THE WORKS OF GILBERT PARKER

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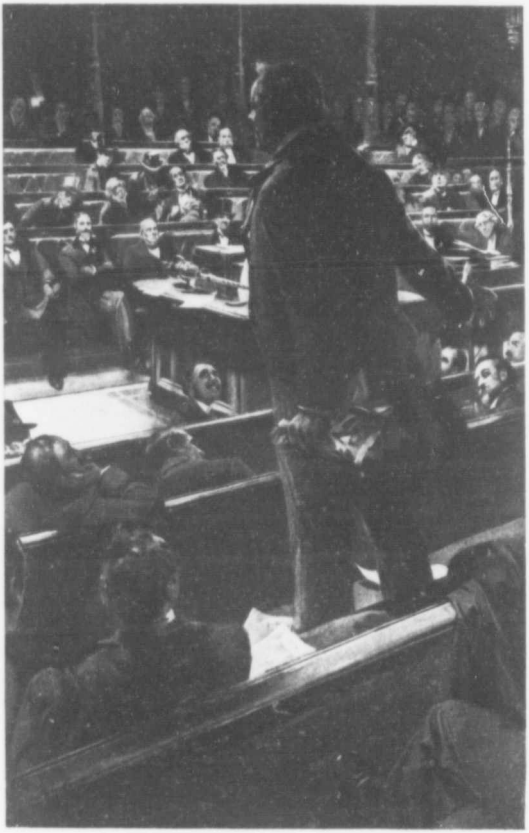

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THE WEAVERS

A TALE OF ENGLAND AND EGYPT
OF FIFTY YEARS AGO

VOLUME II

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
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CONTENTS

BOOK IV

BOOK V

BOOK VI

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CHAPTER XXII

AS IN A GLASS DARKLY

It was very quiet and cool in the Quaker Meeting-house, though outside there was the rustle of leaves, the low din of the bees, the whistle of a bird, or the even tread of horses' hoofs as they journeyed on the London road. The place was full. For a half-hour the worshippers had sat voiceless. They were waiting for the spirit to move some one to speak. As they waited, a lady entered and glided into a seat. Few saw, and these gave no indication of surprise, though they were little used to strangers, and none of the name borne by this lady had entered the building for many years. It was Hylda.

At last the silence was broken. The wizened Elder, with eyes upon the ceiling and his long white chin like ivory on his great collar, began to pray, sitting where he was, his hands upon his knees. He prayed for all who wandered "into by and forbidden paths." He prayed for one whose work was as that of Joseph, son of Jacob; whose footsteps were now upon the sea, and now upon the desert; whose way was set among strange gods and divers heresies—"*'For there must also be heresies, that they which are approved may be made manifest among the weak.'*" A moment more, and then he added: "He hath been tried beyond his years; do Thou uphold his hands. Once with a goad did we urge him on, when in ease and sloth he was among us, but now he spurreth

on his spirit and body in too great haste. O put Thy hand upon the bridle, Lord, that He ride soberly upon Thy business."

There was a longer silence now, but at last came the voice of Luke Claridge.

"Father of the fatherless," he said, "my days are as the sands in the hour-glass hastening to their rest; and my place will soon be empty. He goeth far, and I may not go with him. He fighteth alone, like him that strove with wild beasts at Ephesus; do Thou uphold him that he may bring a nation captive. And if a viper fasten on his hand, as chanced to Paul of old, give him grace to strike it off without hurt. O Lord, he is to me, Thy servant, as the one ewe lamb; let him be Thine when Thou gatherest for Thy vineyard!"

"*And if a viper fasten on his hand—*" David passed his hand across his forehead and closed his eyes. The beasts at Ephesus he had fought, and he would fight them again—there was fighting enough to do in the land of Egypt. And the viper would fasten on his hand—it had fastened on his hand, and he had struck it off; but it would come again, the dark thing against which he had fought in the desert.

Their prayers had unnerved him, had got into that corner of his nature where youth and its irresponsibility loitered yet. For a moment he was shaken, and then, looking into the faces of the Elders, said: "Friends, I go again upon paths that lead into the wilderness. I know not if I ever shall return. Howsoe'er that may be, I shall walk with firmer step because of all ye do for me."

He closed his eyes and prayed: "O God, I go into the land of ancient plagues and present pestilence. If it be Thy will, bring me home to this good land, when

my task is done. If not, by Thy goodness let me be as a stone set by the wayside for others who come after; and save me from the beast and from the viper. '*Thou art faithful, who wilt not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but wilt with the temptation also make a way of escape, that we may be able to bear it!*' "

He sat down, and all grew silent again; but suddenly some one sobbed aloud—sobbed, and strove to stay the sobbing, and could not, and, getting up, hastened towards the door.

It was Faith. David heard, and came quickly after her. As he took her arm gently, his eyes met those of Hylda. She rose and came out also.

"Will thee take her home?" he said huskily. "I can bear no more."

Hylda placed her arm round Faith, and led her out under the trees and into the wood. As they went, Faith looked back.

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me, Davy," she said softly.

Three lights burned in Hamley: one in the Red Mansion, one in the Cloistered House, and one in Soolsby's hut upon the hill. In the Red Mansion old Luke Claridge, his face pale with feeling, his white hair tumbling about, his head thrust forward, his eyes shining, sat listening, as Faith read aloud letters which Benn Claridge had written from the East many years before. One letter, written from Bagdad, he made her read twice. The faded sheet had in it the glow and glamour of the East; it was like a heart beating with life; emotion rose and fell in it like the waves of the sea. Once the old man interrupted Faith.

"Davy—it is as though Davy spoke. It is like Davy —both Claridge, both Claridge," he said. "But is it

not like Davy? Davy is doing what it was in Benn's heart to do. Benn showed the way; Benn called, and Davy came."

He laid both hands upon his knees and raised his eyes. "O Lord, I have sought to do according to Thy will," he whispered. He was thinking of a thing he had long hidden. Through many years he had no doubt, no qualm; but, since David had gone to Egypt, some spirit of unquiet had worked in him. He had acted against the prayer of his own wife, lying in her grave—a quiet-faced woman, who had never crossed him, who had never shown a note of passion in all her life, save in one thing concerning David. Upon it, like some prophetess, she had flamed out. With the insight which only women have where children are concerned, she had told him that he would live to repent of what he had done. She had died soon after, and was laid beside the deserted young mother, whose days had budded and blossomed, and fallen like petals to the ground, while yet it was the spring.

Luke Claridge had understood neither, not his wife when she had said: "Thee should let the Lord do His own work, Luke," nor his dying daughter Mercy, whose last words had been: "With love and sorrow I have sowed; he shall reap rejoicing—my babe. Thee will set him in the garden in the sun, where God may find him —God will not pass him by. He will take him by the hand and lead him home." The old man had thought her touched by delirium then, though her words were but the parable of a mind fed by the poetry of life, by a shy spirit, to which meditation gave fancy and far-seeing. David had come by his idealism honestly. The half-mystical spirit of his Uncle Benn had flowed on to another generation through the filter of a woman's sad

soul. It had come to David a pure force, a constructive and practical idealism.

Now, as Faith read, there were ringing in the old man's ears the words which David's mother had said before she closed her eyes and passed away: "*Set him in the garden in the sun, where God may find him—God will not pass him by.*" They seemed to weave themselves into the symbolism of Benn Claridge's letter, written from the hills of Bagdad.

"But," the letter continued, "the Governor passed by with his suite, the buckles of the harness of his horses all silver, his carriage shining with inlay of gold, his turban full of precious stones. When he had passed, I said to a shepherd standing by, 'If thou hadst all his wealth, shepherd, what wouldst thou do?' and he answered, 'If I had his wealth, I would sit on the south side of my house in the sun all day and every day.' To a messenger of the Palace, who must ever be ready night and day to run at his master's order, I asked the same. He replied, 'If I had all the Effendina's wealth, I would sleep till I died.' To a blind beggar, shaking the copper in his cup in the highways, pleading dumbly to those who passed, I made similar inquisition, and he replied: 'If the wealth of the exalted one were mine, I would sit on the mastaba by the bake-house, and eat three times a day, save at Ramadan, when I would bless Allah the compassionate and merciful, and breakfast at sunset with the flesh of a kid and a dish of dates.' To a woman at the door of a tomb hung with relics of hundreds of poor souls in misery, who besought the buried saint to intercede for her with Allah, I made the same catechism, and she answered, 'Oh, effendi, if his wealth were mine, I would give my son what he has lost.' 'What has he lost, woman?' said I; and she answered: 'A little house

with a garden, and a flock of ten goats, a cow and a dovecote, his inheritance of which he has been despoiled by one who carried a false debt 'gainst his dead father.' And I said to her: 'But if thy wealth were as that of the ruler of the city, thy son would have no need of the little house and garden and the flock of goats, and a cow and a dovecote.' Whereupon she turned upon me in bitterness, and said: 'Were they not his own as the seed of his father? Shall not one cherish that which is his own, which cometh from seed to seed? Is it not the law?' 'But,' said I, 'if his wealth were thine, there would be herds of cattle, and flocks of sheep, and carpets spread, and the banquet-tables, and great orchards.' But she stubbornly shook her head. 'Where the eagle built shall not the young eagle nest? How should God meet me in the way and bless him who stood not by his birthright? The plot of ground was the lad's, and all that is thereon. I pray thee, mock me not.' God knows I did not mock her, for her words were wisdom. So did it work upon me that, after many days, I got for the lad his own again, and there he is happier, and his mother happier, than the Governor in his palace. Later I did learn some truths from the shepherd, the messenger, and the beggar, and the woman with the child; but chiefly from the woman and the child. The material value has no relation to the value each sets upon that which is his own. Behind this feeling lies the strength of the world. Here on this hill of Bagdad I am thinking these things. And, Luke, I would have thee also think on my story of the woman and the child. There is in it a lesson for thee."

When Luke Claridge first read this letter years before, he had put it from him sternly. Now he heard it with a soft emotion. He took the letter from Faith at last

and put it in his pocket. With no apparent relevancy, and laying his hand on Faith's shoulder, he said:

"We have done according to our conscience by Davy —God is our witness, so!"

She leaned her cheek against his hand, but did not speak.

In Soolsby's hut upon the hill David sat talking to the old chair-maker. Since his return he had visited the place several times, only to find Soolsby absent. The old man, on awaking from his drunken sleep, had been visited by a terrible remorse, and, whenever he had seen David coming, had fled into the woods. This evening, however, David came in the dark, and Soolsby was caught.

When David entered first, the old man broke down. He could not speak, but leaned upon the back of a chair, and though his lips moved, no sound came forth. But David took him by the shoulders and set him down, and laughed gently in his face, and at last Soolsby got voice and said:

"Egyptian! O Egyptian!"

Then his tongue was loosened and his eye glistened, and he poured out question after question, many pertinent, some whimsical, all frankly answered by David. But suddenly he stopped short, and his eyes sank before the other, who had laid a hand upon his knee.

"But don't, Egyptian, don't! Don't have aught to do with me. I'm only a drunken swine. I kept sober four years, as she knows—as the Angel down yonder in the Red Mansion knows; but the day you came, going out to meet you, I got drunk—blind drunk. I had only been pretending all the time. I was being coaxed along —made believe I was a real man, I suppose. But I

wasn't. I was a pillar of sand. When pressure came I just broke down—broke down, Egyptian. Don't be surprised if you hear me grunt. It's my natural speech. I'm a hog, a drink-swilling hog. I wasn't decent enough to stay sober till you had said 'Good day,' and 'How goes it, Soolsby?' I tried it on; it was no good. I began to live like a man, but I've slipped back into the ditch. You didn't know that, did you?"

David let him have his say, and then in a low voice said: "Yes, I knew thee had been drinking, Soolsby."

He started. "She told you—Kate Heaver—"

"She did not tell me. I came and found you here with her. You were asleep."

"A drunken sweep!" He spat upon the ground in disgust at himself.

"I ought never have come back here," he added. "It was no place for me. But it drew me. I didn't belong; but it drew me."

"Thee belongs to Hamley. Thee is an honour to Hamley, Soolsby."

Soolsby's eyes widened; the blurred look of rage and self-reproach in them began to fade away.

"Thee has made a fight, Soolsby, to conquer a thing that has had thee by the throat. There's no fighting like it. It means a watching every hour, every minute—thee can never take the eye off it. Some days it's easy, some days it's hard, but it's never so easy that you can say, 'There is no need to watch.' In sleep it whispers and wakes you; in the morning, when there are no shadows, it casts a shadow on the path. It comes between you and your work; you see it looking out of the eyes of a friend. And one day, when you think it has been conquered, that you have worn it down into oblivion and the dust, and you close your eyes and say, 'I am

master,' up it springs with fury from nowhere you can see, and catches you by the throat; and the fight begins again. But you sit stronger, and the fight becomes shorter; and after many battles, and you have learned never to be off guard, to know by instinct where every ambush is, then at last the victory is yours. It is hard, it is bitter, and sometimes it seems hardly worth the struggle. But it is—it is worth the struggle, dear old man."

Soolsby dropped on his knees and caught David by the arms. "How did you know—how did you know?" he asked hoarsely. "It's been just as you say. You've watched some one fighting?"

"I have watched some one fighting—fighting," answered David clearly, but his eyes were moist.

"With drink, the same as me?"

"No, with opium—laudanum."

"Oh, I've heard that's worse, that it makes you mad, the wanting it."

"I have seen it so."

"Did the man break down like me?"

"Only once, but the fight is not yet over with him."

"Was he—an Englishman?"

David inclined his head. "It's a great thing to have a temptation to fight, Soolsby. Then we can understand others."

"It's not always true, Egyptian, for you have never had temptation to fight. Yet you know it all."

"God has been good to me," David answered, putting a hand on the old man's shoulder. "And thee is a credit to Hamley, friend. Thee will never fall again."

"You know that—you say that to me! Then, by Mary the mother of God, I never will be a swine again," he said, getting to his feet.

"Well, good-bye, Soolsby. I go to-morrow," David said presently.

Soolsby frowned; his lips worked. "When will you come back?" he asked eagerly.

David smiled. "There is so much to do, they may not let me come—not soon. I am going into the desert again."

Soolsby was shaking. He spoke huskily. "Here is your place," he said. "You shall come back— Oh, but you shall come back, here, where you belong."

David shook his head and smiled, and clasped the strong hand again. A moment later he was gone.

From the door of the hut Soolsby muttered to himself:

"I will bring you back. If Luke Claridge doesn't, then I will bring you back. If he dies, I will bring you —no, by the love of God, I will bring you back while he lives!"

Two thousand miles away, in a Nile village, women sat wailing in dark doorways, dust on their heads, black mantles covering their faces. By the pond where all the people drank, performed their ablutions, bathed their bodies and rinsed their mouths, sat the sheikh-el-beled, the village chief, taking counsel in sorrow with the barber, the holy man, and others. Now speaking, now rocking their bodies to and fro, in the evening sunlight, they sat and watched the Nile in flood covering the wide wastes of the Fayoum, spreading over the land rich deposits of earth from the mountains of Abyssinia. When that flood subsided there would be fields to be planted with dourha and onions and sugar-cane; but they whose strong arms should plough and sow and wield the sickle, the youth, the upstanding ones, had

been carried off in chains to serve in the army of Egypt, destined for the far Soudan, for hardship, misery, and death, never to see their kindred any more. Twice during three months had the dread servant of the Palace come and driven off their best like sheep to the slaughter. The brave, the stalwart, the bread-winners, were gone; and yet the tax-gatherer would come and press for every impost—on the onion-field, the date-palm, the dourha-field, and the clump of sugar-cane, as though the young men, the toilers, were still there. The old and infirm, the children, the women, must now double and treble their labour. The old men must go to the *corvée*, and mend the banks of the Nile for the Prince and his pashas, providing their own food, their own tools, their own housing, if housing there would be—if it was more than sleeping under a bush by the riverside, or crawling into a hole in the ground, their yeleks their clothes by day, their only covering at night.

They sat like men without hope, yet with the proud, bitter mien of those who had known good and had lost it, had seen content and now were desolate.

Presently one—a lad—the youngest of them, lifted up his voice and began to chant a recitative, while another took a small drum and beat it in unison. He was but just recovered from an illness, or he had gone also in chains to die for he knew not what, leaving behind without hope all that he loved:

"How has the cloud fallen, and the leaf withered on the tree,
The lemon-tree, that standeth by the door.
The melon and the date have gone bitter to the taste,
The weevil, it has eaten at the core—
The core of my heart, the mildew findeth it.
My music, it is but the drip of tears,
The garner empty standeth, the oven hath no fire,
Night filleth me with fears.

O Nile that floweth deeply, hast thou not heard his voice?
His footsteps hast thou covered with thy flood?
He was as one who lifteth up the yoke,
He was as one who taketh off the chain,
As one who sheltereth from the rain,
As one who scattereth bread to the pigeons flying.
His purse was at his side, his mantle was for me,
For any who passeth were his mantle and his purse,
And now like a gourd is he withered from our eyes.
His friendship, it was like a shady wood—
Whither has he gone?—Who shall speak for us?
Who shall save us from the kourbash and the stripes?
Who shall proclaim us in the palace?
Who shall contend for us in the gate?
The sakkia turneth no more; the oxen they are gone;
The young go forth in chains, the old waken in the night,
They waken and weep, for the wheel turns backward,
And the dark days are come again upon us—
Will he return no more?
His friendship was like a shady wood,
O Nile that floweth deeply, hast thou not heard his voice?
Hast thou covered up his footsteps with thy flood?
The core of my heart, the mildew findeth it!"

Another—an old man—took up the strain, as the drum kept time to the beat of the voice with its undulating call and refrain:

"When his footsteps were among us there was peace;
War entered not the village, nor the call of war.
Now our homes are as those that have no roofs.
As a nest decayed, as a cave forsaken,
As a ship that lieth broken on the beach,
Is the house where we were born.
Out in the desert did we bury our gold,
We buried it where no man robbed us, for his arm was strong.
Now are the jars empty, gold did not avail
To save our young men, to keep them from the chains.
God hath swallowed his voice, or the sea hath drowned it,

Or the Nile hath covered him with its flood;
Else would he come when our voices call.
His word was honey in the prince's ear—
Will he return no more?"

And now the sheikh-el-beled spoke. "It hath been so since Nahoum Pasha passed this way four months agone. He hath changed all. War will not avail. David Pasha, he will come again. His word is as the centre of the world. Ye have no hope, because ye see the hawks among the starving sheep. But the shepherd will return from behind the hill, and the hawks will flee away. . . . Behold, once was I in the desert. Listen, for mine are the words of one who hath travelled far—was I not at Damascus and Palmyra and Bagdad, and at Medina by the tomb of Mahomet?"

Reverently he touched the green turban on his head, evidence of his journey to Mahomet's tomb. "Once in the desert I saw afar off an oasis of wood and water, and flying things, and houses where a man might rest. And I got me down from my camel, and knelt upon my sheep-skin, and gave thanks in the name of Allah. Thereupon I mounted again and rode on towards that goodly place. But as I rode it vanished from my sight. Then did I mourn. Yet once again I saw the trees, and flocks of pigeons and waving fields, and I was hungry and thirsty, and longed exceedingly. Yet got I down, and, upon my sheep-skin, once more gave thanks to Allah. And I mounted thereafter in haste and rode on; but once again was I mocked. Then I cried aloud in my despair. It was in my heart to die upon the sheep-skin where I had prayed; for I was burned up within, and there seemed naught to do but say malaish, and go hence. But that goodly sight came again. My heart

rebelled that I should be so mocked. I bent down my head upon my camel that I might not see, yet once more I loosed the sheep-skin. Lifting up my heart, I looked again, and again I took hope and rode on. Farther and farther I rode, and lo! I was no longer mocked; for I came to a goodly place of water and trees, and was saved. So shall it be with us. We have looked for his coming again, and our hearts have fallen and been as ashes, for that he has not come. Yet there be mirages, and one day soon David Pasha will come hither, and our pains shall be eased."

"Aiwa, aiwa—yes, yes," cried the lad who had sung to them.

"Aiwa, aiwa," rang softly over the pond, where naked children stooped to drink.

The smell of the cooking-pots floated out from the mud-houses near by.

"Malaish," said one after another, "I am hungry. He will come again—perhaps to-morrow." So they moved towards the houses over the way.

One cursed his woman for wailing in the doorway; one snatched the lid from a cooking-pot; one drew from an oven cakes of dourha, and gave them to those who had none; one knelt and bowed his forehead to the ground in prayer; one shouted the name of him whose coming they desired.

So was David missed in Egypt.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TENTS OF CUSHAN

"I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction, and the curtains of the Land of Midian did tremble."

A HURDY-GURDY was standing at the corner, playing with shrill insistence a medley of Scottish airs. Now "Loch Lomond" pleaded for pennies from the upper windows:

"For you'll tak' the high road, and I'll tak' the low road,
And I'll be in Scotland before ye:
But I and my true love will never meet again,
On the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond!"

The hurdy-gurdy was strident and insistent, but for a long time no response came. At last, however, as the strains of "Loch Lomond" ceased, a lady appeared on the balcony of a drawing-room, and, leaning over a little forest of flowers and plants, threw a half-crown to the sorry street-musician. She watched the grotesque thing trundle away, then entering the house again, took a 'cello from the corner of the room and tuned the instrument tenderly. It was Hylda.

Something of the peace of Hamley had followed her to London, but the poignant pain of it had come also. Like Melisande, she had looked into the quiet pool of life and had seen her own face, its story and its foreshadowings. Since then she had been "apart." She had watched life move on rather than shared in its movement. Things stood still for her. That apathy of

soul was upon her which follows the inward struggle that exhausts the throb and fret of inward emotions, leaving the mind dominant, the will in abeyance.

She had become conscious that her fate and future were suspended over a chasm, as, on the trapeze of a balloon, an adventurous aeronaut hangs uncertain over the hungry sea, waiting for the coming wind which will either blow the hazardous vessel to its doom or to safe refuge on the land.

She had not seen David after he left Hamley. Their last words had been spoken at the Meeting-house, when he gave Faith to her care. That scene came back to her now, and a flush crept slowly over her face and faded away again. She was recalling, too, the afternoon of that day when she and David had parted in the drawing-room of the Cloistered House, and Eglington had asked her to sing. She thought of the hours with Eglington that followed, first at the piano and afterwards in the laboratory, where in his long blue smock he made experiments. Had she not been conscious of something enigmatical in his gaiety that afternoon, in his cheerful yet cheerless words, she would have been deeply impressed by his appreciation of her playing, and his keen reflections on the merits of the composers; by his still keener attention to his subsequent experiments, and his amusing comments upon them. But, somehow, that very cheerless cheerfulness seemed to proclaim him superficial. Though she had no knowledge of science, she instinctively doubted his earnestness even in this work, which certainly was not pursued for effect. She had put the feeling from her, but it kept returning. She felt that in nothing did he touch the depths. Nothing could possess him wholly; nothing inherent could make him self-effacing.

Yet she wondered, too, if she was right, when she saw his fox-terrier watching him, ever watching him with his big brown eyes as he buoyantly worked, and saw him stoop to pat its head. Or was this, after all, mere animalism, mere superficial vitality, love of health and being? She shuddered, and shut her eyes, for it came home to her that to him she was just such a being of health, vitality and comeliness, on a little higher plane. She put the thought from her, but it had had its birth, and it would not down. He had immense vitality, he was tireless, and abundant in work and industry; he went from one thing to another with ease and swiftly changing eagerness. Was it all mere force—mere man and mind? Was there no soul behind it? There in the laboratory she had laid her hand on the terrier, and prayed in her heart that she might understand him—for her own good, her own happiness, and his. Above all else she wanted to love him truly, and to be loved truly, and duty was to her a daily sacrifice, a constant memorial. She realised to the full that there lay before her a long race unilluminated by the sacred lamp which, lighted at the altar, should still be burning beside the grave.

Now, as she thought of him, she kept saying to herself: "We should have worked out his life together. Work together would have brought peace. He shuts me out—he shuts me out."

At last she drew the bow across the instrument, once, twice, and then she began to play, forgetful of the world. She had a contralto voice, and she sang with a depth of feeling and a delicate form worthy of a professional; on the piano she was effective and charming, but into the 'cello she poured her soul.

For quite an hour she played with scarce an interrup-

tion. At last, with a sigh, she laid the instrument against her knee and gazed out of the window. As she sat lost in her dream—a dream of the desert—a servant entered with letters. One caught her eye. It was from Egypt—from her cousin Lacey. Her heart throbbed violently, yet she opened the official-looking envelope with steady fingers. She would not admit even to herself that news from the desert could move her so. She began to read slowly, but presently, with a little cry, she hastened through the pages. It ran:

THE SOUDAN.

DEAR LADY COUSIN,—

I'm still not certain how I ought to style you, but I thought I'd compromise as per above. Anyway, it's a sure thing that I haven't bothered you much with country-cousin letters. I figure, however, that you've put some money in Egypt, so to speak, and what happens to this sandy-eyed foundling of the Nile you would like to know. So I've studied the only "complete letter-writer" I could find between the tropic of Capricorn and Khartoum, and this is the contemptible result, as the dagos in Mexico say. This is a hot place by reason of the sun that shines above us, and likewise it is hot because of the niggers that swarm around us. I figure, if we get out of this portion of the African continent inside our skins, that we will have put up a pretty good bluff, and pulled off a ticklish proposition.

It's a sort of early Christian business. You see, David the Saadat is great on moral suasion—he's a master of it; and he's never failed yet—not altogether; though there have been minutes by a stop-watch when I've thought it wouldn't stand the strain. Like the Mississippi steamboat which was so weak that when the whistle blew the engines stopped! When those frozen minutes have come to us, I've tried to remember the correct religious etiquette, but I've not had much practise since I stayed with Aunt Melissa, and lived on skim-milk and early piety. When things were looking as bad as they did for Dives, "Now I lay me down to sleep," and "For what we are about to receive," was all that I could think of. But the Saadat, he's a

wonder from Wondertown. With a little stick, or maybe his flute under his arm, he'll smile and string these heathen along, when you'd think they weren't waiting for anybody. A spear took off his fez yesterday. He never blinked—he's a jim-dandy at keeping cool; and when a hundred mounted heathens made a rush down on him the other day, spears sticking out like quills on a porcupine—2.5 on the shell-road the chargers were going—did he stir? Say, he watched 'em as if they were playing for his benefit. And sure enough, he was right. They parted either side of him when they were ten feet away, and there he was quite safe, a blessing in the storm, a little rock island in the rapids—but I couldn't remember a proper hymn of praise to say.

There's no getting away from the fact that he's got a will or something, a sort of force different from most of us, or perhaps any of us. These heathen feel it, and keep their hands off him. They say he's mad, but they've got great respect for mad people, for they think that God has got their souls above with Him, and that what's left behind on earth is sacred. He talks to 'em, too, like a father in Israel; tells 'em they must stop buying and selling slaves, and that if they don't he will have to punish them! And I sit holding my sides, for we're only two white men and forty "friendlies" altogether, and two revolvers among us; and I've got the two! And they listen to his blarneying, and say, "*Aiwa, Saadat! aiwa, Saadat!*" as if he had an army of fifty thousand behind him. Sometimes I've sort of hinted that his canoe was carrying a lot of sail; but my! he believes in it all as if there wasn't a spear or a battle-axe or a rifle within a hundred miles of him. We've been at this for two months now, and a lot of ground we covered till we got here. I've ridden the gentle camel at the rate of sixty and seventy miles a day—sort of sweeping through the land, making treaties, giving presents, freeing slaves, appointing governors and sheikhs-el-beled, doing it as if we owned the continent. He mesmerised 'em, simply mesmerised 'em—till we got here. I don't know what happened then. Now we're distinctly rating low, the laugh is on us somehow. But he—mind it? He goes about talking to the sheikhs as though we were all eating off the same corn-cob, and it seems to stupefy them; they don't grasp it. He goes on arranging for a post here and a station there, and it never occurs to him that it ain't really actual. He doesn't tell me, and I

don't ask him, for I came along to wipe his stirrups, so to speak. I put my money on him, and I'm not going to worry him. He's so dead certain in what he does, and what he is, that I don't lose any sleep guessing about him. It will be funny if we do win out on this proposition—funnier than anything.

Now, there's one curious thing about it all which ought to be whispered, for I'm only guessing, and I'm not a good guesser; I guessed too much in Mexico about three railways and two silver-mines. The first two days after we came here, everything was all right. Then there came an Egyptian, Halim Bey, with a handful of niggers from Cairo, and letters for Claridge Pasha. From that minute there was trouble. I figure it out this way: Halim was sent by Nahoum Pasha to bring letters that said one thing to the Saadat, and, when quite convenient, to say other things to Mustafa, the boss-sheikh of this settlement. Halim Bey has gone again, but he has left his tale behind him. I'd stake all I lost, and more than I ever expect to get out of Mexico on that, and maybe I'll get a hatful out of Mexico yet. I had some good mining propositions down there. The Saadat believes in Nahoum, and has made Nahoum what he is; and on the surface Nahoum pretends to help him; but he is running underground all the time. I'd like to help give him a villa at Fazougli. When the Saadat was in England there was a bad time in Egypt. I was in Cairo; I know. It was the same bad old game—the *corvée*, the kourbash, conscription, a war manufactured to fill the pockets of a few, while the poor starved and died. It didn't come off, because the Saadat wasn't gone long enough, and he stopped it when he came back. But Nahoum—he laid the blame on others, and the Saadat took his word for it, and, instead of a war, there came this expedition of his own.

Ten days later.—Things have happened. First, there's been awful sickness among the natives, and the Saadat has had his chance. His medicine-chest was loaded, he had a special camel for it—and he has fired it off. Night and day he has worked, never resting, never sleeping, curing most, burying a few. He looks like a ghost now, but it's no use saying or doing anything. He says: "Sink your own will; let it be subject to a higher, and you need take no thought." It's eating away his life and strength, but it has given us our return tickets, I guess. They hang about him as if he was Moses in the wilderness smit-

ing the rock. It's his luck. Just when I get scared to death, and run down and want a tonic, and it looks as if there'd be no need to put out next week's washing, then his luck steps in, and we get another run. But it takes a heap out of a man, getting scared. Whenever I look on a lot of green trees and cattle and horses, and the sun, to say nothing of women and children, and listen to music, or feel a horse eating up the ground under me, 2.10 in the sand, I hate to think of leaving it, and I try to prevent it. Besides, I don't like the proposition of going, I don't know where. That's why I get scared. But he says that it's no more than turning down the light and turning it up again.

They used to call me a dreamer in Mexico, because I kept seeing things that no one else had thought of, and laid out railways and tapped mines for the future; but I was nothing to him. I'm a high-and-dry hedge-clipper alongside. I'm betting on him all the time; but no one seems to be working to make his dreams come true, except himself. I don't count; I'm no good, no real good. I'm only fit to run the commissariat, and see that he gets enough to eat, and has a safe camel, and so on. Why doesn't some one else help him? He's working for humanity. Give him half a chance, and Haroun-al-Raschid won't be in it. Kaïd trusts him, depends on him, stands by him, but doesn't seem to know how to help him when help would do most good. The Saadat does it all himself; and if it wasn't that the poor devil of a fellah sees what he's doing, and cottons to him, and the dervishes and Arabs *feel* he's right, he might as well leave. But it's just there he counts. There's something about him, something that's Quaker in him, primitive, silent, and perceptive—if that's a real word—which makes them feel that he's honest, and isn't after anything for himself. Arabs don't talk much; they make each other understand without many words. They think with all their might on one thing at a time, and they think things into happening—and so does he. He's a thousand years old, which is about as old-fashioned as I mean, and as wise, and as plain to read as though you'd write the letters of words as big as a date-palm. That's where he makes the running with them, and they can read their title clear to mansions in the skies!

You should hear him talk with Ebn Ezra Bey—perhaps you don't know of Ezra? He was a friend of his Uncle Benn, and

brought the news of his massacre to England, and came back with the Saadat. Well, three days ago Ebn Ezra came, and there came with him, too, Halim Bey, the Egyptian, who had brought the letters to us from Cairo. Ebn Ezra found him down the river deserted by his niggers, and sick with this new sort of fever, which the Saadat is knocking out of time. And there he lies, the Saadat caring for him as though he was his brother. But that's his way; though, now I come to think of it, the Saadat doesn't suspect what I suspect, that Halim Bey brought word from Nahoum to our sheikhs here to keep us here, or lose us, or do away with us. Old Ebn Ezra doesn't say much himself, doesn't say anything about *that;* but he's guessing the same as me. And the Saadat looks as though he was ready for his grave, but keeps going, going, going. He never seems to sleep. What keeps him alive I don't know. Sometimes I feel clean knocked out myself with the little I do, but he's a travelling hospital all by his lonesome.

Later.—I had to stop writing, for things have been going on —several. I can see that Ebn Ezra has told the Saadat things that make him want to get away to Cairo as soon as possible. That it's Nahoum Pasha and others—oh, plenty of others, of course—I'm certain; but what the particular game is I don't know. Perhaps you know over in England, for you're nearer Cairo than we are by a few miles, and you've got the telegraph. Perhaps there's a revolution, perhaps there's been a massacre of Europeans, perhaps Turkey is kicking up a dust, perhaps Europe is interfering—all of it, all at once.

Later still.—I've found out it's a little of all, and the Saadat is ready to go. I guess he can go now pretty soon, for the worst of the fever is over. But something has happened that's upset him—knocked him stony for a minute. Halim Bey was killed last night—by order of the sheikhs, I'm told; but the sheikhs won't give it away. When the Saadat went to them, his eyes blazing, his face pale as a sheet, and as good as swore at them, and treated them as though he'd string them up the next minute, they only put their hands on their heads, and said they were "the fallen leaves for his foot to scatter," the "snow on the hill for his breath to melt"; but they wouldn't give him any satisfaction. So he came back and shut himself up in his tent, and he sits there like a ghost all shrivelled up for want of sleep, and

his eyes like a lime-kiln burning; for now he knows this at least, that Halim Bey had brought some word from Kaïd's Palace that set these Arabs against him, and nearly stopped my correspondence. You see, there's a widow in Cairo—she's a sister of the American consul, and I've promised to take her with a party camping in the Fayoum—cute as she can be, and plays the guitar. But it's all right now, except that the Saadat is running too close and fine. If he has any real friends in England among the Government people, or among those who can make the Government people sit up, and think what's coming to Egypt and to him, they'll help him now when he needs it. He'll need help real bad when he gets back to Cairo—if we get that far. It isn't yet a sure thing, for we've got to fight in the next day or two—I forgot to tell you that sooner. There's a bull-Arab on the rampage with five thousand men, and he's got a claim out on our sheikh, Mustafa, for ivory he has here, and there's going to be a scrimmage. We've got to make for a better position to-morrow, and meet Abdullah, the bull-Arab, further down the river. That's one reason why Mustafa and all our friends here are so sweet on us now. They look on the Saadat as a kind of mascot, and they think that he can wipe out the enemy with his flute, which they believe is a witch-stick to work wonders.

He's just sent for me to come, and I must stop soon. Say, he hasn't had sleep for a fortnight. It's too much; he can't stand it. I tried it, and couldn't. It wore me down. He's killing himself for others. I can't manage him; but I guess you could. I apologise, dear Lady Cousin. I'm only a hayseed, and a failure, but I guess you'll understand that I haven't thought only of myself as I wrote this letter. The higher *you* go in life the more *you'll* understand; that's your nature. I'll get this letter off by a nigger to-morrow, with those the Saadat is sending through to Cairo by some friendlies. It's only a chance; but everything's chance here now. Anyhow, it's safer than leaving it till the scrimmage. If you get this, won't you try and make the British Government stand by the Saadat? Your husband, the lord, could pull it off, if he tried; and if you ask him, I guess he'd try. I must be off now. David Pasha will be waiting. Well, give my love to the girls!

Your affectionate cousin,

Tom Lacey.

P. S.—I've got a first-class camel for our scrimmage day after to-morrow. Mustafa sent it to me this morning. I had a fight on mules once, down at Oaxaca, but that was child's play. This will be "slaughter in the pan," if the Saadat doesn't stop it somehow. Perhaps he will. If I wasn't so scared I'd wish he couldn't stop it, for it will be a way-up Barbarian scrap, the tongs and the kettle, a bully panjandrum. It gets mighty dull in the desert when you're not moving. But "it makes to think," as the French say. Since I came out here I've had several real centre thoughts, sort of main principles—key-thoughts, that's it. What I want now is a sort of safety-ring to string 'em on and keep 'em safe; for I haven't a good memory, and I get mighty rattled sometimes. Thoughts like these are like the secret of a combination lock; they let you into the place where the gold and securities and title-deeds of life are. Trouble is, I haven't got a safety-ring, and I'm certain to lose them. I haven't got what you'd call an intellectual memory. Things come in flashes to me out of experiences, and pull me up short, and I say, "Yes, that's it—*that's* it; I understand." I see why it's so, and what it means, and where it leads, and how far it spreads. It's five thousand years old. Adam thought it after Cain killed Abel, or Abel thought it just before he died, or Eve learned it from Lilith, or it struck Abraham when he went to sacrifice Isaac. Sometimes things hit me deep like that here in the desert. Then I feel I can see just over on the horizon the tents of Moab in the wilderness; that yesterday and to-day are the same; that I've crossed the prairies of the everlasting years, and am playing about with Ishmael in the wild hills, or fighting with Ahab. Then the world and time seem pretty small potatoes.

You see how it is. I never was trained to think, and I get stunned by thoughts that strike me as being dug right out of the centre. Sometimes I'd like to write them down; but I can't write; I can only talk as I'm talking to you. If you weren't so high up, and so much cleverer than I am, and such a thinker, I'd like you to be my safety-ring, if you would. I could tell the key-thoughts to you when they came to me, before I forgot them with all their bearings; and by-and-by they'd do me a lot of good when I got away from this influence, and back into the machinery of the Western world again. If you could come out here, if you could feel what I feel here—and you would feel a thousand times as much—I don't know what you wouldn't do.

It's pretty wonderful. The nights with the stars so white and glittering, and so near that you'd think you could reach up and hand them down; the dark, deep, blue beyond; such a width of life all round you, a sort of never-ending space, that everything you ever saw or did seems little, and God so great in a kind of hovering sense like a pair of wings; and all the secrets of time coming out of it all, and sort of touching your face like a velvet wind. I expect you'll think me sentimental, a first-class squash out of the pumpkin-garden; but it's in the desert, and it gets into you and saturates you, till you feel that this is a kind of middle space between the world of cities, and factories, and railways, and tenement-houses, and the quiet world to come—a place where they think out things for the benefit of future generations, and convey them through incarnations, or through the desert. Say, your ladyship, I'm a chatterer, I'm a two-cent philosopher, I'm a baby; but you are too much like your grandmother, who was the daughter of a Quaker like David Pasha, to laugh at me.

I've got a suit of fine chain-armour which I bought of an Arab down by Darfûr. I'm wondering if it would be too cowardly to wear it in the scrap that's coming. I don't know, though, but what I'll wear it, I get so scared. But it will be a frightful hot thing under my clothes, and it's hot enough without that, so I'm not sure. It depends how much my teeth chatter when I see "the dawn of battle."

I've got one more thing before I stop. I'm going to send you a piece of poetry which the Saadat wrote, and tore in two, and threw away. He was working off his imagination, I guess, as you have to do out here. I collected it and copied it, and put in the punctuation—he didn't bother about that. Perhaps he can't punctuate. I don't understand quite what the poetry means, but maybe you will. Anyway, you'll see that it's a real desert piece. Here it is:

"THE DESERT ROAD

"In the sands I lived in a hut of palm,
There was never a garden to see;
There was never a path through the desert calm,
Nor a way through its storms for me.

"Tenant was I of a lone domain;
The far pale caravans wound
To the rim of the sky, and vanished again;
My call in the waste was drowned.

"The vultures came and hovered and fled;
And once there stole to my door
A white gazelle, but its eyes were dread
With the hurt of the wounds it bore.

"It passed in the dusk with a foot of fear,
And the white cold mists rolled in;
And my heart was the heart of a stricken deer,
Of a soul in the snare of sin.

"My days they withered like rootless things,
And the sands rolled on, rolled wide;
Like a pelican I, with broken wings,
Like a drifting barque on the tide.

"But at last, in the light of a rose-red day,
In the windless glow of the morn,
From over the hills and from far away,
You came—ah, the joy of the morn!

"And wherever your footsteps fell, there crept
A path—it was fair and wide:
A desert road which no sands have swept,
Where never a hope has died.

"I followed you forth, and your beauty held
My heart like an ancient song;
By that desert road to the blossoming plains
I came—and the way was long!

"So I set my course by the light of your eyes;
I care not what fate may send;
On the road I tread shine the love-starred skies—
The road with never an end."

Not many men can do things like that, and the other things, too, that he does. Perhaps he will win through, by himself, but is it fair to have him run the risk? If he ever did you a good turn, as you once said to me he did, won't you help him now? You are on the inside of political things, and if you make up your mind to help, nothing will stop you—that was your grandmother's way. He ought to get his backing pretty soon, or it won't be any good. . . . I hear him at his flute. I expect he's tired waiting for me. Well, give my love to the girls!

T. L.

As Hylda read, she passed through phases of feeling begotten of new understanding which shook her composure. She had seen David and all that David was doing; Egypt, and all that was threatening the land through the eyes of another who told the whole truth —except about his own cowardice, which was untrue. She felt the issues at stake. While the mention of David's personal danger left her sick for a moment, she saw the wider peril also to the work he had set out to do.

What was the thing without the man? It could not exist—it had no meaning. Where was he now? What had been the end of the battle? He had saved others, had he saved himself? The most charmed life must be pierced by the shaft of doom sooner or later; but he was little more than a youth yet, he had only just begun!

"*And the Saadat looks as though he was ready for his grave—but keeps going, going, going!*" The words kept ringing in her ears. Again: "*And he sits there like a ghost all shrivelled up for want of sleep, and his eyes like a lime-kiln burning. . . . He hasn't had sleep for a fortnight. . . . He's killing himself for others.*"

Her own eyes were shining with a dry, hot light, her lips were quivering, but her hands upon the letter were steady and firm. What could she do?

She went to a table, picked up the papers, and scanned them hurriedly. Not a word about Egypt. She thought for a moment, then left the drawing-room. Passing up a flight of stairs to her husband's study, she knocked and entered. It was empty; but Eglington was in the house, for a red despatch-box lay open on his table. Instinctively she glanced at the papers exposed in the box, and at the letters beside it. The document on the top of the pile in the box related to Cyprus—the name caught her eye. Another document was half exposed beneath it. Her hand went to her heart. She saw the words, "Soudan" and "Claridge Pasha." She reached for it, then drew back her hand, and her eyes closed as though to shut it out from her sight. Why should she not see it? They were her husband's papers, husband and wife were one. Husband and wife one! She shrank back. Were they one? An overmastering desire was on her. It seemed terrible to wait, when here before her was news of David, of life or death. Suddenly she put out her hand and drew the Cyprus paper over the Egyptian document, so that she might not see it.

As she did so the door opened on her, and Eglington entered. He had seen the swift motion of her hand, and again a look peculiar to him crossed his face, enigmatical, cynical, not pleasant to see.

She turned on him slowly, and he was aware of her inward distress to some degree, though her face was ruled to quietness.

He nodded at her and smiled. She shrank, for she saw in his nod and his smile that suggestion of knowing all about everything and everybody, and thinking the worst, which had chilled her so often. Even in their short married life it had chilled those confidences which

she would gladly have poured out before him, if he had been a man with an open soul. Had there been joined to his intellect and temperament a heart capable of true convictions and abiding love, what a man he might have been! But his intellect was superficial, and his temperament was dangerous, because there were not the experiences of a soul of truth to give the deeper hold upon the meaning of life. She shrank now, as, with a little laugh and glancing suggestively at the despatch-box, he said:

"And what do you think of it all?"

She felt as though something was crushing her heart within its grasp, and her eyes took on a new look of pain. "I did not read the papers," she answered quietly.

"I saw them in your fingers. What creatures women are—so dishonourable in little things," he said ironically.

She laid a hand on his. "I did not read them, Harry," she urged.

He smiled and patted her arm. "There, there, it doesn't matter," he laughed. He watched her narrowly.

"It matters greatly," she answered gently, though his words had cut her like a knife. "I did not read the papers. I only saw the word 'Cyprus' on the first paper, and I pushed it over the paper which had the word 'Egypt' on it—'Egypt' and 'Claridge,' lest I should read it. I did not wish to read it. I am not dishonourable, Harry."

He had hurt her more than he had ever done; and only the great matter at stake had prevented the lesser part of her from bursting forth in indignation, from saying things which she did not wish to say. She had given him devotion—such devotion, such self-effacement in his career as few women ever gave. Her wealth—that

was so little in comparison with the richness of her nature—had been his; and yet his vast egotism took it all as his right, and she was repaid in a kind of tyranny, the more galling and cruel because it was wielded by a man of intellect and culture, and ancient name and tradition. If he had been warned that he was losing his wife's love, he would have scouted the idea, his self-assurance was so strong, his vanity complete. If, however, he had been told that another man was thinking of his wife, he would have believed it, as he believed now that David had done; and he cherished that belief, and let resentment grow. He was the Earl of Eglington, and no matter what reputation David had reached, he was still a member of a Quaker trader's family, with an origin slightly touched with scandal. Another resentment, however, was steadily rising in him. It galled him that Hylda should take so powerful an interest in David's work in Egypt; and he knew now that she had always done so. It did not ease his vexed spirit to know that thousands of others of his fellow-countrymen did the same. They might do so, but she was his wife, and his own work was the sun round which her mind and interest should revolve.

"Why should you be so keen about Egypt and Claridge Pasha?" he said to her now.

Her face hardened a little. Had he the right to torture her so? To suspect her? She could read it in his eyes. Her conscience was clear. She was no man's slave. She would not be any man's slave. She was master of her own soul. What right had he to catechise her—as though she were a servant or a criminal? But she checked the answer on her tongue, because she was hurt deeper than words could express, and she said, composedly:

"I have here a letter from my cousin Lacey, who is with Claridge Pasha. It has news of him, of events in the Soudan. He had fever, there was to be a fight, and I wished to know if you had any later news. I thought that document there might contain news, but I did not read it. I realised that it was not yours, that it belonged to the Government, that I had no right. Perhaps you will tell me if you have news. Will you?" She leaned against the table wearily, holding her letter.

"Let me read your letter first," he said wilfully.

A mist seemed to come before her eyes; but she was schooled to self-command, and he did not see he had given her a shock. Her first impulse was to hand the letter over at once; then there came the remembrance of all it contained, all it suggested. Would he see all it suggested? She recalled the words Lacey had used regarding a service which David had once done her. If Eglington asked, what could she say? It was not her secret alone, it was another's. Would she have the right, even if she wished it, to tell the truth, or part of the truth? Or, would she be entitled to relate some immaterial incident which would evade the real truth? What good could it do to tell the dark story? What could it serve? Eglington would horribly misunderstand it—that she knew. There were the verses also. They were more suggestive than anything else, though, indeed, they might have referred to another woman, or were merely impersonal; but she felt that was not so. And there was Eglington's innate unbelief in man and woman! Her first impulse held, however. She would act honestly. She would face whatever there was to face. She would not shelter herself; she would not give him the right in the future to say she had not

dealt fairly by him, had evaded any inquest of her life or mind which he might make.

She gave him the letter, her heart standing still, but she was filled with a regnant determination to defend herself, to defend David against any attack, or from any consequences.

All her life and hopes seemed hanging in the balance, as he began to read the letter. With fear she saw his face cloud over, heard an impatient exclamation pass his lips. She closed her eyes to gather strength for the conflict which was upon her. He spoke, and she vaguely wondered what passage in the letter had fixed his attention. His voice seemed very far away. She scarcely understood. But presently it pierced the clouds of numbness between them, and she realised what he was saying:

"Vulgar fellow—I can't congratulate you upon your American cousin. So, 'the Saadat is great on moral suasion, master of it—never failed yet—not altogether—and Aunt Melissa and skim-milk and early piety!' And 'the Saadat is a wonder from Wondertown'—like a side-show to a circus, a marvel on the flying trapeze! Perhaps you can give me the sense of the letter, if there is any sense in it. I can't read his writing, and it seems interminable. Would you mind?"

A sigh of relief broke from her. A weight slipped away from her heart and brain. It was as though one in armour awaited the impact of a heavy, cruel, overwhelming foe, who suddenly disappeared, and the armour fell from the shoulders, and breath came easily once again.

"Would you mind?" he repeated drily, as he folded up the letter slowly.

He handed it back to her, the note of sarcasm in his

voice pricking her like the point of a dagger. She felt angered with herself that he could rouse her temper by such small mean irony. She had a sense of bitter disappointment in him—or was it a deep hurt?—that she had not made him love her, truly love her. If he had only meant the love that he swore before they had married! Why had he deceived her? It had all been in his hands, her fate and future; but almost before the bridal flowers had faded, she had come to know two bitter things: that he had married with a sordid mind; that he was incapable of the love which transmutes the half-comprehending, half-developed affection of the maid into the absorbing, understanding, beautiful passion of the woman. She had married not knowing what love and passion were; uncomprehending, and innocent because uncomprehending; with a fine affection, but capable of loving wholly. One thing had purified her motives and her life—the desire to share with Eglington his public duty and private hopes, to be his *confidante*, his friend, his coadjutor, proud of him, eager for him, determined to help him. But he had blocked the path to all inner companionship. He did no more than let her share the obvious and outer responsibilities of his life. From the vital things, if there were vital things, she was shut out. What would she not give for one day of simple tenderness and quiet affection, a true day with a true love!

She was now perfectly composed. She told him the substance of the letter, of David's plight, of the fever, of the intended fight, of Nahoum Pasha, of the peril to David's work. He continued to interrogate her, while she could have shrieked out the question, "What is in yonder document? What do you know? Have you news of his safety?" Would he never stop his questioning? It was trying her strength and patience beyond

endurance. At last he drew the document slowly from the despatch-box, and glanced up and down it musingly.

"I fancy he won the battle," he said slowly, "for they have news of him much farther down the river. But from this letter I take it he is not yet within the zone of safety—so Nahoum Pasha says." He flicked the document upwards with his thumb.

"What is our Government doing to help him?" she asked, checking her eagerness.

His heart had gradually hardened towards Egypt. Power had emphasised a certain smallness in him. Personal considerations informed the policy of the moment. He was not going to be dragged at the chariot-wheels of the Quaker. To be passive, when David in Egypt had asked for active interest; to delay, when urgency was important to Claridge Pasha; to speak coldly on Egyptian affairs to his chief, the weak Foreign Secretary, this was the policy he had begun.

So he answered now: "It is the duty of the Egyptian Government to help him—of Prince Kaïd, of Nahoum Pasha, who is acting for him in his absence, who governs finance, and therefore the army. Egypt does not belong to England."

"Nahoum Pasha is his enemy. He will do nothing to help, unless you force him."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I know Nahoum Pasha."

"When did you know Nahoum?"

"In Egypt, years ago."

"Your acquaintance is more varied than I thought," he said sarcastically.

"Oh, do not speak to me like that!" she returned, in a low, indignant voice. "Do not patronise me; do not be sarcastic."

"Do not be so sensitive," he answered unemotionally.

"You surely do not mean that you—that the Government will not help him? He is doing the work of Europe, of civilisation, of Christianity there. He is sacrificing himself for the world. Do you not see it? Oh, but you do! You would realise his work if you knew Egypt as I have seen it."

"Expediency must govern the policy of nations," he answered critically.

"But, if through your expediency he is killed like a rat in a trap, and his work goes to pieces—all undone! Is there no right in the matter?"

"In affairs of state other circumstances than absolute 'right' enter. Here and there the individual is sacrificed who otherwise would be saved—if it were expedient."

"Oh, Eglington! He is of your own county, of your own village, is your neighbour, a man of whom all England should be proud. You can intervene if you will—be just, and say you will. I know that intervention has been discussed in the Cabinet."

"You say he is of my county. So are many people, and yet they are not county people. A neighbour he was, but more in a Scriptural than social sense." He was hurting her purposely.

She made a protesting motion of her hand. "No, no, no, do not be so small. This is a great matter. Do a great thing now; help it to be done for your own honour, for England's honour—for a good man's sake, for your country's sake."

There came a knock at the door. An instant afterwards a secretary entered. "A message from the Prime Minister, sir." He handed over a paper.

"Will you excuse me?" he asked Hylda suavely, in

his eyes the enigmatical look that had chilled her so often before. She felt that her appeal had been useless. She prepared to leave the room. He took her hand, kissed it gallantly, and showed her out. It was his way —too civil to be real.

Blindly she made her way to her room. Inside, she suddenly swayed and sank fainting to the ground, as Kate Heaver ran forward to her. Kate saw the letter in the clinched hand. Loosening it, she read two or three sentences with a gasp. They contained Tom Lacey's appeal for David. She lifted Hylda's head to her shoulder with endearing words, and chafed the cold hands, murmuring to herself the while.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE QUESTIONER

"WHAT has thee come to say?"

Sitting in his high-backed chair, Luke Claridge seemed a part of its dignified severity. In the sparsely furnished room with its uncarpeted floor, its plain teak table, its high wainscoting and undecorated walls, the old man had the look of one who belonged to some ancient consistory, a judge whose piety would march with an austerity that would save a human soul by destroying the body, if need be.

A crisis had come, vaguely foreseen, sombrely eluded. A questioner was before him who, poor, unheeded, an ancient victim of vice, could yet wield a weapon whose sweep of wounds would be wide. Stern and masterful as he looked in his arid isolation, beneath all was a shaking anxiety.

He knew well what the old chair-maker had come to say, but, in the prologue of the struggle before him, he was unwittingly manœuvring for position.

"Speak," he added presently, as Soolsby fumbled in his great loose pockets, and drew forth a paper. "What has thee to say?"

Without a word, Soolsby handed over the paper, but the other would not take it.

"What is it?" he asked, his lips growing pale. "Read —if thee can read."

The gibe in the last words made the colour leap into Soolsby's face, and a fighting look came. He too had

staved off this inevitable hour, had dreaded it, but now his courage shot up high.

"Doost think I have forgotten how to read since the day I put my hand to a writing you've hid so long from them it most concerns? Ay, I can read, and I can write, and I will prove that I can speak too before I've done."

"Read—read," rejoined the old man hoarsely, his hands tightly gripping the chair-arm.

"The fever caught him at Shendy—that is the place—"

"He is not dead—David is not dead?" came the sharp, pained interruption. The old man's head strained forward, his eyes were misty and dazed.

Soolsby's face showed no pity for the other's anxiety; it had a kind of triumph in it. "Nay, he is living," he answered. "He got well of the fever, and came to Cairo, but he's off again into the desert. It's the third time. You can't be tempting Providence for ever. This paper here says it's too big a job for one man—like throwing a good life away. Here in England is his place, it says. And so say I; and so I have come to say, and to hear you say so, too. What is he there? One man against a million. What put it in his head that he thinks he can do it?"

His voice became lower; he fixed his eyes meaningly on the other. "When a man's life got a twist at the start, no wonder it flies off madlike to do the thing that isn't to be done, and leave undone the thing that's here for it to do. Doost think a straight line could come from the crooked line you drew for him?"

"He is safe—he is well and strong again?" asked the old man painfully. Suddenly he reached out a hand for the paper. "Let me read," he said, in a voice scarce above a whisper.

He essayed to take the paper calmly, but it trembled in his hands. He spread it out and fumbled for his glasses, but could not find them, and he gazed helplessly at the page before him. Soolsby took the paper from him and read slowly:

". . . Claridge Pasha has done good work in Egypt, but he is a generation too soon, it may be two or three too soon. We can but regard this fresh enterprise as a temptation to Fate to take from our race one of the most promising spirits and vital personalities which this generation has produced. It is a forlorn hope. Most Englishmen familiar with Claridge Pasha's life and aims will ask—"

An exclamation broke from the old man. In the pause which followed he said: "It was none of my doing. He went to Egypt against my will."

"Ay, so many a man's said that's not wanted to look his own acts straight in the face. If Our Man had been started different, if he'd started in the path where God A'mighty dropped him, and not in the path Luke Claridge chose, would he have been in Egypt to-day wearing out his life? He's not making carpets there, he's only beating them."

The homely illustration drawn from the business in which he had been interested so many years went home to Claridge's mind. He shrank back, and sat rigid, his brows drawing over the eyes, till they seemed sunk in caverns of the head. Suddenly Soolsby's voice rose angrily. Luke Claridge seemed so remorseless and unyielding, so set in his vanity and self-will! Soolsby misread the rigid look in the face, the pale sternness. He did not know that there had suddenly come upon Luke Claridge the full consciousness of an agonising truth—that all he had done where David was concerned had

been a mistake. The hard look, the sternness, were the signals of a soul challenging itself.

"Ay, you've had your own will," cried Soolsby mercilessly. "You've said to God A'mighty that He wasn't able to work out to a good end what He'd let happen; and so you'd do His work for Him. You kept the lad hid away from the people that belonged to him, you kept him out of his own, and let others take his birthright. You put a shame upon him, hiding who his father and his father's people were, and you put a shame upon her that lies in the graveyard—as sweet a lass, as good, as ever lived on earth. Ay, a shame and a scandal! For your eyes were shut always to the sidelong looks, your ears never heard the things people said—'*A good-for-nothing ship-captain, a scamp and a ne'er-do-weel, one that had a lass at every port, and, maybe, wives too; one that none knew or ever had seen—a pirate maybe, or a slave-dealer, or a jail-bird, for all they knew! Married—oh yes, married right enough, but nothing else—not even a home. Just a ring on the finger, and then, beyond and away!*' Around her life that brought into the world our lad yonder you let a cloud draw down; and you let it draw round his, too, for he didn't even bear his father's name—much less knew who his father was—or live in his father's home, or come by his own in the end. You gave the lad shame and scandal. Do you think he didn't feel it, was it much or little? He wasn't walking in the sun, but—"

"Mercy! Mercy!" broke in the old man, his hand before his eyes. He was thinking of Mercy, his daughter, of the words she had said to him when she died, "*Set him in the sun, father, where God can find him,*" and her name now broke from his lips.

Soolsby misunderstood. "Ay, there'll be mercy when

right's been done Our Man, and not till then. I've held my tongue for half a lifetime, but I'll speak now and bring him back. Ay, he shall come back and take the place that is his, and all that belongs to him. That lordship yonder—let him go out into the world and make his place as the Egyptian did. He's had his chance to help Our Man, and he has only hurt, not helped him. We've had enough of his second-best lordship and his ways."

The old man's face was painful in its stricken stillness now. He had regained control of himself, his brain had recovered greatly from its first suffusion of excitement.

"How does thee know my lord yonder has hurt and not helped him?" he asked in an even voice, his lips tightening, however. "How does thee know it surely?"

"From Kate Heaver, my lady's maid. My lady's illness—what was it? Because she would help Our Man, and, out of his hatred, yonder second son said that to her which no woman can bear that's a true woman; and then, what with a chill and fever, she's been yonder ailing these weeks past. She did what she could for him, and her husband did what he could against him."

The old man settled back in his chair again. "Thee has kept silent all these years? Thee has never told any that lives?"

"I gave my word to her that died—to our Egyptian's mother—that I would never speak unless you gave me leave to speak, or if you should die before me. It was but a day before the lad was born. So have I kept my word. But now you shall speak. Ay, then, but you shall speak, or I'll break my word to her, to do right by her son. She herself would speak if she was here, and I'll answer her, if ever I see her after Purgatory, for speaking now."

The old man drew himself up in his chair as though in pain, and said very slowly, almost thickly: "I shall answer also for all I did. The spirit moved me. He is of my blood—his mother was dead—in his veins is the blood that runs in mine. His father—aristocrat, spendthrift, adventurer, renegade, who married her in secret, and left her, bidding her return to me, until he came again, and she to bear him a child—was he fit to bring up the boy?"

He breathed heavily, his face became wan and haggard, as he continued: "Restless on land or sea, for ever seeking some new thing, and when he found it, and saw what was therein, he turned away forgetful. God put it into my heart to abjure him and the life around him. The Voice made me rescue the child from a life empty and bare and heartless and proud. When he returned, and my child was in her grave, he came to me in secret; he claimed the child of that honest lass whom he had married under a false name. I held my hand lest I should kill him, man of peace as I am. Even his father —Quaker though he once became—did we not know ere the end that he had no part or lot with us, that he but experimented with his soul, as with all else? Experiment—experiment—experiment, until at last an Eglington went exploring in my child's heart, and sent her to her grave—the God of Israel be her rest and refuge! What should such high-placed folk do stooping out of their sphere to us who walk in plain paths? What have we in common with them? My soul would have none of them—masks of men, the slaves of riches and titles, and tyrants over the poor."

His voice grew hoarse and high, and his head bent forward. He spoke as though forgetful of Soolsby's presence: "As the East is from the West, so were we separate from these lovers of this world, the self-indul-

gent, the hard-hearted, the proud. I chose for the child that he should stay with me and not go to him, to remain among his own people and his own class. He was a sinister, an evil man. Was the child to be trusted with him?"

"The child was his own child," broke in Soolsby. "Your daughter was his lady—the Countess of Eglington! Not all the Quakers in heaven or earth could alter that. His firstborn son is Earl of Eglington, and has been so these years past; and you, nor his second-best lordship there, nor all the courts in England can alter that. . . . Ay, I've kept my peace, but I will speak out now. I was with the Earl—James Fetherdon he called himself—when he married her that's gone to heaven, if any ever went to heaven; and I can prove all. There's proof aplenty, and 'tis a pity, ay, God's pity! that 'twas not used long ago. Well I knew, as the years passed, that the Earl's heart was with David, but he had not the courage to face it all, so worn away was the man in him. Ah, if the lad had always been with him—who can tell?—he might have been different! Whether so or not, it was the lad's right to take his place his mother gave him, let be whatever his father was. 'Twas a cruel thing done to him. His own was his own, to run his race as God A'mighty had laid the hurdles, not as Luke Claridge willed. I'm sick of seeing yonder fellow in Our Man's place, he that will not give him help, when he may; he that would see him die like a dog in the desert, brother or no brother—"

"He does not know—Lord Eglington does not know the truth?" interposed the old man in a heavy whisper.

"He does not know, but, if he knew, would it matter to him! So much the more would he see Our Man die yonder in the sands. I know the breed. I know him

yonder, the skim-milk lord. There is no blood of justice, no milk of kindness in him. Do you think his father that I friended in this thing—did he ever give me a penny, or aught save that hut on the hill that was not worth a pound a year? Did he ever do aught to show that he remembered?—Like father like son. I wanted naught. I held my peace, not for him, but for her—for the promise I made her when she smiled at me and said: '*If I shouldn't be seeing thee again, Soolsby, remember; and if thee can ever prove a friend to the child that is to be, prove it.*' And I will prove it now. He must come back to his own. Right's right, and I will have it so. More brains you may have, and wealth you have, but not more common sense than any common man like me. If the spirit moved you to hold your peace, it moves me to make you speak. With all your meek face you've been a hard, stiff-necked man, a tyrant too, and as much an aristocrat to such as me as any lord in the land. But I've drunk the mug of silence to the bottom. I've—"

He stopped short, seeing a strange look come over the other's face, then stepped forward quickly as the old man half rose from his chair, murmuring thickly:

"Mercy—David, my lord, come—!" he muttered, and staggered, and fell into Soolsby's arms.

His head dropped forward on his breast, and with a great sigh he sank into unconsciousness. Soolsby laid him on a couch, and ran to the door and called aloud for help.

The man of silence was silent indeed now. In the room where paralysis had fallen on him a bed was brought, and he lay nerveless on the verge of a still deeper silence. The hours went by. His eyes opened, he saw and recognised them all, but his look rested only

on Faith and Soolsby; and, as time went on, these were the only faces to which he gave an answering look of understanding. Days wore away, but he neither spoke nor moved.

People came and went softly, and he gave no heed. There was ever a trouble in his eyes when they were open. Only when Soolsby came did it seem to lessen. Faith saw this, and urged Soolsby to sit by him. She had questioned much concerning what had happened before the stroke fell, but Soolsby said only that the old man had been greatly troubled about David. Once Lady Eglington, frail and gentle and sympathetic, came, but the trouble deepened in his eyes, and the lids closed over them, so that he might not see her face.

When she had gone, Soolsby, who had been present and had interpreted the old man's look according to a knowledge all his own, came over to the bed, leaned down and whispered: "I will speak now."

Then the eyes opened, and a smile faintly flickered at the mouth.

"I will speak now," Soolsby said again into the old man's ear.

CHAPTER XXV

THE VOICE THROUGH THE DOOR

THAT night Soolsby tapped at the door of the lighted laboratory of the Cloistered House where Lord Eglington was at work; opened it, peered in, and stepped inside.

With a glass retort in his hand Eglington faced him. "What's this—what do you want?" he demanded.

"I want to try an experiment," answered Sooisby grimly.

"Ah, a scientific turn!" rejoined Eglington coolly—looking at him narrowly, however. He was conscious of danger of some kind.

Then for a minute neither spoke. Now that Soolsby had come to the moment for which he had waited for so many years, the situation was not what he had so often prefigured. The words he had chosen long ago were gone from his memory; in his ignorance of what had been a commonplace to Soolsby's dark reflection so long, the man he had meant to bring low stood up before him on his own ground, powerful and unabashed.

Eglington wore a blue smock, and over his eyes was a green shade to protect them from the light, but they peered sharply out at the chair-maker, and were boldly alive to the unexpected. He was no physical coward, and, in any case, what reason had he for physical fear in the presence of this man weakened by vice and age? Yet ever since he was a boy there had existed between them an antagonism which had shown itself in many

ways. There had ever been something sinister in Soolsby's attitude to his father and himself.

Eglington vaguely knew that now he was to face some trial of mind and nerve, but with great deliberation he continued dropping liquid from a bottle into the glass retort he carried, his eyes, however, watchful of his visitor, who involuntarily stared around the laboratory.

It was fifteen years since Soolsby had been in this room; and then he had faced this man's father with a challenge on his tongue such as he meant to speak now. The smell of the chemicals, the carboys filled with acids, the queer, tapering glasses with engraved measurements showing against the coloured liquids, the great blue bottles, the mortars and pestles, the microscopic instruments—all brought back the far-off, acrid scene between the late Earl and himself. Nothing had changed, except that now there were wires which gave out hissing sparks, electrical instruments invented since the earlier day; except that this man, gently dropping acids into the round white bottle upon a crystal which gave off musty fumes, was bolder, stronger, had more at stake than the other.

Slowly Eglington moved back to put the retort on a long table against the wall, and Soolsby stepped forward till he stood where the electric sparks were gently hissing about him. Now Eglington leaned against the table, poured some alcohol on his fingers to cleanse the acid from them, and wiped them with a piece of linen, while he looked inquiringly at Soolsby. Still, Soolsby did not speak. Eglington lit a cigarette, and took away the shade from his eyes.

"Well, now, what is your experiment?" he asked, "and why bring it here? Didn't you know the way to the stables or the scullery?"

"I knew my way better here," answered Soolsby, steadying himself.

"Ah, you've been here often?" asked Eglington nonchalantly, yet feeling for the cause of this midnight visit.

"It is fifteen years since I was here, my lord. Then I came to see the Earl of Eglington."

"And so history repeats itself every fifteen years! You came to see the Earl of Eglington then; you come to see the Earl of Eglington again—after fifteen years!"

"I come to speak with him that's called the Earl of Eglington."

Eglington's eyes half closed, as though the light hurt them. "That sounds communistic, or is it pure Quakerism? I believe they used to call my father *Friend Robert* till he backslided. But you are not a Quaker, Soolsby, so why be too familiar? Or is it merely the way of the old family friend?"

"I knew your father before you were born, my lord—he troosted me then."

"So long? And fifteen years ago—here?" He felt a menace, vague and penetrating. His eyes were hard and cruel.

"It wasn't a question of troost then; 'twas one of right or wrong—naught else."

"Ah—and who was right, and what was wrong?"

At that moment there came a tap at the door leading into the living part of the house, and the butler entered.

"The doctor—he has used up all his oxygen, my lord. He begs to know if you can give him some for Mr. Claridge. Mr. Claridge is bad to-night."

A sinister smile passed over Eglington's face. "Who brings the message, Garry?"

"A servant—Miss Claridge's, my lord."

An ironical look came into Eglington's eyes; then they softened a little. In a moment he placed a jar of oxygen in the butler's hands.

"My compliments to Miss Claridge, and I am happy to find my laboratory of use at last to my neighbours," he said, and the door closed upon the man.

Then he came back thoughtfully. Soolsby had not moved.

"Do you know what oxygen's for, Soolsby?" he asked quizzically.

"No, my lord, I've never heerd tell of it."

"Well, if you brought the top of Ben Lomond to the bottom of a coal-mine—breath to the breathless—that's it."

"You've been doing that to Mr. Claridge, my lord?"

"A little oxygen more or less makes all the difference to a man—it probably will to neighbour Claridge, Soolsby; and so I've done him a good turn."

A grim look passed over Soolsby's face. "It's the first, I'm thinking, my lord, and none too soon; and it'll be the last, I'm thinking, too. It's many a year since this house was neighbourly to that."

Eglington's eyes almost closed, as he studied the other's face; then he said: "I asked you a little while ago who was right and what was wrong when you came to see my father here fifteen years ago. Well?"

Suddenly a thought flashed into his eyes, and it seemed to course through his veins like some anæsthetic, for he grew very still, and a minute passed before he added quietly: "Was it a thing between my father and Luke Claridge? There was trouble—well, what was it?" All at once he seemed to rise above the vague anxiety that possessed him, and he fingered inquiringly a long

tapering glass of acids on the bench beside him. "There's been so much mystery, and I suppose it was nothing, after all. What was it all about? Or do you know—eh? Fifteen years ago you came to see my father, and now you have come to see me—all in the light o' the moon, as it were; like a villain in a play. Ah, yes, you said it was to make an experiment—yet you didn't know what oxygen was! It's foolish making experiments, unless you know what you are playing with, Soolsby. See, here are two glasses." He held them up. "If I poured one into the other, we'd have an experiment—and you and I would be picked up in fragments and carried away in a basket. And that wouldn't be a successful experiment, Soolsby."

"I'm not so sure of that, my lord. Some things would be put right then."

"H'm, there would be a new Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and—"

"And Claridge Pasha would come back from Egypt, my lord," was the sharp interjection. Suddenly Soolsby's anger flared up, his hands twitched. "You had your chance to be a friend to him, my lord. You promised her yonder at the Red Mansion that you would help him—him that never wronged you, him you always wronged, and you haven't lifted hand to help him in his danger. A moment since you asked me who was right and what was wrong. You shall know. If you had treated him right, I'd have held my peace, and kept my word to her that's gone these thirty-odd years. I'll hold it no more, and so I told Luke Claridge. I've been silent, but not for your father's sake or yours, for he was as cruel as you, with no heart, and a conscience like a pin's head, not big enough for use. . . . Ay, you shall know. You are no more the Earl of Eglington than me.

The Earl of Eglington is your elder brother, called David Claridge."

As Soolsby's words poured forth passionately, weighty, Eglington listened like one in a dream. Since this man entered the laboratory fifty reasons for his coming had flashed across his mind; he had prepared himself at many corners for defence, he had rallied every mental resource, he had imagined a dozen dangerous events which his father and Luke Claridge shared —with the balance against his father; but this thing was beyond all speculation. Yet on the instant the words were said he had a conviction of their inevitable truth. Even as they were uttered, kaleidoscopic memories rushed in, and David's face, figure, personal characteristics, flashed before him. He saw, he felt, the likeness to his father and himself; a thousand things were explained that could only be explained by this fatal fact launched at him without warning. It was as though, fully armed for his battle of life, he had suddenly been stripped of armour and every weapon, and left naked on the field. But he had the mind of the gamester, and the true gamester's self-control. He had taken chances so often that the tornado of ill-luck left him standing.

"What proof have you?" he asked quietly.

Soolsby's explicit answer left no ground for doubt. He had not asked the question with any idea of finding gaps in the evidence, but rather to find if there were a chance for resistance, of escape, anywhere. The marriage certificate existed; identification of James Fetherdon with his father could be established by Soolsby and Luke Claridge.

Soolsby and Luke Claridge! Luke Claridge—he could not help but smile cynically, for he was composed

and calculating now. A few minutes ago he had sent a jar of oxygen to keep Luke Claridge alive! But for it one enemy to his career, to his future, would be gone. He did not shrink from the thought. Born a gentleman, there were in him some degenerate characteristics which heart could not drown or temperament refine. Selfishness was inwoven with every fibre of his nature.

Now, as he stood with eyes fixed on Soolsby, the world seemed to narrow down to this laboratory. It was a vacuum where sensation was suspended, and the million facts of ordinary existence disappeared into inactivity. There was a fine sense of proportion in it all. Only the bare essential things that concerned him remained: David Claridge was the Earl of Eglington, this man before him knew, Luke Claridge knew; and there was one thing yet to know! When he spoke his voice showed no excitement—the tones were even, colourless.

"Does he know?" In these words he acknowledged that he believed the tale told him.

Soolsby had expected a different attitude; he was not easier in mind because his story had not been challenged. He blindly felt working in the man before him a powerful mind, more powerful because it faced the truth unflinchingly; but he knew that this did not mean calm acceptance of the consequences. He, not Eglington, was dazed and embarrassed, was not equal to the situation. He moved uneasily, changed his position.

"Does he know?" Eglington questioned again quietly. There was no need for Eglington to explain who *he* was.

"Of course he does not know—I said so. If he knew, do you think he'd be in Egypt and you here, my lord?"

Eglington was very quiet. His intellect more than his passions were now at work.

"I am not sure. You never can tell. This might not mean much to him. He has got his work cut out; he wasn't brought up to this. What he has done is in line with the life he has lived as a pious Quaker. What good would it do to bring him back? I have been brought up to it; I am used to it; I have worked things out 'according to the state of life to which I was called.' Take what I've always had away from me, and I am crippled; give him what he never had, and it doesn't work into his scheme. It would do him no good and me harm—Where's the use? Besides, I am still my father's son. Don't you see how unreasonable you are? Luke Claridge was right. He knew that he and his belonged to a different sphere. He didn't speak. Why do you speak now after all these years when we are all set in our grooves? It's silly to disturb us, Soolsby."

The voice was low, persuasive, and searching; the mind was working as it had never worked before, to achieve an end by peaceful means, when war seemed against him. And all the time he was fascinated by the fact that Soolsby's hand was within a few inches of a live electric wire, which, if he touched, would probably complete "the experiment" he had come to make; and what had been the silence of a generation would continue indefinitely. It was as though Fate had deliberately tempted him and arranged the necessary conditions, for Soolsby's feet were in a little pool of liquid which had been spilled on the floor—the experiment was exact and real.

For minutes he had watched Soolsby's hand near the wire—had watched as he talked, and his talk was his argument for non-interference against warning the man

who had come to destroy him and his career. Why had Fate placed that hand so near the wire there, and provided the other perfect conditions for tragedy? Why should he intervene? It would never have crossed his mind to do Soolsby harm, yet here, as the man's arm was stretched out to strike him, Fate offered an escape. Luke Claridge was stricken with paralysis, no doubt would die; Soolsby alone stood in his way.

"You see, Soolsby, it has gone on too long," he added, in a low, penetrating tone. "It would be a crime to alter things now. Give him the earldom and the estates, and his work in Egypt goes to pieces; he will be spoiled for all he wants to do. I've got my faults, but, on the whole, I'm useful, and I play my part here, as I was born to it, as well as most. Anyhow, it's no robbery for me to have what has been mine by every right except the accident of being born after him. I think you'll see that you will do a good thing to let it all be. Luke Claridge, if he was up and well, wouldn't thank you for it—have you got any right to give him trouble, too? Besides, I've saved his life to-night, and . . . and perhaps I might save yours, Soolsby, if it was in danger."

Soolsby's hand had moved slightly. It was only an inch from the wire. For an instant the room was terribly still.

An instant, and it might be too late. An instant, and Soolsby would be gone. Eglington watched the hand which had been resting on the table turn slowly over to the wire. Why should he intervene? Was it his business? This thing was not his doing. Destiny had laid the train of circumstance and accident, and who was stronger than Destiny? In spite of himself his eyes fixed themselves on Soolsby's hand. It was but a

hair's breadth from the wire. The end would come now.

Suddenly a voice was heard outside the door. "Eglington!" it called.

Soolsby started, his hand drew spasmodically away from the wire, and he stepped back quickly.

The door opened, and Hylda entered.

"Mr. Claridge is dead, Eglington," she said.

Destiny had decided.

CHAPTER XXVI

"I OWE YOU NOTHING"

BESIDE the grave under the willow-tree another grave had been made. It was sprinkled with the fallen leaves of autumn. In the Red Mansion Faith's delicate figure moved forlornly among relics of an austere, beloved figure vanished from the apricot-garden and the primitive simplicity of wealth combined with narrow thought.

Since her father's death, the bereaved girl had been occupied by matters of law and business, by affairs of the estate; but the first pressure was over, long letters had been written to David which might never reach him; and now, when the strain was withdrawn, the gentle mind was lost in a grey mist of quiet suffering. In Hamley there were but two in whom she had any real comfort and help—Lady Eglington and the old chair-maker. Of an afternoon or evening one or the other was to be seen in the long high-wainscoted room, where a great fire burned, or in the fruitless garden where the breeze stirred the bare branches.

Almost as deep a quiet brooded in the Cloistered House as in the home where mourning enjoined movement in a minor key. Hylda had not recovered wholly from the illness which had stricken her down on that day in London when she had sought news of David from Eglington, at such cost to her peace and health and happiness. Then had come her slow convalescence in Hamley, and long days of loneliness, in which Eglington

seemed to retreat farther and farther from her inner life. Inquiries had poured in from friends in town, many had asked to come and see her; flowers came from one or two who loved her benignly, like Lord Windlehurst; and now and then she had some cheerful friend with her who cared for music or could sing; and then the old home rang; but she was mostly alone, and Eglington was kept in town by official business the greater part of each week. She did not gain strength as quickly as she ought to have done, and this was what brought the Duchess of Snowdon down on a special mission one day of early November.

Ever since the night she had announced Luke Claridge's death to Eglington, had discovered Soolsby with him, had seen the look in her husband's face and caught the tension of the moment on which she had broken, she had been haunted by a hovering sense of trouble. What had Soolsby been doing in the laboratory at that time of night? What was the cause of this secret meeting? All Hamley knew—she had long known—how Luke Claridge had held the Cloistered House in abhorrence, and she knew also that Soolsby worshipped David and Faith, and, whatever the cause of the family antipathy, championed it. She was conscious of a shadow somewhere, and behind it all was the name of David's father, James Fetherdon. That last afternoon when she had talked with him, and he had told her of his life, she had recalled the name as one she had seen or heard, and it had floated into her mind at last that she had seen it among the papers and letters of the late Countess of Eglington.

As the look in Eglington's face the night she came upon him and Soolsby in the laboratory haunted her, so the look in her own face had haunted Soolsby. Her

voice announcing Luke Claridge's death had suddenly opened up a new situation to him. It stunned him; and afterwards, as he saw Hylda with Faith in the apricot-garden, or walking in the grounds of the Cloistered House hour after hour alone or with her maid, he became vexed by a problem greater than had yet perplexed him. It was one thing to turn Eglington out of his lands and home and title; it was another thing to strike this beautiful being, whose smile had won him from the first, whose voice, had he but known, had saved his life. Perhaps the truth in some dim way was conveyed to him, for he came to think of her a little as he thought of Faith.

Since the moment when he had left the laboratory and made his way to the Red Mansion, he and Eglington had never met face to face; and he avoided a meeting. He was not a blackmailer, he had no personal wrongs to avenge, he had not sprung the bolt of secrecy for evil ends; and when he saw the possible results of his disclosure, he was unnerved. His mind had seen one thing only, the rights of "Our Man," the wrong that had been done him and his mother; but now he saw how the sword of justice, which he had kept by his hand these many years, would cut both ways. His mind was troubled, too, that he had spoken while yet Luke Claridge lived, and so broken his word to Mercy Claridge. If he had but waited till the old man died—but one brief half-hour—his pledge would have been kept. Nothing had worked out wholly as he expected. The heavens had not fallen. The "second-best lordship" still came and went, the wheels went round as usual. There was no change; yet, as he sat in his hut and looked down into the grounds of the Cloistered House, he kept saying to himself:

"It had to be told. It's for my lord now. He knows the truth. I'll wait and see. It's for him to do right by Our Man that's beyond and away."

The logic and fairness of this position, reached after much thinking, comforted him. He had done his duty so far. If, in the end, the "second-best lordship" failed to do his part, hid the truth from the world, refused to do right by his half-brother, the true Earl, then would be time to act again. Also he waited for word out of Egypt; and he had a superstitious belief that David would return, that any day might see him entering the door of the Red Mansion.

Eglington himself was haunted by a spectre which touched his elbow by day, and said: "You are not the Earl of Eglington," and at night laid a clammy finger on his forehead, waking him, and whispering in his ear: "If Soolsby had touched the wire, all would now be well!" And as deep as thought and feeling in him lay, he felt that Fate had tricked him—Fate and Hylda. If Hylda had not come at that crucial instant, the chair-maker's hut on the hill would be empty. Why had not Soolsby told the world the truth since? Was the man waiting to see what course he himself would take? Had the old chair-maker perhaps written the truth to the Egyptian—to his brother David.

His brother! The thought irritated every nerve in him. No note of kindness or kinship or blood stirred in him. If, before, he had had innate antagonism and a dark, hovering jealousy, he had a black repugnance now —the antipathy of the lesser to the greater nature, of the man in the wrong to the man in the right.

And behind it all was the belief that his wife had set David above him—by how much or in what fashion he did not stop to consider; but it made him desire that

death and the desert would swallow up his father's son and leave no trace behind.

Policy? His work in the Foreign Office now had but one policy so far as Egypt was concerned. The active sophistry in him made him advocate non-intervention in Egyptian affairs as diplomatic wisdom, though it was but personal purpose; and he almost convinced himself that he was acting from a national stand-point. Kaïd and Claridge Pasha pursued their course of civilisation in the Soudan, and who could tell what danger might not bring forth? If only Soolsby held his peace yet a while!

Did Faith know? Luke Claridge was gone without speaking, but had Soolsby told Faith? How closely had he watched the faces round him at Luke Claridge's funeral, to see if they betrayed any knowledge!

Anxious days had followed that night in the laboratory. His boundless egotism had widened the chasm between Hylda and himself, which had been made on the day when she fell ill in London, with Lacey's letter in her hand. It had not grown less in the weeks that followed. He nursed a grievance which had, so far as he knew, no foundation in fact; he was vaguely jealous of a man—his brother—thousands of miles away; he was not certain how far Hylda had pierced the disguise of sincerity which he himself had always worn, or how far she understood him. He thought that she shrank from what she had seen of his real self, much or little, and he was conscious of so many gifts and abilities and attractive personal qualities that he felt a sense of injury. Yet what would his position be without her? Suppose David should return and take the estates and titles, and suppose that she should close her hand upon her fortune and leave him, where would he be?

He thought of all this as he sat in his room at the Foreign Office and looked over St. James's Park, his day's work done. He was suddenly seized by a new-born anxiety, for he had been so long used to the open purse and the unchecked stream of gold, had taken it so much as a matter of course, as not to realise the possibility of its being withdrawn. He was conscious of a kind of meanness and ugly sordidness in the suggestion; but the stake—his future, his career, his position in the world—was too high to allow him to be too chivalrous. His sense of the real facts was perverted. He said to himself that he must be practical.

Moved by the new thought, he seized a time-table and looked up the trains. He had been ten days in town, receiving every morning a little note from Hylda telling of what she had done each day; a calm, dutiful note, written without pretence, and out of a womanly affection with which she surrounded the man who, it seemed once—such a little while ago—must be all in all to her. She had no element of pretence in her. What she could give she gave freely, and it was just what it appeared to be. He had taken it all as his due, with an underlying belief that, if he chose to make love to her again, he could blind her to all else in the world. Hurt vanity and egotism and jealousy had prevented him from luring her back to that fine atmosphere in which he had hypnotised her so few years ago. But suddenly, as he watched the swans swimming in the pond below, a new sense of approaching loss, all that Hylda had meant in his march and progress, came upon him; and he hastened to return to Hamley.

Getting out of the train at Heddington, he made up his mind to walk home by the road that David had taken

on his return from Egypt, and he left word at the station that he would send for his luggage.

His first objective was Soolsby's hut, and, long before he reached it, darkness had fallen. From a light shining through the crack of the blind he knew that Soolsby was at home. He opened the door and entered without knocking. Soolsby was seated at a table, a map and a newspaper spread out before him. Egypt and David, always David and Egypt!

Soolsby got to his feet slowly, his eyes fixed inquiringly on his visitor.

"I didn't knock," said Eglington, taking off his great-coat and reaching for a chair; then added, as he seated himself: "Better sit down, Soolsby."

After a moment he continued: "Do you mind my smoking?"

Soolsby did not reply, but sat down again. He watched Eglington light a cigar and stretch out his hands to the wood fire with an air of comfort.

A silence followed. Eglington appeared to forget the other's presence, and to occupy himself with thoughts that glimmered in the fire.

At last Soolsby said moodily: "What have you come for, my lord?"

"Oh, I am *my lord* still, am I?" Eglington returned lazily. "Is it a genealogical tree you are studying there?" He pointed to the map.

"I've studied your family tree with care, as you should know, my lord; and a map of Egypt"—he tapped the parchment before him—"goes well with it. And see, my lord, Egypt concerns you too. Lord Eglington is there, and 'tis time he was returning—ay, 'tis time."

There was a baleful look in Soolsby's eyes. Whatever he might think, whatever considerations might arise at

other times, a sinister feeling came upon him when Eglington was with him.

"And, my lord," he went on, "I'd be glad to know that you've sent for him, and told him the truth."

"Have you?" Eglington flicked the ash from his cigar, speaking coolly.

Soolsby looked at him with his honest blue eyes aflame, and answered deliberately: "I was not for taking your place, my lord. 'Twas my duty to tell you, but the rest was between you and the Earl of Eglington."

"That was thoughtful of you, Soolsby. And Miss Claridge?"

"I told you that night, my lord, that only her father and myself knew; and what was then is now."

A look of relief stole across Eglington's face. "Of course—of course. These things need a lot of thought, Soolsby. One must act with care—no haste, no flurry, no mistakes."

"I would not wait too long, my lord, or be too careful." There was menace in the tone.

"But if you go at things blind, you're likely to hurt where you don't mean to hurt. When you're mowing in a field by a school-house, you must look out for the children asleep in the grass. Sometimes the longest way round is the shortest way home."

"Do you mean to do it or not, my lord? I've left it to you as a gentleman."

"It's going to upset more than you think, Soolsby. Suppose he, out there in Egypt"—he pointed again to the map—"doesn't thank me for the information. Suppose he says no, and—"

"Right's right. Give him the chance, my lord. How can you know, unless you tell him the truth?"

"Do you like living, Soolsby?"

"Do you want to kill me, my lord?"

There was a dark look in Eglington's face. "But answer me, do you want to live?"

"I want to live long enough to see the Earl of Eglington in his own house."

"Well, I've made that possible. The other night when you were telling me your little story, you were near sending yourself into eternity—as near as I am knocking this ash off my cigar." His little finger almost touched the ash. "Your hand was as near touching a wire charged with death. I saw it. It would have been better for me if you had gone; but I shut off the electricity. Suppose I hadn't, could I have been blamed? It would have been an accident. Providence did not intervene; I did. You owe me something, Soolsby."

Soolsby stared at him almost blindly for a moment. A mist was before his eyes; but through the mist, though he saw nothing of this scene in which he now was, he saw the laboratory, and himself and Eglington, and Eglington's face as it peered at him, and, just before the voice called outside, Eglington's eyes fastened on his hand. It all flashed upon him now, and he saw himself starting back at the sound of the voice.

Slowly he got up now, went to the door, and opened it. "My lord, it is not true," he said. "You have not spoken like a gentleman. It was my lady's voice that saved me. This is my castle, my lord—you lodge yonder." He pointed down into the darkness where the lights of the village shone. "I owe you nothing. I pay my debts. Pay yours, my lord, to him that's beyond and away."

Eglington kept his countenance as he drew on his great-coat and slowly passed from the house.

"I ought to have let you die, Soolsby. You'll think better of this soon. But it's quite right to leave the matter to me. It may take a little time, but everything will come right. Justice shall be done. Well, good night, Soolsby. You live too much alone, and imagination is a bad thing for the lonely. Good night—good night."

Going down the hill quickly, he said to himself: "A sort of second sight he had about that wire. But time is on my side, time and the Soudan—and 'The heathen in his blindness. . . .' I will keep what is mine. I will keep it!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE AWAKENING

In her heart of hearts Hylda had not greatly welcomed the Duchess of Snowdon to Hamley. There was no one whose friendship she prized more; but she was passing through a phase of her life when she felt that she was better apart, finding her own path by those intuitions and perceptions which belonged to her own personal experience. She vaguely felt, what all realise sooner or later, that we must live our dark hours alone.

Yet the frank downright nature of the once beautiful, now faded, Duchess, the humorous glimmer in the pale-blue eyes, the droll irony and dry truth of her speech, appealed to Hylda, made her smile a warm greeting when she would rather have been alone. For, a few days before, she had begun a quest which had absorbed her, fascinated her. The miner, finding his way across the gap of a reef to pick up the vein of quartz at some distant and uncertain point, could not have been more lost to the world than was the young wife searching for a family skeleton, indefinitely embodied in her imagination by the name, James Fetherdon.

Pile after pile of papers and letters of the late Earl and his Countess had passed through her hands from chaos to order. As she had read, hour after hour, the diaries of the cold, blue-eyed woman, Sybil Eglington, who had lived without love of either husband or son, as they, in turn, lived without love of each other, she had been

overwhelmed by the revelation of a human heart, whose powers of expression were smothered by a shy and awkward temperament. The late Countess's letters were the unclothing of a heart which had never expanded to the eyes of those whose love would have broken up a natural reserve, which became at last a proud coldness, and gave her a reputation for lack of feeling that she carried to her grave.

In the diaries which Hylda unearthed—the Countess had died suddenly—was the muffled cry of a soul tortured through different degrees of misunderstanding; from the vague pain of suffered indifference, of being left out of her husband's calculations, to the blank neglect narrowing her life down to a tiny stream of duty, which was finally lost in the sands. She had died abroad, and alone, save for her faithful maid, who, knowing the chasm that lay between her mistress and her lord, had brought her letters and papers back to the Cloistered House, and locked them away with all the other papers and correspondence which the Countess had accumulated.

Among these papers was a letter to the late Lord Eglington written the day before she died. In the haste and confusion ensuing on her death, the maid had not seen it. It had never reached his hands, but lay in a pocket of the dead woman's writing-portfolio, which Hylda had explored without discovering. Only a few hours, however, before the Duchess of Snowdon came, Hylda had found again an empty envelope on which was written the name, *James Fetherdon*. The writing on the envelope was that of Sybil Lady Eglington.

When she discovered the envelope, a sense of mystery and premonition possessed her. What was the association between the Countess of Eglington and James

Fetherdon, the father of David Claridge? In vain she searched among the voluminous letters and papers, for it would seem that the dead woman had saved every letter she received, and kept copies of numberless letters she had written. But she had searched without avail. Even the diaries, curiously frank and without reserve, never mentioned the name, so far as she could find, though here and there were strange allusive references, hints of a trouble that weighed her down, phrases of exasperation and defiance. One phrase, or the idea in it, was, however, much repeated in the diaries during the course of years, and towards the last almost feverishly emphasised—"*Why should I bear it for one who would bear nothing for me, for his sake, who would do nothing for my sake? Is it only the mother in me, not the love in me?*"

These words were haunting Hylda's brain when the telegram from the Duchess of Snowdon came. They followed her to Heddington, whither she went in the carriage to bring her visitor to Hamley, and kept repeating themselves at the back of her mind through the cheerful rallying of the Duchess, who spread out the wings of good-humour and motherly freedom over her.

After all, it was an agreeable thing to be taken possession of, and "put in her proper place," as the Duchess said; made to understand that her own affairs were not so important, after all; and that it was far more essential to hear the charming gossip about the new and most popular Princess of Wales, or the quarrel between Dickens and Thackeray. Yet, after dinner, in the little sitting-room, where the Duchess, in a white gown with great pink bows, fitter for a girl fresh from Confirmation, and her cheeks with their fixed colour, which changed only at the discretion of her maid, babbled of

nothing that mattered, Hylda's mind kept turning to the book of life an unhappy woman had left behind her.

The sitting-room had been that of the late Countess also, and on the wall was an oil-painting of her, stately and distant and not very alluring, though the mouth had a sweetness which seemed unable to break into a smile.

"What was she really like—that wasn't her quite, was it?" asked Hylda, at last, leaning her chin on the hand which held the 'cello she had been playing.

"Oh, yes, it's Sybil Eglington, my dear, but done in wood; and she wasn't the graven image that makes her out to be. That's as most people saw her; as the fellow that painted her saw her; but she had another side to her. She disapproved of me rather, because I was squeezing the orange dry, and trying to find yesterday's roses in to-morrow's garden. But she didn't shut her door in my face—it's hard to do that to a Duchess; which is one of the few advantages of living naked in the street, as it were, with only the strawberry leaves to clothe you. No, Sybil Eglington was a woman who never had her chance. Your husband's forbears were difficult, my dear. They didn't exactly draw you out. She needed drawing out; and her husband drove her back into her corner, where she sulked rather till she died—died alone at Wiesbaden, with a German doctor, a stray curate, and a stuttering maid to wish her *bon voyage*. Yet I fancy she went glad enough, for she had no memories, not even an *affaire* to repent of, and to cherish. La, la! she wasn't so stupid, Sybil there, and she was an ornament to her own sex and the despair of the other. His Serene Highness Heinrich of Saxe-Gunden fancied the task of breaking that ice, and he was an adept and an Apollo, but it broke his reputation instead.

No doubt she is happy now. I shall probably never see!"

In spite of the poignant nature of the talk, Hylda could not but smile at the last words.

"Don't despair," she rejoined; "one star differeth from another star in glory, but that is no reason why they should not be on visiting terms."

"My dear, you may laugh—*you* may laugh, but I am sixty-five, and I am not laughing at the idea of what company I may be obliged to keep presently. In any case I'm sure I shall not be comfortable. If I'm where she is, I shall be dull; if I'm where her husband is, I'll have no reputation; and if there is one thing I want, it is a spotless reputation—sometime."

Hylda laughed—the manner and the voice were so droll—but her face saddened too, and her big eyes with the drooping lashes looked up pensively at the portrait of her husband's mother.

"Was it ever a happy family, or a lucky family?" she asked.

"It's lucky now, and it ought to be happy now," was the meaning reply.

Hylda made no answer, but caught the strings of the 'cello lightly, and shook her head reprovingly, with a smile meant to be playful. For a moment she played, humming to herself, and then the Duchess touched the hand that was drawing the bow softly across the strings. She had behind her garishness a gift for sympathy and a keen intuition, delicacy, and allusiveness. She knew what to say and what to leave unsaid, when her heart was moved.

"My darling," she said now, "*you* are not quite happy; but that is because you don't allow yourself to get well. You've never recovered from your attack last

summer; and you won't, until you come out into the world again and see people. This autumn you ought to have been at Homburg or at Aix, where you'd take a little cure of waters and a great deal of cure of people. You were born to bask in friendship and the sun, and to draw from the world as much as you deserve, a little from many, for all you give in return. Because, dearest, you are a very agreeable person, with enough wit and humanity to make it worth the world's while to conspire to make you do what will give it most pleasure, and let yourself get most—and that's why I've come."

"What a person of importance I am!" answered Hylda, with a laugh that was far from mirthful, though she caught the plump, wrinkled little hand of the Duchess and pressed it. "But really I'm getting well here fast. I'm very strong again. It is so restful, and one's days go by so quietly."

"Yet, I'm not sure that it's rest you want. I don't think it is. You want tonics—men and women and things. Monte Carlo would do you a world of good —I'd go with you. Eglington gambles here"—she watched Hylda closely—"why shouldn't you gamble there?"

"Eglington gambles?" Hylda's face took on a frightened look, then it cleared again, and she smiled. "Oh, of course, with international affairs, you mean. Well, I must stay here and be the *croupier*."

"Nonsense! Eglington is his own *croupier*. Besides, he is so much in London, and you so much here. You sit with the distaff; he throws the dice."

Hylda's lips tightened a little. Her own inner life, what Eglington was to her or she to Eglington, was for the ears of no human being, however friendly. She had seen little of him of late, but in one sense that had been

a relief, though she would have done anything to make that feeling impossible. His rather precise courtesy and consideration, when he was with her, emphasised the distance between "the first fine careless rapture" and this grey quiet. And, strange to say, though in the first five years after the Cairo days and deeds, Egypt seemed an infinite space away, and David a distant, almost legendary figure, now Egypt seemed but beyond the door—as though, opening it, she would stand near him who represented the best of all that she might be capable of thinking. Yet all the time she longed for Eglington to come and say one word, which would be like touching the lever of the sluice-gates of her heart, to let loose the flood. As the space grew between her and Eglington, her spirit trembled, she shrank back, because she saw that sea towards which she was drifting.

As she did not answer the last words of the Duchess, the latter said presently: "When do you expect Eglington?"

"Not till the week-end; it is a busy week with him," Hylda answered; then added hastily, though she had not thought of it till this moment: "I shall probably go up to town with you to-morrow."

She did not know that Eglington was already in the house, and had given orders to the butler that she was not to be informed of his arrival for the present.

"Well, if you get that far, will you come with me to the Riviera, or to Florence, or Sicily—or Cairo?" the other asked, adjusting her gold-brown wig with her babyish hands.

Cairo! Cairo! A light shot up into Hylda's eyes. The Duchess had spoken without thought, but, as she spoke, she watched the sudden change in Hylda. What

did it mean? Cairo—why should Cairo have waked her so? Suddenly she recalled certain vague references of Lord Windlehurst, and, for the first time, she associated Hylda with Claridge Pasha in a way which might mean much, account for much, in this life she was leading.

"Perhaps! Perhaps!" answered Hylda abstractedly, after a moment.

The Duchess got to her feet. She had made progress. She would let her medicine work.

"I'm going to bed, my dear. I'm sixty-five, and I take my sleep when I can get it. Think it over, Sicily—Cairo!"

She left the room, saying to herself that Eglington was a fool, and that danger was ahead. "But I hold a red light—poor darling!" she said aloud, as she went up the staircase. She did not know that Eglington, standing in a deep doorway, heard her, and seized upon the words eagerly and suspiciously, and turned them over in his mind.

Below, at the desk where Eglington's mother used to write, Hylda sat with a bundle of letters before her. For some moments she opened, glanced through them, and put them aside. Presently she sat back in her chair, thinking—her mind was invaded by the last words of the Duchess; and somehow they kept repeating themselves with the words in the late Countess's diary: "*Is it only the mother in me, not the love in me?*" Mechanically her hand moved over the portfolio of the late Countess, and it involuntarily felt in one of its many pockets. Her hand came upon a letter. This had remained when the others had been taken out. It was addressed to the late Earl, and was open. She hesitated a moment, then, with a strange premonition and

a tightening of her heart-strings, she spread it out and read it.

At first she could scarcely see because of the mist in her eyes; but presently her sight cleared, and she read quickly, her cheeks burning with excitement, her heart throbbing violently. The letter was the last expression of a disappointed and barren life. The slow, stammering tongue of an almost silent existence had found the fulness of speech. The fountains of the deep had been broken up, and Sybil Eglington's repressed emotions, undeveloped passions, tortured by mortal sufferings, and refined and vitalised by the atmosphere blown in upon her last hours from the Hereafter, were set free, given voice and power at last.

The letter reviewed the life she had lived with her husband during twenty-odd years, reproved herself for not speaking out and telling him his faults at the beginning, and for drawing in upon herself, when she might have compelled him to a truer understanding; and, when all that was said, called him to such an account as only the dying might make—the irrevocable, disillusionising truth which may not be altered, the poignant record of failure and its causes.

". . . I could not talk well, I never could, as a girl," the letter ran; "and you could talk like one inspired, and so speciously, so overwhelmingly, that I felt I could say nothing in disagreement, not anything but assent; while all the time I felt how hollow was so much you said—a cloak of words to cover up the real thought behind. Before *I knew the truth*, I felt the shadow of secrecy in your life. When you talked most, I felt you most secretive, and the feeling slowly closed the door upon all frankness and sympathy and open speech between us. I was always shy and self-conscious and self-centred, and thought little of myself; and I needed deep love and confidence and encouragement to give out what was in me. I gave nothing out, nothing

to you that you wanted, or sought for, or needed. You were complete, self-contained. Harry, my beloved babe Harry, helped at first; but, as the years went on, he too began to despise me for my little intellect and slow intelligence, and he grew to be like you in all things—and secretive also, though I tried so hard to be to him what a mother should be. Oh, Bobby, Bobby—I used to call you that in the days before we were married, and I will call you that now when all is over and done—why did you not tell me all? Why did you not tell me that my boy, my baby Harry, was not your only child, that there had been another wife, and that your eldest son was alive?

"I know all. I have known all for years. The clergyman who married you to Mercy Claridge was a distant relative of my mother's, and before he died he told me. When you married her, he knew you only as James Fetherdon, but, years afterwards, he saw and recognised you. He held his peace then, but at last he came to me. And I did not speak. I was not strong enough, nor good enough, to face the trouble of it all. I could not endure the scandal, to see my own son take the second place—he is so brilliant and able and unscrupulous, like yourself; but, oh, so sure of winning a great place in the world, surer than yourself ever was, he is so calculating and determined and ambitious! And though he loves me little, as he loves you little, too, yet he is my son, and for what he is we are both responsible, one way or another; and I had not the courage to give him the second place, and the Quaker, David Claridge, the first place. Why Luke Claridge, his grandfather, chose the course he did, does not concern me, no more than why you chose secrecy, and kept your own firstborn legitimate son, of whom you might well be proud, a stranger to you and his rights all these years. Ah, Eglington, you never knew what love was, you never had a heart—experiment, subterfuge, secrecy, 'reaping where you had not sowed, and gathering where you had not strawed.' Always, experiment, experiment, experiment!

"I shall be gone in a few hours—I feel it; but before I go I must try to do right, and to warn you. I have had such bad dreams about you and Harry—they haunt me—that I am sure you will suffer terribly, will have some awful tragedy, unless you undo what was done long ago, and tell the truth to the world, and give your titles and estates where they truly belong. Near

to death, seeing how little life is, and how much right is in the end, I am sure that I was wrong in holding my peace; for Harry cannot prosper with this black thing behind him, and you cannot die happy if you smother up the truth. Night after night I have dreamed of you in your laboratory, a vague, dark, terrifying dream of you in that laboratory which I have hated so. It has always seemed to me the place where some native evil and cruelty in your blood worked out its will. I know I am an ignorant woman, with no brain, but God has given me clear sight at the last, and the things I see are true things, and I must warn you. Remember that. . . ."

The letter ended there. She had been interrupted or seized with illness, and had never finished it, and had died a few hours afterwards; and the letter was now, for the first time, read by her whom it most concerned, into whose heart and soul the words sank with an immitigable pain and agonised amazement. A few moments with this death-document had transformed Hylda's life.

Her husband and—and David, were sons of the same father; and the name she bore, the home in which she was living, the estates the title carried, were not her husband's, but another's—David's. She fell back in her chair, white and faint, but, with a great effort, she conquered the swimming weakness which blinded her. Sons of the same father! The past flashed before her, the strange likeness she had observed, the trick of the head, the laugh, the swift gesture, the something in the voice. She shuddered as she had done in reading the letter. But they were related only in name, in some distant, irreconcilable way—in a way which did not warrant the sudden scarlet flush that flooded her face. Presently she recovered herself. She—what did she suffer, compared with her who wrote this revelation of a lifetime of pain, of bitter and torturing knowledge! She

looked up at the picture on the wall, at the still, proud, emotionless face, the conventional, uninspired personality, behind which no one had seen, which had agonised alone till the last. With what tender yet pitiless hand had she laid bare the lives of her husband and her son! How had the neglected mother told the bitter truth of him to whom she had given birth!—"*So brilliant and able, and unscrupulous, like yourself; but, oh, sure of winning a great place in the world . . . so calculating and determined and ambitious. . . . That laboratory which I have hated so. It has always seemed to me the place where some native evil and cruelty in your blood worked out its will. . . .*"

With a deep-drawn sigh Hylda said to herself: "If I were dying to-morrow, would I say that? She loved them so—at first must have loved them so; and yet this at the last! And I—oh, no, no, no!" She looked at a portrait of Eglington on the table near, touched it caressingly, and added, with a sob in her voice: "Oh, Harry, no, it is not true! It is not native evil and cruelty in your blood. It has all been a mistake. You will do right. *We* will do right, Harry. You will suffer, it will hurt, the lesson will be hard—to give up what has meant so much to you; but we will work it out together, you and I, my very dear. Oh, say that we shall, that. . . ."

She suddenly grew silent. A tremor ran through her, she became conscious of his presence near her, and turned, as though he were behind her. There was nothing. Yet she felt him near, and, as she did so, the soul-deep feeling with which she had spoken to the portrait fled. Why was it that, so often, when absent from him, her imagination helped her to make excuses for him, inspired her to press the real truth out of sight, and to make believe that he was worthy of a love which, but

through some inner fault of her own, might be his altogether, and all the love of which he was capable might be hers?

She felt him near her, and the feelings possessing her a moment before slowly chilled and sank away. Instinctively her eyes glanced towards the door. She saw the handle turn, and she slipped the letter inside the portfolio again.

The door opened briskly now, and Eglington entered with what his enemies in the newspaper press had called his "professional smile"—a criticism which had angered his wife, chiefly because it was so near the truth. He smiled. Smiling was part of his equipment, and was for any one at any time that suited him.

Her eyes met his, and he noted in her something that he had never seen before. Something had happened. The Duchess of Snowdon was in the house; had it anything to do with her? Had she made trouble? There was trouble enough without her. He came forward, took Hylda's hand and kissed it, then kissed her on the cheek. As he did so, she laid a hand on his arm with a sudden impulse, and pressed it. Though his presence had chilled the high emotions of a few moments before, yet she had to break to him a truth which would hurt him, dismay him, rob his life of so much that helped it; and a sudden protective, maternal sense was roused in her, reached out to shelter him as he faced his loss and the call of duty.

"You have just come?" she said, in a voice that, to herself, seemed far away.

"I have been here some hours," he answered.

Secrecy again—always the thing that had chilled the dead woman, and laid a cold hand upon herself—"*I felt the shadow of secrecy in your life. When you talked*

most I felt you most secretive, and the feeling slowly closed the door upon all frankness and sympathy and open speech between us."

"Why did you not see me—dine with me?" she asked. "What can the servants think?" Even in such a crisis the little things had place—habit struck its note in the presence of her tragedy.

"You had the Duchess of Snowdon, and we are not precisely congenial; besides, I had much to do in the laboratory. I'm working for that new explosive of which I told you. There's fame and fortune in it, and I'm on the way. I feel it coming"—his eyes sparkled a little. "I made it right with the servants; so don't be apprehensive."

"I have not seen you for nearly a week. It doesn't seem—friendly."

"Politics and science are stern masters," he answered gaily.

"They leave little time for your mistress," she rejoined meaningly.

"Who is my mistress?"

"Well, I am not greatly your wife," she replied. "I have the dregs of your life. I help you—I am allowed to help you—so little, to share so little in the things that matter to you."

"Now, that's imagination and misunderstanding," he rejoined. "It has helped immensely your being such a figure in society, and entertaining so much, and being so popular, at any rate until very lately."

"I do not misunderstand," she answered gravely. "I do not share your real life. I do not help you where your brain works, in the plans and purposes and hopes that lie behind all that you do—oh, yes, I know your ambitions and what positions you are aiming for; but there

is something more than that. There is the object of it all, the pulse of it, the machinery down, down deep in your being that drives it all. Oh, I am not a child! I have some intellect, and I want—I want that we should work it out together."

In spite of all that had come and gone, in spite of the dead mother's words and all her own convictions, seeing trouble coming upon him, she wanted to make one last effort for what might save their lives—her life—from shipwreck in the end. If she failed now, she foresaw a bitter, cynical figure working out his life with a narrowing soul, a hard spirit unrelieved by the softening influence of a great love—even yet the woman in her had a far-off hope that, where the law had made them one by book and scrip, the love which should consecrate such a union, lift it above an almost offensive relation, might be theirs. She did not know how much of her heart, of her being, was wandering over the distant sands of Egypt, looking for its oasis. Eglington had never needed or wanted more than she had given him—her fortune, her person, her charm, her ability to play an express and definite part in his career. It was this material use to which she was so largely assigned, almost involuntarily but none the less truly, that had destroyed all of the finer, dearer, more delicate intimacy invading his mind sometimes, more or less vaguely, where Faith was concerned. So extreme was his egotism that it had never occurred to him, as it had done to the Duchess of Snowdon and Lord Windlehurst, that he might lose Hylda herself as well as her fortune; that the day might come when her high spirit could bear it no longer. As the Duchess of Snowdon had said: "It would all depend upon the other man, whoever he might be."

So he answered her with superficial cheerfulness now;

he had not the depth of soul to see that they were at a crisis, and that she could bear no longer the old method of treating her as though she were a child, to be humoured or to be dominated.

"Well, you see all there is," he answered; "you are so imaginative, crying for some moon there never was in any sky."

In part he had spoken the truth. He had no high objects or ends or purposes. He wanted only success somehow or another, and there was no nobility of mind or aspiration behind it. In her heart of hearts she knew it; but it was the last cry of her soul to him, seeking, though in vain, for what she had never had, could never have.

"What have you been doing?" he added, looking at the desk where she had sat, glancing round the room. "Has the Duchess left any rags on the multitude of her acquaintances? I wonder that you can make yourself contented here with nothing to do. You don't look much stronger. I'm sure you ought to have a change. My mother was never well here; though, for the matter of that, she was never very well anywhere. I suppose it's the laboratory that attracts me here, as it did my father, playing with the ancient forces of the world in these Arcadian surroundings—Arcady without beauty or Arcadians." He glanced up at his mother's picture. "No, she never liked it—a very silent woman, secretive almost."

Suddenly her eyes flared up. Anger possessed her. She choked it down. Secretive—the poor bruised soul who had gone to her grave with a broken heart!

"She secretive? No, Eglington," she rejoined gravely, "she was congealed. She lived in too cold an air. She was not secretive, but yet she kept a secret—another's."

Again Eglington had the feeling which possessed him when he entered the room. She had changed. There was something in her tone, a meaning, he had never heard before. He was startled. He recalled the words of the Duchess as she went up the staircase.

What was it all about?

"Whose secrets did she keep?" he asked, calmly enough.

"Your father's, yours, mine," she replied, in a whisper almost.

"Secret? What secret? Good Lord, such mystery!" He laughed mirthlessly.

She came close to him. "I am sorry—sorry, Harry," she said with difficulty. "It will hurt you, shock you so. It will be a blow to you, but you must bear it."

She tried to speak further, but her heart was beating so violently that she could not. She turned quickly to the portfolio on the desk, drew forth the fatal letter, and, turning to the page which contained the truth concerning David, handed it to him. "It is there," she said.

He had great self-control. Before looking at the page to which she had directed his attention, he turned the letter over slowly, fingering the pages one by one. "My mother to my father," he remarked.

Instinctively he knew what it contained. "You have been reading my mother's correspondence," he added in cold reproof.

"Do you forget that you asked me to arrange her papers?" she retorted, stung by his suggestion.

"Your imagination is vivid," he exclaimed. Then he bethought himself that, after all, he might sorely need all she could give, if things went against him, and that she was the last person he could afford to alienate; "but I do remember that I asked you that," he added—"no doubt foolishly."

"Read what is there," she broke in, "and you will see that it was not foolish, that it was meant to be."

He felt a cold dead hand reaching out from the past to strike him; but he nerved himself, and his eyes searched the paper with assumed coolness—even with her he must still be acting. The first words he saw were: "*Why did you not tell me that my boy, my baby Harry, was not your only child, and that your eldest son was alive?*"

So that was it, after all. Even his mother knew. Master of his nerves as he was, it blinded him for a moment. Presently he read on—the whole page—and lingered upon the words, that he might have time to think what he must say to Hylda. Nothing of the tragedy of his mother touched him, though he was faintly conscious of a revelation of a woman he had never known, whose hungering caresses had made him, as a child, rather peevish, when a fit of affection was not on him. Suddenly, as he read the lines touching himself, "*Brilliant and able and unscrupulous . . . and though he loves me little, as he loves you little too,*" his eye lighted up with anger, his face became pale—yet he had borne the same truths from Faith without resentment, in the wood by the mill that other year. For a moment he stood infuriated, then, going to the fireplace, he dropped the letter on the coals, as Hylda, in horror, started forward to arrest his hand.

"Oh, Eglington—but no—no! It is not honourable. It is proof of all!"

He turned upon her slowly, his face rigid, a strange, cold light in his eyes. "If there is no more proof than that, you need not vex your mind," he said, commanding his voice to evenness.

A bitter anger was on him. His mother had read him

through and through—he had not deceived her even; and she had given evidence against him to Hylda, who, he had ever thought, believed in him completely. Now there was added to the miserable tale, that first marriage, and the rights of David—David, the man who, he was convinced, had captured her imagination. Hurt vanity played a disproportionate part in this crisis.

The effect on him had been different from what Hylda had anticipated. She had pictured him stricken and dumfounded by the blow. It had never occurred to her, it did not now, that he had known the truth; for, of course, to know the truth was to speak, to restore to David his own, to step down into the second and unconsidered place. After all, to her mind, there was no disgrace. The late Earl had married secretly, but he had been duly married, and he did not marry again until Mercy Claridge was dead. The only wrong was to David, whose grandfather had been even more to blame than his own father. She had looked to help Eglington in this moment, and now there seemed nothing for her to do. He was superior to the situation, though it was apparent in his pale face and rigid manner that he had been struck hard.

She came near to him, but there was no encouragement to her to play that part which is a woman's deepest right and joy and pain in one—to comfort her man in trouble, sorrow, or evil. Always, always, he stood alone, whatever the moment might be, leaving her nothing to do—"playing his own game with his own weapons," as he had once put it. Yet there was strength in it too, and this came to her mind now, as though in excuse for whatever else there was in the situation which, against her will, repelled her.

"I am so sorry for you," she said at last.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"To lose all that has been yours so long."

This was their great moment. The response to this must be the touchstone of their lives. A half dozen words might alter all the future, might be the watch-word to the end of all things. Involuntarily her heart fashioned the response he ought to give—"*I shall have you left, Hylda.*"

The air seemed to grow oppressive, and the instant's silence a torture, and, when he spoke, his words struck a chill to her heart—rough notes of pain. "I have not lost yet," were his words.

She shrank. "You will not hide it. You will do right by—by him," she said with difficulty.

"Let him establish his claim to the last item of fact," he said with savage hate.

"Luke Claridge knew. The proofs are but just across the way, no doubt," she answered, almost coldly, so had his words congealed her heart.

Their great moment had passed. It was as though a cord had snapped that held her to him, and in the recoil she had been thrown far off from him. Swift as his mind worked, it had not seen his opportunity to win her to his cause, to asphyxiate her high senses, her quixotic justice, by that old flood of eloquence and compelling persuasion of the emotions with which he had swept her to the altar—an altar of sacrifice. He had not even done what he had left London to do—make sure of her, by an alluring flattery and devotion, no difficult duty with one so beautiful and desirable; though neither love of beauty nor great desire was strong enough in him to divert him from his course for an hour, save by his own initiative. His mother's letter had changed it all. A few hours before he had had a struggle with Soolsby,

and now another struggle on the same theme was here. Fate had dealt illy with him, who had ever been its spoiled child and favourite. He had not learned yet the arts of defence against adversity.

"Luke Claridge is dead," he answered sharply.

"But you will tell—him, you will write to Egypt and tell your brother?" she said, the conviction slowly coming to her that he would not.

"It is not my duty to displace myself, to furnish evidence against myself—"

"You have destroyed the evidence," she intervened, a little scornfully.

"If there were no more than that—" He shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Do you know there is more?" she asked searchingly.

"In whose interests are you speaking?" he rejoined, with a sneer. A sudden fury possessed him. Claridge Pasha—she was thinking of him!

"In yours—your conscience, your honour."

"There is over thirty years' possession on my side," he rejoined.

"It is not as if it were going from your family," she argued.

"Family—what is he to me!"

"What is any one to you?" she returned bitterly.

"I am not going to unravel a mystery in order to facilitate the cutting of my own throat."

"It might be worth while to do something once for another's sake than your own—it would break the monotony," she retorted, all her sense tortured by his words, and even more so by his manner.

Long ago Faith had said in Soolsby's hut that he "blandished" all with whom he came in contact; but Hylda realised with a lacerated heart that he had ceased

to blandish her. Possession had altered that. Yet how had he vowed to her in those sweet tempestuous days of his courtship when the wind of his passion blew so hard! Had one of the vows been kept?

Even as she looked at him now, words she had read some days before flashed through her mind—they had burnt themselves into her brain:

"Broken faith is the crown of evils,
Broken vows are the knotted thongs
Set in the hands of laughing devils,
To scourge us for deep wrongs.

"Broken hearts, when all is ended,
Bear the better all after-stings;
Bruised once, the citadel mended,
Standeth through all things."

Suddenly he turned upon her with aggrieved petulance. "Why are you so eager for proof?"

"Oh, I have," she said, with a sudden flood of tears in her voice, though her eyes were dry—"I have the feeling your mother had, that nothing will be well until you undo the wrong your father did. I know it was not your fault. I feel for you—oh, believe me, I feel as I have never felt, could never feel, for myself. It was brought on you by your father, but you must be the more innocent because he was so guilty. You have had much out of it, it has helped you on your way. It does not mean so much now. By-and-by another—an English—peerage may be yours by your own achievement. Let it go. There is so much left, Harry. It is a small thing in a world of work. It means nothing to me."

Once again, even when she had given up all hope, seeing what was the bent of his mind—once again she

made essay to win him out of his selfishness. If he would only say, "I have you left," how she would strive to shut all else out of her life!

He was exasperated. His usual prescience and prudence forsook him. It angered him that she should press him to an act of sacrifice for the man who had so great an influence upon her. Perversity possessed him. Lifelong egotism was too strong for wisdom, or discretion.

Suddenly he caught her hands in both of his and said hoarsely: "Do you love me—answer me, do you love me with all your heart and soul? The truth now, as though it were your last word on earth."

Always self. She had asked, if not in so many words, for a little love, something for herself to feed on in the darkening days for him, for her, for both; and he was thinking only of himself.

She shrank, but her hands lay passive in his. "No, not with all my heart and soul—but, oh—!"

He flung her hands from him. "No, not with all your heart and soul—I know! You are willing to sacrifice me for him, and you think I do not understand."

She drew herself up, with burning cheeks and flashing eyes. "You understand nothing—nothing. If you had ever understood me, or any human being, or any human heart, you would not have ruined all that might have given you an undying love, something that would have followed you through fire and flood to the grave. You cannot love. You do not understand love. Self—self, always self. Oh, you are mad, mad, to have thrown it all away, all that might have given happiness! All that I have, all that I am, has been at your service; everything has been bent and tuned to your pleasure,

for your good. All has been done for you, with thought of you and your position and your advancement, and now—now, when you have killed all that might have been yours, you cry out in anger that it is dying, and you insinuate what you should kill another for insinuating. Oh, the wicked, cruel folly of it all! You suggest —you dare! I never heard a word from David Claridge that might not be written on the hoardings. His honour is deeper than that which might attach to the title of Earl of Eglington."

She seemed to tower above him. For an instant she looked him in the eyes with frigid dignity, but a great scorn in her face. Then she went to the door—he hastened to open it for her.

"You will be very sorry for this," he said stubbornly. He was too dumfounded to be discreet, too suddenly embarrassed by the turn affairs had taken. He realised too late that he had made a mistake, that he had lost his hold upon her.

As she passed through, there suddenly flashed before her mind the scene in the laboratory with the chair-maker. She felt the meaning of it now.

"You do not intend to tell him—perhaps Soolsby has done so," she said keenly, and moved on to the staircase.

He was thunderstruck at her intuition. "Why do you want to rob yourself?" he asked after her vaguely.

She turned back. "Think of your mother's letter that you destroyed," she rejoined solemnly and quietly. "Was it right?"

He shut the door, and threw himself into a chair. "I will put it straight with her to-morrow," he said helplessly.

He sat for a half-hour silent, planning his course.

At last there came a tap at the door, and the butler appeared.

"Some one from the Foreign Office, my lord," he said.

A moment afterwards a young official, his subordinate, entered. "There's the deuce to pay in Egypt, sir; I've brought the despatch," he said.

BOOK IV

CHAPTER XXVIII

NAHOUM TURNS THE SCREW

LAUGHING to himself, Higli Pasha sat with the stem of a narghileh in his mouth. His big shoulders kept time to the quivering of his fat stomach. He was sitting in a small court-yard of Nahoum Pasha's palace, waiting for its owner to appear. Meanwhile he exercised a hilarious patience. The years had changed him little since he had been sent on that expedition against the southern tribes which followed hard on David's appointment to office. As David had expected, few of the traitorous officers returned. Diaz had ignominiously died of the bite of a tarantula before a blow had been struck, but Higli had gratefully received a slight wound in the first encounter, which enabled him to beat a safe retreat to Cairo. He alone of the chief of the old conspirators was left. Achmet was still at the Place of Lepers, and the old nest of traitors was scattered for ever.

Only Nahoum and Higli were left, and between these two there had never been partnership or understanding. Nahoum was not the man to trust to confederates, and Higli Pasha was too contemptible a coadjutor. Nahoum had faith in no one save Mizraim the Chief Eunuch, but Mizraim alone was better than a thousand; and he was secret—and terrible. Yet Higli had a conviction that Nahoum's alliance with David was a sham, and that David would pay the price of misplaced confidence one

day. More than once when David's plans had had a set-back, Higli had contrived a meeting with Nahoum, to judge for himself the true position.

For his visit to-day he had invented a reason—a matter of finance; but his real reason was concealed behind the malevolent merriment by which he was now seized. So absorbed was he that he did not heed the approach of another visitor down an angle of the court-yard. He was roused by a voice.

"Well, what's tickling you so, pasha?"

The voice was drawling, and quite gentle; but at the sound of it, Higli's laugh stopped short, and the muscles of his face contracted. If there was one man of whom he had a wholesome fear—why, he could not tell—it was this round-faced, abrupt, imperturbable American, Claridge Pasha's right-hand man. Legends of resourcefulness and bravery had gathered round his name.

"Who's been stroking your chin with a feather, pasha?" he continued, his eye piercing the other like a gimlet.

"It was an amusing tale I heard at Assiout, effendi," was Higli's abashed and surly reply.

"Oh, at Assiout!" rejoined Lacey. "Yes, they tell funny stories at Assiout. And when were you at Assiout, pasha?"

"Two days ago, effendi."

"And so you thought you'd tell the funny little story to Nahoum as quick as could be, eh? He likes funny stories, same as you—damn, nice, funny little stories, eh?"

There was something chilly in Lacey's voice now, which Higli did not like; something much too menacing and contemptuous for a mere man-of-all-work to the Inglesi. Higli bridled up, his eyes glared sulkily.

"It is but my own business if I laugh or if I curse, effendi," he replied, his hand shaking a little on the stem of the narghileh.

"Precisely, my diaphanous polyandrist; but it isn't quite your own affair what you laugh at—not if I know it!"

"Does the effendi think I was laughing at him?"

"The effendi thinks not. The effendi knows that the descendant of a hundred tigers was laughing at the funny little story, of how the two cotton-mills that Claridge Pasha built were burned down all in one night, and one of his steamers sent down the cataract at Assouan. A knock-down blow for Claridge Pasha, eh? That's all you thought of, wasn't it? And it doesn't matter to you that the cotton-mills made thousands better off, and started new industries in Egypt. No, it only matters to you that Claridge Pasha loses half his fortune, and that you think his feet are in the quicksands, and 'll be sucked in, to make an Egyptian holiday. Anything to discredit him here, eh? I'm not sure what else you know; but I'll find out, my noble pasha, and if you've had your hand in it—but no, you ain't game-cock enough for that! But if you were, if you had a hand in the making of your funny little story, there's a nutcracker that 'd break the shell of that joke—"

He turned round quickly, seeing a shadow and hearing a movement. Nahoum was but a few feet away. There was a bland smile on his face, a look of innocence in his magnificent blue eye. As he met Lacey's look, the smile left his lips, a grave sympathy appeared to possess them, and he spoke softly:

"I know the thing that burns thy heart, effendi, to whom be the flowers of hope and the fruits of merit.

It is even so, a great blow has fallen. Two hours since I heard. I went at once to see Claridge Pasha, but found him not. Does he know, think you?" he added sadly.

"May your heart never be harder than it is, pasha, and when I left the Saadat an hour ago, he did not know. His messenger hadn't a steamer like Higli Pasha there. But he was coming to see you; and that's why I'm here. I've been brushing the flies off this sore on the hump of Egypt while waiting." He glanced with disdain at Higli.

A smile rose like liquid in the eye of Nahoum and subsided, then he turned to Higli inquiringly.

"I have come on business, Excellency; the railway to Rosetta, and—"

"To-morrow—or the next day," responded Nahoum irritably, and turned again to Lacey.

As Higli's huge frame disappeared through a gateway, Nahoum motioned Lacey to a divan, and summoned a slave for cooling drinks. Lacey's eyes now watched him with an innocence nearly as childlike as his own. Lacey well knew that here was a foe worthy of the best steel. That he was a foe, and a malignant foe, he had no doubt whatever; he had settled the point in his mind long ago; and two letters he had received from Lady Eglington, in which she had said in so many words, "*Watch Nahoum!*" had made him vigilant and intuitive. He knew, meanwhile, that he was following the trail of a master-hunter who covered up his tracks. Lacey was as certain as though he had the book of Nahoum's mind open in his hand, that David's work had been torn down again—and this time with dire effect—by this Armenian, whom David trusted like a brother. But the black doors that closed on the truth on every side only made

him more determined to unlock them; and, when he faltered as to his own powers, he trusted Mahommed Hassan, whose devotion to David had given him eyes that pierced dark places.

"Surely the God of Israel has smitten Claridge Pasha sorely. My heart will mourn to look upon his face. The day is insulting in its brightness," continued Nahoum with a sigh, his eyes bent upon Lacey, dejection in his shoulders.

Lacey started. "*The God of Israel!*" How blasphemous it sounded from the lips of Nahoum, Oriental of Orientals, Christian though he was also!

"I think, perhaps, you'll get over it, pasha. Man is born to trouble, and you've got a lot of courage. I guess you could see other people bear a pile of suffering, and never flinch."

Nahoum appeared not to notice the gibe. "It is a land of suffering, effendi," he sighed, "and one sees what one sees."

"Have you any idea, any real sensible idea, how those cotton-mills got afire?" Lacey's eyes were fixed on Nahoum's face.

The other met his gaze calmly. "Who can tell! An accident, perhaps, or—"

"Or some one set the mills on fire in several places at once—they say the buildings flamed out in every corner; and it was the only time in a month they hadn't been running night and day. Funny, isn't it?"

"It looks like the work of an enemy, effendi." Nahoum shook his head gravely. "A fortune destroyed in an hour, as it were. But we shall get the dog. We shall find him. There is no hole deep enough to hide him from us."

"Well, I wouldn't go looking in holes for him, pasha.

He isn't any cave-dweller, that incendiary; he's an artist—no palace is too unlikely for him. No, I wouldn't go poking in mud-huts to find him."

"Thou dost not think that Higli Pasha—" Nahoum seemed startled out of equanimity by the thought.

Lacey eyed him meditatively, and said reflectively: "Say, you're an artist, pasha. You are a guesser of the first rank. But I'd guess again. Higli Pasha would have done it, if it had ever occurred to him; and he'd had the pluck. But it didn't, and he hadn't. What I can't understand is that the artist that did it should have done it before Claridge Pasha left for the Soudan. Here we were just about to start; and if we'd got away south, the job would have done more harm, and the Saadat would have been out of the way. No, I can't understand why the firebug didn't let us get clean away; for if the Saadat stays here, he'll be where he can stop the underground mining."

Nahoum's self-control did not desert him, though he fully realised that this man suspected him. On the surface Lacey was right. It would have seemed better to let David go, and destroy his work afterwards, but he had been moved by other considerations, and his design was deep. His own emissaries were in the Soudan, announcing David's determination to abolish slavery, secretly stirring up feeling against him, preparing for the final blow to be delivered, when he went again among the southern tribes. He had waited and waited, and now the time was come. Had he, Nahoum, not agreed with David that the time had come for the slave-trade to go? Had he not encouraged him to take this bold step, in the sure belief that it would overwhelm him, and bring him an ignominious death, embittered by total failure of all he had tried to do?

For years he had secretly loosened the foundations of David's work, and the triumph of Oriental duplicity over Western civilisation and integrity was sweet in his mouth. And now there was reason to believe that, at last, Kaïd was turning against the Inglesi. Everything would come at once. If all that he had planned was successful, even this man before him should aid in his master's destruction.

"If it was all done by an enemy," he said, in answer to Lacey, at last, "would it all be reasoned out like that? Is hatred so logical? Dost thou think Claridge Pasha will not go now? The troops are ready at Wady-Halfa, everything is in order; the last load of equipment has gone. Will not Claridge Pasha find the money somehow? I will do what I can. My heart is moved to aid him."

"Yes, you'd do what you could, pasha," Lacey rejoined enigmatically, "but whether it would set the Saadat on his expedition or not is a question. But I guess, after all, he's got to go. He willed it so. People may try to stop him, and they may tear down what he does, but he does at last what he starts to do, and no one can prevent him—not any one. Yes, he's going on this expedition; and he'll have the money, too." There was a strange, abstracted look in his face, as though he saw something which held him fascinated.

Presently, as if with an effort, he rose to his feet, took the red fez from his head, and fanned himself with it for a moment. "Don't you forget it, pasha; the Saadat will win. He can't be beaten, not in a thousand years. Here he comes."

Nahoum got to his feet, as David came quickly through the small gateway of the court-yard, his head erect, his lips smiling, his eyes sweeping the place. He

came forward briskly to them. It was plain he had not heard the evil news.

"Peace be to thee, Saadat, and may thy life be fenced about with safety!" said Nahoum.

David laid a hand on Lacey's arm and squeezed it, smiling at him with such friendship that Lacey's eyes moistened, and he turned his head away.

There was a quiet elation in David's look. "We are ready at last," he said, looking from one to the other. "Well, well," he added, almost boyishly, "has thee nothing to say, Nahoum?"

Nahoum turned his head away as though overcome. David's face grew instantly grave. He turned to Lacey. Never before had he seen Lacey's face with a look like this. He grasped Lacey's arm. "What is it?" he asked quietly. "What does thee want to say to me?"

But Lacey could not speak, and David turned again to Nahoum. "What is there to say to me?" he asked. "Something has happened—what is it? . . . Come, many things have happened before. This can be no worse. Do thee speak," he urged gently.

"Saadat," said Nahoum, as though under the stress of feeling, "the cotton-mills at Tashah and Mini are gone —burned to the ground."

For a moment David looked at him without sight in his eyes, and his face grew very pale. "Excellency, all in one night, the besom of destruction was abroad," he heard Nahoum say, as though from great depths below him. He slowly turned his head to look at Lacey. "Is this true?" he asked at last in an unsteady voice. Lacey could not speak, but inclined his head.

David's figure seemed to shrink for a moment, his face had a withered look, and his head fell forward in a mood of terrible dejection.

"Saadat! Oh, my God, Saadat, don't take it so!" said Lacey brokenly, and stepped between David and Nahoum. He could not bear that the stricken face and figure should be seen by Nahoum, whom he believed to be secretly gloating. "Saadat," he said brokenly, "God has always been with you; He hasn't forgotten you now."

"The work of years," David murmured, and seemed not to hear.

"When God permits, shall man despair?" interposed Nahoum, in a voice that lingered on the words.

Nahoum accomplished what Lacey had failed to do. His voice had pierced to some remote corner in David's nature, and roused him. Was it that doubt, suspicion, had been wakened at last? Was some sensitive nerve touched, that this Oriental should offer Christian comfort to him in his need—to him who had seen the greater light? Or was it that some unreality in the words struck a note which excited a new and subconscious understanding? Perhaps it was a little of all three. He did not stop to inquire. In crises such as that through which he was passing, the mind and body act without reason, rather by the primal instinct, the certain call of the things that were before reason was.

"God is with the patient," continued Nahoum; and Lacey set his teeth to bear this insult to all things.

But Nahoum accomplished what he had not anticipated. David straightened himself up, and clasped his hands behind him. By a supreme effort of the will he controlled himself, and the colour came back faintly to his face. "God's will be done," he said, and looked Nahoum calmly in the eyes. "It was no accident," he added with conviction. "It was an enemy of Egypt."

Suddenly the thing rushed over him again, going

through his veins like a poisonous ether, and clamping his heart as with iron. "All to do over again!" he said brokenly, and again he caught Lacey's arm.

With an uncontrollable impulse Lacey took David's hand in his own warm, human grasp.

"Once I thought I lost everything in Mexico, Saadat, and I understand what you feel. But all wasn't lost in Mexico, as I found at last, and I got something, too, that I didn't put in. Say, let us go from here. God is backing you, Saadat. Isn't it all right—same as ever?"

David was himself again. "Thee is a good man," he said, and through the sadness of his eyes there stole a smile. "Let us go," he said. Then he added in a businesslike way: "To-morrow at seven, Nahoum. There is much to do."

He turned towards the gate with Lacey, where the horses waited. Mahommed Hassan met them as they prepared to mount. He handed David a letter. It was from Faith, and contained the news of Luke Claridge's death. Everything had come at once. He stumbled into the saddle with a moan.

"At last I have drawn blood," said Nahoum to himself with grim satisfaction, as they disappeared. "It is the beginning of the end. It will crush him—I saw it in his eyes. God of Israel, I shall rule again in Egypt!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE RECOIL

It was a great day in the Muslim year. The Mahmal, or Sacred Carpet, was leaving Cairo on its long pilgrimage of thirty-seven days to Mecca and Mahomet's tomb. Great guns boomed from the Citadel, as the gorgeous procession, forming itself beneath the Mokattam Hills, began its slow march to where, seated in the shade of an ornate pavilion, Prince Kaïd awaited its approach to pay devout homage. Thousands looked down at the scene from the ramparts of the Citadel, from the overhanging cliffs, and from the tops of the houses that hung on the ledges of rock rising abruptly from the level ground, to which the last of the famed Mamelukes leaped to their destruction.

Now to Prince Kaïd's ears there came from hundreds of hoarse throats the cry: "*Allah! Allah! May thy journey be with safety to Arafat!*" mingling with the harsh music of the fifes and drums.

Kaïd looked upon the scene with drawn face and lowering brows. His retinue watched him with alarm. A whisper had passed that, two nights before, the Effendina had sent in haste for a famous Italian physician lately come to Cairo, and that since his visit Kaïd had been sullen and depressed. It was also the gossip of the bazaars that he had suddenly shown favour to those of the Royal House and to other reactionaries, who had been enemies to the influence of Claridge Pasha.

This rumour had been followed by an official proclamation that no Europeans or Christians would be admitted to the ceremony of the Sacred Carpet.

Thus it was that Kaïd looked out on a vast multitude of Muslims, in which not one European face showed, and from lip to lip there passed the word, "Harrik—Harrik—remember Harrik! Kaïd turns from the infidel!"

They crowded near the great pavilion—as near as the mounted Nubians would permit—to see Kaïd's face; while he, with eyes wandering over the vast assemblage, was lost in dark reflections. For a year he had struggled against a growing conviction that some obscure disease was sapping his strength. He had hid it from every one, until, at last, distress and pain had overcome him. The verdict of the Italian expert was that possible, but by no means certain, cure might come from an operation which must be delayed for a month or more.

Suddenly, the world had grown unfamiliar to him; he saw it from afar; but his subconscious self involuntarily registered impressions, and he moved mechanically through the ceremonies and duties of the immediate present. Thrown back upon himself, to fight his own fight, with the instinct of primary life his mind involuntarily drew for refuge to the habits and predispositions of youth; and for two days he had shut himself away from the activities with which David and Nahoum were associated. Being deeply engaged with the details of the expedition to the Soudan, David had not gone to the Palace; and he was unaware of the turn which things had taken.

Three times, with slow and stately steps, the procession wound in a circle in the great square, before it

approached the pavilion where the Effendina sat, the splendid camels carrying the embroidered tent wherein the Carpet rested, and that which bore the Emir of the pilgrims, moving gracefully like ships at sea. Naked swordsmen, with upright and shining blades, were followed by men on camels bearing kettle-drums. After them came Arab riders with fresh green branches fastened to the saddles like plumes, while others carried flags and banners emblazoned with texts and symbols. Troops of horsemen in white woollen cloaks, sheikhs and Bedouins with flowing robes and huge turbans, religious chiefs of the great sects, imperturbable and statuesque, were in strange contrast to the shouting dervishes and camel-drivers and eager pilgrims.

At last the great camel with its sacred burden stopped in front of Kaïd for his prayer and blessing. As he held the tassels, lifted the gold-fringed curtain, and invoked Allah's blessing, a half-naked sheikh ran forward, and, raising his hand high above his head, cried shrilly: "Kaïd, Kaïd, hearken!"

Rough hands caught him away, but Kaïd commanded them to desist; and the man called a blessing on him, and cried aloud:

"Listen, O Kaïd, son of the stars and the light of day. God hath exalted thee. Thou art the Egyptian of all the Egyptians. In thy hand is power. But thou art mortal even as I. Behold, O Kaïd, in the hour that I was born thou wast born, I in the dust without thy Palace wall, thou amid the splendid things. But thy star is my star. Behold, as God ordains, the Tree of Life was shaken on the night when all men pray and cry aloud to God—even the Night of the Falling Leaves. And I watched the falling leaves; and I saw my leaf, and it was withered, but only a little withered, and so I live

yet a little. But I looked for thy leaf, thou who wert born in that moment when I waked to the world. I looked long, but I found no leaf, neither green nor withered. But I looked again upon my leaf, and then I saw that thy name now was also upon my leaf, and that it was neither green nor withered; but was a leaf that drooped as when an evil wind has passed and drunk its life. Listen, O Kaïd! Upon the tomb of Mahomet I will set my lips, and it may be that the leaf of my life will come fresh and green again. But thou—wilt thou not come also to the lord Mahomet's tomb? Or"—he paused and raised his voice—"or wilt thou stay and lay thy lips upon the cross of the infidel? Wilt thou—"

He could say no more, for Kaïd's face now darkened with anger. He made a gesture, and, in an instant, the man was gagged and bound, while a sullen silence fell upon the crowd. Kaïd suddenly became aware of this change of feeling, and looked round him. Presently his old prudence and subtlety came back, his face cleared a little, and he called aloud, "Unloose the man, and let him come to me." An instant after, the man was on his knees, silent before him.

"What is thy name?" Kaïd asked.

"Kaïd Ibrahim, Effendina," was the reply.

"Thou hast misinterpreted thy dream, Kaïd Ibrahim," answered the Effendina. "The drooping leaf was token of the danger in which thy life should be, and my name upon thy leaf was token that I should save thee from death. Behold, I save thee. Inshallah, go in peace! There is no God but God, and the Cross is the sign of a false prophet. Thou art mad. God give thee a new mind. Go."

The man was presently lost in the sweltering, half-

frenzied crowd; but he had done his work, and his words rang in the ears of Kaïd as he rode away.

A few hours afterwards, bitter and rebellious, murmuring to himself, Kaïd sat in a darkened room of his Nile Palace beyond the city. So few years on the throne, so young, so much on which to lay the hand of pleasure, so many millions to command; and yet the slave at his door had a surer hold on life and all its joys and lures than he, Prince Kaïd, ruler of Egypt! There was on him that barbaric despair which has taken dreadful toll of life for the decree of destiny. Across the record of this day, as across the history of many an Eastern and pagan tyrant, was written: "He would not die alone." That the world should go on when he was gone, that men should buy and sell and laugh and drink, and flaunt it in the sun, while he, Prince Kaïd, would be done with it all—

He was roused by the rustling of a robe. Before him stood the Arab physician, Sharif Bey, who had been in his father's house and his own for a lifetime. It was many a year since his ministrations to Kaïd had ceased; but he had remained on in the Palace, doing service to those who received him, and—it was said by the evil-tongued—granting certificates of death out of harmony with dark facts, a sinister and useful figure. His beard was white, his face was friendly, almost benevolent, but his eyes had a light caught from no celestial flame.

His look was confident now, as his eyes bent on Kaïd. He had lived long, he had seen much, he had heard of the peril that had been foreshadowed by the infidel physician; and, by a sure instinct, he knew that his own opportunity had come. He knew that Kaïd would snatch at any offered comfort, would cherish any al-

leviating lie, would steal back from science and civilisation and the modern palace to the superstition of the fellah's hut. Were not all men alike when the neboot of Fate struck them down into the terrible loneliness of doom, numbing their minds? Luck would be with him that offered first succour in that dark hour. Sharif had come at the right moment for Sharif.

Kaïd looked at him with dull yet anxious eyes. "Did I not command that none should enter?" he asked presently in a thick voice.

"Am I not thy physician, Effendina, to whom be the undying years? When the Effendina is sick, shall I not heal? Have I not waited like a dog at thy door these many years, till that time would come when none could heal thee save Sharif?"

"What canst thou give me?"

"What the infidel physician gave thee not—I can give thee hope. Hast thou done well, oh, Effendina, to turn from thine own people? Did not thine own father, and did not Mehemet Ali, live to a good age? Who were their physicians? My father and I, and my father's father, and his father's father."

"Thou canst cure me altogether?" asked Kaïd hesitatingly.

"Wilt thou not have faith in one of thine own race? Will the infidel love thee as do we, who are thy children and thy brothers, who are to thee as a nail driven in the wall, not to be moved? Thou shalt live—Inshallah, thou shalt have healing and length of days!"

He paused at a gesture from Kaïd, for a slave had entered and stood waiting.

"What dost thou here? Wert thou not commanded?" asked Kaïd.

"Effendina, Claridge Pasha is waiting," was the reply.

Kaïd frowned, hesitated; then, with a sudden resolve, made a gesture of dismissal to Sharif Bey, and nodded David's admittance to the slave.

As David entered, he passed Sharif Bey, and something in the look on the Arab physician's face—a secret malignancy and triumph—struck him strangely. And now a fresh anxiety and apprehension rose in his mind as he glanced at Kaïd. The eye was heavy and gloomy, the face was clouded, the lips once so ready to smile at him were sullen and smileless now. David stood still, waiting.

"I did not expect thee till to-morrow, Saadat," said Kaïd moodily at last. "The business is urgent?"

"Effendina," said David, with every nerve at tension, yet with outward self-control, "I have to report—" He paused, agitated; then, in a firm voice, he told of the disaster which had befallen the cotton-mills and the steamer.

As David spoke, Kaïd's face grew darker, his fingers fumbled vaguely with the linen of the loose white robe he wore. When the tale was finished he sat for a moment apparently stunned by the news, then he burst out fiercely:

"Bismillah, am I to hear only black words to-day? Hast thou naught to say but this—the fortune of Egypt burned to ashes!"

David held back the quick retort that came to his tongue.

"Half my fortune is in the ashes," he answered with dignity. "The rest came from savings never made before by this Government. Is the work less worthy in thy sight, Effendina, because it has been destroyed? Would thy life be less great and useful because a blow took thee from behind?"

Kaïd's face turned black. David had bruised an open wound.

"What is my life to thee—what is thy work to me?"

"Thy life is dear to Egypt, Effendina," urged David soothingly, "and my labour for Egypt has been pleasant in thine eyes till now."

"Egypt cannot be saved against her will," was the moody response. "What has come of the Western hand upon the Eastern plough?" His face grew blacker; his heart was feeding on itself.

"*Thou*, the friend of Egypt, hast come of it, Effendina."

"Harrik was right, Harrik was right," Kaïd answered, with stubborn gloom and anger. "Better to die in our own way, if we must die, than live in the way of another. Thou wouldst make of Egypt another England; thou wouldst civilise the Soudan—bismillah, it is folly!"

"That is not the way Mehemet Ali thought, nor Ibrahim. Nor dost thou think so, Effendina," David answered gravely. "A dark spirit is on thee. Wouldst thou have me understand that what we have done together, thou and I, was ill done, that the old bad days were better?"

"Go back to thine own land," was the surly answer. "Nation after nation ravaged Egypt, sowed their legions here, but the Egyptian has lived them down. The faces of the fellaheen are the faces of Thotmes and Seti. Go back. Egypt will travel her own path. We are of the East; we are Muslim. What is right to you is wrong to us. Ye would make us over—give us cotton beds and wooden floors and fine flour of the mill, and cleanse the cholera-hut with disinfectants, but are these things all? How many of your civilised millions would

die for their prophet Christ? Yet all Egypt would rise up from the mud-floor, the dourha-field and the mud-hut, and would come out to die for Mahomet and Allah —ay, as Harrik knew, as Harrik knew! Ye steal into corners, and hide behind the curtains of your beds to pray; we pray where the hour of prayer finds us—in the street, in the market-place, where the house is building, the horse being shod, or the money-changers are. Ye hear the call of civilisation, but we hear the Muezzin—"

He stopped, and searched mechanically for his watch.

"It is the hour the Muezzin calls," said David gently. "It is almost sunset. Shall I open the windows that the call may come to us?" he added.

While Kaïd stared at him, his breast heaving with passion, David went to a window and opened the shutters wide.

The Palace faced the Nile, which showed like a tortuous band of blue and silver a mile or so away. Nothing lay between but the brown sand, and here and there a handful of dark figures gliding towards the river, or a little train of camels making for the bare grey hills from the ghiassas which had given them their desert loads. The course of the Nile was marked by a wide fringe of palms showing blue and purple, friendly and ancient and solitary. Beyond the river and the palms lay the grey-brown desert, faintly touched with red. So clear was the sweet evening air that the irregular surface of the desert showed for a score of miles as plainly as though it were but a step away. Hummocks of sand—tombs and fallen monuments—gave a feeling as of forgotten and buried peoples; and the two vast pyramids of Sakkarah stood up in the plaintive glow of the evening skies, majestic and solemn, faithful to the dissolved and

absorbed races who had built them. Curtains of mauve and saffron-red were hung behind them, and through a break of cloud fringing the horizon a yellow glow poured, to touch the tips of the pyramids with poignant splendour. But farther over to the right, where Cairo lay, there hung a bluish mist, palpable and delicate, out of which emerged the vast pyramids of Cheops; and beside it the smiling inscrutable Sphinx faced the changeless centuries. Beyond the pyramids the mist deepened into a vast deep cloud of blue and purple, which seemed the end to some mystic highway untravelled by the sons of men.

Suddenly there swept over David a wave of feeling such as had passed over Kaïd, though of a different nature. Those who had built the pyramids were gone, Cheops and Thotmes and Amenhotep and Chefron and the rest. There had been reformers in those lost races; one age had sought to better the last, one man had toiled to save—yet there only remained offensive bundles of mummied flesh and bone and a handful of relics in tombs fifty centuries old. Was it all, then, futile? Did it matter, then, whether one man laboured or a race aspired?

Only for a moment these thoughts passed through his mind; and then, as the glow through the broken cloud on the opposite horizon suddenly faded, and veils of melancholy fell over the desert and the river and the palms, there rose a call, sweetly shrill, undoubtingly insistent. Sunset had come, and, with it, the Muezzin's call to prayer from the minaret of a mosque hard by.

David was conscious of a movement behind him—that Kaïd was praying with hands uplifted; and out on the sands between the window and the river he saw kneeling figures here and there, saw the camel-drivers

halt their trains, and face the East with hands uplifted. The call went on—"*Lá iláha illa-lláh!*"

It called David, too. The force and searching energy and fire in it stole through his veins, and drove from him the sense of futility and despondency which had so deeply added to his trouble. There was something for him, too, in that which held infatuated the minds of so many millions.

A moment later Kaïd and he faced each other again.

"Effendina," he said, "thou wilt not desert our work now?"

"Money—for this expedition? Thou hast it?" Kaïd asked ironically.

"I have but little money, and it must go to rebuild the mills, Effendina. I must have it of thee."

"Let them remain in their ashes."

"But thousands will have no work."

"They had work before they were built, they will have work now they are gone."

"Effendina, I stayed in Egypt at thy request. The work is thy work. Wilt thou desert it?"

"The West lured me—by things that seemed. Now I know things as they are."

"They will lure thee again to-morrow," said David firmly, but with a weight on his spirit. His eyes sought and held Kaïd's. "It is too late to go back; we must go forward or we shall lose the Soudan, and a Mahdi and his men will be in Cairo in ten years."

For an instant Kaïd was startled. The old look of energy and purpose leaped up into his eye; but it faded quickly again. If, as the Italian physician more than hinted, his life hung by a thread, did it matter whether the barbarian came to Cairo? That was the business of those who came after. If Sharif was right, and his

life was saved, there would be time enough to set things right.

"I will not pour water on the sands to make an ocean," he answered. "Will a ship sail on the Sahara? Bismillah, it is all a dream! Harrik was right. But dost thou think to do with me as thou didst with Harrik?" he sneered. "Is it in thy mind?"

David's patience broke down under the long provocation. "Know then, Effendina," he said angrily, "that I am not thy subject, nor one beholden to thee, nor thy slave. Upon terms well understood, I have laboured here. I have kept my obligations, and it is thy duty to keep thy obligations, though the hand of death were on thee. I know not what has poisoned thy mind, and driven thee from reason and from justice. I know that, Prince Pasha of Egypt as thou art, thou art as bound to me as any fellah that agrees to tend my door or row my boat. Thy compact with me is a compact with England, and it shall be kept, if thou art an honest man. Thou mayst find thousands in Egypt who will serve thee at any price, and bear thee in any mood. I have but one price. It is well known to thee. I will not be the target for thy black temper. This is not the middle ages; I am an Englishman, not a helot. The bond must be kept; thou shalt not play fast and loose. Money must be found; the expedition must go. But if thy purpose is now Harrik's purpose, then Europe should know, and Egypt also should know. I have been thy right hand, Effendina; I will not be thy old shoe, to be cast aside at thy will."

In all the days of his life David had never flamed out as he did now. Passionate as his words were, his manner was strangely quiet, but his white and glistening face and his burning eyes showed how deep was his anger.

As he spoke, Kaïd sank upon the divan. Never had he been challenged so. With his own people he had ever been used to cringing and abasement, and he had played the tyrant, and struck hard and cruelly, and he had been feared; but here, behind David's courteous attitude, there was a scathing arraignment of his conduct which took no count of consequence. In other circumstances his vanity would have shrunk under this whip of words, but his native reason and his quick humour would have justified David. In this black distemper possessing him, however, only outraged egotism prevailed. His hands clenched and unclenched, his lips were drawn back on his teeth in rage.

When David had finished, Kaïd suddenly got to his feet and took a step forward with a malediction, but a faintness seized him and he staggered back. When he raised his head again David was gone.

CHAPTER XXX

LACEY MOVES

If there was one glistening bead of sweat on the bald pate of Lacey of Chicago there were a thousand; and the smile on his face was not less shining and unlimited. He burst into the rooms of the palace where David had residence, calling: "*Oyez! Oyez!* Saadat! Oh, Pasha of the Thousand Tails! *Oyez! Oyez!*"

Getting no answer, he began to perform a dance round the room, which in modern days is known as the negro cake-walk. It was not dignified, but it would have been less dignified still performed by any other living man of forty-five with a bald head and a waist-band ten inches too large. Round the room three times he went, and then he dropped on a divan. He gasped, and mopped his face and forehead, leaving a little island of moisture on the top of his head untouched. After a moment, he gained breath and settled down a little. Then he burst out:

"Are you coming to my party, O effendi?
There'll be high jinks, there'll be welcome, there'll be room;
For to-morrow we are pulling stakes for Shendy.
Are you coming to my party, O Nahoum?"

"Say, I guess that's pretty good on the spur of the moment," he wheezed, and, taking his inseparable note-book from his pocket, wrote the impromptu down. "I

guess She'll like that—it rings spontaneous. She'll be tickled, tickled to death, when she knows what's behind it." He repeated it with gusto. "She'll dote on it," he added—the person to whom he referred being the sister of the American Consul, the little widow, "cute as she can be," of whom he had written to Hylda in the letter which had brought a crisis in her life. As he returned the note-book to his pocket a door opened. Mahommed Hassan slid forward into the room, and stood still, impassive and gloomy. Lacey beckoned, and said grotesquely:

> "'Come hither, come hither, my little daughter,
> And do not tremble so!'"

A sort of scornful patience was in Mahommed's look, but he came nearer and waited.

"Squat on the ground, and smile a smile of mirth, Mahommed," Lacey said riotously. "'For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to be Queen o' the May!'"

Mahommed's face grew resentful. "O effendi, shall the camel-driver laugh when the camels are lost in the khamsin and the water-bottle is empty?"

"Certainly not, O son of the spreading palm; but this is not a desert, nor a gaudy caravan. This is a feast of all angels. This is the day when Nahoum the Nefarious is to be buckled up like a belt, and ridden in a ring. Where is the Saadat?"

"He is gone, effendi! Like a mist on the face of the running water, so was his face; like eyes that did not see, so was his look. 'Peace be to thee, Mahommed, thou art faithful as Zaida,' he said, and he mounted and rode into the desert. I ran after till he was come to the edge of the desert; but he sent me back, saying that I

must wait for thee; and this word I was to say, that Prince Kaïd had turned his face darkly from him, and that the finger of Sharif—"

"That fanatical old quack—Harrik's friend!"

"—that the finger of Sharif was on his pulse; but the end of all was in the hands of God."

"Oh yes, exactly, the finger of Sharif on his pulse! The old story—the return to the mother's milk, throwing back to all the Pharaohs. Well, what then?" he added cheerfully, his smile breaking out again. "Where has he gone, our Saadat?"

"To Ebn Ezra Bey at the Coptic Monastery by the Etl Tree, where your prophet Christ slept when a child."

Lacey hummed to himself meditatively. "A sort of last powwow—Rome before the fall. Everything wrong, eh? Kaïd turned fanatic, Nahoum on the tiles watching for the Saadat to fall, things trembling for want of hard cash. That's it, isn't it, Mahommed?"

Mahommed nodded, but his look was now alert, and less sombre. He had caught at something vital and confident in Lacey's tone. He drew nearer, and listened closely.

"Well, now, my gentle gazelle, listen unto me," continued Lacey. He suddenly leaned forward, and spoke in subdued but rapid tones. "Say, Mahommed, once upon a time there was an American man, with a shock of red hair, and a nature like a spring-lock. He went down to Mexico, with a million or two of his own money got honestly by an undisputed will from an undisputed father—you don't understand that, but it doesn't matter—and with a few millions of other people's money, for to gamble in mines and railways and banks and steamship companies—all to do with Mexico what the

Saadat has tried to do in Egypt with less money; but not for the love of Allah, same as him. This American was going to conquer like Cortez, but his name was Thomas Tilman Lacey, and he had a lot of gall. After years of earnest effort, he lost his hair and the millions of the Infatuated Conquistadores. And by-and-by he came to Cairo with a thimbleful of income, and began to live again. There was a civil war going on in his own country, but he thought that one out of forty millions would not be strictly missed. So he stayed in Egypt; and the tale of his days in Egypt, is it not written with a neboot of domwood in the book of Mahommed Hassan the scribe?"

He paused and beamed upon the watchful Mahommed, who, if he did not understand all that had been said, was in no difficulty as to the drift and meaning of the story.

"Aiwa, effendi," he urged impatiently. "It is a long ride to the Etl Tree, and the day is far spent."

"Inshallah, you shall hear, my turtle-dove! One day there came to Cairo, in great haste, a man from Mexico, looking for the foolish one called T. T. Lacey, bearing glad news. And the man from Mexico blew his trumpet, and straightway T. T. Lacey fell down dismayed. The trumpet said that a million once lost in Mexico was returned, with a small flock of other millions; for a mine, in which it was sunk, had burst forth with a stony stream of silver. And behold! Thomas Tilman Lacey, the depised waster of his patrimony and of other people's treasure, is now, O son of the fig-flower, richer than Kaïd Pasha and all his eunuchs."

Suddenly Mahommed Hassan leaned forward, then backward, and, after the fashion of desert folk, gave a shrill, sweet ululation that seemed to fill the palace.

"Say, that's A1," Lacey said, when Mahommed's voice sank to a whisper of wild harmony. "Yes, you can lick my boots, my noble sheikh of Manfaloot," he added, as Mahommed caught his feet and bent his head upon them. "I wanted to do something like that myself. Kiss 'em, honey; it'll do you good."

After a moment, Mahommed drew back and squatted before him in an attitude of peace and satisfaction. "The Saadat—you will help him? You will give him money?"

"Let's put it in this way, Mahommed: I'll invest in an expedition out of which I expect to get something worth while—concessions for mines and railways, et cetera." He winked a round, blue eye. "Business is business, and the way to get at the Saadat is to talk business; but you can make up your mind that,

> "'To-morrow we are pulling stakes for Shendy!
> Are you coming to my party, O Nahoum?'"

"By the prophet Abraham, but the news is great news," said Mahommed with a grin. "But the Effendina?"

"Well, I'll try and square the Effendina," answered Lacey. "Perhaps the days of backsheesh aren't done in Egypt, after all."

"And Nahoum Pasha?" asked Mahommed, with a sinister look.

"Well, we'll try and square him, too, but in another way."

"The money, it is in Egypt?" queried Mahommed, whose idea was that money to be real must be seen.

"Something that's as handy and as marketable," answered Lacey. "I can raise half a million to-morrow;

and that will do a lot of what we want. How long will it take to ride to the monastery?"

Mahommed told him.

Lacey was about to leave the room, when he heard a voice outside. "Nahoum!" he said, and sat down again on the divan. "He has come to see the Saadat, I suppose; but it'll do him good to see me, perhaps. Open the sluices, Mahommed."

Yes, Nahoum would be glad to see the effendi, since Claridge Pasha was not in Cairo. When would Claridge Pasha return? If, then, the effendi expected to see the Saadat before his return to Cairo, perhaps he would convey a message. He could not urge his presence on the Saadat, since he had not been honoured with any communication since yesterday.

"Well, that's good-mannered, anyhow, pasha," said Lacey with cheerful nonchalance. "People don't always know when they're wanted or not wanted."

Nahoum looked at him guardedly, sighed and sat down. "Things have grown worse since yesterday," he said. "Prince Kaïd received the news badly." He shook his head. "He has not the gift of perfect friendship. That is a Christian characteristic; the Muslim does not possess it. It was too strong to last, maybe—my poor beloved friend, the Saadat."

"Oh, it will last all right," rejoined Lacey coolly. "Prince Kaïd has got a touch of jaundice, I guess. He knows a thing when he finds it, even if he hasn't the gift of 'perfect friendship,' same as Christians like you and me. But even you and me don't push our perfections too far—I haven't noticed you going out of your way to do things for your 'poor beloved friend, the Saadat'."

"I have given him time, energy, experience—money."

Lacey nodded. "True. And I've often wondered why, when I've seen the things you didn't give and the things you took away."

Nahoum's eyes half closed. Lacey was getting to close quarters with suspicion and allusion; but it was not his cue to resent them yet.

"I had come now to offer him help; to advance him enough to carry through his expedition."

"Well, that sounds generous, but I guess he would get on without it, pasha. He would not want to be under any more obligations to you."

"He is without money. He must be helped."

"Just so."

"He cannot go to the treasury, and Prince Kaïd has refused. Why should he decline help from his friend?"

Suddenly Lacey changed his tactics. He had caught a look in Nahoum's eyes which gave him a new thought.

"Well, if you've any proposition, pasha, I'll take it to him. I'll be seeing him to-night."

"I can give him fifty thousand pounds."

"It isn't enough to save the situation, pasha."

"It will help him over the first zareba."

"Are there any conditions?"

"There are no conditions, effendi."

"And interest?"

"There would be no interest in money."

"Other considerations?"

"Yes, other considerations, effendi."

"If they were granted, would there be enough still in the stocking to help him over a second zareba—or a third, perhaps?"

"That would be possible, even likely, I think. Of course we speak in confidence, effendi."

"The confidence of the 'perfect friendship.'"

"There may be difficulty, because the Saadat is sensitive; but it is the only way to help him. I can get the money from but one source; and to get it involves an agreement."

"You think his Excellency would not just jump at it —that it might hurt some of his prejudices, eh?"

"So, effendi."

"And me—where am I in it, pasha?"

"Thou hast great influence with his Excellency."

"I am his servant—I don't meddle with his prejudices, pasha."

"But if it were for his own good, to save his work here."

Lacey yawned almost ostentatiously. "I guess if he can't save it himself it can't be saved, not even when you reach out the hand of perfect friendship. You've been reaching out for a long time, pasha, and it didn't save the steamer or the cotton-mills; and it didn't save us when we were down by Sobât a while ago, and you sent Halim Bey to teach us to be patient. We got out of that nasty corner by sleight of hand, but not your sleight of hand, pasha. Your hand is a quick hand, but a sharp eye can see the trick, and then it's no good, not worth a button."

There was something savage behind Nahoum's eyes, but they did not show it; they blinked with earnest kindness and interest. The time would come when Lacey would go as his master should go, and the occasion was not far off now; but it must not be forced. Besides, was this fat, amorous-looking factotum of Claridge Pasha's as Spartan-minded as his master? Would he be superior to the lure of gold? He would see. He spoke seriously, with apparent solicitude.

"Thou dost not understand, effendi. Claridge Pasha

must have money. Prestige is everything in Egypt, it is everything with Kaïd. If Claridge Pasha rides on as though nothing has happened—and money is the only horse that can carry him—Kaïd will not interfere, and his black mood may pass; but any halting now and the game is done."

"And you want the game to go on right bad, don't you? Well, I guess you're right. Money is the only winner in this race. He's got to have money, sure. How much can you raise? Oh, yes, you told me! Well, I don't think it's enough; he's got to have three times that; and if he can't get it from the Government, or from Kaïd, it's a bad lookout. What's the bargain you have in your mind?"

"That the slave-trade continue, effendi."

Lacey did not wink, but he had a shock of surprise. On the instant he saw the trap—for the Saadat and for himself.

"He would not do it—not for money, pasha."

"He would not be doing it for money. The time is not ripe for it, it is too dangerous. There is a time for all things. If he will but wait!"

"I wouldn't like to be the man that 'd name the thing to him. As you say, he's got his prejudices. They're stronger than in most men."

"It need not be named to him. Thou canst accept the money for him, and when thou art in the Soudan, and he is going to do it, thou canst prevent it."

"Tell him that I've taken the money and that he's used it, and he oughtn't to go back on the bargain I made for him? So that he'll be bound by what I did?"

"It is the best way, effendi."

"He'd be annoyed," said Lacey with a patient sigh.

"He has a great soul; but sometimes he forgets that expediency is the true policy."

"Yet he's done a lot of things without it. He's never failed in what he set out to do. What he's done has been kicked over, but he's done it all right, somehow, at last."

"He will not be able to do this, effendi, except with my help—and thine."

"He's had quite a lot of things almost finished, too," said Lacey reflectively, "and then a hand reached out in the dark and cut the wires—cut them when he was sleeping, and he didn't know; cut them when he was waking, and he wouldn't understand; cut them under his own eyes, and he wouldn't see; because the hand that cut them was the hand of the perfect friend."

He got slowly to his feet, as a cloud of colour drew over the face of Nahoum and his eyes darkened with astonishment and anger. Lacey put his hands in his pockets and waited till Nahoum also rose. Then he gathered the other's eyes to his, and said with drawling scorn:

"So, you thought I didn't understand! You thought I'd got a brain like a peanut, and wouldn't drop onto your game or the trap you've set. You'd advance money—got from the slave-dealers to prevent the slave-trade being stopped! If Claridge Pasha took it and used it, he could never stop the slave-trade. If I took it and used it for him on the same terms, he couldn't stop the slave-trade, though he might know no more about the bargain than a babe unborn. And if he didn't stand by the bargain I made, and did prohibit slave-dealing, nothing'd stop the tribes till they marched into Cairo. He's been safe so far, because they believed in him, and because he'd rather die a

million deaths than go crooked. Say, I've been among the Dagos before—down in Mexico—and I'm onto you. I've been onto you for a good while; though there was nothing I could spot certain; but now I've got you, and I'll break the 'perfect friendship' or I'll eat my shirt. I'll—"

He paused, realising the crisis in which David was moving, and that perils were thick around their footsteps. But, even as he thought of them, he remembered David's own frank, fearless audacity in danger and difficulty, and he threw discretion to the winds. He flung his flag wide, and believed with a belief as daring as David's that all would be well.

"Well, what wilt thou do?" asked Nahoum with cool and deadly menace. "Thou wilt need to do it quickly, because, if it is a challenge, within forty-eight hours Claridge Pasha and thyself will be gone from Egypt—or I shall be in the Nile."

"I'll take my chances, pasha," answered Lacey, with equal coolness. "You think you'll win. It's not the first time I've had to tackle men like you—they've got the breed in Mexico. They beat me there, but I learned the game, and I've learned a lot from you, too. I never knew what your game was here. I only know that the Saadat saved your life, and got you started again with Kaïd. I only know that you called yourself a Christian, and worked on him till he believed in you, and Hell might crackle round you, but he'd believe, till he saw your contract signed with the Devil—and then he'd think the signature forged. But he's got to know now. We are not going out of Egypt, though you may be going to the Nile; but we are going to the Soudan, and with Kaïd's blessing, too. You've put up the bluff, and I take it. Be sure you've got Kaïd solid, for, if you

haven't, he'll be glad to know where you keep the money you got from the slave-dealers."

Nahoum shrugged his shoulders. "Who has seen the money? Where is the proof? Kaïd would know my reasons. It is not the first time virtue has been tested in Egypt, or the first time that it has fallen."

In spite of himself Lacey laughed. "Say, that's worthy of a great Christian intellect. You are a bright particular star, pasha. I take it back—they'd learn a lot from you in Mexico. But the only trouble with lying is, that the demand becomes so great you can't keep all the cards in your head, and then the one you forget does you. The man that isn't lying has the pull in the long run. You are out against us, pasha, and we'll see how we stand in forty-eight hours. You have some cards up your sleeve, I suppose; but—well, I'm taking you on. I'm taking you on with a lot of joy, and some sorrow, too, for we might have pulled off a big thing together, you and Claridge Pasha, with me to hold the stirrups. Now it's got to be war. You've made it so. It's a pity, for when we grip there'll be a heavy fall."

"For a poor man thou hast a proud stomach."

"Well, I'll admit the stomach, pasha. It's proud; and it's strong, too; it's stood a lot in Egypt; it's standing a lot to-day."

"We'll ease the strain, perhaps," sneered Nahoum. He made a perfunctory salutation and walked briskly from the room.

Mahommed Hassan crept in, a malicious grin on his face. Danger and conflict were as meat and drink to him.

"Effendi, God hath given thee a wasp's sting to thy

tongue. It is well. Nahoum Pasha hath Mizraim: the Saadat hath thee and me."

"There's the Effendina," said Lacey reflectively.

"Thou saidst thou would 'square' him, effendi."

"I say a lot," answered Lacey rather ruefully. "Come, Mahommed, the Saadat first, and the sooner the better."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE STRUGGLE IN THE DESERT

"AND His mercy is on them that fear Him throughout all generations."

On the clear, still evening air the words rang out over the desert, sonorous, imposing, peaceful. As the notes of the verse died away the answer came from other voices in deep, appealing antiphonal:

"He hath showed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts."

Beyond the limits of the monastery there was not a sign of life; neither beast nor bird, nor blade of grass, nor any green thing; only the perfect immemorial blue, and in the east a misty moon, striving in vain to offer light which the earth as yet rejected for the brooding radiance of the descending sun. But at the great door of the monastery there grew a stately palm, and near by an ancient acacia-tree; and beyond the stone chapel there was a garden of struggling shrubs and green things, with one rose-tree which scattered its pink leaves from year to year upon the loam, since no man gathered bud or blossom.

The triumphant call of the *Magnificat,* however beautiful, seemed strangely out of place in this lonely island in a sea of sand. It was the song of a bannered army, marching over the battle-field with conquering voices, and swords as yet unsheathed and red, carrying the

spoils of conquest behind the laurelled captain of the host. The crumbling and ancient walls were surrounded by a moat which a stranger's foot crossed hardly from moon to moon, which the desert wayfarer sought rarely, since it was out of the track of caravans, and because food was scant in the refectory of this Coptic brotherhood. It was scarce five hours' ride from the Palace of the Prince Pasha: but it might have been a thousand miles away, so profoundly separate was it from the world of vital things and deeds of men.

As the chant rang out, confident, majestic, and serene, carried by voices of power and shrill sweetness, which only the desert can produce, it might have seemed to any listener that this monastery was all that remained of some ancient kingdom of brimming, active cities, now lying beneath the obliterating sand, itself the monument and memorial of a breath of mercy of the Destroyer, the last refuge of a few surviving captains of a departed greatness. Hidden by the grey, massive walls, built as it were to resist the onset of a ravaging foe, the swelling voices might well have been those of some ancient order of valiant knights, whose banners hung above them, the *réclame* of their deeds. But they were voices and voices only; for they who sang were as unkempt and forceless as the lonely wall which shut them in from the insistent soul of the desert.

Desolation? The desert was not desolate. Its face was bare and burning, it slaked no man's thirst, gave no man food, save where scattered oases were like the breasts of a vast mother eluding the aching lips of her parched children; but the soul of the desert was living and inspiring, beating with vitality. It was life that burned like flame. If the water-skin was dry and the date-bag empty it smothered and destroyed; but it was

life; and to those who ventured into its embrace, obeying the conditions of the sharp adventure, it gave what neither sea, nor green plain, nor high mountain, nor verdant valley could give—a consuming sense of power, which found its way to the deepest recesses of being. Out upon the vast sea of sand, where the descending sun was spreading a note of incandescent colour, there floated the grateful words:

"He remembering His mercy hath holpen His servant Israel; as He promised to our forefathers, Abraham, and his seed for ever."

Then the antiphonal ceased; and together the voices of all within the place swelled out in the *Gloria* and the *Amen*, and seemed to pass away in ever-receding vibrations upon the desert, till it was lost in the comforting sunset.

As the last note died away, a voice from beneath the palm-tree near the door, deeper than any that had come from within, said reverently: *"Ameen—Ameen!"*

He who spoke was a man well over sixty years, with a grey beard, lofty benign forehead, and the eyes of a scholar and a dreamer. As he uttered the words of spiritual assent, alike to the Muslim and the Christian religion, he rose to his feet, showing the figure of a man of action, alert, well-knit, authoritative. Presently he turned towards the East and stretched a robe upon the ground, and with stately beauty of gesture he spread out his hands, standing for a moment in the attitude of aspiration. Then, kneeling, he touched his turbaned head to the ground three times, and as the sun drew down behind the sharp, bright line of sand that marked the horizon, he prayed devoutly and long. It was Ebn Ezra Bey.

Muslim though he was, he had visited this monastery many times, to study the ancient Christian books which lay in disordered heaps in an ill-kept chamber, books which predated the Hegira, and were as near to the life of the Early Church as the Scriptures themselves—or were so reputed. Student and pious Muslim as he was, renowned at El Azhar and at every Muslim university in the Eastern world, he swore by the name of Christ as by that of Abraham, Isaac, and all the prophets, though to him Mahomet was the last expression of Heaven's will to mankind. At first received at the monastery with unconcealed aversion, and not without danger to himself, he had at last won to him the fanatical monks, who, in spirit, kept this ancient foundation as rigid to their faith as though it were in mediæval times. And though their discipline was lax, and their daily duties orderless, this was Oriental rather than degenerate. Here Ebn Ezra had stayed for weeks at a time in the past, not without some religious scandal, long since forgotten.

His prayers ended, he rose up slowly, once more spread out his hands in ascription, and was about to enter the monastery, when, glancing towards the west, he saw a horseman approaching. An instinct told him who it was before he could clearly distinguish the figure, and his face lighted with a gentle and expectant smile. Then his look changed.

"He is in trouble," he murmured. "As it was with his uncle in Damascus, so will it be with him. Malaish, we are in the will of God!"

The hand that David laid in Ebn Ezra's was hot and nervous, the eyes that drank in the friendship of the face which had seen two Claridges emptying out their lives in the East were burning and famished by long fasting

of the spirit, forced abstinence from the pleasures of success and fruition—haunting, desiring eyes, where flamed a spirit which consumed the body and the indomitable mind. The lips, however, had their old trick of smiling, though the smile which greeted Ebn Ezra Bey had a melancholy which touched the desert-worn, life-spent old Arab as he had not been touched since a smile, just like this, flashed up at him from the weather-stained, dying face of quaint Benn Claridge in a street of Damascus. The natural duplicity of the Oriental had been abashed and inactive before the simple and astounding honesty of these two Quaker folk.

He saw crisis written on every feature of the face before him. Yet the scanty meal they ate with the monks in the ancient room was enlivened by the eager yet quiet questioning of David, to whom the monks responded with more spirit than had been often seen in this arid retreat. The single torch which spluttered from the wall as they drank their coffee lighted up faces as strange, withdrawn, and unconsciously secretive as ever gathered to greet a guest. Dim tales had reached them of this Christian reformer and administrator, scraps of legend from stray camel-drivers, a letter from the Patriarch commanding them to pray blessings on his labours—who could tell what advantage might not come to the Coptic Church through him, a Christian! On the dull, torpid faces, light seemed struggling to live for a moment, as David talked. It was as though something in their meagre lives, which belonged to undeveloped feelings, was fighting for existence—a light struggling to break through murky veils of inexperience.

Later, in the still night, however—still, though air vibrated everywhere, as though the desert breathed an ether which was to fill men's veins with that which

quieted the fret and fever of life's disillusions and forgeries and failures—David's speech with Ebn Ezra Bey was of a different sort. If, as it seems ever in the desert, an invisible host of beings, once mortal, now immortal, but suspensive and understanding, listened to the tale he unfolded, some glow of pity must have possessed them; for it was an Iliad of herculean struggle against absolute disaster, ending with the bitter news of his grandfather's death. It was the story of Œdipus overcome by events too strong for soul to bear. In return, as the stars wheeled on, and the moon stole to the zenith, majestic and slow, Ebn Ezra offered to his troubled friend only the philosophy of the predestinarian, mingled with the calm of the stoic. But something antagonistic to his own dejection, to the Muslim's fatalism, emerged from David's own altruism, to nerve him to hope and effort still. His unconquerable optimism rose determinedly to the surface, even as he summed up and related the forces working against him.

"They have all come at once," he said; "all the activities opposing me, just as though they had all been started long ago at different points, with a fixed course to run, and to meet and give me a fall in the hour when I could least resist. You call it Fate. I call it what it proves itself to be. But here it is a hub of danger and trouble, and the spokes of disaster are flying to it from all over the compass, to make the wheel that will grind me; and all the old troop of Palace intriguers and despoilers are waiting to heat the tire and fasten it on the machine of torture. Kaïd has involved himself in loans which press, in foolish experiments in industry without due care; and now from ill-health and bad temper comes a reaction towards the old sinister rule, when the

Prince shuts his eyes and his agents ruin and destroy. Three nations who have intrigued against my work see their chance, and are at Kaïd's elbow. The fate of the Soudan is in the balance. It is all as the shake of a feather. I can save it if I go; but, just as I am ready, my mills burn down, my treasury dries up, Kaïd turns his back on me, and the toil of years is swept away in a night. Thee sees it is terrible, friend?"

Ebn Ezra looked at him seriously and sadly for a moment, and then said: "Is it given one man to do all? If many men had done these things, then there had been one blow for each. Now all falls on thee, Saadat. Is it the will of God that one man should fling the lance, fire the cannon, dig the trenches, gather food for the army, drive the horses on to battle, and bury the dead? Canst thou do all?"

David's eyes brightened to the challenge. "There was the work to do, and there were not the many to do it. My hand was ready; the call came; I answered. I plunged into the river of work alone."

"Thou didst not know the strength of the currents, the eddies and the whirlpools, the hidden rocks—and the shore is far off, Saadat."

"It is not so far but that, if I could get breath to gather strength, I should reach the land in time. Money—ah, but enough for this expedition! That over, order, quiet yonder, my own chosen men as governors, and I could"—he pointed towards the southern horizon—"I could plant my foot in Cairo, and from the centre control the great machinery—with Kaïd's help; and God's help. A sixth of a million, and Kaïd's hand behind me, and the boat would lunge free of the sand-banks and churn on, and churn on. . . . Friend," he added, with the winning insistence that few found it possible to re-

sist, "if all be well, and we go thither, wilt thou become the governor-general yonder? With thee to rule justly where there is most need of justice, the end would be sure—if it be the will of God."

Ebn Ezra Bey sat for a moment looking into the worn, eager face, indistinct in the moonlight, then answered slowly: "I am seventy, and the years smite hard as they pass, and there or here, it little matters when I go, as I must go; and whether it be to bend the lance, or bear the flag before thee, or rule a Mudirieh, what does it matter! I will go with thee," he added hastily; "but it is better thou shouldst not go. Within the last three days I have news from the South. All that thou hast done there is in danger now. The word for revolt has passed from tribe to tribe. A tongue hath spoken, and a hand hath signalled"—his voice lowered—"and I think I know the tongue and the hand!" He paused; then, as David did not speak, continued: "Thou who art wise in most things, dost decline to seek for thy foe in him who eateth from the same dish with thee. Only when it is too late thou wilt defend thyself and all who keep faith with thee."

David's face clouded. "Nahoum, thou dost mean Nahoum? But thou dost not understand, and there is no proof."

"As a camel knows the coming storm while yet the sky is clear, by that which the eye does not see, so do I feel Nahoum. The evils thou hast suffered, Saadat, are from his hand, if from any hand in Egypt—"

Suddenly he leaned over and touched David's arm. "Saadat, it is of no avail. There is none in Egypt that desires good; thy task is too great. All men will deceive thee; if not now, yet in time. If Kaïd favours thee once more, and if it is made possible for thee to go

to the Soudan, yet I pray thee to stay here. Better be smitten here, where thou canst get help from thine own country, if need be, than yonder, where they but wait to spoil thy work and kill thee. Thou art young; wilt thou throw thy life away? Art thou not needed here as there? For me it is nothing, whether it be now or in a few benumbing years; but for thee—is there no one whom thou lovest so well that thou wouldst not shelter thy life to spare that life sorrow? Is there none that thou lovest so, and that will love thee to mortal sorrow, if thou goest without care to thy end too soon?"

As a warm wind suddenly sweeps across the cool air of a summer evening for an instant, suffocating and unnerving, so Ebn Ezra's last words swept across David's spirit. His breath came quicker, his eyes half closed. "*Is there none that thou lovest so, and that will love thee to mortal sorrow, if—*"

As a hand secretly and swiftly slips the lever that opens the sluice-gates of a dike, while the watchman turns away for a moment to look at the fields which the waters enrich and the homes of poor folk whom the gates defend, so, in a moment, when off his guard, worn with watching and fending, as it were, Ebn Ezra had sprung the lever, and a flood of feeling swept over David, drowned him in its impulse and pent-up force.

"*Is there none that thou lovest so—*" Of what use had been all his struggle and his pain since that last day in Hamley—his dark fighting days in the desert with Lacey and Mahommed, and his handful of faithful followers, hemmed in by dangers, the sands swarming with Arabs who feathered now to his safety, now to his doom, and his heart had hungered for what he had denied it with a will that would not be conquered? Wasted by toil and fever and the tension of danger and the care of

others dependent on him, he had also fought a foe which was ever at his elbow, ever whispered its comfort and seduction in his ear, the insidious and peace-giving, exalting opiate that had tided him over some black places, and then had sought for mastery of him when he was back again in the world of normal business and duty, where it appealed not as a medicine, but as a perilous luxury. And fighting this foe, which had a voice so soothing, and words like the sound of murmuring waters, and a cool and comforting hand that sought to lead him into gardens of stillness and passive being, where he could no more hear the clangour and vexing noises of a world that angered and agonised, there had also been the lure of another passion of the heart, which was too perilously dear to contemplate. Eyes that were beautiful, and their beauty was not for him; a spirit that was bright and glowing, but the brightness and the glow might not renew his days. It was hard to fight alone. Alone he was, for only to *one* may the doors within doors be opened—only to one so dear that all else is everlastingly distant may the true tale of the life beneath life be told. And it was not for him—nothing of this; not even the thought of it; for to think of it was to desire it, and to desire it was to reach out towards it; and to reach out towards it was the end of all. There had been moments of abandonment to the alluring dream, such as when he wrote the verses which Lacey had sent to Hylda from the desert; but they were few. Oft-repeated, they would have filled him with an agitated melancholy impossible to be borne in the life which must be his.

So it had been. The deeper into life and its labours and experiences he had gone, the greater had been his temptations, born of two passions, one of the body and

its craving, the other of the heart and its desires: and he had fought on—towards the morning.

"*Is there none that thou lovest so, and that will love thee to mortal sorrow, if thou goest without care to thy end too soon?*" The desert, the dark monastery, the acacia-tree, the ancient palm, the ruinous garden, disappeared. He only saw a face which smiled at him, as it had done by the brazier in the garden at Cairo, that night when she and Nahoum and himself and Mizraim had met in the room of his house by the Ezbekieh gardens, and she had gone out to her old life in England, and he had taken up the burden of the East—that long six years ago. His head dropped in his hands, and all that was beneath the Quaker life he had led so many years, packed under the crust of form and habit, and regulated thought, and controlled emotion, broke forth now, and had its way with him.

He turned away staggering and self-reproachful from the first question, only to face the other—"*And that will love thee to mortal sorrow, if thou goest without care to thy end too soon.*" It was a thought he had never let himself dwell on for an instant in all the days since they had last met. He had driven it back to its covert, even before he could recognise its face. It was disloyal to her, an offence against all that she was, an affront to his manhood to let the thought have place in his mind even for one swift moment. She was Lord Eglington's wife—there could be no sharing of soul and mind and body and the exquisite devotion of a life too dear for thought. Nothing that she was to Eglington could be divided with another, not for an hour, not by one act of impulse; or else she must be less, she that might have been, if there had been no Eglington—

An exclamation broke from him, and, as one crying

out in one's sleep wakes himself, so the sharp cry of his misery woke him from the trance of memory that had been upon him, and he slowly became conscious of Ebn Ezra standing before him. Their eyes met, and Ebn Ezra spoke:

"The will of Allah be thy will, Saadat. If it be to go to the Soudan, I am thine; if it be to stay, I am thy servant and thy brother. But whether it be life or death, thou must sleep, for the young are like water without sleep. Thou canst not live in strength nor die with fortitude without it. For the old, malaish, old age is between a sleeping and a waking! Come, Saadat! Forget not, thou must ride again to Cairo at dawn."

David got slowly to his feet and turned towards the monastery. The figure of a monk stood in the doorway with a torch to light him to his room.

He turned to Ebn Ezra again. "Does thee think that I have aught of his courage—my Uncle Benn? Thou knowest me—shall I face it out as did he?"

"Saadat," the old man answered, pointing, "yonder acacia, that was he, quick to grow and short to live; but thou art as this date-palm, which giveth food to the hungry, and liveth through generations. Peace be upon thee," he added at the doorway, as the torch flickered towards the room where David was to lie.

"And upon thee, peace!" answered David gently, and followed the smoky light to an inner chamber.

The room in which David found himself was lofty and large, but was furnished with only a rough wooden bed, a rug, and a brazier. Left alone, he sat down on the edge of the bed, and, for a few moments, his mind strayed almost vaguely from one object to another. From two windows far up in the wall the moonlight streamed in, making bars of light aslant the darkness.

Not a sound broke the stillness. Yet, to his sensitive nerves, the air seemed tingling with sensation, stirring with unseen activities. Here the spirit of the desert seemed more insistent in its piercing vitality, because it was shut in by four stone walls.

Mechanically he took off his coat, and was about to fold and lay it on the rug beside the bed, when something hard in one of the pockets knocked against his knee. Searching, he found and drew forth a small bottle which, for many a month past, had lain in the drawer of a table where he had placed it on his return from the Soudan. It was an evil spirit which sent this tiny phial to his hand at a moment when he had paid out of the full treasury of his strength and will its accumulated deposit, leaving him with a balance on which no heavy draft could be made. His pulse quickened, then his body stiffened with the effort at self-control.

Who placed this evil elixir in his pocket? What any enemy of his work had done was nothing to what might be achieved by the secret foe, who had placed this anodyne within his reach at this the most critical moment of his life. He remembered the last time he had used it—in the desert: two days of forgetfulness to the world, when it all moved by him, the swarming Arabs, the train of camels, the loads of ivory, the slimy crocodile on the sandbanks, the vultures hovering above unburied carcasses, the kourbash descending on shining black shoulders, corrugating bare brown bodies into cloven skin and lacerated flesh, a fight between champions of two tribes who clasped and smote and struggled and rained blows, and, both mortally wounded, still writhed in last conflict upon the ground—and Mahommed Hassan ever at the tent door or by his side, towering, watchful, sullen to all faces without, smiling to his own, with

dog-like look waiting for any motion of his hand or any word. . . . Ah, Mahommed Hassan, it was he! Mahommed had put this phial in his pocket. His bitter secret was not hidden from Mahommed. And this was an act of supreme devotion—to put at his hand the lulling, inspiring draught. Did this fellah servant know what it meant—the sin of it, the temptation, the terrible joy, the blessed quiet; and then, the agonising remorse, the withering self-hatred and torturing penitence? No, Mahommed only knew that when the Saadat was gone beyond his strength, when the sleepless nights and feverish days came in the past, in their great troubles, when men were dying and only the Saadat could save, that this cordial lifted him out of misery and storm into calm. Yet Mahommed must have divined that it was a thing against which his soul revolted, or he would have given it to him openly. In the heart and mind of the giant murderer, however, must have been the thought that now when trouble was upon his master again, trouble which might end all, this supreme destroyer of pain and dark memory and present misery, would give him the comfort he needed—and that he would take it.

If he had not seen it, this sudden craving would not have seized him for this eager beguiling, this soothing benevolence. Yet here it was in his hand; and even as it lay in his cold fingers—how cold they were, and his head how burning!—the desire for it surged up in him. And, as though the thing itself had the magical power to summon up his troubles, that it might offer the apathy and stimulus in one—even as it lured him, his dangers, his anxieties, the black uncertainties massed, multiplied and aggressive, rose before him, buffeted him, caught at his throat, dragged down his shoulders, clutched at his heart.

Now, with a cry of agony, he threw the phial on the ground, and, sinking on the bed, buried his face in his hands and moaned, and fought for freedom from the cords tightening round him. It was for him to realise now how deep are the depths to which the human soul can sink, even while labouring to climb. Once more the sense of awful futility was on him: of wasted toil and blenched force, veins of energy drained of their blood, hope smitten in the way, and every dear dream shattered. Was it, then, all ended? Was his work indeed fallen, and all his love undone? Was his own redemption made impossible? He had offered up his life to this land to atone for a life taken when she—when *she* first looked up with eyes of gratitude, eyes that haunted him. Was it, then, unacceptable? Was it so that he must turn his back upon this long, heart-breaking but beloved work, this panacea for his soul, without which he could not pay the price of blood?

Go back to England—to Hamley where all had changed, where the old man he loved no longer ruled in the Red Mansion, where all that had been could be no more? Go to some other land, and there begin again another such a work? Were there not vast fields of human effort, effort such as his, where he could ease the sorrow of living by the joy of a divine altruism? Go back to Hamley? Ah, no, a million times, no! That life was dead, it was a cycle of years behind him. There could be no return. He was in a maelstrom of agony, his veins were afire, his lips were parched. He sprang from his bed, knelt down, and felt for the little phial he had flung aside. After a moment his hand caught it, clutched it. But, even at the crest of the wave of temptation, words that he had heard one night in Hamley, that last night of all, flashed into his mind—the words

of old Luke Claridge's prayer, "*And if a viper fasten on his hand, O Lord—*"

Suddenly he paused. That scene in the old Meeting-house swam before his eyes, got into his brain. He remembered the words of his own prayer, and how he had then retreated upon the Power that gave him power, for a draught of the one true tincture which braced the heart to throw itself upon the spears of trial. Now the trial had come, and that which was in him as deep as being, the habit of youth, the mother-fibre and predisposition, responded to the draught he had drunk then. As a body freed from the quivering, unrelenting grasp of an electric battery subsides into a cool quiet, so, through his veins seemed to pass an ether which stilled the tumult, the dark desire to drink the potion in his hand, and escape into that irresponsible, artificial world, where he had before loosened his hold on activity.

The phial slipped from his fingers to the floor. He sank upon the side of the bed, and, placing his hands on his knees, he whispered a few broken words that none on earth was meant to hear. Then he passed into a strange and moveless quiet of mind and body. Many a time in days gone by—far-off days—had he sat as he was doing now, feeling his mind pass into a soft, comforting quiet, absorbed in a sensation of existence, as it were between waking and sleeping, where doors opened to new experience and understanding, where the mind seemed to loose itself from the bonds of human necessity and find a freer air.

Now, as he sat as still as the stone in the walls around him, he was conscious of a vision forming itself before his eyes. At first it was indefinite, vague, without clear form, but at last it became a room dimly outlined, delicately veiled, as it were. Then it seemed, not that

the mist cleared, but that his eyes became stronger, and saw through the delicate haze; and now the room became wholly, concretely visible.

It was the room in which he had said good-bye to Hylda. As he gazed like one entranced, he saw a figure rise from a couch, pale, agitated, and beautiful, and come forward, as it were, towards him. But suddenly the mist closed in again upon the scene, a depth of darkness passed his eyes, and he heard a voice say: "Speak—speak to me!"

He heard her voice as distinctly as though she were beside him—as, indeed, she had stood before him but an instant ago.

Getting slowly to his feet, into the night he sent an answer to the call.

Would she hear? She had said long ago that she would speak to him so. Perhaps she had tried before. But now at last he had heard and answered. Had she heard? Time might tell—if ever they met again. But how good, and quiet, and serene was the night!

He composed himself to sleep, but, as he lay waiting for that coverlet of forgetfulness to be drawn over him, he heard the sound of bells soft and clear. Just such bells he had heard upon the common at Hamley. Was it, then, the outcome of his vision—a sweet hallucination? He leaned upon his elbow and listened.

CHAPTER XXXII

FORTY STRIPES SAVE ONE

THE bells that rang were not the bells of Hamley; they were part of no vision or hallucination, and they drew David out of his chamber into the night. A little group of three stood sharply silhouetted against the moonlight, and towering above them was the spare, commanding form of Ebn Ezra Bey. Three camels crouched near, and beside them stood a Nubian lad singing to himself the song of the camel-driver:

"Fleet is thy foot: thou shalt rest by the Etl tree;
Water shalt thou drink from the blue-deep well;
Allah send His gard'ner with the green bersim,
For thy comfort, fleet one, by the Etl tree.
As the stars fly, have thy footsteps flown—
Deep is the well, drink, and be still once more;
Till the pursuing winds panting have found thee
And, defeated, sink still beside thee—
By the well and the Etl tree."

For a moment David stood in the doorway listening to the low song of the camel-driver. Then he came forward. As he did so, one of the two who stood with Ebn Ezra moved towards the monastery door slowly. It was a monk with a face which, even in this dim light, showed a deathly weariness. The eyes looked straight before him, as though they saw nothing of the world, only a goal to make, an object to be accomplished. The look of the face went to David's heart—the kinship of pain was theirs.

"Peace be to thee," David said gently, as the other passed him.

There was an instant's pause, and then the monk faced him with fingers uplifted. "The grace of God be upon thee, David," he said, and his eyes, drawn back from the world where they had been exploring, met the other's keenly. Then he wheeled and entered the monastery.

"The grace of God be upon thee, David!" How strange it sounded, this Christian blessing in response to his own Oriental greeting, out in this Eastern waste. His own name, too. It was as though he had been transported to the ancient world where "Brethren" were so few that they called each other by their "Christian" names—even as they did in Hamley to-day. In Hamley to-day! He closed his eyes, a tremor running through his body; and then, with an effort which stilled him to peace again, he moved forward, and was greeted by Ebn Ezra, from whom the third member of the little group had now drawn apart nearer to the acacia-tree, and was seated on a rock that jutted from the sand.

"What is it?" David asked.

"Wouldst thou not sleep, Saadat? Sleep is more to thee now than aught thou mayst hear from any man. To all thou art kind save thyself."

"I have rested," David answered, with a measured calmness, revealing to his friend the change which had come since they parted an hour before. They seated themselves under the palm-tree, and were silent for a moment, then Ebn Ezra said:

"These come from the Place of Lepers."

David started slightly. "Zaida?" he asked, with a sigh of pity.

"The monk who passed thee but now goes every year

to the Place of Lepers with the caravan, for a brother of this order stays yonder with the afflicted, seeing no more the faces of this world which he has left behind. Afar off from each other they stand—as far as eye can see—and after the manner of their faith they pray to Allah, and he who has just left us finds a paper fastened with a stone upon the sand at a certain place where he waits. He touches it not, but reads it as it lies, and, having read, heaps sand upon it. And the message which the paper gives is for me."

"For thee? Hast thou there one who—"

"There was one, my father's son, though we were of different mothers; and in other days, so many years ago, he did great wrong to me, and not to me alone,"—the grey head bowed in sorrow—"but to one dearer to me than life. I hated him, and would have slain him, but the mind of Allah is not the mind of man; and he escaped me. Then he was stricken with leprosy, and was carried to the place from whence no leper returns. At first my heart rejoiced; then, at last, I forgave him, Saadat—was he not my father's son, and was the woman not gone to the bosom of Allah, where is peace? So I forgave and sorrowed for him—who shall say what miseries are those which, minute to minute, day after day, and year upon year, repeat themselves, till it is an endless flaying of the body and burning of the soul! Every year I send a message to him, and every year now this Christian monk—there is no Sheikh-el-Islam yonder—brings back the written message which he finds in the sand."

"And thee has had a message to-night?"

"The last that may come—God be praised, he goeth to his long home. It was written in his last hour. There was no hope; he is gone. And so, one more

reason showeth why I should go where thou goest, Saadat."

Casting his eyes toward the figure by the acacia-tree, his face clouded and he pondered anxiously, looking at David the while. Twice he essayed to speak, but paused.

David's eyes followed his look. "What is it? Who is he—yonder?"

The other rose to his feet. "Come and see, Saadat," he replied. "Seeing, thou wilt know what to do."

"Zaida—is it of Zaida?" David asked.

"The man will answer for himself, Saadat."

Coming within a few feet of the figure crouched upon the rock, Ebn Ezra paused and stretched out a hand. "A moment, Saadat. Dost thou not see, dost thou not recognise him?"

David intently studied the figure, which seemed unconscious of their presence. The shoulders were stooping and relaxed as though from great fatigue, but David could see that the figure was that of a tall man. The head was averted, but a rough beard covered the face, and, in the light of the fire, one hand that clutched it showed long and skinny and yellow and cruel. The hand fascinated David's eyes. Where had he seen it? It flashed upon him—a hand clutching a robe, in a frenzy of fear, in the court-yard of the blue tiles, in Kaïd's Palace—Achmet the Ropemaker! He drew back a step.

"Achmet," he said in a low voice. The figure stirred, the hand dropped from the beard and clutched the knee; but the head was not raised, and the body remained crouching and listless.

"He escaped?" David said, turning to Ebn Ezra Bey.

"I know not by what means—a camel-driver bribed, perhaps, and a camel left behind for him. After the

caravan had travelled a day's journey he joined it. None knew what to do. He was not a leper, and he was armed."

"Leave him with me," said David.

Ebn Ezra hesitated. "He is armed; he was thy foe—"

"I am armed also," David answered enigmatically, and indicated by a gesture that he wished to be left alone. Ebn Ezra drew away towards the palm-tree, and stood at this distance watching anxiously, for he knew what dark passions seize upon the Oriental—and Achmet had many things for which to take vengeance.

David stood for a moment, pondering, his eyes upon the deserter. "God greet thee as thou goest, and His goodness befriend thee," he said evenly. There was silence, and no movement. "Rise and speak," he added sternly. "Dost thou not hear? Rise, Achmet Pasha!"

Achmet *Pasha!* The head of the desolate wretch lifted, the eyes glared at David for an instant, as though to see whether he was being mocked, and then the spare figure stretched itself, and the outcast stood up. The old lank straightness was gone, the shoulders were bent, the head was thrust forward, as though the long habit of looking into dark places had bowed it out of all manhood.

"May grass spring under thy footstep, Saadat," he said, in a thick voice, and salaamed awkwardly—he had been so long absent from life's formularies.

"What dost thou here, pasha?" asked David formally. "Thy sentence had no limit."

"I could not die there," said the hollow voice, and the head sank farther forward. "Year after year I lived there, but I could not die among them. I was no leper; I am no leper. My penalty was my penalty, and I paid

it to the full, piastre by piastre of my body and my mind. It was not one death, it was death every hour, every day I stayed. I had no mind. I could not think. Mummy-cloths were round my brain; but the fire burned underneath and would not die. There was the desert, but my limbs were like rushes. I had no will, and I could not flee. I was chained to the evil place. If I stayed it was death, if I went it was death."

"Thou art armed now," said David suggestively.

Achmet laid a hand fiercely upon a dagger under his robe. "I hid it. I was afraid. I could not die—my hand was like a withered leaf; it could not strike; my heart poured out like water. Once I struck a leper, that he might strike and kill me; but he lay upon the ground and wept, for all his anger, which had been great, died in him at last. There was none other given to anger there. The leper has neither anger, nor mirth, nor violence, nor peace. It is all the black silent shame—and I was no leper."

"Why didst thou come? What is there but death for thee here, or anywhere thou goest! Kaïd's arm will find thee; a thousand hands wait to strike thee."

"I could not die there— Dost thou think that I repent?" he added with sudden fierceness. "Is it that which would make me repent? Was I worse than thousands of others? I have come out to die—to fight and die. Aiwa, I have come to thee, whom I hated, because thou canst give me death as I desire it. My mother was an Arab slave from Senaar, and she was got by war, and all her people. War and fighting were their portion—as they ate, as they drank and slept. In the black years behind me among the Unclean, there was naught to fight—could one fight the dead, and the agony of death, and the poison of the agony! Life, it

is done for me—am I not accursed? But to die fighting—ay, fighting for Egypt, since it must be, and fighting for thee, since it must be; to strike, and strike, and strike, and earn death! Must the dog, because he is a dog, die in the slime? Shall he not be driven from the village to die in the clean sand? Saadat, who will see in me Achmet Pasha, who did with Egypt what he willed, and was swept away by the besom in thy hand? Is there in me aught of that Achmet that any should know?"

"None would know thee for that Achmet," answered David.

"I know, it matters not how—at last a letter found me, and the way of escape—that thou goest again to the Soudan. There will be fighting there—"

"Not by my will," interrupted David.

"Then by the will of Sheitan the accursed; but there will be fighting—am I not an Arab, do I not know? Thou hast not conquered yet. Bid me go where thou wilt, do what thou wilt, so that I may be among the fighters, and in the battle forget what I have seen. Since I am unclean, and am denied the bosom of Allah, shall I not go as a warrior to Hell, where men will fear me? Speak, Saadat, canst thou deny me this?"

Nothing of repentance, so far as he knew, moved the dark soul; but, like some evil spirit, he would choose the way to his own doom, the place and the manner of it: a sullen, cruel, evil being, unyielding in his evil, unmoved by remorse—so far as he knew. Yet he would die fighting, and for Egypt—"and for thee, if it must be so. To strike, to strike, to strike, and earn death!" What Achmet did not see, David saw, the glimmer of light breaking through the cloud of shame and evil and doom. Yonder in the Soudan more problems than one

would be solved, more lives than one be put to the extreme test. He did not answer Achmet's question yet.

"Zaida—?" he said in a low voice. The pathos of her doom had been a dark memory.

Achmet's voice dropped lower as he answered. "She lived till the day her sister died. I never saw her face; but I was set to bear each day to her door the food she ate and a balass of water; and I did according to my sentence. Yet I heard her voice. And once, at last, the day she died, she spoke to me, and said from inside the hut: 'Thy work is done, Achmet. Go in peace.' And that night she lay down on her sister's grave, and in the morning she was found dead upon it."

David's eyes were blinded with tears. "It was too long," he said at last, as though to himself.

"That day," continued Achmet, "there fell ill with leprosy the Christian priest from this place who had served in that black service so long; and then a fire leapt up in me. Zaida was gone—I had brought food and a balass of water to her door those many times; there was naught to do, since she was gone—"

Suddenly David took a step nearer to him and looked into the sullen and drooping eyes. "Thou shalt go with me, Achmet. I will do this unlawful act for thee. At daybreak I will give thee orders. Thou shalt join me far from here—if I go to the Soudan," he added, with a sudden remembrance of his position; and he turned away slowly.

After a moment, with muttered words, Achmet sank down upon the stone again, drew a cake of dourha from his inner robe, and began to eat.

The camel-boy had lighted a fire, and he sat beside it warming his hands at the blaze and still singing to himself:

"The bed of my love I will sprinkle with attar of roses,
The face of my love I will touch with the balm—
With the balm of the tree from the farthermost wood,
From the wood without end, in the world without end.
My love holds the cup to my lips, and I drink of the cup,
And the attar of roses I sprinkle will soothe like the evening dew,
And the balm will be healing and sleep, and the cup I will drink,
I will drink of the cup my love holds to my lips—"

David stood listening. What power was there in desert life that could make this poor camel-driver, at the end of a long day of weariness and toil and little food and drink, sing a song of content and cheerfulness? The little needed, the little granted, and no thought beyond—save the vision of one who waited in the hut by the onion-field. He gathered himself together and tuned his mind to the scene through which he had just passed, and then to the interview he would have with Kaïd on the morrow. A few hours ago he had seen no way out of it all—he had had no real hope that Kaïd would turn to him again; but the last two hours had changed all that. Hope was alive in him. He had fought a desperate fight with himself, and he had conquered. Then had come Achmet, unrepentant, degraded still, but with the spirit of Something glowing—Achmet to die for a cause, driven by that Something deep beneath the degradation and the crime. He had hope, and, as the camel-driver's voice died away, and he lay down with a sheep-skin over him and went instantly to sleep, David drew to the fire and sat down beside it. Presently Ebn Ezra came to urge him to go to bed, but he would not. He had slept, he said; he had slept and rested, and the night was good—he would

wait. Then the other brought rugs and blankets, and gave David some, and lay down beside the fire, and watched and waited for he knew not what. Ever and ever his eyes were on David, and far back under the acacia-tree Achmet slept as he had not slept since his doom fell on him.

At last Ebn Ezra Bey also slept; but David was awake with the night and the benevolent moon and the marching stars. The spirit of the desert was on him, filling him with its voiceless music. From the infinite stretches of sand to the south came the irresistible call of life, as soft as the leaves in a garden of roses, as deep as the sea. This world was still, yet there seemed a low, delicate humming, as of multitudinous looms at a distance so great that the ear but faintly caught it—the sound of the weavers of life and destiny and eternal love, the hands of the toilers of all the ages spinning and spinning on; and he was part of it, not abashed or dismayed because he was but one of the illimitable throng.

The hours wore on, but still he sat there, peace in all his heart, energy tingling softly through every vein, the wings of hope fluttering at his ear.

At length the morning came, and, from the west, with the rising sun, came a traveller swiftly, making for where he was. The sleepers stirred around him and waked and rose. The little camp became alive. As the traveller neared the fresh-made fire, David saw that it was Lacey. He went eagerly to meet him.

"Thee has news," he said. "I see it is so." He held Lacey's hand in his.

"Say, you are going on that expedition, Saadat. You wanted money. Will a quarter of a million do?"

David's eyes caught fire.

From the monastery there came the voices of the monks:

"O be joyful in the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness, and come before His presence with a song."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE DARK INDENTURE

NAHOUM had forgotten one very important thing: that what affected David as a Christian in Egypt would tell equally against himself. If, in his ill-health and dejection, Kaïd drank deep of the cup of Mahomet, the red eyes of fanaticism would be turned upon the Armenian, as upon the European Christian. He had forgotten it for the moment, but when, coming into Kaïd's Palace, a little knot of loiterers spat upon the ground and snarled, "Infidel—Nazarene!" with contempt and hatred, the significance of the position came home to him. He made his way to a far quarter of the Palace, thoughtfully weighing the circumstances, and was met by Mizraim.

Mizraim salaamed. "The height of thy renown be as the cedar of Lebanon, Excellency."

"May thy feet tread the corn of everlasting fortune, son of Mahomet."

They entered the room together. Nahoum looked at Mizraim curiously. He was not satisfied with what he saw. Mizraim's impassive face had little expression, but the eyes were furtively eager and sinister.

"Well, so it is, and if it is, what then?" asked Nahoum coolly.

"*Ki di,* so it is," answered Mizraim, and a ghastly smile came to his lips. This infidel pasha, Nahoum, had a mind that pierced to the meaning of words ere

they were spoken. Mizraim's hand touched his forehead, his breast, his lips, and, clasping and unclasping his long, snakelike fingers, he began the story he had come to tell.

"The Inglesi, whom Allah confound, the Effendina hath blackened by a look, his words have smitten him in the vital parts—"

"Mizraim, thou dove, speak to the purpose!"

Mizraim showed a dark pleasure at the interruption. Nahoum was impatient, anxious; that made the tale better worth telling.

"Sharif and the discontented ones who dare not act, like the vultures, they flee the living man, but swoop upon the corpse. The consuls of those countries who love not England or Claridge Pasha, and the holy men, and the Cadi, all scatter smouldering fires. There is a spirit in the Palace and beyond which is blowing fast to a great flame."

"Then, so it is, great one, and what bodes it?"

"It may kill the Inglesi; but it will also sweep thee from the fields of life where thou dost flourish."

"It is not against the foreigner, but against the Christian, Mizraim?"

"Thy tongue hath wisdom, Excellency."

"Thou art a Muslim—"

"Why do I warn thee? For service done to me; and because there is none other worth serving in Egypt. Behold, it is my destiny to rule others, to serve thee."

"Once more thy turban full of gold, Mizraim, if thou dost service now that hath meaning and is not a belching of wind and words. Thou hast a thing to say—say it, and see if Nahoum hath lost his wit, or hath a palsied arm."

"Then behold, pasha. Are not my spies in all the

Palace? Is not my scourge heavier than the whip of the horned horse? *Ki di*, so it is. This I have found. Sharif hath, with others, made a plot which hath enough powder in it to shake Egypt, and toss thee from thy high place into the depths. There is a Christian—an Armenian, as it chances; but he was chosen because he was a Christian, and for that only. His name is Rahib. He is a tent-maker. He had three sons. They did kill an effendi who had cheated them of their land. Two of them were hanged last week; the other, caught but a few days since, is to hang within three days. To-day Kaïd goes to the Mosque of Mahmoud, as is the custom at this festival. The old man hath been persuaded to attempt the life of Kaïd, upon condition that his son—his Benjamin—is set free. It will be but an attempt at Kaïd's life, no more; but the cry will go forth that a Christian did the thing; and the Muslim flame will leap high."

"And the tent-maker?" asked Nahoum musingly, though he was turning over the tale in his mind, seeing behind it and its far consequences.

"Malaish, what does it matter! But he is to escape, and they are to hang another Christian in his stead for the attempt on Kaïd. It hath no skill, but it would suffice. With the dervishes gone *malboos*, and the faithful drunk with piety—canst thou not see the issue, pasha? Blood will be shed."

"The Jews of Europe would be angry," said Nahoum grimly but evenly. "The loans have been many, and Kaïd has given a lien by the new canal at Suez. The Jews will be angry," he repeated, "and for every drop of Christian blood shed there would be a lanced vein here. But that would not bring back Nahoum Pasha," he continued cynically. "Well, this is thy story, Miz-

raim; this is what they would do. Now what hast thou done to stop their doing?"

"Am I not a Muslim? Shall I give Sharif to the Nile?"

Nahoum smiled darkly. "There is a simpler way. Thy mind ever runs on the bowstring and the sword. These are great, but there is a greater. It is the mocking finger. At midnight, when Kaïd goes to the Mosque Mahmoud, a finger will mock the plotters till they are buried in confusion. Thou knowest the governor of the prisons—has he not need of something? Hath he never sought favours of thee?"

"Bismillah, but a week ago!"

"Then, listen, thou shepherd of the sheep—"

He paused, as there came a tap at the door, and a slave entered hurriedly and addressed Nahoum.

"The effendi, Ebn Ezra Bey, whom thou didst set me to watch, he hath entered the Palace, and asks for the Effendina."

Nahoum started, and his face clouded, but his eyes flashed fire. He tossed the slave a coin. "Thou hast done well. Where is he now?"

"He waits in the hall, where is the statue of Mehemet Ali and the lions."

"In an hour, Mizraim, thou shalt hear what I intend. Peace be to thee!"

"And on thee, peace!" answered Mizraim, as Nahoum passed from the room, and walked hastily towards the hall where he should find Ebn Ezra Bey. Nearing the spot, he brought his step to a deliberate slowness, and appeared not to notice the stately Arab till almost upon him.

"Salaam, effendi," he said smoothly, yet with inquisition in his eye, with malice in his tone.

"Salaam, Excellency."

"Thou art come on the business of thy master?"

"Who is my master, Excellency?"

"Till yesterday it was Claridge Pasha. Hast thou then forsaken him in his trouble—the rat from the sinking ship?"

A flush passed over Ebn Ezra Bey's face, and his mouth opened with a gasp of anger. Oriental though he was, he was not as astute as this Armenian Christian, who was purposely insulting him, that he might, in a moment of heat, snatch from him the business he meant to lay before Kaïd. Nahoum had not miscalculated.

"I have but one master, Excellency," Ebn Ezra answered quietly at last, "and I have served him straightly. Hast thou done likewise?"

"What is straight to thee might well be crooked to me, effendi."

"Thou art crooked as the finger of a paralytic."

"Yet I have worked in peace with Claridge Pasha for these years past, even until yesterday, when thou didst leave him to his fate."

"His ship will sail when thine is crumbling on the sands, and all thou art is like a forsaken cockatrice's nest."

"Is it this thou hast come to say to the Effendina?"

"What I have come to say to the Effendina is for the world to know after it hath reached his ears. I know thee, Nahoum Pasha. Thou art a traitor. Claridge Pasha would abolish slavery, and thou dost receive great sums of gold from the slave-dealers to prevent it."

"Is it this thou wilt tell Kaïd?" Nahoum asked with a sneer. "And hast thou proofs?"

"Even this day they have come to my hands from the south."

"Yet I think the proofs thou hast will not avail; and I think that thou wilt not show them to Kaïd. The gift of second thinking is a great gift. Thou must find greater reason for seeking the Effendina."

"That too shall be. Gold thou hadst to pay the wages of the soldiers of the south. Thou didst keep the gold and order the slave-hunt; and the soldiers of the Effendina have been paid in human flesh and blood—ten thousand slaves since Claridge Pasha left the Soudan, and three thousand dead upon the desert sands, abandoned by those who hunted them when water grew scarce and food failed. To-day shall see thy fall."

At his first words Nahoum had felt a shock, from which his spirit reeled; but an inspiration came to him on the moment; and he listened with a saturnine coolness to the passionate words of the indignant figure towering above him. When Ebn Ezra had finished, he replied quietly:

"It is even as thou sayest, effendi. The soldiers were paid in slaves got in the slave-hunt; and I have gold from the slave-dealers. I needed it, for the hour is come when I must do more for Egypt than I have ever done."

With a gesture of contempt Ebn Ezra made to leave, seeing an official of the Palace in the distance.

Nahoum stopped him. "But, one moment ere thou dost thrust thy hand into the cockatrice's den. Thou dost measure thyself against Nahoum? In patience and with care have I trained myself for the battle. The bulls of Bashan may roar, yet my feet are shod with safety. Thou wouldst go to Kaïd and tell him thy affrighted tale. I tell thee, thou wilt not go. Thou hast reason yet, though thy blood is hot. Thou art to Claridge Pasha like a brother—as to his uncle before him, who furnished my father's palace with carpets. The

carpets still soften the fall of my feet in my father's palace, as they did soften the fall of my brother's feet, the feet of Foorgat Bey."

He paused, looking at Ebn Ezra with quiet triumph, though his eyes had ever that smiling innocence which had won David in days gone by. He was turning his words over on the tongue with a relish born of long waiting.

"Come," he said presently—"come, and I will give thee reason why thou wilt not speak with Kaïd to-day. This way, effendi."

He led the other into a little room hung about with rugs and tapestry, and, going to the wall, he touched a spring. "One moment here, effendi," he added quietly. The room was as it had been since David last stood within it.

"In this room, effendi," Nahoum said with cold deliberation, "Claridge Pasha killed my brother, Foorgat Bey."

Ebn Ezra fell back as though he had been struck. Swiftly Nahoum told him the whole truth—even to the picture of the brougham, and the rigid, upright figure passing through the night to Foorgat's palace, the gaunt Mizraim piloting the equipage of death.

"I have held my peace for my own reasons, effendi. Wilt thou then force me to speak? If thou dost still cherish Claridge Pasha, wilt thou see him ruined? Naught but ruin could follow the telling of the tale at this moment—his work, his life, all done. The scandal, the law, vengeance! But as it is now, Kaïd may turn to him again; his work may yet go on—he has had the luck of angels, and Kaïd is fickle. Who can tell?"

Abashed and overwhelmed, Ebn Ezra Bey looked at him keenly. "To tell of Foorgat Bey would ruin thee

also," he said. "That thou knowest. The trick—would Kaïd forgive it? Claridge Pasha would not be ruined alone."

"Be it so. If thou goest to Kaïd with thy story, I go to Egypt with mine. Choose."

Ebn Ezra turned to go. "The high God judge between him and thee," he said, and, with bowed head, left the Palace.

CHAPTER XXXIV

NAHOUM DROPS THE MASK

"Claridge Pasha!"

At the sound of the words, announced in a loud voice, hundreds of heads were turned towards the entrance of the vast salon, resplendent with gilded mirrors, great candelabra and chandeliers, golden hangings, and divans glowing with robes of yellow silk.

It was the anniversary of Kaïd's succession, and all entitled to come poured into the splendid chamber. The showy livery of the officials, the loose, spacious, gorgeous uniforms of the officers, with the curved jewelled scimitars and white turbans, the rich silk robes of the Ulema, robe over robe of coloured silk with flowing sleeves and sumptuous silken vests, the ample dignity of noble-looking Arabs in immense white turbans, the dark straight Stambouli coat of the officials, made a picture of striking variety and colour and interest.

About the centre of the room, laying palm to palm again and yet again, touching lips and forehead and breast, speaking with slow, leisurely voices, were two Arab sheikhs from the far Soudan. One of these showed a singular interest in the movements of Nahoum Pasha as he entered the chamber, and an even greater interest in David when he was announced; but as David, in his journey up the chamber, must pass near him, he drew behind a little group of officials, who whispered to each other excitedly as David came on. More than once

before this same Sheikh Abdullah had seen David, and once they had met, and had made a treaty of amity, and Abdullah had agreed to deal in slaves no more; and yet within three months had sent to Cairo two hundred of the best that could be found between Khartoum and Senaar. His business, of which Ebn Ezra Bey had due knowledge, had now been with Nahoum. The business of the other Arab, a noble-looking and wiry Bedouin from the South, had been with Ebn Ezra Bey, and each hid his business from his friend. Abdullah murmured to himself as David passed—a murmur of admiration and astonishment. He had heard of the disfavour in which the Inglesi was; but, as he looked at David's face with its quiet smile, the influence which he felt in the desert long ago came over him again.

"By Allah," he said aloud abstractedly, "it is a face that will not hide when the khamsin blows! Who shall gainsay it? If he were not an infidel he would be a Mahdi."

To this his Bedouin friend replied: "As the depths of the pool at Ghebel Farik, so are his eyes. You shall dip deep and you shall not find the bottom. Bismillah, I would fight Kaïd's Nubians, but not this infidel pasha!"

Never had David appeared to such advantage. The victory over himself the night before, the message of hope that had reached him at the monastery in the desert, the coming of Lacey, had given him a certain quiet masterfulness not reassuring to his foes.

As he entered the chamber but now, there flashed into his mind the scene six years ago when, an absolute stranger, he had stepped into this Eastern salon, and had heard his name called out to the great throng: "*Claridge effendi!*"

He addressed no one, but he bowed to the group of

foreign consuls-general, looking them steadily in the eyes. He knew their devices and what had been going on of late, he was aware that his fall would mean a blow to British prestige, and the calmness of his gaze expressed a fortitude which had a disconcerting effect upon the group. The British Consul-General stood near by. David advanced to him, and, as he did so, the few who surrounded the Consul-General fell back. David held out his hand. Somewhat abashed and ill at ease, the Consul-General took it.

"Have you good news from Downing Street?" asked David quietly.

The Consul-General hesitated for an instant, and then said: "There is no help to be had for you or for what you are doing in that quarter." He lowered his voice. "I fear Lord Eglington does not favour you; and he controls the Foreign Minister. I am very sorry. I have done my best, but my colleagues, the other consuls, are busy—with Lord Eglington."

David turned his head away for an instant. Strange how that name sent a thrill through him, stirred his blood! He did not answer the Consul-General, and the latter continued:

"Is there any hope? Is the breach with Kaïd complete?"

David smiled gravely. "We shall see presently. I have made no change in my plans on the basis of a breach."

At that moment he caught sight of Nahoum some distance away and moved towards him. Out of the corner of his eye Nahoum saw David coming, and edged away towards that point where Kaïd would enter, and where the crowd was greater. As he did so Kaïd appeared. A thrill went through the chamber. Contrary to his

custom, he was dressed in the old native military dress of Mehemet Ali. At his side was a jewelled scimitar, and in his turban flashed a great diamond. In his hand he carried a snuff-box, covered with brilliants, and on his breast were glittering orders.

The eyes of the reactionaries flashed with sinister pleasure when they saw Kaïd. This outward display of Orientalism could only be a reflex of the mind. It was the outer symbol of Kaïd's return to the spirit of the old days, before the influence of the Inglesi came upon him. Every corrupt and intriguing mind had a palpitation of excitement.

In Nahoum the sight of Kaïd produced mixed feelings. If, indeed, this display meant reaction towards an *entourage* purely Arab, Egyptian, and Muslim, then it was no good omen for his Christian self. He drew near, and placed himself where Kaïd could see him. Kaïd's manner was cheerful, but his face showed the effect of suffering, physical and mental. Presently there entered behind him Sharif Bey, whose appearance was the signal for a fresh demonstration. Now, indeed, there could be no doubt as to Kaïd's reaction. Yet if Sharif had seen Mizraim's face evilly gloating near by he would have been less confident.

David was standing where Kaïd must see him, but the Effendina gave no sign of recognition. This was so significant that the enemies of David rejoiced anew. The day of the Inglesi was over. Again and again did Kaïd's eye wander over David's head.

David remained calm and watchful, neither avoiding nor yet seeking the circle in which Kaïd moved. The spirit with which he had entered the room, however, remained with him, even when he saw Kaïd summon to him some of the most fanatical members of the court

circle, and engage them in talk for a moment. But as this attention grew more marked, a cloud slowly gathered in the far skies of his mind.

There was one person in the great assembly, however, who seemed to be unduly confident. It was an ample, perspiring person in evening dress, who now and again mopped a prematurely bald head, and who said to himself, as Kaïd talked to the reactionaries:

"Say, Kaïd's overdoing it. He's putting potted chicken on the butter. But it's working all right—r-i-g-h-t. It's worth the backsheesh!"

At this moment Kaïd fastened David with his look, and spoke in a tone so loud that people standing at some distance were startled.

"Claridge Pasha!"

In the hush that followed David stepped forward.

"May the bounty of the years be thine, Saadat," Kaïd said in a tone none could misunderstand.

"May no tree in thy orchard wither, Effendina," answered David in a firm voice.

Kaïd beckoned him near, and again he spoke loudly:

"I have proved thee, and found thee as gold tried seven times by the fire, Saadat. In the treasury of my heart shall I store thee up. Thou art going to the Soudan to finish the work Mehemet Ali began. I commend thee to Allah, and will bid thee farewell at sunrise—I and all who love Egypt."

There was a sinister smile on his lips, as his eyes wandered over the faces of the foreign consuls-general. The look he turned on the intriguers of the Palace was repellent; he reserved for Sharif a moody, threatening glance, and the desperate hakim shrank back confounded from it. His first impulse was to flee from the Palace and from Cairo; but he bethought himself of

the assault to be made on Kaïd by the tent-maker, as he passed to the mosque a few hours later, and he determined to await the issue of that event. Exchanging glances with confederates, he disappeared, as Kaïd laid a hand on David's arm and drew him aside.

After viewing the great throng cynically for a moment Kaïd said: "To-morrow thou goest. A month hence the hakim's knife will find the thing that eats away my life. It may be they will destroy it and save me; if not, we shall meet no more."

David looked into his eyes. "Not in a month shall thy work be completed, Effendina. Thou shalt live. God and thy strong will shall make it so."

A light stole over the superstitious face. "No device or hatred, or plot, has prevailed against thee," Kaïd said eagerly. "Thou hast defeated all—even when I turned against thee in the black blood of despair. Thou hast conquered me even as thou didst Harrik."

"Thou dost live," returned David drily. "Thou dost live for Egypt's sake, even as Harrik died for Egypt's sake, and as others shall die."

"Death hath tracked thee down how often! Yet with a wave of the hand thou hast blinded him, and his blow falls on the air. Thou art beset by a thousand dangers, yet thou comest safe through all. Thou art an honest man. For that I besought thee to stay with me. Never didst thou lie to me. Good luck hath followed thee. *Kismet!* Stay with me, and it may be I shall be safe also. This thought came to me in the night, and in the morning was my reward, for Lacey effendi came to me and said, even as I say now, that thou wilt bring me good luck; and even in that hour, by the mercy of God, a loan much needed was negotiated. Allah be praised!"

A glint of humour shot into David's eyes. Lacey—a loan—he read it all! Lacey had eased the Prince Pasha's immediate and pressing financial needs—and, "*Allah be praised!*" Poor human nature—backsheesh to a Prince regnant!

"Effendina," he said presently, "thou didst speak of Harrik. One there was who saved thee then—"

"Zaida!" A change passed over Kaïd's face. "Speak! Thou hast news of her? She is gone?"

Briefly David told him how Zaida was found upon her sister's grave. Kaïd's face was turned away as he listened.

"She spoke no word of me?" Kaïd said at last.

"To whom should she speak?" David asked gently. "But the amulet thou gavest her, set with one red jewel, it was clasped in her hand in death."

Suddenly Kaïd's anger blazed. "Now shall Achmet die," he burst out. "His hands and feet shall be burnt off, and he shall be thrown to the vultures."

"The Place of the Lepers is sacred even from thee, Effendina," answered David gravely. "Yet Achmet shall die even as Harrik died. He shall die for Egypt and for thee, Effendina."

Swiftly he drew the picture of Achmet at the monastery in the desert. "I have done the unlawful thing, Effendina," he said at last, "but thou wilt make it lawful. He hath died a thousand deaths—all save one."

"Be it so," answered Kaïd gloomily, after a moment; then his face lighted with cynical pleasure as he scanned once more the faces of the crowd before him. At last his eyes fastened on Nahoum. He turned to David.

"Thou dost still desire Nahoum in his office?" he asked keenly.

A troubled look came into David's eyes, then it

cleared away, and he said firmly: "For six years we have worked together, Effendina. I am surety for his loyalty to thee."

"And his loyalty to thee?"

A pained look crossed over David's face again, but he said with a will that fought all suspicion down: "The years bear witness."

Kaïd shrugged his shoulders slightly. "The years have perjured themselves ere this. Yet, as thou sayest, Nahoum is a Christian," he added, with irony scarcely veiled.

Now he moved forward with David towards the waiting court. David searched the groups of faces for Nahoum in vain. There were things to be said to Nahoum before he left on the morrow, last suggestions to be given. Nahoum could not be seen.

Nahoum was gone, as were also Sharif and his confederates, and in the lofty Mosque of Mahmoud soft lights were hovering, while the Sheikh-el-Islam waited with Koran and scimitar for the ruler of Egypt to pray to God and salute the Lord Mahomet.

At the great gateway in the Street of the Tent Makers Kaïd paused on his way to the Mosque Mahmoud. The Gate was studded with thousands of nails, which fastened to its massive timbers relics of the faithful, bits of silk and cloth, and hair and leather; and here from time immemorial a holy man had sat and prayed. At the gateway Kaïd salaamed humbly, and spoke to the holy man, who, as he passed, raised his voice shrilly in an appeal to Allah, commending Kaïd to mercy and everlasting favour. On every side eyes burned with religious zeal, and excited faces were turned towards the Effendina. At a certain point there were little

groups of men with faces more set than excited. They had a look of suppressed expectancy. Kaïd neared them, passed them, and, as he did so, they looked at each other in consternation. They were Sharif's confederates, fanatics carefully chosen. The attempt on Kaïd's life should have been made opposite the spot where they stood. They craned their necks in effort to find the Christian tent-maker, but in vain.

Suddenly they heard a cry, a loud voice calling. It was Rahib the tent-maker. He was beside Kaïd's stirrups, but no weapon was in his hand; and his voice was calling blessings down on the Effendina's head for having pardoned and saved from death his one remaining son, the joy of his old age. In all the world there was no prince like Kaïd, said the tent-maker; none so bountiful and merciful and beautiful in the eyes of men. God grant him everlasting days, the beloved friend of his people, just to all and greatly to be praised.

As the soldiers drove the old man away with kindly insistence—for Kaïd had thrown him a handful of gold —Mizraim, the Chief Eunuch, laughed wickedly. As Nahoum had said, the greatest of all weapons was the mocking finger. He and Mizraim had had their way with the governor of the prisons, and the murderer had gone in safety, while the father stayed to bless Kaïd. Rahib the tent-maker had fooled the plotters. They were had in derision. They did not know that Kaïd was as innocent as themselves of having pardoned the tent-maker's son. Their moment had passed; they could not overtake it; the match had spluttered and gone out at the fuel laid for the fire of fanaticism.

The morning of David's departure came. While yet it was dark he had risen, and had made his last preparations. When he came into the open air and mounted,

it was not yet sunrise, and in that spectral early light, which is all Egypt's own, Cairo looked like some dream-city in a forgotten world. The Mokattam Hills were like vast dun barriers guarding and shutting in the ghostly place, and, high above all, the minarets of the huge mosque upon the lofty rocks were impalpable fingers pointing an endless flight. The very trees seemed so little real and substantial that they gave the eye the impression that they might rise and float away. The Nile was hung with mist, a trailing cloud unwound from the breast of the Nile-mother. At last the sun touched the minarets of the splendid mosque with shafts of light, and over at Ghizeh and Sakkarah the great pyramids, lifting their heads from the wall of rolling blue mist below, took the morning's crimson radiance with the dignity of four thousand years.

On the decks of the little steamer which was to carry them south David, Ebn Ezra, Lacey, and Mahommed waited. Presently Kaïd came, accompanied by his faithful Nubians, their armour glowing in the first warm light of the rising sun, and crowds of people, who had suddenly emerged, ran shrilling to the waterside behind him.

Kaïd's pale face had all last night's friendliness, as he bade David farewell with great honour, and commended him to the care of Allah; and the swords of the Nubians clashed against their breasts and on their shields in salaam.

But there was another farewell to make; and it was made as David's foot touched the deck of the steamer. Once again David looked at Nahoum as he had done six years ago, in the little room where they had made their bond together. There was the same straight look in Nahoum's eyes. Was he not to be trusted? Was it

not his own duty to trust? He clasped Nahoum's hand in farewell, and turned away. But as he gave the signal to start, and the vessel began to move, Nahoum came back. He leaned over the widening space and said in a low tone, as David again drew near:

"There is still an account which should be settled, Saadat. It has waited long; but God is with the patient. *There is the account of Foorgat Bey.*"

The light fled from David's eyes and his heart stopped beating for a moment. When his eyes saw the shore again Nahoum was gone with Kaïd.

BOOK V

CHAPTER XXXV

THE FLIGHT OF THE WOUNDED

"And Mario can soothe with a tenor note
The souls in purgatory."

"*Non ti scordar di mi!*" The voice rang out with passionate stealthy sweetness, finding its way into far recesses of human feeling. Women of perfect poise and with the confident look of luxury and social fame dropped their eyes abstractedly on the opera-glasses lying in their laps, or the programmes they mechanically fingered, and recalled, they knew not why—for what had it to do with this musical narration of a tragic Italian tale!—the days when, in the first flush of their wedded life, they had set a seal of devotion and loyalty and love upon their arms, which, long ago, had gone to the limbo of lost jewels, with the chaste, fresh desires of worshipping hearts. Young egotists, supremely happy and defiant in the pride of the fact that they loved each other, and that it mattered little what the rest of the world enjoyed, suffered, and endured—these were suddenly arrested in their buoyant and solitary flight, and stirred restlessly in their seats. Old men whose days of work were over; who no longer marshalled their legions, or moved at a nod great ships upon the waters in masterful manœuvres; whose voices were heard no more in chambers of legislation, lashing par-

tisan feeling to a height of cruelty or lulling a storm among rebellious followers; whose intellects no longer devised vast schemes of finance, or applied secrets of science to transform industry—these heard the enthralling cry of a soul with the darkness of eternal loss gathering upon it, and drew back within themselves; for they too had cried like this one time or another in their lives. Stricken, they had cried out, and ambition had fled away, leaving behind only the habit of living, and of work and duty.

As Hylda, in the Duchess of Snowdon's box, listened with a face which showed nothing of what she felt, and looking straight at the stage before her, the words of a poem she had learned but yesterday came to her mind, and wove themselves into the music thrilling from the voice in the stage prison:

"And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or agonised?
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue thence?
Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should be prized?"

"And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence?" Was it then so? The long weeks which had passed since that night at Hamley, when she had told Eglington the truth about so many things, had brought no peace, no understanding, no good news from anywhere. The morning after she had spoken with heart laid bare. Eglington had essayed to have a reconciliation; but he had come as the martyr, as one injured. His egotism at such a time, joined to his attempt to make light of things, of treating what had happened as a mere "moment of exasperation," as "one of those episodes

inseparable from the lives of the high-spirited," only made her heart sink and grow cold, almost as insensible as the flesh under a spray of ether. He had been neither wise nor patient. She had not slept after that bitter, terrible scene, and the morning had found her like one battered by winter seas, every nerve desperately alert to pain, yet tears swimming at her heart and ready to spring to her eyes at a touch of the real thing, the true note—and she knew so well what the true thing was! Their great moment had passed, had left her withdrawn into herself, firmly, yet without heart, performing the daily duties of life, gay before the world, the delightful hostess, the necessary and graceful figure at so many functions.

Even as Soolsby had done, who went no further than to tell Eglington his dark tale, and told no one else, withholding it from "Our Man"; as Sybil Lady Eglington had shrunk when she had been faced by her obvious duty, so Hylda hesitated, but from better reason than either. To do right in the matter was to strike her husband—it must be a blow now, since her voice had failed. To do right was to put in the ancient home and house of Eglington one whom he—with anger and without any apparent desire to have her altogether for himself, all the riches of her life and love—had dared to say commanded her sympathy and interest, not because he was a man dispossessed of his rights, but because he was a man possessed of that to which he had no right. The insult had stung her, had driven her back into a reserve, out of which she seemed unable to emerge. How could she compel Eglington to do right in this thing—do right by his own father's son?

Meanwhile, that father's son was once more imperilling his life, once more putting England's prestige in the

balance in the Soudan, from which he had already been delivered twice as though by miracles. Since he had gone, months before, there had been little news; but there had been much public anxiety; and she knew only too well that there had been *pourparlers* with foreign ministers, from which no action came safe-guarding David.

Many a human being has realised the apathy, the partial paralysis of the will, succeeding a great struggle, which has exhausted the vital forces. Many a general who has fought a desperate and victorious fight after a long campaign, and amid all the anxieties and miseries of war, has failed to follow up his advantage, from a sudden lesion of the power for action in him. He has stepped from the iron routine of daily effort into a sudden freedom, and his faculties have failed him, the iron of his will has vanished. So it was with Hylda. She waited for she knew not what. Was it some dim hope that Eglington might see the right as she saw it? That he might realise how unreal was this life they were living, outwardly peaceful and understanding, deluding the world, but inwardly a place of tears. How she dreaded the night and its recurrent tears, and the hours when she could not sleep, and waited for the joyless morning, as one lost on the moor, blanched with cold, waits for the sunrise! Night after night at a certain hour—the hour when she went to bed at last after that poignant revelation to Eglington—she wept, as she had wept then, heart-broken tears of disappointment, disillusion, loneliness; tears for the bitter pity of it all; for the wasting and wasted opportunities; for the common aim never understood or planned together; for the precious hours lived in an air of artificial happiness and social excitement; for a perfect understanding missed; for the touch which no longer thrilled.

But the end of it all must come. She was looking frail and delicate, and her beauty, newly refined, and with a fresh charm, as of mystery or pain, was touched by feverishness. An old impatience once hers was vanished, and Kate Heaver would have given a month's wages for one of those flashes of petulance of other days ever followed by a smile. Now the smile was all too often there, the patient smile which comes to those who have suffered. Hardness she felt at times, where Eglington was concerned, for he seemed to need her now not at all, to be self-contained, self-dependent—almost arrogantly so; but she did not show it, and she was outwardly patient.

In his heart of hearts Eglington believed that she loved him, that her interest in David was only part of her idealistic temperament—the admiration of a woman for a man of altruistic aims; but his hatred of David, of what David was, and of his irrefutable claims, reacted on her. Perverseness and his unhealthy belief that he would master her in the end, that she would one day break down and come to him, willing to take his view in all things, and to be his slave—all this drove him farther and farther on a fatal, ever-broadening path.

Success had spoiled him. He applied his gifts in politics, daringly unscrupulous, superficially persuasive, intellectually insinuating, to his wife; and she, who had been captured once by all these things, was not to be captured again. She knew what alone could capture her; and, as she sat and watched the singers on the stage now, the divine notes of that searching melody still lingering in her heart, there came a sudden wonder whether Eglington's heart could not be wakened. She knew that it never had been, that he had never known love, the transfiguring and reclaiming passion. No, no, surely it could not be too late—her marriage with him

had only come too soon! He had ridden over her without mercy; he had robbed her of her rightful share of the beautiful and the good; he had never loved her; but if love came to him, if he could but once realise how much there was of what he had missed! If he did not save himself—and her—what would be the end? She felt the cords drawing her elsewhere; the lure of a voice she had heard in an Egyptian garden was in her ears. One night at Hamley, in an abandonment of grief—life hurt her so—she had remembered the prophecy she had once made that she would speak to David, and that he would hear; and she had risen from her seat, impelled by a strange new feeling, and had cried: "Speak!—speak to me!" As plainly as she had ever heard anything in her life, she had heard his voice speak to her a message that sank into the innermost recesses of her being, and she had been more patient afterwards. She had no doubt whatever; she had spoken to him, and he had answered; but the answer was one which all the world might have heard.

Down deep in her nature was an inalienable loyalty, was a simple, old-fashioned feeling that "they two," she and Eglington, should cleave unto each other till death should part. He had done much to shatter that feeling; but now, as she listened to Mario's voice, centuries of predisposition worked in her, and a great pity awoke in her heart. Could she not save him, win him, wake him, cure him of the disease of Self?

The thought brought a light to her eyes which had not been there for many a day. Out of the deeps of her soul this mist of a pure selflessness rose, the spirit of that idealism which was the real chord of sympathy between her and Egypt.

Yes, she would, this once again, try to win the heart of this man; and so reach what was deeper than heart,

and so also give him that without which his life must be a failure in the end, as Sybil Eglington had said. How often had those bitter anguished words of his mother rung in her ears—"*So brilliant and unscrupulous, like yourself; but, oh, so sure of winning a great place in the world . . . so calculating and determined and ambitious!*" They came to her now, flashed between the eager solicitous eyes of her mind and the scene of a perfect and everlasting reconciliation which it conjured up—flashed and were gone; for her will rose up and blurred them into mist; and other words of that true palimpsest of Sybil Eglington's broken life came instead: "*And though he loves me little, as he loves you little too, yet he is my son, and for what he is we are both responsible one way or another.*" As the mother, so the wife. She said to herself now in sad paraphrase, "And though he loves me little, yet he is my husband, and for what he is it may be that I am in some sense responsible." *Yet he is my husband!* All that it was came to her; the closed door, the drawn blinds; the intimacy which shut them away from all the world; the things said which can only be said without desecration between two honest souls who love each other; and that sweet isolation which makes marriage a separate world, with its own sacred revelation. This she had known; this had been; and though the image of the sacred thing had been defaced, yet the shrine was not destroyed.

For she believed that each had kept the letter of the law; that, whatever his faults, he had turned his face to no other woman. If she had not made his heart captive and drawn him by an ever-shortening cord of attraction, yet she was sure that none other had any influence over him, that, as he had looked at her in those short-lived days of his first devotion, he looked at no other. The way was clear yet. There was nothing

irretrievable, nothing irrevocable, which would for ever stain the memory and tarnish the gold of life when the perfect love should be minted. Whatever faults of mind or disposition or character were his—or hers—there were no sins against the pledges they had made, nor the bond into which they had entered. Life would need no sponge. Memory might still live on without a wound or a cowl of shame.

It was all part of the music to which she listened, and she was almost oblivious of the brilliant throng, the crowded boxes, or of the Duchess of Snowdon sitting near her strangely still, now and again scanning the beautiful face beside her with a reflective look. The Duchess loved the girl—she was but a girl, after all—as she had never loved any of her sex; it had come to be the last real interest of her life. To her eyes, dimmed with much seeing, blurred by a garish kaleidoscope of fashionable life, there had come a look which was like the ghost of a look she had, how many decades ago.

Presently, as she saw Hylda's eyes withdraw from the stage, and look at her with a strange, soft moisture and a new light in them, she laid her fan confidently on her friend's knee, and said in her abrupt whimsical voice: "You like it, my darling; your eyes are as big as saucers. You look as if you'd been seeing things, not things on that silly stage, but what Verdi felt when he wrote the piece, or something of more account than that."

"Yes, I've been seeing things," Hylda answered with a smile which came from a new-born purpose, the dream of an idealist. "I've been seeing things that Verdi did not see, and of more account, too. . . . Do you suppose the House is up yet?"

A strange look flashed into the Duchess's eyes, which had been watching her with as much pity as interest. Hylda had not been near the House of Commons this session, though she had read the reports with her usual care. She had shunned the place.

"Why, did you expect Eglington?" the Duchess asked idly, yet she was watchful too, alert for every movement in this life where the footsteps of happiness were falling by the edge of a precipice, over which she would not allow herself to look. She knew that Hylda did not expect Eglington, for the decision to come to the opera was taken at the last moment.

"Of course not—he doesn't know we are here. But if it wasn't too late, I thought I'd go down and drive him home."

The Duchess veiled her look. Here was some new development in the history which had been torturing her old eyes, which had given her and Lord Windlehurst as many anxious moments as they had known in many a day, and had formed them into a vigilance committee of two, who waited for the critical hour when they should be needed.

"We'll go at once if you like," she replied. "The opera will be over soon. We sent word to Windlehurst to join us, you remember, but he won't come now; it's too late. So, we'll go, if you like."

She half rose, but the door of the box opened, and Lord Windlehurst looked in quizzically. There was a smile on his face.

"I'm late, I know; but you'll forgive me—*you'll* forgive me, dear lady," he added to Hylda, "for I've been listening to your husband making a smashing speech for a bad cause."

Hylda smiled. "Then I must go and congratulate

him," she answered, and withdrew her hand from that of Lord Windlehurst, who seemed to hold it longer than usual, and pressed it in a fatherly way.

"I'm afraid the House is up," he rejoined, as Hylda turned for her opera-cloak; "and I saw Eglington leave Palace Yard as I came away." He gave a swift, ominous glance towards the Duchess, which Hylda caught, and she looked at each keenly.

"It's seldom I sit in the Peers' Gallery," continued Windlehurst; "I don't like going back to the old place much. It seems empty and hollow. But I wouldn't have missed Eglington's fighting speech for a good deal."

"What was it about?" asked Hylda as they left the box. She had a sudden throb of the heart. Was it the one great question, that which had been like a gulf of fire between them?

"Oh, Turkey—the unpardonable Turk," answered Windlehurst. "As good a defence of a bad case as I ever heard."

"Yes, Eglington would do that well," said the Duchess enigmatically, drawing her cloak around her and adjusting her hair. Hylda looked at her sharply, and Lord Windlehurst slyly, but the Duchess seemed oblivious of having said anything out of the way, and added: "It's a gift seeing all that can be said for a bad cause, and saying it, and so making the other side make their case so strong that the verdict has to be just."

"Dear Duchess, it doesn't always work out that way," rejoined Windlehurst with a dry laugh. "Sometimes the devil's advocate wins."

"You are not very complimentary to my husband," retorted Hylda, looking him in the eyes, for she was not always sure when he was trying to baffle her.

"I'm not so sure of that. He hasn't won his case yet. He has only staved off the great attack. It's coming—soon."

"What is the great attack? What has the Government, or the Foreign Office, done or left undone?"

"Well, my dear—" Suddenly Lord Windlehurst remembered himself, stopped, put up his eyeglass, and with great interest seemed to watch a gay group of people opposite; for the subject of attack was Egypt and the Government's conduct in not helping David, in view not alone of his present danger, but of the position of England in the country, on which depended the security of her highway to the East. Windlehurst was a good actor, and he had broken off his words as though the group he was now watching had suddenly claimed his attention. "Well, well, Duchess," he said reflectively, "I see a new nine days' wonder yonder." Then, in response to a reminder from Hylda, he continued: "Ah, yes, the attack! Oh, Persia—Persia, and our feeble diplomacy, my dear lady, though you mustn't take that as my opinion, opponent as I am. That's the charge, Persia—and her cats."

The Duchess breathed a sigh of relief; for she knew what Windlehurst had been going to say, and she shrank from seeing what she felt she would see, if Egypt and Claridge Pasha's name were mentioned. That night at Hamley had burnt a thought into her mind which she did not like. Not that she had any pity for Eglington; her thought was all for this girl she loved. No happiness lay in the land of Egypt for her, whatever her unhappiness here; and she knew that Hylda must be more unhappy still before she was ever happy again, if that might be. There was that concerning Eglington which Hylda did not know, yet which she must know

one day—and then! But why were Hylda's eyes so much brighter and softer and deeper to-night? There was something expectant, hopeful, brooding in them. They belonged not to the life moving round her, but were shining in a land of their own, a land of promise. By an instinct in each of them they stood listening for a moment to the last strains of the opera. The light leaped higher in Hylda's eyes.

"Beautiful—oh, so beautiful!" she said, her hand touching the Duchess's arm.

The Duchess gave the slim warm fingers a spasmodic little squeeze. "Yes, darling, beautiful," she rejoined; and then the crowd began to pour out behind them.

Their carriages were at the door. Lord Windlehurst put Hylda in. "The House is up," he said. "You are going on somewhere?"

"No—home," she said, and smiled into his old, kind, questioning eyes. "Home!"

"Home!" he murmured significantly as he turned towards the Duchess and her carriage. "Home!" he repeated, and shook his head sadly.

"Shall I drive you to your house?" the Duchess asked.

"No, I'll go with you to your door, and walk back to my cell. Home!" he growled to the footman, with a sardonic note in the voice.

As they drove away, the Duchess turned to him abruptly. "What did you mean by your look when you said you had seen Eglington drive away from the House?"

"Well, my dear Betty, *she*—the fly-away—drives him home now. It has come to that."

"To *her* house—Windlehurst, oh, Windlehurst!"

She sank back in the cushions, and gave what was as near a sob as she had given in many a day.

Windlehurst took her hand. "No, not so bad as that yet. She drove him to his club. Don't fret, my dear Betty."

Home! Hylda watched the shops, the houses, the squares, as she passed westward, her mind dwelling almost happily on the new determination to which she had come. It was not love that was moving her, not love for him, but a deeper thing. He had brutally killed love—the full life of it—those months ago; but there was a deep thing working in her which was as near nobility as the human mind can feel. Not in a long time had she neared her home with such expectation and longing. Often on the doorstep she had shut her eyes to the light and warmth and elegance of it, because of that which she did not see. Now, with a thrill of pleasure, she saw its doors open. It was possible Eglington might have come home already. Lord Windlehurst had said that he had left the House. She did not ask if he was in—it had not been her custom for a long time—and servants were curious people; but she looked at the hall-table. Yes, there was a hat which had evidently just been placed there, and gloves, and a stick. He was at home, then.

She hurried to her room, dropped her opera-cloak on a chair, looked at herself in the glass, a little fluttered and critical, and then crossed the hallway to Eglington's bedroom. She listened for a moment. There was no sound. She turned the handle of the door softly, and opened it. A light was burning low, but the room was empty. It was as she thought, he was in his study, where he spent hours sometimes after he came home,

reading official papers. She went up the stairs, at first swiftly, then more slowly, then with almost lagging feet. Why did she hesitate? Why should a woman falter in going to her husband—to her own one man of all the world? Was it not, should it not be, ever the open door between them? Confidence—confidence—could she not have it, could she not get it now at last? She had paused; but now she moved on with quicker step, purpose in her face, her eyes softly lighted.

Suddenly she saw on the floor an opened letter. She picked it up, and, as she did so, involuntarily observed the writing. Almost mechanically she glanced at the contents. Her heart stood still. The first words scorched her eyes.

"*Eglington—Harry, dearest,*" it said, "*you shall not go to sleep to-night without a word from me. This will make you think of me when . . .*"

Frozen, struck as by a mortal blow, Hylda looked at the signature. She knew it—the cleverest, the most beautiful adventuress which the aristocracy and society had produced. She trembled from head to foot, and for a moment it seemed that she must fall. But she steadied herself and walked firmly to Eglington's door. Turning the handle softly, she stepped inside.

He did not hear her. He was leaning over a box of papers, and they rustled loudly under his hand. He was humming to himself that song she heard an hour ago in *Il Trovatore,* that song of passion and love and tragedy. It sent a wave of fresh feeling over her. She could not go on—could not face him, and say what she must say. She turned and passed swiftly from the room, leaving the door open, and hurried down the staircase. Eglington heard now, and wheeled round. He saw the open door, listened to the rustle of her

skirts, knew that she had been there. He smiled, and said to himself:

"She came to me, as I said she would. I shall master her—the full surrender, and then—life will be easy then."

Hylda hurried down the staircase to her room, saw Kate Heaver waiting, beckoned to her, caught up her opera-cloak, and together they passed down the staircase to the front door. Heaver rang a bell, a footman appeared, and, at a word, called a cab. A minute later they were ready:

"Snowdon House," Hylda said; and they passed into the night.

CHAPTER XXXVI

"IS IT ALWAYS SO—IN LIFE?"

The Duchess and her brother, an ex-diplomatist, now deaf and patiently amiable and garrulous, had met on the doorstep of Snowdon House, and together they insisted on Lord Windlehurst coming in for a talk. The two men had not met for a long time, and the retired official had been one of Lord Windlehurst's own best appointments in other days. The Duchess had the carriage wait in consequence.

The ex-official could hear little, but he had cultivated the habit of talking constantly and well. There were some voices, however, which he could hear more distinctly than others, and Lord Windlehurst's was one of them—clear, well-modulated, and penetrating. Sipping brandy and water, Lord Windlehurst gave his latest quip. They were all laughing heartily, when the butler entered the room and said, "Lady Eglington is here, and wishes to see your Grace."

As the butler left the room, the Duchess turned despairingly to Windlehurst, who had risen, and was paler than the Duchess. "It has come," she said, "oh, it has come! I can't face it."

"But it doesn't matter about you facing it," Lord Windlehurst rejoined. "Go to her and help her, Betty. You know what to do—the one thing." He took her hand and pressed it.

She dashed the tears from her eyes and drew herself together, while her brother watched her benevolently.

He had not heard what was said. Betty had always been impulsive, he thought to himself, and here was some one in trouble—they all came to her, and kept her poor.

"Go to bed, Dick," the Duchess said to him, and hurried from the room. She did not hesitate now. Windlehurst had put the matter in the right way. Her pain was nothing, mere moral cowardice; but Hylda—!

She entered the other room as quickly as rheumatic limbs would permit. Hylda stood waiting, erect, her eyes gazing blankly before her and rimmed by dark circles, her face haggard and despairing.

Before the Duchess could reach her, she said in a hoarse whisper: "I have left him—I have left him. I have come to you."

With a cry of pity the Duchess would have taken the stricken girl in her arms, but Hylda held out a shaking hand with the letter in it which had brought this new woe and this crisis foreseen by Lord Windlehurst. "There—there it is. He goes from me to her—to that!" She thrust the letter into the Duchess's fingers. "You knew—you knew! I saw the look that passed between you and Windlehurst at the opera. I understand all now. He left the House of Commons with her—and you knew, oh, you knew! All the world knows—every one knew but me." She threw up her hands. "But I've left him—I've left him, for ever."

Now the Duchess had her in her arms, and almost forcibly drew her to a sofa. "Darling, my darling," she said, "you must not give way. It is not so bad as you think. You must let me help to make you understand."

Hylda laughed hysterically. "Not so bad as I think! Read—read it," she said, taking the letter from the

Duchess's fingers and holding it before her face. "I found it on the staircase. I could not help but read it."

She sat and clasped and unclasped her hands in utter misery. "Oh, the shame of it, the bitter shame of it! Have I not been a good wife to him? Have I not had reason to break my heart? But I waited, and I wanted to be good and to do right. And to-night I was going to try once more—I felt it in the opera. I was going to make one last effort for his sake. It was for his sake I meant to make it, for I thought him only hard and selfish, and that he had never loved; and if he only loved, I thought—"

She broke off, wringing her hands and staring into space, the ghost of the beautiful figure that had left the Opera House with shining eyes.

The Duchess caught the cold hands. "Yes, yes, darling, I know. I understand. So does Windlehurst. He loves you as much as I do. We know there isn't much to be got out of life; but we always hoped you would get more than anybody else."

Hylda shrank, then raised her head, and looked at the Duchess with an infinite pathos. "Oh, is it always so—in life? Is no one true? Is every one betrayed sometime? I would die—yes, a thousand times yes, I would rather die than bear this. What do I care for life—it has cheated me! I meant well, and I tried to do well, and I was true to him in word and deed even when I suffered most, even when—"

The Duchess laid a cheek against the burning head. "I understand, my own dear. I understand—altogether."

"But you cannot know," the broken girl replied; "but through everything I was true; and I have been tempted too when my heart was aching so, when the

days were so empty, the nights so long, and my heart hurt—hurt me. But now, it is over, everything is done. You will keep me here—ah, say you will keep me here till everything can be settled, and I can go away—far away—far—!"

She stopped with a gasping cry, and her eyes suddenly strained into the distance, as though a vision of some mysterious thing hung before her. The Duchess realised that that temptation, which has come to so many disillusioned mortals, to end it all, to find quiet somehow, somewhere out in the dark, was upon her. She became resourceful and persuasively commanding.

"But no, my darling," she said, "you are going nowhere. Here in London is your place now. And you must not stay here in my house. You must go back to your home. Your place is there. For the present, at any rate, there must be no scandal. Suspicion is nothing, talk is nothing, and the world forgets—"

"Oh, I do not care for the world or its forgetting!" the wounded girl replied. "What is the world to me! I wanted my own world, the world of my four walls, quiet and happy, and free from scandal and shame. I wanted love and peace there, and now . . . !"

"You must be guided by those who love you. You are too young to decide what is best for yourself. You must let Windlehurst and me think for you; and, oh, my darling, you cannot know how much I care for your best good!"

"I cannot, will not, bear the humiliation and the shame. This letter here—you see!"

"It is the letter of a woman who has had more *affaires* than any man in London. She is preternaturally clever, my dear—Windlehurst would tell you so. The brilliant and unscrupulous, the beautiful and the bad, have

a great advantage in this world. Eglington was curious, that is all. It is in the breed of the Eglingtons to go exploring, to experiment."

Hylda started. Words from the letter Sybil Lady Eglington had left behind her rushed into her mind: "*Experiment, subterfuge, secrecy. 'Reaping where you had not sowed, and gathering where you had not strawed.' Always experiment, experiment, experiment!*"

"I have only been married three years," she moaned.

"Yes, yes, my darling; but much may happen after three days of married life, and love may come after twenty years. The human heart is a strange thing."

"I was patient—I gave him every chance. He has been false and shameless. I will not go on."

The Duchess pressed both hands hard, and made a last effort, looking into the deep troubled eyes with her own grown almost beautiful with feeling—the faded world-worn eyes.

"You will go back to-night—at once," she said firmly. "To-morrow you will stay in bed till noon—at any rate, till I come. I promise you that you shall not be treated with further indignity. Your friends will stand by you, the world will be with you, if you do nothing rash, nothing that forces it to babble and scold. But you must play its game, my dearest. I'll swear that the worst has not happened. She drove him to his club, and, after a man has had a triumph, a woman will not drive him to his club if—my darling, you must trust me! If there must be the great smash, let it be done in a way that will prevent you being smashed also in the world's eyes. You can live, and you will live. Is there nothing for you to do? Is there no one for whom you would do something, who would be heart-broken if you—if you went mad now?"

Suddenly a great change passed over Hylda. "*Is there no one for whom you would do something?*" Just as in the desert a question like this had lifted a man out of a terrible and destroying apathy, so this searching appeal roused in Hylda a memory and a pledge. "*Is there no one for whom you would do something?*" Was life, then, all over? Was her own great grief all? Was her bitter shame the end?

She got to her feet tremblingly. "I will go back," she said slowly and softly.

"Windlehurst will take you home," the Duchess rejoined eagerly. "My carriage is at the door."

A moment afterwards Lord Windlehurst took Hylda's hands in his and held them long. His old, querulous eyes were like lamps of safety; his smile had now none of that cynicism with which he had aroused and chastened the world. The pitiful understanding of life was there and a consummate gentleness. He gave her his arm, and they stepped out into the moonlit night. "So peaceful, so bright!" he said, looking round.

"I will come at noon to-morrow," called the Duchess from the doorway.

A light was still shining in Eglington's study when the carriage drove up. With a latch-key Hylda admitted herself and her maid.

The storm had broken, the flood had come. The storm was over, but the flood swept far and wide.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE FLYING SHUTTLE

Hour after hour of sleeplessness. The silver-tongued clock remorselessly tinkled the quarters, and Hylda lay and waited for them with a hopeless strained attention. In vain she tried devices to produce that monotony of thought which sometimes brings sleep. Again and again, as she felt that sleep was coming at last, the thought of the letter she had found flashed through her mind with words of fire, and it seemed as if there had been poured through every vein a subtle irritant. Just such a surging, thrilling flood she had felt in the surgeon's chair when she was a girl and an anæsthetic had been given. But this wave of sensation led to no oblivion, no last soothing intoxication. Its current beat against her heart until she could have cried out from the mere physical pain, the clamping grip of her trouble. She withered and grew cold under the torture of it all—the ruthless spoliation of everything which made life worth while or the past endurable.

About an hour after she had gone to bed she heard Eglington's step. It paused at her door. She trembled with apprehension lest he should enter. It was many a day since he had done so, but also she had not heard his step pause at her door for many a day. She could not bear to face it all now; she must have time to think, to plan her course—the last course of all. For she knew that the next step must be the last step in her old life,

and towards a new life, whatever that might be. A great sigh of relief broke from her as she heard his door open and shut, and silence fell on everything, that palpable silence which seems to press upon the night-watcher with merciless, smothering weight.

How terribly active her brain was! Pictures—it was all vivid pictures, that awful visualisation of sorrow which, if it continues, breaks the heart or wrests the mind from its sanity. If only she did not *see!* But she did see Eglington and the Woman together, saw him look into her eyes, take her hands, put his arm round her, draw her face to his! Her heart seemed as if it must burst, her lips cried out. With a great effort of the will she tried to hide from these agonies of the imagination, and again she would approach those happy confines of sleep, which are the only refuge to the lacerated heart; and then the weapon of time on the mantelpiece would clash on the shield of the past, and she was wide awake again. At last, in desperation, she got out of bed, hurried to the fireplace, caught the little sharp-tongued recorder in a nervous grasp, and stopped it.

As she was about to get into bed again, she saw a pile of letters lying on the table near her pillow. In her agitation she had not noticed them, and the devoted Heaver had not drawn her attention to them. Now, however, with a strange premonition, she quickly glanced at the envelopes. The last one of all was less aristocratic-looking than the others; the paper of the envelope was of the poorest, and it had a foreign look. She caught it up with an exclamation. The handwriting was that of her cousin Lacey.

She got into bed with a mind suddenly swept into a new atmosphere, and opened the flimsy cover. Shutting

her eyes, she lay still for a moment—still and vague; she was only conscious of one thing, that a curtain had dropped on the terrible pictures she had seen, and that her mind was in a comforting quiet. Presently she roused herself, and turned the letter over in her hand. It was not long—was that because its news was bad news? The first chronicles of disaster were usually brief! She smoothed the paper out—it had been crumpled and was a little soiled—and read it swiftly. It ran:

Dear Lady Cousin—As the poet says, "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," and in Egypt the sparks set the stacks on fire oftener than anywhere else, I guess. She outclasses Mexico as a "precious example" in this respect. You needn't go looking for trouble in Mexico; it's waiting for you kindly. If it doesn't find you to-day, well, *mañana*. But here it comes running like a native to his cooking-pot at sunset in Ramadan. Well, there have been "hard trials" for the Saadat. His cotton-mills were set on fire—can't you guess who did it? And now, down in Cairo, Nahoum runs Egypt; for a messenger that got through the tribes worrying us tells us that Kaïd is sick, and Nahoum the Armenian says, you shall, and you shan't, now. Which is another way of saying, that between us and the front door of our happy homes there are rattlesnakes that can sting—Nahoum's arm is long, and his traitors are crawling under the canvas of our tents!

I'm not complaining for myself. I asked for what I've got, and, dear Lady Cousin, I put up some cash for it, too, as a man should. No, I *don't* mind for myself, fond as I am of loafing, sort of pottering round where the streets are in the hands of a pure police; for I've seen more, done more, thought more, up here, than in all my life before; and I've felt a country heaving under the touch of one of God's men—it gives you minutes that lift you out of the dust and away from the crawlers. And I'd do it all over a thousand times for him, and for what I've got out of it. I've lived. But, to speak right out plain, I don't know how long this machine will run. There's been a plant of the

worst kind. Tribes we left friendly under a year ago are out against us; cities that were faithful have gone under to rebels. Nahoum has sowed the land with the tale that the Saadat means to abolish slavery, to take away the powers of the great sheikhs, and to hand the country over to the Turk. Ebn Ezra Bey has proofs of the whole thing, and now at last the Saadat knows—too late—that his work has been spoiled by the only man who could spoil it. The Saadat knows it, but does he rave and tear his hair? He says nothing. He stands up like a rock before the riot of treachery and bad luck and all the terrible burden he has to carry here. If he wasn't a Quaker I'd say he had the pride of an archangel. You can bend him, but you can't break him; and it takes a lot to bend him. Men desert, but he says others will come to take their place. And so they do. It's wonderful, in spite of the holy war that's being preached, and all the lies about him sprinkled over this part of Africa, how they all fear him, and find it hard to be out on the war-path against him. We should be gorging the vultures if he wasn't the wonder he is. We need boats. Does he sit down and wring his hands? No, he organises, and builds them—out of scraps. Hasn't he enough food for a long siege? He goes himself to the tribes that have stored food in their cities, and haven't yet declared against him, and he puts a hand on their hard hearts, and takes the sulkiness out of their eyes, and a fleet of ghiassas comes down to us loaded with dourha. The defences of this place are nothing. Does he fold his hands like a man of peace that he is, and say, 'Thy will be done'? Not the Saadat. He gets two soldier-engineers, one an Italian who murdered his wife in Italy twenty years ago, and one a British officer that cheated at cards and had to go, and we've got defences that'll take some negotiating. That's the kind of man he is; smiling to cheer others when their hearts are in their boots, stern like a commander-in-chief when he's got to punish, and then he does it like steel; but I've seen him afterwards in his tent with a face that looks sixty, and he's got to travel a while yet before he's forty. None of us dares be as afraid as we could be, because a look at him would make us so ashamed we'd have to commit suicide. He hopes when no one else would ever hope. The other day I went to his tent to wait for him, and I saw his Bible open on the table. A passage was marked. It was this:

"*Behold, I have taken out of thy hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury, thou shalt no more drink it again:*

"*But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over; and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over.*"

I'd like to see Nahoum with that cup of trembling in his hand, and I've got an idea, too, that it will be there yet. I don't know how it is, but I never can believe the worst will happen to the Saadat. Reading those verses put hope into me. That's why I'm writing to you, on the chance of this getting through by a native who is stealing down the river with a letter from the Saadat to Nahoum, and one to Kaïd, and one to the Foreign Minister in London, and one to your husband. If they reach the hands they're meant for, it may be we shall pan out here yet. But there must be display of power; an army must be sent, without delay, to show the traitors that the game is up. Five thousand men from Cairo under a good general would do it. Will Nahoum send them? Does Kaïd, the sick man, know? I'm not banking on Kaïd. I think he's on his last legs. Unless pressure is put on him, unless some one takes him by the throat and says: If you don't relieve Claridge Pasha and the people with him, you will go to the crocodiles, Nahoum won't stir. So, I am writing to you. England can do it. The lord, your husband, can do it. England will have a nasty stain on her flag if she sees this man go down without a hand lifted to save him. He is worth another Alma to her prestige. She can't afford to see him slaughtered here, where he's fighting the fight of civilisation. You see right through this thing, I know, and I don't need to palaver any more about it. It doesn't matter about me. I've had a lot for my money, and I'm no use—or I wouldn't be, if anything happened to the Saadat. No one would drop a knife and fork at the breakfast-table when my *obit* was read out—well, yes, there's one, cute as she can be, but she's lost two husbands already, and you can't be hurt so bad twice in the same place. But the Saadat, back him, Hylda—I'll call you that at this distance. Make Nahoum move. Send four or five thousand men before the day comes when famine does its work and they draw the bowstring tight.

Salaam and salaam, and the post is going out, and there's

nothing in the morning paper; and, as Aunt Melissa used to say: "Well, so much for so much!" One thing I forgot. I'm lucky to be writing to you at all. If the Saadat was an old-fashioned overlord, I shouldn't be here. I got into a bad corner three days ago with a dozen Arabs—I'd been doing a little work with a friendly tribe all on my own, and I almost got caught by this loose lot of fanatics. I shot three, and galloped for it. I knew the way through the mines outside, and just escaped by the skin of my teeth. Did the Saadat, as a matter of discipline, have me shot for cowardice? Cousin Hylda, my heart was in my mouth as I heard them yelling behind me—and I never enjoyed a dinner so much in my life. Would the Saadat have run from them? Say, he'd have stayed and saved his life too. Well, give my love to the girls!

Your affectionate cousin,

TOM LACEY.

P.S.—There's no use writing to me. The letter service is bad. Send a few thousand men by military parcel-post, prepaid, with some red seals—majors and colonels from Aldershot will do. They'll give the step to the Gyppies. T.

Hylda closed her eyes. A fever had passed from her veins. Here lay her duty before her—the redemption of the pledge she had made. Whatever her own sorrow, there was work before her; a supreme effort must be made for another. Even now it might be too late. She must have strength for what she meant to do. She put the room in darkness, and resolutely banished thought from her mind.

The sun had been up for hours before she waked. Eglington had gone to the Foreign Office. The morning papers were full of sensational reports concerning Claridge Pasha and the Soudan. A *Times* leader sternly admonished the Government.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

JASPER KIMBER SPEAKS

THAT day the adjournment of the House of Commons was moved "To call attention to an urgent matter of public importance"—the position of Claridge Pasha in the Soudan. Flushed with the success of last night's performance, stung by the attacks of the Opposition morning papers, confident in the big majority behind, which had cheered him a few hours before, viciously resenting the letter he had received from David that morning, Eglington returned such replies to the questions put to him that a fire of angry mutterings came from the forces against him. He might have softened the growing resentment by a change of manner, but his intellectual arrogance had control of him for the moment; and he said to himself that he had mastered the House before, and he would do so now. Apart from his deadly antipathy to his half-brother, and the gain to himself—to his credit, the latter weighed with him not so much, so set was he on a stubborn course—if David disappeared for ever, there was at bottom a spirit of anti-expansion, of reaction against England's world-wide responsibilities. He had no largeness of heart or view concerning humanity. He had no inherent greatness, no breadth of policy. With less responsibility taken, there would be less trouble, national and international—that was his point of view; that had been his view long ago at the meeting at Heddington; and his weak chief had taken it, knowing nothing of the personal elements behind.

The disconcerting factor in the present bitter questioning in the House was, that it originated on his own side. It was Jasper Kimber who had launched the questions, who moved the motion for adjournment. Jasper had had a letter from Kate Heaver that morning early, which sent him to her, and he had gone to the House to do what he thought to be his duty. He did it boldly, to the joy of the Opposition, and with a somewhat sullen support from many on his own side. Now appeared Jasper's own inner disdain of the man who had turned his coat for office. It gave a lead to a latent feeling among members of the ministerial party, of distrust, and of suspicion that they were the dupes of a mind of abnormal cleverness which, at bottom, despised them.

With flashing eyes and set lips, vigilant and resourceful, Eglington listened to Jasper Kimber's opening remarks.

By unremitting industry Jasper had made a place for himself in the House. The humour and vitality of his speeches, and his convincing advocacy of the cause of the "factory folk," had gained him a hearing. Thickset, under middle size, with an arm like a giant and a throat like a bull, he had strong common sense, and he gave the impression that he would wear his heart out for a good friend or a great cause, but that if he chose to be an enemy he would be narrow, unrelenting, and persistent. For some time the House had been aware that he had more than a gift for criticism of the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

His speech began almost stumblingly, his h's ran loose, and his grammar became involved, but it was seen that he meant business, that he had that to say which would give anxiety to the Government, that he

had a case wherein were the elements of popular interest and appeal, and that he was thinking and speaking as thousands outside the House would think and speak.

He had waited for this hour. Indirectly he owed to Claridge Pasha all that he had become. The day in which David knocked him down saw the depths of his degradation reached, and, when he got up, it was to start on a new life uncertainly, vaguely at first, but a new life for all that. He knew, from a true source, of Eglington's personal hatred of Claridge Pasha, though he did not guess their relationship; and all his interest was enlisted for the man who had, as he knew, urged Kate Heaver to marry himself—and Kate was his great ambition now. Above and beyond these personal considerations was a real sense of England's duty to the man who was weaving the destiny of a new land.

"It isn't England's business?" he retorted, in answer to an interjection from a faithful soul behind the ministerial Front Bench. "Well, it wasn't the business of the Good Samaritan to help the man that had been robbed and left for dead by the wayside; but he did it. As to David Claridge's work, some have said that—I've no doubt it's been said in the Cabinet, and it is the thing the Under-Secretary would say as naturally as he would flick a fly from his boots—that it's a generation too soon. Who knows that? I suppose there was those that thought John the Baptist was baptising too soon, that Luther preached too soon, and Savonarola was in too great a hurry, all because he met his death and his enemies triumphed—and Galileo and Hampden and Cromwell and John Howard were all too soon. Who's to be judge of that? God Almighty puts it into some men's minds to work for a thing that's a great, and maybe an impossible, thing, so far as the success of the

moment is concerned. Well, for a thing that has got to be done some time, the seed has to be sown, and it's always sown by men like Claridge Pasha, who has shown millions of people—barbarians and half-civilised alike—what a true lover of the world can do. God knows, I think he might have stayed and found a cause in England, but he elected to go to the ravaging Soudan, and he is England there, the best of it. And I know Claridge Pasha—from his youth up I have seen him, and I stand here to bear witness of what the working men of England will say to-morrow. Right well the noble lord yonder knows that what I say is true. He has known it for years. Claridge Pasha would never have been in his present position, if the noble lord had not listened to the enemies of Claridge Pasha and of this country, in preference to those who know and hold the truth as I tell it here to-day. I don't know whether the noble lord has repented or not; but I do say that his Government will rue it, if his answer is not the one word 'Intervention!' Mistaken, rash or not, dreamer if you like, Claridge Pasha should be relieved now, and his policy discussed afterwards. I don't envy the man who holds a contrary opinion; he'll be ashamed of it some day. But"—he pointed towards Eglington—"but there sits the minister in whose hands his fate has been. Let us hope that this speech of mine needn't have been made, and that I've done injustice to his patriotism and to the policy he will announce."

"A set-back, a sharp set-back," said Lord Windlehurst, in the Peers' Gallery, as the cheers of the Opposition and of a good number of ministerialists sounded through the Chamber. There were those on the Treasury Bench who saw danger ahead. There was an attempt at a conference, but Kimber's seconder only

said a half-dozen words, and sat down, and Eglington had to rise before any definite confidences could be exchanged. One word only he heard behind him as he got up. It was the word, "Temporise," and it came from the Prime Minister.

Eglington was in no mood for temporising. Attack only nerved him. He was a good and ruthless fighter; and last night's intoxication of success was still in his brain. He did not temporise. He did not leave a way of retreat open for the Prime Minister, who would probably wind up the debate. He fought with skill, but he fought without gloves, and the House needed gentle handling. He had the gift of effective speech to a rare degree, and when he liked he could be insinuating and witty, but he had not genuine humour or good feeling, and the House knew it. In debate he was biting, resourceful, and unscrupulous. He made the fatal mistake of thinking that intellect and gifts of fence, followed by a brilliant peroration, in which he treated the commonplaces of experienced minds as though they were new discoveries and he was their Columbus, could accomplish anything. He had never had a political crisis, but one had come now.

In his reply he first resorted to arguments of high politics, historical, informative, and, in a sense, commanding; indeed, the House became restless under what seemed a piece of intellectual dragooning. Signs of impatience appeared on his own side, and, when he ventured on a solemn warning about hampering ministers who alone knew the difficulties of diplomacy and the danger of wounding the susceptibilities of foreign and friendly countries, the silence was broken by a voice that said sneeringly, "The kid-glove Government!"

Then he began to lose place with the Chamber. He

was conscious of it, and shifted his ground, pointing out the dangers of doing what the other nations interested in Egypt were not prepared to do.

"Have you asked them? Have you pressed them?" was shouted across the House. Eglington ignored the interjections. "Answer! Answer!" was called out angrily, but he shrugged a shoulder and continued his argument. If a man insisted on using a flying-machine before the principle was fully mastered and applied—if it could be mastered and applied—it must not be surprising if he was killed. Amateurs sometimes took preposterous risks without the advice of the experts. If Claridge Pasha had asked the advice of the English Government, or of any of the Chancellories of Europe, as to his incursions into the Soudan and his premature attempts at reform, he would have received expert advice that civilisation had not advanced to that stage in this portion of the world which would warrant his experiments. It was all very well for one man to run vast risks and attempt quixotic enterprises, but neither he nor his countrymen had any right to expect Europe to embroil itself on his particular account.

At this point he was met by angry cries of dissent, which did not come from the Opposition alone. His lips set, he would not yield. The Government could not hold itself responsible for Claridge Pasha's relief, nor in any sense for his present position. However, from motives of humanity, it would make representations in the hope that the Egyptian Government would act; but it was not improbable, in view of past experiences of Claridge Pasha, that he would extricate himself from his present position, perhaps had done so already. Sympathy and sentiment were natural and proper manifestations of human society, but governments were, of

necessity, ruled by sterner considerations. The House must realise that the Government could not act as though it were wholly a free agent, or as if its every move would not be matched by another move on the part of another Power or Powers.

Then followed a brilliant and effective appeal to his own party to trust the Government, to credit it with feeling and with a due regard for English prestige and the honour brought to it by Claridge Pasha's personal qualities, whatever might be thought of his crusading enterprises. The party must not fall into the trap of playing the game of the Opposition. Then, with some supercilious praise of the "worthy sentiments" of Jasper Kimber's speech and a curt depreciation of its reasoning, he declared that: "No Government can be ruled by clamour. The path to be trodden by this Government will be lighted by principles of progress and civilisation, humanity and peace, the urbane power of reason, and the persuasive influence of just consideration for the rights of others, rather than the thunder and the threat of the cannon and the sword!"

He sat down amid the cheers of a large portion of his party, for the end of his speech had been full of effective if meretricious appeal. But the debate that followed showed that the speech had been a failure. He had not uttered one warm or human word concerning Claridge Pasha, and it was felt and said, that no pledge had been given to insure the relief of the man who had caught the imagination of England.

The debate was fierce and prolonged. Eglington would not agree to any modification of his speech, to any temporising. Arrogant and insistent, he had his way, and, on a division, the Government was saved by a mere

handful of votes—votes to save the party, not to indorse Eglington's speech or policy.

Exasperated and with jaw set, but with a defiant smile, Eglington drove straight home after the House rose. He found Hylda in the library with an evening paper in her hands. She had read and reread his speech, and had steeled herself for "the inevitable hour," to this talk which would decide for ever their fate and future.

Eglington entered the room smiling. He remembered the incident of the night before, when she came to his study and then hurriedly retreated. He had been defiant and proudly disdainful at the House and on the way home; but in his heart of hearts he was conscious of having failed to have his own way; and, like such men, he wanted assurance that he could not err, and he wanted sympathy. Almost any one could have given it to him, and he had a temptation to seek that society which was his the evening before; but he remembered that *she* was occupied where he could not reach her, and here was Hylda, from whom he had been estranged, but who must surely have seen by now that at Hamley she had been unreasonable, and that she must trust his judgment. So absorbed was he with self and the failure of his speech, that, for a moment, he forgot the subject of it, and what that subject meant to them both.

"What do you think of my speech, Hylda?" he asked, as he threw himself into a chair. "I see you have been reading it. Is it a full report?"

She handed the paper over. "Quite full," she answered evenly.

He glanced down the columns. "Sentimentalists!" he said as his eye caught an interjection. "Cant!" he added. Then he looked at Hylda, and remembered once

again on whom and what his speech had been made. He saw that her face was very pale.

"What do you think of my speech?" he repeated stubbornly.

"If you think an answer necessary, I regard it as wicked and unpatriotic," she answered firmly.

"Yes, I suppose you would," he rejoined bitingly.

She got to her feet slowly, a flush passing over her face. "If you think I would, did you not think that a great many other people would think so too, and for the same reason?" she asked, still evenly, but very slowly.

"Not for the same reason," he rejoined in a low, savage voice.

"You do not treat me well," she said, with a voice that betrayed no hurt, no indignation. It seemed to state a fact deliberately; that was all.

"No, please," she added quickly, as she saw him rise to his feet with anger trembling at his lips. "Do not say what is on your tongue to say. Let us speak quietly to-night. It is better; and I am tired of strife, spoken and unspoken. I have got beyond that. But I want to speak of what you did to-day in Parliament."

"Well, you have said it was wicked and unpatriotic," he rejoined, sitting down again and lighting a cigar, in an attempt to be composed.

"What you said was that; but I am concerned with what you did. Did your speech mean that you would not press the Egyptian Government to relieve Claridge Pasha at once?"

"Is that the conclusion you draw from my words?" he asked.

"Yes; but I wish to know beyond doubt if that is what you mean the country to believe?"

"It is what I mean you to believe, my dear."

She shrank from the last two words, but still went on quietly, though her eyes burned and she shivered. "If you mean that you will do nothing, it will ruin you and your Government," she answered. "Kimber was right, and—"

"Kimber was inspired from here," he interjected sharply.

She put her hand upon herself. "Do you think I would intrigue against you? Do you think I would stoop to intrigue?" she asked, a hand clasping and unclasping a bracelet on her wrist, her eyes averted, for very shame that he should think the thought he had uttered.

"It came from this house—the influence," he rejoined.

"I cannot say. It is possible," she answered; "but you cannot think that I connive with my maid against you. I think Kimber has reasons of his own for acting as he did to-day. He speaks for many besides himself; and he spoke patriotically this afternoon. He did his duty."

"And I did not? Do you think I act alone?"

"You did not do your duty, and I think that you are not alone responsible. That is why I hope the Government will be influenced by public feeling." She came a step nearer to him. "I ask you to relieve Claridge Pasha at any cost. He is your father's son. If you do not, when all the truth is known, you will find no shelter from the storm that will break over you."

"You will tell—the truth?"

"I do not know yet what I shall do," she answered. "It will depend on you; but it is your duty to tell the truth, not mine. That does not concern me; but to save Claridge Pasha does concern me."

"So I have known."

Her heart panted for a moment with a wild indignation; but she quieted herself, and answered almost calmly: "If you refuse to do that which is honourable —and human, then I shall try to do it for you while yet I bear your name. If you will not care for your family honour, then I shall try to do so. If you will not do your duty, then I will try to do it for you." She looked him determinedly in the eyes. "Through you I have lost nearly all I cared to keep in the world. I should like to feel that in this one thing you acted honourably."

He sprang to his feet, bursting with anger, in spite of the inward admonition that much that he prized was in danger, that any breach with Hylda would be disastrous. But self-will and his native arrogance overruled the monitor within, and he said: "Don't preach to me, don't play the martyr. You will do this and you will do that! You will save my honour and the family name! You will relieve Claridge Pasha, you will do what Governments choose not to do; you will do what your husband chooses not to do— Well, I say that you will do what your husband chooses to do, or take the consequences."

"I think I will take the consequences," she answered. "I will save Claridge Pasha, if it is possible. It is no boast. I will do it, if it can be done at all, if it is God's will that it should be done; and in doing it I shall be conscious that you and I will do nothing together again —never! But that will not stop me; it will make me do it, the last right thing, before the end."

She was so quiet, so curiously quiet. Her words had a strange solemnity, a tragic apathy. What did it mean? He had gone too far, as he had done before. He had blundered viciously, as he had blundered before.

She spoke again before he could collect his thoughts and make reply.

"I did not ask for too much, I think, and I could have forgiven and forgotten all the hurts you have given me, if it were not for one thing. You have been unjust, hard, selfish, and suspicious. Suspicious—of me! No one else in all the world ever thought of me what you have thought. I have done all I could. I have honourably kept the faith. But you have spoiled it all. I have no memory that I care to keep. It is stained. My eyes can never bear to look upon the past again, the past with you—never."

She turned to leave the room. He caught her arm. "You will wait till you hear what I have to say," he cried in anger. Her last words had stung him so, her manner was so pitilessly scornful. It was as though she looked down on him from a height. His old arrogance fought for mastery over his apprehension. What did she know? What did she mean? In any case he must face it out, be strong—and merciful and affectionate afterwards.

"Wait, Hylda," he said. "We must talk this out."

She freed her arm. "There is nothing to talk out," she answered. "So far as our relations are concerned, all reason for talk is gone." She drew the fatal letter from the sash at her waist. "You will think so too when you read this letter again." She laid it on the table beside him, and, as he opened and glanced at it, she left the room.

He stood with the letter in his hand, dumfounded.

"Good God!" he said, and sank into a chair.

CHAPTER XXXIX

FAITH JOURNEYS TO LONDON

FAITH withdrew her eyes from Hylda's face, and they wandered helplessly over the room. They saw, yet did not see; and even in her trouble there was some subconscious sense softly commenting on the exquisite refinement and gentle beauty which seemed to fill the room; but the only definite objects which the eyes registered at the moment were the flowers filling every corner. Hylda had been lightly adjusting a clump of roses when she entered; and she had vaguely noticed how pale was the face that bent over the flowers, how pale and yet how composed—as she had seen a Quaker face, after some sorrow had passed over it, and left it like a quiet sea in the sun, when wreck and ruin were done. It was only a swift impression, for she could think of but one thing, David and his safety. She had come to Hylda, she said, because of Lord Eglington's position, and she could not believe that the Government would see David's work undone and David killed by the slave-dealers of Africa.

Hylda's reply had given her no hope that Eglington would keep the promise he had made that evening long ago when her father had come upon them by the old mill, and because of which promise she had forgiven Eglington so much that was hard to forgive. Hylda had spoken with sorrowful decision, and then this pause had come, in which Faith tried to gain composure and strength. There was something strangely still in the

two women. From the far past, through Quaker ancestors, there had come to Hylda now this grey mist of endurance and self-control and austere reserve. Yet behind it all, beneath it all, a wild heart was beating.

Presently, as they looked into each other's eyes, and Faith dimly apprehended something of Hylda's distress and its cause, Hylda leaned over and spasmodically pressed her hand.

"It is so, Faith," she said. "They will do nothing. International influences are too strong." She paused. "The Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs will do nothing; but yet we must hope. Claridge Pasha has saved himself in the past; and he may do so now, even though it is all ten times worse. Then, there is another way. Nahoum Pasha can save him, if he can be saved. And I am going to Egypt—to Nahoum."

Faith's face blanched. Something of the stark truth swept into her brain. She herself had suffered—her own life had been maimed, it had had its secret bitterness. Her love for her sister's son was that of a mother, sister, friend combined, and he was all she had in life. That he lived, that she might cherish the thought of him living, was the one thing she had; and David must be saved, if that might be; but this girl—was she not a girl, ten years younger than herself?—to go to Egypt to do—what? She herself lived out of the world, but she knew the world! To go to Egypt, and—

"Thee will not go to Egypt. What can thee do?" she pleaded, something very like a sob in her voice. "Thee is but a woman, and David would not be saved at such a price, and I would not have him saved so. Thee will not go. Say thee will not. He is all God has left to me in life; but thee to go—ah, no! It is a bitter world—and what could thee do?"

Hylda looked at her reflectively. Should she tell Faith all, and take her to Egypt? No, she could not take her without telling her all, and that was impossible now. There might come a time when this wise and tender soul might be taken into the innermost chambers, when all the truth might be known; but the secret of David's parentage was Eglington's concern most of all, and she would not speak now; and what was between Nahoum and David was David's concern; and she had kept his secret all these years. No, Faith might not know now, and might not come with her. On this mission she must go alone.

Hylda rose to her feet, still keeping hold of Faith's hand. "Go back to Hamley and wait there," she said, in a colourless voice. "You can do nothing; it may be I can do much. Whatever can be done I can do, since England will not act. Pray for his safety. It is all you can do. It is given to some to work, to others to pray. I must work now."

She led Faith towards the door; she could not endure more; she must hold herself firm for the journey and the struggle before her. If she broke down now she could not go forward; and Faith's presence roused in her an emotion almost beyond control.

At the door she took both of Faith's hands in hers, and kissed her cheek. "It is your place to stay; you will see that it is best. Good-bye," she added hurriedly, and her eyes were so blurred that she could scarcely see the graceful, demure figure pass into the sunlit street.

That afternoon Lord Windlehurst entered the Duchess of Snowdon's presence hurried and excited. She started on seeing his face.

"What has happened?" she asked breathlessly.

"She is gone," he answered. "Our girl has gone to Egypt."

The Duchess almost staggered to her feet. "Windlehurst—gone!" she gasped.

"I called to see her. Her ladyship had gone into the country, the footman said. I saw the butler, a faithful soul, who would die—or clean the area steps—for her. He was discreet; but he knew what you and I are to her. It was he got the tickets—for Marseilles and Egypt."

The Duchess began to cry silently. Big tears ran down a face from which the glow of feeling had long fled, but her eyes were sad enough.

"Gone—gone! It is the end!" was all she could say.

Lord Windlehurst frowned, though his eyes were moist. "We must act at once. You must go to Egypt, Betty. You must catch her at Marseilles. Her boat does not sail for three days. She thought it went sooner, as it was advertised to do. It is delayed—I've found that out. You can start to-night, and—and save the situation. You will do it, Betty?"

"I will do anything you say, as I have always done." She dried her eyes.

"She is a good girl. We must do all we can. I'll arrange everything for you myself. I've written this paragraph to go into the papers to-morrow morning: '*The Duchess of Snowdon, accompanied by Lady Eglington, left London last night for the Mediterranean via Calais, to be gone for two months or more.*' That is simple and natural. I'll see Eglington. He must make no fuss. He thinks she has gone to Hamley, so the butler says. There, it's all clear. Your work is cut out, Betty, and I know you will do it as no one else can."

"Oh, Windlehurst," she answered, with a hand clutching at his arm, "if we fail, it will kill me."

"If she fails, it will kill her," he answered, "and she is very young. What is in her mind, who can tell? But she thinks she can help Claridge somehow. We must save her, Betty."

"I used to think you had no real feeling, Windlehurst. You didn't show it," she said in a low voice.

"Ah, that was because you had too much," he answered. "I had to wait till you had less." He took out his watch.

BOOK VI

CHAPTER XL

HYLDA SEEKS NAHOUM

It was as though she had gone to sleep the night before, and waked again upon this scene unchanged, brilliant, full of colour, a chaos of decoration—confluences of noisy, garish streams of life, eddies of petty labour. Craftsmen crowded one upon the other in dark bazaars; merchants chattered and haggled on their benches; hawkers clattered and cried their wares. It was a people that lived upon the streets, for all the houses seemed empty and forsaken. The sáis ran before the Pasha's carriage, the donkey-boys shrieked for their right of way, a train of camels calmly forced its passage through the swirling crowds, supercilious and heavy-laden.

It seemed but yesterday since she had watched with amused eyes the sherbet-sellers clanking their brass saucers, the carriers streaming the water from the bulging goatskins into the earthen bottles, crying, "Allah be praised, here is coolness for thy throat for ever!" the idle singer chanting to the soft kánoon, the chess-players in the shade of a high wall, lost to the world, the dancing-girls with unveiled, shameless faces, posturing for evil eyes. Nothing had changed these past six years. Yet everything had changed.

She saw it all as in a dream, for her mind had no time for reverie or retrospect; it was set on one thing only.

Yet behind the one idea possessing her there was a subconscious self taking note of all these sights and sounds, and bringing moisture to her eyes. Passing the house which David had occupied on that night when he and she and Nahoum and Mizraim had met, the mist of feeling almost blinded her; for there at the gate sat the bowáb who had admitted her then, and with apathetic eyes had watched her go, in the hour when it seemed that she and David Claridge had bidden farewell for ever, two driftwood spars that touched and parted in the everlasting sea. Here again in the Palace square were Kaïd's Nubians in their glittering armour as of silver and gold, drawn up as she had seen them drawn then, to be reviewed by their overlord.

She swept swiftly through the streets and bazaars on her mission to Nahoum. "Lady Eglington" had asked for an interview, and Nahoum had granted it without delay. He did not associate her with the girl for whom David Claridge had killed Foorgat Bey, and he sent his own carriage to bring her to the Palace. No time had been lost, for it was less than twenty-four hours since she had arrived in Cairo, and very soon she would know the worst or the best. She had put her past away for the moment, and the Duchess of Snowdon had found at Marseilles a silent, determined, yet gentle-tongued woman, who refused to look back, or to discuss anything vital to herself and Eglington, until what she had come to Egypt to do was accomplished. Nor would she speak of the future, until the present had been fully declared and she knew the fate of David Claridge. In Cairo there were only varying rumours: that he was still holding out; that he was lost; that he had broken through; that he was a prisoner—all without foundation upon which she could rely.

As she neared the Palace entrance, a female fortune-teller ran forward, thrusting towards her a gazelle's skin, filled with the instruments of her mystic craft, and crying out: "I divine—I reveal! What is present I manifest! What is absent I declare! What is future I show! Beautiful one, hear me. It is all written. To thee is greatness, and thy heart's desire. Hear all! See! Wait for the revealing. Thou comest from afar, but thy fortune is near. Hear and see. I divine—I reveal. Beautiful one, what is future I show."

Hylda's eyes looked at the poor creature eagerly, pathetically. If it could only be, if she could but see one step ahead! If the veil could but be lifted! She dropped some silver into the folds of the gazelle-skin and waved the Gipsy away. "There is darkness, it is all dark, beautiful one," cried the woman after her, "but it shall be light. I show—I reveal!"

Inside these Palace walls there was a revealer of more merit, as she so well and bitterly knew. He could raise the veil—a dark and dangerous necromancer, with a flinty heart and a hand that had waited long to strike. Had it struck its last blow?

Outside Nahoum's door she had a moment of utter weakness, when her knees smote together, and her throat became parched; but before the door had swung wide and her eyes swept the cool and shadowed room, she was as composed as on that night long ago when she had faced *the man who knew*.

Nahoum was standing in a waiting and respectful attitude as she entered. He advanced towards her and bowed low, but stopped dumfounded, as he saw who she was. Presently he recovered himself; but he offered no further greeting than to place a chair for her where her face was in the shadow and his in the light—time of

crisis as it was, she noticed this and marvelled at him. His face was as she had seen it those years ago. It showed no change whatever. The eyes looked at her calmly, openly, with no ulterior thought behind, as it might seem. The high, smooth forehead, the full but firm lips, the brown, well-groomed beard, were all indicative of a nature benevolent and refined. Where did the duplicity lie? Her mind answered its own question on the instant; it lay in the brain and the tongue. Both were masterly weapons, an armament so complete that it controlled the face and eyes and outward man into a fair semblance of honesty. The tongue—she remembered its insinuating and adroit power, and how it had deceived the man she had come to try and save. She must not be misled by it. She felt it was to be a struggle between them, and she must be alert and persuasive, and match him word for word, move for move.

"I am happy to welcome you here, madame," he said in English. "It is years since we met; yet time has passed you by."

She flushed ever so slightly—compliment from Nahoum Pasha! Yet she must not resent anything to-day; she must get what she came for, if it was possible. What had Lacey said?—"A few thousand men by parcel-post, and some red seals—British officers."

"We meet under different circumstances," she replied meaningly. "You were asking a great favour then."

"Ah, but of you, madame?"

"I think you appealed to me when you were doubtful of the result."

"Well, madame, it may be so—but, yes, you are right; I thought you were Claridge Pasha's kinswoman, I remember."

"Excellency, you *said* you thought I was Claridge Pasha's kinswoman."

"And you are not?" he asked reflectively.

He did not understand the slight change that passed over her face. His kinswoman—Claridge Pasha's kinswoman!

"I was not his kinswoman," she answered calmly. "You came to ask a favour then of Claridge Pasha; your life-work to do under him. I remember your words—'*I can aid thee in thy great task. Thou wouldst remake our Egypt, and my heart is with you. I would rescue, not destroy. . . . I would labour, but my master has taken away from me the anvil, the fire, and the hammer, and I sit without the door like an armless beggar.*' Those were your words, and Claridge Pasha listened and believed, and saved your life and gave you work; and now again you have power greater than all others in Egypt."

"Madame, I congratulate you on a useful memory. May it serve you as the hill-fountain the garden in the city! Those indeed were my words. I hear myself from your lips, and yet recognise myself, if that be not vanity. But, madame, why have you sought me? What is it you wish to know—to hear?"

He looked at her innocently, as though he did not know her errand; as though beyond, in the desert, there was no tragedy approaching—or come.

"Excellency, you are aware that I have come to ask for news of Claridge Pasha." She leaned forward slightly, but, apart from her tightly interlaced fingers, it would not have been possible to know that she was under any strain.

"You come to me instead of to the Effendina. May I ask why, madame? Your husband's position—I did

not know you were Lord Eglington's wife—would entitle you to the highest consideration."

"I knew that Nahoum Pasha would have the whole knowledge, while the Effendina would have part only. Excellency, will you not tell me what news you have? Is Claridge Pasha alive?"

"Madame, I do not know. He is in the desert. He was surrounded. For over a month there has been no word—none. He is in danger. His way by the river was blocked. He stayed too long. He might have escaped, but he would insist on saving the loyal natives, on remaining with them, since he could not bring them across the desert; and the river and the desert are silent. Nothing comes out of that furnace yonder. Nothing comes."

He bent his eyes upon her complacently. Her own dropped. She could not bear that he should see the misery in them.

"You have come to try and save him, madame. What did you expect to do? Your Government did not strengthen my hands; your husband did nothing—nothing that could make it possible for me to act. There are many nations here, alas! Your husband does not take so great an interest in the fate of Claridge Pasha as yourself, madame."

She ignored the insult. She had determined to endure everything, if she might but induce this man to do the thing that could be done—if it was not too late. Before she could frame a reply, he said urbanely:

"But that is not to be expected. There was that between Claridge Pasha and yourself which would induce you to do all you might do for him, to be anxious for his welfare. Gratitude is a rare thing—as rare as the flower of the century-aloe; but you have it, madame."

There was no chance to misunderstand him. Foor-

gat Bey—he knew the truth, and had known it all these years.

"Excellency," she said, "if through me, Claridge Pasha—"

"One moment, madame," he interrupted, and, opening a drawer, took out a letter. "I think that what you would say may be found here, with much else that you will care to know. It is the last news of Claridge Pasha—a letter from him. I understand all you would say to me; but he who has most at stake has said it, and, if he failed, do you think, madame, that you could succeed?"

He handed her the letter with a respectful salutation. "In the hour he left, madame, he came to know that the name of Foorgat Bey was not blotted from the book of Time, nor from Fate's reckoning."

After all these years! Her instinct had been true, then, that night so long ago. The hand that took the letter trembled slightly in spite of her will, but it was not the disclosure Nahoum had made which caused her agitation. This letter she held was in David Claridge's hand, the first she had ever seen, and, maybe, the last that he had ever written, or that any one would ever see, a document of tears. But no, there were no tears in this letter! As Hylda read it the trembling passed from her fingers, and a great thrilling pride possessed her. If tragedy had come, then it had fallen like a fire from heaven, not like a pestilence rising from the earth. Here indeed was that which justified all she had done, what she was doing now, what she meant to do when she had read the last word of it and the firm, clear signature beneath.

"Excellency [the letter began in English], I came into the desert and into the perils I find here, with your last words in my ear, '*There is the matter of Foorgat Bey.*' The time you

chose to speak was chosen well for your purpose, but ill for me. I could not turn back, I must go on. Had I returned, of what avail? What could I do but say what I say here, that my hand killed Foorgat Bey; that I had not meant to kill him, though at the moment I struck I took no heed whether he lived or died. Since you know of my sorrowful deed, you also know why Foorgat Bey was struck down. When, as I left the bank of the Nile, your words blinded my eyes, my mind said in its misery: 'Now, I see!' The curtains fell away from between you and me, and I saw all that you had done for vengeance and revenge. You knew all on that night when you sought your life of me and the way back to Kaïd's forgiveness. I see all as though you spoke it in my ear. You had reason to hurt me, but you had no reason for hurting Egypt, as you have done. I did not value my life, as you know well, for it has been flung into the midst of dangers for Egypt's sake, how often! It was not cowardice which made me hide from you and all the world the killing of Foorgat Bey. I desired to face the penalty, for did not my act deny all that I had held fast from my youth up? But there was another concerned—a girl, but a child in years, as innocent and true a being as God has ever set among the dangers of this life, and, by her very innocence and unsuspecting nature, so much more in peril before such unscrupulous wiles as were used by Foorgat Bey.

"I have known you many years, Nahoum, and dark and cruel as your acts have been against the work I gave my life to do, yet I think that there was ever in you, too, the root of goodness. Men would call your acts treacherous if they knew what you had done; and so indeed they were; but yet I have seen you do things to others—not to me—which could rise only from the fountain of pure waters. Was it partly because I killed Foorgat and partly because I came to place and influence and power, that you used me so, and all that I did? Or was it the East at war with the West, the immemorial feud and foray?

"This last I will believe; for then it will seem to be something beyond yourself—centuries of predisposition, the long stain of the indelible—that drove you to those acts of matricide. Ay, it is that! For, Armenian as you are, this land is your native land, and in pulling down what I have built up—with you, Nahoum, with you—you have plunged the knife into the bosom of your mother. Did it never seem to you that the work which

you did with me was a good work—the reduction of the *corvée*, the decrease of conscription, the lessening of taxes of the fellah, the bridges built, the canals dug, the seed distributed, the plague stayed, the better dwellings for the poor in the Delta, the destruction of brigandage, the slow blotting-out of exaction and tyranny under the kourbash, the quiet growth of law and justice, the new industries started—did not all these seem good to you, as you served the land with me, your great genius for finance, ay, and your own purse, helping on the things that were dear to me, for Egypt's sake? Giving with one hand freely, did your soul not misgive you when you took away with the other?

"When you tore down my work, you were tearing down your own; for, more than the material help I thought you gave in planning and shaping reforms, ay, far more than all, was the feeling in me which helped me over many a dark place, that I had you with me, that I was not alone. I trusted you, Nahoum. A life for a life you might have had for the asking; but a long torture and a daily weaving of the web of treachery—that has taken more than my life; it has taken your own, for you have killed the best part of yourself, that which you did with me; and here in an ever-narrowing circle of death I say to you that you will die with me. Power you have, but it will wither in your grasp. Kaïd will turn against you; for with my failure will come a dark reaction in his mind, which feels the cloud of doom drawing over it. Without me, with my work falling about his ears, he will, as he did so short a time ago, turn to Sharif and Higli and the rest; and the only comfort you will have will be that you destroyed the life of him who killed your brother. Did you love your brother? Nay, not more than did I, for I sent his soul into the void, and I would gladly have gone after it to ask God for the pardon of all his sins—and mine. Think: I hid the truth, but why? Because a woman would suffer an unmerited scandal and shame. Nothing could recall Foorgat Bey; but for that silence I gave my life, for the land which was his land. Do you betray it, then?

"And now, Nahoum, the gulf in which you sought to plunge me when you had ruined all I did is here before me. The long deception has nearly done its work. I know from Ebn Ezra Bey what passed between you. They are out against me—the

slave-dealers—from Senaar to where I am. The dominion of Egypt is over here. Yet I could restore it with a thousand men and a handful of European officers, had I but a show of authority from Cairo, which they think has deserted me.

"I am shut up here with a handful of men who can fight and thousands who cannot fight, and food grows scarcer, and my garrison is worn and famished; but each day I hearten them with the hope that you will send me a thousand men from Cairo. One steamer pounding here from the north with men who bring commands from the Effendina, and those thousands out yonder beyond my mines and moats and guns will begin to melt away. Nahoum, think not that you shall triumph over David Claridge. If it be God's will that I shall die here, my work undone, then, smiling, I shall go with step that does not falter, to live once more; and another day the work that I began will rise again in spite of you or any man.

"Nahoum, the killing of Foorgat Bey has been like a cloud upon all my past. You know me, and you know I do not lie. Yet I do not grieve that I hid the thing—it was not mine only; and if ever you knew a good woman, and in dark moments have turned to her, glad that she was yours, think what you would have done for her, how you would have sheltered her against aught that might injure her, against those things women are not made to bear. Then think that I hid the deed for one who was a stranger to me, whose life must ever lay far from mine, and see clearly that I did it for a woman's sake, and not for this woman's sake; for I had never seen her till the moment I struck Foorgat Bey into silence and the tomb. Will you not understand, Nahoum?

"Yonder, I see the tribes that harry me. The great guns firing make the day a burden, the nights are ever fretted by the dangers of surprise, and there is scarce time to bury the dead whom sickness and the sword destroy. From the midst of it all my eyes turn to you in Cairo, whose forgiveness I ask for the one injury I did you; while I pray that you will seek pardon for all that you have done to me and to those who will pass with me, if our circle is broken. Friend, Achmet the Ropemaker is here fighting for Egypt. Art thou less, then, than Achmet? So, God be with thee.

"David Claridge."

Without a pause Hylda had read the letter from the first word to the last. She was too proud to let this conspirator and traitor see what David's words could do to her. When she read the lines concerning herself, she became cold from head to foot, but she knew that Nahoum never took his eyes from her face, and she gave no outward sign of what was passing within. When she had finished it, she folded it up calmly, her eyes dwelt for a moment on the address upon the envelope, and then she handed it back to Nahoum without a word.

She looked him in the eyes and spoke. "He saved your life, he gave you all you had lost. It was not his fault that Prince Kaïd chose him for his chief counsellor. You would be lying where your brother lies, were it not for Claridge Pasha."

"It may be; but the luck was with me; and I have my way."

She drew herself together to say what was hard to say.

"Excellency, the man who was killed deserved to die. Only by lies, only by subterfuge, only because I was curious to see the inside of the Palace, and because I had known him in London, did I, without a thought of indiscretion, give myself to his care to come here. I was so young; I did not know life, or men—or Egyptians." The last word was uttered with low scorn.

He glanced up quickly, and for the first time she saw a gleam of malice in his eyes. She could not feel sorry she had said it, yet she must remove the impression if possible.

"What Claridge Pasha did, any man would have done, Excellency. He struck, and death was an accident. Foorgat's temple struck the corner of a pedestal. His death was instant. He would have killed Claridge Pasha if it had been possible—he tried to do so. But,

Excellency, if you have a daughter, if you ever had a child, what would you have done if any man had—"

"In the East daughters are more discreet; they tempt men less," he answered quietly, and fingered the string of beads he carried.

"Yet you would have done as Claridge Pasha did. That it was your brother was an accident, and—"

"It was an accident that the penalty must fall on Claridge Pasha, and on you, madame. I did not choose the objects of penalty. Destiny chose them, as Destiny chose Claridge Pasha as the man who should supplant me, who should attempt to do these mad things for Egypt against the judgment of the world—against the judgment of your husband. Shall I have better judgment than the chancellories of Europe and England—and Lord Eglington?"

"Excellency, you know what moves other nations; but it is for Egypt to act for herself. You ask me why I did not go to the Effendina. I come to you because I know that you could circumvent the Effendina, even if he sent ten thousand men. It is the way in Egypt."

"Madame, you have insight—will you not look farther still, and see that, however good Claridge Pasha's work might be some day in the far future, it is not good to-day. It is too soon. At the beginning of the twentieth century, perhaps. Men pay the penalty of their mistakes. A man's life"—he watched her closely with his wide, benevolent eyes—"is neither here nor there, nor a few thousands, in the destiny of a nation. A man who ventures into a lion's den must not be surprised if he goes as Harrik went—ah, perhaps you do not know how Harrik went! A man who tears at the foundations of a house must not be surprised if the timbers fall on him and on his workmen. It is Destiny that Claridge

Pasha should be the slayer of my brother, and a danger to Egypt, and one whose life is so dear to you, madame. You would have it otherwise, and so would I, but we must take things as they are—and you see that letter. It is seven weeks since then, and it may be that the circle has been broken. Yet it may not be so. The circle may be smaller, but not broken."

She felt how he was tempting her from word to word with a merciless ingenuity; yet she kept to her purpose; and however hopeless it seemed, she would struggle on.

"Excellency," she said in a low, pleading tone, "has he not suffered enough? Has he not paid the price of that life which you would not bring back if you could? No, in those places of your mind where no one can see lies the thought that you would not bring back Foorgat Bey. It is not an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth that has moved you; it has not been love of Foorgat Bey; it has been the hatred of the East for the West. And yet you are a Christian! Has Claridge Pasha not suffered enough, Excellency? Have you not had your fill of revenge? Have you not done enough to hurt a man whose only crime was that he killed a man to save a woman, and had not meant to kill?"

"Yet he says in his letter that the thought of killing would not have stopped him."

"Does one think at such a moment? Did he think? There was no time. It was the work of an instant. Ah, Fate was not kind, Excellency! If it had been, I should have been permitted to kill Foorgat Bey with my own hands."

"I should have found it hard to exact the penalty from you, madame."

The words were uttered in so neutral a way that they

were enigmatical, and she could not take offence or be sure of his meaning.

"Think, Excellency. Have you ever known one so selfless, so good, so true? For humanity's sake, would you not keep alive such a man? If there were a feud as old as Adam between your race and his, would you not before this life of sacrifice lay down the sword and the bitter challenge? He gave you his hand in faith and trust, because your God was his God, your prophet and lord his prophet and lord. Such faith should melt your heart. Can you not see that he tried to make compensation for Foorgat's death, by giving you your life and setting you where you are now, with power to save or kill him?"

"You call him great; yet I am here in safety, and he is—where he is. Have you not heard of the strife of minds and wills? He represented the West, I the East. He was a Christian, so was I; the ground of our battle was a fair one, and—and I have won."

"The ground of battle fair!" she protested bitterly. "He did not know that there was strife between you. He did not fight you. I think that he always loved you, Excellency. He would have given his life for you, if it had been in danger. Is there in that letter one word that any man could wish unwritten when the world was all ended for all men? But no, there was no strife between you—there was only hatred on your part. He was so much greater than you that you should feel no rivalry, no strife. The sword he carries cuts as wide as Time. You are of a petty day in a petty land. Your mouth will soon be filled with dust, and you will be forgotten. He will live in the history of the world. Excellency, I plead for him because I owe him so much: he killed a man and brought upon himself a lifelong

misery for me. It is all I can do, plead to you who know the truth about him—yes, you know the truth—to make an effort to save him. It may be too late; but yet God may be waiting for you to lift your hand. You said the circle may be smaller, but it may be unbroken still. Will you not do a great thing once, and win a woman's gratitude, and the thanks of the world, by trying to save one who makes us think better of humanity? Will you not have the name of Nahoum Pasha linked with his—with his who thought you were his friend? Will you not save him?"

He got slowly to his feet, a strange look in his eyes. "Your words are useless. I will not save him for your sake; I will not save him for the world's sake; I will not save him—"

A cry of pain and grief broke from her, and she buried her face in her hands.

"—I will not save him for any other sake than his own."

He paused. Slowly, as dazed as though she had received a blow, Hylda raised her face and her hands dropped in her lap.

"For any other sake than his own!" Her eyes gazed at him in a bewildered, piteous way. What did he mean? His voice seemed to come from afar off.

"Did you think that you could save him? That I would listen to you, if I did not listen to him? No, no, madame. Not even did he conquer me; but something greater than himself within himself, it conquered me."

She got to her feet gasping, her hands stretched out. "Oh, is it true—is it true?" she cried.

"The West has conquered," he answered.

"You will help him—you will try to save him?"

"When, a month ago, I read the letter you have read,

I tried to save him. I sent secretly four thousand men who were at Wady Halfa to relieve him—if it could be done; five hundred to push forward on the quickest of the armed steamers, the rest to follow as fast as possible. I did my best. That was a month ago, and I am waiting —waiting and hoping, madame."

Suddenly she broke down. Tears streamed from her eyes. She sank into the chair, and sobs shook her from head to foot.

"Be patient, be composed, madame," Nahoum said gently. "I have tried you greatly—forgive me. Nay, do not weep. I have hope. We may hear from him at any moment now," he added softly, and there was a new look in his wide blue eyes as they were bent on her.

CHAPTER XLI

IN THE LAND OF SHINAR

"Then I said to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the Ephah?

"And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar; and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base."

DAVID raised his head from the paper he was studying. He looked at Lacey sharply. "And how many rounds of ammunition?" he asked.

"Ten thousand, Saadat."

"How many shells?" he continued, making notes upon the paper before him.

"Three hundred, Saadat."

"How many hundredweight of dourha?"

"Eighty—about."

"And how many mouths to feed?"

"Five thousand."

"How many fighters go with the mouths?"

"Nine hundred and eighty—of a kind."

"And of the best?'

"Well, say, five hundred."

"Thee said six hundred three days ago, Lacey."

"Sixty were killed or wounded on Sunday, and forty I reckon in *the others*, Saadat."

The dark eyes flashed, the lips set. "The fire was sickening—they fell back?"

"Well, Saadat, they reflected—at the wrong time."

"They ran?"

"Not back—they were slow in getting on."

"But they fought it out?"

"They had to—root hog, or die. You see, Saadat, in that five hundred I'm only counting the invincibles, the up-and-at-'ems, the blind-goers that 'd open the lid of Hell and jump in after the enemy."

The pale face lighted. "So many! I would not have put the estimate half so high. Not bad for a dark race fighting for they know not what!"

"They know that all right; they are fighting for you, Saadat."

David seemed not to hear. "Five hundred—so many, and the enemy so near, the temptation so great."

"The deserters are all gone to Ali Wad Hei, Saadat. For a month there have been only the deserted."

A hardness crept into the dark eyes. "Only the deserted!" He looked out to where the Nile lost itself in the northern distance. "I asked Nahoum for one thousand men, I asked England for the word which would send them. I asked for a thousand, but even two hundred would turn the scale—the sign that the Inglesi had behind him Cairo and London. Twenty weeks, and nothing comes!"

He got to his feet slowly and walked up and down the room for a moment, glancing out occasionally towards the clump of palms which marked the disappearance of the Nile into the desert beyond his vision. At intervals a cannon-shot crashed upon the rarefied air, as scores of thousands had done for months past, torturing to ear and sense and nerve. The confused and dulled roar of voices came from the distance also; and, looking out to the landward side, David saw a series of movements of the besieging forces, under the Arab leader, Ali Wad Hei. Here a loosely formed body of lancers and light cavalry cantered away towards the south, con-

verging upon the Nile; there a troop of heavy cavalry in glistening mail moved nearer to the northern defences; and between, battalions of infantry took up new positions, while batteries of guns moved nearer to the river, curving upon the palace north and south. Suddenly David's eyes flashed fire. He turned to Lacey eagerly. Lacey was watching with eyes screwed up shrewdly, his forehead shining with sweat.

"Saadat," he said suddenly, "this isn't the usual set of quadrilles. It's the real thing. They're watching the river—waiting."

"But south!" was David's laconic response. At the same moment he struck a gong. An orderly entered. Giving swift instructions, he turned to Lacey again.

"Not Cairo—Darfûr," he added.

"Ebn Ezra Bey coming! Ali Wad Hei's got word from up the Nile, I guess."

David nodded, and his face clouded. "We should have had word also," he said sharply.

There was a knock at the door, and Mahommed Hassan entered, supporting an Arab, down whose haggard face blood trickled from a wound in the head, while an arm hung limp at his side.

"Behold, Saadat—from Ebn Ezra Bey," Mahommed said. The man drooped beside him.

David caught a tin cup from a shelf, poured some liquor into it, and held it to the lips of the fainting man. "Drink," he said. The Arab drank greedily, and, when he had finished, gave a long sigh of satisfaction. "Let him sit," David added.

When the man was seated on a sheepskin, the huge Mahommed squatting behind like a sentinel, David questioned him. "What is thy name—thy news?" he asked in Arabic.

"I am called Feroog. I come from Ebn Ezra Bey, to whom be peace!" he answered. "Thy messenger, Saadat, behold he died of hunger and thirst, and his work became mine. Ebn Ezra Bey came by the river. . . ."

"He is near?" asked David impatiently.

"He is twenty miles away."

"Thou camest by the desert?"

"By the desert, Saadat, as Ebn Ezra effendi comes."

"By the desert! But thou saidst he came by the river."

"Saadat, yonder, forty miles from where we are, the river makes a great curve. There the effendi landed in the night with four hundred men to march hither. But he commanded that the boats should come on slowly and receive the attack in the river, while he came in from the desert."

David's eye flashed. "A great device. They will be here by midnight, then, perhaps?"

"At midnight, Saadat, by the blessing of God."

"How wert thou wounded?"

"I came upon two of the enemy. They were mounted. I fought them. Upon the horse of one I came here."

"The other?"

"God is merciful, Saadat. He is in the bosom of God."

"How many men come by the river?"

"But fifty, Saadat," was the answer, "but they have sworn by the stone in the Kaabah not to surrender."

"And those who come with the effendi, with Ebn Ezra Bey, are they as those who will not surrender?"

"Half of them are so. They were with thee, as was I, Saadat, when the great sickness fell upon us, and were healed by thee, and afterwards fought with thee."

David nodded abstractedly, and motioned to Ma-

hommed to take the man away; then he said to Lacey: "How long do you think we can hold out?"

"We shall have more men, but also more rifles to fire, and more mouths to fill, if Ebn Ezra gets in, Saadat."

David raised his head. "But with more rifles to fire away your ten thousand rounds"—he tapped the paper on the table—"and eat the eighty hundredweight of dourha, how long can we last?"

"If they are to fight, and with full stomachs, and to stake everything on that one fight, then we can last two days. No more, I reckon."

"I make it one day," answered David. "In three days we shall have no food, and unless help comes from Cairo, we must die or surrender. It is not well to starve on the chance of help coming, and then die fighting with weak arms and broken spirit. Therefore, we must fight to-morrow, if Ebn Ezra gets in to-night. I think we shall fight well," he added. "You think so?"

"You are a born fighter, Saadat."

A shadow fell on David's face, and his lips tightened. "I was not born a fighter, Lacey. The day we met first no man had ever died by my hand or by my will."

"There are three who must die at sunset—an hour from now—by thy will, Saadat."

A startled look came into David's face. "Who?" he asked.

"The Three Pashas, Saadat. They have been recaptured."

"Recaptured!" rejoined David mechanically.

"Achmet Pasha got them from under the very noses of the sheikhs before sunrise this morning."

"Achmet—Achmet Pasha!" A light came into David's face again.

"You will keep faith with Achmet, Saadat. He

risked his life to get them. They betrayed you, and betrayed three hundred good men to death. If they do not die, those who fight for you will say that it doesn't matter whether men fight for you or betray you, they get the same stuff off the same plate. If we are going to fight to-morrow, it ought to be with a clean bill of health."

"They served me well so long—ate at my table, fought with me. But—but traitors must die, even as Harrik died." A stern look came into his face. He looked round the great room slowly. "We have done our best," he said. "I need not have failed, if there had been no treachery. . . ."

"If it hadn't been for Nahoum!"

David raised his head. Supreme purpose came into his bearing. A grave smile played at his lips, as he gave that quick toss of the head which had been a characteristic of both Eglington and himself. His eyes shone—a steady, indomitable light. "I will not give in. I still have hope. We are few and they are many, but the end of a battle has never been sure. We may not fail even now. Help may come from Cairo even to-morrow."

"Say, somehow you've always pulled through before, Saadat. When I've been most frightened I've perked up and stiffened my backbone, remembering your luck. I've seen a blue funk evaporate by thinking of how things always come your way just when the worst seems at the worst."

David smiled as he caught up a small cane and prepared to go. Looking out of a window, he stroked his thin, clean-shaven face with a lean finger. Presently a movement in the desert arrested his attention. He put a field-glass to his eyes, and scanned the field of operations closely once more.

"Good—good!" he burst out cheerfully. "Achmet has done the one thing possible. The way to the north will be still open. He has flung his men between the Nile and the enemy, and now the batteries are at work." Opening the door, they passed out. "He has anticipated my orders," he added. "Come, Lacey, it will be an anxious night. The moon is full, and Ebn Ezra Bey has his work cut out—sharp work for all of us, and . . ."

Lacey could not hear the rest of his words in the roar of the artillery. David's steamers in the river were pouring shot into the desert where the enemy lay, and Achmet's "friendlies" and the Egyptians were making good their new position. As David and Lacey, fearlessly exposing themselves to rifle fire, and taking the shortest and most dangerous route to where Achmet fought, rode swiftly from the palace, Ebn Ezra's three steamers appeared up the river, and came slowly down to where David's gunboats lay. Their appearance was greeted by desperate discharges of artillery from the forces under Ali Wad Hei, who had received word of their coming two hours before, and had accordingly redisposed his attacking forces. But for Achmet's sharp initiative, the boldness of the attempt to cut off the way north and south would have succeeded, and the circle of fire and sword would have been complete. Achmet's new position had not been occupied before, for men were too few, and the position he had just left was now exposed to attack.

Never since the siege began had the foe shown such initiative and audacity. They had relied on the pressure of famine and decimation by sickness, the steady effects of sorties, with consequent fatalities and desertions, to bring the Liberator of the Slaves to his knees. Ebn Ezra

Bey had sought to keep quiet the sheikhs far south, but he had been shut up in Darfûr for months, and had been in as bad a plight as David. He had, however, broken through at last. His ruse in leaving the steamers in the night and marching across the desert was as courageous as it was perilous, for, if discovered before he reached the beleaguered place, nothing could save his little force from destruction. There was one way in from the desert to the walled town, and it was through that space which Achmet and his men had occupied, and on which Ali Wad Hei might now, at any moment, throw his troops.

David's heart sank as he saw the danger. From the palace he had sent an orderly with a command to an officer to move forward and secure the position, but still the gap was open, and the men he had ordered to advance remained where they were. Every minute had its crisis.

As Lacey and himself left the town the misery of the place smote him in the eyes. Filth, refuse, *débris* filled the streets. Sick and dying men called to him from dark doorways, children and women begged for bread, carcasses lay unburied, vultures hovering above them—his tireless efforts had not been sufficient to cope with the daily horrors of the siege. But there was no sign of hostility to him. Voices called blessings on him from dark doorways, lips blanching in death commended him to Allah, and now and then a shrill call told of a fighter who had been laid low, but who had a spirit still unbeaten. Old men and women stood over their cooking-pots waiting for the moment of sunset; for it was Ramadan, and the faithful fasted during the day—as though every day was not a fast.

Sunset was almost come, as David left the city and galloped away to send forces to stop the gap of danger

before it was filled by the foe. Sunset—the Three Pashas were to die at sunset! They were with Achmet, and in a few moments they would be dead. As David and Lacey rode hard, they suddenly saw a movement of men on foot at a distant point of the field, and then a small mounted troop, fifty at most, detach themselves from the larger force and, in close formation, gallop fiercely down on the position which Achmet had left. David felt a shiver of anxiety and apprehension as he saw this sharp, sweeping advance. Even fifty men, well intrenched, could hold the position until the main body of Ali Wad Hei's infantry came on.

They rode hard, but harder still rode Ali Wad Hei's troop of daring Arabs. Nearer and nearer they came. Suddenly from the trenches, which they had thought deserted, David saw jets of smoke rise, and a half-dozen of the advancing troop fell from their saddles, their riderless horses galloping on.

David's heart leaped: Achmet had, then, left men behind, hidden from view; and these were now defending the position. Again came the jets of smoke, and again more Arabs dropped from their saddles. But the others still came on. A thousand feet away others fell. Twenty-two of the fifty had already gone. The rest fired their rifles as they galloped. But now, to David's relief, his own forces, which should have moved half an hour before, were coming swiftly down to cut off the approach of Ali Wad Hei's infantry, and he turned his horse upon the position where a handful of men were still emptying the saddles of the impetuous enemy. But now all that were left of the fifty were upon the trenches. Then came the flash of swords, puffs of smoke, the thrust of lances, and figures falling from the screaming, rearing horses.

Lacey's pistol was in his hand, David's sword was gripped tight, as they rushed upon the *mêlée*. Lacey's pistol snapped, and an Arab fell; again, and another swayed in his saddle. David's sword swept down, and a turbaned head was gashed by a mortal stroke. As he swung towards another horseman, who had struck down a defender of the trenches, an Arab raised himself in his saddle and flung a lance with a cry of terrible malice; but, even as he did so, a bullet from Lacey's pistol pierced his shoulder. The shot had been too late to stop the lance, but sufficient to divert its course. It caught David in the flesh of the body under the arm—a slight wound only. A few inches to the right, however, and his day would have been done.

The remaining Arabs turned and fled. The fight was over. As David, dismounting, stood with dripping sword in his hand, in imagination he heard the voice of Kaïd say to him, as it said that night when he killed Foorgat Bey: "Hast thou never killed a man?"

For an instant it blinded him, then he was conscious that, on the ground at his feet, lay one of the Three Pashas who were to die at sunset. It was sunset now, and the man was dead. Another of the Three sat upon the ground winding his thigh with the folds of a dead Arab's turban, blood streaming from his gashed face. The last of the trio stood before David, stoical and attentive. For a moment David looked at the Three, the dead man and the two living men, and then suddenly turned to where the opposing forces were advancing. His own men were now between the position and Ali Wad Hei's shouting fanatics. They would be able to reach and defend the post in time. He turned and gave orders. There were only twenty men besides the two pashas, whom his commands also comprised. Two small

guns were in place. He had them trained on that portion of the advancing infantry of Ali Wad Hei not yet covered by his own forces. Years of work and responsibility had made him master of many things, and long ago he had learned the work of an artilleryman. In a moment a shot, well directed, made a gap in the ranks of the advancing foe. An instant afterwards a shot from the other gun fired by the unwounded pasha, who, in his youth, had been an officer of artillery, added to the confusion in the swerving ranks, and the force hesitated; and now from Ebn Ezra Bey's river steamers, which had just arrived, there came a flank fire. The force wavered. From David's gun another shot made havoc. They turned and fell back quickly. The situation was saved.

As if by magic the attack of the enemy all over the field ceased. By sunset they had meant to finish this enterprise, which was to put the besieged wholly in their hands, and then to feast after the day's fasting. Sunset had come, and they had been foiled; but hunger demanded the feast. The order to cease firing and retreat sounded, and three thousand men hurried back to the cooking-pot, the sack of dourha, and the prayer-mat. Malaish, if the infidel Inglesi was not conquered to-day, he should be beaten and captured and should die to-morrow! And yet there were those among them who had a well-grounded apprehension that the "Inglesi" would win in the end.

By the trenches, where five men had died so bravely, and a traitorous pasha had paid the full penalty of a crime and won a soldier's death, David spoke to his living comrades. As he prepared to return to the city, he said to the unwounded pasha: "Thou wert to die at sunset; it was thy sentence."

And the pasha answered: "Saadat, as for death—I am ready to die, but have I not fought for thee?"

David turned to the wounded pasha.

"Why did Achmet Pasha spare thee?"

"He did not spare us, Saadat. Those who fought with us but now were to shoot us at sunset, and remain here till other troops came. Before sunset we saw the danger, since no help came. Therefore we fought to save this place for thee."

David looked them in the eyes. "Ye were traitors," he said, "and for an example it was meet that ye should die. But this that ye have done shall be told to all who fight to-morrow, and men will know why it is I pardon treachery. Ye shall fight again, if need be, betwixt this hour and morning, and ye shall die, if need be. Ye are willing?"

Both men touched their foreheads, their lips, and their breasts. "Whether it be death or it be life, Inshallah, we are true to thee, Saadat!" one said, and the other repeated the words after him. As they salaamed David left them, and rode forward to the advancing forces.

Upon the roof of the palace Mahommed Hassan watched and waited, his eyes scanning sharply the desert to the south, his ears strained to catch that stir of life which his accustomed ears had so often detected in the desert, when no footsteps, marching, or noises could be heard. Below, now in the palace, now in the defences, his master, the Saadat, planned for the last day's effort on the morrow, gave directions to the officers, sent commands to Achmet Pasha, arranged for the disposition of his forces, with as strange a band of adherents and subordinates as ever men had—adventurers, to whom adventure in their own land had brought no profit; mem-

bers of that legion of the non-reputable, to whom Cairo offered no home; Levantines, who had fled from that underground world where every coin of reputation is falsely minted, refugees from the storm of the world's disapproval. There were Greeks with Austrian names; Armenians, speaking Italian as their native tongue; Italians of astonishing military skill, whose services were no longer required by their offended country; French Pizarros with a romantic outlook, even in misery, intent to find new El Dorados; Englishmen, who had cheated at cards and had left the Horse Guards for ever behind; Egyptian intriguers, who had been banished for being less successful than greater intriguers; but also a band of good gallant men of every nation.

Upon all these, during the siege, Mahommed Hassan had been a self-appointed spy, and had indirectly added to that knowledge which made David's decisive actions to circumvent intrigue and its consequences seem almost supernatural. In his way Mahommed was a great man. He knew that David would endure no spying, and it was creditable to his subtlety and skill that he was able to warn his master, without being himself suspected of getting information by dark means. On the palace roof Mahommed was happy to-night. To-morrow would be a great day, and, since the Saadat was to control its destiny, what other end could there be but happiness? Had not the Saadat always ridden over all that had been in his way? Had not he, Mahommed, ever had plenty to eat and drink, and money to send to Manfaloot to his father there, and to bribe when bribing was needed? Truly, life was a boon! With a neboot of dom-wood across his knees he sat in the still, moonlit night, peering into that distance whence Ebn Ezra Bey and his men must come, the moon above tranquil

and pleasant and alluring, and the desert beneath, covered as it was with the outrages and terrors of war, breathing softly its ancient music, that delicate vibrant humming of the latent activities. In his uncivilised soul Mahommed Hassan felt this murmur, and even as he sat waiting to know whether a little army would steal out of the south like phantoms into this circle the Saadat had drawn round him, he kept humming to himself—had he not been, was he not now, an Apollo to numberless houris who had looked down at him from behind mooshrabieh screens, or waited for him in the palm-grove or the cane-field? The words of his song were not uttered aloud, but yet he sang them silently—

"Every night long and all night my spirit is moaning and crying—
O dear gazelle, that has taken away my peace!
Ah! if my beloved come not, my eyes will be blinded with weeping—
Moon of my joy, come to me, hark to the call of my soul!"

Over and over he kept chanting the song. Suddenly, however, he leaned farther forward and strained his ears. Yes, at last, away to the south-east, there was life stirring, men moving—moving quickly. He got to his feet slowly, still listening, stood for a moment motionless, then, with a cry of satisfaction, dimly saw a moving mass in the white moonlight far over by the river. Ebn Ezra Bey and his men were coming. He started below, and met David on the way up. He waited till David had mounted the roof, then he pointed. "Now, Saadat!" he said.

"They have stolen in?" David peered into the misty whiteness.

"They are almost in, Saadat. Nothing can stop them now."

"It is well done. Go and ask Ebn Ezra effendi to come hither," he said.

Suddenly a shot was fired, then a hoarse shout came over the desert, then there was silence again.

"They are in, Saadat," said Mahommed Hassan.

Day broke over a hazy plain. On both sides of the Nile the river mist spread wide, and the army of Ali Wad Hei and the defending forces were alike veiled from each other and from the desert world beyond. Down the river for scores of miles the mist was heavy, and those who moved within it and on the waters of the Nile could not see fifty feet ahead. Yet through this heavy veil there broke gently a little fleet of phantom vessels, the noise of the paddle-wheels and their propellers muffled as they moved slowly on. Never had vessels taken such risks on the Nile before, never had pilots trusted so to instinct, for there were sand-banks and ugly drifts of rock here and there. A safe journey for phantom ships; but these armed vessels, filled by men with white, eager faces and others with dark Egyptian features, were no phantoms. They bristled with weapons, and armed men crowded every corner of space. For full two hours from the first streak of light they had travelled swiftly, taking chances not to be taken save in some desperate moment. The moment was desperate enough, if not for them. They were going to the relief of besieged men, with a message from Nahoum Pasha to Claridge Pasha, and with succour. They had looked for a struggle up this river as they neared the beleaguered city; but, as they came nearer and nearer, not a gun fired at them from the forts on the banks out of the mists. If they were heard they still were safe from the guns, for they could not be seen, and those on shore could not know

whether they were friend or foe. Like ghostly vessels they passed on, until at last they could hear the stir and murmur of life along the banks of the stream.

Boom! boom! boom! Through the mist the guns of the city were pouring shot and shell out into Ali Wad Hei's camp, and Ali Wad Hei laughed contemptuously. Surely now the Inglesi was altogether mad, and to-day, this day after prayers at noon, he should be shot like a mad dog, for yesterday's defeat had turned some of his own adherent sheikhs into angry critics. He would not wait for starvation to compel the infidel to surrender. He would win freedom to deal in human flesh and blood, and make slave-markets where he willed, and win glory for the Lord Mahomet, by putting this place to the sword; and, when it was over, he would have the Inglesi's head carried on a pole through the city for the faithful to mock at, a target for the filth of the streets. So, by the will of Allah, it should be done!

Boom! boom! boom! The Inglesi was certainly mad, for never had there been so much firing in any long day in all the siege as in this brief hour this morning. It was the act of a fool, to fire his shot and shell into the mist without aim, without a clear target. Ali Wad Hei scorned to make any reply with his guns, but sat in desultory counsel with his sheikhs, planning what should be done when the mists had cleared away. But yesterday evening the Arab chief had offered to give the Inglesi life if he would surrender and become a Muslim, and swear by the Lord Mahomet; but late in the night he had received a reply which left only one choice, and that was to disembowel the infidel, and carry his head aloft on a spear. The letter he had received ran thus in Arabic:

"To Ali Wad Hei and All with Him:

"We are here to live or to die as God wills, and not as ye will. I have set my feet on the rock, and not by threats of any man shall I be moved. But I say that for all the blood that ye have shed here there will be punishment, and for the slaves which ye have slain or sold there will be high price paid. Ye have threatened the city and me—take us if ye can. Ye are seven to one. Why falter all these months? If ye will not come to us, we shall come to you, rebellious ones, who have drawn the sword against your lawful ruler, the Effendina.

"CLARIDGE PASHA."

It was a rhetorical document couched in the phraseology they best understood; and if it begat derision, it also begat anger; and the challenge David had delivered would be met when the mists had lifted from the river and the plain. But when the first thinning of the mists began, when the sun began to dissipate the rolling haze, Ali Wad Hei and his rebel sheikhs were suddenly startled by rifle-fire at close quarters, by confused noises, and the jar and roar of battle. Now the reason for the firing of the great guns was plain. The noise was meant to cover the advance of David's men. The little garrison, which had done no more than issue in sorties, was now throwing its full force on the enemy in a last desperate endeavour. It was either success or absolute destruction. David was staking all, with the last of his food, the last of his ammunition, the last of his hopes. All round the field the movement was forward, till the circle had widened to the enemy's lines; while at the old defences were only handfuls of men. With scarce a cry David's men fell on the unprepared foe; and he himself, on a grey Arab, a mark for any lance or spear and rifle, rode upon that point where Ali Wad Hei's tent was set.

But after the first onset, in which hundreds were killed, there began the real noise of battle—fierce shout-

ing, the shrill cries of wounded and maddened horses as they struck with their feet, and bit as fiercely at the fighting foe as did their masters. The mist cleared slowly, and, when it had wholly lifted, the fight was spread over every part of the field of siege. Ali Wad Hei's men had gathered themselves together after the first deadly onslaught, and were fighting fiercely, shouting the Muslim battle-cry, "*Allah hu achbar!*" Able to bring up reinforcements, the great losses at first sustained were soon made up, and the sheer weight of numbers gave them courage and advantage. By rushes with lance and sword and rifle they were able, at last, to drive David's men back upon their old defences with loss. Then charge upon charge ensued, and each charge, if it cost them much, cost the besieged more, by reason of their fewer numbers. At one point, however, the besieged became again the attacking party. This was where Achmet Pasha had command. His men on one side of the circle, as Ebn Ezra Bey's men on the other, fought with a valour as desperate as the desert ever saw. But David, galloping here and there to order, to encourage, to prevent retreat at one point, or to urge attack at another, saw that the doom of his gallant force was certain; for the enemy were still four to one, in spite of the carnage of the first attack. Bullets hissed past him. One carried away a button, one caught the tip of his ear, one pierced the fez he wore; but he felt nothing of this, saw nothing. He was buried in the storm of battle preparing for the end, for the final grim defence, when his men would retreat upon the one last strong fort, and there await their fate. From this absorption he was roused by Lacey, who came galloping towards him.

"They've come, Saadat, they've come at last! We're

saved—oh, my God, you bet we're all right now! See! See, Saadat!"

David saw. Five steamers carrying the Egyptian flag were bearing around the point where the river curved below the town, and converging upon David's small fleet. Presently the steamers opened fire, to encourage the besieged, who replied with frenzied shouts of joy, and soon there poured upon the sands hundreds of men in the uniform of the Effendina. These came forward at the double, and, with a courage which nothing could withstand, the whole circle spread out again upon the discomfited tribes of Ali Wad Hei. Dismay, confusion, possessed the Arabs. Their river-watchers had failed them, God had hidden His face from them; and when Ali Wad Hei and three of his emirs turned and rode into the desert, their forces broke and ran also, pursued by the relentless men who had suffered the tortures of siege so long. The chase was short, however, for they were desert folk, and they returned to loot the camp which had menaced them so long.

Only the new-comers, Nahoum's men, carried the hunt far; and they brought back with them a body which their leader commanded to be brought to a great room of the palace. Towards sunset David and Ebn Ezra Bey and Lacey came together to this room. The folds of loose linen were lifted from the face, and all three looked at it long in silence. At last Lacey spoke:

"He got what he wanted; the luck was with him. It's better than Leperland."

"In the bosom of Allah there is peace," said Ebn Ezra. "It is well with Achmet."

With misty eyes David stooped and took the dead man's hand in his for a moment. Then he rose to his feet and turned away.

"And Nahoum also—and Nahoum," he said presently. "Read this," he added, and put a letter from Nahoum into Ebn Ezra's hand.

Lacey reverently covered Achmet's face. "Say, he got what he wanted," he said again.

CHAPTER XLII

THE LOOM OF DESTINY

It was many a day since the Duchess of Snowdon had seen a sunrise, and the one on which she now gazed from the deck of the dahabieh *Nefert*, filled her with a strange new sense of discovery and revelation. Her perceptions were arrested and a little confused, and yet the undercurrent of feeling was one of delight and rejuvenation. Why did this sunrise bring back, all at once, the day when her one lost child was born, and she looked out of the windows of Snowdon Hall, as she lay still and nerveless, and thought how wonderful and sweet and green was the world she saw and the sky that walled it round? Sunrise over the Greek Temple of Philæ and the splendid ruins of a farther time towering beside it! In her sight were the wide, islanded Nile, where Cleopatra loitered with Antony, the foaming, crashing cataracts above, the great quarries from which ancient temples had been hewed, unfinished obelisks and vast blocks of stone left where bygone workmen had forsaken them, when the invader came and another dynasty disappeared into that partial oblivion from which the Egyptian still emerges triumphant over all his conquerors, unchanged in form and feature. Something of its meaning got into her mind.

"I wonder what Windlehurst would think of it. He always had an eye for things like that," she murmured; and then caught her breath, as she added: "He always liked beauty." She looked at her wrinkled, child-

ish hands. "But sunsets never grow old," she continued, with no apparent relevance. "La, la, we were young once!"

Her eyes were lost again in the pinkish glow spreading over the grey-brown sand of the desert, over the palm-covered island near. "And now it's others' turn, or ought to be," she murmured.

She looked to where, not far away, Hylda stood leaning over the railing of the dahabieh, her eyes fixed in reverie on the farthest horizon line of the unpeopled, untravelled plain of sand.

"No, poor thing, it's not her turn," she added, as Hylda, with a long sigh, turned and went below. Tears gathered in her pale blue eyes. "Not yet—with Eglington alive. And perhaps it would be best if the other never came back. I could have made the world better worth living in if I had had the chance—and I wouldn't have been a duchess! La! La!"

She relapsed into reverie, an uncommon experience for her; and her mind floated indefinitely from one thing to another, while she was half conscious of the smell of coffee permeating the air, and of the low resonant notes of the Nubian boys, as, with locked shoulders, they scrubbed the decks of a dahabieh near by with hemp-shod feet.

Presently, however, she was conscious of another sound—the soft clip of oars, joined to the guttural, explosive song of native rowers; and, leaning over the rail, she saw a boat draw alongside the *Nefert*. From it came the figure of Nahoum Pasha, who stepped briskly on deck, in his handsome face a light which flashed an instant meaning to her.

"I know—I know! Claridge Pasha—you have heard?" she said excitedly, as he came to her.

He smiled and nodded. "A messenger has arrived. Within a few hours he should be here."

"Then it was all false that he was wounded—ah, that horrible story of his death!"

"Bismillah, it was not all false! The night before the great battle he was slightly wounded in the side. He neglected it, and fever came on; but he survived. His first messengers to us were killed, and that is why the news of the relief came so late. But all is well at last. I have come to say so to Lady Eglington—even before I went to the Effendina." He made a gesture towards a huge and gaily-caparisoned dahabieh not far away. "Kaïd was right about coming here. His health is better. He never doubted Claridge Pasha's return; it was *une idée fixe*. He believes a magic hand protects the Saadat, and that, adhering to him, he himself will carry high the flower of good fortune and live for ever. *Kismet!* I will not wait to see Lady Eglington. I beg to offer to her my congratulations on the triumph of her countryman."

His words had no ulterior note; but there was a shadow in his eyes which in one not an Oriental would have seemed sympathy.

"Pasha, Pasha!" the Duchess called after him, as he turned to leave; "tell me, is there any news from England—from the Government?"

"From Lord Eglington? No," Nahoum answered meaningly. "I wrote to him. Did the English Government desire to send a message to Claridge Pasha, if the relief was accomplished? That is what I asked. But there is no word. Malaish, Egypt will welcome him!"

She followed his eyes. Two score of dahabiehs lay along the banks of the Nile, and on the shore were en-

campments of soldiers, while flags were flying everywhere. Egypt had followed the lead of the Effendina. Claridge Pasha's star was in its zenith.

As Nahoum's boat was rowed away, Hylda came on deck again, and the Duchess hastened to her. Hylda caught the look in her face. "What has happened? Is there news? Who has been here?" she asked.

The Duchess took her hands. "Nahoum has gone to tell Prince Kaïd. He came to you with the good news first," she said with a flutter.

She felt Hylda's hands turn cold. A kind of mist filled the dark eyes, and the slim, beautiful figure swayed slightly. An instant only, and then the lips smiled, and Hylda said in a quavering voice: "They will be so glad in England."

"Yes, yes, my darling, that is what Nahoum said." She gave Nahoum's message to her. "Now they'll make him a peer, I suppose, after having deserted him. So English!"

She did not understand why Hylda's hands trembled so, why so strange a look came into her face, but, in an instant, the rare and appealing eyes shone again with a light of agitated joy, and suddenly Hylda leaned over and kissed her cheek.

"Smell the coffee," she said with assumed gaiety. "Doesn't fair-and-sixty want her breakfast? Sunrise is a splendid tonic." She laughed feverishly.

"My darling, I hadn't seen the sun rise in thirty years, not since the night I first met Windlehurst at a Foreign Office ball."

"You have always been great friends?" Hylda stole a look at her.

"That's the queer part of it; I was so stupid, and he so clever. But Windlehurst has a way of letting himself

down to your level. He always called me Betty after my boy died, just as if I was his equal. La, la, but I was proud when he first called me that—the Prime Minister of England. I'm going to watch the sun rise again to-morrow, my darling. I didn't know it was so beautiful, and gave one such an appetite." She broke a piece of bread, and, not waiting to butter it, almost stuffed it into her mouth.

Hylda leaned over and pressed her arm. "What a good mother Betty it is!" she said tenderly.

Presently they were startled by the shrill screaming of a steamer whistle, followed by the churning of the paddles, as she drove past and drew to the bank near them.

"It is a steamer from Cairo, with letters, no doubt," said Hylda; and the Duchess nodded assent, and covertly noted her look, for she knew that no letters had arrived from Eglington since Hylda had left England.

A half-hour later, as the Duchess sat on deck, a great straw hat tied under her chin with pale-blue ribbons, like a child of twelve, she was startled by seeing the figure of a farmer-looking person with a shock of grey-red hair, a red face, and with great blue eyes, appear before her in the charge of Hylda's dragoman.

"This has come to speak with my lady," the dragoman said, "but my lady is riding into the desert—there." He pointed to the sands.

The Duchess motioned the dragoman away, and scanned the face of the new-comer shrewdly. Where had she seen this strange-looking English peasant, with the rolling walk of a sailor?

"What is your name, and where do you come from?"

she asked, not without anxiety, for there was something ominous and suggestive in the old man's face.

"I come from Hamley, in England, and my name is Soolsby, your grace. I come to see my Lady Eglington."

Now she remembered him. She had seen him in Hamley more than once.

"You have come far; have you important news for her ladyship? Is there anything wrong?" she asked with apparent composure, but with heavy premonition.

"Ay, news that counts, I bring," answered Soolsby, "or I hadn't come this long way. 'Tis a long way at sixty-five."

"Well, yes, at our age it is a long way," rejoined the Duchess in a friendly voice, suddenly waving away the intervening air of class, for she was half a peasant at heart.

"Ay, and we both come for the same end, I suppose," Soolsby added; "and a costly business it is. But what matters, so be that you help her ladyship and I help Our Man."

"And who is 'Our Man'?" was the rejoinder.

"Him that's coming safe here from the South—David Claridge," he answered. "Ay, 'twas the first thing I heard when I landed here, me that be come all these thousand miles to see him, if so be he was alive."

Just then he caught sight of Kate Heaver climbing the stair to the deck where they were. His face flushed; he hurried forward and gripped her by the arm, as her feet touched the upper deck. "Kate—ay, 'tis Kate!" he cried. Then he let go her arm and caught a hand in both of his and fondled it. "Ay, ay, 'tis Kate!"

"What is it brings you, Soolsby?" Kate asked anxiously.

"'Tis not Jasper, and 'tis not the drink—ay, I've been sober since, ever since, Kate, lass," he answered stoutly.

"Quick, quick, tell me what it is!" she said, frowning. "You've not come here for naught, Soolsby."

Still holding her hand, he leaned over and whispered in her ear. For an instant she stood as though transfixed, and then, with a curious muffled cry, broke away from him and turned to go below.

"Keep your mouth shut, lass, till proper time," he called after her, as she descended the steps hastily again. Then he came slowly back to the Duchess.

He looked her in the face—he was so little like a peasant, so much more like a sailor here with his feet on the deck of a floating thing. "Your grace is a good friend to her ladyship," he said at last deliberately, "and 'tis well that you tell her ladyship. As good a friend to her you've been, I doubt not, as that I've been to him that's coming from beyond and away."

"Go on, man, go on. I want to know what startled Heaver yonder, what you have come to say."

"I beg pardon, your grace. One doesn't keep good news waiting, and 'tis not good news for her ladyship I bring, even if it be for Claridge Pasha, for there was no love lost 'twixt him and second-best lordship that's gone."

"Speak, man, speak it out, and no more riddles," she interrupted sharply.

"Then, he that was my Lord Eglington is gone foreign—he is dead," he said slowly.

The Duchess fell back in her chair. For an instant the desert, the temples, the palms, the Nile waters faded, and she was in some middle world, in which Soolsby's voice seemed coming muffled and deep across a dark flood; then she recovered herself, and gave a little cry,

not unlike that which Kate gave a few moments before, partly of pain, partly of relief.

"Ay, he's dead and buried, too, and in the Quaker churchyard. Miss Claridge would have it so. And none in Hamley said nay, not one."

The Duchess murmured to herself. Eglington was dead—Eglington was dead—Eglington was dead! And David Claridge was coming out of the desert, was coming to-day—now!

"How did it happen?" she asked, faintly, at last.

"Things went wrong wi' him—bad wrong in Parliament and everywhere, and he didn't take it well. He stood the world off like—ay, he had no temper for black days. He shut himself up at Hamley in his chemical place, like his father, like his father before him. When the week-end came, there he was all day and night among his bottles and jars and wires. He was after summat big in experiment for explosives, so the papers said, and so he said himself before he died, to Miss Claridge—ay, 'twas her he deceived and treated cruel, that come to him when he was shattered by his experimenting. No patience, he had at last—and reckless in his chemical place, and didn't realise what his hands was doing. 'Twas so he told her, that forgave him all his deceit, and held him in her arms when he died. Not many words he had to speak; but he did say that he had never done any good to any one—ay, I was standing near behind his bed and heard all, for I was thinking of her alone with him, and so I would be with her, and she would have it so. Ay, and he said that he had misused cruel her that had loved him, her ladyship, that's here. He said he had misused her because he had never loved her truly, only pride and vainglory being in his heart. Then he spoke summat to her that was there to

forgive him and help him over the stile 'twixt this field and it that's Beyond and Away, which made her cry out in pain and say that he must fix his thoughts on other things. And she prayed out loud for him, for he would have no parson there. She prayed and prayed as never priest or parson prayed, and at last he got quiet and still, and, when she stopped praying, he did not speak or open his eyes for a longish while. But when the old clock on the stable was striking twelve, he opened his eyes wide, and when it had stopped, he said: 'It is always twelve by the clock that stops at noon. I've done no good. I've earned my end.' He looked as though he was waiting for the clock to go on striking, half raising himself up in bed, with Miss Faith's arm under his head. He whispered to her then—he couldn't speak by this time. 'It's twelve o'clock,' he said. Then there came some words I've heard the priest say at Mass, '*Vanitas, Vanitatum,*'—that was what he said. And her he'd lied to, there with him, laying his head down on the pillow, as if he was her child going to sleep. So, too, she had him buried by her father, in the Quaker burying-ground—ay, she is a saint on earth, I warrant."

For a moment after he had stopped the Duchess did not speak, but kept untying and tying the blue ribbons under her chin, her faded eyes still fastened on him, burning with the flame of an emotion which made them dark and young again.

"So, it's all over," she said, as though to herself. "They were all alike, from old Broadbrim, the grandfather, down to this one, and back to William the Conqueror."

"Like as peas in a pod," exclaimed Soolsby—"all but one, all but one, and never satisfied with what was

in their own garden, but peeking, peeking beyond the hedge, and climbing and getting a fall. That's what they've always been evermore."

His words aroused the Duchess, and the air became a little colder about her—after all, the division between the classes and the masses must be kept, and the Eglingtons were no upstarts. "You will say nothing about this till I give you leave to speak," she commanded. "I must tell her ladyship."

Soolsby drew himself up a little, nettled at her tone. "It is your grace's place to tell her ladyship," he responded; "but I've taken ten years' savings to come to Egypt, and not to do any one harm, but good, if so be I might."

The Duchess relented at once. She got to her feet as quickly as she could, and held out her hand to him. "You are a good man, and a friend worth having, I know, and I shall like you to be my friend, Mr. Soolsby," she said impulsively.

He took her hand and shook it awkwardly, his lips working. "Your grace, I understand. I've got naught to live for except my friends. Money's naught, naught's naught, if there isn't a friend to feel a crunch at his heart when summat bad happens to you. I'd take my affydavy that there's no better friend in the world than your grace."

She smiled at him. "And so we are friends, aren't we? And I am to tell her ladyship, and you are to say 'naught.'"

"But to the Egyptian, to him, your grace, it is my place to speak—to Claridge Pasha, when he comes."

The Duchess looked at him quizzically. "How does Lord Eglington's death concern Claridge Pasha?" she asked rather anxiously. Had there been gossip about

Hylda? Had the public got a hint of the true story of her flight, in spite of all Windlehurst had done? Was Hylda's name smirched, now, when all would be set right? Had everything come too late, as it were?

"There's two ways that his lordship's death concerns Claridge Pasha," answered Soolsby shrewdly, for though he guessed the truth concerning Hylda and David, his was not a leaking tongue. "There's two ways it touches him. There'll be a new man in the Foreign Office—Lord Eglington was always against Claridge Pasha; and there's matters of land betwixt the two estates—matters of land that's got to be settled now," he continued, with determined and successful evasion.

The Duchess was deceived. "But you will not tell Claridge Pasha until I have told her ladyship and I give you leave? Promise that," she urged.

"I will not tell him until then," he answered. "Look, look, your grace," he added, suddenly pointing towards the southern horizon, "there he comes! Ay, 'tis Our Man, I doubt not—Our Man evermore!"

Miles away there appeared on the horizon a dozen camels being ridden towards Assouan.

"Our Man evermore," repeated the Duchess, with a trembling smile. "Yes, it is surely he. See, the soldiers are moving. They're going to ride out to meet him." She made a gesture towards the far shore where Kaïd's men were saddling their horses, and to Nahoum's and Kaïd's dahabiehs, where there was a great stir.

"There's one from Hamley will meet them first," Soolsby said, and pointed to where Hylda, in the desert, was riding towards the camels coming out of the south.

The Duchess threw up her hands. "Dear me, dear me," she said in distress, "if she only knew!"

"There's thousands of women that'd ride out mad to

meet him," said Soolsby carefully; "women that likes to see an Englishman that's done his duty—ay, women and men, that'd ride hard to welcome him back from the grave. Her ladyship's as good a patriot as any," he added, watching the Duchess out of the corners of his eyes, his face turned to the desert.

The Duchess looked at him quizzically, and was satisfied with her scrutiny. "You're a man of sense," she replied brusquely, and gathered up her skirts. "Find me a horse or a donkey, and I'll go too," she added whimsically. "Patriotism is such a nice sentiment."

For David and Lacey the morning had broken upon a new earth. Whatever of toil and tribulation the future held in store, this day marked a step forward in the work to which David had set his life. A way had been cloven through the bloody palisades of barbarism, and though the dark races might seek to hold back the forces which drain the fens, and build the bridges, and make the desert blossom as the rose, which give liberty and preserve life, the good end was sure and near, whatever of rebellion and disorder and treachery intervened. This was the larger, graver issue; but they felt a spring in the blood, and their hearts were leaping, because of the thought that soon they would clasp hands again with all from which they had been exiled.

"Say, Saadat, think of it: a bed with four feet, and linen sheets, and sleeping till any time in the morning, and, 'If you please, sir, breakfast 's on the table.' Say, it's great, and we're in it!"

David smiled. "Thee did very well, friend, without such luxuries. Thee is not skin and bone."

Lacey mopped his forehead. "Well, I've put on a layer or two since the relief. It's being scared that

takes the flesh off me. I never was intended for the 'stricken field.' Poetry and the hearth-stone was my real vocation—and a bit of silver mining to blow off steam with," he added with a chuckle.

David laughed and tapped his arm. "That is an old story now, thy cowardice. Thee should be more original."

"It's worth not being original, Saadat, to hear you *thee* and *thou* me as you used to do. It's like old times—the oldest, first times. You've changed a lot, Saadat."

"Not in anything that matters, I hope."

"Not in anything that matters to any one that matters. To me it's the same as it ever was, only more so. It isn't that, for you are you. But you've had disappointment, trouble, hard nuts to crack, and all you could do to escape the rocks being rolled down the Egyptian hill onto you; and it's left its mark."

"Am I grown so different?"

Lacey's face shone under the look that was turned towards him. "Say, Saadat, you're the same old red sandstone; but I missed the *thee* and *thou*. I sort of hankered after it; it gets me where I'm at home with myself."

David laughed drily. "Well, perhaps I've missed something in you. Thee never says now—not since thee went south a year ago, 'Well, give my love to the girls.' Something has left its mark, friend," he added teasingly; for his spirits were boyish to-day; he was living in the present. There had gone from his eyes and from the lines of his figure the melancholy which Hylda had remarked when he was in England.

"Well, now, I never noticed," rejoined Lacey. "That's got me. Looks as if I wasn't as friendly as I used to be, doesn't it? But I am—I am, Saadat."

"I thought that the widow in Cairo, perhaps—"

Lacey chuckled. "Say, perhaps it was—cute as she can be, maybe, wouldn't like it, might be prejudiced."

Suddenly David turned sharply to Lacey. "Thee spoke of silver mining just now. I owe thee something like two hundred thousand pounds, I think—Egypt and I."

Lacey winked whimsically at himself under the rim of his helmet. "Are you drawing back from those concessions, Saadat?" he asked with apparent ruefulness.

"Drawing back? No! But does thee think they are worth—"

Lacey assumed an injured air. "If a man that's made as much money as me can't be trusted to look after a business proposition—"

"Oh, well, then!"

"Say, Saadat, I don't want you to think I've taken a mean advantage of you; and if—"

David hastened to put the matter right. "No, no; thee must be the judge!" He smiled sceptically. "In any case, thee has done a good deed in a great way, and it will do thee no harm in the end. In one way the investment will pay a long interest, as long as the history of Egypt runs. Ah, see, the houses of Assouan, the palms, the river, the masts of the dahabiehs!"

Lacey quickened his camel's steps, and stretched out a hand to the inviting distance. "My, it's great," he said, and his eyes were blinking with tears. Presently he pointed. "There's a woman riding to meet us, Saadat. Golly, can't she ride! She means to be in it—to salute the returning brave."

He did not glance at David. If he had done so, he would have seen that David's face had taken on a strange look, just such a look as it wore that night in the monas-

tery when he saw Hylda in a vision and heard her say: "Speak, speak to me!"

There had shot into David's mind the conviction that the woman riding towards them was Hylda. Hylda, the first to welcome him back, Hylda—Lady Eglington! Suddenly his face appeared to tighten and grow thin. It was all joy and torture at once. He had fought this fight out with himself—had he not done so? Had he not closed his heart to all but duty and Egypt? Yet there she was riding out of the old life, out of Hamley, and England, and all that had happened in Cairo, to meet him. Nearer and nearer she came. He could not see the face, but yet he knew. He quickened his camel and drew ahead of Lacey. Lacey did not understand, he did not recognise Hylda as yet; but he knew by instinct the Saadat's wishes, and he motioned the others to ride more slowly, while he and they watched horsemen coming out from Assouan towards them.

David urged his camel on. Presently he could distinguish the features of the woman riding towards him. It was Hylda. His presentiment, his instinct had been right. His heart beat tumultuously, his hand trembled, he grew suddenly weak; but he summoned up his will, and ruled himself to something like composure. This, then, was his home-coming from the far miseries and trials and battle-fields—to see her face before all others, to hear her voice first. What miracle had brought this thing to pass, this beautiful, bitter, forbidden thing? Forbidden! Whatever the cause of her coming, she must not see what he felt for her. He must deal fairly by her and by Eglington; he must be true to that real self which had emerged from the fiery trial in the monastery. Bronzed as he was, his face showed no paleness; but, as he drew near her, it grew pinched and wan from

the effort at self-control. He set his lips and rode on, until he could see her eyes looking into his—eyes full of that which he had never seen in any eyes in all the world!

What had been her feelings during that ride in the desert? She had not meant to go out to meet him. After she heard that he was coming, her desire was to get away from all the rest of the world, and be alone with her thoughts. He was coming, he was safe, and her work was done. What she had set out to do was accomplished—to bring him back, if it was God's will, out of the jaws of death, for England's sake, for the world's sake, for his sake, for her own sake. For her own sake? Yes, yes, in spite of all, for her own sake. Whatever lay before, now, for this one hour, for this moment of meeting he should be hers. But meet him, where? Before all the world, with a smile of conventional welcome on her lips, with the same hand-clasp that any friend and lover of humanity would give him?

The desert air blew on her face, keen, sweet, vibrant, thrilling. What he had heard that night at the monastery, the humming life of the land of white fire—the desert, the million looms of all the weavers of the world weaving, this she heard in the sunlight, with the sand rising like surf behind her horse's heels. The misery and the tyranny and the unrequited love were all behind her, the disillusion and the loss and the undeserved insult to her womanhood—all, all were sunk away into the unredeemable past. Here, in Egypt, where she had first felt the stir of life's passion and pain and penalty, here, now, she lost herself in a beautiful, buoyant dream. She was riding out to meet the one man of all men, hero, crusader, rescuer—ah, that dreadful night in the Palace, and Foorgat's face! But he was coming, who

had made her live, to whom she had called, to whom her soul had spoken in its grief and misery. Had she ever done aught to shame the best that was in herself —and had she not been sorely tempted? Had she not striven to love Eglington even when the worst was come, not alone at her own soul's command, but because she knew that this man would have it so? Broken by her own sorrow, she had left England, Eglington—all, to keep her pledge to help him in his hour of need, to try and save him to the world, if that might be. So she had come to Nahoum, who was binding him down on the bed of torture and of death. And yet, alas! not herself had conquered Nahoum, but David, as Nahoum had said. She herself had not done this one thing which would have compensated for all that she had suffered. This had not been permitted; but it remained that she had come here to do it, and perhaps he would understand when he saw her.

Yes, she knew he would understand! She flung up her head to the sun and the pulse-stirring air, and, as she did so, she saw his cavalcade approaching. She was sure it was he, even when he was far off, by the same sure instinct that convinced him. For an instant she hesitated. She would turn back, and meet him with the crowd. Then she looked around. The desert was deserted by all save herself and himself and those who were with him. No. Her mind was made up. She would ride forward. She would be the first to welcome him back to life and the world. He and she would meet alone in the desert. For one minute they would be alone, they two, with the world afar, they two, to meet, to greet—and to part. Out of all that Fate had to give of sorrow and loss, this one delectable moment, no matter what came after.

"David!" she cried with beating heart, and rode on, harder and harder.

Now she saw him ride ahead of the others. Ah, he knew that it was she, though he could not see her face! Nearer and nearer. Now they looked into each other's eyes.

She saw him stop his camel and make it kneel for the dismounting. She stopped her horse also, and slid to the ground, and stood waiting, one hand upon the horse's neck. He hastened forward, then stood still, a few feet away, his eyes on hers, his helmet off, his brown hair, brown as when she first saw it—peril and hardship had not thinned or greyed it. For a moment they stood so, for a moment of revealing and understanding, but speechless; and then, suddenly, and with a smile infinitely touching, she said, as he had heard her say in the monastery—the very words:

"Speak—speak to me!"

He took her hand in his. "There is no need—I have said all," he answered, happiness and trouble at once in his eyes. Then his face grew calmer. "Thee has made it worth while living on," he added.

She was gaining control of herself also. "I said that I would come when I was needed," she answered less tremblingly.

"Thee came alone?" he asked gently.

"From Assouan, yes," she said in a voice still unsteady. "I was riding out to be by myself, and then I saw you coming, and I rode on. I thought I should like to be the first to say: 'Well done,' and 'God bless you!'"

He drew in a long breath, then looked at her keenly. "Lord Eglington is in Egypt also?" he asked.

Her face did not change. She looked him in the eyes.

"No, Eglington would not come to help you. I came to Nahoum, as I said I would."

"Thee has a good memory," he rejoined simply.

"I am a good friend," she answered, then suddenly her face flushed up, her breast panted, her eyes shone with a brightness almost intolerable to him, and he said in a low, shaking voice:

"It is all fighting, all fighting. We have done our best; and thee has made all possible."

"David!" she said in a voice scarce above a whisper.

"Thee and me have far to go," he said in a voice not louder than her own, "but our ways may not be the same."

She understood, and a newer life leaped up in her. She knew that he loved her—that was sufficient; the rest would be easier now. Sacrifice, all, would be easier. To part, yes, and for evermore; but to know that she had been truly loved—who could rob her of that?

"See," she said lightly, "your people are waiting—and there, why, there is my cousin Lacey. Tom, oh, Cousin Tom!" she called eagerly.

Lacey rode down on them. "I swan, but I'm glad," he said, as he dropped from his horse. "Cousin Hylda, I'm blest if I don't feel as if I could sing like Aunt Melissa."

"You may kiss me, Cousin Tom," she said, as she took his hands in hers.

He flushed, was embarrassed, then snatched a kiss from her cheek. "Say, I'm in it, ain't I? And you were in it first, eh, Cousin Hylda? The rest are nowhere—there they come from Assouan, Kaïd, Nahoum, and the Nubians. Look at 'em glisten!"

A hundred of Kaïd's Nubians in their glittering armour made three sides of a quickly moving square, in

the centre of which, and a little ahead, rode Kaïd and Nahoum, while behind the square—in parade and gala dress—trooped hundreds of soldiers and Egyptians and natives.

Swiftly the two cavalcades approached each other, the desert ringing with the cries of the Bedouins, the Nubians, and the fellaheen. They met on an upland of sand, from which the wide valley of the Nile and its wild cataracts could be seen. As men meet who parted yesterday, Kaïd, Nahoum, and David met, but Kaïd's first quiet words to David had behind them a world of meaning:

"I also have come back, Saadat, to whom be the bread that never moulds and the water that never stales!" he said, with a look in his face which had not been there for many a day. Superstition had set its mark on him—on Claridge Pasha's safety depended his own, that was his belief; and the look of this thin, bronzed face, with its living fire, gave him vital assurance of length of days.

And David answered: "May thy life be the nursling of Time, Effendina. I bring the tribute of the rebellious once more to thy hand. What was thine, and was lost, is thine once more. Peace and salaam!"

Between Nahoum and David there were no words at first at all. They shook hands like Englishmen, looking into each other's eyes, and with pride of what Nahoum, once, in his duplicity, had called "perfect friendship."

Lacey thought of this now as he looked on; and not without a sense of irony, he said under his breath, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian!"

But in Hylda's look, as it met Nahoum's, there was no doubt—what woman doubts the convert whom she

thinks she has helped to make? Meanwhile, the Nubians smote their mailed breasts with their swords in honour of David and Kaïd.

Under the gleaming moon, the exquisite temple of Philæ perched on its high rock above the river, the fires on the shore, the masts of the dahabiehs twinkling with lights, and the barbarous songs floating across the water, gave the feeling of past centuries to the scene. From the splendid boat which Kaïd had placed at his disposal David looked out upon it all, with emotions not yet wholly mastered by the true estimate of what this day had brought to him. With a mind unsettled he listened to the natives in the forepart of the boat and on the shore, beating the darabukkeh and playing the kemengeh. Yet it was moving in a mist and on a flood of greater happiness than he had ever known.

He did not know as yet that Eglington was gone for ever. He did not know that the winds of time had already swept away all traces of the house of ambition which Eglington had sought to build; and that his nimble tongue and untrustworthy mind would never more delude and charm, and wanton with truth. He did not know, but within the past hour Hylda knew; and now out of the night Soolsby came to tell him.

He was roused from his reverie by Soolsby's voice saying: "Hast nowt to say to me, Egyptian?"

It startled him, sounded ghostly in the moonlight; for why should he hear Soolsby's voice on the confines of Egypt? But Soolsby came nearer, and stood where the moonlight fell upon him, hat in hand, a rustic modern figure in this Oriental world.

David sprang to his feet and grasped the old man by

the shoulders. "Soolsby, Soolsby," he said, with a strange plaintive note in his voice, yet gladly, too. "Soolsby, thee is come here to welcome me! But has she not come—Miss Claridge, Soolsby?"

He longed for that true heart which had never failed him, the simple soul whose life had been filled by thought and care of him, and whose every act had for its background the love of sister for brother—for that was their relation in every usual meaning—who, too frail and broken to come to him now, waited for him by the old hearthstone. And so Soolsby, in his own way, made him understand; for who knew them both better than this old man, who had shared in David's destiny since the fatal day when Lord Eglington had married Mercy Claridge in secret, had set in motion a long line of tragic happenings?

"Ay, she would have come, she would have come," Soolsby answered, "but she was not fit for the journey, and there was little time, my lord."

"Why did thee come, Soolsby? Only to welcome me back?"

"I come to bring you back to England, to your duty there, my lord."

The first time Soolsby had used the words "my lord," David had scarcely noticed it, but its repetition struck him strangely.

"Here, sometimes they call me *Pasha* and *Saadat*, but I am not 'my lord,'" he said.

"Ay, but you are my lord, Egyptian, as sure as I've kept my word to you that I'd drink no more, ay, on my sacred honour. So you are my lord; you are Lord Eglington, my lord."

David stood rigid and almost unblinking as Soolsby told his tale, beginning with the story of Eglington's

death, and going back all the years to the day of Mercy Claridge's marriage.

"And him that never was Lord Eglington, your own father's son, is dead and gone, my lord; and you are come into your rights at last." This was the end of the tale.

For a long time David stood looking into the sparkling night before him, speechless and unmoving, his hands clasped behind him, his head bent forward, as though in a dream.

How, all in an instant, had life changed for him! How had Soolsby's tale of Eglington's death filled him with a pity deeper than he had ever felt—the futile, bitter, unaccomplished life, the audacious, brilliant genius quenched, a genius got from the same source as his own resistless energy and imagination, from the same wild spring. Gone—all gone, with only pity to cover him, unloved, unloving, unbemoaned, save by the Quaker girl whose true spirit he had hurt, save by the wife whom he had cruelly wronged and tortured; and pity was the thing that moved them both, unfathomable and almost maternal, in that sense of motherhood which, in spite of love or passion, is behind both, behind all, in every true woman's life.

At last David spoke.

"Who knows of all this—of who I am, Soolsby?"

"Lady Eglington and myself, my lord."

"Only she and you?"

"Only us two, Egyptian."

"Then let it be so—for ever."

Soolsby was startled, dumfounded.

"But you will take your title and estates, my lord; you will take the place which is your own."

"And prove my grandfather wrong? Had he not

enough sorrow? And change my life, all to please thee, Soolsby?"

He took the old man's shoulders in his hands again. "Thee has done thy duty as few in this world, Soolsby, and given friendship such as few give. But thee must be content. I am David Claridge, and so shall remain ever."

"Then, since he has no male kin, the title dies, and all that's his will go to her ladyship," Soolsby rejoined sourly.

"Does thee grudge her ladyship what was his?"

"I grudge her what is yours, my lord—"

Suddenly Soolsby paused, as though a new thought had come to him, and he nodded to himself in satisfaction. "Well, since you will have it so, it will be so, Egyptian; but it is a queer fuddle, all of it; and where's the way out, tell me that, my lord?"

David spoke impatiently. "Call me 'my lord' no more. . . . But I will go back to England to her that's waiting at the Red Mansion, and you will remember, Soolsby—"

Slowly the great flotilla of dahabiehs floated with the strong current down towards Cairo, the great sails swelling to the breeze that blew from the Libyan Hills. Along the bank of the Nile thousands of Arabs and fellaheen crowded to welcome "the Saadat," bringing gifts of dates and eggs and fowls and dourha and sweetmeats, and linen cloth; and even in the darkness and in the trouble that was on her, and the harrowing regret that she had not been with Eglington in his last hour—she little knew what Eglington had said to Faith in that last hour—Hylda's heart was soothed by the long, loud tribute paid to David.

As she sat in the evening light, David and Lacey came, and were received by the Duchess of Snowdon, who could only say to David, as she held his hand, "Windlehurst sent his regards to you, his loving regards. He was sure you would come home—come home. He wished he were in power for your sake."

So, for a few moments she talked vaguely, and said at last: "But Lady Eglington, she will be glad to see you, such old friends as you are, though not so old as Windlehurst and me—thirty years, over thirty la, la!"

They turned to go to Hylda, and came face to face with Kate Heaver.

Kate looked at David as one would look who saw a lost friend return from the dead. His eyes lighted, he held out his hand to her.

"It is good to see thee here," he said gently.

"And 'tis the cross-roads once again, sir," she rejoined.

"Thee means thee will marry Jasper?"

"Ay, I will marry Jasper now," she answered.

"It has been a long waiting."

"It could not be till now," she responded.

David looked at her reflectively, and said: "By devious ways the human heart comes home. One can only stand in the door and wait. He has been patient."

"I have been patient, too," she answered.

As the Duchess disappeared with David, a swift change came over Lacey. He spun round on one toe, and, like a boy of ten, careered around the deck to the tune of a negro song.

"Say, things are all right in there with them two, and it's my turn now," he said. "Cute as she can be, and

knows the game! Twice a widow, and knows the game! Waiting, she is down in Cairo, where the orange blossom blows. I'm in it; we're all in it—every one of us. Cousin Hylda's free now, and I've got no past worth speaking of; and, anyhow, she'll understand, down there in Cairo. Cute as she can be—"

Suddenly he swung himself down to the deck below. "The desert's the place for me to-night," he said.

Stepping ashore, he turned to where the Duchess stood on the deck, gazing out into the night. "Well, give my love to the girls," he called, waving a hand upwards, as it were to the wide world, and disappeared into the alluring whiteness.

"I've got to get a key-thought," he muttered to himself, as he walked swiftly on, till only faint sounds came to him from the riverside. In the letter he had written to Hylda, which was the turning-point of all for her, he had spoken of these "key-thoughts." With all the childishness he showed at times, he had wisely felt his way into spheres where life had depth and meaning. The desert had justified him to himself and before the spirits of departed peoples, who wandered over the sands, until at last they became sand also, and were blown hither and thither, to make beds for thousands of desert wayfarers, or paths for camels' feet, or a blinding storm to overwhelm the traveller and the caravan; Life giving and taking, and absorbing and destroying, and destroying and absorbing, till the circle of human existence wheel to the full, and the task of Time be accomplished.

On the gorse-grown common above Hamley, David and Faith, and David's mother Mercy, had felt the same soul of things stirring—in the green things of green England, in the arid wastes of the Libyan desert, on the

bosom of the Nile, where Mahommed Hassan now lay in a nugger singing a song of passion, Nature, with burning voice, murmuring down the unquiet world its message of the Final Peace through the innumerable years.

GLOSSARY

Aiwa—Yes.
Allah hu Achbar—God is most Great.
Al'mah—Female professional singers, signifying "a learned female."
Ardab—A measure equivalent to five English bushels.

Backsheesh—Tip, *douceur*.
Balass—Earthen vessel for carrying water.
Bâsha—Pasha.
Bersim—Clover.
Bismillah—In the name of God.
Bowâb—A doorkeeper.

Dahabieh—A Nile houseboat with large lateen sails.
Darabukkeh—A drum made of a skin stretched over an earthenware funnel.
Dourha—Maize.

Effendina—Most noble.
El Azhar—The Arab University at Cairo.

Feddân—A measure of land representing about an acre.
Fellâh—The Egyptian peasant.

Ghiassa—Small boat.

Hakim—Doctor.
Hasheesh—Leaves of hemp.

Inshallah—God willing.

Kânoon—A musical instrument like a dulcimer.
Kavass—An orderly.
Kemengeh—A cocoanut fiddle.
Khamsin—A hot wind of Egypt and the Soudan.
Kourbash—A whip, often made of rhinoceros hide.

Lâ ilâha illa-llâh—There is no deity but God.

Malaish—No matter.
Malboos—Demented.
Mastaba—A bench.
Medjidie—A Turkish Order.
Mooshrabieh—Lattice window.
Moufettish—High Steward.
Mudir—The Governor of a *Mudirieh*, or province.
Muezzin — The sheikh of the mosque who calls to prayer.

Narghileh—A Persian pipe.
Neboot—A quarter-staff.

Ramadan—The Mahommedan season of fasting.

Saadat-el-bâsha—Excellency Pasha.
Sâis—Groom.
Sakkia—The Persian water-wheel.
Salaam—Eastern salutation.
Sheikh-el-beled—Head of a village.

Tarboosh—A Turkish turban.

Ulema—Learned men.

Wakf—Mahommedan Court dealing with succession, etc.
Welée—A holy man or saint.

Yashmak—A veil for the lower part of the face.
Yelek—A long vest or smock.