

CHAPTER XVII. THE BATTLE--AND AFTER

Two hours went by and I knew by the stars that the dawn could not be far away. My eyes were fixed upon the Nile and on the lights that hung to the prows of the Great King's ships. Where were those who had been sent to fire them, I wondered, for of them I saw nothing. Well, their journey would be long as they must wade the river. Perhaps they had not yet arrived, or perhaps they had miscarried. At least the fleet seemed very quiet. None were alarmed there and no sentry challenged.

At length it grew near to dawn and behind me I heard the gentle stir of the Ethiopians arising and eating as they had been bidden, whereon I too ate and drank a little, though never had I less wished for food. The East brightened and far up the Nile of a sudden there appeared what at first I took to be a meteor or a lantern waving in the wind that now was blowing its strongest, as it does at this season of the year just at the time of dawn. Yet that lantern seemed to travel fast and lo! now I saw that it was fire running up the rigging of a ship.

It leapt from rope to rope and from sail to sail till they blazed fiercely, and in other ships also nearer to us, flame appeared that grew to a great red sheet. Our men had not failed; the navy of the King of kings was burning! Oh! how it burned fanned by the breath of that strong wind. From vessel to vessel leapt the fire like a thing alive, for all of them were drawn up on the bank with prows fastened in such fashion that they could not readily be made loose. Some broke away indeed, but

they were aflame and only served to spread the fire more quickly. Before the rim of the sun appeared for a league or more there was nothing but blazing ships from which rose a hideous crying, and still more and more took fire lower down the line.

I had no time to watch for now I must be up and doing. The sky grew grey, there was light enough to see though faintly. I cast my eyes about me and perceived that no place in the world could have been better for archery. In front the hill was steep for a hundred paces or more and scattered over with thousands of large stones behind which bowmen might take shelter. Then came a gentle slope of loose sand up which attackers would find it hard to climb. Then the long flat plain whereon the Easterns were camped, and beyond it, scarce two furlongs away, the banks of Nile.

Indeed the place was ill-chosen for so great an army, nor could it have held them all, had not the camping ground been a full league in length, and even so they were crowded. Out of the mist their tents appeared, thousands of them, farther than my eye could reach, and almost opposite to me, near to the banks of the river, was a great pavilion of silk and gold that I guessed must shelter the majesty of the King of kings. Indeed this was certain since now I saw that over it floated his royal banner which I knew so well, I who had stolen the little White Signet of signets from which it was taken. Truly the holy Tanofir, or his Cup, Karema, or his messengers, or the spirits with whom he dwelt, I know not which, had a general's eye and knew how to plan an ambushade.

So, thought I to myself as I ran back to my army to meet the gathered captains and set all things in order. It was soon done for they were ready, as were the fierce Ethiopians fresh from their rest and food, and stringing their bows, every one of them, or loosening the arrows in their quivers. As I came they lifted their hands in salute, for speak they dared not and I sent a whisper down their ranks, that this day they must fight and conquer, or fall for the glory of Ethiopia and their king. Then I gave my orders and before the sun rose and revealed them they crept forward in a fourfold line and took shelter behind the stones, lying there invisible on their bellies until the moment came.

The red rim of Ra appeared glorious in the East, and I, from behind the rocks that I had chosen, sat down and watched. Oh! truly Tanofir or the gods of Egypt were ordering things aright for us. The huge camp was awake now and aware of what was happening on the Nile. They could not see well because of the tall reeds upon the river's rim and therefore, without order or discipline, by the thousand and the ten thousand, for their numbers were countless, some with arms and some without, they ran to the slope of sand beneath our station and began to climb it to have a better view of the burning ships.

The sun leapt up swiftly as it does in Egypt. His glowing edge appeared over the crest of the hill though the hollows beneath were still filled with shadow. The moment was at hand. I waited till I had counted ten, glancing to the right and left of me to see that all were ready and to

suffer the crowd to thicken on the slope, but not to reach the lowest rocks, whither they were climbing. Then I gave the double signal that had been agreed.

Behind me the banner of the golden Grasshopper was raised upon a tall pole and broke upon the breeze. That was the first signal whereat every man rose to his knees and set shaft on string. Next I lifted my bow, the black bow, the ancient bow that few save I could bend, and drew it to my ear.

Far away, out of arrow-reach as most would have said, floated the Great King's standard over his pavilion. At this I aimed, making allowance for the wind, and shot. The shaft leapt forward, seen in the sunlight, lost in the shadow, seen in the sunlight again and lastly seen once more, pinning that golden standard against its pole!

At the sight of the omen a roar went up that rolled to right and left of us, a roar from thirty thousand throats. Now it was lost in a sound like to the hissing of thunder rain in Ethiopia, the sound of thirty thousand arrows rushing through the wind. Oh! they were well aimed, those arrows for I had not taught the Ethiopians archery in vain.

How many went down before them? The gods of Egypt know alone. I do not. All I know is that the long slope of sand which had been crowded with standing men, was now thick with fallen men, many of whom lay as though they were asleep. For what mail could resist the iron-pointed shafts

driven by the strong bows of the Ethiopians?

And this was but a beginning, for, flight after flight, those arrows sped till the air grew dark with them. Soon there were no more to shoot at on the slope, for these were down, and the order went to lift the bows and draw upon the camp, and especially upon the parks of baggage beasts. Presently these were down also, or rushing maddened to and fro.

At last the Eastern generals saw and understood. Orders were shouted and in a mad confusion the scores of thousands who were unharmed, rushed back towards the banks of Nile where our shafts could not reach them. Here they formed up in their companies and took counsel. It was soon ended, for all the vast mass of them, preceded by a cloud of archers, began to advance upon the hill.

Now I passed a command to the Ethiopians, of whom so far not one had fallen, to lie low and wait. On came the glittering multitude of Easterns, gay with purple and gold, their mail and swords shining in the risen sun. On they came by squadron and by company, more than the eye could number. They reached the sand slope thick with their own dead and wounded and paused a little because they could see no man, since the black bodies of the Ethiopians were hid behind the black stones and the black bows did not catch the light.

Then from a gorgeous group that I guessed hid the person of the Great King surrounded by his regiment of guards, ten thousand of them who were

called Immortals, messengers sprang forth screaming the order to charge. The host began to climb the slippery sand slope but still I held my hand till their endless lines were within fifty paces of us and their arrows rattled harmlessly against our stones. Then I caused the banner of the Grasshopper that had been lowered, to be lifted thrice, and at the third lifting once more thirty thousand arrows rushed forth to kill.

They went down, they went down in lines and heaps, riddled through and through. But still others came on for they fought under the eye of the Great King, and to fly meant death with shame and torture. We could not kill them all, they were too many. We could not kill the half of them. Now their foremost were within ten paces of us and since we must stand up to shoot, our men began to fall, also pierced with arrows. I caused the blast of retreat to be sounded on the ivory horn and step by step we drew back to the crest of the ridge, shooting as we went. On the crest we re-formed rapidly in a double line standing as close as we could together and my example was followed all down the ranks to right and left. Then I bethought me of a plan that I had taught these archers again and again in Ethiopia.

With the flag I signalled a command to stop shooting and also passed the word down the line, so that presently no more arrows flew. The Easterns hesitated, wondering whether this were a trap, or if we lacked shafts, and meanwhile I sent messengers with certain orders to the vanguard, who sped away at speed behind the hill, running as they never ran before. Presently I heard a voice below cry out,

"The Great King commands that the barbarians be destroyed. Let the barbarians be destroyed!"

Now with a roar they came on like a flood. I waited till they were within twenty paces of us, and shouted, "Shoot and fall!"

The first line shot and oh! fearful was its work, for not a shaft missed those crowded hosts and many pinned two together. My archers shot and fell down, setting new arrows to the string as they fell, whereon the second line also shot over them. Then up we sprang and loosed again, and again fell down, whereon the second line once more poured in its deadly hail.

Now the Easterns stayed their advance, for their front ranks lay prone, and those behind must climb over them if they could. Yes, standing there in glittering groups they rocked and hesitated although their officers struck them with swords and lances to drive them forward. Once more our front rank rose and loosed, and once more we dropped and let the shafts of the second speed over us. It was too much, flesh and blood could not bear more of those arrows. Thousands upon thousands were down and the rest began to flee in confusion.

Then at my command the ivory horns sounded the charge. Every man slung his bow upon his back and drew his short sword.

"On to them!" I cried and leapt forward.

Like a black torrent we rushed down the hill, leaping over the dead and wounded. The retreat became a rout since before these ebon, great-eyed warriors the soft Easterns did not care to stand. They fled screaming,

"These are devils! These are devils!"

We were among them now, hacking and stabbing with the short swords upon their heads and backs. There was no need to aim the blow, they were so many. Like a huddled mob of cattle they turned and fled down Nile. But my orders had reached the vanguard and these, hidden in the growing crops on the narrow neck of swampy land between the hills and the Nile, met them with arrows as they came, also raked them from the steep cliff side. Their chariot wheels sank into the mud till the horses were slain; their footmen were piled in heaps about them, till soon there was a mighty wall of dead and dying. And our centre and rearguard came up behind. Oh! we slew and slew, till before the sun was an hour high over half the army of the Great King was no more. Then we re-formed, having suffered but little loss, and drank of the water of the Nile.

"All is not done," I cried.

For the Immortals still remained behind us, gathered in massed ranks about their king. Also there were many thousands of others between these and the walls of Amada, and to the south of the city yet a second army,

that with which Bes had been left to deal, with what success I knew not.

"Ethiopians," I shouted, "cease crying Victory, since the battle is about to begin. Strike, and at once before the Easterns find their heart again."

So we advanced upon the Immortals, all of us, for now the vanguard had joined our strength.

In long lines we advanced over that blood-soaked plain, and as we came the Great King loosed his remaining chariots against us. It availed him nothing, since the horses could not face our arrows whereof, thanks be to the gods! I had prepared so ample a store, carried in bundles by lads. Scarce a chariot reached our lines, and those that did were destroyed, leaving us unbroken.

The chariots were done with and their drivers dead, but there still frowned the squares of the Immortals. We shot at them till nearly all our shafts were spent, and, galled to madness, they charged. We did not wait for the points of those long spears, but ran in beneath them striking with our short swords, and oh! grim and desperate was that battle, since the Easterns were clad in mail and the Ethiopians had but short jerkins of bull's hide.

Fight as we would we were driven back. The fray turned against us and we fell by hundreds. I bethought me of flight to the hills, since now

we were outnumbered and very weary. But behold! when all seemed lost a great shouting rose from Amada and through her opened gates poured forth all that remained of the army of Pharaoh, perhaps eighteen or twenty thousand men. I saw, and my heart rose again.

"Stand firm!" I cried. "Stand firm!" and lo! we stood.

The Egyptians were on them now and in their midst I saw Pharaoh's banner. By degrees the battle swayed towards the banks of Nile, we to the north, the Egyptians to the south and the Easterns between us. They were trying to turn our flank; yes, and would have done it, had there not suddenly appeared upon the Nile a fleet of ships. At first I thought that we were lost, for these ships were from Greece and Cyprus, till I saw the banner of the Grasshopper wave from a prow, and knew that they were manned by our five thousand who had gone out to burn the fleet, and had saved these vessels. They beached and from their crowded holds poured the five thousand, or those that were left of them, and ranging themselves upon the bank, raised their war-shout and attacked the ends of the Easterns' lines.

Now we charged for the last time and the Egyptians charged from the south. Ha-ha! the ranks of the Immortals were broken at length. We were among them. I saw Pharaoh, his uræus circlet on his helm. He was wounded and sore beset. A tall Immortal rushed at him with a spear and drove it home.

Pharaoh fell.

I leapt over him and killed that Eastern with a blow upon the neck, but my sword shattered on his armour. The tide of battle rolled up and swept us apart and I saw Pharaoh being carried away. Look! yonder was the Great King himself standing in a golden chariot, the Great King in all his glory whom last I had seen far away in the East. He knew me and shot at me with a bow, the bow he thought my own, shouting, "Die, dog of an Egyptian!"

His arrow pierced my helm but missed my head. I strove to come at him but could not.

The real rout began. The Immortals were broken like an earthen jar. They retreated in groups fighting desperately and of these the thickest was around the Great King. He whom I hated was about to escape me. He still had horses; he would fly down Nile, gain his reserves and so away back to the East, where he would gather new and yet larger armies, since men in millions were at his command. Then he would return and destroy Egypt when perchance there were no Ethiopians to help her, and perhaps after all drag Amada to his House of Women. See, they were breaking through and already I was far away with a wound in my breast, a hurt leg and a shattered sword.

What could I do? My arrows were spent and the bearers had none left to give me. No, there was one still in the quiver. I drew it out. On its

shaft were two black feathers and one white. Who had spoken of that arrow? I remembered, Tanofir. I was to think of certain things that he had said when I noted what it pierced. I unslung my bow, strung it and set that arrow on the string.

By now the Great King was far away, out of reach for most archers. His chariot forging ahead amidst the remnant of his guards and the nobles who attended on his sacred person, travelled over a little rise where doubtless once there had been a village, long since rotted down to its parent clay. The sunlight glinted on his shining armour and silken robe, whereof the back was toward me.

I aimed, I drew, I loosed! Swift and far the shaft sped forward. By Osiris! it struck him full between the shoulders, and lo! the King of kings, the Monarch of the World, lurched forward, fell on to the rail of his chariot, and rolled to the ground. Next instant there arose a roar of, "The King is dead! The Great King is dead! Fly, fly, fly!"

So they fled and after them thundered the pursuers slaying and slaying till they could lift their arms no more. Oh! yes, some escaped though the men of Thebes and country folk murdered many of them and but a few ever won back to the East to tell the tale of the blotting out of the mighty army of the King of kings and of the doom dealt to him by the great black bow of Shabaka the Egyptian.

I stood there gasping, when suddenly I heard a voice at my side. It

said,

"You seem to have done very well, Brother, even better than we did yonder on the other side of the town, though some might think that fray a thing whereof to make a song. Also that last shot of yours was worthy of a good archer, for I marked it, I marked it. A great lord was laid low thereby. Let us go and see who it was."

I threw my arm round the bull neck of Bes and leaning on him, advanced to where the King lay alone save for the fallen about him.

"This man is not yet sped," said Bes. "Let us look upon his face," and he turned him over, and stretched him there upon the sand with the arrow standing two spans beyond his corselet.

"Why," said Bes, "this is a certain High one with whom we had dealings in the East!" and he laughed thickly.

Then the Great King opened his eyes and knew us and on his dying features came a look of hate.

"So you have conquered, Egyptian," he said. "Oh! if only I had you again in the East, whence in my folly I let you go----"

"You would set me in your boat, would you not, whence by the wisdom of Bes I escaped."

"More than that," he gasped.

"I shall not serve you so," I went on. "I shall leave you to die as a warrior should upon a fair fought field. But learn, tyrant and murderer, that the shaft which overthrew you came from the black bow you coveted and thought you had received, and that this hand loosed it--not at hazard."

"I guessed it," he whispered.

"Know, too, King, that the lady Amada whom you also coveted, waits to be my wife; that your mighty army is destroyed, and that Egypt is free by the hands of Shabaka the Egyptian and Bes the dwarf."

"Shabaka the Egyptian," he muttered, "whom I held and let go because of a dream and for policy. So, Shabaka, you will wed Amada whom I desired because I could not take her, and doubtless you will rule in Egypt, for Pharaoh, I think, is as I am to-day. O Shabaka, you are strong and a great warrior, but there is something stronger than you in the world--that which men call Fate. Such success as yours offends the gods. Look on me, Shabaka, look on the King of kings, the Ruler of the earth, lying shamed in the dust before you, and, accursed Shabaka! do not call yourself happy until you see death as near as I do now."

Then he threw his arms wide and died.

We called to soldiers to bear his body and having set the pursuit, with that royal clay entered into Amada in triumph. It was not a very great town and the temple was its finest building and thither we wended. In the outer court we found Pharaoh lying at the point of death, for from many wounds his life drained out with his flowing blood, nor could the leeches help him.

"Greeting, Shabaka," he said, "you and the Ethiopians have saved Egypt. My son is slain in the battle and I too am slain, and who remains to rule her save you, you and Amada? Would that you had married her at once, and never left my side. But she was foolish and headstrong and I--was jealous of you, Shabaka. Forgive me, and farewell."

He spoke no more although he lived a little while.

Karema came from the inner court. She greeted her husband, then turned and said,

"Lord Shabaka, one waits to welcome you."

I rested myself upon her shoulder, for I could not walk alone.

"What happened to the army of the Karoon?" I asked as we went slowly.

"That happened, Lord, which the holy Tanofir foretold. The Easterns attacked across the swamp, thinking to bear us down by numbers. But the paths were too narrow and their columns were bogged in the mud. Still they struggled on against the arrows to its edge and there the Ethiopians fell on them and being lighter-footed and without armour, had the mastery of them, who were encumbered by their very multitude. Oh! I saw it all from the temple top. Bes did well and I am proud of him, as I am proud of you."

"It is of the Ethiopians that you should be proud, Karema, since with one to five they have won a great battle."

We came to the end of the second court where was a sanctuary.

"Enter," said Karema and fell back.

I did so and though the cedar door was left a little ajar, at first could see nothing because of the gloom of the place. By degrees my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness and I perceived an alabaster statue of the goddess Isis of the size of life, who held in her arms an ivory child, also lifesize. Then I heard a sigh and, looking down, saw a woman clad in white kneeling at the feet of the statue, lost in prayer. Suddenly she rose and turned and the ray of light from the door ajar fell upon her. It was Amada draped only in the transparent robe of a

priestess, and oh! she was beautiful beyond imagining, so beautiful that my heart stood still.

She saw me in my battered mail and the blood flowed up to her breast and brow and in her eyes there came a light such as I had never known in them before, the light that is lit only by the torch of woman's love. Yes, no longer were hers the eyes of a priestess; they were the eyes of a woman who burns with mortal passion.

"Amada," I whispered, "Amada found at last."

"Shabaka," she whispered back, "returned at last, to me, your home," and she stretched out her arms toward me.

But before I could take her into mine, she uttered a little cry and shrank away.

"Oh! not here," she said, "not here in the presence of this Holy One who watches all that passes in heaven and earth."

"Then perchance, Amada, she has watched the freeing of Egypt on yonder field to-day, and knows for whose sake it was done."

"Hearken, Shabaka. I am your guerdon. Moreover as a woman I am yours. There is naught I desire so much as to feel your kiss upon me. For it and it alone I am ready to risk my spirit's death and torment. But for

you I fear. Twice have I sworn myself to this goddess and she is very jealous of those who rob her of her votaries. I fear that her curse will fall not only on me, but on you also, and not only for this life but for all lives that may be given to us. For your own sake, I pray you leave me. I hear that Pharaoh my uncle is dead or dying, and doubtless they will offer you the throne. Take it, Shabaka, for in it I ask no share. Take it and leave me to serve the goddess till my death."

"I too serve a goddess," I answered hoarsely, "and she is named Love, and you are her priestess. Little I care for Isis who serve the goddess Love. Come, kiss me here and now, ere perchance I die. Kiss me who have waited long enough, and so let us be wed."

One moment she paused, swaying in the wind of passion, like a tall reed on the banks of Nile, and then, ah! then she sank upon my breast and pressed her lips against my own.

AND AFTER

For a few moments I, Shabaka, seemed to be lost in a kind of delirium and surrounded by a rose-hued mist. Then I, Allan Quatermain, heard a sharp quick sound as of a clock striking, and looked up. It was a lock, a beautiful old clock on a mantelpiece opposite to me and the hands showed that it had just struck the hour of ten.

Now I remembered that centuries ago, as I was dropping asleep, I did not know why, I had seen that clock and those hands in the same position and known that it was striking the second stroke of ten. Oh! what did it all mean? Had thousands of years gone by or--only eight seconds?

There was a weight upon my shoulder. I glanced round to see what it was and discovered the beautiful head of Lady Ragnall who was sweetly sleeping there. Lady Ragnall! and in that very strange dream which I had dreamed she was the priestess called Amada. Look, there was the mark of the new moon above her breast. And not a second ago I had been in a shrine with Amada dressed as Lady Ragnall was to-night, in circumstances so intimate that it made me blush to think of them. Lady Ragnall! Amada!--Amada! Lady Ragnall! A shrine! A boudoir! Oh! I must be going mad!

I could not disturb her, it would have been--well, unseemly. So I, Shabaka, or Allan Quatermain, just sat still feeling curiously comfortable, and tried to piece things together, when suddenly Amada--I mean Lady Ragnall woke.

"I wonder," she said without lifting her head from my shoulder, "what happened to the holy Tanofir. I think that I heard him outside the shine giving directions for the digging of Pharaoh's grave at that spot, and saying that he must do so at once as his time was very short. Yes, and I wished that he would go away. Oh! my goodness!" she exclaimed, and

suddenly sprang up.

I too rose and we stood facing each other.

Between us, in front of the fire stood the tripod and the bowl of black stone at the bottom of which lay a pinch of white ashes, the remains of the Taduki. We stared at it and at each other.

"Oh! where have we been, Shaba--I mean, Mr. Quatermain?" she gasped, looking at me round-eyed.

"I don't know," I answered confusedly. "To the East I suppose. That is--it was all a dream."

"A dream!" she said. "What nonsense! Tell me, were you or were you not in a sanctuary just now with me before the statue of Isis, the same that fell on George two years ago and killed him, and did you or did you not give me a necklace of wonderful rosy pearls which we put upon the neck of the statue as a peace-offering because I had broken my vows to the goddess--those that you won from the Great King?"

"No," I answered triumphantly, "I did nothing of the sort. Is it likely that I should have taken those priceless pearls into battle? I gave them to Karema to keep after my mother returned them to me on her death-bed; I remember it distinctly."

"Yes, and Karema handed them to me again as your love-token when she appeared in the city with the holy Tanofir, and what was more welcome at the moment--something to eat. For we were near starving, you know. Well, I threw them over your neck and my own in the shrine to be the symbol of our eternal union. But afterwards we thought that it might be wise to offer them to the goddess--to appease her, you know. Oh! how dared we plight our mortal troth there in her very shrine and presence, and I her twice-sworn servant? It was insult heaped on sacrilege."

"At a guess, because love is stronger than fear," I replied. "But it seems that you dreamed a little longer than I did. So perhaps you can tell me what happened afterwards. I only got as far as--well, I forget how far I got," I added, for at that moment full memory returned and I could not go on.

She blushed to her eyes and grew disturbed.

"It is all mixed up in my mind too," she exclaimed. "I can only remember something rather absurd--and affectionate. You know what strange things dreams are."

"I thought you said it wasn't a dream."

"Really I don't know what it was. But--your wound doesn't hurt you, does it? You were bleeding a good deal. It stained me here," and she touched her breast and looked down wonderingly at her sacred, ancient robe as

though she expected to see that it was red.

"As there is no stain now it must have been a dream. But my word! that was a battle," I answered.

"Yes, I watched it from the pylon top, and oh! it was glorious. Do you remember the charge of the Ethiopians against the Immortals? Why of course you must as you led it. And then the fall of Pharaoh Peroa--he was George, you know. And the death of the Great King, killed by your black bow; you were a wonderful shot even then, you see. And the burning of the ships, how they blazed! And--a hundred other things."

"Yes," I said, "it came off. The holy Tanofir was a good strategist--or his Cup was, I don't know which."

"And you were a good general, and so for the matter of that was Bes. Oh! what agonies I went through while the fight hung doubtful. My heart was on fire, yes, I seemed to burn for----" and she stopped.

"For whom?" I asked.

"For Egypt of course, and when, reflected in the alabaster, I saw you enter that shrine, where you remember I was praying for your success--and safety, I nearly died of joy. For you know I had been, well, attached to you--to Shabaka, I mean--all the time--that's my part of the story which I daresay you did not see. Although I seemed so cold

and wayward I could love, yes, in that life I knew how to love. And Shabaka looked, oh! a hero with his rent mail and the glory of triumph in his eyes. He was very handsome, too, in his way. But what nonsense I am talking."

"Yes, great nonsense. Still, I wish we were sure how it ended. It is a pity that you forget, for I am crazed with curiosity. I suppose there is no more Tadaki, is there?"

"Not a scrap," she answered firmly, "and if there were it would be fatal to take it twice on the same day. We have learned all there is to learn. Perhaps it is as well, though I should like to know what happened after our--our marriage."

"So we were married, were we?"

"I mean," she went on ignoring my remark, "whether you ruled long in Egypt. For you, or rather Shabaka, did rule. Also whether the Easterns returned and drove us out, or what. You see the Ivory Child went away somehow, for we found it again in Kendah Land only a few years ago."

"Perhaps we retired to Ethiopia," I suggested, "and the worship of the Child continued in some part of that country after the Ethiopian kingdom passed away."

"Perhaps, only I don't think Karema would ever have gone back to

Ethiopia unless she was obliged. You remember how she hated the place. No, not even to see those black children of hers. Well, as we can never tell, it is no use speculating."

"I thought there was more Taduki," I remarked sadly. "I am sure I saw some in the coffer."

"Not one bit," she answered still more firmly than before, and, stretching out her hand, she shut down the lid of the coffer before I could look into it. "It may be best so, for as it stands the story had a happy ending and I don't want to learn, oh! I don't want to learn how the curse of Isis fell on you and me."

"So you believe in that?"

"Yes, I do," she answered with passion, "and what is more, I believe it is working still, which perhaps is why we have all come down in the world, you and I and George and Hans, yes, and even old Harût whom we knew in Kendah Land, who, I think, was the holy Tanofir. For as surely as I live I know beyond possibility of doubt that whatever we may be called to-day, you were the General Shabaka and I was the priestess Amada, Royal Lady of Egypt, and between us and about us the curse of Isis wavers like a sword. That is why George was killed and that is why--but I feel very tired, I think I had better go to bed."

As I recall that I have explained, I was obliged to leave Ragnall Castle early the next morning to keep a shooting engagement. O heavens! to keep a shooting engagement!

But whatever Amada, I mean Lady Ragnall, said, there was plenty more Taduki, as I have good reason to know.

Allan Quatermain.