

CHAPTER III

OF THE LIFE OF HIM WHO WAS NAMED THE LEARNED OLYMPUS, IN THE TOMB OF THE HARPERS THAT IS BY TÁPÉ; OF HIS COUNSEL TO CLEOPATRA; OF THE MESSAGE OF CHARMION; AND OF THE PASSING OF OLYMPUS DOWN TO ALEXANDRIA

These things then came to pass. For eighty days I was hidden of the old wife, Atoua, while the body of the Prince, my father, was made ready for burial by those skilled in the arts of embalming. And when at last all things were done in order, I crept from my hiding-place and made offerings to the spirit of my father, and placing lotus-flowers on his breast went thence sorrowing. And on the following day, from where I lay hid, I saw the Priests of the Temple of Osiris and of the holy shrine of Isis come forth, and in slow procession bear his painted coffin to the sacred lake and lay it beneath the funeral tent in the consecrated boat. I saw them celebrate the symbol of the trial of the dead, and name him above all men just, and then bear him thence to lay him by his wife, my mother, in the deep tomb that he had hewn in the rock near to the resting-place of the Holy Osiris, where, notwithstanding my sins, I, too, hope to sleep ere long. And when all these things were done and the deep tomb sealed, the wealth of my father having been removed from the hidden treasury and placed in safety, I fled, disguised, with the old wife, Atoua, up the Nile till we came to Tápé,[*] and here in this great city I lay a while, till a place could be found where I should hide myself.

[*] Thebes.--Editor.

And such a place I found. For to the north of the great city are brown and rugged hills, and desert valley blasted of the sun, and in this place of desolation the Divine Pharaohs, my forefathers, hollowed out their tombs in the solid rock, the most part of which are lost to this day, so cunningly have they been hidden. But some are open, for the accursed Persians and other thieves broke into them in search of treasure. And one night--for by night only did I leave my hiding-place--just as the dawn was breaking on the mountain tops, I wandered alone in this sad valley of death, like to which there is no other, and presently came to the mouth of a tomb hidden amid great rocks, which afterwards I knew for the place of the burying of the Divine Rameses, the third of that name, now long gathered to Osiris. And by the faint light of the dawn creeping through the entrance I saw that it was spacious and that within were chambers.

On the following night, therefore, I returned, bearing lights, with Atoua, my nurse, who ever ministered faithfully to me as when I was little and without discretion. And we searched the mighty tomb and came to the great Hall of the Sarcophagus of granite, in which the Divine Rameses sleeps, and saw the mystic paintings on the walls: the symbol of the Snake unending, the symbol of Ra resting upon the Scarabæus, the symbol of Ra resting upon Nout, the symbol of the Headless men, and many others, whereof, being initiated, well I read the mysteries. And opening from the long descending passage I found chambers in which were paintings beautiful to behold, and of all manner of things. For beneath each chamber is entombed the master of the craft of which the paintings

tell, he who was the chief of the servants of that craft in the house of this Divine Rameses. And on the walls of the last chamber--on the left-hand side, looking toward the Hall of the Sarcophagus--are paintings exceedingly beautiful, and two blind harpers playing upon their bent harps before the God Mou; and beneath the flooring these harpers, who harp no more, are soft at sleep. Here, then, in this gloomy place, even in the tomb of the Harpers and the company of the dead, I took up my abode; and here for eight long years I worked out my penance and made atonement for my sin. But Atoua, because she loved to be near the light, abode in the chamber of the Boats--that is, the first chamber on the right-hand side of the gallery looking toward the Hall of the Sarcophagus.

And this was the manner of my life. On every second day the old wife, Atoua, went forth and brought water from the city and such food as is necessary to keep the life from failing, and also tapers made from fat. And one hour at the time of sunrise and one hour at the time of sunset I did go forth also to wander in the valley for my health's sake and to save my sight from failing in the great darkness of the tomb. But the other hours of the day and night, except when I climbed the mountain to watch the course of the stars, I spent in prayer and meditation and sleep, till the cloud of sin lifted from my heart and once more I drew near to the Gods, though with Isis, my heavenly Mother, I might speak no more. And I grew exceedingly wise also, pondering on all those mysteries to which I held the key. For abstinence and prayer and sorrowful solitude wore away the grossness of my flesh, and with the eyes of the Spirit I learned to look deep into the heart of things till the joy of

Wisdom fell like dew upon my soul.

Soon the rumour was wafted about the city that a certain holy man named Olympus abode in solitude in the tombs of the awful Valley of the Dead; and hither came people bearing sick that I might cure them. And I gave my mind to the study of simples, in which Atoua instructed me; and by lore and the weight of my thought I gained great skill in medicine, and healed many sick. And thus ever, as time went on, my fame was noised abroad; for it was said that I was also a magician and that in the tombs I had commune with the Spirits of the Dead. And this, indeed, I did--though it is not lawful for me to speak of these matters. Thus, then, it came to pass that no more need Atoua go forth to seek food and water, for the people brought it--more than was needful, for I would receive no fee. Now at first, fearing lest some in the hermit Olympus might know the lost Harmachis, I would only meet those who came in the darkness of the tomb. But afterwards, when I learned how it was held through all the land that Harmachis was certainly no more, I came forth and sat in the mouth of the tomb, and ministered to the sick, and at times calculated nativities for the great. And thus my fame grew continually, till at length folk journeyed even from Memphis and Alexandria to visit me; and from them I learned how Antony had left Cleopatra for a while, and, Fulvia being dead, had married Octavia, the sister of Cæsar. Many other things I learned also.

And in the second year I did this: I despatched the old wife, Atoua, disguised as a seller of simples, to Alexandria, bidding her seek out Charmion, and, if yet she found her faithful, reveal to her the secret

of my way of life. So she went, and in the fifth month from her sailing returned, bearing Charmion's greetings and a token. And she told me that she had found means to see Charmion, and, in talk, had let fall the name of Harmachis, speaking of me as one dead; at which Charmion, unable to control her grief, wept aloud. Then, reading her heart--for the old wife was very clever, and held the key of knowledge--she told her that Harmachis yet lived, and sent her greetings. Thereon Charmion wept yet more with joy, and kissed the old wife, and made her gifts, bidding her tell me that she had kept her vow, and waited for my coming and the hour of vengeance. So, having learned many secrets, Atoua returned again to Tápé.

And in the following year messengers came to me from Cleopatra, bearing a sealed roll and great gifts. I opened the roll, and read this in it:

"Cleopatra to Olympus, the learned Egyptian who dwells in the Valley of Death by Tápé--

"The fame of thy renown, O learned Olympus, hath reached our ears. Tell thou, then, this to us, and if thou tellest aright greater honour and wealth shalt thou have than any in Egypt: How shall we win back the love of noble Antony, who is bewitched of cunning Octavia, and tarries long from us?"

Now, in this I saw the hand of Charmion, who had made my renown known to Cleopatra.

All that night I took counsel with my wisdom, and on the morrow wrote my answer as it was put into my heart to the destruction of Cleopatra and Antony. And thus I wrote:

"Olympus the Egyptian to Cleopatra the Queen--

"Go forth into Syria with one who shall be sent to lead thee; thus shalt thou win Antony to thy arms again, and with him gifts more great than thou canst dream."

And with this letter I dismissed the messengers, bidding them share the presents sent by Cleopatra among their company.

So they went wondering.

But Cleopatra, seizing on the advice to which her passion prompted her, departed straightway with Fonteius Capito into Syria, and there the thing came about as I had foretold, for Antony was subdued of her and gave her the greater part of Cilicia, the ocean shore of Arabia Nabathæa, the balm-bearing provinces of Judæa, the province of Phoenicia, the province of Coele-Syria, the rich isle of Cyprus, and all the library of Pergamus. And to the twin children that, with the son Ptolemy, Cleopatra had borne to Antony, he impiously gave the names of "Kings, the Children of Kings"--of Alexander Helios, as the Greeks name the sun, and of Cleopatra Selene, the moon, the long-winged.

These things then came to pass.

Now on her return to Alexandria Cleopatra sent me great gifts, of which I would have none, and prayed me, the learned Olympus, to come to her at Alexandria; but it was not yet time, and I would not. But thereafter she and Antony sent many times to me for counsel, and I ever counselled them to their ruin, nor did my prophecies fail.

Thus the long years rolled away, and I, the hermit Olympus, the dweller in a tomb, the eater of bread and the drinker of water, by strength of the wisdom that was given me of the avenging Power, became once more great in Khem. For I grew ever wiser as I trampled the desires of the flesh beneath my feet and turned my eyes to heaven.

At length eight full years were accomplished. The war with the Parthians had come and gone, and Artavasdes, King of Armenia, had been led in triumph through the streets of Alexandria. Cleopatra had visited Samos and Athens; and, by her counselling, the noble Octavia had been driven, like some discarded concubine, from the house of Antony at Rome. And now, at the last, the measure of the folly of Antony was full even to the brim. For this Master of the World had no longer the good gift of reason; he was lost in Cleopatra as I had been lost. Therefore, in the event, Octavianus declared war against him.

And as I slept upon a certain day in the chamber of the Harpers, in the tomb of Pharaoh that is by Tápé, there came to me a vision of my father,

the aged Amenemhat, and he stood over me, leaning on his staff, and spoke, saying:

"Look forth, my son."

Then I looked forth, and with the eyes of my spirit saw the sea, and two great fleets grappling in war hard by a rocky coast. And the emblems were those of Octavian, and of the other those of Cleopatra and Antony. The ships of Antony and Cleopatra bore down upon the ships of Cæsar, and drove them on, for victory inclined to Antony.

I looked again. There sat Cleopatra in a gold-decked galley watching the fight with eager eyes. Then I cast my Spirit on her so that she seemed to hear the voice of dead Harmachis crying in her ear.

"Fly, Cleopatra," it seemed to say, "fly or perish!"

She looked up wildly, and again she heard my Spirit's cry. Now a mighty fear took hold of her. She called aloud to the sailors to hoist the sails and make signal to her fleet to put about. This they did wondering but little loath, and fled in haste from the battle.

Then a great roar went up from friend and foe.

"Cleopatra is fled! Cleopatra is fled!" And I saw wreck and red ruin fall upon the fleet of Antony and awoke from my trance.

The days passed, and again a vision of my father came to me and spoke, saying:

"Arise, my son!--the hour of vengeance is at hand! Thy plots have not failed; thy prayers have been heard. By the bidding of the Gods, as she sat in her galley at the fight of Actium, the heart of Cleopatra was filled with fears, so that, deeming she heard thy voice bidding her fly or perish, she fled with all her fleet. Now the strength of Actium is broken on the sea. Go forth, and as it shall be put into thy mind, so do thou."

In the morning I awoke, wondering, and went to the mouth of the tomb, and there, coming up the valley, I saw the messengers of Cleopatra, and with them a Roman guard.

"What will ye with me now?" I asked, sternly.

"This is the message of the Queen and of great Antony," answered the Captain, bowing low before me, for I was much feared by all men. "The Queen commands thy presence at Alexandria. Many times has she sent, and thou wouldst not come; now she bids thee to come, and that swiftly, for she has need of thy counsel."

"And if I say Nay, soldier, what then?"

"These are my orders, most holy Olympus; that I bring thee by force."

I laughed aloud. "By force, thou fool! Use not such talk to me, lest I smite thee where thou art. Know, then, that I can kill as well as cure!"

"Pardon, I beseech thee!" he answered, shrinking. "I say but those things that I am bid."

"Well, I know it, Captain. Fear not; I come."

So on that very day I departed, together with the aged Atoua. Ay, I went as secretly as I had come; and the tomb of the Divine Rameses knew me no more. And with me I took all the treasures of my father, Amenemhat, for I was not minded to go to Alexandria empty-handed and as a suppliant, but rather as a man of much wealth and condition. Now, as I went, I learned that Antony, following Cleopatra, had, indeed, fled from Actium, and knew that the end drew nigh. For this and many other things had I foreseen in the darkness of the tomb of Tápé, and planned to bring about.

Thus, then, I came to Alexandria, and entered into a house which had been made ready for me at the palace gates.

And that very night Charmion came to me--Charmion whom I had not seen for nine long years.