THE WORKS OF GILBERT PARKER

IMPERIAL EDITION

VOLUME

XV

The unveiled dancers came and went

GILBERT PARKER

THE WEAVERS

A TALE OF ENGLAND AND EGYPT
OF FIFTY YEARS AGO

VOLUME I

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1913

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BEAUTIFUL AND BELOVED

THIS

TO

YOU

INTRODUCTION

When I turn over the hundreds of pages of this book, I have a feeling that I am looking upon something for which I have no particular responsibility, though it has a strange contour of familiarity. It is as though one looks upon a scene in which one had lived and moved, with the friendly yet half-distant feeling that it once was one's own possession but is so no longer. I should think the feeling to be much like that of the old man whose sons, gone to distant places, have created their own plantations of life and have themselves become the masters of possessions. Also I suppose that when I read the story through again from the first page to the last, I shall recreate the feeling in which I lived when I wrote it, and it will become a part of my own identity again. That distance between himself and his work, however, which immediately begins to grow as soon as a book leaves the author's hands for those of the public, is a thing which, I suppose, must come to one who produces a work of the imagination. It is no doubt due to the fact that every piece of art which has individuality and real likeness to the scenes and character it is intended to depict is done in a kind of trance. The author, in effect, self-hypnotises himself, has created an atmosphere which is separate and apart from that of his daily surroundings, and by virtue of his imagination becomes absorbed in that atmosphere. When the book is finished and it goes forth, when the imagination is relaxed and the concentration of mind is withdrawn, the atmosphere disappears, and then one experi-

ences what I feel when I take up *The Weavers* and, in a sense, wonder how it was done, such as it is.

The frontispiece of the English edition represents a scene in the House of Commons, and this brings to my mind a warning which was given me similar to that on my entering new fields outside the one in which I first made a reputation in fiction. When, in a certain year, I determined that I would enter the House of Commons I had many friends who, in effect, wailed and gnashed their teeth. They said that it would be the death of my imaginative faculties; that I should never write anything any more; that all the qualities which make literature living and compelling would disappear. I thought this was all wrong then, and I know it is all wrong now. Political life does certainly interfere with the amount of work which an author may produce. He certainly cannot write a book every year and do political work as well, but if he does not attempt to do the two things on the same days, as it were, but in blocks of time devoted to each separately and respectively, he will only find, as I have found, that public life—the conflict of it, the accompanying attrition of mind, the searching for the things which will solve the problems of national life, the multitudinous variations of character with which one comes in contact, the big issues suddenly sprung upon the congregation of responsible politicians, all are stimulating to the imagination, invigorating to the mind, and marvellously freshening to every literary instinct. No danger to the writer lies in doing political work, if it does not sap his strength and destroy his health. Apart from that, he should not suffer. The very spirit of statesmanship is imagination, vision; and the same quality which enables an author to realise humanity for a book is necessary for him to realise humanity in the crowded chamber of a Parliament.

So far as I can remember, whatever was written of *The Weavers*, no critic said that it lacked imagination. Some critics said it was too crowded with incident; that there was enough

incident in it for two novels; some said that the sweep was too wide, but no critic of authority declared that the book lacked vision or the vivacity of a living narrative. It is not likely that I shall ever write again a novel of Egypt, but I have made my contribution to Anglo-Egyptian literature, and I do not think I failed completely in showing the greatness of soul which enabled one man to keep the torch of civilisation, of truth, justice, and wholesome love alight in surroundings as offensive to civilisation as was Egypt in the last days of Ismail Pasha—a time which could be well typified by the words put by Bulwer Lytton in the mouth of Cardinal Richelieu:

> "I found France rent asunder,
> Sloth in the mart and schism in the temple;
> Broils festering to rebellion; and weak laws
> Rotting away with rust in antique sheaths.
> I have re-created France; and, from the ashes
> Of the old feudal and decrepit carcase,
> Civilisation on her luminous wings
> Soars, phœnix-like, to Jove!"

Critics and readers have endeavoured to identify the main characteristics of *The Weavers* with figures in Anglo-Egyptian and official public life. David Claridge was, however, a creature of the imagination. It has been said that he was drawn from General Gordon. I am not conscious of having taken Gordon for David's prototype, though, as I was saturated with all that had been written about Gordon, there is no doubt that something of that great man may have found its way into the character of David Claridge. The true origin of David Claridge, however, may be found in a short story called *All the World's Mad*, in *Donovan Pasha*, which was originally published by Lady Randolph Churchill in an ambitious but defunct magazine called *The Anglo-Saxon Review*. The truth is that David Claridge had his origin in a fairly close understanding of, and interest in,

Quaker life. I had Quaker relatives through the marriage of a connection of my mother, and the original of Benn Claridge, the uncle of David, is still alive, a very old man, who in my boyhood days wore the broad brim and the straight preacher-like coat of the old-fashioned Quaker. The grandmother of my wife was also a Quaker, and used the "thee" and "thou" until the day of her death.

Here let me say that criticism came to me from several quarters both in England and America on the use of these words *thee* and *thou*, and statements were made that the kind of speech which I put into David Claridge's mouth was not Quaker speech. For instance, they would not have it that a Quaker would say, "Thee will go with me"—as though they were ashamed of the sweet inaccuracy of the objective pronoun being used in the nominative; but hundreds of times I have myself heard Quakers use "thee" in just such a way in England and America. The facts are, however, that Quakers differ extensively in their habits, and there grew up in England among the Quakers in certain districts a sense of shame for false grammar which, to say the least, was very childish. To be deliberately and boldly ungrammatical, when you serve both euphony and simplicity, is merely to give archaic charm, not to be guilty of an offence. I have friends in Derbyshire who still say "Thee thinks," etc., and I must confess that the picture of a Quaker rampant over my deliberate use of this well-authenticated form of speech produced to my mind only the effect of an infuriated sheep, when I remembered the peaceful attribute of Quaker life and character. From another quarter came the assurance that I was wrong when I set up a tombstone with a name upon it in a Quaker graveyard. I received a sarcastic letter from a lady on the borders of Sussex and Surrey upon this point, and I immediately sent her a first-class railway ticket to enable her to visit the Quaker churchyard at Croydon, in Surrey, where dead and gone Quakers have tombstones by

the score, and inscriptions on them also. It is a good thing to be accurate; it is desperately essential in a novel. The average reader, in his triumph at discovering some slight error of detail, would consign a masterpiece of imagination, knowledge of life and character to the rubbish-heap.

I believe that *The Weavers* represents a wider outlook of life, closer understanding of the problems which perplex society, and a clearer view of the verities than any previous book written by me, whatever its popularity may have been. It appealed to the British public rather more than *The Right of Way*, and the great public of America and the Oversea Dominions gave it a welcome which enabled it to take its place beside *The Right of Way*, the success of which was unusual.

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NOTE

This book is not intended to be an historical novel, nor are its characters meant to be identified with well-known persons connected with the history of England or of Egypt; but all that is essential in the tale is based upon, and drawn from, the life of both countries. Though Egypt has greatly changed during the past generation, away from Cairo and the commercial centres the wheels of social progress have turned but slowly, and much remains as it was in the days of which this book is a record in the spirit of the life, at least.

G. P.

THE WEAVERS

VOLUME I

"Dost thou spread the sail, throw the spear, swing the axe, lay thy hand upon the plough, attend the furnace door, shepherd the sheep upon the hills, gather corn from the field, or smite the rock in the quarry? Yet, whatever thy task, thou art even as one who twists the thread and throws the shuttle, weaving the web of Life. Ye are all weavers, and Allah the Merciful, does He not watch beside the loom?"

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

AS THE SPIRIT MOVED

THE village lay in a valley which had been the bed of a great river in the far-off days when Ireland, Wales and Brittany were joined together and the Thames flowed into the Seine. The place had never known turmoil or stir. For generations it had lived serenely.

Three buildings in the village stood out insistently, more by the authority of their appearance and position than by their size. One was a square, red-brick mansion in the centre of the village, surrounded by a high, red-brick wall enclosing a garden. Another was a big, low, graceful building with wings. It had once been a monastery. It was covered with ivy, which grew thick and hungry upon it, and it was called the Cloistered House. The last of the three was of wood, and of no great size —a severely plain but dignified structure, looking like some council-hall of a past era. Its heavy oak doors and windows with diamond panes, and its air of order, cleanliness and serenity, gave it a commanding influence in the picture. It was the key to the history of the village—a Quaker Meeting-house.

Involuntarily the village had built itself in such a way that it made a wide avenue from the common at one end to the Meeting-house on the gorse-grown upland at the other. With a demure resistance to the will of its

makers the village had made itself decorative. The people were unconscious of any attractiveness in themselves or in their village. There were, however, a few who felt the beauty stirring around them. These few, for their knowledge and for the pleasure which it brought, paid the accustomed price. The records of their lives were the only notable history of the place since the days when their forefathers suffered for the faith.

One of these was a girl—for she was still but a child when she died; and she had lived in the Red Mansion with the tall porch, the wide garden behind, and the wall of apricots and peaches and clustering grapes. Her story was not to cease when she was laid away in the stiff graveyard behind the Meeting-house. It was to go on in the life of her son, whom to bring into the world she had suffered undeserved, and loved with a passion more in keeping with the beauty of the vale in which she lived than with the piety found on the high-backed seats in the Quaker Meeting-house. The name given her on the register of death was Mercy Claridge, and a line beneath said that she was the daughter of Luke Claridge, that her age at passing was nineteen years, and that "her soul was with the Lord."

Another whose life had given pages to the village history was one of noble birth, the Earl of Eglington. He had died twenty years after the time when Luke Claridge, against the then custom of the Quakers, set up a tombstone to Mercy Claridge's memory behind the Meeting-house. Only thrice in those twenty years had he slept in a room of the Cloistered House. One of those occasions was the day on which Luke Claridge put up the grey stone in the graveyard, three years after his daughter's death. On the night of that day these two

men met face to face in the garden of the Cloistered House. It was said by a passer-by, who had involuntarily overheard, that Luke Claridge had used harsh and profane words to Lord Eglington, though he had no inkling of the subject of the bitter talk. He supposed, however, that Luke had gone to reprove the other for a wasteful and wandering existence; for desertion of that Quaker religion to which his grandfather, the third Earl of Eglington, had turned in the second half of his life, never visiting his estates in Ireland, and residing here among his new friends to his last day. This listener—John Fairley was his name—kept his own counsel.

On two other occasions had Lord Eglington visited the Cloistered House in the years that passed, and remained many months. Once he brought his wife and child. The former was a cold, blue-eyed Saxon of an old family, who smiled distantly upon the Quaker village; the latter, a round-headed, warm-faced youth, with a bold, menacing eye, who probed into this and that, rushed here and there as did his father; now built a miniature mill; now experimented at some peril in the laboratory which had been arranged in the Cloistered House for scientific experiments; now shot partridges in the fields where partridges had not been shot for years; and was as little in the picture as his adventurous father, though he wore a broad-brimmed hat, smiling the while at the pain it gave to the simple folk around him.

And yet once more the owner of the Cloistered House returned alone. The blue-eyed lady was gone to her grave; the youth was abroad. This time he came to die. He was found lying on the floor of his laboratory with a broken retort in fragments beside him. With his servant, Luke Claridge was the first to look upon him

lying in the wreck of his last experiment, a spirit-lamp still burning above him, in the grey light of a winter's morning. Luke Claridge closed the eyes, straightened the body, and crossed the hands over the breast which had been the laboratory of many conflicting passions of life.

The dead man had left instructions that his body should be buried in the Quaker graveyard, but Luke Claridge and the Elders prevented that—he had no right to the privileges of a Friend; and, as the only son was afar, and no near relatives pressed the late Earl's wishes, the ancient family tomb in Ireland received all that was left of the owner of the Cloistered House, which, with the estates in Ireland and the title, passed to the wandering son.

CHAPTER II

THE GATES OF THE WORLD

STILLNESS in the Meeting-house, save for the light swish of one graveyard-tree against the window-pane, and the slow breathing of the Quaker folk who filled every corner. On the long bench at the upper end of the room the Elders sat motionless, their hands on their knees, wearing their hats; the women in their poke-bonnets kept their gaze upon their laps. The heads of all save three were averted, and they were Luke Claridge, his only living daughter, called Faith, and his dead daughter's son David, who kept his eyes fixed on the window where the twig flicked against the pane. The eyes of Faith, who sat on a bench at one side, travelled from David to her father constantly; and if, once or twice, the plain rebuke of Luke Claridge's look compelled her eyes upon her folded hands, still she was watchful and waiting, and seemed demurely to defy the convention of unblinking silence. As time went on, others of her sex stole glances at Mercy's son from the depths of their bonnets; and at last, after over an hour, they and all were drawn to look steadily at the young man upon whose business this Meeting of Discipline had been called. The air grew warmer and warmer, but no one became restless; all seemed as cool of face and body as the grey gowns and coats with grey steel buttons which they wore.

At last a shrill voice broke the stillness. Raising his

head, one of the Elders said: "Thee will stand up, friend." He looked at David.

With a slight gesture of relief the young man stood up. He was good to look at—clean-shaven, broad of brow, fine of figure, composed of carriage, though it was not the composure of the people by whom he was surrounded. They were dignified, he was graceful; they were consistently slow of movement, but at times his quick gestures showed that he had not been able to train his spirit to that passiveness by which he lived surrounded. Their eyes were slow and quiet, more meditative than observant; his were changeful in expression, now abstracted, now dark and shining as though some inner fire was burning. The head, too, had a habit of coming up quickly with an almost wilful gesture, and with an air which, in others, might have been called pride.

"What is thy name?" said another owl-like Elder to him.

A gentle, half-amused smile flickered at the young man's lips for an instant, then, "David Claridge—still," he answered.

His last word stirred the meeting. A sort of ruffle went through the atmosphere, and now every eye was fixed and inquiring. The word was ominous. He was there on his trial, and for discipline; and it was thought by all that, as many days had passed since his offence was committed, meditation and prayer should have done their work. Now, however, in the tone of his voice, as it clothed the last word, there was something of defiance. On the ear of his grandfather, Luke Claridge, it fell heavily. The old man's lips closed tightly, he clasped his hands between his knees with apparent self-repression.

The second Elder who had spoken was he who had once heard Luke Claridge use profane words in the Cloistered House. Feeling trouble ahead, and liking the young man and his brother Elder, Luke Claridge, John Fairley sought now to take the case into his own hands.

"Thee shall never find a better name, David," he said, "if thee live a hundred years. It hath served well in England. This thee didst do. While the young Earl of Eglington was being brought home, with noise and brawling, after his return to Parliament, thee mingled among the brawlers; and because some evil words were said of thy hat and thy apparel, thee laid about thee, bringing one to the dust, so that his life was in peril for some hours to come. Jasper Kimber was his name."

"Were it not that the smitten man forgave thee, thee would now be in a prison cell," shrilly piped the Elder who had asked his name.

"The fight was fair," was the young man's reply. "Though I am a Friend, the man was English."

"Thee was that day a son of Belial," rejoined the shrill Elder. "Thee did use thy hands like any heathen sailor—is it not the truth?"

"I struck the man. I punished him—why enlarge?"

"Thee is guilty?"

"I did the thing."

"That is one charge against thee. There are others. Thee was seen to drink of spirits in a public-house at Heddington that day. Twice—thrice, like any drunken collier."

"Twice," was the prompt correction.

There was a moment's pause, in which some women sighed and others folded and unfolded their hands on their laps; the men frowned.

"Thee has been a dark deceiver," said the shrill Elder again, and with a ring of acrid triumph; "thee has hid these things from our eyes many years, but in one day thee has uncovered all. Thee—"

"Thee is charged," interposed Elder Fairley, "with visiting a play this same day, and with seeing a dance of Spain following upon it."

"I did not disdain the music," said the young man drily; "the flute, of all instruments, has a mellow sound." Suddenly his eyes darkened, he became abstracted, and gazed at the window where the twig flicked softly against the pane, and the heat of summer palpitated in the air. "It has good grace to my ear," he added slowly.

Luke Claridge looked at him intently. He began to realize that there were forces stirring in his grandson which had no beginning in Claridge blood, and were not nurtured in the garden with the fruited wall. He was not used to problems; he had only a code, which he had rigidly kept. He had now a glimmer of something beyond code or creed.

He saw that the shrill Elder was going to speak. He intervened. "Thee is charged, David," he said coldly, "with kissing a woman—a stranger and a wanton—where the four roads meet 'twixt here and yonder town." He motioned towards the hills.

"In the open day," added the shrill Elder, a red spot burning on each withered cheek.

"The woman was comely," said the young man, with a tone of irony, recovering an impassive look.

A strange silence fell, the women looked down; yet they seemed not so confounded as the men. After a moment they watched the young man with quicker flashes of the eye.

"The answer is shameless," said the shrill Elder. "Thy life is that of a carnal hypocrite."

The young man said nothing. His face had become very pale, his lips were set, and presently he sat down and folded his arms.

"Thee is guilty of all?" asked John Fairley.

His kindly eye was troubled, for he had spent numberless hours in this young man's company, and together they had read books of travel and history, and even the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe, though drama was anathema to the Society of Friends—they did not realize it in the life around them. That which was drama was either the visitation of God or the dark deeds of man, from which they must avert their eyes. Their own tragedies they hid beneath their grey coats and bodices; their dirty linen they never washed in public, save in the scandal such as this where the Society must intervene. Then the linen was not only washed, but duly starched, sprinkled, and ironed.

"I have answered all. Judge by my words," said David gravely.

"Has repentance come to thee? Is it thy will to suffer that which we may decide for thy correction?" It was Elder Fairley who spoke. He was determined to control the meeting and to influence its judgment. He loved the young man.

David made no reply; he seemed lost in thought.

"Let the discipline proceed—he hath an evil spirit," said the shrill Elder.

"His childhood lacked in much," said Elder Fairley patiently.

To most minds present the words carried home—to every woman who had a child, to every man who had lost a wife and had a motherless son. This much they

knew of David's real history, that Mercy Claridge, his mother, on a visit to the house of an uncle at Portsmouth, her mother's brother, had eloped with and was duly married to the captain of a merchant ship. They also knew that, after some months, Luke Claridge had brought her home; and that before her child was born news came that the ship her husband sailed had gone down with all on board. They knew likewise that she had died soon after David came, and that her father, Luke Claridge, buried her in her maiden name, and brought the boy up as his son, not with his father's name but bearing that name so long honoured in England, and even in the far places of the earth—for had not Benn Claridge, Luke's brother, been a great carpet-merchant, traveller, and explorer in Asia Minor, Egypt, and the Soudan—Benn Claridge of the whimsical speech, the pious life? All this they knew; but none of them, to his or her knowledge, had ever seen David's father. He was legendary; though there was full proof that the girl had been duly married. That had been laid before the Elders by Luke Claridge on an occasion when Benn Claridge, his brother was come among them again from the East.

At this moment of trial David was thinking of his uncle, Benn Claridge, and of his last words fifteen years before when going once again to the East, accompanied by the Muslim chief Ebn Ezra, who had come with him to England on the business of his country. These were Benn Claridge's words: "Love God before all, love thy fellow-man, and thy conscience will bring thee safe home, lad."

"If he will not repent, there is but one way," said the shrill Elder.

"Let there be no haste," said Luke Claridge, in a

voice that shook a little in his struggle for self-control.

Another heretofore silent Elder, sitting beside John Fairley, exchanged words in a whisper with him, and then addressed them. He was a very small man with a very high stock and spreading collar, a thin face, and large wide eyes. He kept his chin down in his collar, but spoke at the ceiling like one blind, though his eyes were sharp enough on occasion. His name was Meacham.

"It is meet there shall be time for sorrow and repentance," he said. "This, I pray you all, be our will: that for three months David live apart, even in the hut where lived the drunken chair-maker ere he disappeared and died, as rumour saith—it hath no tenant. Let it be that after to-morrow night at sunset none shall speak to him till that time be come, the first day of winter. Till that day he shall speak to no man, and shall be despised of the world, and—pray God—of himself. Upon the first day of winter let it be that he come hither again and speak with us."

On the long stillness of assent that followed there came a voice across the room, from within a grey-and-white bonnet, which shadowed a delicate face shining with the flame of the spirit within. It was the face of Faith Claridge, the sister of the woman in the graveyard, whose soul was "with the Lord," though she was but one year older and looked much younger than her nephew, David.

"Speak, David," she said softly. "Speak now. Doth not the spirit move thee?"

She gave him his cue, for he had of purpose held his peace till all had been said; and he had come to say some things which had been churning in his mind too

long. He caught the faint cool sarcasm in her tone, and smiled unconsciously at her last words. She, at least, must have reasons for her faith in him, must have grounds for his defence in painful days to come; for painful they must be, whether he stayed to do their will, or went into the fighting world where Quakers were few and life composite of things they never knew in Hamley.

He got to his feet and clasped his hands behind his back. After an instant he broke silence.

"All those things of which I am accused, I did; and for them is asked repentance. Before that day on which I did these things was there complaint, or cause for it? Was my life evil? Did I think in secret that which might not be done openly? Well, some things I did secretly. Ye shall hear of them. I read where I might, and after my taste, many plays, and found in them beauty and the soul of deep things. Tales I have read, but a few, and John Milton, and Chaucer, and Bacon, and Montaigne, and Arab poets also, whose books my uncle sent me. Was this sin in me?"

"It drove to a day of shame for thee," said the shrill Elder.

He took no heed, but continued: "When I was a child I listened to the lark as it rose from the meadow; and I hid myself in the hedge that, unseen, I might hear it sing; and at night I waited till I could hear the nightingale. I have heard the river singing, and the music of the trees. At first I thought that this must be sin, since ye condemn the human voice that sings, but I could feel no guilt. I heard men and women sing upon the village green, and I sang also. I heard bands of music. One instrument seemed to me more than all the rest. I bought one like it, and learned to play. It was the

flute—its note so soft and pleasant. I learned to play it—years ago—in the woods of Beedon beyond the hill, and I have felt no guilt from then till now. For these things I have no repentance."

"Thee has had good practice in deceit," said the shrill Elder.

Suddenly David's manner changed. His voice became deeper; his eyes took on that look of brilliance and heat which had given Luke Claridge anxious thoughts.

"I did, indeed, as the spirit moved me, even as ye have done."

"Blasphemer, did the spirit move thee to brawl and fight, to drink and curse, to kiss a wanton in the open road? What hath come upon thee?" Again it was the voice of the shrill Elder.

"Judge me by the truth I speak," he answered. "Save in these things my life has been an unclasped book for all to read."

"Speak to the charge of brawling and drink, David," rejoined the little Elder Meacham with the high collar and gaze upon the ceiling.

"Shall I not speak when I am moved? Ye have struck swiftly; I will draw the arrow slowly from the wound. But, in truth, ye had good right to wound. Naught but kindness have I had among you all; and I will answer. Straightly have I lived since my birth. Yet betimes a torturing unrest of mind was used to come upon me as I watched the world around us. I saw men generous to their kind, industrious and brave, beloved by their fellows; and I have seen these same men drink and dance and give themselves to coarse, rough play like young dogs in a kennel. Yet, too, I have seen dark things done in drink—the cheerful made

morose, the gentle violent. What was the temptation? What the secret? Was it but the low craving of the flesh, or was it some primitive unrest, or craving of the soul, which, clouded and baffled by time and labour and the wear of life, by this means was given the witched medicament—a false freedom, a thrilling forgetfulness? In ancient days the high, the humane, in search of cure for poison, poisoned themselves, and then applied the antidote. He hath little knowledge and less pity for sin who has never sinned. The day came when all these things which other men did in my sight I did—openly. I drank with them in the taverns—twice I drank. I met a lass in the way. I kissed her. I sat beside her at the roadside and she told me her brief, sad, evil story. One she had loved had left her. She was going to London. I gave her what money I had—"

"And thy watch," said a whispering voice from the Elders' bench.

"Even so. And at the cross-roads I bade her good-bye with sorrow."

"There were those who saw," said the shrill voice from the bench.

"They saw what I have said—no more. I had never tasted spirits in my life. I had never kissed a woman's lips. Till then I had never struck my fellow-man; but before the sun went down I fought the man who drove the lass in sorrow into the homeless world. I did not choose to fight; but when I begged the man Jasper Kimber for the girl's sake to follow and bring her back, and he railed at me and made to fight me, I took off my hat, and there I laid him in the dust."

"No thanks to thee that he did not lie in his grave," observed the shrill Elder.

"In truth I hit hard," was the quiet reply.

"How came thee expert with thy fists?" asked Elder Fairley, with the shadow of a smile.

"A book I bought from London, a sack of corn, a hollow leather ball, and an hour betimes with the drunken chair-maker in the hut by the lime-kiln on the hill. He was once a sailor and a fighting man."

A look of blank surprise ran slowly along the faces of the Elders. They were in a fog of misunderstanding and reprobation.

"While yet my father"—he looked at Luke Claridge, whom he had ever been taught to call his father—"shared the great business at Heddington, and the ships came from Smyrna and Alexandria, I had some small duties, as is well known. But that ceased, and there was little to do. Sports are forbidden among us here, and my body grew sick, because the mind had no labour. The world of work has thickened round us beyond the hills. The great chimneys rise in a circle as far as eye can see on yonder crests; but we slumber and sleep."

"Enough, enough," said a voice from among the women. "Thee has a friend gone to London—thee knows the way. It leads from the cross-roads!"

Faith Claridge, who had listened to David's speech, her heart panting, her clear grey eyes—she had her mother's eyes—fixed benignly on him, turned to the quarter whence the voice came. Seeing who it was—a widow who, with no demureness, had tried without avail to bring Luke Claridge to her—her lips pressed together in a bitter smile, and she said to her nephew clearly:

"Patience Spielman hath little hope of thee, David. Hope hath died in her."

A faint, prim smile passed across the faces of all present, for all knew Faith's allusion, and it relieved the

tension of the past half-hour. From the first moment David began to speak he had commanded his hearers. His voice was low and even; but it had also a power which, when put to sudden quiet use, compelled the hearer to an almost breathless silence, not so much to the meaning of the words, but to the tone itself, to the man behind it. His personal force was remarkable. Quiet and pale ordinarily, his clear russet-brown hair falling in a wave over his forehead, when roused, he seemed like some delicate engine made to do great labours. As Faith said to him once, "David, thee looks as though thee could lift great weights lightly." When roused, his eyes lighted like a lamp, the whole man seemed to pulsate. He had shocked, awed, and troubled his listeners. Yet he had held them in his power, and was master of their minds. The interjections had but given him new means to defend himself. After Faith had spoken he looked slowly round.

"I am charged with being profane," he said. "I do not remember. But is there none among you who has not secretly used profane words and, neither in secret nor openly, has repented? I am charged with drinking. On one day of my life I drank openly. I did it because something in me kept crying out, 'Taste and see!' I tasted and saw, and know; and I know that oblivion, that brief pitiful respite from trouble, which this evil tincture gives. I drank to know; and I found it lure me into a new careless joy. The sun seemed brighter, men's faces seemed happier, the world sang about me, the blood ran swiftly, thoughts swarmed in my brain. My feet were on the mountains, my hands were on the sails of great ships; I was a conqueror. I understood the drunkard in the first withdrawal begotten of this false stimulant. I drank to know. Is there none among

you who has, though it be but once, drunk secretly as I drank openly? If there be none, then I am condemned."

"Amen," said Elder Fairley's voice from the bench.

"In the open way by the cross-roads I saw a woman. I saw she was in sorrow. I spoke to her. Tears came to her eyes. I took her hand, and we sat down together. Of the rest I have told you. I kissed her—a stranger. She was comely. And this I know, that the matter ended by the cross-roads, and that by and forbidden paths have easy travel. I kissed the woman openly—is there none among you who has kissed secretly, and has kept the matter hidden? For him I struck and injured, it was fair. Shall a man be beaten like a dog? Kimber would have beaten me."

"Wherein has it all profited?" asked the shrill Elder querulously.

"I have knowledge. None shall do these things hereafter but I shall understand. None shall go venturing, exploring, but I shall pray for him."

"Thee will break thy heart and thy life exploring," said Luke Claridge bitterly. Experiment in life he did not understand, and even Benn Claridge's emigration to far lands had ever seemed to him a monstrous and amazing thing, though it ended in the making of a great business in which he himself had prospered, and from which he had now retired. He suddenly realized that a day of trouble was at hand with this youth on whom his heart doted, and it tortured him that he could not understand.

"By none of these things shall I break my life," was David's answer now.

For a moment he stood still and silent, then all at once he stretched out his hands to them. "All these

things I did were against our faith. I desire forgiveness. I did them out of my own will; I will take up your judgment. If there be no more to say, I will make ready to go to old Soolsby's hut on the hill till the set time be passed."

There was a long silence. Even the shrill Elder's head was buried in his breast. They were little likely to forego his penalty. There was a gentle inflexibility in their natures born of long restraint and practised determination. He must go out into blank silence and banishment until the first day of winter. Yet, recalcitrant as they held him, their secret hearts were with him, for there was none of them but had had happy commerce with him; and they could think of no more bitter punishment than to be cut off from their own society for three months. They were satisfied he was being trained back to happiness and honour.

A new turn was given to events, however. The little wizened Elder Meacham said: "The flute, friend—is it here?"

"I have it here," David answered.

"Let us have music, then."

"To what end?" interjected the shrill Elder.

"He hath averred he can play," drily replied the other. "Let us judge whether vanity breeds untruth in him."

The furtive brightening of the eyes in the women was represented in the men by an assumed look of abstraction in most; in others by a bland assumption of judicial calm. A few, however, frowned, and would have opposed the suggestion, but that curiosity mastered them. These watched with darkening interest the flute, in three pieces, drawn from an inner pocket and put together swiftly.

David raised the instrument to his lips, blew one low note, and then a little run of notes, all smooth and soft. Mellowness and a sober sweetness were in the tone. He paused a moment after this, and seemed questioning what to play. And as he stood, the flute in his hands, his thoughts took flight to his Uncle Benn, whose kindly, shrewd face and sharp brown eyes were as present to him, and more real, than those of Luke Claridge, whom he saw every day. Of late when he had thought of his uncle, however, alternate depression and lightness of spirit had possessed him. Night after night he had troubled sleep, and he had dreamed again and again that his uncle knocked at his door, or came and stood beside his bed and spoke to him. He had wakened suddenly and said "Yes" to a voice which seemed to call to him.

Always his dreams and imaginings settled round his Uncle Benn, until he had found himself trying to speak to the little brown man across the thousand leagues of land and sea. He had found, too, in the past that when he seemed to be really speaking to his uncle, when it seemed as though the distance between them had been annihilated, that soon afterwards there came a letter from him. Yet there had not been more than two or three a year. They had been, however, like books of many pages, closely written, in Arabic, in a crabbed characteristic hand, and full of the sorrow and grandeur and misery of the East. How many books on the East David had read he would hardly have been able to say; but something of the East had entered into him, something of the philosophy of Mahomet and Buddha, and the beauty of Omar Khayyám had given a touch of colour and intellect to the narrow faith in which he had been schooled. He had found himself replying to a

question asked of him in Heddington, as to how he knew that there was a God, in the words of a Muslim quoted by his uncle: "As I know by the tracks in the sand whether a Man or Beast has passed there, so the heaven with its stars, the earth with its fruits, show me that God has passed." Again, in reply to the same question, the reply of the same Arab sprang to his lips—"Does the Morning want a Light to see it by?"

As he stood with his flute—his fingers now and then caressingly rising and falling upon its little caverns, his mind travelled far to those regions he had never seen, where his uncle traded, and explored. Suddenly, the call he had heard in his sleep now came to him in this waking reverie. His eyes withdrew from the tree at the window, as if startled, and he almost called aloud in reply; but he realised where he was. At last, raising the flute to his lips, as the eyes of Luke Claridge closed with very trouble, he began to play.

Out in the woods of Beedon he had attuned his flute to the stir of leaves, the murmur of streams, the song of birds, the boom and burden of storm; and it was soft and deep as the throat of the bell-bird of Australian wilds. Now it was mastered by the dreams he had dreamed of the East: the desert skies, high and clear and burning, the desert sunsets, plaintive and peaceful and unvaried—one lovely diffusion, in which day dies without splendour and in a glow of pain. The long velvety tread of the camel, the song of the camel-driver, the monotonous chant of the river-man, with fingers mechanically falling on his little drum, the cry of the eagle of the Libyan Hills, the lap of the heavy waters of the Dead Sea down by Jericho, the battle-call of the Druses beyond Damascus, the lonely gigantic figures at the mouth of the temple of Abou Simbel, looking out with

the eternal question to the unanswering desert, the delicate ruins of moonlit Baalbec, with the snow mountains hovering above, the green oases, and the deep wells where the caravans lay down in peace—all these were pouring their influences on his mind in the little Quaker village of Hamley where life was so bare, so grave.

The music he played was all his own, was instinctively translated from all other influences into that which they who listened to him could understand. Yet that sensuous beauty which the Quaker Society was so concerned to banish from any part in their life was playing upon them now, making the hearts of the women beat fast, thrilling them, turning meditation into dreams, and giving the sight of the eyes far visions of pleasure. So powerful was this influence that the shrill Elder twice essayed to speak in protest, but was prevented by the wizened Elder Meacham. When it seemed as if the aching, throbbing sweetness must surely bring denunciation, David changed the music to a slow mourning cadence. It was a wail of sorrow, a march to the grave, a benediction, a soft sound of farewell, floating through the room and dying away into the mid-day sun.

There came a long silence after, and David sat with unmoving look upon the distant prospect through the window. A woman's sob broke the air. Faith's handkerchief was at her eyes. Only one quick sob, but it had been wrung from her by the premonition suddenly come that the brother—he was brother more than nephew—over whom her heart had yearned had, indeed, come to the cross-roads, and that their ways would henceforth divide. The punishment or banishment now to be meted out to him was as nothing. It meant a few weeks of disgrace, of ban, of what, in effect, was self-immolation, of that commanding justice of the Society

which no one yet save the late Earl of Eglington had defied. David could refuse to bear punishment, but such a possibility had never occurred to her or to any one present. She saw him taking his punishment as surely as though the law of the land had him in its grasp. It was not that which she was fearing. But she saw him moving out of her life. To her this music was the prelude of her tragedy.

A moment afterwards Luke Claridge arose and spoke to David in austere tones: "It is our will that thee begone to the chair-maker's hut upon the hill till three months be passed, and that none have speech with thee after sunset to-morrow even."

"Amen," said all the Elders.

"Amen," said David, and put his flute into his pocket, and rose to go.

CHAPTER III

BANISHED

THE chair-maker's hut lay upon the north hillside about half-way between the Meeting-house at one end of the village and the common at the other end. It commanded the valley, had no house near it, and was sheltered from the north wind by the hill-top which rose up behind it a hundred feet or more. No road led to it —only a path up from the green of the village, winding past a gulley and the deep cuts of old rivulets now overgrown by grass or bracken. It got the sun abundantly, and it was protected from the full sweep of any storm. It had but two rooms, the floor was of sanded earth, but it had windows on three sides, east, west, and south, and the door looked south. Its furniture was a plank bed, a few shelves, a bench, two chairs, some utensils, a fireplace of stone, a picture of the Virgin and Child, and of a cardinal of the Church of Rome with a red hat—for the chair-maker had been a Roman Catholic, the only one of that communion in Hamley. Had he been a Protestant his vices would have made him anathema, but, being what he was, his fellow-villagers had treated him with kindness.

After the half-day in which he was permitted to make due preparations, lay in store of provisions, and purchase a few sheep and hens, hither came David Claridge. Here, too, came Faith, who was permitted one hour with him before he began his life of willing isolation. Little

was said as they made the journey up the hill, driving the sheep before them, four strong lads following with necessities—flour, rice, potatoes, and suchlike.

Arrived, the goods were deposited inside the hut, the lads were dismissed, and David and Faith were left alone. David looked at his watch. They had still a handful of minutes before the parting. These flew fast, and yet, seated inside the door, and looking down at the village which the sun was bathing in the last glowing of evening, they remained silent. Each knew that a great change had come in their hitherto unchanging life, and it was difficult to separate premonition from substantial fact. The present fact did not represent all they felt, though it represented all on which they might speak together now.

Looking round the room, at last Faith said: "Thee has all thee needs, David? Thee is sure?"

He nodded. "I know not yet how little man may need. I have lived in plenty."

At that moment her eyes rested on the Cloistered House.

"The Earl of Eglington would not call it plenty."

A shade passed over David's face. "I know not how he would measure. Is his own field so wide?"

"The spread of a peacock's feather."

"What does thee know of him?" David asked the question absently.

"I have eyes to see, Davy." The shadows from that seeing were in her eyes as she spoke, but he did not observe them.

"Thee sees but with half an eye," she continued. "With both mine I have seen horses and carriages, and tall footmen, and wine and silver, and gilded furniture, and fine pictures, and rolls of new carpet—of Uncle

Benn's best carpets, Davy—and a billiard-table, and much else."

A cloud slowly gathered over David's face, and he turned to her with an almost troubled surprise. "Thee has seen these things—and how?"

"One day—thee was in Devon—one of the women was taken ill. They sent for me because the woman asked it. She was a Papist; but she begged that I should go with her to the hospital, as there was no time to send to Heddington for a nurse. She had seen me once in the house of the toll-gate keeper. Ill as she was, I could have laughed, for, as we went in the Earl's carriage to the hospital—thirty miles it was—she said she felt at home with me, my dress being so like a nun's. It was then I saw the Cloistered House within and learned what was afoot."

"In the Earl's carriage indeed—and the Earl?"

"He was in Ireland, burrowing among those tarnished baubles, his titles, and stripping the Irish Peter to clothe the English Paul."

"He means to make Hamley his home? From Ireland these furnishings come?"

"So it seems. Henceforth the Cloistered House will have its doors flung wide. London and all the folk of Parliament will flutter along the dunes of Hamley."

"Then the bailiff will sit yonder within a year, for he is but a starved Irish peer."

"He lives to-day as though he would be rich to-morrow. He bids for fame and fortune, Davy."

"'Tis as though a shirtless man should wear a broadcloth coat over a cotton vest."

"The world sees only the broadcloth coat. For the rest—"

"For the rest, Faith?"

"They see the man's face, and—"

His eyes were embarrassed. A thought had flashed into his mind which he considered unworthy, for this girl beside him was little likely to dwell upon the face of a renegade peer, whose living among them was a constant reminder of his father's apostasy. She was too fine, dwelt in such high spheres, that he could not think of her being touched by the glittering adventures of this daring young member of Parliament, whose book of travels had been published, only to herald his understood determination to have office in the Government, not in due time, but in his own time. What could there be in common between the sophisticated Eglington and this sweet, primitively wholesome Quaker girl?

Faith read what was passing in his mind. She flushed—slowly flushed until her face and eyes were one soft glow, then she laid a hand upon his arm and said: "Davy, I feel the truth about him—no more. Nothing of him is for thee or me. His ways are not our ways." She paused, and then said solemnly: "He hath a devil. That I feel. But he hath also a mind, and a cruel will. He will hew a path, or make others hew it for him. He will make or break. Nothing will stand in his way, neither man nor thing, those he loves nor those he hates. He will go on—and to go on, all means, so they be not criminal, will be his. Men will prophesy great things for him—they do so now. But nothing they prophesy, Davy, keeps pace with his resolve."

"How does thee know these things?"

His question was one of wonder and surprise. He had never before seen in her this sharp discernment and criticism.

"How know I, Davy? I know him by studying thee. What thee is not he is. What he is thee is not."

The last beams of the sun sent a sudden glint of yellow to the green at their feet from the western hills, rising far over and above the lower hills of the village, making a wide ocean of light, at the bottom of which lay the Meeting-house and the Cloistered House, and the Red Mansion with the fruited wall, and all the others, like dwellings at the bottom of a golden sea. David's eyes were on the distance, and the far-seeing look was in his face which had so deeply impressed Faith in the Meeting-house, by which she had read his future.

"And shall I not also go on?" he asked.

"How far, who can tell?"

There was a plaintive note in her voice—the unavailing and sad protest of the maternal spirit, of the keeper of the nest, who sees the brood fly safely away, looking not back.

"What does thee see for me afar, Faith?" His look was eager.

"The will of God, which shall be done," she said with a sudden resolution, and stood up. Her hands were lightly clasped before her like those of Titian's Mater Dolorosa among the Rubens and Tintorettos of the Prado, a lonely figure, whose lot it was to spend her life for others. Even as she already had done; for thrice she had refused marriages suitable and possible to her. In each case she had steeled her heart against loving, that she might be all in all to her sister's child and to her father. There is no habit so powerful as the habit of care of others. In Faith it came as near being a passion as passion could have a place in her even-flowing blood, under that cool flesh,

governed by a heart as fair as the apricot blossoms on the wall in her father's garden. She had been bitterly hurt in the Meeting-house; as bitterly as is many a woman when her lover has deceived her. David had acknowledged before them all that he had played the flute secretly for years! That he should have played it was nothing; that she should not have shared his secret, and so shared his culpability before them all, was a wound which would take long to heal.

She laid her hand upon his shoulder suddenly with a nervous little motion.

"And the will of God thee shall do to His honour, though thee is outcast to-day. . . . But, Davy, the music—thee kept it from me."

He looked up at her steadily; he read what was in her mind.

"I hid it so, because I would not have thy conscience troubled. Thee would go far to smother it for me; and I was not so ungrateful to thee. I did it for good to thee."

A smile passed across her lips. Never was woman so grateful, never wound so quickly healed. She shook her head sadly at him, and stilling the proud throbbing of her heart, she said:

"But thee played so well, Davy!"

He got up and turned his head away, lest he should laugh outright. Her reasoning—though he was not worldly enough to call it feminine, and though it scarce tallied with her argument—seemed to him quite her own.

"How long have we?" he said over his shoulder.

"The sun is yet five minutes up, or more," she said, a little breathlessly, for she saw his hand inside his coat, and guessed his purpose.

"But thee will not dare to play—thee will not dare," she said, but more as an invitation than a rebuke.

"Speech was denied me here, but not my music. I find no sin in it."

She eagerly watched him adjust the flute. Suddenly she drew to him the chair from the doorway, and beckoned him to sit down. She sat where she could see the sunset.

The music floated through the room and down the hillside, a searching sweetness.

She kept her face ever on the far hills. It went on and on. At last it stopped. David roused himself, as from a dream. "But it is dark!" he said, startled. "It is past the time thee should be with me. My banishment began at sunset."

"Are all the sins to be thine?" she asked calmly.

She had purposely let him play beyond the time set for their being together.

"Good-night, Davy." She kissed him on the cheek. "I will keep the music for the sin's remembrance," she added, and went out into the night.

CHAPTER IV

THE CALL

"ENGLAND is in one of those passions so creditable to her moral sense, so illustrative of her unregulated virtues. We are living in the first excitement and horror of the news of the massacre of Christians at Damascus. We are full of righteous and passionate indignation. 'Punish—restore the honour of the Christian nations' is the proud appeal of prelate, prig, and philanthropist, because some hundreds of Christians who knew their danger, yet chose to take up their abode in a fanatical Muslim city of the East, have suffered death."

The meeting had been called in answer to an appeal from Exeter Hall. Lord Eglington had been asked to speak, and these were among his closing words.

He had seen, as he thought, an opportunity for sensation. Politicians of both sides, the press on all hands, were thundering denunciations upon the city of Damascus, sitting insolent and satiated in its exquisite bloom of pear and nectarine, and the deed itself was fading into that blank past of Eastern life where there "are no birds in last year's nest." If he voyaged with the crowd, his pennant would be lost in the clustering sails! So he would move against the tide, and would startle, even if he did not convince.

"Let us not translate an inflamed religious emotion into a war," he continued. "To what good? Would it restore one single life in Damascus? Would it bind

one broken heart? Would it give light to one darkened home? Let us have care lest we be called a nation of hypocrites. I will neither support nor oppose the resolution presented; I will content myself with pointing the way to a greater national self-respect."

Mechanically, a few people who had scarcely apprehended the full force of his remarks began to applaud; but there came cries of "*'Sh! 'Sh!*" and the clapping of hands suddenly stopped. For a moment there was absolute silence, in which the chairman adjusted his glasses and fumbled with the agenda paper in his confusion, scarcely knowing what to do. The speaker had been expected to second the resolution, and had not done so. There was an awkward silence. Then, in a loud whisper, some one said:

"David, David, do thee speak."

It was the voice of Faith Claridge. Perturbed and anxious, she had come to the meeting with her father. They had not slept for nights, for the last news they had had of Benn Claridge was from the city of Damascus, and they were full of painful apprehensions.

It was the eve of the first day of winter, and David's banishment was over. Faith had seen David often at a distance—how often had she stood in her window and looked up over the apricot-wall to the chair-maker's hut on the hill! According to his penalty David had never come to Hamley village, but had lived alone, speaking to no one, avoided by all, working out his punishment. Only the day before the meeting he had read of the massacre at Damascus from a newspaper which had been left on his doorstep overnight. Elder Fairley had so far broken the covenant of ostracism and boycott, knowing David's love for his Uncle Benn.

All that night David paced the hillside in anxiety and agitation, and saw the sun rise upon a new world—a world of freedom, of home-returning, yet a world which, during the past four months, had changed so greatly that it would never seem the same again.

The sun was scarce two hours high when Faith and her father mounted the hill to bring him home again. He had, however, gone to Heddington to learn further news of the massacre. He was thinking of his Uncle Benn—all else could wait. His anxiety was infinitely greater than that of Luke Claridge, for his mind had been disturbed by frequent premonitions; and those sudden calls in his sleep—his uncle's voice—ever seemed to be waking him at night. He had not meant to speak at the meeting, but the last words of the speaker decided him; he was in a flame of indignation. He heard the voice of Faith whisper over the heads of the people. "David, David, do thee speak." Turning, he met her eyes, then rose to his feet, came steadily to the platform, and raised a finger towards the chairman.

A great whispering ran through the audience. Very many recognised him, and all had heard of him—the history of his late banishment and self-approving punishment were familiar to them. He climbed the steps of the platform alertly, and the chairman welcomed him with nervous pleasure. Any word from a Quaker, friendly to the feeling of national indignation, would give the meeting the new direction which all desired.

Something in the face of the young man, grown thin and very pale during the period of long thought and little food in the lonely and meditative life he had led; something human and mysterious in the strange tale

of his one day's mad doings, fascinated them. They had heard of the liquor he had drunk, of the woman he had kissed at the cross-roads, of the man he had fought, of his discipline and sentence. His clean, shapely figure, and the soft austerity of the neat grey suit he wore, his broad-brimmed hat pushed a little back, showing well a square white forehead—all conspired to send a wave of feeling through the audience, which presently broke into cheering.

Beginning with the usual formality, he said: "I am obliged to differ from nearly every sentiment expressed by the Earl of Eglington, the member for Levizes, who has just taken his seat."

There was an instant's pause, the audience cheered, and cries of delight came from all parts of the house. "All good counsel has its sting," he continued, "but the good counsel of him who has just spoken is a sting in a wound deeper than the skin. The noble Earl has bidden us to be consistent and reasonable. I have risen here to speak for that to which mere consistency and reason may do cruel violence. I am a man of peace, I am the enemy of war—it is my faith and creed; yet I repudiate the principle put forward by the Earl of Eglington, that you shall not clinch your hand for the cause which is your heart's cause, because, if you smite, the smiting must be paid for."

He was interrupted by cheers and laughter, for the late event in his own life came to them to point his argument.

"The nation that declines war may be refusing to inflict that just punishment which alone can set the wrong-doers on the better course. It is not the faith of that Society to which I belong to decline correction lest it may seem like war."

The point went home significantly, and cheering followed. "The high wall of Tibet, a stark refusal to open the door to the wayfarer, I can understand; but, friend"—he turned to the young peer—"friend, I cannot understand a defence of him who opens the door upon terms of mutual hospitality, and then, in the red blood of him who has so contracted, blots out the just terms upon which they have agreed. Is that thy faith, friend?"

The repetition of the word *friend* was almost like a gibe, though it was not intended as such. There was none present, however, but knew of the defection of the Earl's father from the Society of Friends, and they chose to interpret the reference to a direct challenge. It was a difficult moment for the young Earl, but he only smiled, and cherished anger in his heart.

For some minutes David spoke with force and power, and he ended with passionate solemnity. His voice rang out: "The smoke of this burning rises to Heaven, the winds that wail over scattered and homeless dust bear a message of God to us. In the name of Mahomet, whose teaching condemns treachery and murder, in the name of the Prince of Peace, who taught that justice which makes for peace, I say it is England's duty to lay the iron hand of punishment upon this evil city and on the Government in whose orbit it shines with so deathly a light. I fear it is that one of my family and of my humble village lies beaten to death in Damascus. Yet not because of that do I raise my voice here to-day. These many years Benn Claridge carried his life in his hands, and in a good cause it was held like the song of a bird, to be blown from his lips in the day of the Lord. I speak only as an Englishman. I ask you to close your

minds against the words of this brilliant politician, who would have you settle a bill of costs written in Christian blood, by a promise to pay, got through a mockery of armed display in those waters on which once looked the eyes of the Captain of our faith. Humanity has been put in the witness-box of the world; let humanity give evidence."

Women wept. Men waved their hats and cheered; the whole meeting rose to its feet and gave vent to its feelings.

For some moments the tumult lasted, Eglington looking on with face unmoved. As David turned to leave the table, however, he murmured, "Peacemaker! Peacemaker!" and smiled sarcastically.

As the audience resumed their seats, two people were observed making their way to the platform. One was Elder Fairley, leading the way to a tall figure in a black robe covering another coloured robe, and wearing a large white turban. Not seeing the new-comers, the chairman was about to put the resolution; but a protesting hand from John Fairley stopped him, and in a strange silence the two new-comers mounted the platform. David rose and advanced to meet them. There flashed into his mind that this stranger in Eastern garb was Ebn Ezra Bey, the old friend of Benn Claridge, of whom his uncle had spoken and written so much. The same instinct drew Ebn Ezra Bey to him—he saw the uncle's look in the nephew's face. In a breathless stillness the Oriental said in perfect English, with a voice monotonously musical:

"I came to thy house and found thee not. I have a message for thee from the land where thine uncle sojourned with me."

He took from a wallet a piece of paper and passed it

to David, adding: "I was thine uncle's friend. He hath put off his sandals and walketh with bare feet!"

David read eagerly.

"*It is time to go, Davy,*" the paper said. "*All that I have is thine. Go to Egypt, and thee shall find it so. Ebn Ezra Bey will bring thee. Trust him as I have done. He is a true man, though the Koran be his faith. They took me from behind, Davy, so that I was spared temptation—I die as I lived, a man of peace. It is too late to think how it might have gone had we met face to face; but the will of God worketh not according to our will. I can write no more. Luke, Faith, and Davy—dear Davy, the night has come, and all's well. Good morrow, Davy. Can you not hear me call? I have called thee so often of late! Good morrow! Good morrow! . . . I doff my hat, Davy—at last—to God!*"

David's face whitened. All his visions had been true visions, his dreams true dreams. Brave Benn Claridge had called to him at his door—"*Good morrow! Good morrow! Good morrow!*" Had he not heard the knocking and the voice? Now all was made clear. His path lay open before him—a far land called him, his quiet past was infinite leagues away. Already the staff was in his hands and the cross-roads were sinking into the distance behind. He was dimly conscious of the wan, shocked face of Faith in the crowd beneath him, which seemed blurred and swaying, of the bowed head of Luke Claridge, who, standing up, had taken off his hat in the presence of this news of his brother's death which he saw written in David's face. David stood for a moment before the great throng, numb and speechless.

"It is a message from Damascus," he said at last, and could say no more.

Ebn Ezra Bey turned a grave face upon the audience.

"Will you hear me?" he said. "I am an Arab."

"Speak—speak!" came from every side.

"The Turk hath done his evil work in Damascus," he said. "All the Christians are dead—save one; he hath turned Muslim, and is safe." His voice had a note of scorn. "It fell sudden and swift like a storm in summer. There were no paths to safety. Soldiers and those who led them shared in the slaying. As he and I who had travelled far together these many years sojourned there in the way of business, I felt the air grow colder, I saw the cloud gathering. I entreated, but he would not go. If trouble must come, then he would be with the Christians in their peril. At last he saw with me the truth. He had a plan of escape. There was a Christian weaver with his wife in a far quarter—against my entreaty he went to warn them. The storm broke. He was the first to fall, smitten in 'that street called Straight.' I found him soon after. Thus did he speak to me—even in these words: 'The blood of women and children shed here to-day shall cry from the ground. Unprovoked the host has turned wickedly upon his guest. The storm has been sown, and the whirlwind must be reaped. Out of this evil good shall come. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' These were his last words to me then. As his life ebbed out, he wrote a letter which I have brought hither to one"—he turned to David—"whom he loved. At the last he took off his hat, and lay with it in his hands, and died. . . . I am a Muslim, but the God of pity, of justice, and of right is my God; and in His name be it said that was a crime of Sheitan the accursed."

In a low voice the chairman put the resolution. The Earl of Eglington voted in its favour.

Walking the hills homeward with Ebn Ezra Bey,

Luke, Faith, and John Fairley, David kept saying over to himself the words of Benn Claridge: *"I have called thee so often of late. Good morrow! Good morrow! Good morrow! Can you not hear me call?"*

BOOK II

CHAPTER V

THE WIDER WAY

SOME months later the following letter came to David Claridge in Cairo from Faith Claridge in Hamley:

David, I write thee from the village and the land of the people which thou didst once love so well. Does thee love them still? They gave thee sour bread to eat ere thy going, but yet thee didst grind the flour for the baking. Thee didst frighten all who knew thee with thy doings that mad midsummer time. The tavern, the theatre, the cross-roads, and the cockpit—was ever such a day!

Now, Davy, I must tell of a strange thing. But first, a moment. Thee remembers the man Kimber smitten by thee at the public-house on *that* day? What think thee has happened? He followed to London the lass kissed by thee, and besought her to return and marry him. This she refused at first with anger; but afterwards she said that, if in three years he was of the same mind, and stayed sober and hard-working meanwhile, she would give him an answer, she would consider. Her head was high. She has become maid to a lady of degree, who has well befriended her.

How do I know these things? Even from Jasper Kimber, who, on his return from London, was taken to his bed with fever. Because of the hard blows dealt him by thee, I went to make amends. He welcomed me, and soon opened his whole mind. That mind has generous moments, David, for he took to being thankful for thy knocks.

Now for the strange thing I hinted. After visiting Jasper Kimber at Heddington, as I came back over the hill by the path we all took that day after the Meeting—Ebn Ezra Bey, my father, Elder Fairley, and thee and me—I drew near the chair-maker's hut where thee lived alone all those sad months. It was late evening; the sun had set. Yet I felt that I must needs go and lay my hand in love upon the door of the empty hut which had been ever as thee left it. So I came down the little path swiftly, and then round the great rock, and up towards the door. But, as I did so, my heart stood still, for I heard voices. The door was open, but I could see no one. Yet there the voices sounded, one sharp and peevish with anger, the other low and rough. I could not hear what was said. At last, a figure came from the door and went quickly down the hillside. Who, think thee, was it? Even "neighbour Eglington." I knew the walk and the forward thrust of the head. Inside the hut all was still. I drew near with a kind of fear, but yet I came to the door and looked in.

As I looked into the dusk, my limbs trembled under me, for who should be sitting there, a half-finished chair between his knees, but Soolsby the old chair-maker! Yes, it was he. There he sat looking at me with his staring blue eyes and shock of red-grey hair. "Soolsby! Soolsby!" said I, my heart hammering at my breast; for was not Soolsby dead and buried? His eyes stared at me in fright. "Why do you come?" he said in a hoarse whisper. "Is he dead, then? Has harm come to him?"

By now I had recovered myself, for it was no ghost I saw, but a human being more distraught than was myself. "Do you not know me, Soolsby?" I asked. "You are Mercy Claridge from beyond—beyond and away," he answered dazedly. "I am Faith Claridge, Soolsby," answered I. He started, peered forward at me, and for a moment he did not speak; then the fear went from his face. "Ay, Faith Claridge, as I said," he answered, with apparent understanding, his stark mood passing. "No, thee said Mercy Claridge, Soolsby," said I, "and she has been asleep these many years." "Ay, she has slept soundly, thanks be to God!" he replied, and crossed himself. "Why should thee call me by her name?" I inquired. "Ay, is not her tomb in the churchyard?" he answered, and added quickly, "Luke Claridge and I are of an age to a day—which, think you, will go first?"

He stopped weaving, and peered over at me with his staring blue eyes, and I felt a sudden quickening of the heart. For, at the question, curtains seemed to drop from all around me, and leave me in the midst of pains and miseries, in a chill air that froze me to the marrow. I saw myself alone—thee in Egypt and I here, and none of our blood and name beside me. For we are the last, Davy, the last of the Claridges. But I said coldly, and with what was near to anger, that he should link his name and fate with that of Luke Claridge: "Which of ye two goes first is God's will, and according to His wisdom. Which, think thee," added I—and now I cannot forgive myself for saying it—"which, think thee, would do least harm in going?" "I know which would do most good," he answered, with a harsh laugh in his throat. Yet his blue eyes looked kindly at me, and now he began to nod pleasantly. I thought him a little mad, but yet his speech had seemed not without dark meaning. "Thee has had a visitor," I said to him presently. He laughed in a snarling way that made me shrink, and answered: "He wanted this and he wanted that—his high-handed, second-best lordship. Ay, and he would have it, because it pleased him to have it—like his father before him. A poor sparrow on a tree-top, if you tell him he must not have it, he will hunt it down the world till it is his, as though it was a bird of paradise. And when he's seen it fall at last, he'll remember but the fun of the chase; and the bird may get to its tree-top again—if it can—if it can—if it can, my lord! That is what his father was, the last Earl, and that is what he is who left my door but now. He came to snatch old Soolsby's palace, his nest on the hill, to use it for a telescope, or such whimsies. He has scientific tricks like his father before him. Now is it astronomy, and now chemistry, and suchlike; and always it is the Eglington mind, which let God A'mighty make it as a favour. He would have old Soolsby's palace for his spy-glass, would he then? It scared him, as though I was the devil himself, to find me here. I had but come back in time—a day later, and he would have sat here and seen me in the Pit below before giving way. Possession's nine points were with me; and here I sat and faced him; and here he stormed, and would do this and should do that; and I went on with my work. Then he would buy my Colisyum, and I wouldn't sell it for all his puffball lordship might offer. Isn't the house of the snail as much to him as the turtle's

shell to the turtle? I'll have no upstart spilling his chemicals here, or devilling the stars from a seat on my roof." "Last autumn," said I, "David Claridge was housed here. Thy palace was a prison then." "I know well of that. Haven't I found his records here? And do you think his makeshift lordship did not remind me?" "Records? What records, Soolsby?" asked I, most curious. "Writings of his thoughts which he forgot—food for mind and body left in the cupboard." "Give them to me upon this instant, Soolsby," said I. "All but one," said he, "and that is my own, for it was his mind upon Soolsby the drunken chair-maker. God save him from the heathen sword that slew his uncle. Two better men never sat upon a chair!"

He placed the papers in my hand, all save that one which spoke of him. Ah, David, what with the flute and the pen, banishment was no pain to thee! . . . He placed the papers, save that one, in my hands, and I, womanlike, asked again for all. "Some day," said he, "come, and I will read it to you. Nay, I will give you a taste of it now," he added, as he brought forth the writing. "Thus it reads."

Here are thy words, Davy. What think thee of them now?

"As I dwell in this house I know Soolsby as I never knew him when he lived, and though, up here, I spent many an hour with him. Men leave their impressions on all around them. The walls which have felt their look and their breath, the floor which has taken their footsteps, the chairs in which they have sat, have something of their presence. I feel Soolsby here at times so sharply that it would seem he came again and was in this room, though he is dead and gone. I ask him how it came he lived here alone; how it came that he made chairs, he, with brains enough to build great houses or great bridges; how it was that drink and he were such friends; and how he, a Catholic, lived here among us Quakers, so singular, uncompanionable, and severe. I think it true, and sadly true, that a man with a vice which he is able to satisfy easily and habitually, even as another satisfies a virtue, may give up the wider actions of the world and the possibilities of his life for the pleasure which his one vice gives him, and neither miss nor desire those greater chances of virtue or ambition which he has lost. The simplicity of a vice may be as real as the simplicity of a virtue."

Ah, David, David, I know not what to think of those strange

words; but old Soolsby seemed well to understand thee, and he called thee "a first-best gentleman." Is my story long? Well, it was so strange, and it fixed itself upon my mind so deeply, and thy writings at the hut have been so much in my hands and in my mind, that I have put it all down here. When I asked Soolsby how it came he had been rumoured dead, he said that he himself had been the cause of it; but for what purpose he would not say, save that he was going a long voyage, and had made up his mind to return no more. "I had a friend," he said, "and I was set to go and see that friend again. . . . But the years go on, and friends have an end. Life spills faster than the years," he said. And he would say no more, but would walk with me even to my father's door. "May the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints be with you," he said at parting, "if you will have a blessing from them. And tell him who is beyond and away in Egypt that old Soolsby's busy making a chair for him to sit in when the scarlet cloth is spread, and the East and West come to salaam before him. Tell him the old man says his fluting will be heard."

And now, David, I have told thee all, nearly. Remains to say that thy one letter did our hearts good. My father reads it over and over, and shakes his head sadly, for, truth is, he has a fear that the world may lay its hand upon thee. One thing I do observe, his heart is hard set against Lord Eglington. In degree it has ever been so; but now it is like a constant frown upon his forehead. I see him at his window looking out towards the Cloistered House; and if our neighbour comes forth, perhaps upon his hunter, or now in his cart, or again with his dogs, he draws his hat down upon his eyes and whispers to himself. I think he is ever setting thee off against Lord Eglington; and that is foolish, for Eglington is but a man of the earth earthy. His is the soul of the adventurer.

Now what more to be set down? I must ask thee how is thy friend Ebn Ezra Bey? I am glad thee did find all he said was true, and that in Damascus thee was able to set a mark by my uncle's grave. But that the Prince Pasha of Egypt has set up a claim against my uncle's property is evil news; though, thanks be to God, as my father says, we have enough to keep us fed and clothed and housed. But do thee keep enough of thy inheritance to bring thee safe home again to those who love thee.

England is ever grey, Davy, but without thee it is grizzled—all one "Quaker drab," as says the Philistine. But it is a comely and a good land, and here we wait for thee.

In love and remembrance.

I am thy mother's sister, thy most loving friend.

FAITH.

David received this letter as he was mounting a huge white Syrian donkey to ride to the Mokattam Hills, which rise sharply behind Cairo, burning and lonely and large. The cities of the dead Khalifas and Mamelukes separated them from the living city where the fellah toiled, and Arab, Bedouin, Copt strove together to intercept the fruits of his toiling, as it passed in the form of taxes to the Palace of the Prince Pasha; while in the dark corners crouched, waiting, the cormorant usurers —Greeks, Armenians, and Syrians, a hideous salvage corps, who saved the house of a man that they might at last walk off with his shirt and the cloth under which he was carried to his grave. In a thousand narrow streets and lanes, in the warm glow of the bazaars, in earth-damp huts, by blistering quays, on the myriad ghiassas on the river, from long before sunrise till the sunset gun boomed from the citadel rising beside the great mosque whose pinnacles seem to touch the blue, the slaves of the city of Prince Kaïd ground out their lives like corn between the millstones.

David had been long enough in Egypt to know what sort of toiling it was. A man's labour was not his own. The fellah gave labour and taxes and backsheesh and life to the State, and the long line of tyrants above him, under the sting of the kourbash; the high officials gave backsheesh to the Prince Pasha, or to his Mouffetish, or to his Chief Eunuch, or to his barber, or to some slave who had his ear.

But all the time the bright, unclouded sun looked down on a smiling land, and in Cairo streets the din of the hammers, the voices of the boys driving heavily laden donkeys, the call of the camel-drivers leading their caravans into the great squares, the clang of the brasses of the sherbet-sellers, the song of the vendor of sweetmeats, the drone of the merchant praising his wares, went on amid scenes of wealth and luxury, and the city glowed with colour and gleamed with light. Dark faces grinned over the steaming pot at the door of the cafés, idlers on the benches smoked hasheesh, female street-dancers bared their faces shamelessly to the men, and indolent musicians beat on their tiny drums, and sang the song of "*O Seyyid*," or of "*Antar*"; and the reciter gave his sing-song tale from a bench above his fellows. Here a devout Muslim, indifferent to the presence of strangers, turned his face to the East, touched his forehead to the ground, and said his prayers. There, hung to a tree by a deserted mosque near by, the body of one who was with them all an hour before, and who had paid the penalty for some real or imaginary crime; while his fellows blessed Allah that the storm had passed them by. Guilt or innocence did not weigh with them; and the dead criminal, if such he were, who had drunk his glass of water and prayed to Allah, was, in their sight, only fortunate and not disgraced, and had "gone to the bosom of Allah." Now the Muezzin from a minaret called to prayer, and the fellah in his cotton shirt and yelek heard, laid his load aside, and yielded himself to his one dear illusion, which would enable him to meet with apathy his end—it might be to-morrow!—and go forth to that plenteous heaven where wives without number awaited him, where fields would yield harvests without labour, where rich food

in gold dishes would be ever at his hand. This was his faith.

David had now been in the country six months, rapidly perfecting his knowledge of Arabic, speaking it always to his servant Mahommed Hassan, whom he had picked from the streets. Ebn Ezra Bey had gone upon his own business to Fazougli, the tropical Siberia of Egypt, to liberate, by order of Prince Kaïd,—and at a high price—a relative banished there. David had not yet been fortunate with his own business—the settlement of his Uncle Benn's estate—though the last stages of negotiation with the Prince Pasha seemed to have been reached. When he had brought the influence of the British Consulate to bear, promises were made, doors were opened wide, and Pasha and Bey offered him coffee and talked to him sympathetically. They had respect for him more than for most Franks, because the Prince Pasha had honoured him with especial favour. Perhaps because David wore his hat always and the long coat with high collar like a Turk, or because Prince Kaïd was an acute judge of human nature, and also because honesty was a thing he greatly desired—in others—and never found near his own person; however it was, he had set David high in his esteem at once. This esteem gave greater certainty that any backsheesh coming from the estate of Benn Claridge would not be sifted through many hands on its way to himself. Of Benn Claridge Prince Kaïd had scarcely even heard until he died; and, indeed, it was only within the past few years that the Quaker merchant had extended his business to Egypt and had made his headquarters at Assiout, up the river.

David's donkey now picked its way carefully through the narrow streets of the Moosky. Arabs and fella-

heen squatting at street corners looked at him with furtive interest. A foreigner of this character they had never before seen, with coat buttoned up like an Egyptian official in the presence of his superior, and this wide, droll hat on his head. David knew that he ran risks, that his confidence invited the occasional madness of a fanatical mind, which makes murder of the infidel a passport to heaven; but as a man he took his chances, and as a Christian he believed he would suffer no mortal hurt till his appointed time. He was more Oriental, more fatalist, than he knew. He had also early in his life learned that an honest smile begets confidence; and his face, grave and even a little austere in outline, was usually lighted by a smile.

From the Mokattam Hills, where he read Faith's letter again, his back against one of the forts which Napoleon had built in his Egyptian days, he scanned the distance. At his feet lay the great mosque, and the citadel, whose guns controlled the city, could pour into it a lava stream of shot and shell. The Nile wound its way through the green plains, stretching as far to the north as eye could see between the opal and mauve and gold of the Libyan Hills. Far over in the western vista a long line of trees, twining through an oasis flanking the city, led out to a point where the desert abruptly raised its hills of yellow sand. Here, enormous, lonely, and cynical, the pyramids which Cheops had built, the stone sphinx of Ghizeh, kept faith with the desert in the glow of rainless land—reminders ever that the East, the mother of knowledge, will by knowledge prevail; that

> "The thousand years of thy insolence
> The thousand years of thy faith,
> Will be paid in fiery recompense,
> And a thousand years of bitter death."

"The sword—for ever the sword," David said to himself, as he looked: "Rameses and David and Mahomet and Constantine, and how many conquests have been made in the name of God! But after other conquests there have been peace and order and law. Here in Egypt it is ever the sword, the survival of the strongest."

As he made his way down the hillside again he fell to thinking upon all Faith had written. The return of the drunken chair-maker made a deep impression on him—almost as deep as the waking dreams he had had of his uncle calling him.

"Soolsby and me—what is there between Soolsby and me?" he asked himself now as he made his way past the tombs of the Mamelukes. "He and I are as far apart as the poles, and yet it comes to me now, with a strange conviction, that somehow my life will be linked with that of the drunken Romish chair-maker. To what end?" Then he fell to thinking of his Uncle Benn. The East was calling him. "Something works within me to hold me here, a work to do."

From the ramparts of the citadel he watched the sun go down, bathing the pyramids in a purple and golden light, throwing a glamour over all the western plain, and making heavenly the far hills with a plaintive colour, which spoke of peace and rest, but not of hope. As he stood watching, he was conscious of people approaching. Voices mingled, there was light laughter, little bursts of admiration, then lower tones, and then he was roused by a voice calling. He turned round. A group of people were moving towards the exit from the ramparts, and near himself stood a man waving an adieu.

"Well, give my love to the girls," said the man cheerily.

Merry faces looked back and nodded, and in a moment they were gone. The man turned round, and looked at David, then he jerked his head in a friendly sort of way and motioned towards the sunset.

"Good enough, eh?"

"Surely, for me," answered David. On the instant he liked the red, wholesome face, and the keen, round, blue eyes, the rather opulent figure, the shrewd, whimsical smile, all aglow now with beaming sentimentality, which had from its softest corner called out: "Well, give my love to the girls."

"Quaker, or I never saw Germantown and Philadelphy," he continued, with a friendly manner quite without offence. "I put my money on Quakers every time."

"But not from Germantown or Philadelphia," answered David, declining a cigar which his new acquaintance offered.

"Bet you, I know that all right. But I never saw Quakers anywhere else, and I meant the tribe and not the tent. English, I bet? Of course, or you wouldn't be talking the English language—though I've heard they talk it better in Boston than they do in England, and in Chicago they're making new English every day and improving on the patent. If Chicago can't have the newest thing, she won't have anything. 'High hopes that burn like stars sublime,' has Chicago. She won't let Shakespeare or Milton be standards much longer. She won't have it—simply won't have England swaggering over the English language. Oh, she's dizzy, is Chicago—simply dizzy. I was born there. Parents, one Philadelphy, one New York, one Pawtucket—the Pawtucket one was the step-mother. Father liked his wives from the original States; but

I was born in Chicago. My name is Lacey—Thomas Tilman Lacey of Chicago."

"I thank thee," said David.

"And you, sir?"

"David Claridge."

"Of—?"

"Of Hamley."

"Mr. Claridge of Hamley. Mr. Claridge, I am glad to meet you." They shook hands. "Been here long, Mr. Claridge?"

"A few months only."

"Queer place—gilt-edged dust-bin; get anything you like here, from a fresh gutter-snipe to old Haroun-al-Raschid. It's the biggest jack-pot on earth. Barnum's the man for this place—P. T. Barnum. Golly, how the whole thing glitters and stews! Out of Shoobra his High Jinks Pasha kennels with his lions and lives with his cellars of gold, as if he was going to take them with him where he's going—and he's going fast. Here—down here, the people, the real people, sweat and drudge between a cake of dourha, an onion, and a balass of water at one end of the day, and a hemp collar and their feet off the ground at the other."

"You have seen much of Egypt?" asked David, feeling a strange confidence in the garrulous man, whose frankness was united to shrewdness and a quick, observant eye.

"How much of *Egypt* I've seen, the Egypt where more men get lost, strayed, and stolen than die in their beds every day, the Egypt where a eunuch is more powerful than a minister, where an official will toss away a life as I'd toss this cigar down there where the last Mameluke captain made his great jump, where women—Lord A'mighty! where women are divorced

by one evil husband, by the dozen, for nothing they ever did or left undone, and yet 'd be cut to pieces by their own fathers if they learned that 'To step aside is human—' Mr. Claridge, of that Egypt I don't know much more'n would entitle me to say, How d'ye do. But it's enough for me. You've seen something —eh?"

"A little. It is not civilised life here. Yet—yet a few strong patriotic men—"

Lacey looked quizzically at David.

"Say," he said, "I thought that about Mexico once. I said *Mañana*—this *Mañana* is the curse of Mexico. It's always to-morrow—to-morrow—to-morrow. Let's teach 'em to do things to-day. Let's show 'em what *business* means. Two million dollars went into that experiment, but *Mañana* won. We had good hands, but it had the joker. After five years I left, with a bald head at twenty-nine, and a little book of noble thoughts—Tips for the Tired, or Things you can say To-day on what you can do to-morrow. I lost my hair worrying, but I learned to be patient. The Dagos wanted to live in their own way, and they did. It's one thing to be a missionary and say the little word in season; it's another to run your soft red head against a hard stone wall. I went to Mexico a *conquistador*, I left it a child of time, who had learned to smile; and I left some millions behind me, too. I said to an old Padre down there that I knew—we used to meet in the Café Manriqué and drink chocolate—I said to him, 'Padre, the Lord's Prayer is a mistake down here.' '*Si, señor*,' he said, and smiled his far-away smile at me. 'Yes,' said I, 'for you say in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread."' '*Si, señor*,' he says, 'but we do not expect it till to-morrow!' The

Padre knew from the start, but I learned at great expense, and went out of business—closed up shop for ever, with a bald head and my Tips for the Tired. Well, I've had more out of it all, I guess, than if I'd trebled the millions and wiped *Mañana* off the Mexican coat of arms."

"You think it would be like that here?" David asked abstractedly.

Lacey whistled. "There the Government was all right and the people all wrong. Here the people are all right and the Government all wrong. Say, it makes my eyes water sometimes to see the fellah slogging away. He's a Jim-dandy—works all day and half the night, and if the tax-gatherer isn't at the door, wakes up laughing. I saw one"—his light blue eyes took on a sudden hardness—"laughing on the other side of his mouth one morning. They were 'kourbashing' his feet; I landed on them as the soles came away. I hit out." His face became grave, he turned the cigar round in his mouth. "It made me feel better, but I had a close call. Lucky for me that in Mexico I got into the habit of carrying a pop-gun. It saved me then. But it isn't any use going on these special missions. We Americans think a lot of ourselves. We want every land to do as we do; and we want to make 'em do it. But a strong man here at the head, with a sword in his hand, peace in his heart, who'd be just and poor—how can you make officials honest when you take all you can get yourself—! But, no, I guess it's no good. This is a rotten cotton show."

Lacey had talked so much, not because he was garrulous only, but because the inquiry in David's eyes was an encouragement to talk. Whatever his misfor-

tunes in Mexico had been, his forty years sat lightly on him, and his expansive temperament, his childlike sentimentality, gave him an appearance of beaming, sophisticated youth. David was slowly apprehending these things as he talked—subconsciously, as it were; for he was seeing pictures of the things he himself had observed, through the lens of another mind, as primitive in some regards as his own, but influenced by different experiences.

"Say, you're the best listener I ever saw," added Lacey, with a laugh.

David held out his hand. "Thee sees things clearly," he answered.

Lacey grasped his hand.

At that moment an orderly advanced towards them.

"He's after us—one of the Palace cavalry," said Lacey.

"Effendi—Claridge Effendi! May his grave be not made till the karadh-gatherers return," said the orderly to David.

"My name is Claridge," answered David.

"To the hotel, effendi, first, then to the Mokattam Hills after thee, then here—from the Effendina, on whom be God's peace, this letter for thee."

David took the letter. "I thank thee, friend," he said.

As he read it, Lacey said to the orderly in Arabic: "How didst thou know he was here?"

The orderly grinned wickedly.

"Always it is known what place the effendi honours. It is not dark where he uncovers his face."

Lacey gave a low whistle.

"Say, you've got a pull in this show," he said, as David folded up the letter and put it in his pocket.

"In Egypt, if the master smiles on you, the servant puts his nose in the dust."

"The Prince Pasha bids me to dinner at the Palace to-night. I have no clothes for such affairs. Yet—"

His mind was asking itself if this was a door opening, which he had no right to shut with his own hand. There was no reason why he should not go; therefore there might be a reason why he should go. It might be, it no doubt was, in the way of facilitating his business. He dismissed the orderly with an affirmative and ceremonial message to Prince Kaïd—and a piece of gold.

"You've learned the custom of the place," said Lacey, as he saw the gold piece glitter in the brown palm of the orderly.

"I suppose the man's only pay is in such service," rejoined David. "It is a land of backsheesh. The fault is not with the people; it is with the rulers. I am not sorry to share my goods with the poor."

"You'll have a big going concern here in no time," observed Lacey. "Now, if I had those millions I left in Mexico—" Suddenly he stopped. "Is it you that's trying to settle up an estate here—at Assiout—belonged to an uncle?"

David inclined his head.

"They say that you and Prince Kaïd are doing the thing yourselves, and that the pashas and judges and all the high-mogul sharks of the Medjidie think that the end of the world has come. Is that so?"

"It is so, if not completely so. There are the poor men and humble—the pashas and judges and the others of the Medjidie, as thee said, are not poor. But such as the orderly yonder—" He paused meditatively.

Lacey looked at David with profound respect. "You make the poorest your partners, your friends. I see, I see. Jerusalem, that's masterly! I admire you. It's a new way in this country." Then, after a moment: "It'll do—by golly, it'll do! Not a bit more costly, and you do some good with it. Yes—it—will—do."

"I have given no man money save in charity and for proper service done openly," said David, a little severely.

"Say—of course. And that's just what isn't done here. Everything goes to him who hath, and from him who hath not is taken away even that which he hath. One does the work and another gets paid—that's the way here. But you, Mr. Claridge, you clinch with the strong man at the top, and, down below, you've got as your partners the poor man, whose name is Legion. If you get a fall out of the man at the top, you're solid with the Legion. And if the man at the top gets up again and salaams and strokes your hand, and says, 'Be my brother,' then it's a full Nile, and the fig-tree putteth forth its tender branches, and the date-palm flourisheth, and at the village pond the thanksgiving turkey gobbles and is glad. 'Selah'!"

The sunset gun boomed out from the citadel. David turned to go, and Lacey added:

"I'm waiting for a pasha who's taking toll of the officers inside there—Achmet Pasha. They call him the Ropemaker, because so many pass through his hands to the Nile. The Old Muslin I call him, because he's so diaphanous. Thinks nobody can see through him, and there's nobody that can't. If you stay long in Egypt, you'll find that Achmet is the worst, and Nahoum the Armenian the deepest, pasha in all this sick-

ening land. Achmet is cruel as a tiger to any one that stands in his way; Nahoum, the whale, only opens out to swallow now and then; but when Nahoum does open out, down goes Jonah, and never comes up again. He's a deep one, and a great artist is Nahoum. I'll bet a dollar you'll see them both to-night at the Palace—if Kaïd doesn't throw them to the lions for their dinner before yours is served. Here one shark is swallowed by another bigger, till at last the only and original sea-serpent swallows 'em all."

As David wound his way down the hills, Lacey waved a hand after him.

"Well, give my love to the girls," he said.

CHAPTER VI

"HAST THOU NEVER KILLED A MAN?"

"CLARIDGE Effendi!"

As David moved forward, his mind was embarrassed by many impressions. He was not confused, but the glitter and splendour, the Oriental gorgeousness of the picture into which he stepped, excited his eye, roused some new sense in him. He was a curious figure in those surroundings. The consuls and agents of all the nations save one were in brilliant uniform, and pashas, generals, and great officials were splendid in gold braid and lace, and wore flashing Orders on their breasts. David had been asked for half-past eight o'clock, and he was there on the instant; yet here was every one assembled, the Prince Pasha included. As he walked up the room he suddenly realised this fact, and, for a moment, he thought he had made a mistake; but again he remembered distinctly that the letter said half-past eight, and he wondered now if this had been arranged by the Prince—for what purpose? To afford amusement to the assembled company? He drew himself up with dignity, his face became graver. He had come in a Quaker suit of black broadcloth, with grey steel buttons, and a plain white stock; and he wore his broad-brimmed hat—to the consternation of the British Consul-General and the Europeans present, to the amazement of the Turkish and native officials, who eyed him keenly. They themselves wore red tarbooshes, as did the Prince; yet all

of them knew that the European custom of showing respect was by doffing the hat. The Prince Pasha had settled that with David, however, at their first meeting, when David had kept on his hat and offered Kaïd his hand.

Now, with amusement in his eyes, Prince Kaïd watched David coming up the great hall. What his object was in summoning David for an hour when all the court and all the official Europeans should be already present, remained to be seen. As David entered, Kaïd was busy receiving salaams, and returning greeting, but with an eye to the singularly boyish yet gallant figure approaching. By the time David had reached the group, the Prince Pasha was ready to receive him.

"Friend, I am glad to welcome thee," said the Effendina, sly humour lurking at the corner of his eye. Conscious of the amazement of all present, he held out his hand to David.

"May thy coming be as the morning dew, friend," he added, taking David's willing hand.

"And thy feet, Kaïd, walk in goodly paths, by the grace of God the compassionate and merciful."

As a wind, unfelt, stirs the leaves of a forest, making it rustle delicately, a whisper swept through the room. Official Egypt was dumfounded. Many had heard of David, a few had seen him, and now all eyed with inquisitive interest one who defied so many of the customs of his countrymen; who kept on his hat; who used a Mahommedan salutation like a true believer; whom the Effendina honoured—and presently honoured in an unusual degree by seating him at table opposite himself, where his Chief Chamberlain was used to sit.

During dinner Kaïd addressed his conversation again and again to David, asking questions put to disconcert

the consuls and other official folk present, confident in the naïve reply which would be returned. For there was a keen truthfulness in the young man's words which, however suave and carefully balanced, however gravely simple and tactful, left no doubt as to their meaning. There was nothing in them which could be challenged, could be construed into active criticism of men or things; and yet much he said was horrifying. It made Achmet Pasha sit up aghast, and Nahoum Pasha, the astute Armenian, for a long time past the confidant and favourite of the Prince Pasha, laugh in his throat; for, if there was a man in Egypt who enjoyed the thrust of a word or the bite of a phrase, it was Nahoum. Christian though he was, he was, nevertheless, Oriental to his farthermost corner, and had the culture of a French savant. He had also the primitive view of life, and the morals of a race who, in the clash of East and West, set against Western character and directness, and loyalty to the terms of a bargain, the demoralised cunning of the desert folk; the circuitous tactics of those who believed that no man spoke the truth directly, that it must ever be found beneath devious and misleading words, to be tracked like a panther, as an Antipodean bushman once said, "through the sinuosities of the underbrush." Nahoum Pasha had also a rich sense of grim humour. Perhaps that was why he had lived so near the person of the Prince, had held office so long. There were no Grand Viziers in Egypt; but he was as much like one as possible, and he had one uncommon virtue, he was greatly generous. If he took with his right hand he gave with his left; and Mahommedan as well as Copt and Armenian, and beggars of every race and creed, hung about his doors each morning to receive the food and alms he gave freely.

After one of David's answers to Kaïd, which had had the effect of causing his Highness to turn a sharp corner of conversation by addressing himself to the French consul, Nahoum said suavely:

"And so, monsieur, you think that we hold life lightly in the East—that it is a characteristic of civilisation to make life more sacred, to cherish it more fondly?"

He was sitting beside David, and though he asked the question casually, and with apparent intention only of keeping talk going, there was a lurking inquisition in his eye. He had seen enough to-night to make him sure that Kaïd had once more got the idea of making a European his confidant and adviser; to introduce to his court one of those mad Englishmen who cared nothing for gold—only for power; who loved administration for the sake of administration and the foolish joy of labour. He was now set to see what sort of match this intellect could play, when faced by the inherent contradictions present in all truths or the solutions of all problems.

"It is one of the characteristics of that which lies behind civilisation, as thee and me have been taught," answered David.

Nahoum was quick in strategy, but he was unprepared for David's knowledge that he was an Armenian Christian, and he had looked for another answer.

But he kept his head and rose to the occasion. "Ah, it is high, it is noble, to save life—it is so easy to destroy it," he answered. "I saw his Highness put his life in danger once to save a dog from drowning. To cherish the lives of others, and to be careless of our own; to give that of great value as though it were of no worth—is it not the Great Lesson?" He said it with such an air of sincerity, with such dissimulation, that, for the moment, David was deceived. There was, how-

ever, on the face of the listening Kaïd a curious, cynical smile. He had heard all, and he knew the sardonic meaning behind Nahoum's words.

Fat Higli Pasha, the Chief Chamberlain, the corrupt and corruptible, intervened. "It is not so hard to be careless when care would be useless," he said, with a chuckle. "When the khamsin blows the dust-storms upon the caravan, the camel-driver hath no care for his camels. '*Malaish!*' he says, and buries his face in his yelek."

"Life is beautiful and so difficult—to save," observed Nahoum, in a tone meant to tempt David on one hand and to reach the ears of the notorious Achmet Pasha, whose extortions, cruelties, and taxations had built his master's palaces, bribed his harem, given him money to pay the interest on his European loans, and made himself the richest man in Egypt, whose spies were everywhere, whose shadow was across every man's path. Kaïd might slay, might toss a pasha or a slave into the Nile now and then, might invite a Bey to visit him, and stroke his beard and call him brother and put diamond-dust in the coffee he drank, so that he died before two suns came and went again, "of inflammation and a natural death"; but he, Achmet Pasha, was the dark Inquisitor who tortured every day, for whose death all men prayed, and whom some would have slain, but that another worse than himself might succeed him.

At Nahoum's words the dusky brown of Achmet's face turned as black as the sudden dilation of the pupil of an eye deepens its hue, and he said with a guttural accent:

"Every man hath a time to die."

"But not his own time," answered Nahoum maliciously.

"It would appear that in Egypt he hath not always the choice of the fashion or the time," remarked David calmly. He had read the malice behind their words, and there had flashed into his own mind tales told him, with every circumstance of accuracy, of deaths within and without the Palace. Also he was now aware that Nahoum had mocked him. He was concerned to make it clear that he was not wholly beguiled.

"Is there, then, for a man choice of fashion or time in England, effendi?" asked Nahoum, with assumed innocence.

"In England it is a matter between the Giver and Taker of life and himself—save where murder does its work," said David.

"And here it is between man and man—is it that you would say?" asked Nahoum.

"There seem wider privileges here," answered David drily.

"Accidents will happen, privileges or no," rejoined Nahoum, with lowering eyelids.

The Prince intervened. "Thy own faith forbids the sword, forbids war, or—punishment."

"The Prophet I follow was called the Prince of Peace, friend," answered David, bowing gravely across the table.

"Hast thou never killed a man?" asked Kaïd, with interest in his eyes. He asked the question as a man might ask another if he had never visited Paris.

"Never, by the goodness of God, never," answered David.

"Neither in punishment nor in battle?"

"I am neither judge nor soldier, friend."

"*Inshallah*, thou hast yet far to go! Thou art young yet. Who can tell?"

"I have never so far to go as that, friend," said David, in a voice that rang a little.

"To-morrow is no man's gift."

David was about to answer, but chancing to raise his eyes above the Prince Pasha's head, his glance was arrested and startled by seeing a face—the face of a woman—looking out of a panel in a mooshrabieh screen in a gallery above. He would not have dwelt upon the incident, he would have set it down to the curiosity of a woman of the harem, but that the face looking out was that of an English girl, and peering over her shoulder was the dark, handsome face of an Egyptian or a Turk.

Self-control was the habit of his life, the training of his faith, and, as a rule, his face gave little evidence of inner excitement. Demonstration was discouraged, if not forbidden, among the Quakers, and if, to others, it gave a cold and austere manner, in David it tempered to a warm stillness the powerful impulses in him, the rivers of feeling which sometimes roared through his veins.

Only Nahoum Pasha had noticed his arrested look, so motionless did he sit; and now, without replying, he bowed gravely and deferentially to Kaïd, who rose from the table. He followed with the rest. Presently the Prince sent Higli Pasha to ask his nearer presence.

The Prince made a motion of his hand, and the circle withdrew. He waved David to a seat.

"To-morrow thy business shall be settled," said the Prince suavely, "and on such terms as will not startle. Death-tribute is no new thing in the East. It is fortunate for thee that the tribute is from thy hand to my hand, and not through many others to mine."

"I am conscious I have been treated with favour,

friend," said David. "I would that I might show thee kindness. Though how may a man of no account make return to a great Prince?"

"By the beard of my father, it is easily done, if thy kindness is a real thing, and not that which makes me poorer the more I have of it—as though one should be given a herd of horses which must not be sold but still must be fed."

"I have given thee truth. Is not truth cheaper than falsehood?"

"It is the most expensive thing in Egypt; so that I despair of buying thee. Yet I would buy thee to remain here—here at my court; here by my hand which will give thee the labour thou lovest, and will defend thee if defence be needed. Thou hast not greed, thou hast no thirst for honour, yet thou hast wisdom beyond thy years. Kaïd has never besought men, but he beseeches thee. Once there was in Egypt, Joseph, a wise youth, who served a Pharaoh, and was his chief counsellor, and it was well with the land. Thy name is a good name; well-being may follow thee. The ages have gone, and the rest of the world has changed, but Egypt is the same Egypt, the Nile rises and falls, and the old lean years and fat years come and go. Though I am in truth a Turk, and those who serve and rob me here are Turks, yet the fellah is the same as he was five thousand years ago. What Joseph the Israelite did, thou canst do; for I am no more unjust than was that Rameses whom Joseph served. Wilt thou stay with me?"

David looked at Kaïd as though he would read in his face the reply that he must make, but he did not see Kaïd; he saw, rather, the face of one he had loved more than Jonathan had been loved by the young shepherd-prince of Israel. In his ears he heard the voice that had

called him in his sleep—the voice of Benn Claridge; and, at the same instant, there flashed into his mind a picture of himself fighting outside the tavern beyond Hamley and bidding farewell to the girl at the cross-roads.

"Friend, I cannot answer thee now," he said, in a troubled voice.

Kaïd rose. "I will give thee an hour to think upon it. Come with me." He stepped forward.

"To-morrow I will answer thee, Kaïd."

"To-morrow there is work for thee to do. Come." David followed him.

The eyes that followed the Prince and the Quaker were not friendly. What Kaïd had long foreshadowed seemed at hand: the coming of a European counsellor and confidant. They realised that in the man who had just left the room with Kaïd there were characteristics unlike those they had ever met before in Europeans.

"A madman," whispered Higli Pasha to Achmet the Ropemaker.

"Then his will be the fate of the swine of Gadarene," said Nahoum Pasha, who had heard.

"At least one need not argue with a madman." The face of Achmet the Ropemaker was not more pleasant than his dark words.

"It is not the madman with whom you have to deal, but his keeper," rejoined Nahoum.

Nahoum's face was heavier than usual. Going to weight, he was still muscular and well groomed. His light brown beard and hair and blue eyes gave him a look almost Saxon, and bland power spoke in his face and in every gesture.

He was seldom without the string of beads so many

Orientals love to carry, and, Armenian Christian as he was, the act seemed almost religious. It was to him, however, like a ground-wire in telegraphy—it carried off the nervous force tingling in him and driving him to impulsive action, while his reputation called for a constant outward urbanity, a philosophical apathy. He had had his great fight for place and power, alien as he was in religion, though he had lived in Egypt since a child. Bar to progress as his religion had been at first, it had been an advantage afterwards; for, through it, he could exclude himself from complications with the Wakfs, the religious court of the Muslim creed, which had lands to administer, and controlled the laws of marriage and inheritance. He could shrug his shoulders and play with his beads, and urbanely explain his own helplessness and ineligibility when his influence was summoned, or it was sought to entangle him in warring interests Oriental through and through, the basis of his creed was similar to that of a Muslim: Mahomet was a prophet and Christ was a prophet. It was a case of rival prophets—all else was obscured into a legend, and he saw the strife of race in the difference of creed. For the rest, he flourished the salutations and language of the Arab as though they were his own, and he spoke Arabic as perfectly as he did French and English.

He was the second son of his father. The first son, who was but a year older, and was as dark as he was fair, had inherited—had seized—all his father's wealth. He had lived abroad for some years in France and England. In the latter place he had been one of the Turkish Embassy, and, having none of the outward characteristics of the Turk, and being in appearance more of a Spaniard than an Oriental, he had, by his

gifts, his address and personal appearance, won the good-will of the Duchess of Middlesex, and had had that success all too flattering to the soul of a libertine. It had, however, been the means of his premature retirement from England, for his chief at the Embassy had a preference for an Oriental *entourage*. He was called Foorgat Bey.

Sitting at table, Nahoum alone of all present had caught David's arrested look, and, glancing up, had seen the girl's face at the panel of mooshrabieh, and had seen also over her shoulder the face of his brother, Foorgat Bey. He had been even more astonished than David, and far more disturbed. He knew his brother's abilities; he knew his insinuating address—had he not influenced their father to give him wealth while he was yet alive? He was aware also that his brother had visited the Palace often of late. It would seem as though the Prince Pasha was ready to make him, as well as David, a favourite. But the face of the girl —it was an English face! Familiar with the Palace, and bribing when it was necessary to bribe, Foorgat Bey had evidently brought her to see the function, there where all women were forbidden. He could little imagine Foorgat doing this from mere courtesy; he could not imagine any woman, save one wholly sophisticated, or one entirely innocent, trusting herself with him—and in such a place. The girl's face, though not that of one in her teens, had seemed to him a very flower of innocence.

But, as he stood telling his beads, abstractedly listening to the scandal talked by Achmet and Higli, he was not thinking of his brother, but of the two who had just left the chamber. He was speculating as to which room they were likely to enter. They had not

gone by the door convenient to passage to Kaïd's own apartments. He would give much to hear the conversation between Kaïd and the stranger; he was all too conscious of its purport. As he stood thinking, Kaïd returned. After looking round the room for a moment, the Prince came slowly over to Nahoum, and, stretching out a hand, stroked his beard.

"Oh, brother of all the wise, may thy sun never pass its noon!" said Kaïd, in a low, friendly voice.

Despite his will, a shudder passed through Nahoum Pasha's frame. How often in Egypt this gesture and such words were the prelude to assassination, from which there was no escape save by death itself. Into Nahoum's mind there flashed the words of an Arab teacher, "There is no refuge from God but God Himself," and he found himself blindly wondering, even as he felt Kaïd's hand upon his beard and listened to the honeyed words, what manner of death was now preparing for him, and what death of his own contriving should intervene. Escape, he knew, there was none, if his death was determined on; for spies were everywhere, and slaves in the pay of Kaïd were everywhere, and such as were not could be bought or compelled, even if he took refuge in the house of a foreign consul. The lean, invisible, ghastly arm of death could find him, if Kaïd willed, though he delved in the bowels of the Cairene earth, or climbed to an eagle's eyrie in the Libyan Hills. Whether it was diamond-dust or Achmet's thin thong that stopped the breath, it mattered not; it was sure. Yet he was not of the breed to tremble under the descending sword, and he had long accustomed himself to the chance of "sudden demise." It had been chief among the chances he had taken when he entered the high and perilous service of

Kaïd. Now, as he felt the secret joy of these dark spirits surrounding him—Achmet, and Higli Pasha, who kept saying beneath his breath in thankfulness that it was not his turn, Praise be to God!—as he felt their secret self-gratulations, and their evil joy over his prospective downfall, he settled himself steadily, made a low salutation to Kaïd, and calmly awaited further speech. It came soon enough.

"It is written upon a cucumber leaf—does not the world read it?—that Nahoum Pasha's form shall cast a longer shadow than the trees; so that every man in Egypt shall, thinking on him, be as covetous as Ashaah, who knew but one thing more covetous than himself—the sheep that mistook the rainbow for a rope of hay, and, jumping for it, broke his neck."

Kaïd laughed softly at his own words.

With his eye meeting Kaïd's again, after a low salaam, Nahoum made answer:

"I would that the lance of my fame might sheathe itself in the breasts of thy enemies, Effendina."

"Thy tongue does that office well," was the reply. Once more Kaïd laid a gentle hand upon Nahoum's beard. Then, with a gesture towards the consuls and Europeans, he said to them in French: "If I might but beg your presence for yet a little time!" Then he turned and walked away. He left by a door leading to his own apartments.

When he had gone, Nahoum swung slowly round and faced the agitated groups.

"He who sleeps with one eye open sees the sun rise first," he said, with a sarcastic laugh. "He who goes blindfold never sees it set."

Then, with a complacent look upon them all, he slowly left the room by the door out of which David and Kaïd had first passed.

Outside the room his face did not change. His manner had not been bravado. It was as natural to him as David's manner was to himself. Each had trained himself in his own way to the mastery of his will, and the will in each was stronger than any passion of emotion in them. So far at least it had been so. In David it was the outcome of his faith, in Nahoum it was the outcome of his philosophy, a simple, fearless fatalism.

David had been left by Kaïd in a small room, little more than an alcove, next to a larger room richly furnished. Both rooms belonged to a spacious suite which lay between the harem and the major portion of the Palace. It had its own entrance and exits from the Palace, opening on the square at the front, at the back opening on its own garden, which also had its own exits to the public road. The quarters of the Chief Eunuch separated the suite from the harem, and Mizraim, the present Chief Eunuch, was a man of power in the Palace, knew more secrets, was more courted, and was richer than some of the princes. Nahoum had an office in the Palace, also, which gave him the freedom of the place, and brought him often in touch with the Chief Eunuch. He had made Mizraim a fast friend ever since the day he had, by an able device, saved the Chief Eunuch from determined robbery by the former Prince Pasha, with whom he had suddenly come out of favour.

When Nahoum left the great salon, he directed his steps towards the quarters of the Chief Eunuch, thinking of David, with a vague desire for pursuit and conflict. He was too much of a philosopher to seek to do David physical injury—a futile act; for it could do him no good in the end, could not mend his own for-

tunes; and, merciless as he could be on occasion, he had no love of bloodshed. Besides, the game afoot was not of his making, and he was ready to await the finish, the more so because he was sure that to-morrow would bring forth momentous things. There was a crisis in the Soudan, there was trouble in the army, there was dark conspiracy of which he knew the heart, and anything might happen to-morrow! He had yet some cards to play, and Achmet and Higli—and another very high and great—might be delivered over to Kaïd's deadly purposes rather than himself to-morrow. What he knew Kaïd did not know. He had not meant to act yet; but new facts faced him, and he must make one struggle for his life. But as he went towards Mizraim's quarters he saw no sure escape from the stage of those untoward events, save by the exit which is for all in some appointed hour.

He was not, however, more perplexed and troubled than David, who, in the little room where he had been brought and left alone with coffee and cigarettes, served by a slave from some distant portion of the Palace, sat facing his future.

David looked round the little room. Upon the walls hung weapons of every kind—from a polished dagger of Toledo to a Damascus blade, suits of chain armour, long-handled, two-edged Arab swords, pistols which had been used in the Syrian wars of Ibrahim, lances which had been taken from the Druses at Palmyra, rude battle-axes from the tribes of the Soudan, and neboots of dom-wood which had done service against Napoleon at Damietta. The cushions among which he sat had come from Constantinople, the rug at his feet from Tiflis, the prayer-rug on the wall from Mecca.

All that he saw was as unlike what he had known in past years as though he had come to Mars or Jupiter. All that he had heard recalled to him his first readings in the Old Testament—the story of Nebuchadnezzar, of Belshazzar, of Ahasuerus—of Ahasuerus! He suddenly remembered the face he had seen looking down at the Prince's table from the panel of mooshrabieh. That English face—where was it? Why was it there? Who was the man with her? Whose the dark face peering scornfully over her shoulder? The face of an English girl in that place dedicated to sombre intrigue, to the dark effacement of women, to the darker effacement of life, as he well knew, all too often! In looking at this prospect for good work in the cause of civilisation, he was not deceived, he was not allured. He knew into what subterranean ways he must walk, through what mazes of treachery and falsehood he must find his way; and though he did not know to the full the corruption which it was his duty to Kaïd to turn to incorruption, he knew enough to give his spirit pause. What would be—what could be—the end? Would he not prove to be as much out of place as was the face of that English girl? The English girl! England rushed back upon him—the love of those at home; of his father, the only father he had ever known; of Faith, the only mother or sister he had ever known; of old John Fairley; the love of the woods and the hills where he had wandered came upon him. There was work to do in England, work too little done—the memory of the great meeting at Heddington flashed upon him. Could his labour and his skill, if he had any, not be used there? Ah, the green fields, the soft grey skies, the quiet vale, the brave, self-respecting, toiling millions, the beautiful sense of law and order

and goodness! Could his gifts and labours not be used there? Could not—

He was suddenly startled by a smothered cry, then a call of distress. It was the voice of a woman.

He started up. The voice seemed to come from a room at his right; not that from which he had entered, but one still beyond this where he was. He sprang towards the wall and examined it swiftly. Finding a division in the tapestry, he ran his fingers quickly and heavily down the crack between. It came upon the button of a spring. He pressed it, the door yielded, and, throwing it back, he stepped into the room—to see a woman struggling to resist the embraces and kisses of a man. The face was that of the girl who had looked out of the panel in the mooshrabieh screen. Then it was beautiful in its mirth and animation, now it was pale and terror-stricken, as with one free hand she fiercely beat the face pressed to hers.

The girl only had seen David enter. The man was not conscious of his presence till he was seized and flung against the wall. The violence of the impact brought down at his feet two weapons from the wall above him. He seized one—a dagger—and sprang to his feet. Before he could move forward or raise his arm, however, David struck him a blow in the neck which flung him upon a square marble pedestal intended for a statue. In falling his head struck violently a sharp corner of the pedestal. He lurched, rolled over on the floor, and lay still.

The girl gave a choking cry. David quickly stooped and turned the body over. There was a cut where the hair met the temple. He opened the waistcoat and thrust his hand inside the shirt. Then he felt the pulse of the limp wrist.

For a moment he looked at the face steadily, almost contemplatively it might have seemed, and then drew both arms close to the body.

Foorgat Bey, the brother of Nahoum Pasha, was dead.

Rising, David turned, as if in a dream, to the girl. He made a motion of the hand towards the body. She understood. Dismay was in her face, but the look of horror and desperation was gone. She seemed not to realise, as did David, the awful position in which they were placed, the deed which David had done, the significance of the thing that lay at their feet.

"Where are thy people?" said David. "Come, we will go to them."

"I have no people here," she said, in a whisper.

"Who brought thee?"

She made a motion behind her towards the body. David glanced down. The eyes of the dead man were open. He stooped and closed them gently. The collar and tie were disarranged; he straightened them, then turned again to her.

"I must take thee away," he said calmly. "But it must be secretly." He looked around, perplexed.

"We came secretly. My maid is outside the garden—in a carriage. Oh, come, let us go, let us escape. They will kill you—!" Terror came into her face again.

"Thee, not me, is in danger—name, goodness, future, all. . . . Which way did thee come?"

"Here—through many rooms—" She made a gesture to curtains beyond. "But we first entered through doors with sphinxes on either side, with a room where was a statue of Mehemet Ali."

It was the room through which David had come with Kaïd. He took her hand. "Come quickly. I

know the way. It is here," he said, pointing to the panel-door by which he had entered.

Holding her hand still, as though she were a child, he led her quickly from the room, and shut the panel behind them. As they passed through, a hand drew aside the curtains on the other side of the room which they were leaving.

Presently the face of Nahoum Pasha followed the hand. A swift glance to the floor, then he ran forward, stooped down, and laid a hand on his brother's breast. The slight wound on the forehead answered his rapid scrutiny. He realised the situation as plainly as if it had been written down for him—he knew his brother well.

Noiselessly he moved forward and touched the spring of the door through which the two had gone. It yielded, and he passed through, closed the door again and stealthily listened, then stole a look into the farther chamber. It was empty. He heard the outer doors close. For a moment he listened, then went forward and passed through into the hall. Softly turning the handle of the big wooden doors which faced him, he opened them an inch or so, and listened. He could hear swiftly retreating footsteps. Presently he heard the faint noise of a gate shutting. He nodded his head, and was about to close the doors and turn away, when his quick ear detected footsteps again in the garden. Some one—the man, of course—was returning.

"May fire burn his eyes for ever! He would talk with Kaïd, then go again among them all, and so pass out unsuspected and safe. For who but I—who but I could say he did it? And I—what is my proof? Only the words which I speak."

A scornful, fateful smile passed over his face. "'Hast thou never killed a man?' said Kaïd. 'Never,' said he—'by the goodness of God, never!' The voice of Him of Galilee, the hand of Cain, the craft of Jael. But God is with the patient."

He went hastily and noiselessly—his footfall was light for so heavy a man—through the large room to the farther side from that by which David and Kaïd had first entered. Drawing behind a clump of palms near a door opening to a passage leading to Mizraim's quarters, he waited. He saw David enter quickly, yet without any air of secrecy, and pass into the little room where Kaïd had left him.

For a long time there was silence.

The reasons were clear in Nahoum's mind why he should not act yet. A new factor had changed the equation which had presented itself a short half hour ago.

A new factor had also entered into the equation which had been presented to David by Kaïd with so flattering an insistence. He sat in the place where Kaïd had left him, his face drawn and white, his eyes burning, but with no other sign of agitation. He was frozen and still. His look was fastened now upon the door by which the Prince Pasha would enter, now upon the door through which he had passed to the rescue of the English girl, whom he had seen drive off safely with her maid. In their swift passage from the Palace to the carriage, a thing had been done of even greater moment than the killing of the sensualist in the next room. In the journey to the gateway the girl David served had begged him to escape with her. This he had almost sharply declined; it would be no escape, he had said. She had urged that no one knew. He

had replied that Kaïd would come again for him, and suspicion would be aroused if he were gone.

"Thee has safety," he had said. "I will go back. I will say that I killed him. I have taken a life, I will pay for it as is the law."

Excited as she was, she had seen the inflexibility of his purpose. She had seen the issue also clearly. He would give himself up, and the whole story would be the scandal of Europe.

"You have no right to save me only to kill me," she had said desperately. "You would give your life, but you would destroy that which is more than life to me. You did not intend to kill him. It was no murder, it was punishment." Her voice had got harder. "He would have killed my life because he was evil. Will you kill it because you are good? Will you be brave, quixotic, but not pitiful? . . . No, no, no!" she had said, as his hand was upon the gate, "I will not go unless you promise that you will hide the truth, if you can." She had laid her hand upon his shoulder with an agonised impulse. "You will hide it for a girl who will cherish your memory her whole life long. Ah—God bless you!"

She had felt that she conquered before he spoke—as, indeed, he did not speak, but nodded his head and murmured something indistinctly. But that did not matter, for she had won; she had a feeling that all would be well. Then he had placed her in her carriage, and she was driven swiftly away, saying to herself half hysterically: "I am safe, I am safe. He will keep his word."

Her safety and his promise were the new factor which changed the equation for which Kaïd would presently ask the satisfaction. David's life had sud-

denly come upon problems for which his whole past was no preparation. Conscience, which had been his guide in every situation, was now disarmed, disabled, and routed. It had come to terms.

In going quickly through the room, they had disarranged a table. The girl's cloak had swept over it, and a piece of bric-à-brac had been thrown upon the floor. He got up and replaced it with an attentive air. He rearranged the other pieces on the table mechanically, seeing, feeling another scene, another inanimate thing which must be for ever and for ever a picture burning in his memory. Yet he appeared to be casually doing a trivial and necessary act. He did not definitely realise his actions; but long afterwards he could have drawn an accurate plan of the table, could have reproduced upon it each article in its exact place as correctly as though it had been photographed. There were one or two spots of dust or dirt on the floor, brought in by his boots from the garden. He flicked them aside with his handkerchief.

How still it was! Or was it his life which had become so still? It seemed as if the world must be noiseless, for not a sound of the life in other parts of the Palace came to him, not an echo or vibration of the city which stirred beyond the great gateway. Was it the chilly hand of death passing over everything, and smothering all the activities? His pulses, which, but a few minutes past, were throbbing and pounding like drums in his ears, seemed now to flow and beat in very quiet. Was this, then, the way that murderers felt, that men felt who took human life—so frozen, so little a part of their surroundings? Did they move as dead men among the living, devitalised, vacuous calm?

His life had been suddenly twisted out of recogni-

tion. All that his habit, his code, his morals, his religion, had imposed upon him had been overturned in one moment. To take a human life, even in battle, was against the code by which he had ever been governed, yet he had taken life secretly, and was hiding it from the world.

Accident? But had it been necessary to strike at all? His presence alone would have been enough to save the girl from further molestation; but he had thrown himself upon the man like a tiger. Yet, somehow, he felt no sorrow for that. He knew that if again and yet again he were placed in the same position he would do even as he had done—even as he had done with the man Kimber by the Fox and Goose tavern beyond Hamley. He knew that the blow he had given then was inevitable, and he had never felt real repentance. Thinking of that blow, he saw its sequel in the blow he had given now. Thus was that day linked with the present, thus had a blow struck in punishment of the wrong done the woman at the cross-roads been repeated in the wrong done the girl who had just left him.

A sound now broke the stillness. It was a door shutting not far off. Kaïd was coming. David turned his face towards the room where Foorgat Bey was lying dead. He lifted his arms with a sudden passionate gesture. The blood came rushing through his veins again. His life, which had seemed suspended, was set free; and an exaltation of sorrow, of pain, of action, possessed him.

"I have taken a life, O my God!" he murmured. "Accept mine in service for this land. What I have done in secret, let me atone for in secret, for this land —for this poor land, for Christ's sake!"

Footsteps were approaching quickly. With a great effort of the will he ruled himself to quietness again. Kaïd entered, and stood before him in silence. David rose. He looked Kaïd steadily in the eyes. "Well?" said Kaïd placidly.

"For Egypt's sake I will serve thee," was the reply.

He held out his hand. Kaïd took it, but said, in smiling comment on the action: "As the Viceroy's servant there is another way!"

"I will salaam to-morrow, Kaïd," answered David.

"It is the only custom of the place I will require of thee, effendi. Come."

A few moments later they were standing among the consuls and officials in the salon.

"Where is Nahoum?" asked Kaïd, looking round on the agitated throng.

No one answered. Smiling, Kaïd whispered in David's ear.

CHAPTER VII

THE COMPACT

One by one the lights went out in the Palace. The excited guests were now knocking at the doors of Cairene notables, bent upon gossip of the night's events, or were scouring the bazaars for ears into which to pour the tale of how David was exalted and Nahoum was brought low; how, before them all, Kaïd had commanded Nahoum to appear at the Palace in the morning at eleven, and the Inglesi, as they had named David, at ten. But they declared to all who crowded upon their words that the Inglesi left the Palace with a face frozen white, as though it was he that had met *débâcle*, while Nahoum had been as urbane and cynical as though he had come to the fulness of his power.

Some, on hearing this, said: "Beware Nahoum!" But those who had been at the Palace said: "Beware the Inglesi!" This still Quaker, with the white shining face and pontifical hat, with his address of "thee" and "thou," and his forms of speech almost Oriental in their imagery and simplicity, himself an archaism, had impressed them with a sense of power. He had prompted old Diaz Pasha to speak of him as a reincarnation, so separate and withdrawn he seemed at the end of the evening, yet with an uncanny mastery in his dark brown eyes. One of the Ulema, or holy men, present had said in reply to Diaz: "It is the look of one who hath walked with Death and bought and sold with Sheitan the accursed." To Nahoum Pasha, Diaz

had said, as the former left the Palace, a cigarette between his fingers: "Sleep not nor slumber, Nahoum. The world was never lost by one earthquake." And Nahoum had replied with a smooth friendliness: "The world is not reaped in one harvest."

"The day is at hand—the East against the West," murmured old Diaz, as he passed on.

"The day is far spent," answered Nahoum, in a voice unheard by Diaz; and, with a word to his coachman, who drove off quickly, he disappeared in the shrubbery.

A few minutes later he was tapping at the door of Mizraim, the Chief Eunuch. Three times he tapped in the same way. Presently the door opened, and he stepped inside. The lean, dark figure of Mizraim bowed low; the long, slow fingers touched the forehead, the breast, and the lips.

"May God preserve thy head from harm, excellency, and the night give thee sleep," said Mizraim. He looked inquiringly at Nahoum.

"May thy head know neither heat nor cold, and thy joys increase," responded Nahoum mechanically, and sat down.

To an European it would have seemed a shameless mockery to have wished joy to this lean, hateful dweller in the between-worlds; to Nahoum it was part of a life which was all ritual and intrigue, gabbling superstition and innate fatalism, decorated falsehood and a brave philosophy.

"I have work for thee at last, Mizraim," said Nahoum.

"At last?"

"Thou hast but played before. To-night I must see the sweat of thy brow."

Mizraim's cold fingers again threw themselves against his breast, forehead, and lips, and he said:

"As a woman swims in a fountain, so shall I bathe in sweat for thee, who hath given with one hand and hath never taken with the other."

"I did thee service once, Mizraim—eh?"

"I was as a bird buffeted by the wind; upon thy masts my feet found rest. Behold, I build my nest in thy sails, excellency."

"There are no birds in last year's nest, Mizraim, thou dove," said Nahoum, with a cynical smile.

"When I build, I build. Where I swear by the stone of the corner, there am I from dark to dark and from dawn to dawn, pasha." Suddenly he swept his hand low to the ground and a ghastly sort of smile crossed over his face. "Speak—I am thy servant. Shall I not hear? I will put my hand in the entrails of Egypt, and wrench them forth for thee."

He made a gesture so cruelly, so darkly, suggestive that Nahoum turned his head away. There flashed before his mind the scene of death in which his own father had lain, butchered like a beast in the shambles, a victim to the rage of Ibrahim Pasha, the son of Mehemet Ali.

"Then listen, and learn why I have need of thee to-night."

First, Nahoum told the story of David's coming, and Kaïd's treatment of himself, the foreshadowing of his own doom. Then of David and the girl, and the dead body he had seen; of the escape of the girl, of David's return with Kaïd—all exactly as it had happened, save that he did not mention the name of the dead man.

It did not astonish Mizraim that Nahoum had kept

all this secret. That crime should be followed by secrecy and further crime, if need be, seems natural to the Oriental mind. Mizraim had seen removal follow upon removal, and the dark Nile flowed on gloomily, silently, faithful to the helpless ones tossed into its bosom. It would much have astonished him if Nahoum had not shown a gaping darkness somewhere in his tale, and he felt for the key to the mystery.

"And he who lies dead, excellency?"

"My brother."

"Foorgat Bey!"

"Even he, Mizraim. He lured the girl here—a madman ever. The other madman was in the next room. He struck—come, and thou shalt see."

Together they felt their way through the passages and rooms, and presently entered the room where Foorgat Bey was lying. Nahoum struck a light, and, as he held the candle, Mizraim knelt and examined the body closely. He found the slight wound on the temple, then took the candle from Nahoum and held it close to the corner of the marble pedestal. A faint stain of blood was there. Again he examined the body, and ran his fingers over the face and neck. Suddenly he stopped, and held the light close to the skin beneath the right jaw. He motioned, and Nahoum laid his fingers also on the spot. There was a slight swelling.

"A blow with the fist, excellency—skilful, and English." He looked inquiringly at Nahoum. "As a weasel hath a rabbit by the throat, so is the Inglesi in thy hands."

Nahoum shook his head. "And if I went to Kaïd, and said, 'This is the work of the Inglesi,' would he believe? Kaïd would hang me for the lie—would it be truth to him? What proof have I, save the testimony

of mine own eyes? Egypt would laugh at that. Is it the time, while yet the singers are beneath the windows, to assail the bride? All bridegrooms are mad. It is all sunshine and morning with the favourite, the Inglesi. Only when the shadows lengthen may he be stricken. Not now."

"Why dost thou hide this from Kaïd, O thou brother of the eagle?"

"For my gain and thine, keeper of the gate. To-night I am weak, because I am poor. To-morrow I shall be rich and, it may be, strong. If Kaïd knew of this to-night, I should be a prisoner before cockcrow. What claims has a prisoner? Kaïd would be in my brother's house at dawn, seizing all that is there and elsewhere, and I on my way to Fazougli, to be strangled or drowned."

"O wise and far-seeing! Thine eye pierces the earth. What is there to do? What is my gain—what thine?"

"Thy gain? The payment of thy debt to me."

Mizraim's face lengthened. His was a loathsome sort of gratitude. He was willing to pay in kind; but what Oriental ever paid a debt without a gift in return, even as a bartering Irishman demands his lucky penny.

"So be it, excellency, and my life is thine to spill upon the ground, a scarlet cloth for thy feet. And backsheesh?"

Nahoum smiled grimly. "For backsheesh, thy turban full of gold."

Mizraim's eyes glittered—the dull black shine of a mongrel terrier's. He caught the sleeve of Nahoum's coat and kissed it, then kissed his hand.

Thus was their bargain made over the dead body; and Mizraim had an almost superstitious reverence for the fulfilment of a bond, the one virtue rarely found in the

Oriental. Nothing else had he, but of all men in Egypt he was the best instrument Nahoum could have chosen; and of all men in Egypt he was the one man who could surely help him.

"What is there now to do, excellency?"

"My coachman is with the carriage at the gate by which the English girl left. It is open still. The key is in Foorgat's pocket, no doubt; stolen by him, no doubt also. . . . This is my design. Thou wilt drive him"—he pointed to the body—"to his palace, seated in the carriage as though he were alive. There is a secret entrance. The bowáb of the gate will show the way; I know it not. But who will deny thee? Thou comest from high places—from Kaïd. Who will speak of this? Will the bowáb? In the morning Foorgat will be found dead in his bed! The slight bruise thou canst heal—thou canst?"

Mizraim nodded. "I can smooth it from the sharpest eye."

"At dawn he will be found dead; but at dawn I shall be knocking at his gates. Before the world knows I shall be in possession. All that is his shall be mine, for at once the men of law shall be summoned, and my inheritance secured before Kaïd shall even know of his death. I shall take my chances for my life."

"And the coachman, and the bowáb, and others it may be?"

"Shall not these be with thee—thou, Kaïd's keeper of the harem, the lion at the door of his garden of women? Would it be strange that Foorgat, who ever flew at fruit above his head, perilous to get or keep, should be found on forbidden ground, or in design upon it? Would it be strange to the bowáb or the slave that he should return with thee stark and still? They would

but count it mercy of Kaïd that he was not given to the serpents of the Nile. A word from thee—would one open his mouth? Would not the shadow of thy hand, of the swift doom, be over them? Would not a handful of gold bind them to me? Is not the man dead? Are they not mine—mine to bind or break as I will?"

"So be it! Wisdom is of thee as the breath of man is his life. I will drive Foorgat Bey to his home."

A few moments later all that was left of Foorgat Bey was sitting in his carriage beside Mizraim the Chief Eunuch—sitting upright, stony, and still, and in such wise was driven swiftly to his palace.

CHAPTER VIII

FOR HIS SOUL'S SAKE AND THE LAND'S SAKE

David came to know a startling piece of news the next morning—that Foorgat Bey had died of heart-disease in his bed, and was so found by his servants. He at once surmised that Foorgat's body had been carried out of the Palace; no doubt that it might not be thought he had come to his death by command of Kaïd. His mind became easier. Death, murder, crime in Egypt was not a nine days' wonder; it scarce outlived one day. When a man was gone none troubled. The dead man was in the bosom of Allah; then why should the living be beset or troubled? If there was foul play, why make things worse by sending another life after the life gone, even in the way of justice?

The girl David saved had told him her own name, and had given him the name of the hotel at which she was staying. He had an early breakfast, and prepared to go to her hotel, wishing to see her once more. There were things to be said for the first and last time and then be buried for ever. She must leave the country at once. In this sick, mad land, in this whirlpool of secret murder and conspiracy, no one could tell what plot was hatching, what deeds were forward; and he could not yet be sure that no one save himself and herself knew who had killed Foorgat Bey. Her perfect safety lay in instant flight. It was his duty to see that she went, and at once —this very day. He would go and see her.

He went to the hotel. There he learned that, with her aunt, she had left that morning for Alexandria *en route* to England.

He approved her wisdom, he applauded her decision. Yet—yet, somehow, as he bent his footsteps towards his lodgings again he had a sense of disappointment, of revelation. What might happen to him—evidently that had not occurred to her. How could she know but that his life might be in danger; that, after all, they might have been seen leaving the fatal room? Well, she had gone, and with all his heart he was glad that she was safe.

His judgment upon last night's event was not coloured by a single direct criticism upon the girl. But he could not prevent the suggestion suddenly flashing into his mind that she had thought of herself first and last. Well, she had gone; and he was here to face the future, unencumbered by aught save the weight of his own conscience.

Yet, the weight of his conscience! His feet were still free—free for one short hour before he went to Kaïd; but his soul was in chains. As he turned his course to the Nile, and crossed over the great bridge, there went clanking by in chains a hundred conscripts, torn from their homes in the Fayoum, bidding farewell for ever to their friends, receiving their last offerings, for they had no hope of return. He looked at their haggard and dusty faces, at their excoriated ankles, and his eyes closed in pain. All they felt he felt. What their homes were to them, these fellaheen, dragged forth to defend their country, to go into the desert and waste their lives under leaders tyrannous, cruel, and incompetent, his old open life, his innocence, his integrity, his truthfulness and character, were to him. By an impulsive act, by a rash blow, he had asserted his humanity; but he had

killed his fellow-man in anger. He knew that as that fatal blow had been delivered, there was no thought of punishment—it was blind anger and hatred: it was the ancient virus working which had filled the world with war, and armed it at the expense, the bitter and oppressive expense, of the toilers and the poor. The taxes for wars were wrung out of the sons of labour and sorrow. These poor fellaheen had paid taxes on everything they possessed. Taxes, taxes, nothing but taxes from the cradle! Their lands, houses, and palm-trees would be taxed still, when they would reap no more. And having given all save their lives, these lives they must now give under the whip and the chain and the sword.

As David looked at them in their single blue calico coverings, in which they had lived and slept—shivering in the cold night air upon the bare ground—these thoughts came to him; and he had a sudden longing to follow them and put the chains upon his own arms and legs, and go forth and suffer with them, and fight and die? To die were easy. To fight? . . . Was it then come to that? He was no longer a man of peace, but a man of the sword; no longer a man of the palm and the evangel, but a man of blood and of crime! He shrank back out of the glare of the sun; for it suddenly seemed to him that there was written upon his forehead, "*This is a brother of Cain.*" For the first time in his life he had a shrinking from the light, and from the sun which he had loved like a Persian, had, in a sense, unconsciously worshipped.

He was scarcely aware where he was. He had wandered on until he had come to the end of the bridge and into the great groups of traffickers who, at this place, made a market of their wares. Here sat a seller of sugar-

cane; there wandered, clanking his brasses, a merchant of sweet waters; there shouted a cheap-jack of the Nile the virtues of a knife from Sheffield. Yonder a camel-driver squatted and counted his earnings; and a sheep-dealer haggled with the owner of a ghiassa bound for the sands of the North. The curious came about him and looked at him, but he did not see or hear. He sat upon a stone, his gaze upon the river, following with his eyes, yet without consciously observing, the dark riverine population whose ways are hidden, who know only the law of the river and spend their lives in eluding it—pirates and brigands now, and yet again the peaceful porters of commerce.

To his mind, never a criminal in this land but less a criminal than he! For their standard was a standard of might the only right; but he—his whole life had been nurtured in an atmosphere of right and justice, had been a spiritual demonstration against force. He was without fear, as he was without an undue love of life. The laying down of his life had never been presented to him; and yet, now that his conscience was his only judge, and it condemned him, he would gladly have given his life to pay the price of blood.

That was impossible. His life was not his own to give, save by suicide; and that would be the unpardonable insult to God and humanity. He had given his word to the woman, and he would keep it. In those brief moments she must have suffered more than most men suffer in a long life. Not her hand, however, but his, had committed the deed. And yet—a sudden wave of pity for her rushed over him, because the conviction seized him that she would also in her heart take upon herself the burden of his guilt as though it were her own. He had seen it in the look of her face last night.

For the sake of her future it was her duty to shield herself from any imputation which might as unjustly as scandalously arise, if the facts of that black hour ever became known— Ever became known? The thought that there might be some human eye which had seen, which knew, sent a shiver through him.

"I would give my life a thousand times rather than that," he said aloud to the swift-flowing river. His head sank on his breast. His lips murmured in prayer:

"But be merciful to me, Thou just Judge of Israel, for Thou hast made me, and Thou knowest whereof I am made. Here will I dedicate my life to Thee for the land's sake. Not for my soul's sake, O my God! If it be Thy will, let my soul be cast away; but for the soul of him whose body I slew, and for his land, let my life be the long sacrifice."

Dreams he had had the night before—terrible dreams, which he could never forget; dreams of a fugitive being hunted through the world, escaping and eluding, only to be hemmed in once more; on and on till he grew grey and gaunt, and the hunt suddenly ended in a great morass, into which he plunged with the howling world behind him. The grey, dank mists came down on him, his footsteps sank deeper and deeper, and ever the cries, as of damned spirits, grew in his ears. Mocking shapes flitted past him, the wings of obscene birds buffeted him, the morass grew up about him; and now it was all a red moving mass like a dead sea heaving about him. With a moan of agony he felt the dolorous flood above his shoulders, and then a cry pierced the gloom and the loathsome misery, and a voice he knew called to him, "David, David, I am coming!" and he had awaked with the old hallucination of his uncle's voice calling to him in the dawn.

It came to him now as he sat by the water-side, and he raised his face to the sun and to the world. The idlers had left him alone; none were staring at him now. They were all intent on their own business, each man labouring after his kind. He heard the voice of a river-man as he toiled at a rope standing on the corn that filled his ghiassa from end to end, from keel to gunwale. The man was singing a wild chant of cheerful labour, the soul of the hard-smitten of the earth rising above the rack and burden of the body:

"O, the garden where to-day we sow and to-morrow we reap!
O, the sakkia turning by the garden walls;
O, the onion-field and the date-tree growing,
And my hand on the plough—by the blessing of God;
Strength of my soul, O my brother, all's well!"

The meaning of the song got into his heart. He pressed his hand to his breast with a sudden gesture. It touched something hard. It was his flute. Mechanically he had put it in his pocket when he dressed in the morning. He took it out and looked at it lovingly. Into it he had poured his soul in the old days—days, centuries away, it seemed now. It should still be the link with the old life.

He rose and walked towards his home again. The future spread clearly before him. Rapine, murder, tyranny, oppression, were round him on every side, and the ruler of the land called him to his counsels. Here a great duty lay—his life for this land, his life, and his love, and his faith. He would expiate his crime and his sin, the crime of homicide for which he alone was responsible, the sin of secrecy for which he and another were responsible. And that other? If only there had been but one word of understanding between them before she left!

At the door of his house stood the American whom he had met at the citadel yesterday—it seemed a hundred years ago.

"I've got a letter for you," Lacey said. "The lady's aunt and herself are cousins of mine more or less removed, and originally at home in the U. S. A. a generation ago. Her mother was an American. She didn't know your name—Miss Hylda Maryon, I mean. I told her, but there wasn't time to put it on." He handed over the unaddressed envelope.

David opened the letter, and read:

"I have seen the papers. I do not understand what has happened, but I know that all is well. If it were not so, I would not go. That is the truth. Grateful I am, oh, believe me! So grateful that I do not yet know what is the return which I must make. But the return will be made. I hear of what has come to you—how easily I might have destroyed all! My thoughts blind me. You are great and good; you will know at least that I go because it is the only thing to do. I fly from the storm with a broken wing. Take now my promise to pay what I owe in the hour Fate wills—or in the hour of your need. You can trust him who brings this to you; he is a distant cousin of my own. Do not judge him by his odd and foolish words. They hide a good character, and he has a strong nature. He wants work to do. Can you give it? Farewell."

David put the letter in his pocket, a strange quietness about his heart.

He scarcely realised what Lacey was saying. "Great girl that. Troubled about something in England, I guess. Going straight back."

David thanked him for the letter. Lacey became red in the face. He tried to say something, but failed.

"Thee wishes to say something to me, friend?" asked David.

"I'm full up; I can't speak. But, say—"

"I am going to the Palace now. Come back at noon if you will."

He wrung David's hand in gratitude. "You're going to do it. You're going to do it. I see it. It's a great game—like Abe Lincoln's. Say, let me black your boots while you're doing it, will you?"

David pressed his hand.

CHAPTER IX

THE LETTER, THE NIGHT, AND THE WOMAN

"To-day has come the fulfilment of my dream, Faith. I am given to my appointed task; I am set on a road of life in which there is no looking back. My dreams of the past are here begun in very truth and fact. When, in the night, I heard Uncle Benn calling, when in the Meeting-house voices said, 'Come away, come away, and labour, thou art idle,' I could hear my heart beat in the ardour to be off. Yet I knew not whither. Now I know.

"Last night the Prince Pasha called me to his Council, made me adviser, confidant, as one who has the ear of his captain—after he had come to terms with me upon that which Uncle Benn left of land and gold. Think not that he tempted me.

"Last night I saw favourites look upon me with hate because of Kaïd's favour, though the great hall was filled with show of cheerful splendour, and men smiled and feasted. To-day I know that in the Palace where I was summoned to my first duty with the Prince, every step I took was shadowed, every motion recorded, every look or word noted and set down. I have no fear of them. They are not subtle enough for the unexpected acts of honesty in the life of a true man. Yet I do not wonder men fail to keep honest in the midst of this splendour, where all is strife as to who shall have the Prince's favour; who shall enjoy the fruits of bribery, backsheesh, and monopoly; who shall wring from the slave and the toil-ridden fellah the coin his poor body mints at the *corvée*, in his own taxed fields of dourha and cucumbers.

"Is this like anything we ever dreamed at Hamley, Faith? Yet here am I set, and here shall I stay till the skein be ravelled out. Soon I shall go into the desert upon a mission to the cities

of the South, to Dongola, Khartoum, and Darfûr and beyond; for there is trouble yonder, and war is near, unless it is given to me to bring peace. So I must bend to my study of Arabic, which I am thankful I learned long ago. And I must not forget to say that I shall take with me on my journey that faithful Muslim Ebn Ezra. Others I shall take also, but of them I shall write hereafter.

"I shall henceforth be moving in the midst of things which I was taught to hate. I pray that I may not hate them less as time goes on. To-morrow I shall breathe the air of intrigue, shall hear footsteps of spies behind me wherever I go; shall know that even the roses in the garden have ears; that the ground under my feet will telegraph my thoughts. Shall I be true? Shall I at last whisper, and follow, and evade, believe in no one, much less in myself, steal in and out of men's confidences to use them for my own purposes? Does any human being know what he can bear of temptation or of the daily pressure of the life around him? what powers of resistance are in his soul? how long the vital energy will continue to throw off the never-ending seduction, the freshening force of evil? Therein lies the power of evil, that it is ever new, ever fortified by continuous conquest and achievements. It has the rare fire of aggression; is ever more upon the offence than upon the defence; has, withal, the false lure of freedom from restraint, the throbbing force of sympathy.

"Such things I dreamed not of in Soolsby's hut upon the hill, Faith, though, indeed, that seemed a time of trial and sore-heartedness. How large do small issues seem till we have faced the momentous things! It is true that the larger life has pleasures and expanding capacities; but it is truer still that it has perils, events which try the soul as it is never tried in the smaller life—unless, indeed, the soul be that of the Epicurean. The Epicurean I well understand, and in his way I might have walked with a wicked grace. I have in me some hidden depths of luxury, a secret heart of pleasure, an understanding for the forbidden thing. I could have walked the broad way with a laughing heart, though, in truth, habit of mind and desire have kept me in the better path. But offences must come, and woe to him from whom the offence cometh! I have begun now, and only now, to feel the storms that shake us to our farthest

cells of life. I begin to see how near good is to evil; how near faith is to unfaith; and how difficult it is to judge from actions only; how little we can know to-day what we shall feel to-morrow. Yet one must learn to see deeper, to find motive, not in acts that shake the faith, but in character which needs no explanation, which—"

He paused, disturbed. Then he raised his head, as though not conscious of what was breaking the course of his thoughts. Presently he realised a low, hurried knocking at his door. He threw a hand over his eyes, and sprang up. An instant later the figure of a woman, deeply veiled, stood within the room, beside the table where he had been writing. There was silence as they faced each other, his back against the door.

"Oh, do you not know me?" she said at last, and sank into the chair where he had been sitting.

The question was unnecessary, and she knew it was so; but she could not bear the strain of the silence. She seemed to have risen out of the letter he had been writing; and had he not been writing of her—of what concerned them both? How mean and small-hearted he had been, to have thought for an instant that she had not the highest courage, though in going she had done the discreeter, safer thing. But she had come—she had come!

All this was in his eyes, though his face was pale and still. He was almost rigid with emotion, for the ancient habit of repose and self-command of the Quaker people was upon him.

"Can you not see—do you not know?" she repeated, her back upon him now, her face still veiled, her hands making a swift motion of distress.

"Has thee found in the past that thee is so soon forgotten?"

"Oh, do not blame me!" She raised her veil suddenly, and showed a face as pale as his own, and in the eyes a fiery brightness. "I did not know. It was so hard to come—do not blame me. I went to Alexandria —I felt that I must fly; the air around me seemed full of voices crying out. Did you not understand why I went?"

"I understand," he said, coming forward slowly. "Thee should not have returned. In the way I go now the watchers go also."

"If I had not come, you would never have understood," she answered quickly. "I am not sorry I went. I was so frightened, so shaken. My only thought was to get away from the terrible Thing. But I should have been sorry all my life long had I not come back to tell you what I feel, and that I shall never forget. All my life I shall be grateful. You have saved me from a thousand deaths. Ah, if I could give you but one life! Yet—yet—oh, do not think but that I would tell you the whole truth, though I am not wholly truthful. See, I love my place in the world more than I love my life; and but for you I should have lost all."

He made a protesting motion. "The debt is mine, in truth. But for you I should never have known what, perhaps—" He paused.

His eyes were on hers, gravely speaking what his tongue faltered to say. She looked and looked, but did not understand. She only saw troubled depths, lighted by a soul of kindling purpose. "Tell me," she said, awed.

"Through you I have come to know—" He paused again. What he was going to say, truthful though it was, must hurt her, and she had been sorely hurt already. He put his thoughts more gently, more vaguely.

"By what happened I have come to see what matters in life. I was behind the hedge. I have broken through upon the road. I know my goal now. The highway is before me."

She felt the tragedy in his words, and her voice shook as she spoke. "I wish I knew life better. Then I could make a better answer. You are on the road, you say. But I feel that it is a hard and cruel road—oh, I understand that at least! Tell me, please, tell me the whole truth. You are hiding from me what you feel. I have upset your life, have I not? You are a Quaker, and Quakers are better than all other Christian people, are they not? Their faith is peace, and for me, you—" She covered her face with her hands for an instant, but turned quickly and looked him in the eyes: "For me you put your hand upon the clock of a man's life, and stopped it."

She got to her feet with a passionate gesture, but he put a hand gently upon her arm, and she sank back again. "Oh, it was not you; it was I who did it!" she said. "You did what any man of honour would have done, what a brother would have done."

"What I did is a matter for myself only," he responded quickly. "Had I never seen your face again it would have been the same. You were the occasion; the thing I did had only one source, my own heart and mind. There might have been another way; but for that way, or for the way I did take, you could not be responsible."

"How generous you are!" Her eyes swam with tears; she leaned over the table where he had been writing, and the tears dropped upon his letter. Presently she realised this, and drew back, then made as though to dry the tears from the paper with her handkerchief. As

she did so the words that he had written met her eye: "'*But offences must come, and woe to him from whom the offence cometh!*' I have begun now, and only now, to feel the storms that shake us to our farthest cells of life."

She became very still. He touched her arm and said heavily: "Come away, come away."

She pointed to the words she had read. "I could not help but see, and now I know what this must mean to you."

"Thee must go at once," he urged. "Thee should not have come. Thee was safe—none knew. A few hours and it would all have been far behind. We might never have met again."

Suddenly she gave a low, hysterical laugh. "You think you hide the real thing from me. I know I'm ignorant and selfish and feeble-minded, but I can see farther than you think. You want to tell the truth about—about *it*, because you are honest and hate hiding things, because you want to be punished, and so pay the price. Oh, I can understand! If it were not for me you would not. . . ." With a sudden wild impulse she got to her feet. "And you shall not," she cried. "I will not have it." Colour came rushing to her cheeks. "I will not have it. I will not put myself so much in your debt. I will not demand so much of you. I will face it all. I will stand alone."

There was a touch of indignation in her voice. Somehow she seemed moved to anger against him. Her hands were clasped at her side rigidly, her pulses throbbing. He stood looking at her fixedly, as though trying to realise her. His silence agitated her still further, and she spoke excitedly:

"I could have, would have, killed him myself with-

out a moment's regret. He had planned, planned—ah, God, can you not see it all! I would have taken his life without a thought. I was mad to go upon such an adventure, but I meant no ill. I had not one thought that I could not have cried out from the housetops, and he had in his heart—he had what you saw. But you repent that you killed him—by accident, it was by accident. Do you realise how many times others have been trapped by him as was I? Do you not see what he was—as I see now? Did he not say as much to me before you came, when I was dumb with terror? Did he not make me understand what his whole life had been? Did I not see in a flash the women whose lives he had spoiled and killed? Would I have had pity? Would I have had remorse? No, no, no! I was frightened when it was done, I was horrified, but I was not sorry; and I am not sorry. It was to be. It was the true end to his vileness. Ah!"

She shuddered, and buried her face in her hands for a moment, then went on: "I can never forgive myself for going to the Palace with him. I was mad for experience, for mystery; I wanted more than the ordinary share of knowledge. I wanted to probe things. Yet I meant no wrong. I thought then nothing of which I shall ever be ashamed. But I shall always be ashamed because I knew him, because he thought that I—oh, if I were a man, I should be glad that I had killed him, for the sake of all honest women!"

He remained silent. His look was not upon her, he seemed lost in a dream; but his face was fixed in trouble.

She misunderstood his silence. "You had the courage, the impulse to—to do it," she said keenly; "you have not the courage to justify it. I will not have it so.

I will tell the truth to all the world. I will not shrink. I shrank yesterday because I was afraid of the world; to-day I will face it, I will—"

She stopped suddenly, and another look flashed into her face. Presently she spoke in a different tone; a new light had come upon her mind. "But I see," she added. "To tell all is to make you the victim, too, of what he did. It is in your hands; it is all in your hands; and I cannot speak unless—unless you are ready also."

There was an unintended touch of scorn in her voice. She had been troubled and tried beyond bearing, and her impulsive nature revolted at his silence. She misunderstood him, or, if she did not wholly misunderstand him, she was angry at what she thought was a needless remorse or sensitiveness. Did not the man deserve his end?

"There is only one course to pursue," he rejoined quietly, "and that is the course we entered upon last night. I neither doubted yourself nor your courage. Thee must not turn back now. Thee must not alter the course which was your own making, and the only course which thee could, or I should, take. I have planned my life according to the word I gave you. I could not turn back now. We are strangers, and we must remain so. Thee will go from here now, and we must not meet again. I am—"

"I know who you are," she broke in. "I know what your religion is; that fighting and war and bloodshed is a sin to you."

"I am of no family or place in England," he went on calmly. "I come of yeoman and trading stock; I have nothing in common with people of rank. Our lines of life will not cross. It is well that it should be so. As

to what happened—that which I may feel has nothing to do with whether I was justified or no. But if thee has thought that I have repented doing what I did, let that pass for ever from your mind. I know that I should do the same, yes, even a hundred times. I did according to my nature. Thee must not now be punished cruelly for a thing thee did not do. Silence is the only way of safety or of justice. We must not speak of this again. We must each go our own way."

Her eyes were moist. She reached out a hand to him timidly. "Oh, forgive me," she added brokenly, "I am so vain, so selfish, and that makes one blind to the truth. It is all clearer now. You have shown me that I was right in my first impulse, and that is all I can say for myself. I shall pray all my life that it will do you no harm in the end."

She remained silent, for a moment adjusting her veil, preparing to go. Presently she spoke again: "I shall always want to know about you—what is happening to you. How could it be otherwise?"

She was half realising one of the deepest things in existence, that the closest bond between two human beings is a bond of secrecy upon a thing which vitally, fatally concerns both or either. It is a power at once malevolent and beautiful. A secret like that of David and Hylda will do in a day what a score of years could not accomplish, will insinuate confidences which might never be given to the nearest or dearest. In neither was any feeling of the heart begotten by their experiences; and yet they had gone deeper in each other's lives than any one either had known in a lifetime. They had struck a deeper note than love or friendship. They had touched the chord of a secret and mutual experience which had gone so far that their lives would be in-

fluenced by it for ever after. Each understood this in a different way.

Hylda looked towards the letter lying on the table. It had raised in her mind, not a doubt, but an undefined, undefinable anxiety. He saw the glance, and said: "I was writing to one who has been as a sister to me. She was my mother's sister though she is almost as young as I. Her name is Faith. There is nothing there of what concerns thee and me, though it would make no difference if she knew." Suddenly a thought seemed to strike him. "The secret is of thee and me. There is safety. If it became another's, there might be peril. The thing shall be between us only, for ever?"

"Do you think that I—"

"My instinct tells me a woman of sensitive mind might one day, out of an unmerciful honesty, tell her husband—"

"I am not married—"

"But one day—"

She interrupted him. "Sentimental egotism will not rule me. Tell me," she added, "tell me one thing before I go. You said that your course was set. What is it?"

"I remain here," he answered quietly. "I remain in the service of Prince Kaïd."

"It is a dreadful government, an awful service—"

"That is why I stay."

"You are going to try and change things here—you alone?"

"I hope not alone, in time."

"You are going to leave England, your friends, your family, your place—in Hamley, was it not? My aunt has read of you—my cousin—" she paused.

"I had no place in Hamley. Here is my place.

Distance has little to do with understanding or affection. I had an uncle here in the East for twenty-five years, yet I knew him better than all others in the world. Space is nothing if minds are in sympathy. My uncle talked to me over seas and lands. I felt him, heard him speak."

"You think that minds can speak to minds, no matter what the distance—real and definite things?"

"If I were parted from one very dear to me, I would try to say to him or her what was in my mind, not by written word only, but by the flying thought."

She sat down suddenly, as though overwhelmed. "Oh, if that were possible!" she said. "If only one could send a thought like that!" Then with an impulse, and the flicker of a sad smile, she reached out a hand. "If ever in the years to come you want to speak to me, will you try to make me understand, as your uncle did with you?"

"I cannot tell," he answered. "That which is deepest within us obeys only the laws of its need. By instinct it turns to where help lies, as a wild deer, fleeing from captivity, makes for the veldt and the watercourse."

She got to her feet again. "I want to pay my debt," she said solemnly. "It is a debt that one day must be paid—so awful—so awful!" A swift change passed over her. She shuddered, and grew white. "I said brave words just now," she added in a hoarse whisper, "but now I see him lying there cold and still, and you stooping over him. I see you touch his breast, his pulse. I see you close his eyes. One instant full of the pulse of life, the next struck out into infinite space. Oh, I shall never—how can I ever—forget!" She turned her head away from him, then composed herself

again, and said quietly, with anxious eyes: "Why was nothing said or done? Perhaps they are only waiting. Perhaps they know. Why was it announced that he died in his bed at home?"

"I cannot tell. When a man in high places dies in Egypt, it may be one death or another. No one inquires too closely. He died in Kaïd Pasha's Palace, where other men have died, and none has inquired too closely. To-day they told me at the Palace that his carriage was seen to leave with himself and Mizraim the Chief Eunuch. Whatever the object, he was secretly taken to his house from the Palace, and his brother Nahoum seized upon his estate in the early morning. I think that no one knows the truth. But it is all in the hands of God. We can do nothing more. Thee must go. Thee should not have come. In England thee will forget, as thee should forget. In Egypt I shall remember, as I should remember."

"*Thee*," she repeated softly. "I love the Quaker *thee*. My grandmother was an American Quaker. She always spoke like that. Will you not use *thee* and *thou* in speaking to me, always?"

"We are not likely to speak together in any language in the future," he answered. "But now thee must go, and I will—"

"My cousin, Mr. Lacey, is waiting for me in the garden," she answered. "I shall be safe with him."

She moved towards the door. He caught the handle to turn it, when there came the noise of loud talking, and the sound of footsteps in the court-yard. He opened the door slightly and looked out, then closed it quickly.

"It is Nahoum Pasha," he said. "Please, the other room," he added, and pointed to a curtain. "There is a window leading on a garden. The garden-gate opens

on a street leading to the Ezbekiah Square and your hotel."

"But, no, I shall stay here," she said. She drew down her veil, then taking from her pocket another, arranged it also, so that her face was hidden.

"Thee must go," he said—"go quickly." Again he pointed.

"I will remain," she rejoined, with determination, and seated herself in a chair.

CHAPTER X

THE FOUR WHO KNEW

THERE was a knocking at the door. David opened it. Nahoum Pasha stepped inside, and stood still a moment looking at Hylda. Then he made low salutation to her, touched his hand to his lips and breast saluting David, and waited.

"What is thy business, pasha?" asked David quietly, and motioned towards a chair.

"May thy path be on the high hills, Saadat-el-básha. I come for a favour at thy hands." Nahoum sat down.

"What favour is mine to give to Nahoum Pasha?"

"The Prince has given thee supreme place—it was mine but yesterday. It is well. To the deserving be the fruits of deserving."

"Is merit, then, so truly rewarded here?" asked David quietly.

"The Prince saw merit at last when he chose your Excellency for councillor."

"How shall I show merit, then, in the eyes of Nahoum Pasha?"

"Even by urging the Prince to give me place under him again. Not as heretofore—that is thy place—yet where it may be. I have capacity. I can aid thee in the great task. Thou wouldst remake our Egypt—and my heart is with you. I would rescue, not destroy. In years gone by I tried to do good to this land, and I failed. I was alone. I had not the strength to fight the forces around me. I was overcome. I had too

little faith. But my heart was with the right—I am an Armenian and a Christian of the ancient faith. I am in sorrow. Death has humbled me. My brother Foorgat Bey—may flowers bloom for ever on his grave! —he is dead,"—his eyes were fixed on those of David, as with a perfectly assured candour—"and my heart is like an empty house. But man must not be idle and live—if Kaïd lets me live. I have riches. Are not Foorgat's riches mine, his Palace, his gardens, his cattle, and his plantations, are they not mine? I may sit in the court-yard and hear the singers, may listen to the tale-tellers by the light of the moon; I may hear the tales of Al-Raschid chanted by one whose tongue never falters, and whose voice is like music; after the manner of the East I may give bread and meat to the poor at sunset; I may call the dancers to the feast. But what comfort shall it give? I am no longer a youth. I would work. I would labour for the land of Egypt, for by work shall we fulfil ourselves, redeem ourselves. Saadat, 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. What work to do in Egypt save to help the land, and how shall one help, save in the Prince's service? There can be no reform from outside. If I laboured for better things outside Kaïd's Palace, how long dost thou think I should escape the Nile, or the diamond-dust in my coffee? The work which I did, is it not so that it, with much more, falls now to thy hands, Saadat, with a confidence from Kaïd that never was mine?"

"I sought not the office."

"Have I a word of blame? I come to ask for work to do with thee. Do I not know Prince Kaïd? He had come to distrust us all. As stale water were we in his

taste. He had no pleasure in us, and in our deeds he found only stones of stumbling. He knew not whom to trust. One by one we all had yielded to ceaseless intrigue and common distrust of each other, until no honest man was left; till all were intent to save their lives by holding power; for in this land to lose power is to lose life. No man who has been in high place, has had the secrets of the Palace and the ear of the Prince, lives after he has lost favour. The Prince, for his safety, must ensure silence, and the only silence in Egypt is the grave. In thee, Saadat, Kaïd has found an honest man. Men will call thee mad, if thou remainest honest, but that is within thine own bosom and with fate. For me, thou hast taken my place, and more. Malaish, it is the decree of fate, and I have no anger. I come to ask thee to save my life, and then to give me work."

"How shall I save thy life?"

"By reconciling the Effendina to my living, and then by giving me service, where I shall be near to thee; where I can share with thee, though it be as the ant beside the beaver, the work of salvation in Egypt. I am rich since my brother was—" He paused; no covert look was in his eyes, no sign of knowledge, nothing but meditation and sorrowful frankness—"since Foorgat passed away in peace, praise be to God! He lay on his bed in the morning, when one came to wake him, like a sleeping child, no sign of the struggle of death upon him."

A gasping sound came from the chair where Hylda sat; but he took no notice. He appeared to be unconscious of David's pain-drawn face, as he sat with hands upon his knees, his head bent forward listening, as though lost to the world.

"So did Foorgat, my brother, die while yet in the fulness of his manhood, life beating high in his veins, with years before him to waste. He was a pleasure-lover, alas! he laid up no treasure of work accomplished; and so it was meet that he should die as he lived, in a moment of ease. And already he is forgotten. It is the custom here. He might have died by diamond-dust, and men would have set down their coffee-cups in surprise, and then would have forgotten; or he might have been struck down by the hand of an assassin, and, unless it was in the Palace, none would have paused to note it. And so the sands sweep over his steps upon the shore of time."

After the first exclamation of horror, Hylda had sat rigid, listening as though under a spell. Through her veil she gazed at Nahoum with a cramping pain at her heart, for he seemed ever on the verge of the truth she dreaded; and when he spoke the truth, as though unconsciously, she felt she must cry out and rush from the room. He recalled to her the scene in the little tapestried room as vividly as though it was there before her eyes, and it had for the moment all the effect of a hideous nightmare. At last, however, she met David's eyes, and they guided her, for in them was a steady strength and force which gave her confidence. At first he also had been overcome inwardly, but his nerves were cool, his head was clear, and he listened to Nahoum, thinking out his course meanwhile.

He owed this man much. He had taken his place, and by so doing had placed his life in danger. He had killed the brother upon the same day that he had dispossessed the favourite of office; and the debt was heavy. In office Nahoum had done after his kind, after the custom of the place and the people; and yet, as it

would seem, the man had had stirrings within him towards a higher path. He, at any rate, had not amassed riches out of his position, and so much could not be said of any other servant of the Prince Pasha. Much he had heard of Nahoum's powerful will, hidden under a genial exterior, and behind his friendly, smiling blue eyes. He had heard also of cruelty—of banishment, and of enemies removed from his path suddenly, never to be seen again; but, on the whole, men spoke with more admiration of him than of any other public servant, Armenian Christian in a Mahommedan country though he was. That very day Kaïd had said that if Nahoum had been less eager to control the State, he might still have held his place. Besides, the man was a Christian—of a mystic, half-legendary, obscure Christianity; yet having in his mind the old faith, its essence and its meaning, perhaps. Might not this Oriental mind, with that faith, be a power to redeem the land? It was a wonderful dream, in which he found the way, as he thought, to atone somewhat to this man for a dark injury done.

When Nahoum stopped speaking David said: "But if I would have it, if it were well that it should be, I doubt I have the power to make it so."

"Saadat-el-básha, Kaïd believes in thee to-day; he will not believe to-morrow if thou dost remain without initiative. Action, however startling, will be proof of fitness. His Highness shakes a long spear. Those who ride with him must do battle with the same valour. Excellency, I have now great riches—since Death smote Foorgat Bey in the forehead"—still his eyes conveyed no meaning, though Hylda shrank back—"and I would use them for the good thou wouldst do here. Money will be needed, and sufficient will not be at thy

hand—not till new ledgers be opened, new balances struck."

He turned to Hylda quietly, and with a continued air of innocence said: "Shall it not be so—madame? Thou, I doubt not, are of his kin. It would seem so, though I ask pardon if it be not so—wilt thou not urge his Excellency to restore me to Kaïd's favour? I know little of the English, though I know them humane and honest; but my brother, Foorgat Bey, he was much among them, lived much in England, was a friend to many great English. Indeed, on the evening that he died I saw him in the gallery of the banquet-room with an English lady—can one be mistaken in an English face? Perhaps he cared for her; perhaps that was why he smiled as he lay upon his bed, never to move again. Madame, perhaps in England thou mayst have known my brother. If that is so, I ask thee to speak for me to his Excellency. My life is in danger, and I am too young to go as my brother went. I do not wish to die in middle age, as my brother died."

He had gone too far. In David's mind there was no suspicion that Nahoum knew the truth. The suggestion in his words had seemed natural; but, from the first, a sharp suspicion was in the mind of Hylda, and his last words had convinced her that if Nahoum did not surely know the truth, he suspected it all too well. Her instinct had pierced far; and as she realised his suspicions, perhaps his certainty, and heard his words of covert insult, which, as she saw, David did not appreciate, anger and determination grew in her. Yet she felt that caution must mark her words, and that nothing but danger lay in resentment. She felt the everlasting indignity behind the quiet, youthful eyes, the determined power of the man; but she saw also that, for

the present, the course Nahoum suggested was the only course to take. And David must not even feel the suspicion in her own mind, that Nahoum knew or suspected the truth. If David thought that Nahoum knew, the end of all would come at once. It was clear, however, that Nahoum meant to be silent, or he would have taken another course of action. Danger lay in every direction, but, to her mind, the least danger lay in following Nahoum's wish.

She slowly raised her veil, showing a face very still now, with eyes as steady as David's. David started at her action, he thought it rash; but the courage of it pleased him, too.

"You are not mistaken," she said slowly in French; "your brother was known to me. I had met him in England. It will be a relief to all his friends to know that he passed away peacefully." She looked him in the eyes determinedly. "Monsieur Claridge is not my kinsman, but he is my fellow-countryman. If you mean well by monsieur, your knowledge and your riches should help him on his way. But your past is no guarantee of good faith, as you will acknowledge."

He looked her in the eyes with a far meaning. "*But I am giving guarantees of good faith now,*" he said softly. "Will you—not?"

She understood. It was clear that he meant peace, for the moment at least.

"If I had influence I would advise him to reconcile you to Prince Kaïd," she said quietly, then turned to David with an appeal in her eyes.

David stood up. "I will do what I can," he said. "If thee means as well by Egypt as I mean by thee, all may be well for all."

"Saadat! Saadat!" said Nahoum, with show of as-

sumed feeling, and made salutation. Then to Hylda, making lower salutation still, he said: "Thou hast lifted from my neck the yoke. Thou hast saved me from the shadow and the dust. I am thy slave." His eyes were like a child's, wide and confiding.

He turned towards the door, and was about to open it, when there came a knocking, and he stepped back. Hylda drew down her veil. David opened the door cautiously and admitted Mizraim the Chief Eunuch. Mizraim's eyes searched the room, and found Nahoum.

"Pasha," he said to Nahoum, "may thy bones never return to dust, nor the light of thine eyes darken! There is danger."

Nahoum nodded, but did not speak.

"Shall I speak, then?" He paused and made low salutation to David, saying, "Excellency, I am thine ox to be slain."

"Speak, son of the flowering oak," said Nahoum, with a sneer in his voice. "What blessing dost thou bring?"

"The Effendina has sent for thee."

Nahoum's eyes flashed. "By thee, lion of Abdin?"

The lean, ghastly being smiled. "He has sent a company of soldiers and Achmet Pasha."

"Achmet! Is it so? They are here, Mizraim, watcher of the morning?"

"They are at thy palace—I am here, light of Egypt."

"How knewest thou I was here?"

Mizraim salaamed. "A watch was set upon thee this morning early. The watcher was of my slaves. He brought the word to me that thou wast here now. A watcher also was set upon thee, Excellency"—he turned to David. "He also was of my slaves. Word was delivered to his Highness that thou"—he turned to Nahoum again—"wast in thy palace, and Achmet Pasha

went thither. He found thee not. Now the city is full of watchers, and Achmet goes from bazaar to bazaar, from house to house which thou was wont to frequent —and thou art here."

"What wouldst thou have me do, Mizraim?"

"Thou art here; is it the house of a friend or a foe?"

Nahoum did not answer. His eyes were fixed in thought upon the floor, but he was smiling. He seemed without fear.

"But if this be the house of a friend, is he safe here?" asked David.

"For this night, it may be," answered Mizraim, "till other watchers be set, who are no slaves of mine. To-night, here, of all places in Cairo, he is safe; for who could look to find him where thou art who hast taken from him his place and office, Excellency—on whom the stars shine for ever! But in another day, if my lord Nahoum be not forgiven by the Effendina, a hundred watchers will pierce the darkest corner of the bazaar, the smallest room in Cairo."

David turned to Nahoum. "Peace be to thee, friend. Abide here till to-morrow, when I will speak for thee to his Highness, and, I trust, bring thee pardon. It shall be so—but I shall prevail," he added, with slow decision; "I shall prevail with him. My reasons shall convince his Highness."

"I can help thee with great reasons, Saadat," said Nahoum. "Thou shalt prevail. I can tell thee that which will convince Kaïd."

While they were speaking, Hylda had sat motionless watching. At first it seemed to her that a trap had been set, and that David was to be the victim of Oriental duplicity; but revolt, as she did, from the miserable creature before them, she saw at last that he spoke the truth.

"Thee will remain under this roof to-night, pasha?" asked David.

"I will stay if thy goodness will have it so," answered Nahoum slowly. "It is not my way to hide, but when the storm comes it is well to shelter."

Salaaming low, Mizraim withdrew, his last glance being thrown towards Hylda, who met his look with a repugnance which made her face rigid. She rose and put on her gloves. Nahoum rose also, and stood watching her respectfully.

"Thee will go?" asked David, with a movement towards her.

She inclined her head. "We have finished our business, and it is late," she answered.

David looked at Nahoum. "Thee will rest here, pasha, in peace. In a moment I will return." He took up his hat.

There was a sudden flash of Nahoum's eyes, as though he saw an outcome of the intention which pleased him, but Hylda saw the flash, and her senses were at once alarmed.

"There is no need to accompany me," she said. "My cousin waits for me."

David opened the door leading into the court-yard. It was dark, save for the light of a brazier of coals. A short distance away, near the outer gate, glowed a star of red light, and the fragrance of a strong cigar came over.

"Say, looking for me?" said a voice, and a figure moved towards David. "Yours to command, pasha, yours to command." Lacey from Chicago held out his hand.

"Thee is welcome, friend," said David.

"She's ready, I suppose. Wonderful person, that.

Stands on her own feet every time. She don't seem as though she came of the same stock as me, does she?"

"I will bring her if thee will wait, friend."

"I'm waiting." Lacey drew back to the gateway again and leaned against the wall, his cigar blazing in the dusk.

A moment later David appeared in the garden again, with the slim, graceful figure of the girl who stood "upon her own feet." David drew her aside for a moment.

"Thee is going at once to England?" he asked.

"To-morrow to Alexandria. There is a steamer next day for Marseilles. In a fortnight more I shall be in England."

"Thee must forget Egypt," he said.

"Remembrance is not a thing of the will," she answered.

"It is thy duty to forget. Thee is young, and it is spring with thee. Spring should be in thy heart. Thee has seen a shadow; but let it not fright thee."

"My only fear is that I may forget," she answered.

"Yet thee will forget."

With a motion towards Lacey he moved to the gate. Suddenly she turned to him and touched his arm. "You will be a great man here in Egypt," she said. "You will have enemies without number. The worst of your enemies always will be your guest to-night."

He did not, for a moment, understand. "Nahoum?" he asked. "I take his place. It would not be strange; but I will win him to me."

"You will never win him," she answered. "Oh, trust my instinct in this! Watch him. Beware of him."

David smiled slightly. "I shall have need to beware of many. I am sure thee does well to caution me. Farewell," he added.

"If it should be that I can ever help you—" she said, and paused.

"Thee has helped me," he replied. "The world is a desert. Caravans from all quarters of the sun meet at the cross-roads. One gives the other food or drink or medicine, and they move on again. And all grows dim with time. And the camel-drivers are forgotten; but the cross-roads remain, and the food and the drink and the medicine and the cattle helped each caravan upon the way. Is it not enough?"

She placed her hand in his. It lay there for a moment. "God be with thee, friend," he said.

The next instant Thomas Tilman Lacey's drawling voice broke the silence.

"There's something catching about these nights in Egypt. I suppose it's the air. No wind—just the stars, and the ultramarine, and the nothing to do but lay me down and sleep. It doesn't give you the jim-jumps like Mexico. It makes you forget the world, doesn't it? You'd do things here that you wouldn't do anywhere else."

The gate was opened by the bowáb, and the two passed through. David was standing by the brazier, his hand held unconsciously over the coals, his eyes turned towards them. The reddish flame from the fire lit up his face under the broad-brimmed hat. His head, slightly bowed, was thrust forward to the dusk. Hylda looked at him steadily for a moment. Their eyes met, though hers were in the shade. Again Lacey spoke.

"Don't be anxious. I'll see her safe back. Good-bye. Give my love to the girls."

David stood looking at the closed gate with eyes full of thought and wonder and trouble. He was not thinking of the girl. There was no sentimental reverie in

his look. Already his mind was engaged in scrutiny of the circumstances in which he was set. He realised fully his situation. The idealism which had been born with him had met its reward in a labour herculean at the least, and the infinite drudgery of the practical issues came in a terrible pressure of conviction to his mind. The mind did not shrink from any thought of the dangers in which he would be placed, from any vision of the struggle he must have with intrigue, and treachery and vileness. In a dim, half-realised way he felt that honesty and truth would be invincible weapons with a people who did not know them. They would be embarrassed, if not baffled, by a formula of life and conduct which they could not understand.

It was not these matters that vexed him now, but the underlying forces of life set in motion by the blow which killed a fellow-man. This fact had driven him to an act of redemption unparalleled in its intensity and scope; but he could not tell—and this was the thought that shook his being—how far this act itself, inspiring him to a dangerous and immense work in life, would sap the best that was in him, since it must remain a secret crime, for which he could not openly atone. He asked himself as he stood by the brazier, the bowáb apathetically rolling cigarettes at his feet, whether, in the flow of circumstance, the fact that he could not make open restitution, or take punishment for his unlawful act, would undermine the structure of his character. He was on the threshold of his career: action had not yet begun; he was standing like a swimmer on a high shore, looking into depths beneath which have never been plumbed by mortal man, wondering what currents, what rocks, lay beneath the surface of the blue. Would his strength, his knowledge, his skill, be equal to the

enterprise? Would he emerge safe and successful, or be carried away by some strong undercurrent, be battered on unseen rocks?

He turned with a calm face to the door behind which sat the displaced favourite of the Prince, his mind at rest, the trouble gone out of his eyes.

"Uncle Benn! Uncle Benn!" he said to himself, with a warmth at his heart as he opened the door and stepped inside.

Nahoum sat sipping coffee. A cigarette was between his fingers. He touched his hand to his forehead and his breast as David closed the door and hung his hat upon a nail. David's servant, Mahommed Hassan, whom he had had since first he came to Egypt, was gliding from the room—a large, square-shouldered fellow of over six feet, dressed in a plain blue yelek, but on his head the green turban of one who had done a pilgrimage to Mecca. Nahoum waved a hand after Mahommed and said:

"Whence came thy servant, Saadat?"

"He was my guide to Cairo. I picked him from the street."

Nahoum smiled. There was no malice in the smile, only, as it might seem, a frank humour. "Ah, your Excellency used independent judgment. Thou art a judge of men. But does it make any difference that the man is a thief and a murderer—a murderer?"

David's eyes darkened, as they were wont to do when he was moved or shocked.

"Shall one only deal, then, with those who have neither stolen nor slain—is that the rule of the just in Egypt?"

Nahoum raised his eyes to the ceiling as though in amiable inquiry, and began to finger a string of beads

as a nun might tell her paternosters. "If that were the rule," he answered, after a moment, "how should any man be served in Egypt? Hereabouts is a man's life held cheap, else I had not been thy guest to-night; and Kaïd's Palace itself would be empty, if every man in it must be honest. But it is the custom of the place for political errors to be punished by a hidden hand; we do not call it murder."

"What is murder, friend?"

"It is such a crime as that of Mahommed yonder, who killed—"

David interposed. "I do not wish to know his crime. That is no affair between thee and me."

Nahoum fingered his beads meditatively. "It was an affair of the housetops in his town of Manfaloot. I have only mentioned it because I know what view the English take of killing, and how set thou art to have thy household above reproach, as is meet in a Christian home. So, I took it, would be thy mind—which Heaven fill with light for Egypt's sake!—that thou wouldst have none about thee who were not above reproach, neither liars, nor thieves, nor murderers."

"But thee would serve with me, friend," rejoined David quietly. "Thee has men's lives against thy account."

"Else had mine been against their account."

"Was it not so with Mahommed? If so, according to the custom of the land, then Mahommed is as immune as thou art."

"Saadat, like thee I am a Christian, yet am I also Oriental, and what is crime with one race is none with another. At the Palace two days past thou saidst thou hadst never killed a man; and I know that thy religion condemns killing even in war. Yet in Egypt thou wilt kill, or thou shalt thyself be killed, and thy aims will

come to naught. When, as thou wouldst say, thou hast sinned, hast taken a man's life, then thou wilt understand. Thou wilt keep this fellow Mahommed, then?"

"I understand, and I will keep him."

"Surely thy heart is large and thy mind great. It moveth above small things. Thou dost not seek riches here?"

"I have enough; my wants are few."

"There is no precedent for one in office to withhold his hand from profit and backsheesh."

"Shall we not try to make a precedent?"

"Truthfulness will be desolate—like a bird blown to sea, beating 'gainst its doom."

"Truth will find an island in the sea."

"If Egypt is that sea, Saadat, there is no island."

David came over close to Nahoum, and looked him in the eyes.

"Surely I can speak to thee, friend, as to one understanding. Thou art a Christian—of the ancient fold. Out of the East came the light. Thy Church has preserved the faith. It is still like a lamp in the mist and the cloud in the East. Thou saidst but now that thy heart was with my purpose. Shall the truth that I would practise here not find an island in this sea—and shall it not be the soul of Nahoum Pasha?"

"Have I not given my word? Nay, then, I swear it by the tomb of my brother, whom Death met in the highway, and because he loved the sun, and the talk of men, and the ways of women, rashly smote him out of the garden of life into the void. Even by his tomb I swear it."

"Hast thou, then, such malice against Death? These things cannot happen save by the will of God."

"And by the hand of man. But I have no cause for revenge. Foorgat died in his sleep like a child. Yet

if it had been the hand of man, Prince Kaïd or any other, I would not have held my hand until I had a life for his."

"Thou art a Christian, yet thou wouldst meet one wrong by another?"

"I am an Oriental." Then, with a sudden change of manner, he added: "But thou hast a Christianity the like of which I have never seen. I will learn of thee, Saadat, and thou shalt learn of me also many things which I know. They will help thee to understand Egypt and the place where thou wilt be set—if so be my life is saved, and by thy hand."

Mahommed entered, and came to David.

"Where wi't thou sleep, Saadat?" he asked.

"The pasha will sleep yonder," David replied, pointing to another room. "I will sleep here." He laid a hand upon the couch where he sat.

Nahoum rose and, salaaming, followed Mahommed to the other room.

In a few moments the house was still, and remained so for hours. Just before dawn the curtain of Nahoum's room was drawn aside, the Armenian entered stealthily, and moved a step towards the couch where David lay. Suddenly he was stopped by a sound. He glanced towards a corner near David's feet. There sat Mahommed watching, a neboot of dom-wood across his knees.

Their eyes remained fixed upon each other for a moment. Then Nahoum passed back into his bedroom as stealthily as he had come.

Mahommed looked closely at David. He lay with an arm thrown over his head, resting softly, a moisture on his forehead as on that of a sleeping child.

"Saadat! Saadat!" said Mahommed softly to the sleeping figure, scarcely above his breath, and then with his eyes upon the curtained room opposite, began to whisper words from the Koran:

"*In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful—*"

CHAPTER XI

AGAINST THE HOUR OF MIDNIGHT

ACHMET the Ropemaker was ill at ease. He had been set a task in which he had failed. The bright Cairene sun starkly glittering on the French chandeliers and Viennese mirrors, and beating on the brass trays and braziers by the window, irritated him. He watched the flies on the wall abstractedly; he listened to the early peripatetic salesmen crying their wares in the streets leading to the Palace; he stroked his cadaverous cheek with yellow fingers; he listened anxiously for a footstep. Presently he straightened himself up, and his fingers ran down the front of his coat to make sure that it was buttoned from top to bottom. He grew a little paler. He was less stoical and apathetic than most Egyptians. Also he was absurdly vain, and he knew that his vanity would receive rough usage.

Now the door swung open, and a portly figure entered quickly. For so large a man Prince Kaïd was light and subtle in his movements. His face was mobile, his eye keen and human.

Achmet salaamed low. "The gardens of the First Heaven be thine, and the uttermost joy, Effendina," he said elaborately.

"A thousand colours to the rainbow of thy happiness," answered Kaïd mechanically, and seated himself cross-legged on a divan, taking a narghileh from the black slave who had glided ghostlike behind him.

"What hour didst thou find him? Where hast thou placed him?" he added, after a moment.

Achmet salaamed once more. "I have burrowed without ceasing, but the holes are empty, Effendina," he returned, abjectly and nervously.

He had need to be concerned. The reply was full of amazement and anger. "Thou hast not found him? Thou hast not brought Nahoum to me?" Kaïd's eyes were growing reddish; no good sign for those around him, for any that crossed him or his purposes.

"A hundred eyes failed to search him out. Ten thousand piastres did not find him; the kourbash did not reveal him."

Kaïd's frown grew heavier. "Thou shalt bring Nahoum to me by midnight to-morrow!"

"But if he has escaped, Effendina?" Achmet asked desperately. He had a peasant's blood; fear of power was ingrained.

"What was thy business but to prevent escape? Son of a Nile crocodile, if he has escaped, thou too shalt escape from Egypt—into Fazougli. Fool, Nahoum is no coward. He would remain. He is in Egypt."

"If he be in Egypt, I will find him, Effendina. Have I ever failed? When thou hast pointed, have I not brought? Have there not been many, Effendina? Should I not bring Nahoum, who has held over our heads the rod?"

Kaïd looked at him meditatively, and gave no answer to the question. "He reached too far," he muttered. "Egypt has one master only."

The door opened softly and the black slave stole in. His lips moved, but scarce a sound travelled across the room. Kaïd understood, and made a gesture. An instant afterwards the vast figure of Higli Pasha bulked

into the room. Again there were elaborate salutations and salaams, and Kaïd presently said:

"Foorgat?"

"Effendina," answered Higli, "it is not known how he died. He was in this Palace alive at night. In the morning he was found in bed at his own home."

"There was no wound?"

"None, Effendina."

"The thong?"

"There was no mark, Effendina."

"Poison?"

"There was no sign, Effendina."

"Diamond-dust?"

"Impossible, Effendina. There was not time. He was alive and well here at the Palace at eleven, and—"

Kaïd made an impatient gesture. "By the stone in the Kaabah, but it is not reasonable that Foorgat should die in his bed like a babe and sleep himself into heaven! Fate meant him for a violent end; but ere that came there was work to do for me. He had a gift for scenting treason—and he had treasure." His eyes shut and opened again with a look not pleasant to see. "But since it was that he must die so soon, then the loan he promised must now be a gift from the dead, if he be dead, if he be not shamming. Foorgat was a dire jester."

"But now it is no jest, Effendina. He is in his grave."

"In his grave! *Bismillah!* In his grave, dost thou say?"

Higli's voice quavered. "Yesterday before sunset, Effendina. By Nahoum's orders."

"I ordered the burial for to-day. By the gates of hell, but who shall disobey me!"

"He was already buried when the Effendina's orders came," Higli pleaded anxiously.

"Nahoum should have been taken yesterday," he rejoined, with malice in his eyes.

"If I had received the orders of the Effendina on the night when the Effendina dismissed Nahoum—" Achmet said softly, and broke off.

"A curse upon thine eyes that did not see thy duty!" Kaïd replied gloomily. Then he turned to Higli. "My seal has been put upon Foorgat's doors? His treasure-places have been found? The courts have been commanded as to his estate, the banks—"

"It was too late, Effendina," replied Higli hopelessly.

Kaïd got to his feet slowly, rage possessing him. "Too late! Who makes it too late when I command?"

"When Foorgat was found dead, Nahoum at once seized the palace and the treasures. Then he went to the courts and to the holy men, and claimed succession. That was while it was yet early morning. Then he instructed the banks. The banks hold Foorgat's fortune against us, Effendina."

"Foorgat had turned Mahommedan. Nahoum is a Christian. My will is law. Shall a Christian dog inherit from a true believer? The courts, the Wakfs shall obey me. And thou, son of a burnt father, shalt find Nahoum! Kaïd shall not be cheated. Foorgat pledged the loan. It is mine. Allah scorch thine eyes!" he added fiercely to Achmet, "but thou shalt find this Christian gentleman, Nahoum."

Suddenly, with a motion of disgust, he sat down, and taking the stem of the narghileh, puffed vigorously in silence. Presently in a red fury he cried: "Go—go—go, and bring me back by midnight Nahoum, and Foorgat's

treasures, to the last piastre. Let every soldier be a spy, if thine own spies fail."

As they turned to go, the door opened again, the black slave appeared, and ushered David into the room.

David salaamed, but not low, and stood still.

On the instant Kaïd changed, The rage left his face. He leaned forward eagerly, the cruel and ugly look faded slowly from his eyes.

"May thy days of life be as a river with sands of gold, effendi," he said gently. He had a voice like music.

"May the sun shine in thy heart and fruits of wisdom flourish there, Effendina," answered David quietly. He saluted the others gravely, and his eyes rested upon Achmet in a way which Higli Pasha noted for subsequent gossip.

Kaïd pulled at his narghileh for a moment, mumbling good-humouredly to himself and watching the smoke reel away; then, with half-shut eyes, he said to David:

"Am I master in Egypt or no, effendi?"

"In ruling this people the Prince of Egypt stands alone," answered David. "There is no one between him and the people. There is no Parliament."

"It is in my hand, then, to give or to withhold, to make or to break?" Kaïd chuckled to have this tribute, as he thought, from a Christian, who did not blink at Oriental facts, and was honest.

David bowed his head to Kaïd's words.

"Then if it be my hand that lifts up or casts down, that rewards or that punishes, shall my arm not stretch into the darkest corner of Egypt to bring forth a traitor? Shall it not be so?"

"It belongs to thy power," answered David. "It is the ancient custom of princes here. Custom is law, while it is yet the custom."

Kaïd looked at him enigmatically for a moment, then smiled grimly—he saw the course of the lance which David had thrown. He bent his look fiercely on Achmet and Higli. "Ye have heard. Truth is on his lips. I have stretched out my arm. Ye are my arm, to reach for and gather in Nahoum and all that is his." He turned quickly to David again. "I have given this hawk, Achmet, till to-morrow night to bring Nahoum to me," he explained.

"And if he fails—a penalty? He will lose his place?" asked David, with cold humour.

"More than his place," Kaïd rejoined, with a cruel smile.

"Then is his place mine, Effendina," rejoined David, with a look which could give Achmet no comfort.

"Thou will bring Nahoum—thou?" asked Kaïd, in amazement.

"I have brought him," answered David. "Is it not my duty to know the will of the Effendina and to do it, when it is just and right?"

"Where is he—where does he wait?" questioned Kaïd eagerly.

"Within the Palace—here," replied David. "He awaits his fate in thine own dwelling, Effendina."

Kaïd glowered upon Achmet. "In the years which Time, the Scytheman, will cut from thy life, think, as thou fastest at Ramadan or feastest at Beiram, how Kaïd filled thy plate when thou wast a beggar, and made thee from a dog of a fellah into a pasha. Go to thy dwelling, and come here no more," he added sharply. "I am sick of thy yellow, sinful face."

Achmet made no reply, but, as he passed beyond the door with Higli, he said in a whisper: "Come—to Harrik and the army! He shall be deposed. The hour

is at hand." Higli answered him faintly, however. He had not the courage of the true conspirator, traitor though he was.

As they disappeared, Kaïd made a wide gesture of friendliness to David, and motioned to a seat, then to a narghileh. David seated himself, took the stem of a narghileh in his mouth for an instant, then laid it down again and waited.

"Nahoum—I do not understand," Kaïd said presently, his eyes gloating.

"He comes of his own will, Effendina."

"Wherefore?" Kaïd could not realise the truth. This truth was not Oriental on the face of it.

"Effendina, he comes to place his life in thy hands. He would speak with thee."

"How is it thou dost bring him?"

"He sought me to plead for him with thee, and because I knew his peril, I kept him with me and brought him hither but now."

"Nahoum went to thee?" Kaïd's eyes peered abstractedly into the distance between the almost shut lids. That Nahoum should seek David, who had displaced him from his high office, was scarcely Oriental, when his every cue was to have revenge on his rival. This was a natural sequence to his downfall. It was understandable. But here was David safe and sound. Was it, then, some deeper scheme of future vengeance? The Oriental instinctively pierced the mind of the Oriental. He could have realised fully the fierce, blinding passion for revenge which had almost overcome Nahoum's calculating mind in the dark night, with his foe in the next room, which had driven him suddenly from his bed to fall upon David, only to find Mahommed Hassan watching—also with the instinct of the Oriental.

Some future scheme of revenge? Kaïd's eyes gleamed red. *There would be no future for Nahoum.*

"Why did Nahoum go to thee?" he asked again presently.

"That I might beg his life of thee, Highness, as I said," David replied.

"I have not ordered his death."

David looked meditatively at him. "It was agreed between us yesterday that I should speak plainly—is it not so?"

Kaïd nodded, and leaned back among the cushions.

"If what the Effendina intends is fulfilled, there is no other way but death for Nahoum," added David.

"What is my intention, effendi?"

"To confiscate the fortune left by Foorgat Bey. Is it not so?"

"I had a pledge from Foorgat—a loan."

"That is the merit of the case, Effendina. I am otherwise concerned. There is the law. Nahoum inherits. Shouldst thou send him to Fazougli, he would still inherit."

"He is a traitor."

"Highness, where is the proof?"

"I know. My friends have disappeared one by one—Nahoum. Lands have been alienated from me—Nahoum. My income has declined—Nahoum. I have given orders and they have not been fulfilled—Nahoum. Always, always some rumour of assassination, or of conspiracy, or the influence and secret agents of the Sultan—all Nahoum. He is a traitor. He has grown rich while I borrow from Europe to pay my army and to meet the demands of the Sultan."

"What man can offer evidence in this save the Effendina who would profit by his death?"

"I speak of what I know. I satisfy myself. It is enough."

"Highness, there is a better way; to satisfy the people, for whom thee lives. None should stand between. Is not the Effendina a father to them?"

"The people! Would they not say Nahoum had got his due if he were blotted from their sight?"

"None has been so generous to the poor, so it is said by all. His hand has been upon the rich only. Now, Effendina, he has brought hither the full amount of all he has received and acquired in thy service. He would offer it in tribute."

Kaïd smiled sardonically. "It is a thin jest. When a traitor dies the State confiscates his goods!"

"Thee calls him traitor. Does thee believe he has ever conspired against thy life?"

Kaïd shrugged his shoulders.

"Let me answer for thee, Effendina. Again and again he has defeated conspiracy. He has blotted it out—by the sword and other means. He has been a faithful servant to his Prince at least. If he has done after the manner of all others in power here, the fault is in the system, not in the man alone. He has been a friend to thee, Kaïd."

"I hope to find in thee a better."

"Why should he not live?"

"Thou hast taken his place."

"Is it, then, the custom to destroy those who have served thee, when they cease to serve?" David rose to his feet quickly. His face was shining with a strange excitement. It gave him a look of exaltation, his lips quivered with indignation. "Does thee kill because there is silence in the grave?"

Kaïd blew a cloud of smoke slowly. "Silence in the grave is a fact beyond dispute," he said cynically.

"Highness, thee changes servants not seldom," rejoined David meaningly. "It may be that my service will be short. When I go, will the long arm reach out for me in the burrows where I shall hide?"

Kaïd looked at him with ill-concealed admiration. "Thou art an Englishman, not an Egyptian, a guest, not a subject, and under no law save my friendship." Then he added scornfully: "When an Englishman in England leaves office, no matter how unfaithful, though he be a friend of any country save his own, they send him to the House of Lords—or so I was told in France when I was there. What does it matter to thee what chances to Nahoum? Thou hast his place with me. My secrets are thine. They shall all be thine—for years I have sought an honest man. Thou art safe whether to go or to stay."

"It may be so. I heed it not. My life is as that of a gull—if the wind carry it out to sea, it is lost. As my uncle went I shall go one day. Thee will never do me ill; but do I not know that I shall have foes at every corner, behind every mooshrabieh screen, on every mastaba, in the pasha's court-yard, by every mosque? Do I not know in what peril I serve Egypt?"

"Yet thou wouldst keep alive Nahoum! He will dig thy grave deep, and wait long."

"He will work with me for Egypt, Effendina."

Kaïd's face darkened. "What is thy meaning?"

"I ask Nahoum's life that he may serve under me, to do those things thou and I planned yesterday—the land, taxation, the army, agriculture, the Soudan. Together we will make Egypt better and greater and richer—the poor richer, even though the rich be poorer."

"And Kaïd—poorer?"

"When Egypt is richer, the Prince is richer, too. Is not the Prince Egypt? Highness, yesterday—yester-

day thee gave me my commission. If thee will not take Nahoum again into service to aid me, I must not remain. I cannot work alone."

"Thou must have this Christian Oriental to work with thee?" He looked at David closely, then smiled sardonically, but with friendliness to David in his eyes. "Nahoum has prayed to work with thee, to be a slave where he was master? He says to thee that he would lay his heart upon the altar of Egypt?" Mordant, questioning humour was in his voice.

David inclined his head.

"He would give up all that is his?"

"It is so, Effendina."

"All save Foorgat's heritage?"

"It belonged to their father. It is a due inheritance."

Kaïd laughed sarcastically. "It was got in Mehemet Ali's service."

"Nathless, it is a heritage, Effendina. He would give that fortune back again to Egypt in work with me, as I shall give of what is mine, and of what I am, in the name of God, the all-merciful!"

The smile faded out of Kaïd's face, and wonder settled on it. What manner of man was this? His life, his fortune for Egypt, a country alien to him, which he had never seen till six months ago! What kind of being was behind the dark, fiery eyes and the pale, impassioned face? Was he some new prophet? If so, why should he not have cast a spell upon Nahoum? Had he not bewitched himself, Kaïd, one of the ablest princes since Alexander or Amenhotep? Had Nahoum, then, been mastered and won? Was ever such power? In how many ways had it not been shown! He had fought for his uncle's fortune, and had got it at last yesterday

without a penny of backsheesh. Having got his will, he was now ready to give that same fortune to the good of Egypt—but not to beys and pashas and eunuchs (and that he should have escaped Mizraim was the marvel beyond all others!), or even to the Prince Pasha; but to that which would make "Egypt better and greater and richer—the poor richer, even though the rich be poorer!" Kaïd chuckled to himself at that. To make the rich poorer would suit him well, so long as he remained rich. And, if riches could be got, as this pale Frank proposed, by less extortion from the fellah and less kourbash, so much the happier for all.

He was capable of patriotism, and this Quaker dreamer had stirred it in him a little. Egypt, industrial in a real sense; Egypt, paying her own way without tyranny and loans: Egypt, without *corvée*, and with an army hired from a full public purse; Egypt, grown strong and able to resist the suzerainty and cruel tribute—that touched his native goodness of heart, so long in disguise; it appealed to the sense of leadership in him; to the love of the soil deep in his bones; to regard for the common people—for was not his mother a slave? Some distant nobleness trembled in him, while yet the arid humour of the situation flashed into his eyes, and, getting to his feet, he said to David: "Where is Nahoum?"

David told him, and he clapped his hands. The black slave entered, received an order, and disappeared. Neither spoke, but Kaïd's face was full of cheerfulness.

Presently Nahoum entered and salaamed low, then put his hand upon his turban. There was submission, but no cringing or servility in his manner. His blue eyes looked fearlessly before him. His face was not paler than its wont. He waited for Kaïd to speak.

"Peace be to thee," Kaïd murmured mechanically.

"And to thee, peace, O Prince," answered Nahoum. "May the feet of Time linger by thee, and Death pass thy house forgetful."

There was silence for a moment, and then Kaïd spoke again. "What are thy properties and treasure?" he asked sternly.

Nahoum drew forth a paper from his sleeve, and handed it to Kaïd without a word. Kaïd glanced at it hurriedly, then said: "This is but nothing. What hast thou hidden from me?"

"It is all I have got in thy service, Highness," he answered boldly. "All else I have given to the poor; also to spies—and to the army."

"To spies—and to the army?" asked Kaïd slowly, incredulously.

"Wilt thou come with me to the window, Effendina?"

Kaïd, wondering, went to the great windows which looked on to the Palace square. There, drawn up, were a thousand mounted men as black as ebony, wearing shining white metal helmets and fine chain-armour and swords and lances like medieval crusaders. The horses, too, were black, and the mass made a barbaric display belonging more to another period in the world's history. This regiment of Nubians Kaïd had recruited from the far south, and had maintained at his own expense. When they saw him at the window now, their swords clashed on their thighs and across their breasts, and they raised a great shout of greeting.

"Well?" asked Kaïd, with a ring to the voice.

"They are loyal, Effendina, every man. But the army otherwise is honeycombed with treason. Effendina, my money has been busy in the army paying and bribing officers, and my spies were costly. There has

been sedition—conspiracy; but until I could get the full proofs I waited; I could but bribe and wait. Were it not for the money I had spent, there might have been another Prince of Egypt."

Kaïd's face darkened. He was startled, too. He had been taken unawares. "My brother Harrik—!"

"And I should have lost my place, lost all for which I cared. I had no love for money; it was but a means. I spent it for the State—for the Effendina, and to keep my place. I lost my place, however, in another way."

"Proofs! Proofs!" Kaïd's voice was hoarse with feeling.

"I have no proofs against Prince Harrik, no word upon paper. But there are proofs that the army is seditious, that, at any moment, it may revolt."

"Thou hast kept this secret?" questioned Kaïd darkly and suspiciously.

"The time had not come. Read, Effendina," he added, handing some papers over.

"But it is the whole army!" said Kaïd aghast, as he read. He was convinced.

"*There is only one guilty*," returned Nahoum. Their eyes met. Oriental fatalism met inveterate Oriental distrust and then instinctively Kaïd's eyes turned to David. In the eyes of the Inglesi was a different thing.

The test of the new relationship had come.

Ferocity was in his heart, a vitriolic note was in his voice as he said to David, "If this be true—the army rotten, the officers disloyal, treachery under every tunic —bismillah, speak!"

"Shall it not be one thing at a time, Effendina?" asked David. He made a gesture towards Nahoum.

Kaïd motioned to a door. "Wait yonder," he said darkly to Nahoum. As the door opened, and Nahoum

disappeared leisurely and composedly, David caught a glimpse of a guard of armed Nubians in leopard-skins filed against the white wall of the other room.

"What is thy intention towards Nahoum, Effendina?" David asked presently.

Kaïd's voice was impatient. "Thou hast asked his life—take it; it is thine; but if I find him within these walls again until I give him leave, he shall go as Foorgat went."

"What was the manner of Foorgat's going?" asked David quietly.

"As a wind blows through a court-yard, and the lamp goes out, so he went—in the night. Who can say? Wherefore speculate? He is gone. It is enough. Were it not for thee, Egypt should see Nahoum no more."

David sighed, and his eyes closed for an instant. "Effendina, Nahoum has proved his faith—is it not so?" He pointed to the documents in Kaïd's hands.

A grim smile passed over Kaïd's face. Distrust of humanity, incredulity, cold cynicism, were in it. "Wheels within wheels, proofs within proofs," he said. "Thou hast yet to learn the Eastern heart. When thou seest white in the East, call it black, for in an instant it will be black. Malaish, it is the East! Have I not trusted—did I not mean well by all? Did I not deal justly? Yet my justice was but darkness of purpose, the hidden terror to them all. So did I become what thou findest me and dost believe me—a tyrant, in whose name a thousand do evil things of which I neither hear nor know. Proof! When a woman lies in your arms, it is not the moment to prove her fidelity. Nahoum has crawled back to my feet with these things, and by the beard of the Prophet they are true!" He looked at the papers with loathing. "But what his purpose was

when he spied upon and bribed my army I know not. Yet, it shall be said, he has held Harrik back—Harrik, my brother. Son of Sheitan and slime of the Nile, have I not spared Harrik all these years!"

"Hast thou proof, Effendina?"

"I have proof enough; I shall have more soon. To save their lives, these, these will tell. I have their names here." He tapped the papers. "There are ways to make them tell. Now, speak, effendi, and tell me what I shall do to Harrik."

"Wouldst thou proclaim to Egypt, to the Sultan, to the world that the army is disloyal? If these guilty men are seized, can the army be trusted? Will it not break away in fear? Yonder Nubians are not enough —a handful lost in the *mêlée*. Prove the guilt of him who perverted the army and sought to destroy thee. Punish him."

"How shall there be proof save through those whom he has perverted? There is no writing."

"There is proof," answered David calmly.

"Where shall I find it?" Kaïd laughed contemptuously.

"I have the proof," answered David gravely.

"Against Harrik?"

"Against Prince Harrik Pasha."

"Thou—what dost thou know?"

"A woman of the Prince heard him give instructions for thy disposal, Effendina, when the Citadel should turns its guns upon Cairo and the Palace. She was once of thy harem. Thou didst give her in marriage, and she came to the harem of Prince Harrik at last. A woman from without who sang to her—a singing girl, an *al'mah*—she trusted with the paper to warn thee, Effendina, in her name. Her heart had remembrance

of thee. Her foster-brother Mahommed Hassan is my servant. Him she told, and Mahommed laid the matter before me this morning. Here is a sign by which thee will remember her, so she said. Zaida she was called here." He handed over an amulet which had one red gem in the centre.

Kaïd's face had set into fierce resolution, but as he took the amulet his eyes softened.

"Zaida. Inshallah! Zaida, she was called. She has the truth almost of the English. She could not lie ever. My heart smote me concerning her, and I gave her in marriage." Then his face darkened again, and his teeth showed in malice. A demon was roused in him. He might long ago have banished the handsome and insinuating Harrik, but he had allowed him wealth and safety—and now . . . !

His intention was unmistakable.

"He shall die the death," he said. "Is it not so?" he added fiercely to David, and gazed at him fixedly. Would this man of peace plead for the traitor, the would-be fratricide?

"He is a traitor; he must die," answered David slowly.

Kaïd's eyes showed burning satisfaction. "If he were thy brother, thou wouldst kill him?"

"I would give a traitor to death for the country's sake. There is no other way."

"To-night he shall die."

"But with due trial, Effendina?"

"Trial—is not the proof sufficient?"

"But if he confess, and give evidence himself, and so offer himself to die?"

"Is Harrik a fool?" answered Kaïd, with scorn.

"If there be a trial and sentence is given, the truth

concerning the army must appear. Is that well? Egypt will shake to its foundations—to the joy of its enemies."

"Then he shall die secretly."

"The Prince Pasha of Egypt will be called a murderer."

Kaïd shrugged his shoulders.

"The Sultan—Europe—is it well?"

"I will tell the truth," Kaïd rejoined angrily.

"If the Effendina will trust me, Prince Harrik shall confess his crime and pay the penalty also."

"What is thy purpose?"

"I will go to his palace and speak with him."

"Seize him?"

"I have no power to seize him, Effendina."

"I will give it. My Nubians shall go also."

"Effendina, I will go alone. It is the only way. There is great danger to the throne. Who can tell what a night will bring forth?"

"If Harrik should escape—"

"If I were an Egyptian and permitted Harrik to escape, my life would pay for my failure. If I failed, thou wouldst not succeed. If I am to serve Egypt, there must be trust in me from thee, or it were better to pause now. If I go, as I shall go, alone, I put my life in danger—is it not so?"

Suddenly Kaïd sat down again among his cushions.

"Inshallah! In the name of God, be it so. Thou art not as other men. There is something in thee above my thinking. But I will not sleep till I see thee again."

"I shall see thee at midnight, Effendina. Give me the ring from thy finger."

Kaïd passed it over, and David put it in his pocket. Then he turned to go.

"Nahoum?" he asked.

"Take him hence. Let him serve thee if it be thy will. Yet I cannot understand it. The play is dark. Is he not an Oriental?"

"He is a Christian."

Kaïd laughed sourly, and clapped his hands for the slave.

In a moment David and Nahoum were gone.

"Nahoum, a Christian! Bismillah!" murmured Kaïd scornfully, then fell to pondering darkly over the evil things he had heard.

Meanwhile the Nubians in their glittering armour waited without in the blistering square.

CHAPTER XII

THE JEHAD AND THE LIONS

"*ALLAH hu Achbar! Allah hu Achbar! Ashhadu an la illaha illalla!*" The sweetly piercing, resonant voice of the Muezzin rang far and commandingly on the clear evening air, and from bazaar and crowded street the faithful silently hurried to the mosques, leaving their slippers at the door, while others knelt where the call found them, and touched their foreheads to the ground.

In his palace by the Nile, Harrik, the half-brother of the Prince Pasha, heard it, and breaking off from conversation with two urgent visitors, passed to an alcove near, dropping a curtain behind him. Kneeling reverently on the solitary furniture of the room—a prayer-rug from Medina—he lost himself as completely in his devotions as though his life were an even current of unforbidden acts and motives.

Cross-legged on the great divan of the room he had left, his less pious visitors, unable to turn their thoughts from the dark business on which they had come, smoked their cigarettes, talking to each other in tones so low as would not have been heard by a European, and with apparent listlessness.

Their manner would not have indicated that they were weighing matters of life and death, of treason and infamy, of massacre and national shame. Only the sombre, smouldering fire of their eyes was evidence of the lighted fuse of conspiracy burning towards the maga-

zine. One look of surprise had been exchanged when Harrik Pasha left them suddenly—time was short for what they meant to do; but they were Muslims, and they resigned themselves.

"The Inglesi must be the first to go; shall a Christian dog rule over us?"

It was Achmet the Ropemaker who spoke, his yellow face wrinkling with malice, though his voice but murmured hoarsely.

"Nahoum will kill him." Higli Pasha laughed low—it was like the gurgle of water in the narghileh—a voice of good nature and persuasiveness from a heart that knew no virtue. "Bismillah! Who shall read the meaning of it? Why has he not already killed?"

"Nahoum would choose his own time—after he has saved his life by the white carrion. Kaïd will give him his life if the Inglesi asks. The Inglesi, he is mad. If he were not mad, he would see to it that Nahoum was now drying his bones in the sands."

"What each has failed to do for the other shall be done for them," answered Achmet, a hateful leer on his immobile features. "To-night many things shall be made right. To-morrow there will be places empty and places filled. Egypt shall begin again to-morrow."

"Kaïd?"

Achmet stopped smoking for a moment. "When the khamsin comes, when the camels stampede, and the children of the storm fall upon the caravan, can it be foretold in what way Fate shall do her work? So but the end be the same—malaish! We shall be content to-morrow."

Now he turned and looked at his companion as though his mind had chanced on a discovery. "To him who first brings word to a prince who inherits, that the

reigning prince is dead, belong honour and place," he said.

"Then shall it be between us twain," said Higli, and laid his hot palm against the cold, snaky palm of the other. "And he to whom the honour falls shall help the other."

"*Aiwa*, but it shall be so," answered Achmet, and then they spoke in lower tones still, their eyes on the curtain behind which Harrik prayed.

Presently Harrik entered, impassive, yet alert, his slight, handsome figure in sharp contrast to the men lounging in the cushions before him, who salaamed as he came forward. The features were finely chiselled, the forehead white and high, the lips sensuous, the eyes fanatical, the look concentrated yet abstracted. He took a seat among the cushions, and, after a moment, said to Achmet, in a voice abnormally deep and powerful: "Diaz—there is no doubt of Diaz?"

"He awaits the signal. The hawk flies not swifter than Diaz will act."

"The people—the bazaars—the markets?"

"As the air stirs a moment before the hurricane comes, so the whisper has stirred them. From one lip to another, from one street to another, from one quarter to another, the word has been passed—'Nahoum was a Christian, but Nahoum was an Egyptian whose heart was Muslim. The stranger is a Christian and an Inglesi. Reason has fled from the Prince Pasha, the Inglesi has bewitched him. But the hour of deliverance draweth nigh. Be ready! To-night!' So has the whisper gone."

Harrik's eyes burned. "God is great," he said. "The time has come. The Christians spoil us. From France, from England, from Austria—it is enough. Kaïd has

handed us over to the Greek usurers, the Inglesi and the Frank are everywhere. And now this new-comer who would rule Kaïd, and lay his hand upon Egypt like Joseph of old, and bring back Nahoum, to the shame of every Muslim—behold, the spark is to the tinder, it shall burn."

"And the hour, Effendina?"

"At midnight. The guns to be trained on the Citadel, the Palace surrounded. Kaïd's Nubians?"

"A hundred will be there, Effendina, the rest a mile away at their barracks." Achmet rubbed his cold palms together in satisfaction.

"And Prince Kaïd, Effendina?" asked Higli cautiously.

The fanatical eyes turned away. "The question is foolish—have ye no brains?" he said impatiently.

A look of malignant triumph flashed from Achmet to Higli, and he said, scarce above a whisper: "May thy footsteps be as the wings of the eagle, Effendina. The heart of the pomegranate is not redder than our hearts are red for thee. Cut deep into our hearts, and thou shalt find the last beat is for thee—and for the *Jehad!*"

"The Jehad—ay, the Jehad! The time is at hand," answered Harrik, glowering at the two. "The sword shall not be sheathed till we have redeemed Egypt. Go your ways, effendis, and peace be on you and on all the righteous worshippers of God!"

As Higli and Achmet left the palace, the voice of a holy man—admitted everywhere and treated with reverence—chanting the Koran, came somnolently through the court-yard: "*Bismillah hirrahmah, nirraheem. Elhamdu lillahi sabbila!*"

Rocking his body backwards and forwards and dwelling sonorously on each vowel, the holy man seemed the

incarnation of Muslim piety; but as the two conspirators passed him with scarce a glance, and made their way to a small gate leading into the great garden bordering on the Nile, his eyes watched them sharply. When they had passed through, he turned towards the windows of the harem, still chanting. For a long time he chanted. An occasional servant came and went, but his voice ceased not, and he kept his eyes fixed ever on the harem windows.

At last his watching had its reward. Something fluttered from a window to the ground. Still chanting, he rose and began walking round the great court-yard. Twice he went round, still chanting, but the third time he stooped to pick up a little strip of linen which had fallen from the window, and concealed it in his sleeve. Presently he seated himself again, and, still chanting, spread out the linen in his palm and read the characters upon it. For an instant there was a jerkiness to the voice, and then it droned on resonantly again. Now the eyes of the holy man were fixed on the great gates through which strangers entered, and he was seated in the way which any one must take who came to the palace doors.

It was almost dark, when he saw the bowáb, after repeated knocking, sleepily and grudgingly open the gates to admit a visitor. There seemed to be a moment's hesitation on the bowáb's part, but he was presently assured by something the visitor showed him, and the latter made his way deliberately to the palace doors. As the visitor neared the holy man, who chanted on monotonously, he was suddenly startled to hear between the long-drawn syllables the quick words in Arabic:

"Beware, Saadat! See, I am Mahommed Hassan, thy servant! At midnight they surround Kaïd's palace

—Achmet and Higli—and kill the Prince Pasha. Return, Saadat. Harrik will kill thee."

David made no sign, but with a swift word to the faithful Mahommed Hassan, passed on, and was presently admitted to the palace. As the doors closed behind him, he would hear the voice of the holy man still chanting: *"Waladalleen—Ameen—Ameen! Waladalleen—Ameen!"*

The voice followed him, fainter and fainter, as he passed through the great bare corridors with the thick carpets on which the footsteps made no sound, until it came, soft and undefined, as it were from a great distance. Then suddenly there fell upon him a sense of the peril of his enterprise. He had been left alone in the vast dim hall while a slave, made obsequious by the sight of the ring of the Prince Pasha, sought his master. As he waited he was conscious that people were moving about behind the great screens of mooshrabieh which separated this room from others, and that eyes were following his every motion. He had gained easy ingress to this place; but egress was a matter of some speculation. The doors which had closed behind him might swing one way only! He had voluntarily put himself in the power of a man whose fatal secret he knew. He only felt a moment's apprehension, however. He had been moved to come from a whisper in his soul; and he had the sure conviction of the predestinarian that he was not to be the victim of "The Scytheman" before his appointed time. His mind resumed its composure, and he watchfully waited the return of the slave.

Suddenly he was conscious of some one behind him, though he had heard no one approach. He swung round and was met by the passive face of the black slave in personal attendance on Harrik. The slave did not

speak, but motioned towards a screen at the end of the room, and moved towards it. David followed. As they reached it, a broad panel opened, and they passed through, between a line of black slaves. Then there was a sudden darkness, and a moment later David was ushered into a room blazing with light. Every inch of the walls was hung with red curtains. No door was visible. He was conscious of this as the panel clicked behind him, and the folds of the red velvet caught his shoulder in falling. Now he saw sitting on a divan on the opposite side of the room Prince Harrik.

David had never before seen him, and his imagination had fashioned a different personality. Here was a combination of intellect, refinement, and savagery. The red, sullen lips stamped the delicate, fanatical face with cruelty and barbaric indulgence, while yet there was an intensity in the eyes that showed the man was possessed of an idea which mastered him—a root-thought. David was at once conscious of a complex personality, of a man in whom two natures fought. He understood it. By instinct the man was a Mahdi, by heredity he was a voluptuary, that strange commingling of the religious and the evil found in so many criminals. In some far corner of his nature David felt something akin. The rebellion in his own blood against the fine instinct of his Quaker faith and upbringing made him grasp the personality before him. Had he himself been born in these surroundings, under these influences—! The thought flashed through his mind like lightning, even as he bowed before Harrik, who salaamed and said: "Peace be unto thee!" and motioned him to a seat on a divan near and facing him.

"What is thy business with me, effendi?" asked Harrik.

"I come on the business of the Prince Pasha," answered David.

Harrik touched his fez mechanically, then his breast and lips, and a cruel smile lurked at the corners of his mouth as he rejoined:

"The feet of them who wear the ring of their Prince wait at no man's door. The carpet is spread for them. They go and they come as the feet of the doe in the desert. Who shall say, They shall not come; who shall say, They shall not return!"

Though the words were spoken with an air of ingenuous welcome, David felt the malignity in the last phrase, and knew that now was come the most fateful moment of his life. In his inner being he heard the dreadful challenge of Fate. If he failed in his purpose with this man, he would never begin his work in Egypt. Of his life he did not think—his life was his purpose, and the one was nothing without the other. No other man would have undertaken so Quixotic an enterprise, none would have exposed himself so recklessly to the dreadful accidents of circumstance. There had been other ways to overcome this crisis, but he had rejected them for a course fantastic and fatal when looked at in the light of ordinary reason. A struggle between the East and the West was here to be fought out between two wills; between an intellectual libertine steeped in Oriental guilt and cruelty and self-indulgence, and a being selfless, human, and in an agony of remorse for a life lost by his hand.

Involuntarily David's eyes ran round the room before he replied. How many slaves and retainers waited behind those velvet curtains?

Harrik saw the glance and interpreted it correctly. With a look of dark triumph he clapped his hands. As

if by magic fifty black slaves appeared, armed with daggers. They folded their arms and waited like statues.

David made no sign of discomposure, but said slowly: "Dost thou think I did not know my danger, Eminence? Do I seem to thee such a fool? I came alone as one would come to the tent of a Bedouin chief whose son one had slain, and ask for food and safety. A thousand men were mine to command, but I came alone. Is thy guest imbecile? Let them go. I have that to say which is for Prince Harrik's ear alone."

An instant's hesitation, and Harrik motioned the slaves away. "What is the private word for my ear?" he asked presently, fingering the stem of the narghileh.

"To do right by Egypt, the land of thy fathers and thy land; to do right by the Prince Pasha, thy brother."

"What is Egypt to thee? Why shouldst thou bring thine insolence here? Couldst thou not preach in thine own bazaars beyond the sea?"

David showed no resentment. His reply was composed and quiet. "I am come to save Egypt from the work of thy hands."

"Dog of an unbeliever, what hast thou to do with me, or the work of my hands?"

David held up Kaïd's ring, which had lain in his hand. "I come from the master of Egypt—master of thee, and of thy life, and of all that is thine."

"What is Kaïd's message to me?" Harrik asked, with an effort at unconcern, for David's boldness had in it something chilling to his fierce passion and pride.

"The word of the Effendina is to do right by Egypt, to give thyself to justice and to peace."

"Have done with parables. To do right by Egypt—

wherein, wherefore?" The eyes glinted at David like bits of fiery steel.

"I will interpret to thee, Eminence."

"Interpret." Harrik muttered to himself in rage. His heart was dark, he thirsted for the life of this arrogant Inglesi. Did the fool not see his end? Midnight was at hand! He smiled grimly.

"This is the interpretation, O Prince! Prince Harrik has conspired against his brother the Prince Pasha, has treacherously seduced officers of the army, has planned to seize Cairo, to surround the Palace and take the life of the Prince of Egypt. For months, Prince, thee has done this: and the end of it is that thee shall do right ere it be too late. Thee is a traitor to thy country and thy lawful lord."

Harrik's face turned pale; the stem of the narghileh shook in his fingers. All had been discovered, then! But there was a thing of dark magic here. It was not a half-hour since he had given the word to strike at midnight, to surround the Palace, and to seize the Prince Pasha. Achmet—Higli, had betrayed him, then! Who other? No one else knew save Zaida, and Zaida was in the harem. Perhaps even now his own palace was surrounded. If it was so, then, come what might, this masterful Inglesi should pay the price. He thought of the den of lions hard by, of the cage of tigers—the menagerie not a thousand feet away. He could hear the distant roaring now, and his eyes glittered. The Christian to the wild beasts! That at least before the end. A Muslim would win heaven by sending a Christian to hell.

Achmet—Higli! No others knew. The light of a fateful fanaticism was in his eyes. David read him as an open book, and saw the madness come upon him.

"Neither Higli, nor Achmet, nor any of thy fellow-conspirators has betrayed thee," David said. "God has other voices to whisper the truth than those who share thy crimes. I have ears, and the air is full of voices."

Harrik stared at him. Was this Inglesi, then, with the grey coat, buttoned to the chin, and the broad black hat which remained on his head unlike the custom of the English—was he one of those who saw visions and dreamed dreams, even as himself! Had he not heard last night a voice whisper through the dark: "*Harrik, Harrik, flee to the desert! The lions are loosed upon thee!*" Had he not risen with the voice still in his ears and fled to the harem, seeking Zaida, she who had never cringed before him, whose beauty he had conquered, but whose face turned from him when he would lay his lips on hers? And, as he fled, had he not heard, as it were, footsteps lightly following him —or were they going before him? Finding Zaida, had he not told her of the voice, and had she not said: "*In the desert all men are safe—safe from themselves and safe from others; from their own acts and from the acts of others*"? Were the lions, then, loosed upon him? Had he been betrayed?

Suddenly the thought flashed into his mind that his challenger would not have thrust himself into danger, given himself to the mouth of the Pit, if violence were intended. There was that inside his robe, than which lightning would not be more quick to slay. Had he not been a hunter of repute? Had he not been in deadly peril with wild beasts, and was he not quicker than they? This man before him was like no other he had ever met. Did voices speak to him? Were there, then, among the Christians such holy men as among the Muslims, who

saw things before they happened, and read the human mind? Were there sorcerers among them, as among the Arabs?

In any case his treason was known. What were to be the consequences? Diamond-dust in his coffee? To be dropped into the Nile like a dog? To be smothered in his sleep?—For who could be trusted among all his slaves and retainers when it was known he was disgraced, and that the Prince Pasha would be happier if Harrik were quiet for ever?

Mechanically he drew out his watch and looked at it. It was nine o'clock. In three hours more would have fallen the *coup*. But from this man's words he knew that the stroke was now with the Prince Pasha. Yet, if this pale Inglesi, this Christian sorcerer, knew the truth in a vision only, and had not declared it to Kaïd, there might still be a chance of escape. The lions were near—it would be a joy to give a Christian to the lions to celebrate the capture of Cairo and the throne. He listened intently to the distant rumble of the lions. There was one cage dedicated to vengeance. Five human beings on whom his terrible anger fell in times past had been thrust into it alive. Two were slaves, one was an enemy, one an invader of his harem, and one was a woman, his wife, his favourite, the darling of his heart. When his chief eunuch accused her of a guilty love, he had given her paramour and herself to that awful death. A stroke of the vast paw, a smothered roar as the teeth gave into the neck of the beautiful Fatima, and then—no more. Fanaticism had caught a note of savage music that tuned it to its height.

"Why art thou here? For what hast thou come? Do the spirit voices give thee that counsel?" he snarled.

"I am come to ask Prince Harrik to repair the wrong he has done. When the Prince Pasha came to know of thy treason—"

Harrik started. "Kaïd believes thy tale of treason?" he burst out.

"Prince Kaïd knows the truth," answered David quietly. "He might have surrounded this palace with his Nubians, and had thee shot against the palace walls. That would have meant a scandal in Egypt and in Europe. I besought him otherwise. It may be the scandal must come, but in another way, and—"

"That I, Harrik, must die?" Harrik's voice seemed far away. In his own ears it sounded strange and unusual. All at once the world seemed to be a vast vacuum in which his brain strove for air, and all his senses were numbed and overpowered. Distempered and vague, his soul seemed spinning in an aching chaos. It was being overpowered by vast elements, and life and being were atrophied in a deadly smother. The awful forces behind visible being hung him in the middle space between consciousness and dissolution. He heard David's voice, at first dimly, then understandingly.

"There is no other way. Thou art a traitor. Thou wouldst have been a fratricide. Thou wouldst have put back the clock in Egypt by a hundred years, even to the days of the Mamelukes—a race of slaves and murderers. God ordained that thy guilt should be known in time. Prince, thou art guilty. It is now but a question how thou shalt pay the debt of treason."

In David's calm voice was the ring of destiny. It was dispassionate, judicial; it had neither hatred nor pity. It fell on Harrik's ear as though from some far height. Destiny, the controller—who could escape it?

Had he not heard the voices in the night—"*The lions are loosed upon thee*"? He did not answer David now, but murmured to himself like one in a dream.

David saw his mood, and pursued the startled mind into the pit of confusion. "If it become known to Europe that the army is disloyal, that its officers are traitors like thee, what shall we find? England, France, Turkey, will land an army of occupation. Who shall gainsay Turkey if she chooses to bring an army here and recover control, remove thy family from Egypt, and seize upon its lands and goods? Dost thou not see that the hand of God has been against thee? He has spoken, and thy evil is discovered."

He paused. Still Harrik did not reply, but looked at him with dilated, fascinated eyes. Death had hypnotised him, and against death and destiny who could struggle? Had not a past Prince Pasha of Egypt safeguarded himself from assassination all his life, and, in the end, had he not been smothered in his sleep by slaves?

"There are two ways only," David continued—"to be tried and die publicly for thy crimes, to the shame of Egypt, its present peril, and lasting injury; or to send a message to those who conspired with thee, commanding them to return to their allegiance, and another to the Prince Pasha, acknowledging thy fault, and exonerating all others. Else, how many of thy dupes shall die! Thy choice is not life or death, but how thou shalt die, and what thou shalt do for Egypt as thou diest. Thou didst love Egypt, Eminence?"

David's voice dropped low, and his last words had a suggestion which went like an arrow to the source of all Harrik's crimes, and that also which redeemed him in a little. It got into his inner being. He roused him-

self and spoke, but at first his speech was broken and smothered.

"Day by day I saw Egypt given over to the Christians," he said. "The Greek, the Italian, the Frenchman, the Englishman, everywhere they reached out their hands and took from us our own. They defiled our mosques; they corrupted our life; they ravaged our trade, they stole our customers, they crowded us from the streets where once the faithful lived alone. Such as thou had the ear of the Prince, and such as Nahoum, also an infidel, who favoured the infidels of Europe. And now thou hast come, the most dangerous of them all! Day by day the Muslim has loosed his hold on Cairo, and Alexandria, and the cities of Egypt. Street upon street knows him no more. My heart burned within me. I conspired for Egypt's sake. I would have made her Muslim once again. I would have fought the Turk and the Frank, as did Mehemet Ali; and if the infidels came, I would have turned them back; or if they would not go, I would have destroyed them here. Such as thou should have been stayed at the door. In my own house I would have been master. We seek not to take up our abode in other nations and in the cities of the infidel. Shall we give place to them on our own mastaba, in our own court-yard—hand to them the keys of our harems? I would have raised the Jehad if they vexed me with their envoys and their armies." He paused, panting.

"It would not have availed," was David's quiet answer. "This land may not be as Tibet—a prison for its own people. If the door opens outward, then must it open inward also. Egypt is the bridge between the East and the West. Upon it the peoples of all nations pass and repass. Thy plan was folly, thy hope

madness, thy means to achieve horrible. Thy dream is done. The army will not revolt, the Prince will not be slain. Now only remains what thou shalt do for Egypt."

"And thou—thou wilt be left here to lay thy will upon Egypt. Kaïd's ear will be in thy hand—thou hast the sorcerer's eye. I know thy meaning. Thou wouldst have me absolve all, even Achmet, and Higli, and Diaz, and the rest, and at thy bidding go out into the desert" —he paused—"or into the grave."

"*Not into the desert,*" rejoined David firmly. "Thou wouldst not rest. There, in the desert, thou wouldst be a Mahdi. Since thou must die, wilt thou not order it after thine own choice? It is to die for Egypt."

"Is this the will of Kaïd?" asked Harrik, his voice thick with wonder, his brain still dulled by the blow of Fate.

"It was not the Effendina's will, but it hath his assent. Wilt thou write the word to the army and also to the Prince?"

He had conquered. There was a moment's hesitation, then Harrik picked up paper and ink that lay near, and said: "I will write to Kaïd. I will have naught to do with the army."

"It shall be the whole, not the part," answered David determinedly. "The truth is known. It can serve no end to withhold the writing to the army. Remember what I have said to thee. The disloyalty of the army must not be known. Canst thou not act after the will of Allah, the all-powerful, the all-just, the all-merciful?"

There was an instant's pause, and then suddenly Harrik placed the paper in his palm and wrote swiftly and at some length to Kaïd. Laying it down, he took

another and wrote but a few words—to Achmet and Diaz. This message said in brief, "Do not strike. It is the will of Allah. The army shall keep faithful until the day of the Mahdi be come. I spoke before the time. I go to the bosom of my Lord Mahomet."

He threw the papers on the floor before David, who picked them up, read them, and put them into his pocket.

"It is well," he said. "Egypt shall have peace. And thou, Eminence?"

"Who shall escape Fate? What I have written I have written."

David rose and salaamed. Harrik rose also.

"Thou wouldst go, having accomplished thy will?" Harrik asked, a thought flashing to his mind again, in keeping with his earlier purpose. Why should this man be left to trouble Egypt?

David touched his breast. "I must bear thy words to the Palace and the Citadel."

"Are there not slaves for messengers?" Involuntarily Harrik turned his eyes to the velvet curtains. No fear possessed David, but he felt the keenness of the struggle, and prepared for the last critical moment of fanaticism.

"It were a foolish thing to attempt my death," he said calmly. "I have been thy friend to urge thee to do that which saves thee from public shame, and Egypt from peril. I came alone, because I had no fear that thou wouldst go to thy death shaming hospitality."

"Thou wast sure I would give myself to death?"

"Even as that I breathe. Thou wert mistaken; a madness possessed thee; but thou, I knew, wouldst choose the way of honour. I too have had dreams—and of Egypt. If it were for her good, I would die for her."

"Thou art mad. But the mad are in the hands of God, and—"

Suddenly Harrik stopped. There came to his ears two distant sounds—the faint click of horses' hoofs and that dull rumble they had heard as they talked, a sound he loved, the roar of his lions.

He clapped his hands twice, the curtains parted opposite, and a slave slid silently forward.

"Quick! The horses! What are they? Bring me word," he said.

The slave vanished. For a moment there was silence. The eyes of the two men met. In the minds of both was the same thing.

"Kaïd! The Nubians!" Harrik said, at last. David made no response.

The slave returned, and his voice murmured softly, as though the matter were of no concern: "The Nubians—from the Palace." In an instant he was gone again.

"Kaïd had not faith in thee," Harrik said grimly. "But see, infidel though thou art, thou trustest me, and thou shalt go thy way. Take them with thee, yonder jackals of the desert. I will not go with them. I did not choose to live; others chose for me; but I will die after my own choice. Thou hast heard a voice, even as I. It is too late to flee to the desert. Fate tricks me. '*The lions are loosed on thee*'—so the voice said to me in the night. Hark! dost thou not hear them—the lions, Harrik's lions, got out of the uttermost desert?"

David could hear the distant roar, for the menagerie was even part of the palace itself.

"Go in peace," continued Harrik soberly and with dignity, "and when Egypt is given to the infidel and Muslims are their slaves, remember that Harrik would

have saved it for his Lord Mahomet, the Prophet of God."

He clapped his hands, and fifty slaves slid from behind the velvet curtains.

"I have thy word by the tomb of thy mother that thou wilt take the Nubians hence, and leave me in peace?" he asked.

David raised a hand above his head. "As I have trusted thee, trust thou me, Harrik, son of Mahomet." Harrik made a gesture of dismissal, and David salaamed and turned to go. As the curtains parted for his exit, he faced Harrik again. "Peace be to thee," he said.

But, seated in his cushions, the haggard, fanatical face of Harrik was turned from him, the black, flaring eyes fixed on vacancy. The curtain dropped behind David, and through the dim rooms and corridors he passed, the slaves gliding beside him, before him, and behind him, until they reached the great doors. As they swung open and the cool night breeze blew in his face, a great suspiration of relief passed from him. What he had set out to do would be accomplished in all. Harrik would keep his word. It was the only way.

As he emerged from the doorway some one fell at his feet, caught his sleeve and kissed it. It was Mahommed Hassan. Behind Mahommed was a little group of officers and a hundred stalwart Nubians. David motioned them towards the great gates, and, without speaking, passed swiftly down the pathway and emerged upon the road without. A moment later he was riding towards the Citadel with Harrik's message to Achmet.

In the red-curtained room Harrik sat alone, listening until he heard the far clatter of hoofs, and knew that the Nubians were gone. Then the other distant sound which had captured his ear came to him again. In his

fancy it grew louder and louder. With it came the voice that called him in the night, the voice of a woman—of the wife he had given to the lions for a crime against him which she did not commit, which had haunted him all the years. He had seen her thrown to the king of them all, killed in one swift instant, and dragged about the den by her warm white neck—this slave wife from Albania, his adored Fatima. And when, afterwards, he came to know the truth, and of her innocence, from the chief eunuch who with his last breath cleared her name, a terrible anger and despair had come upon him. Time and intrigue and conspiracy had distracted his mind, and the Jehad became the fixed aim and end of his life. Now this was gone. Destiny had tripped him up. Kaïd and the infidel Inglesi had won.

As the one great passion went out like smoke, the woman he loved, whom he had given to the lions, the memory of her, some haunting part of her, possessed him, overcame him. In truth, he had heard a voice in the night, but not the voice of a spirit. It was the voice of Zaida, who, preying upon his superstitious mind—she knew the hallucination which possessed him concerning her he had cast to the lions—and having given the terrible secret to Kaïd, whom she had ever loved, would still save Harrik from the sure vengeance which must fall upon him. Her design had worked, but not as she intended. She had put a spell of superstition on him, and the end would be accomplished, but not by flight to the desert.

Harrik chose the other way. He had been a hunter. He was without fear. The voice of the woman he loved called him. It came to him through the distant roar of the lions as clear as when, with one cry of "*Harrik!*" she had fallen beneath the lion's paw. He knew now

why he had kept the great beast until this hour, though tempted again and again to slay him.

Like one in a dream, he drew a dagger from the cushions where he sat, and rose to his feet. Leaving the room and passing dark groups of waiting slaves, he travelled empty chambers and long corridors, the voices of the lions growing nearer and nearer. He sped faster now, and presently came to two great doors, on which he knocked thrice. The doors opened, and two slaves held up lights for him to enter. Taking a torch from one of them, he bade them retire, and the doors clanged behind them.

Harrik held up the torch and came nearer. In the centre of the room was a cage in which one great lion paced to and fro in fury. It roared at him savagely. It was his roar which had come to Harrik through the distance and the night. He it was who had carried Fatima, the beloved, about his cage by that neck in which Harrik had laid his face so often.

The hot flush of conflict and the long anger of the years were on him. Since he must die, since Destiny had befooled him, left him the victim of the avengers, he would end it here. Here, against the thing of savage hate which had drunk of the veins and crushed the bones of his fair wife, he would strike one blow deep and strong and shed the blood of sacrifice before his own was shed.

He thrust the torch into the ground, and, with the dagger grasped tightly, carefully opened the cage and stepped inside. The door clicked behind him. The lion was silent now, and in a far corner prepared to spring, crouching low.

"Fatima!" Harrik cried, and sprang forward as the wild beast rose at him. He struck deep, drew forth the dagger—and was still.

CHAPTER XIII

ACHMET THE ROPEMAKER STRIKES

War! War! The chains of the conscripts clanked in the river villages; the wailing of the women affrighted the pigeons in a thousand dovecotes on the Nile; the dust of despair was heaped upon the heads of the old, who knew that their young would no more return, and that the fields of dourha would go ungathered, the water-channels go unattended, and the onion-fields be bare. *War! War! War!* The strong, the broad-shouldered —Aka, Mahmoud, Raschid, Selim, they with the bodies of Seti and the faces of Rameses, in their blue yeleks and unsandalled feet—would go into the desert as their forefathers did for the Shepherd Kings. But there would be no spoil for them—no slaves with swelling breasts and lips of honey; no straight-limbed servants of their pleasure to wait on them with caressing fingers; no rich spoils carried back from the fields of war to the mud hut, the earth oven, and the thatched roof; no rings of soft gold and necklaces of amber snatched from the fingers and bosoms of the captive and the dead. Those days were no more. No vision of loot or luxury allured these. They saw only the yellow sand, the ever-receding oasis, the brackish, undrinkable water, the withered and fruitless date-tree, handfuls of dourha for their food by day, and the keen, sharp night to chill their half-dead bodies in a half-waking sleep. And then the savage struggle

for life—with all the gain to the pashas and the beys, and those who ruled over them; while their own wounds grew foul, and, in the torturing noon-day heat of the white waste, Death reached out and dragged them from the drooping lines to die. Fighting because they must fight—not patriot love, nor understanding, nor sacrifice in their hearts. *War! War! War! War!*

David had been too late to stop it. It had grown to a head with revolution and conspiracy. For months before he came conscripts had been gathered in the Nile country from Rosetta to Assouan, and here and there, far south, tribes had revolted. He had come to power too late to devise another course. One day, when this war was over, he would go alone, save for a faithful few, to deal with these tribes and peoples upon another plane than war; but here and now the only course was that which had been planned by Kaïd and those who counselled him. Troubled by a deep danger drawing near, Kaïd had drawn him into his tough service, half-blindly catching at his help, with a strange, almost superstitious belief that luck and good would come from the alliance; seeing in him a protection against wholesale robbery and debt—were not the English masters of finance, and was not this Englishman honest, and with a brain of fire and an eye that pierced things?

David had accepted the inevitable. The war had its value. It would draw off to the south—he would see that it was so—Achmet and Higli and Diaz and the rest, who were ever a danger. Not to himself: he did not think of that; but to Kaïd and to Egypt. They had been out-manœuvred, beaten, foiled, knew who had foiled them and what they had escaped; congratulated themselves, but had no gratitude to him, and still plotted his destruction. More than once his death had

been planned, but the dark design had come to light—now from the workers of the bazaars, whose wires of intelligence pierced everywhere; now from some hungry fellah whose yelek he had filled with cakes of dourha beside a bread-shop; now from Mahommed Hassan, who was for him a thousand eyes and feet and hands, who cooked his food, and gathered round him fellaheen or Copts or Soudanese or Nubians whom he himself had tested and found true, and ruled them with a hand of plenty and a rod of iron. Also, from Nahoum's spies he learned of plots and counterplots, chiefly on Achmet's part; and these he hid from Kaïd, while he trusted Nahoum—and not without reason, as yet.

The day of Nahoum's wrath and revenge was not yet come; it was his deep design to lay the foundation for his own dark actions strong on a rock of apparent confidence and devotion. A long torture and a great overwhelming was his design. He knew himself to be in the scheme of a master-workman, and by-and-by he would blunt the chisel and bend the saw; but not yet. Meanwhile, he hated, admired, schemed, and got a sweet taste on his tongue from aiding David to foil Achmet—Higli and Diaz were of little account; only the injury they felt in seeing the sluices being closed on the stream of bribery and corruption kept them in the toils of Achmet's conspiracy. They had saved their heads, but they had not learned their lesson yet; and Achmet, blinded by rage, not at all. Achmet did not understand clemency. One by one his plots had failed, until the day came when David advised Kaïd to send him and his friends into the Soudan, with the punitive expedition under loyal generals. It was David's dream that, in the field of war, a better spirit might enter into Achmet and his friends; that patriotism might stir in them.

The day was approaching when the army must leave. Achmet threw dice once more.

Evening was drawing down. Over the plaintive pink and golden glow of sunset was slowly being drawn a pervasive silver veil of moonlight. A caravan of camels hunched alone in the middle distance, making for the western desert. Near by, village life manifested itself in heavily laden donkeys; in wolfish curs stealing away with refuse into the waste; in women, upright and modest, bearing jars of water on their heads; in evening fires, where the cover of the pot clattered over the boiling mass within; in the voice of the Muezzin calling to prayer.

Returning from Alexandria to Cairo in the special train which Kaïd had sent for him, David watched the scene with grave and friendly interest. There was far to go before those mud huts of the thousand years would give place to rational modern homes; and as he saw a solitary horseman spread his sheepskin on the ground and kneel to say his evening prayer, as Mahomet had done in his flight between Mecca and Medina, the distance between the Egypt of his desire and the ancient Egypt that moved round him sharply impressed his mind, and the magnitude of his task settled heavily on his spirit.

"But it is the beginning—the beginning," he said aloud to himself, looking out upon the green expanses of dourha and lucerne, and eyeing lovingly the cotton-fields here and there, the origin of the industrial movement he foresaw—"and some one had to begin. The rest is as it must be—"

There was a touch of Oriental philosophy in his mind —was it not Galilee and the Nazarene, that Oriental

source from which Mahomet also drew? But he added to the "as it must be" the words, "and as God wills."

He was alone in the compartment with Lacey, whose natural garrulity had had a severe discipline in the months that had passed since he had asked to be allowed to black David's boots. He could now sit for an hour silent, talking to himself, carrying on unheard conversations. Seeing David's mood, he had not spoken twice on this journey, but had made notes in a little "Book of Experience,"—as once he had done in Mexico. At last, however, he raised his head, and looked eagerly out of the window as David did, and sniffed.

"The Nile again," he said, and smiled. The attraction of the Nile was upon him, as it grows on every one who lives in Egypt. The Nile and Egypt—Egypt and the Nile—its mystery, its greatness, its benevolence, its life-giving power, without which Egypt is as the Sahara, it conquers the mind of every man at last.

"The Nile, yes," rejoined David, and smiled also. "We shall cross it presently."

Again they relapsed into silence, broken only by the *clang, clang* of the metal on the rails, and then presently another, more hollow sound—the engine was upon the bridge. Lacey got up and put his head out of the window. Suddenly there was a cry of fear and horror over his head, a warning voice shrieking:

"The bridge is open—we are lost. Effendi—master—Allah!" It was the voice of Mahommed Hassan, who had been perched on the roof of the car.

Like lightning Lacey realised the danger, and saw the only way of escape. He swung open the door, even as the engine touched the edge of the abyss and shrieked its complaint under the hand of the terror-stricken

driver, caught David's shoulder, and cried: "Jump—jump into the river—quick!"

As the engine toppled, David jumped—there was no time to think, obedience was the only way. After him sprang, far down into the grey-blue water, Lacey and Mahommed. When they came again to the surface, the little train with its handful of human freight had disappeared.

Two people had seen the train plunge to destruction—the solitary horseman whom David had watched kneel upon his sheepskin, and who now from a far hill had seen the disaster, but had not seen the three jump for their lives, and a fisherman on the bank, who ran shouting towards a village standing back from the river.

As the fisherman sped shrieking and beckoning to the villagers, David, Lacey, and Mahommed fought for their lives in the swift current, swimming at an angle upstream towards the shore; for, as Mahommed warned them, there were rocks below. Lacey was a good swimmer, but he was heavy, and David was a better, but Mahommed had proved his merit in the past on many an occasion when the laws of the river were reaching out strong hands for him. Now, as Mahommed swam, he kept moaning to himself, cursing his father and his father's son, as though he himself were to blame for the crime which had been committed. Here was a plot, and he had discovered more plots than one against his master. The bridge-opener—when he found him he would take him into the desert and flay him alive; and find him he would. His watchful eyes were on the hut by the bridge where this man should be. No one was visible. He cursed the man and all his ancestry and all his posterity, sleeping and waking, until the day when he, Mahommed, would pinch his flesh with red-

hot irons. But now he had other and nearer things to occupy him, for in the fierce struggle towards the shore Lacey found himself failing, and falling down the stream. Presently both Mahommed and David were beside him, Lacey angrily protesting to David that he must save himself.

"Say, think of Egypt and all the rest. You've got to save yourself—let me splash along!" he spluttered, breathing hard, his shoulders low in the water, his mouth almost submerged.

But David and Mahommed fought along beside him, each determined that it must be all or none; and presently the terror-stricken fisherman who had roused the village, still shrieking deliriously, came upon them in a flat-bottomed boat manned by four stalwart fellaheen, and the tragedy of the bridge was over. But not the tragedy of Achmet the Ropemaker.

CHAPTER XIV

BEYOND THE PALE

MAHOMMED HASSAN had vowed a vow in the river, and he kept it in so far as was seemly. His soul hungered for the face of the bridge-opener, and the hunger grew. He was scarce passed from the shivering Nile into a dry yelek, had hardly taken a juicy piece from the cooking-pot at the house of the village sheikh, before he began to cultivate friends who could help him, including the sheikh himself; for what money Mahommed lacked was supplied by Lacey, who had a reasoned confidence in him, and by the fiercely indignant Kaïd himself, to whom Lacey and Mahommed went secretly, hiding their purpose from David. So, there were a score of villages where every sheikh, eager for gold, listened for the whisper of the doorways, and every slave and villager listened at the sheikh's door. But neither to sheikh nor to villager was it given to find the man.

But one evening there came a knocking at the door of the house which Mahommed still kept in the lowest Muslim quarter of the town, a woman who hid her face and was of more graceful figure than was familiar in those dark purlieus. The door was at once opened, and Mahommed, with a cry, drew her inside.

"Zaida—the peace of God be upon thee," he said, and gazed lovingly yet sadly upon her, for she had greatly changed.

"And upon thee peace, Mahommed," she answered, and sat upon the floor, her head upon her breast.

"Thou hast trouble—eat," he said, and put some cakes of dourha and a meated cucumber beside her.

She touched the food with her fingers, but did not eat.

"Is thy grief, then, for thy prince who gave himself to the lions?" he asked.

"Inshallah! Harrik is in the bosom of Allah. He is with Fatima in the fields of heaven—was I as Fatima to him? Nay, the dead have done with hurting."

"Since that night thou hast been lost, even since Harrik went. I searched for thee, but thou wert hid. Surely, thou knewest mine eyes were aching and my heart was cast down—did not thou and I feed at the same breast?"

"I was dead, and am come forth from the grave; but I shall go again into the dark where all shall forget, even I myself; but there is that which I would do, which thou must do for me, even as I shall do good to thee, that which is the desire of my heart."

"Speak, light of the morning and blessing of thy mother's soul," he said, and crowded into his mouth a roll of meat and cucumber. "Against thy feddan shall be set my date-tree; it hath been so ever."

"Listen then, and by the stone of the Kaabah, keep the faith which has been thine and mine since my mother, dying, gave me to thy mother, whose milk gave me health and, in my youth, beauty—and, in my youth, beauty!" Suddenly she buried her face in her veil, and her body shook with sobs which had no voice. Presently she continued: "Listen, and by Abraham and Christ and all the Prophets, and by Mahomet the true revealer, give me thine aid. When Harrik gave his life to the lions, I fled to her whom I had loved in the house of Kaïd—Laka the Syrian, afterwards the wife of Achmet Pasha. By Harrik's death I was free—no more a

slave. Once Laka had been the joy of Achmet's heart, but, because she had no child, she was despised and forgotten. Was it not meet I should fly to her whose sorrow would hide my loneliness? And so it was—I was hidden in the harem of Achmet. But miserable tongues —may God wither them!—told Achmet of my presence. And though I was free, and not a bondswoman, he broke upon my sleep. . . ."

Mahommed's eyes blazed, his dark skin blackened like a coal, and he muttered maledictions between his teeth.

". . . In the morning there was a horror upon me, for which there is no name. But I laughed also when I took a dagger and stole from the harem to find him in the quarters beyond the women's gate. I found him, but I held my hand, for one was with him who spake with a tone of anger and of death, and I listened. Then, indeed, I rejoiced for thee, for I have found thee a road to honour and fortune. The man was a bridge-opener—"

"Ah!—O, light of a thousand eyes, fruit of the tree of Eden!" cried Mahommed, and fell on his knees at her feet, and would have kissed them, but that, with a cry, she said: "Nay, nay, touch me not. But listen. . . . Ay, it was Achmet who sought to drown thy Pasha in the Nile. Thou shalt find the man in the little street called Singat in the Moosky, at the house of Haleel the date-seller."

Mahommed rocked backwards and forwards in his delight. "Oh, now art thou like a lamp of Paradise, even as a star which leadeth an army of stars, beloved," he said. He rubbed his hands together. "Thy witness and his shall send Achmet to a hell of scorpions, and I shall slay the bridge-opener with my own hand—hath not the Effendina secretly said so to me, knowing that my Pasha, the Inglesi, upon whom be peace for ever

and for ever, would forgive him. Ah, thou blossom of the tree of trees—"

She rose hastily, and when he would have kissed her hand she drew back to the wall. "Touch me not—nay, then, Mahommed, touch me not—"

"Why should I not pay thee honour, thou princess among women? Hast thou not the brain of a man, and thy beauty, like thy heart, is it not—"

She put out both her hands and spoke sharply. "Enough, my brother," she said. "Thou hast thy way to great honour. Thou shalt yet have a thousand feddans of well-watered land and slaves to wait upon thee. Get thee to the house of Haleel. There shall the blow fall on the head of Achmet, the blow which was mine to strike, but that Allah stayed my hand that I might do thee and thy Pasha good, and to give the soul-slayer and the body-slayer into the hands of Kaïd, upon whom be everlasting peace!" Her voice dropped low. "Thou saidst but now that I had beauty. Is there yet any beauty in my face?" She lowered her yashmak and looked at him with burning eyes.

"Thou art altogether beautiful," he answered, "but there is a strangeness to thy beauty like none I have seen; as if upon the face of an angel there fell a mist—nay, I have not words to make it plain to thee."

With a great sigh, and yet with the tenseness gone from her eyes, she slowly drew the veil up again till only her eyes were visible. "It is well," she answered. "Now, I have heard that to-morrow night Prince Kaïd will sit in the small court-yard of the blue tiles by the harem to feast with his friends, ere the army goes into the desert at the next sunrise. Achmet is bidden to the feast."

"It is so, O beloved!"

"There will be dancers and singers to make the feast worthy?"

"At such a time it will be so."

"Then this thou shalt do. See to it that I shall be among the singers, and when all have danced and sung, that I shall sing, and be brought before Kaïd."

"Inshallah! It shall be so. Thou dost desire to see Kaïd—in truth, thou hast memory, beloved."

She made a gesture of despair. "Go upon thy business. Dost thou not desire the blood of Achmet and the bridge-opener?"

Mahommed laughed, and joyfully beat his breast, with whispered exclamations, and made ready to go. "And thou?" he asked.

"Am I not welcome here?" she replied wearily.

"O, my sister, thou art the master of my life and all that I have," he exclaimed, and a moment afterwards he was speeding towards Kaïd's Palace.

For the first time since the day of his banishment Achmet the Ropemaker was invited to Kaïd's Palace. Coming, he was received with careless consideration by the Prince. Behind his long, harsh face and sullen eyes a devil was raging, because of all his plans that had gone awry, and because the man he had sought to kill still served the Effendina, putting a blight upon Egypt. To-morrow he, Achmet, must go into the desert with the army, and this hated Inglesi would remain behind to have his will with Kaïd. The one drop of comfort in his cup was the fact that the displeasure of the Effendina against himself was removed, and that he had, therefore, his foot once more inside the Palace. When he came back from the war he would win his way to power again. Meanwhile, he cursed the man who had eluded

the death he had prepared for him. With his own eyes had he not seen, from the hill top, the train plunge to destruction, and had he not once more got off his horse and knelt upon his sheepskin and given thanks to Allah —a devout Arab obeying the sunset call to prayer, as David had observed from the train?

One by one, two by two, group by group, the unveiled dancers came and went; the singers sang behind the screen provided for them, so that none might see their faces, after the custom. At last, however, Kaïd and his guests grew listless, and smoked and talked idly. Yet there was in the eyes of Kaïd a watchfulness unseen by any save a fellah who squatted in a corner eating sweetmeats, and a hidden singer waiting until she should be called before the Prince Pasha. The singer's glances continually flashed between Kaïd and Achmet. At last, with gleaming eyes, she saw six Nubian slaves steal silently behind Achmet. One, also, of great strength, came suddenly and stood before him. In his hands was a leathern thong.

Achmet saw, felt the presence of the slaves behind him, and shrank back numbed and appalled. A mist came before his eyes; the voice he heard summoning him to stand up seemed to come from infinite distances. The hand of doom had fallen like a thunderbolt. The leathern thong in the hands of the slave was the token of instant death. There was no chance of escape. The Nubians had him at their mercy. As his brain struggled to regain its understanding, he saw, as in a dream, David enter the court-yard and come towards Kaïd.

Suddenly David stopped in amazement, seeing Achmet. Inquiringly he looked at Kaïd, who spoke earnestly to him in a low tone. Whereupon David turned

his head away, but after a moment fixed his eyes on Achmet.

Kaïd motioned all his startled guests to come nearer. Then in strong, unmerciful voice he laid Achmet's crime before them, and told the story of the bridge-opener, who had that day expiated his crime in the desert by the hands of Mahommed—but not with torture, as Mahommed had hoped might be.

"What shall be his punishment—so foul, so wolfish?" Kaïd asked of them all. A dozen voices answered, some one terrible thing, some another.

"Mercy!" moaned Achmet aghast. "Mercy, Saadat!" he cried to David.

David looked at him calmly. There was little mercy in his eyes as he answered: "Thy crimes sent to their death in the Nile those who never injured thee. Dost thou quarrel with justice? Compose thy soul, and I pray only the Effendina to give thee that seemly death thou didst deny thy victims." He bowed respectfully to Kaïd.

Kaïd frowned. "The ways of Egypt are the ways of Egypt, and not of the land once thine," he answered shortly. Then, under the spell of that influence which he had never yet been able to resist, he added to the slaves: "Take him aside. I will think upon it. But he shall die at sunrise ere the army goes. Shall not justice be the gift of Kaïd for an example and a warning? Take him away a little. I will decide."

As Achmet and the slaves disappeared into a dark corner of the court-yard, Kaïd rose to his feet, and, upon the hint, his guests, murmuring praises of his justice and his mercy and his wisdom, slowly melted from the court-yard; but once outside they hastened to proclaim in the four quarters of Cairo how yet again the English

Pasha had picked from the Tree of Life an apple of fortune.

The court-yard was now empty, save for the servants of the Prince, David and Mahommed, and two officers in whom David had advised Kaïd to put trust. Presently one of these officers said: "There is another singer, and the last. Is it the Effendina's pleasure?"

Kaïd made a gesture of assent, sat down, and took the stem of a narghileh between his lips. For a moment there was silence, and then, out upon the sweet, perfumed night, over which the stars hung brilliant and soft and near, a voice at first quietly, then fully, and palpitating with feeling, poured forth an Eastern love song:

> "Take thou thy flight, O soul! Thou hast no more
> The gladness of the morning! Ah, the perfumed roses
> My love laid on my bosom as I slept!
> How did he wake me with his lips upon mine eyes,
> How did the singers carol—the singers of my soul
> That nest among the thoughts of my beloved! . . .
> All silent now, the choruses are gone,
> The windows of my soul are closed; no more
> Mine eyes look gladly out to see my lover come.
> There is no more to do, no more to say:
> Take flight, my soul, my love returns no more!"

At the first note Kaïd started, and his eyes fastened upon the screen behind which sat the singer. Then, as the voice, in sweet anguish, filled the court-yard, entrancing them all, rose higher and higher, fell and died away, he got to his feet, and called out hoarsely: "Come —come forth!"

Slowly a graceful, veiled figure came from behind the great screen. He took a step forward.

"Zaida! Zaida!" he said gently, amazedly.

She salaamed low. "Forgive me, O my lord!" she

said, in a whispering voice, drawing her veil about her head. "It was my soul's desire to look upon thy face once more."

"Whither didst thou go at Harrik's death? I sent to find thee, and give thee safety; but thou wert gone, none knew where."

"O my lord, what was I but a mote in thy sun, that thou shouldst seek me?"

Kaïd's eyes fell, and he murmured to himself a moment, then he said slowly: "Thou didst save Egypt, thou and my friend"—he gestured towards David—"and my life also, and all else that is worth. Therefore bounty, and safety, and all thy desires were thy due. Kaïd is no ingrate—no, by the hand of Moses that smote at Sinai!"

She made a pathetic motion of her hands. "By Harrik's death I am free, a slave no longer. O my lord, where I go bounty and famine are the same."

Kaïd took a step forward. "Let me see thy face," he said, something strange in her tone moving him with awe.

She lowered her veil and looked him in the eyes. Her wan beauty smote him, conquered him, the exquisite pain in her face filled Kaïd's eyes with foreboding, and pierced his heart.

"O cursed day that saw thee leave these walls! I did it for thy good—thou wert so young; thy life was all before thee! But now—come, Zaida, here in Kaïd's Palace thou shalt have a home, and be at peace, for I see that thou hast suffered. Surely it shall be said that Kaïd honours thee." He reached out to take her hand.

She had listened like one in a dream, but, as he was about to touch her, she suddenly drew back, veiled her

face, save for the eyes, and said in a voice of agony: "*Unclean, unclean! My lord, I am a leper!*"

An awed and awful silence fell upon them all. Kaïd drew back as though smitten by a blow.

Presently, upon the silence, her voice sharp with agony said: "I am a leper, and I go to that desert place which my lord has set apart for lepers, where, dead to the world, I shall watch the dreadful years come and go. Behold, I would die, but that I have a sister there these many years, and her sick soul lives in loneliness. O my lord, forgive me! Here was I happy; here of old I did sing to thee, and I came to sing to thee once more a death-song. Also, I came to see thee do justice, ere I went from thy face for ever."

Kaïd's head was lowered on his breast. He shuddered. "Thou art so beautiful—thy voice, all! Thou wouldst see justice—speak! Justice shall be made plain before thee."

Twice she essayed to speak, and could not; but from his sweetmeats and the shadows Mahommed crept forward, kissed the ground before Kaïd, and said: "Effendina, thou knowest me as the servant of thy high servant, Claridge Pasha."

"I know thee—proceed."

"Behold, she whom God has smitten, man smote first. I am her foster-brother—from the same breast we drew the food of life. Thou wouldst do justice, O Effendina; but canst thou do double justice—ay, a thousandfold? Then"—his voice raised almost shrilly—"then do it upon Achmet Pasha. She—Zaida—told me where I should find the bridge-opener."

"Zaida once more!" Kaïd murmured.

"She had learned all in Achmet's harem—hearing speech between Achmet and the man whom thou didst deliver to my hands yesterday."

"Zaida—in Achmet's harem?" Kaïd turned upon her.

Swiftly she told her dreadful tale, how, after Achmet had murdered all of her except her body, she rose up to kill herself; but fainting, fell upon a burning brazier, and her hand thrust accidentally in the live coals felt no pain. "And behold, O my lord, I knew I was a leper; and I remembered my sister and lived on." So she ended, in a voice numbed and tuneless.

Kaïd trembled with rage, and he cried in a loud voice: "Bring Achmet forth."

As the slave sped upon the errand, David laid a hand on Kaïd's arm, and whispered to him earnestly. Kaïd's savage frown cleared away, and his rage calmed down; but an inflexible look came into his face, a look which petrified the ruined Achmet as he salaamed before him.

"Know thy punishment, son of a dog with a dog's heart, and prepare for a daily death," said Kaïd. "This woman thou didst so foully wrong, even when thou didst wrong her, she was a leper."

A low cry broke from Achmet, for now when death came he must go unclean to the after-world, forbidden Allah's presence. Broken and abject he listened.

"She knew not, till thou wert gone," continued Kaïd. "She is innocent before the law. But thou—beast of the slime—hear thy sentence. There is in the far desert a place where lepers live. There, once a year, one caravan comes, and, at the outskirts of the place unclean, leaves food and needful things for another year, and returns again to Egypt after many days. From that place there is no escape—the desert is as the sea, and upon that sea there is no ghiassa to sail to a farther shore. It is the leper land. Thither thou shalt go to wait upon this woman thou hast savagely wronged, and upon her kind, till thou diest. It shall be so."

"Mercy! Mercy!" Achmet cried, horror-stricken, and turned to David. "Thou art merciful. Speak for me, Saadat."

"When didst thou have mercy?" asked David. "Thy crimes are against humanity."

Kaïd made a motion, and, with dragging feet, Achmet passed from the haunts of familiar faces.

For a moment Kaïd stood and looked at Zaida, rigid and stricken in that awful isolation which is the leper's doom. Her eyes were closed, but her head was high.

"Wilt thou not die?" Kaïd asked her gently.

She shook her head slowly, and her hands folded on her breast. "My sister is there," she said at last.

There was an instant's stillness, then Kaïd added with a voice of grief: "Peace be upon thee, Zaida. Life is but a spark. If death comes not to-day, it will to-morrow, for thee—for me. Inshallah, peace be upon thee!"

She opened her eyes and looked at him. Seeing what was in his face, they lighted with a great light for a moment.

"And upon thee peace, O my lord, for ever and for ever!" she said softly, and, turning, left the court-yard, followed at a distance by Mahommed Hassan.

Kaïd remained motionless looking after her.

David broke in on his abstraction. "The army at sunrise—thou wilt speak to it, Effendina?"

Kaïd roused himself. "What shall I say?" he asked anxiously.

"Tell them they shall be clothed and fed, and to every man or his family three hundred piastres at the end."

"Who will do this?" asked Kaïd incredulously.

"Thou, Effendina—Egypt and thou and I."

"So be it," answered Kaïd.

As they left the court-yard, he said suddenly to an officer behind him:

"The caravan to the Place of Lepers—add to the stores fifty camel-loads this year, and each year hereafter. Have heed to it. Ere it starts, come to me. I would see all with mine own eyes."

BOOK III

CHAPTER XV

SOOLSBY'S HAND UPON THE CURTAIN

FAITH raised her eyes from the paper before her and poised her head meditatively.

"How long is it, friend, since—"

"Since *he* went to Egypt?"

"Nay, since thee—"

"Since I went to Mass?" he grumbled humorously.

She laughed whimsically. "Nay, then, since thee made the promise—"

"That I would drink no more till his return—ay, that was my bargain; till then and no longer! I am not to be held back then, unless I change my mind when I see him. Well, 'tis three years since—"

"Three years! Time hasn't flown. Is it not like an old memory, his living here in this house, Soolsby, and all that happened then?"

Soolsby looked at her over his glasses, resting his chin on the back of the chair he was caning, and his lips worked in and out with a suppressed smile.

"Time's got naught to do with you. He's afeard of you," he continued. "He lets you be."

"Friend, thee knows I am almost an old woman now." She made marks abstractedly upon the corner of a piece of paper. "Unless my hair turns grey presently I must bleach it, for 'twill seem improper it should remain so brown."

She smoothed it back with her hand. Try as she would to keep it trim after the manner of her people, it still waved loosely on her forehead and over her ears. And the grey bonnet she wore but added piquancy to its luxuriance, gave a sweet gravity to the demure beauty of the face it sheltered.

"I am thirty now," she murmured, with a sigh, and went on writing.

The old man's fingers moved quickly among the strips of cane, and, after a silence, without raising his head, he said: "Thirty, it means naught."

"To those without understanding," she rejoined drily.

"'Tis tough understanding why there's no wedding-ring on yonder finger. There's been many a man that's wanted it, that's true—the Squire's son from Bridgley, the lord of Axwood Manor, the long soldier from Shipley Wood, and doctors, and such folk aplenty. There's where understanding fails."

Faith's face flushed, then it became pale, and her eyes, suffused, dropped upon the paper before her. At first it seemed as though she must resent his boldness; but she had made a friend of him these years past, and she knew he meant no rudeness. In the past they had talked of things deeper and more intimate still. Yet there was that in his words which touched a sensitive corner of her nature.

"Why should I be marrying?" she asked presently. "There was my sister's son all those years. I had to care for him."

"Ay, older than him by a thimbleful!" he rejoined.

"Nay, till he came to live in this hut alone older by many a year. Since then he is older than me by fifty. I had not thought of marriage before he went away.

Squire's son, soldier, or pillman, what were they to me! He needed me. They came, did they? Well, and if they came?"

"And since the Egyptian went?"

A sort of sob came into her throat. "He does not need me, but he may—he will one day; and then I shall be ready. But now—"

Old Soolsby's face turned away. His house overlooked every house in the valley beneath: he could see nearly every garden; he could even recognise many in the far streets. Besides, there hung along two nails on the wall a telescope, relic of days when he sailed the main. The grounds of the Cloistered House and the fruit-decked garden-wall of the Red Mansion were ever within his vision. Once, twice, thrice, he had seen what he had seen, and dark feelings, harsh emotions, had been roused in him.

"He will need us both—the Egyptian will need us both one day," he answered now; "you more than any, me because I can help him, too—ay, I can help him. But married or single you could help him; so why waste your days here?"

"Is it wasting my days to stay with my father? He is lonely, most lonely since our Davy went away; and troubled, too, for the dangers of that life yonder. His voice used to shake when he prayed, in those days when Davy was away in the desert, down at Darfûr and elsewhere among the rebel tribes. He frightened me then, he was so stern and still. Ah, but that day when we knew he was safe, I was eighteen, and no more!" she added, smiling. "But, think you, I could marry while my life is so tied to him and to our Egyptian?"

No one looking at her limpid, shining blue eyes but would have set her down for twenty-three or twenty-

four, for not a line showed on her smooth face; she was exquisite of limb and feature, and had the lissomeness of a girl of fifteen. There was in her eyes, however, an unquiet sadness; she had abstracted moments when her mind seemed fixed on some vexing problem. Such a mood suddenly came upon her now. The pen lay by the paper untouched, her hands folded in her lap, and a long silence fell upon them, broken only by the twanging of the strips of cane in Soolsby's hands. At last, however, even this sound ceased; and the two scarce moved as the sun drew towards the middle afternoon. At last they were roused by the sound of a horn, and, looking down, they saw a four-in-hand drawing smartly down the road to the village over the gorse-spread common, till it stopped at the Cloistered House. As Faith looked, her face slightly flushed. She bent forward till she saw one figure get down and, waving a hand to the party on the coach as it moved on, disappear into the gateway of the Cloistered House.

"What is the office they have given him?" asked Soolsby, disapproval in his tone, his eyes fixed on the disappearing figure.

"They have made Lord Eglington Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs," she answered.

"And what means that to a common mind?"

"That what his Government does in Egypt will mean good or bad to our Egyptian," she returned.

"That he can do our man good or ill?" Soolsby asked sharply—"that he, yonder, can do that?"

She inclined her head.

"When I see him doing ill—well, when I see him doing that"—he snatched up a piece of wood from the floor—"then I will break him, so!"

He snapped the stick across his knee, and threw the

pieces on the ground. He was excited. He got to his feet and walked up and down the little room, his lips shut tight, his round eyes flaring.

Faith watched him in astonishment. In the past she had seen his face cloud over, his eyes grow sulky, at the mention of Lord Eglington's name; she knew that Soolsby hated him; but his aversion now was more definite and violent than he had before shown, save on that night long ago when David went first to Egypt, and she had heard hard words between them in this same hut. She supposed it one of those antipathies which often grow in inverse ratio to the social position of those concerned. She replied in a soothing voice:

"Then we shall hope that he will do our Davy only good."

"You would not wish me to break his lordship? *You* would not wish it?" He came over to her, and looked sharply at her. "You would not wish it?" he repeated meaningly.

She evaded his question. "Lord Eglington will be a great man one day perhaps," she answered. "He has made his way quickly. How high he has climbed in three years—how high!"

Soolsby's anger was not lessened. "Pooh! Pooh! He is an Earl. An Earl has all with him at the start—name, place, and all. But look at our Egyptian! Look at Egyptian David—what had he but his head and an honest mind? What is he? He is the great man of Egypt. Tell me, who helped Egyptian David? That second-best lordship yonder, he crept about coaxing this one and wheedling that. I know him—I know him. He wheedles and wheedles. No matter whether 'tis a babe or an old woman, he'll talk, and talk, and talk, till

they believe in him, poor folks! No one's too small for his net. There's Martha Higham yonder. She's forty-five. If he sees her, as sure as eggs he'll make love to her, and fill her ears with words she'd never heard before, and 'd never hear at all if not from him. Ay, there's no man too sour and no woman too old that he'll not blandish, if he gets the chance."

As he spoke Faith shut her eyes, and her fingers clasped tightly together—beautiful long, tapering fingers, like those in Romney's pictures. When he stopped, her eyes opened slowly, and she gazed before her down towards that garden by the Red Mansion where her lifetime had been spent.

"Thee says hard words, Soolsby," she rejoined gently. "But maybe thee is right." Then a flash of humour passed over her face. "Suppose we ask Martha Higham if the Earl has 'blandished' her. If the Earl has blandished Martha, he is the very captain of deceit. Why, he has himself but twenty-eight years. Will a man speak so to one older than himself, save in mockery? So, if thee is right in this, then—then if he speak well to deceive and to serve his turn, he will also speak ill; and he will do ill when it may serve his turn; and so he may do our Davy ill, as thee says, Soolsby."

She rose to her feet and made as if to go, but she kept her face from him. Presently, however, she turned and looked at him. "If he does ill to Davy, there will be those like thee, Soolsby, who will not spare him."

His fingers opened and shut maliciously, he nodded dour assent. After an instant, while he watched her, she added: "Thee has not heard my lord is to marry?"

"Marry—who is the blind lass?"

"Her name is Maryon, Miss Hylda Maryon: and she has a great fortune. But within a month it is to be.

Thee remembers the woman of the cross-roads, her that our Davy—"

"Her the Egyptian kissed, and put his watch in her belt—ay, Kate Heaver!"

"She is now maid to her Lord Eglington will wed. She is to spend to-night with us."

"Where is her lad that was, that the Egyptian rolled like dough in a trough?"

"Jasper Kimber? He is at Sheffield. He has been up and down, now sober for a year, now drunken for a month, now in, now out of a place, until this past year. But for this whole year he has been sober, and he may keep his pledge. He is working in the trades-unions. Among his fellow-workers he is called a politician—if loud speaking and boasting can make one. Yet if these doings give him stimulant instead of drink, who shall complain?"

Soolsby's head was down. He was looking out over the far hills, while the strips of cane were idle in his hands. "Ay, 'tis true—'tis true," he nodded. "Give a man an idee which keeps him cogitating, makes him think he's greater than he is, and sets his pulses beating, why, that's the cure to drink. Drink is friendship and good company and big thoughts while it lasts; and it's lonely without it, if you've been used to it. Ay, but Kimber's way is best. Get an idee in your noddle, to do a thing that's more to you than work or food or bed, and 'twill be more than drink, too."

He nodded to himself, then began weaving the strips of cane furiously. Presently he stopped again, and threw his head back with a chuckle. "Now, wouldn't it be a joke, a reg'lar first-class joke, if Kimber and me both had the same idee, if we was both workin' for the same thing—an' didn't know it? I reckon it might be so."

"What end is thee working for, friend? If the public prints speak true, Kimber is working to stand for Parliament against Lord Eglington."

Soolsby grunted and laughed in his throat. "Now, is that the game of Mister Kimber? Against my Lord Eglington! Hey, but that's a joke, my lord!"

"And what is thee working for, Soolsby?"

"What do I be working for? To get the Egyptian back to England—what else?"

"That is no joke."

"Ay, but 'tis a joke." The old man chuckled. "'Tis the best joke in the boilin'." He shook his head and moved his body backwards and forwards with glee. "Me and Kimber! Me and Kimber!" he roared, "and neither of us drunk for a year—not drunk for a whole year. Me and Kimber—and *him!*"

Faith put her hand on his shoulder. "Indeed, I see no joke, but only that which makes my heart thankful, Soolsby."

"Ay, you will be thankful, you will be thankful, by-and-by," he said, still chuckling, and stood up respectfully to show her out.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DEBT AND THE ACCOUNTING

His forehead frowning, but his eyes full of friendliness, Soolsby watched Faith go down the hillside and until she reached the main road. Here, instead of going to the Red Mansion, she hesitated a moment, and then passed along a wooded path leading to the Meeting-house, and the graveyard. It was a perfect day of early summer, the gorse was in full bloom, and the may and the hawthorn were alive with colour. The path she had taken led through a narrow lane, overhung with blossoms and greenery. By bearing away to the left into another path, and making a *détour*, she could reach the Meeting-house through a narrow lane leading past a now disused mill and a small, strong stream flowing from the hill above.

As she came down the hill, other eyes than Soolsby's watched her. From his laboratory—the laboratory in which his father had worked, in which he had lost his life—Eglington had seen the trim, graceful figure. He watched it till it moved into the wooded path. Then he left his garden, and, moving across a field, came into the path ahead of her. Walking swiftly, he reached the old mill, and waited.

She came slowly, now and again stooping to pick a flower and place it in her belt. Her bonnet was slung on her arm, her hair had broken a little loose and made a sort of hood round the face, so still, so composed, into

which the light of steady, soft, apprehending eyes threw a gentle radiance. It was a face to haunt a man when the storm of life was round him. It had, too, a courage which might easily become a delicate stubbornness, a sense of duty which might become sternness, if roused by a sense of wrong to herself or others.

She reached the mill and stood and listened towards the stream and the waterfall. She came here often. The scene quieted her in moods of restlessness which came from a feeling that her mission was interrupted, that half her life's work had been suddenly taken from her. When David went, her life had seemed to shrivel; for with him she had developed as he had developed; and when her busy care of him was withdrawn, she had felt a sort of paralysis which, in a sense, had never left her. Then suitors had come—the soldier from Shipley Wood, the lord of Axwood Manor, and others, and, in a way, a new sense was born in her, though she was alive to the fact that the fifteen thousand pounds inherited from her Uncle Benn had served to warm the air about her into a wider circle. Yet it was neither to soldier, nor squire, nor civil engineer, nor surgeon that the new sense stirring in her was due. The spring was too far beneath to be found by them.

When, at last, she raised her head, Lord Eglington was in the path, looking at her with a half-smile. She did not start, but her face turned white, and a mist came before her eyes.

Quickly, however, as though fearful lest he should think he could trouble her composure, she laid a hand upon herself.

He came near to her and held out his hand. "It has been a long six months since we met here," he said.

She made no motion to take his hand. "I find days

grow shorter as I grow older," she rejoined steadily, and smoothed her hair with her hand, making ready to put on her bonnet.

"Ah, do not put it on," he urged quickly, with a gesture. "It becomes you so—on your arm."

She had regained her self-possession. Pride, the best weapon of a woman, the best tonic, came to her resource. "Thee loves to please thee at any cost," she replied. She fastened the grey strings beneath her chin.

"Would it be costly to keep the bonnet on your arm?"

"It is my pleasure to have it on my head, and my pleasure has some value to myself."

"A moment ago," he rejoined laughing, "it was your pleasure to have it on your arm."

"Are all to be monotonous except Lord Eglington? Is he to have the only patent of change?"

"Do I change?" He smiled at her with a sense of inquisition, with an air that seemed to say, "I have lifted the veil of this woman's heart; I am the master of the situation."

She did not answer to the obvious meaning of his words, but said:

"Thee has done little else but change, so far as eye can see. Thee and thy family were once of Quaker faith, but thee is a High Churchman now. Yet they said a year ago thee was a sceptic or an infidel."

"There is force in what you say," he replied. "I have an inquiring mind; I am ever open to reason. Confucius said: 'It is only the supremely wise or the deeply ignorant who never alter.'"

"Thee has changed politics. Thee made a sensation, but that was not enough. Thee that was a rebel became a deserter."

He laughed. "Ah, I was open to conviction! I took my life in my hands, defied consequences." He laughed again.

"It brought office."

"I am Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs," he murmured complacently.

"Change is a policy with thee, I think. It has paid thee well, so it would seem."

"Only a fair rate of interest for the capital invested and the risks I've taken," he answered with an amused look.

"I do not think that interest will increase. Thee has climbed quickly, but fast climbing is not always safe climbing."

His mood changed. His voice quickened, his face lowered. "You think I will fail? You wish me to fail?"

"In so far as thee acts uprightly, I wish thee well. But if, out of office, thee disregards justice and conscience and the rights of others, can thee be just and faithful in office? Subtlety will not always avail. The strong man takes the straight course. Subtlety is not intellect."

He flushed. She had gone to the weakest point in his defences. His vanity was being hurt. She had an advantage now.

"You are wrong," he protested. "You do not understand public life, here in a silly Quaker village."

"Does thee think that all that happens in 'public life' is of consequence? That is not sensible. Thee is in the midst of a thousand immaterial things, though they have importance for the moment. But the chief things that matter to all, does thee not know that a 'silly Quaker village' may realise them to the full—more

fully because we see them apart from the thousand little things that do not matter? I remember a thing in political life that mattered. It was at Heddington after the massacre at Damascus. Does thee think that we did not know thee spoke without principle then, and only to draw notice?"

"You would make me into a demagogue," he said irritably.

"Thee is a demagogue," she answered candidly.

"Why did you never say all this to me long ago? Years have passed since then, and since then you and I have—have been friends. You have—"

He paused, for she made a protesting motion, and a fire sprang into her eyes. Her voice got colder.

"Thee made me believe—ah, how many times did we speak together? Six times it was, not more. Thee made me believe that what I thought or said helped thee to see things better. Thee said I saw things truly like a child, with the wisdom of a woman. Thee remembers that?"

"It was so," he put in hastily.

"No, not for a moment so, though I was blinded to think for an instant that it was. Thee subtly took the one way which could have made me listen to thee. Thee wanted help, thee said; and if a word of mine could help thee now and then, should I withhold it, so long as I thought thee honest?"

"Do you think I was not honest in wanting your friendship?"

"Nay, it was not friendship thee wanted, for friendship means a giving and a getting. Thee was bent on getting what was, indeed, of but little value save to the giver; but thee gave nothing; thee remembered nothing of what was given thee."

"It is not so, it is not so," he urged eagerly, nervously. "I gave, and I still give."

"In those old days, I did not understand," she went on, "what it was thee wanted. I know now. It was to know the heart and mind of a woman—of a woman older than thee. So that thee should have such sort of experience, though I was but a foolish choice of the experiment. They say thee has a gift for chemistry like thy father; but if thee experiments no more wisely in the laboratory than with me, thee will not reach distinction."

"Your father hated my father and did not believe in him, I know not why, and you are now hating and disbelieving me."

"I do not know why my father held the late Earl in abhorrence; I know he has no faith in thee; and I did ill in listening to thee, in believing for one moment there was truth in thee. But no, no, I think I never believed it. I think that even when thee said most, at heart I believed least."

"You doubt that? You doubt all I said to you?" he urged softly, coming close to her.

She drew aside slightly. She had steeled herself for this inevitable interview, and there was no weakening of her defences; but a great sadness came into her eyes, and spread over her face, and to this was added, after a moment, a pity which showed the distance she was from him, the safety in which she stood.

"I remember that the garden was beautiful, and that thee spoke as though thee was part of the garden. Thee remembers that, at our meeting in the Cloistered House, when the woman was ill, I had no faith in thee; but thee spoke with grace, and turned common things round about, so that they seemed different to the ear from any

past hearing; and I listened. I did not know, and I do not know now, why it is my duty to shun any of thy name, and above all thyself; but it has been so commanded by my father all my life; and though what he says may be in a little wrong, in much it must ever be right."

"And so, from a hatred handed down, your mind has been tuned to shun even when your heart was learning to give me a home—Faith?"

She straightened herself. "Friend, thee will do me the courtesy to forget to use my Christian name. I am not a child—indeed, I am well on in years"—he smiled—"and thee has no friendship or kinship for warrant. If my mind was tuned to shun thee, I gave proof that it was willing to take thee at thine own worth, even against the will of my father, against the desire of David, who knew thee better than I—he gauged thee at first glance."

"You have become a philosopher and a statesman," he said ironically. "Has your nephew, the new Joseph in Egypt, been giving you instructions in high politics? Has he been writing the Epistles of David to the Quakers?"

"Thee will leave his name apart," she answered with dignity. "I have studied neither high politics nor statesmanship, though in the days when thee did flatter me thee said I had a gift for such things. Thee did not speak the truth. And now I will say that I do not respect thee. No matter how high thee may climb, still I shall not respect thee; for thee will ever gain ends by flattery, by subtlety, and by using every man and every woman for selfish ends. Thee cannot be true—not even to that which by nature is greatest in thee."

He withered under her words.

"And what is greatest in me?" he asked abruptly, his coolness and self-possession striving to hold their own.

"That which will ruin thee in the end." Her eyes looked beyond his into the distance, rapt and shining; she seemed scarcely aware of his presence. "That which will bring thee down—thy hungry spirit of discovery. It will serve thee no better than it served the late Earl. But thee it will lead into paths ending in a gulf of darkness."

"Deborah!" he answered, with a rasping laugh. "*Continuez!* Forewarned is forearmed."

"No, do not think I shall be glad," she answered, still like one in a dream. "I shall lament it as I lament—as I lament now. All else fades away into the end which I see for thee. Thee will live alone without a near and true friend, and thee will die alone, never having had a true friend. Thee will never be a true friend, thee will never love truly man or woman, and thee will never find man or woman who will love thee truly, or will be with thee to aid thee in the dark and falling days."

"Then," he broke in sharply, querulously, "then, I will stand alone. I shall never come whining that I have been ill-used, to fate or fortune, to men or to the Almighty."

"That I believe. Pride will build up in thee a strength which will be like water in the end. Oh, my lord," she added, with a sudden change in her voice and manner, "if thee could only be true—thee who never has been true to any one!"

"Why does a woman always judge a man after her own personal experience with him, or what she thinks is her own personal experience?"

A robin hopped upon the path before her. She

watched it for a moment intently, then lifted her head as the sound of a bell came through the wood to her. She looked up at the sun, which was slanting towards evening. She seemed about to speak, but with second thought, moved on slowly past the mill and towards the Meeting-house. He stepped on beside her. She kept her eyes fixed in front of her, as though oblivious of his presence.

"You shall hear me speak. You shall listen to what I have to say, though it is for the last time," he urged stubbornly. "You think ill of me. Are you sure you are not pharisaical?"

"I am honest enough to say that which hurts me in the saying. I do not forget that to believe thee what I think is to take all truth from what thee said to me last year, and again this spring when the tulips first came and there was good news from Egypt."

"I said," he rejoined boldly, "that I was happier with you than with any one else alive. I said that what you thought of me meant more to me than what any one else in the world thought; and that I say now, and will always say it."

The old look of pity came into her face. "I am older than thee by two years," she answered quaintly, "and I know more of real life, though I have lived always here. I have made the most of the little I have seen; thee has made little of the much that thee has seen. Thee does not know the truth concerning thee. Is it not, in truth, vanity which would have me believe in thee? If thee was happier with me than with any one alive, why then did thee make choice of a wife even in the days thee was speaking to me as no man shall ever speak again? Nothing can explain so base a fact. No, no, no, thee said to me what thee said to others, and will say again without

shame. But—but see, I will forgive; yes, I will follow thee with good wishes, if thee will promise to help David, whom thee has ever disliked, as, in the place held by thee, thee can do now. Will thee offer this one proof, in spite of all else that disproves, that thee spoke any words of truth to me in the Cloistered House, in the garden by my father's house, by yonder mill, and hard by the Meeting-house yonder—near to my sister's grave by the willow-tree? Will thee do that for me?"

He was about to reply, when there appeared in the path before them Luke Claridge. His back was upon them, but he heard their footsteps and swung round. As though turned to stone, he waited for them. As they approached, his lips, dry and pale, essayed to speak, but no sound came. A fire was in his eyes which boded no good. Amazement, horror, deadly anger, were all there, but, after a moment, the will behind the tumult commanded it, the wild light died away, and he stood calm and still awaiting them. Faith was as pale as when she had met Eglington. As she came nearer, Luke Claridge said, in a low voice:

"How do I find thee in this company, Faith?"

There was reproach unutterable in his voice, in his face. He seemed humiliated and shamed, though all the while a violent spirit in him was struggling for the mastery.

"As I came this way to visit my sister's grave I met my lord by the mill. He spoke to me, and, as I wished a favour of him, I walked with him thither—but a little way. I was going to visit my sister's grave."

"Thy sister's grave!" The fire flamed up again, but the masterful will chilled it down, and he answered: "What secret business can thee have with any of that name which I have cast out of knowledge or notice?"

Ignorant as he was of the old man's cause for quarrel or dislike, Eglington felt himself aggrieved, and, therefore, with an advantage.

"You had differences with my father, sir," he said. "I do not know what they were, but they lasted his lifetime, and all my life you have treated me with aversion. I am not a pestilence. I have never wronged you. I have lived your peaceful neighbour under great provocation, for your treatment would have done me harm if my place were less secure. I think I have cause for complaint."

"I have never acted in haste concerning thee, or those who went before thee. What business had thee with him, Faith?" he asked again. His voice was dry and hard.

Her impulse was to tell the truth, and so for ever have her conscience clear, for there would never be any more need for secrecy. The wheel of understanding between Eglington and herself had come full circle, and there was an end. But to tell the truth would be to wound her father, to vex him against Eglington even as he had never yet been vexed. Besides, it was hard, while Eglington was there, to tell what, after all, was the sole affair of her own life. In one literal sense, Eglington was not guilty of deceit. Never in so many words had he said to her: "I love you;" never had he made any promise to her or exacted one; he had done no more than lure her to feel one thing, and then to call it another thing. Also there was no direct and vital injury, for she had never loved him; though how far she had travelled towards that land of light and trial she could never now declare. These thoughts flashed through her mind as she stood looking at her father. Her tongue seemed imprisoned, yet her soft and candid eyes conquered the austerity in the old man's gaze.

Eglington spoke for her.

"Permit me to answer, neighbour," he said. "I wished to speak with your daughter, because I am to be married soon, and my wife will, at intervals, come here to live. I wished that she should not be shunned by you and yours as I have been. She would not understand, as I do not. Yours is a constant call to war, while all your religion is an appeal for peace. I wished to ask your daughter to influence you to make it possible for me and mine to live in friendship among you. My wife will have some claims upon you. Her mother was an American, of a Quaker family from Derbyshire. She has done nothing to merit your aversion."

Faith listened astonished and baffled. Nothing of this had he said to her. Had he meant to say it to her? Had it been in his mind? Or was it only a swift adaptation to circumstances, an adroit means of working upon the sympathies of her father, who, she could see, was in a quandary? Eglington had indeed touched the old man as he had not been touched in thirty years and more by one of his name. For a moment the insinuating quality of the appeal submerged the fixed idea in a mind to which the name of Eglington was anathema.

Eglington saw his advantage. He had felt his way carefully, and he pursued it quickly. "For the rest, your daughter asked what I was ready to offer—such help as, in my new official position, I can give to Claridge Pasha in Egypt. As a neighbour, as Minister in the Government, I will do what I can to aid him."

Silent and embarrassed, the old man tried to find his way. Presently he said tentatively: "David Claridge has a title to the esteem of all civilised people."

Eglington was quick with his reply. "If he succeeds, his *title* will become a concrete fact. There is no hon-

our the Crown would not confer for such remarkable service."

The other's face darkened. "I did not speak, I did not think, of handles to his name. I find no good in them, but only means for deceiving and deluding the world. Such honours as might make him baronet, or duke, would add not a cubit to his stature. If he had such a thing by right"—his voice hardened, his eyes grew angry once again—"I would wish it sunk into the sea."

"You are hard on us, sir, who did not give ourselves our titles, but took them with our birth as a matter of course. There was nothing inspiring in them. We became at once distinguished and respectable by patent."

He laughed good-humouredly. Then suddenly he changed, and his eyes took on a far-off look which Faith had seen so often in the eyes of David, but in David's more intense and meaning, and so different. With what deftness and diplomacy had he worked upon her father! He had crossed a stream which seemed impassable by adroit, insincere diplomacy.

She saw that it was time to go, while yet Eglington's disparagement of rank and aristocracy was ringing in the old man's ears; though she knew there was nothing in Eglington's equipment he valued more than his title and the place it gave him. Grateful, however, for his successful intervention, Faith now held out her hand.

"I must take my father away, or it will be sunset before we reach the Meeting-house," she said. "Good-bye—friend," she added gently.

For an instant Luke Claridge stared at her, scarce comprehending that his movements were being directed by any one save himself. Truth was, Faith had come to

her cross-roads in life. For the first time in her memory she had seen her father speak to an Eglington without harshness; and, as he weakened for a moment, she moved to take command of that weakness, though she meant it to seem like leading. While loving her and David profoundly, her father had ever been quietly imperious. If she could but gain ascendency even in a little, it might lead to a more open book of life for them both.

Eglington held out his hand to the old man. "I have kept you too long, sir. Good-bye—if you will."

The offered hand was not taken, but Faith slid hers into the old man's palm, and pressed it, and he said quietly to Eglington:

"Good evening, friend."

"And when I bring my wife, sir?" Eglington added, with a smile.

"When thee brings the lady, there will be occasion to consider—there will be occasion then."

Eglington raised his hat, and turned back upon the path he and Faith had travelled.

The old man stood watching him until he was out of view. Then he seemed more himself. Still holding Faith's hand, he walked with her on the gorse-covered hill towards the graveyard.

"Was it his heart spoke or his tongue—is there any truth in him?" he asked at last.

Faith pressed his hand. "If he help Davy, father—"

"If he help Davy; ay, if he help Davy! Nay, I cannot go to the graveyard, Faith. Take me home," he said with emotion.

His hand remained in hers. She had conquered. She was set upon a new path of influence. Her hand was upon the door of his heart.

"Thee is good to me, Faith," he said, as they entered the door of the Red Mansion.

She glanced over towards the Cloistered House. Smoke was coming from the little chimney of the laboratory.

CHAPTER XVII

THE WOMAN OF THE CROSS-ROADS

The night came down slowly. There was no moon, the stars were few, but a mellow warmth was in the air. At the window of her little sitting-room up-stairs Faith sat looking out into the stillness. Beneath was the garden with its profusion of flowers and fruit; away to the left was the common; and beyond—far beyond—was a glow in the sky, a suffused light, of a delicate orange, merging away into a grey-blueness, deepening into a darker blue; and then a purple depth, palpable and heavy with a comforting silence.

There was something alluring and suggestive in the soft, smothered radiance. It had all the glamour of some distant place of pleasure and quiet joy, of happiness and ethereal being. It was, in fact, the far-off mirror of the flaming furnace of the great Heddington factories. The light of the sky above was a soft radiance, as of a happy Arcadian land; the fire of the toil beneath was the output of human striving, an intricate interweaving of vital forces which, like some Titanic machine, wrought out in pain a vast destiny.

As Faith looked, she thought of the thousands beneath struggling and striving, none with all desires satisfied, some in an agony of want and penury, all straining for the elusive Enough; like Sisyphus ever rolling the rock of labour up a hill too steep for them.

Her mind flew to the man Kimber and his task of organising labour for its own advance. What a life-work

for a man! Here might David have spent his days, here among his own countrymen, instead of in that far-off land where all the forces of centuries were fighting against him. Here the forces would have been fighting for him; the trend was towards the elevation of the standards of living and the wider rights of labour, to the amelioration of hard conditions of life among the poor. David's mind, with its equity, its balance, and its fire —what might it not have accomplished in shepherding such a cause, guiding its activity?

The gate of the garden clicked. Kate Heaver had arrived. Faith got to her feet and left the room.

A few minutes later the woman of the cross-roads was seated opposite Faith at the window. She had changed greatly since the day David had sent her on her way to London and into the unknown. Then there had been recklessness, something of coarseness, in the fine face. Now it was strong and quiet, marked by purpose and self-reliance.

Ignorance had been her only peril in the past, as it had been the cause of her unhappy connection with Jasper Kimber. The atmosphere in which she was raised had been unmoral; it had not been consciously immoral. Her temper and her indignation against her man for drinking had been the means of driving them apart. He would have married her in those days, if she had given the word, for her will was stronger than his own; but she had broken from him in an agony of rage and regret and despised love.

She was now, again, as she had been in those first days before she went with Jasper Kimber; when she was the rose-red angel of the quarters; when children were lured by the touch of her large, shapely hands; when she had been counted a great nurse among her

neighbours. The old simple untutored sympathy was in her face.

They sat for a long time in silence, and at length Faith said: "Thee is happy now with her who is to marry Lord Eglington?"

Kate nodded, smiling. "Who could help but be happy with her! Yet a temper, too—so quick, and then all over in a second. Ah, she is one that'd break her heart if she was treated bad; but I'd be sorry for him that did it. For the like of her goes mad with hurting, and the mad cut with a big scythe."

"Has thee seen Lord Eglington?"

"Once before I left these parts and often in London." Her voice was constrained; she seemed not to wish to speak of him.

"Is it true that Jasper Kimber is to stand against him for Parliament?"

"I do not know. They say my lord has to do with foreign lands now. If he helps Mr. Claridge there, then it would be a foolish thing for Jasper to fight him; and so I've told him. You've got to stand by those that stand by you. Lord Eglington has his own way of doing things. There's not a servant in my lady's house that he hasn't made his friend. He's one that's bound to have his will. I heard my lady say he talks better than any one in England, and there's none she doesn't know from duchesses down."

"She is beautiful?" asked Faith, with hesitation.

"Taller than you, but not so beautiful."

Faith sighed, and was silent for a moment, then she laid a hand upon the other's shoulder. "Thee has never said what happened when thee first got to London. Does thee care to say?"

"It seems so long ago," was the reply. . . . "No need to tell of the journey to London. When I got

there it frightened me at first. My head went round. But somehow it came to me what I should do. I asked my way to a hospital. I'd helped a many that was hurt at Heddington and thereabouts, and doctors said I was as good as them that was trained. I found a hospital at last, and asked for work, but they laughed at me—it was the porter at the door. I was not to be put down, and asked to see some one that had rights to say yes or no. So he opened the door and told me to go. I said he was no man to treat a woman so, and I would not go. Then a fine white-haired gentleman came forward. He had heard all we had said, standing in a little room at one side. He spoke a kind word or two, and asked me to go into the little room. Before I had time to think, he came to me with the matron, and left me with her. I told her the whole truth, and she looked at first as if she'd turn me out. But the end of it was I stayed there for the night, and in the morning the old gentleman came again, and with him his lady, as kind and sharp of tongue as himself, and as big as three. Some things she said made my tongue ache to speak back to her; but I choked it down. I went to her to be a sort of nurse and maid. She taught me how to do a hundred things, and by-and-by I couldn't be too thankful she had taken me in. I was with her till she died. Then, six months ago I went to Miss Maryon, who knew about me long before from her that died. With her I've been ever since—and so that's all."

"Surely God has been kind to thee."

"I'd have gone down—down—down, if it hadn't been for Mr. Claridge at the cross-roads."

"Does thee think I shall like her that will live yonder?" She nodded towards the Cloistered House.

"There's none but likes her. She will want a friend,

I'm thinking. She'll be lonely by-and-by. Surely, she will be lonely."

Faith looked at her closely, and at last leaned over, and again laid a soft hand on her shoulder. "Thee thinks that—why?"

"He cares only what matters to himself. She will be naught to him but one that belongs. He'll never try to do her good. Doing good to any but himself never comes to his mind."

"How does thee know him, to speak so surely?"

"When, at the first, he gave me a letter for her one day, and slipped a sovereign into my hand, and nodded, and smiled at me, I knew him right enough. He never could be true to aught."

"Did thee keep the sovereign?" Faith asked anxiously.

"Ay, that I did. If he was for giving his money away, I'd take it fast enough. The gold gave father boots for a year. Why should I mind?"

Faith's face suffused. How low was Eglington's estimate of humanity!

In the silence that followed the door of her room opened, and her father entered. He held in one hand a paper, in the other a candle. His face was passive, but his eyes were burning.

"David—David is coming," he cried, in a voice that rang. "Does thee hear, Faith? Davy is coming home!"

A woman laughed exultantly. It was not Faith.

But still two years passed before David came.

CHAPTER XVIII

TIME, THE IDOL-BREAKER

Lord Windlehurst looked meditatively round the crowded and brilliant salon. His host, the Foreign Minister, had gathered in the vast golden chamber the most notable people of a most notable season, and in as critical a period of the world's politics as had been known for a quarter of a century. After a moment's survey, the ex-Prime-Minister turned to answer the frank and caustic words addressed to him by the Duchess of Snowdon concerning the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Presently he said:

"But there is method in his haste, dear lady. He is good at his dangerous game. He plays high, he plunges; but, somehow, he makes it do. I've been in Parliament a generation or so, and I've never known an amateur more daring and skilful. I should have given him office had I remained in power. Look at him, and tell me if he wouldn't have been worth the backing."

As Lord Windlehurst uttered the last word with an arid smile, he looked quizzically at the central figure of a group of people gaily talking.

The Duchess impatiently tapped her knee with a fan. "Be thankful you haven't got him on your conscience," she rejoined. "I call Eglington unscrupulous and unreliable. He has but one god—getting on; and he has got on, with a vengeance. Whenever I look at that dear

thing he's married, I feel there's no trusting Providence, who seems to make the deserving a footstool for the undeserving. I've known Hylda since she was ten, and I've known him since the minute he came into the world, and I've got the measure of both. She is the finest essence the middle class can distil, and he, oh, he's paraffin—*vin ordinaire*, if you like it better, a selfish, calculating adventurer!"

Lord Windlehurst chuckled mordantly. "Adventurer! That's what they called me—with more reason. I spotted him as soon as he spoke in the House. There was devilry in him, and unscrupulousness, as you say; but, I confess, I thought it would give way to the more profitable habit of integrity, and that some cause would seize him, make him sincere and mistaken, and give him a few falls. But in that he was more original than I thought. He is superior to convictions. You don't think he married yonder Queen of Hearts from conviction, do you?"

He nodded towards a corner where Hylda, under a great palm, and backed by a bank of flowers, stood surrounded by a group of people palpably amused and interested; for she had a reputation for wit—a wit that never hurt, and irony that was only whimsical.

"No, there you are wrong," the Duchess answered. "He married from conviction, if ever a man did. Look at her beauty, look at her fortune, listen to her tongue. Don't you think conviction was easy?"

Lord Windlehurst looked at Hylda approvingly. "She has the real gift—little information, but much knowledge, the primary gift of public life. Information is full of traps; knowledge avoids them, it reads men; and politics is men—and foreign affairs, perhaps! She is remarkable. I've made some hay in the political

world, not so much as the babblers think, but I hadn't her ability at twenty-five."

"Why didn't she see through Eglington?"

"My dear Betty, he didn't give her time. He carried her off her feet. You know how he can talk."

"That's the trouble. She was clever, and liked a clever man, and he—!"

"Quite so. He'd disprove his own honest parentage, if it would help him on—as you say."

"I didn't say it. Now don't repeat that as from me. I'm not clever enough to think of such things. But that Eglington lot—I knew his father and his grandfather. Old Broadbrim they called his grandfather after he turned Quaker, and he didn't do that till he had had his fling, so my father used to say. And Old Broadbrim's father was called I-want-to-know. He was always poking his nose into things, and playing at being a chemist—like this one and the one before. They all fly off. This one's father used to disappear for two or three years at a time. This one will fly off, too. You'll see!"

"He is too keen on Number One for that, I fancy. He calculates like a mathematician. As cool as a cracksman of fame and fancy."

The Duchess dropped the fan in her lap. "My dear, I've said nothing as bad as that about him. And there he is at the Foreign Office!"

"Yet, what has he done, Betty, after all? He has never cheated at cards, or forged a cheque, or run away with his neighbour's wife."

"There's no credit in not doing what you don't want to do. There's no virtue in not falling, when you're not tempted. Neighbour's wife! He hasn't enough feeling to face it. Oh no, he'll not break the heart of his

neighbour's wife. That's melodrama, and he's a cold-blooded artist. He will torture that sweet child over there until she poisons him, or runs away."

"Isn't he too clever for that? She has a million!"

"He'll not realise it till it's all over. He's too selfish to see—how I hate him!"

Lord Windlehurst smiled indulgently at her. "Ah, you never hated any one—not even the Duke."

"I will not have you take away my character. Of course I've hated, or I wouldn't be worth a button. I'm not the silly thing you've always thought me."

His face became gentler. "I've always thought you one of the wisest women of this world—adventurous, but wise. If it weren't too late, if my day weren't over, I'd ask the one great favour, Betty, and—"

She tapped his arm sharply with her fan. "What a humbug you are—the Great Pretender! But tell me, am I not right about Eglington?"

Windlehurst became grave. "Yes, you are right—but I admire him, too. He is determined to test himself to the full. His ambition is boundless and ruthless, but his mind has a scientific turn—the obligation of energy to apply itself, of intelligence to engage itself to the farthest limit. But service to humanity—"

"Service to humanity!" she sniffed.

"Of course he would think it 'flap-doodle'—except in a speech; but I repeat, I admire him. Think of it all. He was a poor Irish peer, with no wide circle of acquaintance, come of a family none too popular. He strikes out a course for himself—a course which had its dangers, because it was original. He determines to become celebrated—by becoming notorious first. He uses his title as a weapon for advancement as though he were a butter merchant. He plans carefully and

adroitly. He writes a book of travel. It is impudent, and it traverses the observations of authorities, and the scientific geographers prance with rage. That was what he wished. He writes a novel. It sets London laughing at me, his political chief. He knew me well enough to be sure I would not resent it. He would have lampooned his grandmother, if he was sure she would not, or could not, hurt him. Then he becomes more audacious. He publishes a monograph on the painters of Spain, artificial, confident, rhetorical, acute: as fascinating as a hide-and-seek drawing-room play—he is so cleverly escaping from his ignorance and indiscretions all the while. Connoisseurs laugh, students of art shriek a little, and Ruskin writes a scathing letter, which was what he had played for. He had got something for nothing cheaply. The few who knew and despised him did not matter, for they were able and learned and obscure, and, in the world where he moves, most people are superficial, mediocre, and 'tuppence coloured.' It was all very brilliant. He pursued his notoriety, and got it."

"Industrious Eglington!"

"But, yes, he is industrious. It is all business. It was an enormous risk, rebelling against his party, and leaving me, and going over; but his temerity justified itself, and it didn't matter to him that people said he went over to get office as we were going out. He got the office—and people forget so soon. Then, what does he do—"

"He brings out another book, and marries a wife, and abuses his old friends—and you."

"Abuse? With his tongue in his cheek, hoping that I should reply. Dev'lishly ingenious! But on that book of *Electricity and Disease* he scored. In most other

things he's a barber-shop philosopher, but in science he has got a flare, a real talent. So he moves modestly in this thing, for which he had a fine natural gift and more knowledge than he ever had before in any department, whose boundaries his impertinent and ignorant mind had invaded. That book gave him a place. It wasn't full of new things, but it crystallised the discoveries, suggestions, and expectations of others; and, meanwhile, he had got a name at no cost. He is so various. Look at it dispassionately, and you will see much to admire in his skill. He pleases, he amuses, he startles, he baffles, he mystifies."

The Duchess made an impatient exclamation. "The silly newspapers call him a 'remarkable man, a personality.' Now, believe me, Windlehurst, he will overreach himself one of these days, and he'll come down like a stick."

"There you are on solid ground. He thinks that Fate is with him, and that, in taking risks, he is infallible. But the best system breaks at political roulette sooner or later. You have got to work for something outside yourself, something that is bigger than the game, or the end is sickening."

"Eglington hasn't far to go, if that's the truth."

"Well, well, when it comes, we must help him—we must help him up again."

The Duchess nervously adjusted her wig, with ludicrously tiny fingers for one so ample, and said petulantly: "You are incomprehensible. He has been a traitor to you and to your party, he has thrown mud at you, he has played with principles as my terrier plays with his rubber ball, and yet you'll run and pick him up when he falls, and—"

"'And kiss the spot to make it well,'" he laughed

softly, then added with a sigh: "Able men in public life are few; 'far too few, for half our tasks; we can spare not one.' Besides, my dear Betty, there is his pretty lass o' London."

The Duchess was mollified at once. "I wish she had been my girl," she said, in a voice a little tremulous. "She never needed looking after. Look at the position she has made for herself. Her father wouldn't go into society, her mother knew a mere handful of people, and—"

"She knew you, Betty."

"Well, suppose I did help her a little— I was only a kind of reference. She did the rest. She's set a half-dozen fashions herself—pure genius. She was born to lead. Her turnouts were always a little smarter, her horses travelled a little faster, than other people's. She took risks, too, but she didn't play a game; she only wanted to do things well. We all gasped when she brought Adelaide to recite from 'Romeo and Juliet' at an evening party, but all London did the same the week after."

"She discovered, and the Duchess of Snowdon applied the science. Ah, Betty, don't think I don't agree. She has the gift. She has temperament. No woman should have temperament. She hasn't scope enough to wear it out in some passion for a cause. Men are saved in spite of themselves by the law of work. Forty comes to a man of temperament, and then a passion for a cause seizes him, and he is safe. A woman of temperament at forty is apt to cut across the bows of iron-clad convention and go down. She has temperament, has my lady yonder, and I don't like the look of her eyes sometimes. There's dark fire smouldering in them. She should have a cause; but a cause to a woman now-

adays means 'too little of pleasure, too much of pain,' for others."

"What was your real cause, Windlehurst? You had one, I suppose, for you've never had a fall."

"My cause? You ask that? Behold the barren fig-tree! A lifetime in my country's service, and you who have driven me home from the House in your own brougham, and told me that you understood—oh, Betty!"

She laughed. "You'll say something funny as you're dying, Windlehurst."

"Perhaps. But it will be funny to know that presently I'll have a secret that none of you know, who watch me 'launch my pinnace into the dark.' But causes? There are hundreds, and all worth while. I've come here to-night for a cause—no, don't start, it's not you, Betty, though you are worth any sacrifice. I've come here to-night to see a modern Paladin, a real crusader:

> "'Then felt I like some watcher of the skies,
> When a new planet swims into his ken.'"

"Yes, that's poetry, Windlehurst, and you know I love it—I've always kept yours. But who's the man—the planet?"

"Egyptian Claridge."

"Ah, he is in England?"

"He will be here to-night; you shall see him."

"Really! What is his origin?"

He told her briefly, adding: "I've watched the rise of Claridge Pasha. I've watched his cause grow, and now I shall see the man—ah, but here comes our lass o' London!"

The eyes of both brightened, and a whimsical pleas-

ure came to the mask-like face of Lord Windlehurst. There was an eager and delighted look in Hylda's face also as she quickly came to them, her cavaliers following.

The five years that had passed since that tragic night in Cairo had been more than kind to her. She was lissome, radiant, and dignified, her face was alive with expression, and a delicate grace was in every movement. The dark lashes seemed to have grown longer, the brown hair fuller, the smile softer and more alluring.

"She is an invaluable asset to the Government," Lord Windlehurst murmured as she came. "No wonder the party helped the marriage on. London conspired for it, her feet got tangled in the web—and he gave her no time to think. Thinking had saved her till he came."

By instinct Lord Windlehurst knew. During the first year after the catastrophe at Kaïd's Palace Hylda could scarcely endure the advances made by her many admirers, the greatly eligible and the eager ineligible, all with as real an appreciation of her wealth as of her personal attributes. But she took her place in London life with more than the old will to make for herself, with the help of her aunt Conyngham, an individual position.

The second year after her visit to Egypt she was less haunted by the dark episode of the Palace, memory tortured her less; she came to think of David and the part he had played with less agitation. At first the thought of him had moved her alternately to sympathy and to revolt. His chivalry had filled her with admiration, with a sense of confidence, of dependence, of touching and vital obligation; but there was, too, another overmastering feeling. He had seen her life naked, as it

were, stripped of all independence, with the knowledge of a dangerous indiscretion which, to say the least, was a deformity; and she inwardly resented it, as one would resent the exposure of a long-hidden physical deformity, even by the surgeon who saved one's life. It was not a very lofty attitude of mind, but it was human—and feminine.

These moods had been always dissipated, however, when she recalled, as she did so often, David as he stood before Nahoum Pasha, his soul fighting in him to make of his enemy—of the man whose brother he had killed—a fellow-worker in the path of altruism he had mapped out for himself. David's name had been continually mentioned in telegraphic reports and journalistic correspondence from Egypt; and from this source she had learned that Nahoum Pasha was again high in the service of Prince Kaïd. When the news of David's southern expedition to the revolting slave-dealing tribes began to appear, she was deeply roused. Her agitation was the more intense because she never permitted herself to talk of him to others, even when his name was discussed at dinner-tables, accompanied by strange legends of his origin and stranger romances regarding his call to power by Kaïd.

She had surrounded him with romance; he seemed more a hero of history than of her own real and living world, a being apart. Even when there came rumblings of disaster, dark dangers to be conquered by the Quaker crusader, it all was still as of another life. True it was, that when his safe return to Cairo was announced she had cried with joy and relief; but there was nothing emotional or passionate in her feeling; it was the love of the lower for the higher, the hero-worship of an idealist in passionate gratitude.

And, amid it all, her mind scarcely realised that they would surely meet again. At the end of the second year the thought had receded into an almost indefinite past. She was beginning to feel that she had lived two lives, and that this life had no direct or vital bearing upon her previous existence, in which David had moved. Yet now and then the perfume of the Egyptian garden, through which she had fled to escape from tragedy, swept over her senses, clouded her eyes in the daytime, made them burn at night.

At last she had come to meet and know Eglington. From the first moment they met he had directed his course towards marriage. He was the man of the moment. His ambition seemed but patriotism, his ardent and overwhelming courtship the impulse of a powerful nature. As Lord Windlehurst had said, he carried her off her feet, and, on a wave of devotion and popular encouragement, he had swept her to the altar.

The Duchess held both her hands for a moment, admiring her, and, presently, with a playful remark upon her unselfishness, left her alone with Lord Windlehurst.

As they talked, his mask-like face became lighted from the brilliant fire in the inquisitorial eyes, his lips played with topics of the moment in a mordant fashion, which drew from her flashing replies. Looking at her, he was conscious of the mingled qualities of three races in her—English, Welsh, and American-Dutch of the Knickerbocker strain; and he contrasted her keen perception and her exquisite sensitiveness with the pure-bred Englishwomen round him, stately, kindly, handsome, and monotonously intelligent.

"Now I often wonder," he said, conscious of, but indifferent to, the knowledge that he and the brilliant

person beside him were objects of general attention—"I often wonder, when I look at a gathering like this, how many undiscovered crimes there are playing about among us. They never do tell—or shall I say, *we* never do tell?"

All day, she knew not why, Hylda had been nervous and excited. Without reason his words startled her. Now there flashed before her eyes a room in a Palace at Cairo, and a man lying dead before her. The light slowly faded out of her eyes, leaving them almost lustreless, but her face was calm, and the smile on her lips stayed. She fanned herself slowly, and answered nonchalantly: "Crime is a word of many meanings. I read in the papers of political crimes—it is a common phrase; yet the criminals appear to go unpunished."

"There you are wrong," he answered cynically. "The punishment is, that political virtue goes unrewarded, and in due course crime is the only refuge to most. Yet in politics the temptation to be virtuous is great."

She laughed now with a sense of relief. The intellectual stimulant had brought back the light to her face. "How is it, then, with you—inveterate habit or the strain of the ages? For they say you have not had your due reward."

He smiled grimly. "Ah, no, with me virtue is the act of an inquiring mind—to discover where it will lead me. I began with political crime—I was understood! I practise political virtue: it embarrasses the world, it fogs them, it seems original, because so unnecessary. Mine is the scientific life. Experiment in old substances gives new—well, say, new precipitations. But you are scientific, too. You have a laboratory, and have much to do—with retorts."

"No, you are thinking of my husband. The laboratory is his."

"But the retorts are yours."

"The precipitations are his."

"Ah, well, at least you help him to fuse the constituents! . . . But now, be quite confidential to an old man who has experimented too. Is your husband really an amateur scientist, or is he a scientific amateur? Is it a pose or a taste? I fiddled once—and wrote sonnets; one was a pose, the other a taste."

It was mere persiflage, but it was a jest which made an unintended wound. Hylda became conscious of a sudden sharp inquiry going on in her mind. There flashed into it the question, Does Eglington's heart ever really throb for love of any object or any cause? Even in moments of greatest intimacy, soon after marriage, when he was most demonstrative towards her, he had seemed preoccupied, except when speaking about himself and what he meant to do. Then he made her heart throb in response to his confident, ardent words—concerning himself. But his own heart, did it throb? Or was it only his brain that throbbed?

Suddenly, with an exclamation, she involuntarily laid a hand upon Windlehurst's arm. She was looking down the room straight before her to a group of people towards which other groups were now converging, attracted by one who seemed to be a centre of interest.

Presently the eager onlookers drew aside, and Lord Windlehurst observed moving up the room a figure he had never seen before. The new-comer was dressed in a grey and blue official dress, unrelieved save by silver braid at the collar and at the wrists. There was no decoration, but on the head was a red fez, which gave prominence to the white, broad forehead, with the dark

hair waving away behind the ears. Lord Windlehurst held his eye-glass to his eye in interested scrutiny.

"H'm," he said, with lips pursed out, "a most notable figure, a most remarkable face! My dear, there's a fortune in that face. It's a national asset."

He saw the flush, the dumb amazement, the poignant look in Lady Eglington's face, and registered it in his mind. "Poor thing," he said to himself, "I wonder what it is all about—I wonder. I thought she had no unregulated moments. She gave promise of better things."

The Foreign Minister was bringing his guest towards them. The new-comer did not look at them till within a few steps of where they stood. Then his eyes met those of Lady Eglington. For an instant his steps were arrested. A swift light came into his face, softening its quiet austerity and strength.

It was David.

CHAPTER XIX

SHARPER THAN A SWORD

A GLANCE of the eye was the only sign of recognition between David and Hylda; nothing that others saw could have suggested that they had ever met before. Lord Windlehurst at once engaged David in conversation.

At first when Hylda had come back from Egypt, those five years ago, she had often wondered what she would think or do if she ever were to see this man again; whether, indeed, she could bear it. Well, the moment and the man had come. Her eyes had gone blind for an instant; it had seemed for one sharp, crucial moment as though she could not bear it; then the gulf of agitation was passed, and she had herself in hand.

While her mind was engaged subconsciously with what Lord Windlehurst and David said, comprehending it all, and, when Lord Windlehurst appealed to her, offering by a word contribution to the *pourparler*, she was studying David as steadily as her heated senses would permit her.

He seemed to her to have put on twenty years in the steady force of his personality—in the composure of his bearing, in the self-reliance of his look, though his face and form were singularly youthful. The face was handsome and alight, the look was that of one who weighed things; yet she was conscious of a great change. The old delicate quality of the features was not so marked, though there was nothing material in the look, and the

head had not a sordid line, while the hand that he now and again raised, brushing his forehead meditatively, had gained much in strength and force. Yet there was something—something different, that brought a slight cloud into her eyes. It came to her now, a certain melancholy in the bearing of the figure, erect and well-balanced as it was. Once the feeling came, the certainty grew. And presently she found a strange sadness in the eyes, something that lurked behind all that he did and all that he was, some shadow over the spirit. It was even more apparent when he smiled.

As she was conscious of this new reading of him, a motion arrested her glance, a quick lifting of the head to one side, as though the mind had suddenly been struck by an idea, the glance flying upward in abstracted questioning. This she had seen in her husband, too, the same brisk lifting of the head, the same quick smiling. Yet this face, unlike Eglington's, expressed a perfect single-mindedness; it wore the look of a self-effacing man of luminous force, a concentrated battery of energy. Since she had last seen him every sign of the provincial had vanished. He was now the well-modulated man of affairs, elegant in his simplicity of dress, with the dignified air of the intellectual, yet with the decision of a man who knew his mind.

Lord Windlehurst was leaving. Now David and she were alone. Without a word they moved on together through the throng, the eyes of all following them, until they reached a quiet room at one end of the salon, where were only a few people watching the crowd pass the doorway.

"You will be glad to sit," he said, motioning her to a chair beside some palms. Then, with a change of tone, he added: "Thee is not sorry I am come?"

Thee—the old-fashioned simple Quaker word! She put her fingers to her eyes. Her senses were swimming with a distant memory. The East was in her brain, the glow of the skies, the gleam of the desert, the swish of the Nile, the cry of the sweet-seller, the song of the dance-girl, the strain of the darabukkeh, the call of the sáis. She saw again the ghiassas drifting down the great river, laden with dourha; she saw the mosque of the blue tiles with its placid fountain, and its handful of worshippers praying by the olive-tree. She watched the moon rise above the immobile Sphinx, she looked down on the banqueters in the Palace, David among them, and Foorgat Bey beside her. She saw Foorgat Bey again lying dead at her feet. She heard the stir of the leaves; she caught the smell of the lime-trees in the Palace garden as she fled. She recalled her reckless return to Cairo from Alexandria. She remembered the little room where she and David, Nahoum and Mizraim, crossed a bridge over a chasm, and stood upon ground which had held good till now—till this hour, when the man who had played a most vital part in her life had come again out of a land which, by some forced obliquity of mind and stubbornness of will, she had assured herself she would never see again.

She withdrew her hand from her eyes, and saw him looking at her calmly, though his face was alight.

"Thee is fatigued," he said. "This is labour which wears away the strength." He made a motion towards the crowd.

She smiled a very little, and said: "You do not care for such things as this, I know. Your life has its share of it, however, I suppose."

He looked out over the throng before he answered. "It seems an eddy of purposeless waters. Yet there is

great depth beneath, or there were no eddy; and where there is depth and the eddy there is danger—always."

As he spoke she became almost herself again. "You think that deep natures have most perils?"

"Thee knows it is so. Human nature is like the earth: the deeper the plough goes into the soil unploughed before, the more evil substance is turned up—evil that becomes alive as soon as the sun and the air fall upon it."

"Then, women like me who pursue a flippant life, who ride in this merry-go-round"—she made a gesture towards the crowd beyond—"who have no depth, we are safest, we live upon the surface." Her gaiety was forced; her words were feigned.

"Thee has passed the point of danger, thee is safe," he answered meaningly.

"Is that because I am not deep, or because the plough has been at work?" she asked. "In neither case I am not sure you are right."

"Thee is happily married," he said reflectively; "and the prospect is fair."

"I think you know my husband," she said in answer, and yet not in answer.

"I was born in Hamley where he has a place—thee has been there?" he asked eagerly.

"Not yet. We are to go next Sunday—for the first time—to the Cloistered House. I had not heard that my husband knew you, until I saw in the paper a few days ago that your home was in Hamley. Then I asked Eglington, and he told me that your family and his had been neighbours for generations."

"His father was a Quaker," David rejoined, "but he forsook the faith."

"I did not know," she answered, with some hesita-

tion. There was no reason why, when she and Eglington had talked of Hamley, he should not have said his own father had once been a Quaker; yet she had dwelt so upon the fact that she herself had Quaker blood, and he had laughed so much over it, with the amusement of the superior person, that his silence on this one point struck her now with a sense of confusion.

"You are going to Hamley—we shall meet there?" she continued.

"To-day I should have gone, but I have business at the Foreign Office to-morrow. One needs time to learn that all 'private interests and partial affections' must be sacrificed to public duty."

"But you are going soon? You will be there on Sunday?"

"I shall be there to-morrow night, and Sunday, and for one long week at least. Hamley is the centre of the world, the axle of the universe—you shall see. You doubt it?" he added, with a whimsical smile.

"I shall dispute most of what you say, and all that you think, if you do not continue to use the Quaker 'thee' and 'thou'—ungrammatical as you are so often."

"Thee is now the only person in London, or in England, with whom I use 'thee' and 'thou.' I am no longer my own master, I am a public servant, and so I must follow custom."

"It is destructive of personality. The 'thee' and 'thou' belong to you. I wonder if the people of Hamley will say 'thee' and 'thou' to me. I hope, I do hope they will."

"Thee may be sure they will. They are no respecters of persons there. They called your husband's father Robert—his name was Robert. Friend Robert they

called him, and afterwards they called him Robert Denton till he died."

"Will they call me Hylda?" she asked, with a smile.

"More like they will call thee Friend Hylda; it sounds simple and strong," he replied.

"As they call Claridge Pasha Friend David," she answered, with a smile. "David is a good name for a strong man."

"That David threw a stone from a sling and smote a giant in the forehead. The stone from this David's sling falls into the ocean and is lost beneath the surface."

His voice had taken on a somewhat sombre tone, his eyes looked away into the distance; yet he smiled too, and a hand upon his knee suddenly closed in sympathy with an inward determination.

A light of understanding came into her face. They had been keeping things upon the surface, and, while it lasted, he seemed a lesser man than she had thought him these past years. But now—now there was the old unschooled simplicity, the unique and lonely personality, the homely soul and body bending to one root-idea, losing themselves in a wave of duty. Again he was to her, once more, the dreamer, the worker, the conqueror —the conqueror of her own imagination. She had in herself the soul of altruism, the heart of the crusader. Touched by the fire of a great idea, she was of those who could have gone out into the world without wallet or scrip, to work passionately for some great end. . . . And she had married the Earl of Eglington!

She leaned towards David, and said eagerly: "But you are satisfied—you *are* satisfied with your work for poor Egypt?"

"Thee says 'poor Egypt,' " he answered, "and thee

says well. Even now she is not far from the day of Rameses and Joseph. Thee thinks perhaps thee knows Egypt—none knows her."

"You know her—now?"

He shook his head slowly. "It is like putting one's ear to the mouth of the Sphinx. Yet sometimes, almost in despair, when I have lain down in the desert beside my camel, set about with enemies, I have got a message from the barren desert, the wide silence, and the stars." He paused.

"What is the message that comes?" she asked softly.

"It is always the same: *Work on!* Seek not to know too much, nor think that what you do is of vast value. Work, because it is yours to be adjusting the machinery in your own little workshop of life to the wide mechanism of the universe and time. One wheel set right, one flying belt adjusted, and there is a step forward to the final harmony—ah, but how I preach!" he added hastily.

His eyes were fixed on hers with a great sincerity, and they were clear and shining, yet his lips were smiling—what a trick they had of smiling! He looked as though he should apologise for such words in such a place.

She rose to her feet with a great suspiration, with a light in her eyes and a trembling smile.

"But no, no, no, you inspire one. *Thee* inspires me," she said, with a little laugh, in which there was a note of sadness. "I may use 'thee,' may I not, when I will? I am a little a Quaker also, am I not? My people came from Derbyshire, my American people, that is—and only forty years ago. Almost thee persuades me to be a Quaker now," she added. "And perhaps I shall be, too," she went on, her eyes fixed on the crowd passing by, Eglington among them.

David saw Eglington also, and moved forward with her.

"We shall meet in Hamley," she said composedly, as she saw her husband leave the crush and come towards her. As Eglington noticed David, a curious enigmatical glance flashed from his eyes. He came forward, however, with outstretched hand.

"I am sorry I was not at the Foreign Office when you called to-day. Welcome back to England, home—and beauty." He laughed in a rather mirthless way, but with a certain *empressement*, conscious, as he always was, of the onlookers. "You have had a busy time in Egypt?" he continued cheerfully, and laughed again.

David laughed slightly, also, and Hylda noticed that it had a certain resemblance in its quick naturalness to that of her husband.

"I am not sure that we are so busy there as we ought to be," David answered. "I have no real standards. I am but an amateur, and have known nothing of public life. But you should come and see."

"It has been in my mind. An ounce of eyesight is worth a ton of print. My lady was there once, I believe"—he turned towards her—"but before your time, I think. Or did you meet there, perhaps?" He glanced at both curiously. He scarcely knew why a thought flashed into his mind—as though by some telepathic sense; for it had never been there before, and there was no reason for its being there now.

Hylda saw what David was about to answer, and she knew instinctively that he would say they had never met. It shamed her. She intervened as she saw he was about to speak.

"We were introduced for the first time to-night," she said; "but Claridge Pasha is part of my education in

the world. It is a miracle that Hamley should produce two such men," she added gaily, and laid her fan upon her husband's arm lightly. "You should have been a Quaker, Harry, and then you two would have been—"

"Two Quaker Don Quixotes," interrupted Eglington ironically.

"I should not have called you a Don Quixote," his wife lightly rejoined, relieved at the turn things had taken. "I cannot imagine you tilting at wind-mills—"

"Or saving maidens in distress? Well, perhaps not; but you do not suggest that Claridge Pasha tilts at wind-mills either—or saves maidens in distress. Though, now I come to think, there was an episode." He laughed maliciously. "Some time ago it was—a lass of the cross-roads. I think I heard of such an adventure, which did credit to Claridge Pasha's heart, though it shocked Hamley at the time. But I wonder, was the maiden really saved?"

Lady Eglington's face became rigid. "Well, yes," she said slowly, "the maiden was saved. She is now my maid. Hamley may have been shocked, but Claridge Pasha has every reason to be glad that he helped a fellow-being in trouble."

"Your maid—Heaver?" asked Eglington in surprise, a swift shadow crossing his face.

"Yes; she only told me this morning. Perhaps she had seen that Claridge Pasha was coming to England. I had not, however. At any rate, Quixotism saved her."

David smiled. "It is better than I dared to hope," he remarked quietly.

"But that is not all," continued Hylda. "There is more. She had been used badly by a man who now wants to marry her—has tried to do so for years. Now,

be prepared for a surprise, for it concerns you rather closely, Eglington. Fate is a whimsical jade. Whom do you think it is? Well, since you could never guess, it was Jasper Kimber."

Eglington's eyes opened wide. "This is nothing but a coarse and impossible stage coincidence," he laughed. "It is one of those tricks played by Fact to discredit the imagination. Life is laughing at us again. The longer I live, the more I am conscious of being an object of derision by the scene-shifters in the wings of the stage. What a cynical comedy life is at the best!"

"It all seems natural enough," rejoined David.

"It is all paradox."

"Isn't it all inevitable law? I have no belief in 'antic Fate.'"

Hylda realised, with a new and poignant understanding, the difference of outlook on life between the two men. She suddenly remembered the words of Confucius, which she had set down in her little book of daily life: "By nature we approximate, it is only experience that drives us apart."

David would have been content to live in the desert all his life for the sake of a cause, making no calculations as to reward. Eglington must ever have the counters for the game.

"Well, if you do not believe in 'antic Fate,' you must be greatly puzzled as you go on," he rejoined, laughing; "especially in Egypt, where the East and the West collide, race against race, religion against religion, Oriental mind against Occidental intellect. You have an unusual quantity of Quaker composure, to see in it all 'inevitable law.' And it must be dull. But you always were, so they say in Hamley, a monument of seriousness."

"I believe they made one or two exceptions," answered David drily. "I had assurances."

Eglington laughed boyishly. "You are right. You achieved a name for humour in a day—'a glass, a kick, and a kiss,' it was. Do you have such days in Egypt?"

"You must come and see," David answered lightly, declining to notice the insolence. "These are critical days there. The problems are worthy of your care. Will you not come?"

Eglington was conscious of a peculiar persuasive influence over himself that he had never felt before. In proportion, however, as he felt its compelling quality, there came a jealousy of the man who was its cause. The old antagonism, which had had its sharpest expression the last time they had met on the platform at Heddington, came back. It was one strong will resenting another—as though there was not room enough in the wide world of being for these two atoms of life, sparks from the ceaseless wheel, one making a little brighter flash than the other for the moment, and then presently darkness, and the whirring wheel which threw them off, throwing off millions of others again.

On the moment Eglington had a temptation to say something with an edge, which would show David that his success in Egypt hung upon the course that he himself and the weak Foreign Minister, under whom he served, would take. And this course would be his own course largely, since he had been appointed to be a force and strength in the Foreign Office which his chief did not supply. He refrained, however, and, on the moment, remembered the promise he had given to Faith to help David.

A wave of feeling passed over him. His wife was beautiful, a creature of various charms, a centre of at-

traction. Yet he had never really loved her—so many sordid elements had entered into the thought of marriage with her, lowering the character of his affection. With a perversity which only such men know, such heart as he had turned to the unknown Quaker girl who had rebuked him, scathed him, laid bare his soul before himself, as no one ever had done. To Eglington it was a relief that there was one human being—he thought there was only one—who read him through and through; and that knowledge was in itself as powerful an influence as was the secret between David and Hylda. It was a kind of confessional, comforting to a nature not self-contained. Now he restrained his cynical intention to deal David a side-thrust, and quietly said:

"We shall meet at Hamley, shall we not? Let us talk there, and not at the Foreign Office. You would care to go to Egypt, Hylda?"

She forced a smile. "Let us talk it over at Hamley."

With a smile to David she turned away to some friends.

Eglington offered to introduce David to some notable people, but he said that he must go—he was fatigued after his journey. He had no wish to be lionised.

As he left the salon, the band was playing a tune that made him close his eyes, as though against something he would not see. The band in Kaïd's Palace had played it that night when he had killed Foorgat Bey.

CHAPTER XX

EACH AFTER HIS OWN ORDER

With the passing years new feelings had grown up in the heart of Luke Claridge. Once David's destiny and career were his own peculiar and self-assumed responsibility. "Inwardly convicted," he had wrenched the lad away from the natural circumstances of his life, and created a scheme of existence for him out of his own conscience—a pious egoist.

After David went to Egypt, however, his mind involuntarily formed the resolution that "Davy and God should work it out together."

He had grown very old in appearance, and his quiet face was almost painfully white; but the eyes burned with more fire than in the past. As the day approached when David should arrive in England, he walked by himself continuously, oblivious of the world round him. He spoke to no one, save the wizened Elder Meacham, and to John Fairley, who rightly felt that he had a share in the making of Claridge Pasha.

With head perched in the air, and face half hidden in his great white collar, the wizened Elder, stopping Luke Claridge in the street one day, said:

"Does thee think the lad will ride in Pharaoh's chariot here?"

There were sly lines of humour about the mouth of the wizened Elder as he spoke, but Luke Claridge did not see.

"Pride is far from his heart," he answered portentously. "He will ride in no chariot. He has written that he will walk here from Heddington, and none is to meet him."

"He will come by the cross-roads, perhaps," rejoined the other piously. "Well, well, memory is a flower or a rod, as John Fox said, and the cross-roads have memories for him."

Again flashes of humour crossed his face, for he had a wide humanity, of insufficient exercise.

"He has made full atonement, and thee does ill to recall the past, Reuben," rejoined the other sternly.

"If he has done no more that needs atonement than he did that day at the cross-roads, then has his history been worthy of Hamley," rejoined the wizened Elder, eyes shut and head buried in his collar. "Hamley made him—Hamley made him. We did not spare advice, or example, or any correction that came to our minds—indeed, it was almost a luxury. Think you, does he still play the flute—an instrument none too grave, Luke?"

But, to this, Luke Claridge exclaimed impatiently and hastened on; and the little wizened Elder chuckled to himself all the way to the house of John Fairley. None in Hamley took such pride in David as did these two old men, who had loved him from a child, but had discreetly hidden their favour, save to each other. Many times they had met and prayed together in the weeks when his life was in notorious danger in the Soudan.

As David walked through the streets of Heddington making for the open country, he was conscious of a new

feeling regarding the place. It was familiar, but in a new sense. Its grimy, narrow streets, unlovely houses, with shut windows, summer though it was, and no softening influences anywhere, save here and there a box of sickly geraniums in the windows, all struck his mind in a way they had never done before. A mile away were the green fields, the woods, the roadsides gay with flowers and shrubs—loveliness was but over the wall, as it were; yet here the barrack-like houses, the grey, harsh streets, seemed like prison walls, and the people in them prisoners who, with every legal right to call themselves free, were as much captives as the criminal on some small island in a dangerous sea. Escape—where? Into the gulf of no work and degradation?

They never lifted their eyes above the day's labour. They were scarce conscious of anything beyond. What were their pleasures? They had imitations of pleasures. To them a funeral or a wedding, a riot or a vociferous band, a dog-fight or a strike, were alike in this, that they quickened feelings which carried them out of themselves, gave them a sense of intoxication.

Intoxication? David remembered the far-off day of his own wild rebellion in Hamley. From that day forward he had better realised that in the hearts of so many of the human race there was a passion to forget themselves; to blot out, if for a moment only, the troubles of life and time; or, by creating a false air of exaltation, to rise above them. Once in the desert, when men were dying round him of fever and dysentery, he had been obliged, exhausted and ill, scarce able to drag himself from his bed, to resort to an opiate to allay his own sufferings, that he might minister to others. He remembered how, in the atmosphere it had created—an in-

toxication, a soothing exhilaration and pervasive thrill —he had saved so many of his followers. Since then the temptation had come upon him often when trouble weighed or difficulties surrounded him—accompanied always by recurrence of fever—to resort to the insidious medicine. Though he had fought the temptation with every inch of his strength, he could too well understand those who sought for "surcease of pain"—

> "Seeking for surcease of pain,
> Pilgrim to Lethe I came;
> Drank not, for pride was too keen,
> Stung by the sound of a name!"

As the plough of action had gone deep into his life and laid bare his nature to the light, there had been exposed things which struggled for life and power in him, with the fiery strength which only evil has.

The western heavens were aglow. On every hand the gorse and the may were in bloom, the lilacs were coming to their end, but wild rhododendrons were glowing in the bracken, as he stepped along the road towards the place where he was born. Though every tree and road-mark was familiar, yet he was conscious of a new out-look. He had left these quiet scenes inexperienced and untravelled, to be thrust suddenly into the thick of a struggle of nations over a sick land. He had worked in a vortex of debilitating local intrigue. All who had to do with Egypt gained except herself, and if she moved in revolt or agony, they threatened her. Once when resisting the pressure and the threats of war of a for-eign diplomatist, he had, after a trying hour, written to Faith in a burst of passionate complaint, and his letter had ended with these words:

"In your onward march, O men,
White of face, in promise whiter,
You unsheath the sword, and then
Blame the wrongèd as the fighter.

"Time, ah, Time, rolls onward o'er
All these fœtid fields of evil,
While hard at the nation's core
Eats the burning rust and weevil!

"Nathless, out beyond the stars
Reigns the Wiser and the Stronger,
Seeing in all strifes and wars
Who the wrongèd, who the wronger."

Privately he had spoken thus, but before the world he had given way to no impulse, in silence finding safety from the temptation to diplomatic evasion. Looking back over five years, he felt now that the sum of his accomplishment had been small.

He did not realise the truth. When his hand was almost upon the object for which he had toiled and striven —whether pacifying a tribe, meeting a loan by honest means, building a barrage, irrigating the land, financing a new industry, or experimenting in cotton—it suddenly eluded him. Nahoum had snatched it away by subterranean wires. On such occasions Nahoum would shrug his shoulders, and say with a sigh, "Ah, my friend, let us begin again. We are both young; time is with us; and we will flourish palms in the face of Europe yet. We have our course set by a bright star. We will continue."

Yet, withal, David was the true altruist. Even now as he walked this road which led to his old home, dear to him beyond all else, his thoughts kept flying to the Nile and to the desert.

Suddenly he stopped. He was at the cross-roads. Here he had met Kate Heaver, here he had shamed his

neighbours—and begun his work in life. He stood for a moment, smiling, as he looked at the stone where he had sat those years ago, his hand feeling instinctively for his flute. Presently he turned to the dusty road again.

Walking quickly away, he swung into the path of the wood which would bring him by a short cut to Hamley, past Soolsby's cottage. Here was the old peace, the old joy of solitude among the healing trees. Experience had broadened his life, had given him a vast theatre of work; but the smell of the woods, the touch of the turf, the whispering of the trees, the song of the birds, had the ancient entry to his heart.

At last he emerged on the hill where Soolsby lived. He had not meant, if he could help it, to speak to any one until he had entered the garden of the Red Mansion, but he had inadvertently come upon this place where he had spent the most momentous days of his life, and a feeling stronger than he cared to resist drew him to the open doorway. The afternoon sun was beating in over the threshold as he reached it, and, at his footstep, a figure started forward from the shadow of a corner.

It was Kate Heaver.

Surprise, then pain showed in her face; she flushed, was agitated.

"I am sorry. It's too bad—it's hard on him you should see," she said in a breath, and turned her head away for an instant; but presently looked him in the face again, all trembling and eager. "He'll be sorry enough to-morrow," she added solicitously, and drew away from something she had been trying to hide.

Then David saw. On a bench against a wall lay old Soolsby—drunk. A cloud passed across his face and left it pale.

"Of course," he said simply, and went over and

touched the heaving shoulders reflectively. "Poor Soolsby!"

"He's been sober four years—over four," she said eagerly. "When he knew you'd come again, he got wild, and he would have the drink in spite of all. Walking from Heddington, I saw him at the tavern, and brought him home."

"At the tavern—" David said reflectively.

"The Fox and Goose, sir." She turned her face away again, and David's head came up with a quick motion. There it was, five years ago, that he had drunk at the bar, and had fought Jasper Kimber.

"Poor fellow!" he said again, and listened to Soolsby's stertorous breathing, as a physician looks at a patient whose case he cannot control, does not wholly understand.

The hand of the sleeping man was suddenly raised, his head gave a jerk, and he said mumblingly: "Claridge for ever!"

Kate nervously intervened. "It fair beat him, your coming back, sir. It's awful temptation, the drink. I lived in it for years, and it's cruel hard to fight it when you're worked up either way, sorrow or joy. There's a real pleasure in being drunk, I'm sure. While it lasts you're rich, and you're young, and you don't care what happens. It's kind of you to take it like this, sir, seeing you've never been tempted and mightn't understand."

David shook his head sadly, and looked at Soolsby in silence.

"I don't suppose he took a quarter what he used to take, but it made him drunk. 'Twas but a minute of madness. You've saved him right enough."

"I was not blaming him. I understand—I understand."

He looked at her clearly. She was healthy and fine-looking, with large, eloquent eyes. Her dress was severe and quiet, as became her occupation—a plain, dark grey, but the shapely fulness of the figure gave softness to the outlines. It was no wonder Jasper Kimber wished to marry her; and, if he did, the future of the man was sure. She had a temperament which might have made her an adventuress—or an opera-singer. She had been touched in time, and she had never looked back.

"You are with Lady Eglington now, I have heard?" he asked.

She nodded.

"It was hard for you in London at first?"

She met his look steadily. "It was easy in a way. I could see round me what was the right thing to do. Oh, that was what was so awful in the old life over there at Heddington,"—she pointed beyond the hill,—"we didn't know what was good and what was bad. The poor people in big working-places like Heddington ain't much better than heathens, leastways as to most things that matter. They haven't got a sensible religion, not one that gets down into what they do. The parson doesn't reach them—he talks about church and the sacraments, and they don't get at what good it's going to do them. And the chapel preachers ain't much better. They talk and sing and pray, when what the people want is light, and hot water, and soap, and being shown how to live, and how to bring up children healthy and strong, and decent-cooked food. I'd have food-hospitals if I could, and I'd give the children in the schools one good meal a day. I'm sure the children of the poor go wrong and bad more through the way they live than anything. If only they was taught right—not as though they was paupers! Give me enough nurses of

the right sort, and enough good plain cooks, and meat three times a week, and milk and bread and rice and porridge every day, and I'd make a new place of any town in England in a year. I'd—"

She stopped all at once, however, and flushing, said: "I didn't stop to think I was talking to you, sir."

"I am glad you speak to me so," he answered gently. "You and I are both reformers at heart."

"Me? I've done nothing, sir, not any good to anybody or anything."

"Not to Jasper Kimber?"

"You did that, sir; he says so; he says you made him."

A quick laugh passed David's lips. "Men are not made so easily. I think I know the trowel and the mortar that built that wall! Thee will marry him, friend?"

Her eyes burned as she looked at him. She had been eternally dispossessed of what every woman has the right to have—one memory possessing the elements of beauty. Even if it remain but for the moment, yet that moment is hers by right of her sex, which is denied the wider rights of those they love and serve. She had tasted the cup of bitterness and drunk of the waters of sacrifice. Married life had no lure for her. She wanted none of it. The seed of service had, however, taken root in a nature full of fire and light and power, undisciplined and undeveloped as it was. She wished to do something —the spirit of toil, the first habit of the life of the poor, the natural medium for the good that may be in them, had possession of her.

This man was to her the symbol of work. To have cared for his home, to have looked after his daily needs, to have sheltered him humbly from little things, would have been her one true happiness. And this was denied

her. Had she been a man, it would have been so easy. She could have offered to be his servant; could have done those things which she could do better than any, since hers would be a heart-service.

But even as she looked at him now, she had a flash of insight and prescience. She had, from little things said or done, from newspapers marked and a hundred small indications, made up her mind that her mistress's mind dwelt much upon "the Egyptian." The thought flashed now that she might serve this man, after all; that a day might come when she could say that she had played a part in his happiness, in return for all he had done for her. Life had its chances—and strange things had happened. In her own mind she had decided that her mistress was not happy, and who could tell what might happen? Men did not live for ever! The thought came and went, but it left behind a determination to answer David as she felt.

"I will not marry Jasper," she answered slowly. "I want work, not marriage."

"There would be both," he urged.

"With women there is the one or the other, not both."

"Thee could help him. He has done credit to himself, and he can do good work for England. Thee can help him."

"I want work alone, not marriage, sir."

"He would pay thee his debt."

"He owes me nothing. What happened was no fault of his, but of the life we were born in. He tired of me, and left me. Husbands tire of their wives, but stay on and beat them."

"He drove thee mad almost, I remember."

"Wives go mad and are never cured, so many of them. I've seen them die, poor things, and leave the little ones

behind. I had the luck wi' me. I took the right turning at the cross-roads yonder."

"Thee must be Jasper's wife if he asks thee again," he urged.

"He will come when I call, but I will not call," she answered.

"But still thee will marry him when the heart is ready," he persisted. "It shall be ready soon. He needs thee. Good-bye, friend. Leave Soolsby alone. He will be safe. And do not tell him that I have seen him so." He stooped over and touched the old man's shoulder gently.

He held out his hand to her. She took it, then suddenly leaned over and kissed it. She could not speak.

He stepped to the door and looked out. Behind the Red Mansion the sun was setting, and the far garden looked cool and sweet. He gave a happy sigh, and stepped out and down.

As he disappeared, the woman dropped into a chair, her arms upon a table. Her body shook with sobs.

She sat there for an hour, and then, when the sun was setting, she left the drunken man sleeping, and made her way down the hill to the Cloistered House.

Entering, she was summoned to her mistress's room.

"I did not expect my lady so soon," she said, surprised.

"No; we came sooner than we expected. Where have you been?"

"At Soolsby's hut on the hill, my lady."

"Who is Soolsby?"

Kate told her all she knew, and of what had happened that afternoon—but not all.

CHAPTER XXI

"THERE IS NOTHING HIDDEN WHICH SHALL NOT BE REVEALED"

A FORTNIGHT had passed since they had come to Hamley—David, Eglington, and Hylda—and they had all travelled a long distance in mutual understanding during that time, too far, thought Luke Claridge, who remained neutral and silent. He would not let Faith go to the Cloistered House, though he made no protest against David going; because he recognised in these visits the duty of diplomacy and the business of the nation—more particularly David's business, which, in his eyes, swallowed all. Three times David had gone to the Cloistered House; once Hylda and he had met in the road leading to the old mill, and once at Soolsby's hut. Twice, also, in the garden of his old home he had seen her, when she came to visit Faith, who had captured her heart at once. Eglington and Faith had not met, however. He was either busy in his laboratory, or with his books, or riding over the common and through the woods, and their courses lay apart.

But there came an afternoon when Hylda and David were a long hour together at the Cloistered House. They talked freely of his work in Egypt. At last she said: "And Nahoum Pasha?"

"He has kept faith."

"He is in high place again?"

"He is a good administrator."

"You put him there!"

"Thee remembers what I said to him, that night in Cairo?"

Hylda closed her eyes and drew in a long breath. Had there been a word spoken that night when she and David and Nahoum met which had not bitten into her soul! That David had done so much in Egypt without ruin or death was a tribute to his power. Nevertheless, though Nahoum had not struck yet, she was certain he would one day. All that David now told her of the vicissitudes of his plans, and Nahoum's sympathy and help, only deepened this conviction. She could well believe that Nahoum gave David money from his own pocket, which he replaced by extortion from other sources, while gaining credit with David for co-operation. Armenian Christian Nahoum might be, but he was ranged with the East against the West, with the reactionary and corrupt against advance, against civilisation and freedom and equality. Nahoum's Christianity was permeated with Orientalism, the Christian belief obscured by the theism of the Muslim. David was in a deadlier struggle than he knew. Yet it could serve no good end to attempt to warn him now. He had outlived peril so far; might it not be that, after all, he would win?

So far she had avoided Nahoum's name in talks with David. She could scarcely tell why she did, save that it opened a door better closed, as it were; but the restraint had given way at last.

"Thee remembers what I said that night?" David repeated slowly.

"I remember—I understand. You devise your course and you never change. It is like building on a rock. That is why nothing happens to you as bad as might happen."

"Nothing bad ever happens to me."

"The philosophy of the desert," she commented smiling. "You are living in the desert even when you are here. This is a dream; the desert and Egypt only are real."

"That is true, I think. I seem sometimes like a sojourner here, like a spirit 'revisiting the scenes of life and time.'" He laughed boyishly.

"Yet you are happy here. I understand now why and how you are what you are. Even I that have been here so short a time feel the influence upon me. I breathe an air that, somehow, seems a native air. The spirit of my Quaker grandmother revives in me. Sometimes I sit hours thinking, scarcely stirring; and I believe I know now how people might speak to each other without words. Your Uncle Benn and you—it was so with you, was it not? You heard his voice speaking to you sometimes; you understood what he meant to say to you? You told me so long ago."

David inclined his head. "I heard him speak as one might speak through a closed door. Sometimes, too, in the desert I have heard Faith speak to me."

"And your grandfather?"

"Never my grandfather—never. It would seem as though, in my thoughts, I could never reach him; as though masses of opaque things lay between. Yet he and I—there is love between us. I don't know why I never hear him."

"Tell me of your childhood, of your mother. I have seen her grave under the ash by the Meeting-house, but I want to know of her from you."

"Has not Faith told you?"

"We have only talked of the present. I could not ask her; but I can ask you. I want to know of your mother and you together."

"We were never together. When I opened my eyes she closed hers. It was so little to get for the life she gave. See, was it not a good face?" He drew from his pocket a little locket which Faith had given him years ago, and opened it before her.

Hylda looked long. "She was exquisite," she said, "exquisite."

"My father I never knew either. He was a captain of a merchant ship. He married her secretly while she was staying with an aunt at Portsmouth. He sailed away, my mother told my grandfather all, and he brought her home here. The marriage was regular, of course, but my grandfather, after announcing it, and bringing it before the Elders, declared that she should never see her husband again. She never did, for she died a few months after, when I came, and my father died very soon, also. I never saw him, and I do not know if he ever tried to see me. I never had any feeling about it. My grandfather was the only father I ever knew, and Faith, who was born a year before me, became like a sister to me, though she soon made other pretensions!" He laughed again, almost happily. "To gain an end she exercised authority as my aunt!"

"What was your father's name?"

"Fetherdon—James Fetherdon."

"Fetherdon — James Fetherdon!" Involuntarily Hylda repeated the name after him. Where had she heard the name before—or where had she seen it? It kept flashing before her eyes. Where had she seen it? For days she had been rummaging among old papers in the library of the Cloistered House, and in an old box full of correspondence and papers of the late countess, who had died suddenly. Was it among them that she had seen the name? She could not tell. It was all

vague, but that she had seen it or heard it she was sure.

"Your father's people, you never knew them?"

He shook his head. "Nor of them. Here was my home—I had no desire to discover them. We draw in upon ourselves here."

"There is great force in such a life and such a people," she answered. "If the same concentration of mind could be carried into the wide life of the world, we might revolutionise civilisation; or vitalise and advance it, I mean—as you are doing in Egypt."

"I have done nothing in Egypt. I have sounded the bugle—I have not had my fight."

"That is true in a sense," she replied. "Your real struggle is before you. I do not know why I say it, but I do say it; I feel it. Something here"—she pressed her hand to her heart—"something here tells me that your day of battle is yet to come." Her eyes were brimming and full of excitement. "We must all help you." She gained courage with each word. "You must not fight alone. You work for civilisation; you must have civilisation behind you." Her hands clasped nervously; there was a catch in her throat. "You remember *then*, that I said I would call to you one day, as your Uncle Benn did, and you should hear and answer me. It shall not be that I will call. You—you will call, and I will help you if I can. I will help, no matter what may seem to prevent, if there is anything I can do. I, surely I, of all the world owe it to you to do what I can, always. I owe so much—you did so much. Oh, how it haunts me! Sometimes in the night I wake with a start and see it all—all!"

The flood which had been dyked back these years past had broken loose in her heart.

Out of the stir and sweep of social life and duty, of official and political ambition—heart-hungry, for she had no child; heart-lonely, though she had scarce recognised it in the duties and excitements round her—she had floated suddenly into this backwater of a motionless life in Hamley. Its quiet had settled upon her, the shackles of her spirit had been loosed, and dropped from her; she had suddenly bathed her heart and soul in a freer atmosphere than they had ever known before. And David and Hamley had come together. The old impulses, dominated by a divine altruism, were swinging her out upon a course leading she knew not, recked not, whither—for the moment recked not. This man's career, the work he was set to do, the ideal before him, the vision of a land redeemed, captured her, carried her panting into a resolve which, however she might modify her speech or action, must be an influence in her life hereafter. Must the penance and the redemption be his only? This life he lived had come from what had happened to her and to him in Egypt. In a deep sense her life was linked with his.

In a flash David now felt the deep significance of their relations. A curtain seemed suddenly to have been drawn aside. He was blinded for a moment. Her sympathy, her desire to help, gave him a new sense of hope and confidence, but—but there was no room in his crusade for any woman; the dear egotism of a life-dream was masterful in him, possessed him.

Yet, if ever his heart might have dwelt upon a woman with thought of the future, this being before him—he drew himself up with a start! . . . He was going to Egypt again in a few days; they might probably never meet again—would not, no doubt—should not. He had pressed her husband to go to Egypt, but now he

would not encourage it; he must "finish his journey alone."

He looked again in her eyes, and their light and beauty held him. His own eyes swam. The exaltation of a great idea was upon them, was a bond of fate between them. It was a moment of peril not fully realised by either. David did realise, however, that she was beautiful beyond all women he had ever seen—or was he now for the first time really aware of the beauty of woman? She had an expression, a light of eye and face, finely alluring beyond mere outline of feature. Yet the features were there, too, regular and fine; and her brown hair waving away from her broad, white forehead over eyes a greyish violet in colour gave her a classic distinction. In the quietness of the face there was that strain of the Quaker, descending to her through three generations, yet enlivened by a mind of impulse and genius.

They stood looking at each other for a moment, in which both had taken a long step forward in life's experience. But presently his eyes looked beyond her, as though at something that fascinated them.

"Of what are you thinking? What do you see?" she asked.

"You, leaving the garden of my house in Cairo, I standing by the fire," he answered, closing his eyes for an instant.

"It is what I saw also," she said breathlessly. "It is what I saw and was thinking of that instant." When, as though she must break away from the cords of feeling drawing her nearer and nearer to him, she said, with a little laugh, "Tell me again of my Chicago cousin? I have not had a letter for a year."

"Lacey, he is with me always. I should have done

little had it not been for him. He has remarkable resource; he is never cast down. He has but one fault."

"What is that?"

"He is no respecter of persons. His humour cuts deep. He has a wide heart for your sex. When leaving the court of the King of Abyssinia he said to his Majesty: 'Well, good-bye, King. Give my love to the girls.'"

She laughed again. "How absurd and childish he is! But he is true and able. And how glad you should be that you are able to make true friends, without an effort. Yesterday I met neighbour Fairley, and another little old Elder who keeps his chin in his collar and his eyes on the sky. They did little else but sing your praises. One might have thought that you had invented the world—or Hamley."

"Yet they would chafe if I were to appear among them without these." He glanced down at the Quaker clothes he wore, and made a gesture towards the broad-brimmed hat reposing on a footstool near by.

"It is good to see that you are not changed, not spoiled at all," she remarked, smiling. "Though, indeed, how could you be, who always work for others and never for yourself? All I envy you is your friends. You make them and keep them so."

She sighed, and a shadow came into her eyes suddenly. She was thinking of Eglington. Did he make friends—true friends? In London—was there one she knew who would cleave to him for love of him? In England—had she ever seen one? In Hamley, where his people had been for so many generations, had she found one?

Herself? Yes, she was his true friend. She would do

—what would she not do to help him, to serve his interests? What had she not done since she married! Her fortune, it was his; her every waking hour had been filled with something devised to help him on his way. Had he ever said to her: "Hylda, you are a help to me"? He had admired her—but was he singular in that? Before she married there were many—since, there had been many—who had shown, some with tact and carefulness, others with a crudeness making her shudder, that they admired her; and, if they might, would have given their admiration another name with other manifestations. Had she repelled it all? She had been too sure of herself to draw her skirts about her; she was too proud to let any man put her at any disadvantage. She had been safe, because her heart had been untouched. The Duchess of Snowdon, once beautiful, but now with a face like a mask, enamelled and rouged and lifeless, had said to her once: "My dear, I ought to have died at thirty. When I was twenty-three I wanted to squeeze the orange dry in a handful of years, and then go out suddenly, and let the dust of forgetfulness cover my bones. I had one child, a boy, and would have no more; and I squeezed the orange! But I didn't go at thirty, and yet the orange was dry. My boy died; and you see what I am—a fright, I know it; and I dress like a child of twenty; and I can't help it."

There had been moments, once, when Hylda, too, had wished to squeeze the orange dry, but something behind, calling to her, had held her back. She had dropped her anchor in perilous seas, but it had never dragged.

"Tell me how to make friends—and keep them," she added gaily.

"If it be true I make friends, thee taught me how,"

he answered, "for thee made me a friend, and I forget not the lesson."

She smiled. "Thee has learnt another lesson too well," she answered brightly. "Thee must not flatter. It is not that which makes thee keep friends. Thee sees I also am speaking as they do in Hamley—am I not bold? I love the grammarless speech."

"Then use it freely to-day, for this is farewell," he answered, not looking at her.

"This—is—farewell," she said slowly, vaguely. Why should it startle her so? "You are going so soon—where?"

"To-morrow to London, next week to Egypt."

She laid a hand upon herself, for her heart was beating violently. "Thee is not fair to give no warning—there is so much to say," she said, in so low a tone that he could scarcely hear her. "There is the future, your work, what we are to do here to help. What I am to do."

"Thee will always be a friend to Egypt, I know," he answered. "She needs friends. Thee has a place where thee can help."

"Will not right be done without my voice?" she asked, her eyes half closing. "There is the Foreign Office, and English policy, and the ministers, and—and Eglington. What need of me?"

He saw the thought had flashed into her mind that he did not trust her husband. "Thee knows and cares for Egypt, and knowing and caring make policy easier to frame," he rejoined.

Suddenly a wave of feeling went over her. He whose life had been flung into this field of labour by an act of her own, who should help him but herself?

But it all baffled her, hurt her, shook her. She was

not free to help as she wished. Her life belonged to another; and he exacted the payment of tribute to the uttermost farthing. She was blinded by the thought. Yet she must speak. "I will come to Egypt—we will come to Egypt," she said quickly. "Eglington shall know, too; he shall understand. You shall have his help. You shall not work alone."

"Thee can work here," he said. "It may not be easy for Lord Eglington to come."

"You pressed it on him."

Their eyes met. She suddenly saw what was in his mind.

"You know best what will help you most," she added gently.

"You will not come?" he asked.

"I will not say I will not come—not ever," she answered firmly. "It may be I should have to come." Resolution was in her eyes. She was thinking of Nahoum. "I may have to come," she added after a pause, "to do right by you."

He read her meaning. "Thee will never come," he continued confidently. He held out his hand.

"Perhaps I shall see you in town," she rejoined, as her hand rested in his, and she looked away. "When do you start for Egypt?"

"To-morrow week, I think," he answered. "There is much to do."

"Perhaps we shall meet in town," she repeated. But they both knew they would not.

"Farewell," he said, and picked up his hat.

As he turned again, the look in her eyes brought the blood to his face, then it became pale. A new force had come into his life.

"God be good to thee," he said, and turned away.

She watched him leave the room and pass through the garden.

"David! David!" she said softly after him.

At the other end of the room her husband, who had just entered, watched her. He heard her voice, but did not hear what she said.

"Come, Hylda, and have some music," he said brusquely.

She scrutinised him calmly. His face showed nothing. His look was enigmatical.

"Chopin is the thing for me," he said, and opened the piano.