

## CHAPTER V

### OF THE RETURN OF HARMACHIS TO ABOUTHIS; OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE MYSTERIES; OF THE CHANT OF ISIS; AND OF THE WARNING OF AMENEMHAT

On the next day I embraced my uncle Sepa, and with an eager heart departed from Annu back to Abouthis. To be short, I came thither in safety, having been absent five years and a month, being now no more a boy but a man full grown and having my mind well stocked with the knowledge of men and the ancient wisdom of Egypt. So once again I saw the old lands, and the known faces, though of these some few were wanting, having been gathered to Osiris. Now, as, riding across the fields, I came nigh to the enclosure of the Temple, the priests and people issued forth to bid me welcome, and with them the old wife, Atoua, who, but for a few added wrinkles that Time had cut upon her forehead, was just as she had been when she threw the sandal after me five long years before.

"La! la! la!" she cried; "and there thou art, my bonny lad; more bonny even than thou wert! La! what a man! what shoulders! and what a face and form! Ah, it does an old woman credit to have dandled thee! But thou art over-pale; those priests down there at Annu have starved thee, surely? Starve not thyself: the Gods love not a skeleton. 'Empty stomach makes empty head' as they say at Alexandria. But this is a glad hour; ay, a joyous hour. Come in--come in!" and as I lighted down she embraced me.

But I thrust her aside. "My father! where is my father?" I cried; "I see him not!"

"Nay, nay, have no fear," she answered; "his Holiness is well; he waits thee in his chamber. There, pass on. O happy day! O happy Aboutthis!"

So I went, or rather ran, and reached the chamber of which I have written, and there at the table sat my father, Amenemhat, the same as he had been, but very old. I came to him and, kneeling before him, kissed his hand, and he blessed me.

"Look up, my son," he said, "let my old eyes gaze upon thy face, that I may read thy heart."

So I lifted up my head, and he looked upon me long and earnestly.

"I read thee," he said at length; "thou art pure and strong in wisdom; I have not been deceived in thee. Oh, the years have been lonely; but I did well to send thee hence. Now, tell me of thy life; for thy letters have told me little, and thou canst not know, my son, how hungry is a father's heart."

And so I told him; we sat far into the night and talked together. And in the end he bade me know that I must now prepare to be initiated into those last mysteries that are learned of the chosen of the Gods.

And so it came about that for a space of three months I prepared myself according to the holy customs. I ate no meat. I was constant in the sanctuaries, in the study of the secrets of the Great Sacrifice and of the woe of the Holy Mother. I watched and prayed before the altars. I lifted up my soul to God; ay, in dreams I communed with the Invisible, till at length earth and earth's desires seemed to pass from me. I longed no more for the glory of this world, my heart hung above it as an eagle on his outstretched wings, and the voice of the world's blame could not stir it, and the vision of its beauty brought no delight. For above me was the vast vault of heaven, where in unalterable procession the stars pass on, drawing after them the destinies of men; where the Holy Ones sit upon their burning thrones, and watch the chariot-wheels of Fate as they roll from sphere to sphere. O hours of holy contemplation! who, having once tasted of your joy could wish again to grovel on the earth? O vile flesh to drag us down! I would that thou hadst then altogether fallen from me, and left my spirit free to seek Osiris!

The months of probation passed but too swiftly, and now the holy day drew near when I was in truth to be united to the universal Mother. Never hath Night so longed for the promise of the Dawn; never hath the heart of a lover so passionately desired the sweet coming of his bride, as I longed to see Thy glorious face, O Isis! Even now that I have been faithless to Thee, and Thou art far from me, O Divine! my soul goes out to Thee, and once more I know----But as it is bidden that I should draw the veil, and speak of things which have not been told since the beginning of this world, let me pass on and reverently set down the

history of that holy morn.

For seven days the great festival had been celebrated, the suffering of the Lord Osiris had been commemorated, the grief of the Mother Isis had been sung and glory had been done to the memory of the coming of the Divine Child Horus, the Son, the Avenger, the God-begot. All these things had been carried out according to the ancient rites. The boats had floated on the sacred lake, the priests had scourged themselves before the sanctuaries, and the images had been borne through the streets at night.

And now, as the sun sank on the seventh day, once more the great procession gathered to chant the woes of Isis and tell how the evil was avenged. We went in silence from the temple, and passed through the city ways. First came those who clear the path, then my father Amenemhat in all his priestly robes, and the wand of cedar in his hand. Then, clad in pure linen, I, the neophyte, followed alone; and after me the white-robed priests, holding aloft banners and emblems of the Gods. Next came those who bear the sacred boat, and after them the singers and the mourners; while, stretching as far as the eye could reach, all the people marched, clad in melancholy black because Osiris was no more. We went in silence through the city streets till at length we came to the wall of the temple and passed in. And as my father, the High Priest, entered beneath the gateway of the outer pylon, a sweet-voiced woman singer began to sing the Holy Chant, and thus she sang:

"Sing we Osiris dead,

Lament the fallen head:  
The light has left the world, the world is grey.  
Athwart the starry skies  
The web of Darkness flies,  
And Isis weeps Osiris passed away.  
Your tears, ye stars, ye fires, ye rivers, shed,  
Weep, children of the Nile, weep for your Lord is dead!"

She paused in her most sweet song, and the whole multitude took up the melancholy dirge:

"Softly we tread, our measured footsteps falling  
Within the Sanctuary Sevenfold;  
Soft on the Dead that liveth are we calling:  
'Return, Osiris, from thy Kingdom cold!  
Return to them that worship thee of old!"

The chorus ceased, and once again she sang:

"Within the court divine  
The Sevenfold sacred shrine  
We pass, while echoes of the Temple walls  
Repeat the long lament  
The sound of sorrow sent  
Far up within the imperishable halls,  
Where, each in the other's arms, the Sisters weep,  
Isis and Nephthys, o'er His unawaking sleep."

And then again rolled forth the solemn chorus of a thousand voices:

"Softly we tread, our measured footsteps falling  
Within the Sanctuary Sevenfold;  
Soft on the Dead that liveth are we calling:  
'Return, Osiris, from thy Kingdom cold!  
Return to them that worship thee of old!'"

It ceased, and sweetly she took up the song:

"O dweller in the West,  
Lover and Lordliest,  
Thy love, thy Sister Isis, calls thee home!  
Come from thy chamber dun  
Thou Master of the Sun,  
Thy shadowy chamber far below the foam!  
With weary wings and spent  
Through all the firmament,  
Through all the horror-haunted ways of Hell,  
I seek thee near and far,  
From star to wandering star,  
Free with the dead that in Amenti dwell.  
I search the height, the deep, the lands, the skies,  
Rise from the dead and live, our Lord Osiris, rise!"

"Softly we tread, our measured footsteps falling  
Within the Sanctuary Sevenfold;

Soft on the Dead that liveth are we calling:

'Return, Osiris, from thy Kingdom cold!

Return to them that worship thee of old!"

Now in a strain more high and glad the singer sang:

"He wakes--from forth the prison

We sing Osiris risen,

We sing the child that Nout conceived and bare.

Thine own love, Isis, waits

The Warden of the Gates,

She breathes the breath of Life on breast and hair,

And in her breast and breath

Behold! he waketh,

Behold! at length he riseth out of rest;

Touched with her holy hands,

The Lord of all the Lands,

He stirs, he rises from her breath, her breast!

But thou, fell Typhon, fly,

The judgment day drawn nigh,

Fleet on thy track as flame speeds Horus from the sky."

"Softly we tread, our measured footsteps falling

Within the Sanctuary Sevenfold;

Soft on the Dead that liveth are we calling:

'Return, Osiris, from thy Kingdom cold!

Return to them that worship thee of old!"

Once more, as we bowed before the Holy, she sang, and sent the full breath of her glad music ringing up the everlasting walls till the silence quivered with her round notes of melody, and the hearts of those who hearkened stirred strangely in the breast. And thus, as we walked, she sang the song of Osiris risen, the song of Hope, the song of Victory:

"Sing we the Trinity,  
Sing we the Holy Three,  
Sing we, and praise we and worship the Throne,  
Throne that our Lord hath set--  
There peace and truth are met  
There in the Halls of the Holy alone!  
There in the shadowings  
Faint of the folded wings,  
There shall we dwell and rejoice in our rest,  
We that thy servants are!  
Horus drive ill afar!  
Far in the folds of the dark of the West!"

Again, as her notes died away, thundered forth the chorus of all the voices:

"Softly we tread, our measured footsteps falling  
Within the Sanctuary Sevenfold;  
Soft on the Dead that liveth are we calling:



'Return, Osiris, from thy Kingdom cold!

Return to them that worship thee of old!'"

The chanting ceased, and as the sun sank the High Priest raised the statue of the living God and held it before the multitude that was now gathered in the court of the temple. Then, with a mighty and joyful shout of:

"Osiris our hope! Osiris! Osiris!"

the people tore their black wrappings from their dress, revealing the white robes they wore beneath, and, as one man, they bowed before the God, and the feast was ended.

But for me the ceremony was only begun, for to-night was the night of my initiation. Leaving the inner court I bathed myself, and, clad in pure linen, passed, as it is ordained, into an inner, but not the inmost, sanctuary, and laid the accustomed offerings on the altar. Then, lifting my hands to heaven, I remained for many hours in contemplation, striving, by holy thoughts and prayer, to gather up my strength against the mighty moment of my trial.

The hours sped slowly in the silence of the temple, till at length the door opened and my father Amenemhat, the High Priest, came in, clad in white, and leading by the hand the Priest of Isis. For, having been married, he did not himself enter into the mysteries of the Holy Mother.

I rose to my feet and stood humbly before them.

"Art thou ready?" said the priest, lifting the lamp he held so that its light fell upon my face. "O thou chosen one, art thou ready to see the glory of the Goddess face to face?"

"I am ready," I answered.

"Behold thee," he said again, in solemn tones, "it is no small thing. If thou wilt carry out this thy last desire, understand, royal Harmachis, that now this very night thou must die for a while in the flesh, what time thy soul shall look on spiritual things. And if thou diest and any evil shall be found within thy heart, when thou comest at last into that awful presence, woe unto thee, Harmachis, for the breath of life shall no more enter in at the gateway of thy mouth, thy body shall utterly perish, and what shall befall thy other parts, if I know, I may not say.[\*] Art thou prepared to be taken to the breast of Her who Was and Is and Shall Be, and in all things to do Her holy will; for Her, while she shall so command, to put away the thought of earthly woman; and to labour always for Her glory till at the end thy life is gathered to Her eternal life?"

[\*] According to the Egyptian religion the being Man is composed of four parts: the body, the double or astral shape (ka), the soul (bi), and the spark of life sprung from the Godhead (khou).--Editor.

"I am," I answered; "lead on."

"It is well," said the priest. "Noble Amenemhat, we go hence alone."

"Farewell, my son," said my father; "be firm and triumph over things spiritual as thou shalt triumph over things earthly. He who would truly rule the world must first be lifted up above the world. He must be at one with God, for thus only shall he learn the secrets of the Divine. But beware! The Gods demand much of those who dare to enter the circle of their Divinity. If they go back therefrom, they shall be judged of a sharper law, and scourged with a heavier rod, for as their glory is, so shall their shame be. Therefore, make thy heart strong, royal Harmachis! And when thou speedest down the ways of Night and enterest the Holies, remember that from him to whom great gifts have been given shall gifts be required again. And now--if, indeed, thy mind be fixed--go whither it is not as yet given me to follow thee. Farewell!"

For a moment as my heart weighed these heavy words, I wavered, as well as I might. But I was filled with longing to be gathered to the company of the Divine ones, and I knew that I had no evil in me, and desired to do only the thing that is just. Therefore, having with so much labour drawn the bowstring to my ear, I was fain to let fly the shaft. "Lead on," I cried with a loud voice; "lead on, thou holy Priest! I follow thee!"

And we went forth.