

## CHAPTER VI

OF THE WORKINGS OF THE LEARNED OLYMPUS AT MEMPHIS; OF THE POISONINGS OF CLEOPATRA; OF THE SPEECH OF ANTONY TO HIS CAPTAINS; AND OF THE PASSING OF ISIS FROM THE LAND OF KHEM

Now I, Harmachis, must make speed with my task, setting down that which is permitted as shortly as may be, and leaving much untold. For of this I am warned, that Doom draws on and my days are wellnigh sped. After the drawing forth of Antony from the Timonium came that time of heavy quiet which heralds the rising of the desert wind. Antony and Cleopatra once again gave themselves up to luxury, and night by night feasted in splendour at the palace. They sent ambassadors to Cæsar; but Cæsar would have none of them; and, this hope being gone, they turned their minds to the defence of Alexandria. Men were gathered, ships were built, and a great force was made ready against the coming of Cæsar.

And now, aided by Charmion, I began my last work of hate and vengeance. I wormed myself deep into the secrets of the palace, counselling all things for evil. I bade Cleopatra keep Antony gay, lest he should brood upon his sorrows: and thus she sapped his strength and energy with luxury and wine. I gave him of my draughts--draughts that sank his soul in dreams of happiness and power, leaving him to wake to a heavier misery. Soon, without my healing medicine he could not sleep, and thus, being ever at his side, I bound his weakened will to mine, till at last he would do little if I said not "It is well." Cleopatra, also grown very superstitious, leaned much upon me; for I prophesied falsely to her

in secret.

Moreover, I wove other webs. My fame was great throughout Egypt, for during the long years that I had dwelt in Tápé it had spread through all the land. Therefore many men of note came to me, both for their health's sake and because it was known that I had the ear of Antony and the Queen; and, in these days of doubt and trouble, they were fain to learn the truth. All these men I worked upon with doubtful words, sapping their loyalty; and I caused many to fall away, and yet none could bear an evil report of what I had said. Also, Cleopatra sent me to Memphis, there to move the Priests and Governors that they should gather men in Upper Egypt for the defence of Alexandria. And I went and spoke to the priests with such a double meaning and with so much wisdom that they knew me to be one of the initiated in the deeper mysteries. But how I, Olympus the physician, came thus to be initiated none might say. And afterwards they sought me secretly, and I gave them the holy sign of brotherhood; and thereunder bade them not to ask who I might be, but send no aid to Cleopatra. Rather, I said, must they make peace with Cæsar, for by Cæsar's grace only could the worship of the Gods endure in Khem. So, having taken counsel of the Holy Apis, they promised in public to give help to Cleopatra, but in secret sent an embassy to Cæsar.

Thus, then, it came to pass that Egypt gave but little aid to its hated Macedonian Queen. Thence from Memphis I came once more to Alexandria, and, having made favourable report, continued my secret work. And, indeed, the Alexandrians could not easily be stirred, for, as they say in the marketplace, "The ass looks at its burden and is blind to its

master." Cleopatra had oppressed them so long that the Roman was like a welcome friend.

Thus the time passed on, and every night found Cleopatra with fewer friends than that which had gone before, for in evil days friends fly like swallows before the frost. Yet she would not give up Antony, whom she loved; though to my knowledge Cæsar, by his freedman, Thyreus, made promise to her of her dominions for herself and for her children if she would but slay Antony, or even betray him bound. But to this her woman's heart--for still she had a heart--would not consent, and, moreover, we counselled her against it, for of necessity we must hold him to her, lest, Antony escaping or being slain, Cleopatra might ride out the storm and yet be Queen of Egypt. And this grieved me, because Antony, though weak, was still a brave man, and a great; and, moreover, in my own heart I read the lesson of his woes. For were we not akin in wretchedness? Had not the same woman robbed us of Empire, Friends, and Honour? But pity has no place in politics, nor could it turn my feet from the path of vengeance it was ordained that I should tread. Cæsar drew nigh; Pelusium fell; the end was at hand. It was Charmion who brought the tidings to the Queen and Antony, as they slept in the heat of the day, and I came with her.

"Awake!" she cried. "Awake! This is no time for sleep! Seleucus hath surrendered Pelusium to Cæsar, who marches straight on Alexandria!"

With a great oath, Antony sprang up and clutched Cleopatra by the arm.

"Thou hast betrayed me--by the Gods I swear it! Now thou shalt pay the price!" And snatching up his sword he drew it.

"Stay thy hand, Antony!" she cried. "It is false--I know naught of this!" And she sprang upon him, and clung about his neck, weeping. "I know naught, my Lord. Take thou the wife of Seleucus and his little children, whom I hold in guard, and avenge thyself. O Antony, Antony! why dost thou doubt me?"

Then Antony threw down his sword upon the marble, and, casting himself upon the couch, hid his face, and groaned in bitterness of spirit.

But Charmion smiled, for it was she who had sent secretly to Seleucus, her friend, counselling him to surrender forthwith, saying that no fight would be made at Alexandria. And that very night Cleopatra took all her great store of pearls and emeralds--those that remained of the treasure of Menkau-ra--all her wealth of gold, ebony, ivory, and cinnamon, treasure without price, and placed it in the mausoleum of granite which, after our Egyptian fashion, she had built upon the hill that is by the Temple of the Holy Isis. These riches she piled up upon a bed of flax, that, when she fired it, all might perish in the flame and escape the greed of money-loving Octavianus. And she slept henceforth in this tomb, away from Antony; but in the daytime she still saw him at the palace.

But a little while after, when Cæsar with all his great force had already crossed the Caponic mouth of the Nile and was hard on Alexandria, I came to the palace, whither Cleopatra had summoned me.

There I found her in the Alabaster Hall, royally clad, a wild light in her eyes, and, with her, Iras and Charmion, and before her guards; and stretched here and there upon the marble, bodies of dead men, among whom lay one yet dying.

"Greeting, thou Olympus!" she cried. "Here is a sight to glad a physician's heart--men dead and men sick unto death!"

"What doest thou, O Queen?" I said affrighted.

"What do I? I wreak justice on these criminals and traitors; and, Olympus, I learn the ways of death. I have caused six different poisons to be given to these slaves, and with an attentive eye have watched their working. That man," and she pointed to a Nubian, "he went mad, and raved of his native deserts and his mother. He thought himself a child again, poor fool! and bade her hold him close to her breast and save him from the darkness which drew near. And that Greek, he shrieked, and, shrieking, died. And this, he wept and prayed for pity, and in the end, like a coward, breathed his last. Now, note the Egyptian yonder, he who still lives and groans; first he took the draught--the deadliest draught of all, they swore--and yet the slave so dearly loves his life he will not leave it! See, he yet strives to throw the poison from him; twice have I given him the cup and yet he is athirst. What a drunkard we have here! Man, man, knowest thou not that in death only can peace be found? Struggle no more, but enter into rest." And even as she spoke, the man, with a great cry, gave up the spirit.

"There!" she cried, "at length the farce is played--away with those slaves whom I have forced through the difficult gates of Joy!" and she clapped her hands. But when they had borne the bodies thence she drew me to her, and spoke thus:

"Olympus, for all thy prophecies, the end is at hand. Cæsar must conquer, and I and my Lord Antony be lost. Now, therefore, the play being wellnigh done, I must make ready to leave this stage of earth in such fashion as becomes a Queen. For this cause, then, I do make trial of these poisons, seeing that in my person I must soon endure those agonies of death that to-day I give to others. These drugs please me not; some wrench out the soul with cruel pains, and some too slowly work their end. But thou art skilled in the medicines of death. Now, do thou prepare me such a draught as shall, pangless, steal my life away."

And as I listened the sense of triumph filled my bitter heart, for I knew now that by my own hand should this ruined woman die and the justice of the Gods be done.

"Spoken like a Queen, O Cleopatra!" I said. "Death shall cure thy ills, and I will brew such a wine as shall draw him down a sudden friend and sink thee in a sea of slumber whence, upon this earth, thou shalt never wake again. Oh! fear not Death: Death is thy hope; and, surely, thou shalt pass sinless and pure of heart into the dreadful presence of the Gods!"

She trembled. "And if the heart be not altogether pure, tell me--thou

dark man--what then? Nay, I fear not the Gods! for if the Gods of Hell be men, there I shall Queen it also. At the least, having once been royal, royal I shall ever be."

And, as she spoke, suddenly from the palace gates came a great clamour, and the noise of joyful shouting.

"Why, what is this?" she said, springing from her couch.

"Antony! Antony!" rose the cry; "Antony hath conquered!"

She turned swiftly and ran, her long hair streaming on the wind. I followed her, more slowly, down the great hall, across the courtyards, to the palace gates. And here she met Antony, riding through them, radiant with smiles and clad in his Roman armour. When he saw her he leapt to the ground, and, all armed as he was, clasped her to his breast.

"What is it?" she cried; "is Cæsar fallen?"

"Nay, not altogether fallen, Egypt: but we have beat his horsemen back to their trenches, and, like the beginning, so shall be the end, for, as they say here, 'Where the head goes, the tail will follow.' Moreover, Cæsar has my challenge, and if he will but meet me hand to hand, the world shall soon see which is the better man, Antony or Octavian."

And even as he spoke and the people cheered there came the cry of "A messenger from Cæsar!"

The herald entered, and, bowing low, gave a writing to Antony, bowed again, and went. Cleopatra snatched it from his hand, broke the silk and read aloud:

"Cæsar to Antony, greeting.

"This answer to thy challenge: Can Antony find no better way of death than beneath the sword of Cæsar? Farewell!"

And thereafter they cheered no more.

The darkness came, and before it was midnight, having feasted with his friends who to-night went over his woes and to-morrow should betray him, Antony went forth to the gathering of the captains of the land-forces and of the fleet, attended by many, among whom was I.

When all were come together, he spoke to them, standing bareheaded in their midst, beneath the radiance of the moon. And thus he most nobly spoke:

"Friends and companions in arms! who yet cling to me, and whom many a time I have led to victory, hearken to me now, who to-morrow may lie in the dumb dust, disempired and dishonoured. This is our design: no longer will we hang on poised wings above the flood of war, but will



straightway plunge, perchance thence to snatch the victor's diadem, or, failing, there to drown. Be now but true to me, and to your honour's sake, and you may still sit, the most proud of men, at my right hand in the Capitol of Rome. Fail me now, and the cause of Antony is lost and so are ye. To-morrow's battle must be hazardous indeed, but we have stood many a time and faced a fiercer peril, and ere the sun had sunk, once more have driven armies like desert sands before our gale of valour and counted the spoil of hostile kings. What have we to fear? Though allies be fled, still is our array as strong as Cæsar's! And show we but as high a heart, why, I swear to you, upon my princely word, to-morrow night I shall deck yonder Canopic gate with the heads of Octavian and his captains!

"Ay, cheer, and cheer again! I love that martial music which swells, not as from the indifferent lips of clarions, now 'neath the breath of Antony and now of Cæsar, but rather out of the single hearts of men who love me. Yet--and now I will speak low, as we do speak o'er the bier of some beloved dead--yet, if Fortune should rise against me and if, borne down by the weight of arms, Antony, the soldier, dies a soldier's death, leaving you to mourn him who ever was your friend, this is my will, that, after our rough fashion of the camp, I here declare to you. You know where all my treasure lies. Take it, most dear friends; and, in the memory of Antony, make just division. Then go to Cæsar and speak thus: 'Antony, the dead, to Cæsar, the living, sends greeting; and, in the name of ancient fellowship and of many a peril dared, craves this boon: the safety of those who clung to him and that which he hath given them.'

"Nay, let not my tears--for I must weep--overflow your eyes! Why, it is not manly; 'tis most womanish! All men must die, and death were welcome were it not so lone. Should I fall, I leave my children to your tender care--if, perchance, it may avail to save them from the fate of helplessness. Soldiers, enough! to-morrow at the dawn we spring on Cæsar's throat, both by land and sea. Swear that ye will cling to me, even to the last issue!"

"We swear!" they cried. "Noble Antony, we swear!"

"It is well! Once more my star grows bright; to-morrow, set in the highest heaven, it yet may shine the lamp of Cæsar down! Till then, farewell!"

He turned to go. As he went they caught his hand and kissed it; and so deeply were they moved that many wept like children; nor could Antony master his grief, for, in the moonlight, I saw tears roll down his furrowed cheeks and fall upon that mighty breast.

And, seeing all this, I was much troubled. For I well knew that if these men held firm to Antony all might yet go well for Cleopatra; and though I bore no ill-will against Antony, yet he must fall, and in that fall drag down the woman who, like some poisonous plant, had twined herself about his giant strength till it choked and mouldered in her embrace.

Therefore, when Antony went I went not, but stood back in the shadow watching the faces of the lords and captains as they spoke together.

"Then it is agreed!" said he who should lead the fleet. "And this we swear to, one and all, that we will cling to noble Antony to the last extremity of fortune!"

"Ay! ay!" they answered.

"Ay! ay!" I said, speaking from the shadow; "cling, and die!"

They turned fiercely and seized me.

"Who is he?" quoth one.

"'Tis that dark-faced dog, Olympus!" cried another. "Olympus, the magician!"

"Olympus, the traitor!" growled another; "put an end to him and his magic!" and he drew his sword.

"Ay! slay him; he would betray the Lord Antony, whom he is paid to doctor."

"Hold a while!" I said in a slow and solemn voice, "and beware how ye try to murder the servant of the Gods. I am no traitor. For myself, I abide the event here in Alexandria, but to you I say, Flee, flee to Cæsar! I serve Antony and the Queen--I serve them truly; but above all I serve the Holy Gods; and what they make known to me, that, Lords, I do

know. And I know this: that Antony is doomed, and Cleopatra is doomed, for Cæsar conquers. Therefore, because I honour you, noble gentlemen, and think with pity on your wives, left widowed, and your little fatherless children, that shall, if ye hold to Antony, be sold as slaves--therefore, I say, cling to Antony if ye will and die; or flee to Cæsar and be saved! And this I say because it is so ordained of the Gods."

"The Gods!" they growled; "what Gods? Slit the traitor's throat, and stop his ill-omened talk!"

"Let him show us a sign from his Gods or let him die: I do mistrust this man," said another.

"Stand back, ye fools!" I cried. "Stand back--free mine arms--and I will show you a sign;" and there was that in my face which frightened them, for they freed me and stood back. Then I lifted up my hands and putting out all my strength of soul searched the depths of space till my Spirit communed with the Spirit of my Mother Isis. Only the Word of Power I uttered not, as I had been bidden. And the holy mystery of the Goddess answered to my Spirit's cry, falling in awful silence upon the face of the earth. Deeper and deeper grew the terrible silence; even the dogs ceased to howl, and in the city men stood still afeared. Then, from far away, there came the ghostly music of the sistra. Faint it was at first, but ever as it came it grew more loud, till the air shivered with the unearthly sound of terror. I said naught, but pointed with my hand toward the sky. And behold! bosomed upon the air, floated a vast veiled

Shape that, heralded by the swelling music of the sistra, drew slowly near, till its shadow lay upon us. It came, it passed, it went toward the camp of Cæsar, till at length the music died away, and the awful Shape was swallowed in the night.

"It is Bacchus!" cried one. "Bacchus, who leaves lost Antony!" and, as he spoke, there rose a groan of terror from all the camp.

But I knew that it was not Bacchus, the false God, but the Divine Isis who deserted Khem, and, passing over the edge of the world, sought her home in space, to be no more known of men. For though her worship is still upheld, though still she is here and in all Earths, Isis manifests herself no more in Egypt. I hid my face and prayed, but when I lifted it from my robe, lo! all had fled and I was alone.