

He knew now what had brought this noisy throng to the sanctuary.

He went forward with such haste as his old limbs would allow to meet the column of mourners, but before he could join them he saw the gatekeeper and his wife come out of the gatehouse, bearing between them, on a mat, the corpse of a boy. The husband held one end, his frail, tiny wife held the other ; and the stalwart man had to stoop low to keep their stiff burden in a horizontal position that it might not slip down towards the woman. Three children closed the melancholy party, and a little girl holding a lantern led the way.

No one, perhaps, would have observed them, but that the gatekeeper's wife shrieked forth her griefs so loudly and shrilly that it was impossible not to hear her cries. The second prophet of Amon turned to look, and then his companions ; the procession came to a standstill, and, as some of the priests went nearer to the body, the father cried in a loud voice : " Away, away from the plague-stricken ! Our first-born is dead ! "

The mother, meanwhile, had snatched the lantern from her little daughter, and, holding it so as to throw a light on the face of the dead boy, she shrieked out :

" The god hath suffered it to come to pass. Yes, even under our own roof. But it is not his will, but the curse of the stranger in the land that has come over us and our lives. Behold, this was the first-born ; and two temple servants have likewise been taken. One is dead already ; he is lying in our little room yonder ; and there—see, there lies young Kamus, the grandson of Rameri, the star-reader. We heard the old man calling and saw what was happening, but who can hold another man's house up when his own is falling about his ears ? Beware while it is yet time, for the gods have opened even the temple gates to the abomination, and if the whole world should perish I should not be surprised, and never complain—certainly not. My lords and priests, I am but a poor and humble woman, but am I not in the right when I ask : Are our gods asleep ? Has a magic spell bound them ? Or what are they doing, and where are they, that they leave us and our children in the power of the vile Hebrew race ? "