heard in after time, were great men of Upper Egypt, approached wondering, and, saying no word, made obeisance to me because of the omen. And many other things I saw in Memphis that are too long to write of here.

On the fourth day some priests of Annu came to lead me to Sepa, my uncle, the High Priest of Annu. So, having bidden farewell to those of Memphis, we crossed the river and rode on asses two parts of a day's

journey through many villages, which we found in great poverty because of the oppression of the tax-gatherers. Also, as we went, I saw for the first time the great pyramids that are beyond the image of the God Horemkhu, that Sphinx whom the Greeks name Harmachis, and the Temples of the Divine Mother Isis, Queen of the Memnonia, and the God Osiris, Lord of Rosatou, of which temples, together with the Temple of the worship of the Divine Menkau-ra, I, Harmachis, am by right Divine the Hereditary High Priest. I saw them and marvelled at their greatness and the white carven limestone, and red granite of Syene, that flashed the sun's rays back to heaven. But at this time I knew nothing of the treasure that was hid in Her, which is the third among the pyramids--would I had never known of it!

And so at last we came within sight of Annu, which after Memphis has been seen is no large town, but stands on raised ground, before which are lakes fed by a canal. Behind the town is the inclosed field of the Temple of the God Ra.

We dismounted at the pylon, and were met beneath the portico by a man not great of stature, but of noble aspect, having his head shaven, and with dark eyes that twinkled like the further stars.

"Hold!" he cried, in a great voice which fitted his weak body but ill.

"Hold! I am Sepa, who opens the mouth of the Gods!"

"And I," I said, "am Harmachis, son of Amenemhat, Hereditary High Priest and Ruler of the Holy City Abouthis; and I bear letters to thee, O

Sepa!"

"Enter," he said. "Enter!" scanning me all the while with his twinkling eyes. "Enter, my son!" And he took me and led me to a chamber in the inner hall, closed to the door, and then, having glanced at the letters that I brought, of a sudden he fell upon my neck and embraced me.

"Welcome," he cried, "welcome, son of my own sister, and hope of Khem! Not in vain have I prayed the Gods that I might live to look upon thy face and impart to thee the wisdom which perchance I alone have mastered of those who are left alive in Egypt. There are few whom it is lawful that I should teach. But thine is the great destiny, and thine shall be the ears to hear the lessons of the Gods."

And he embraced me once more and bade me go bathe and eat, saying that on the morrow he would speak with me further.

This of a truth he did, and at such length that I will forbear to set down all he said both then and afterwards, for if I did so there would be no papyrus left in Egypt when the task was ended. Therefore, having much to tell and but little time to tell it, I will pass over the events of the years that followed.

For this was the manner of my life. I rose early, I attended the worship of the Temple, and I gave my days to study. I learnt of the rites of religion and their meaning, and of the beginning of the Gods and the beginning of the Upper World. I learnt of the mystery of the movements

of the stars, and of how the earth rolls on among them. I was instructed in that ancient knowledge which is called magic, and in the way of interpretation of dreams, and of the drawing nigh to God. I was taught the language of symbols and their outer and inner secrets. I became acquainted with the eternal laws of Good and Evil, and with the mystery of that trust which is held of man; also I learnt the secrets of the pyramids--which I would that I had never known. Further, I read the records of the past, and of the acts and words of the ancient kings who were before me since the rule of Horus upon earth; and I was made to know all craft of state, the lore of earth, and with it the history of Greece and Rome. Also I learnt the Grecian and Roman tongues, of which indeed I already had some knowledge--and all this while, for five long years, I kept my hands clean and my heart pure, and did no evil in the sight of God or man; but laboured heavily to acquire all things, and to prepare myself for the destiny that awaited me.

Twice every year greetings and letters came from my father Amenemhat, and twice every year I sent back my answers asking if the time had come to cease from labour. And so the days of my probation sped away till I grew faint and weary at heart, for being now a man, ay and learned, I longed to make a beginning of the life of men. And often I wondered if this talk and prophecy of the things that were to be was but a dream born of the brains of men whose wish ran before their thought. I was, indeed, of the Royal blood, that I knew: for my uncle, Sepa the Priest, showed me a secret record of the descent, traced without break from father to son, and graven in mystic symbols on a tablet of the stone of Syene. But of what avail was it to be Royal by right when Egypt, my

heritage, was a slave--a slave to do the pleasure and minister to the luxury of the Macedonian Lagidæ--ay, and when she had been so long a serf that, perchance, she had forgotten how to put off the servile smile of Bondage and once more to look across the world with Freedom's happy eyes?

Then I bethought me of my prayer upon the pylon tower of Abouthis and of the answer given to my prayer, and wondered if that, too, were a dream.

And one night, as, weary with study, I walked within the sacred grove that is in the garden of the temple, and mused thus, I met my uncle Sepa, who also was walking and thinking.

"Hold!" he cried in his great voice; "why is thy face so sad, Harmachis? Has the last problem that we studied overwhelmed thee?"

"Nay, my uncle," I answered, "I am overwhelmed indeed, but not of the problem; it was a light one. My heart is heavy, for I am weary of life within these cloisters, and the piled-up weight of knowledge crushes me. It is of no avail to store up force which cannot be used."

"Ah, thou art impatient, Harmachis," he answered; "it is ever the way of foolish youth. Thou wouldst taste of the battle; thou dost tire of watching the breakers fall upon the beach, thou wouldst plunge into them and venture the desperate hazard of the war. And so thou wouldst be going, Harmachis? The bird would fly the nest as, when they are grown, the swallows fly from the eaves of the Temple. Well, it shall be as

thou desirest; the hour is at hand. I have taught thee all that I have learned, and methinks that the pupil has outrun his master," and he paused and wiped his bright black eyes, for he was very sad at the thought of my departure.

"And whither shall I go, my uncle?" I asked rejoicing; "back to Abouthis to be initiated into the mysteries of the Gods?"

"Ay, back to Abouthis, and from Abouthis to Alexandria, and from Alexandria to the Throne of thy fathers, Harmachis! Listen, now; things are thus: Thou knowest how Cleopatra, the Queen, fled into Syria when that false eunuch Pothinus set the will of her father Aulêtes at naught and raised her brother Ptolemy to the sole lordship of Egypt. Thou knowest also how she came back, like a Queen indeed, with a great army in her train, and lay at Pelusium, and how at this juncture the mighty Cæsar, that great man, that greatest of all men, sailed with a weak company hither to Alexandria from Pharsalia's bloody field in hot pursuit of Pompey. But he found Pompey already dead, having been basely murdered by Achillas, the General, and Lucius Septimius, the chief of the Roman legions in Egypt, and thou knowest how the Alexandrians were troubled at his coming and would have slain his lictors. Then, as thou hast heard, Cæsar seized Ptolemy, the young King, and his sister Arsinoë, and bade the army of Cleopatra and the army of Ptolemy, under Achillas, which lay facing each other at Pelusium, disband and go their ways. And for answer Achillas marched on Cæsar, and besieged him straitly in the Bruchium at Alexandria, and so, for a while, things were, and none knew who should reign in Egypt. But then Cleopatra took

up the dice, and threw them, and this was the throw she made--in truth, it was a bold one. For, leaving the army at Pelusium, she came at dusk to the harbour of Alexandria, and alone with the Sicilian Apollodorus entered and landed. Then Apollodorus bound her in a bale of rich rugs, such as are made in Syria, and sent the rugs as a present to Cæsar. And when the rugs were unbound in the palace, behold! within them was the fairest girl on all the earth--ay, and the most witty and the most learned. And she seduced the great Cæsar--even his weight of years did not avail to protect him from her charms--so that, as a fruit of his folly, he wellnigh lost his life, and all the glory he had gained in a hundred wars."

"The fool!" I broke in--"the fool! Thou callest him great; but how can the man be truly great who has no strength to stand against a woman's wiles? Cæsar, with the world hanging on his word! Cæsar, at whose breath forty legions marched and changed the fate of peoples! Cæsar the cold! the far-seeing! the hero!--Cæsar to fall like a ripe fruit into a false girl's lap! Why, in the issue, of what common clay was this Roman Cæsar, and how poor a thing!"

But Sepa looked at me and shook his head. "Be not so rash, Harmachis, and talk not with so proud a voice. Knowest thou not that in every suit of mail there is a joint, and woe to him who wears the harness if the sword should search it out! For Woman, in her weakness, is yet the strongest force upon the earth. She is the helm of all things human; she comes in many shapes and knocks at many doors; she is quick and patient, and her passion is not ungovernable like that of man, but as a gentle

steed that she can guide e'en where she will, and as occasion offers can now bit up and now give rein. She has a captain's eye, and stout must be that fortress of the heart in which she finds no place of vantage. Does thy blood beat fast in youth? She will outrun it, nor will her kisses tire. Art thou set toward ambition? She will unlock thy inner heart, and show thee roads that lead to glory. Art thou worn and weary? She has comfort in her breast. Art thou fallen? She can lift thee up, and to the illusion of thy sense gild defeat with triumph. Ay, Harmachis, she can do these things, for Nature ever fights upon her side; and while she does them she can deceive and shape a secret end in which thou hast no part. And thus Woman rules the world. For her are wars; for her men spend their strength in gathering gains; for her they do well and ill, and seek for greatness, to find oblivion. But still she sits like yonder Sphinx, and smiles; and no man has ever read all the riddle of her smile, or known all the mystery of her heart. Mock not! mock not! Harmachis; for he must be great indeed who can defy the power of Woman, which, pressing round him like the invisible air, is often strongest when the senses least discover it."

I laughed aloud. "Thou speakest earnestly, my uncle Sepa," I said; "one might almost think that thou hadst not come unscathed through this fierce fire of temptation. Well, for myself, I fear not woman and her wiles; I know naught of them, and naught do I wish to know; and I still hold that this Cæsar was a fool. Had I stood where Cæsar stood, to cool its wantonness that bale of rugs should have been rolled down the palace steps, into the harbour mud."

"Nay, cease! cease!" he cried aloud. "It is evil to speak thus; may the Gods avert the omen and preserve to thee this cold strength of which thou boastest. Oh! man, thou knowest not!--thou in thy strength and beauty that is without compare, in the power of thy learning and the sweetness of thy tongue--thou knowest not! The world where thou must mix is not a sanctuary as that of the Divine Isis. But there--it may be so! Pray that thy heart's ice may never melt, so thou shalt be great and happy and Egypt shall be delivered. And now let me take up my tale--thou seest, Harmachis, even in so grave a story woman claims her place. The young Ptolemy, Cleopatra's brother, being loosed of Cæsar, treacherously turned on him. Then Cæsar and Mithridates stormed the camp of Ptolemy, who took to flight across the river. But his boat was sunk by the fugitives who pressed upon it, and such was the miserable end of Ptolemy.

"Thereon, the war being ended, though she had but then borne him a son, Cæsarion, Cæsar appointed the younger Ptolemy to rule with Cleopatra, and be her husband in name, and he himself departed for Rome, bearing with him the beautiful Princess Arsinoë to follow his triumph in her chains. But the great Cæsar is no more. He died as he had lived, in blood, and right royally. And but now Cleopatra, the Queen, if my tidings may be trusted, has slain Ptolemy, her brother and husband, by poison, and taken the child Cæsarion to be her fellow on the throne, which she holds by the help of the Roman legions, and, as they say, of young Sextus Pompeius, who has succeeded Cæsar in her love. But, Harmachis, the whole land boils and seethes against her. In every city the children of Khem talk of the deliverer who is to come--and thou art

he, Harmachis. The time is almost ripe. The hour is nigh at hand. Go thou back to Abouthis and learn the last secrets of the Gods, and meet those who shall direct the bursting of the storm. Then act, Harmachis--act, I say, and strike home for Khem, rid the land of the Roman and the Greek, and take thy place upon the throne of thy divine fathers and be a King of men. For to this end thou wast born, O Prince!"