Sulamith

by Alexander Kuprin

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SULAMITH

A Romance of Antiquity

By ALEXANDRE KUPRIN

Author of “Yama” (The Pit), etc.

Translated from the Russian By B. G. GUERNEY

with Eight full-page illustrations in color By FORBES-FELIX

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AUTHOR’S DEDICATION:

To Ivan Alexeievich Bunin

A. Kuprin

Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.1

THE SONG OF SONGS

Transcriber’s Note: This Table of Contents has been added for convenience; none

was present in the original, which contained only the List of Illustrations.

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I.

K King Solomon had not yet attained middle age—forty-five; yet the fame of his wisdom and comeliness, of the grandeur of his life and the pomp of his court, had spread far beyond the limits of Palestine. In Assyria and Phœnicia; in Lower and Upper Ægypt; from ancient Tabriz to Yemen and from Ismar unto Persepolis; on the coast of the Black Sea and upon the islands of the Mediterranean,—all uttered his name in wonder, for there was none among the kings like unto him in all his days.

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of Ægypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Zif,2 did the king undertake the erection of the great temple of the Lord in Mount Moriah, and the building of his palace in Jerusalem. Fourscore thousand stonesquarers and threescore and ten thousand that bare burthens wrought without cease in the mountains, and in the outskirts of the city; while ten thousand hewers that cut timber, out of a number of eight and thirty thousand, were sent each month, by courses, to Lebanon, where they spent a month in labour so arduous that they rested for two months thereafter. Thousands of men tied the cut trees into flotes, and hundreds of seamen brought them by sea to Jaffa, where they were fashioned by

Tyrians, skilled to work at turning and carpentry. Only at the rearing of the pyramids of Khephren, Khufu, and Mencheres, at Ghizeh, had such an infinite multitude of labourers been used.

Three thousand and six hundred officers oversaw the works; while Azariah, the son of Nathan, was over the officers,—a cruel man and an active, concerning whom had sprung up a rumour that he never slept, devoured by the fire of an internal, incurable disease. As for the plans of the palace and the temple; the drawings of the columns, the fore-court, and the brasen sea; the designs for the windows; the ornaments of the walls and the thrones,—they had all been created by the master builder Hiram-Abiah of Sidon, the son of a worker in brass of the tribe of Naphtali.

After seven years, in the month of Bul,3 the temple of the Lord was completed; and after thirteen years, the palace of the king also. For cedar logs out of Lebanon, for cypress and olive boards, for almug, shittim, and tarshish woods, for great stones, costly stones, and hewed and polished stones; for purple, scarlet, and for byssin broidered in gold; for stuffs of blue wool; for ivory and red-dyed rams' skins; for iron, onyx, and the vast quantity of marble; for precious stones; for the chains, the wreaths, the cords, the tongs, the nets, the lavers, and the flowers and the lamps and the candlesticks,—all, all of gold; for the hinges of gold for the doors, and the nails of gold, weighing sixty shekels each; for the basons and platters of beaten gold; for ornaments,—graven and in mosaic; for the images of lions, cherubim, oxen, palms and pineapples, both hewn in stone and molten,—for all these did Solomon give Hiram, King of Tyre, who bore the same name as the master builder, twenty cities and hamlets in the land of Galilee, and Hiram found the gift insignificant, with such splendour had been built the temple of the Lord, and the palace of Solomon, and the little palace at Millo for the king's wife, the beautiful Queen Astis, daughter to Shishak, Pharaoh of Ægypt; while the redwood which later went for the balustrades and stairs of the galleries, for the musical instruments and for the bindings of the sacred books, had been brought as a gift to Solomon by the Queen of Sheba, the

wise and beautiful Balkis, together with such a quantity of aromatic incense, sweet smelling oils, and precious perfumes, as had never been seen before in the land of Israel.

With each year did the riches of the king increase. Thrice a year did his ships return to harbour: the Tarshish, that sailed the Mediterranean, and the Hiram, that sailed the Black Sea. They brought out of Africa ivory and apes and peacocks and antelopes; richly adorned chariots out of Ægypt; live tigers and lions, as well as animal pelts and furs, out of Mesopotamia; snow-white steeds out of Cuth; gold dust out of Parvaam that came to six hundred and threescore talents in one year; redwood, ebony and sandalwood out of the land of Ophir; gay rugs of Asshur and Calah, of marvelous designs,—the friendly gifts of King Tiglath-Pileser; artistic mosaic out of Nineveh, Nimroud, and Sargon; wondrous figured stuffs out of Khatuar; goblets of beaten gold out of Tyre; stained glass out of Sidon; and out of Punt, which is near Bab-el-Medebu, those rare perfumes,—nard, aloes, calamus, cinnamon, saffron, amber, musk, stacte, galbanum, Smyrna myrrh, and frankincense,—for the possession of which the Ægyptian pharaohs had more than once embarked upon bloody wars.

As for silver, it was accounted of as common stone in the days of Solomon, and redwood was of no more value than the common sycamores that grow in the low plains in abundance.

Pools of stone, lined with porphyry, and marble cisterns and cool fountains did the king build, commanding the water to be conveyed from mountain springs that plunged down into the Kidron’s torrent; while around the palace he planted gardens and groves, and cultivated a vineyard in Baal-hamon.

And Solomon had forty thousand stalls for mules and for the horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand for his cavalry; barley also and straw for the horses were brought daily from the provinces. Thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore

measures of other meal; an hundred baths of different wines; ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and three hundred sheep, not counting harts and roebucks, and fallowdeer, and fatted fowl,—all this, passing through the hands of twelve officers, went daily for the table of Solomon, as well as for his court, his retinue, and his guard. Threescore warriors, out of a number of five hundred of the most stalwart and most valiant in all his army, held watch by turns in the inner chambers of the palace. Five hundred bucklers, covered with plates of gold, did the king command to be made for his bodyguards.

II.

W Whatsoever the eyes of the king might desire, he kept not from them; and withheld not his heart from any joy. Seven hundred wives had the king, and three hundred concubines, without counting slaves and dancers. And all of them did Solomon charm with his love, for God had endowed him with such an inexhaustible strength of passion as was not given to ordinary men. He loved the white-faced, black-eyed, red-lipped Hittites for their vivid but momentary beauty, that bursts into blossom just as early and enchantingly, and fades just as rapidly as the flower of the narcissus; the swarthy, tall, vehement Philistines, with wiry, curly locks, who wore golden, tinkling armlets upon their wrists, golden hoops upon their shoulders, and broad anklets, joined by a thin little chain, upon both ankles; gentle, diminutive, lithe Ammorites formed without a blemish, whose faithfulness and submissiveness in love had passed into a proverb; women out of Assyria, who put their eyes in painting to make them seem more elongated, and who ate out with acid blue stars upon their foreheads and cheeks; well-schooled, gay and witty daughters of Sidon, who knew well how to sing and dance, as well as to play upon harps, lutes and flutes, to the accompaniment of tabours; xanthochroöus women of Ægypt, indefatigable in love and insane in jealousy; voluputous Babylonians, whose entire

body underneath their raiment was as smooth as marble, because they eradicated the hair upon it with a special paste; virgins of Baktria, who stained their nails and hair a fiery-red colour, and wore wide, loose trowsers; silent, bashful Moabites, whose magnificent breasts were cool on the sultriest nights of summer; care-free and profligate Ammonites, with fiery hair, and flesh of such whiteness that it glowed in the dark; frail, blue-eyed women with flaxen hair, and skin of a delicate fragrance, who were brought from the north, through Baalbec, and whose tongue was incomprehensible to all the dwellers in Palestine. The king loved many daughters of Judæa and Israel besides.

Also shared he his couch with Balkis-Mâkkedah, the Queen of Sheba, who had surpassed all women on earth in beauty, wisdom, riches, and her diversified art in passion; and with Abishag the Shunamite, who had warmed the old age of David,—a kindly, quiet beauty, for whose sake Solomon had put to death his elder brother Adonijah, at the hands of Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada.

And also with the poor maiden of the vineyard, by the name of Sulamith, whom alone among all women the king had loved with all his heart.

Solomon made himself a litter of the best cedar wood, with pillars of silver, with arm-rests of gold in the form of recumbent lions, with a covering of purple Tyrian stuff, while the entire inner side of the covering was ornamented with gold embroidery and with precious stones,—the love-gifts of the women and virgins of Jerusalem. And when well-built black slaves bore Solomon among his people on grand festal days, truly was the king glorious, like the lilies that are in the Valley of Sharon!

Pale was his face; his lips like unto a vivid thread of scarlet; his wavy locks a bluish black, and in them—the adornment of wisdom—gleamed gray hairs, like to the silver threads of mountain streams, falling down from the dark crags of Hermon; gray hairs glistened in his dark beard also, curled, after the custom of the kings of

Assyria, in regular, small rows.

As for the eyes of the king, they were dark, like the darkest agate, like the heavens on a moonless night in summer; while his eye-lashes, that spread upward and downward like arrows, resembled dark rays around dark stars. And there was no man in all the universe who could bear the gaze of Solomon without casting down his eyes. And the lightnings of wrath in the eyes of the king would prostrate people to the earth.

But there were moments of heartfelt merriment, when the king would grow intoxicated with love, or wine, or the delight of power, or when he rejoiced over words of wisdom or beauty, fitly spoken. Then his lashes would be softly half-lowered, casting blue shadows upon his radiant face, and in the king's eyes would kindle the warm flames of a kindly, tender laughter, just like the play of black diamonds; and whosoever might behold this smile was ready to yield up body and soul for it—so indescribably beautiful was it. The mere name of King Solomon, uttered aloud, stirred the hearts of women, like the fragrance of spilt myrrh that recalls nights of love.

The king's hands were soft, white, warm and beautiful, like a woman's; but they held such an excess of life energy that, by the laying on of his palms upon the temples of the sick, the king cured headaches, convulsions, black melancholy, and demoniacal possession. Upon the index finger of his left hand the king wore a gem of blood-red asteria that emitted six pearl-coloured rays. Many centuries did this ring number, and upon the reverse side of its stone was graven an inscription, in the tongue of an ancient, vanished people: "All things pass away."

And so great was the sway of Solomon's soul that even beasts submitted to it; lions and tigers crawled at the feet of the king, rubbing their muzzles against his knees, and licking his hands with their rough tongues, whenever he entered their quarters. And he, whose heart found joy in the dazzling play of precious stones, in the

fragrance of sweet-smelling Ægyptian resins, in the soft touch of light stuffs, in sweet music, in the exquisite taste of red, sparkling wine playing in a chased Ninuanian chalice,—he also loved to stroke the coarse manes of lions, the velvety backs of black panthers, and the tender paws of young, speckled leopards; loved to hear the roar of wild beasts, to see their powerful and superb movements, and to feel the hot feral odour of their breath.

Thus did Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilud, the historian of his days, depict King Solomon.

III.

“

B Because thou hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy words; lo, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart: so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.”

Thus spake God unto Solomon, and through His word did the king come to know the structure of the universe and the working of the elements; to fathom the beginning, end, and midst of all ages; to penetrate the mystery of the eternal, wave-like and rotating recurrence of events; from the astronomers of Byblos, Acre, Sargon, Borsippa and Nineveh did he learn to watch the yearly orbits of the stars and the changes in their positions. He knew also the nature of all animals and divined the feelings of beasts; he understood the source and direction of winds, the different properties of plants, and the potency of healing herbs.

The designs in the heart of man are deep waters, but even them could the king fathom. In the words and voice, in the eyes, in the motions of the hands, he read the innermost mysteries of souls as plainly as the characters of an open book. And

because of that, from all ends of Palestine, there came to him a vast multitude of people, imploring judgment, advice, help, the settlement of some dispute, as well as the solving of incomprehensible portents and dreams. And men would marvel at the profundity and finesse of Solomon's answers.

Three thousand proverbs did Solomon compose, and his songs were a thousand and five. He dictated them to two skilled and rapid scribes: Elihoreph and Ahiah, the sons of Shisha, and afterwards collated what both had written. Always did he clothe his thoughts in choice expressions, for a word fitly spoken is like an apple of gold in a bowl of translucent sardonyx;4 and also for that the words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one Shepherd. "A word is a spark in the motion of the heart,"—thus saith the king. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of the Ægyptians. For he was above all men in wisdom; wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Dardra, the sons of Mahol. But he was already beginning to weary of the beauty of ordinary human wisdom, and no longer did it have its former value in his eyes. With a restless and searching mind did he thirst after that higher wisdom, which the Lord possessed in the beginning of His way, before His works of old, set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was; that wisdom which was His great artificer when He set a compass upon the face of the deep. And Solomon found it not.

The king mastered the teachings of the magi of Chaldæa and Nineveh; the science of the astrologers of Abydos, Sais, and Memphis; the secrets of the Assyrian sorcerers, mystagogues, and epopts, and of the fatidicæ of Baktria and Persepolis; and he had become convinced that their knowledge was but the knowledge of mortals.

Also did he seek for wisdom in the occult rites of ancient pagan faiths, and for that reason visited idol-temples and offered up oblations to the mighty Baal-Lebanon, who was honoured under the name of Melkart,—the god of creation and destruction,

the patron of navigation in Tyre and Sidon,—called Ammon in the Oasis of Sibakh, where his idol would nod his head to indicate the routes to festal processions; called Bel by the Chaldæans, and Moloch by the Canaanites. He also bowed down before his spouse,—the dread and passionate Astarte, who bore in other temples the names of Ishtar, Isaar, Baaltis, Ashera, Istar-Belet, and Atargatis. He libated holy oil and burnt incense before Isis and Osiris of Ægypt,—sister and brother, joined in wedlock while still in the womb of their mother and there conceiving the god Horus; and before Derketo, the pisciform Tyrian goddess; and before Anubis of the dog's head, the god of embalming; and before the Babylonian Cannes; and Dagon of the Philistines; and the Assyrian Abdenago; and Utsabu, the Ninevehian idol; and the sombre Kybele; and Bel Marduk, the patron of Babylon,—the god of the planet Jupiter; and the Chaldæan Or,—the god of eternal fire; and the mystic Omorca, the first mother of the gods, whom Bel had cloven in two parts, creating heaven and earth out of them, and out of her head, men; and the king bowed down also before the goddess Anaïtis, in whose honour the virgins of Phœnicia, Lydia, Armenia and Persia gave up their bodies to passers-by, as a sacred offering, at the threshold of temples.

But the king found in the pagan rites nought save drunkenness, night orgies, lechery, incest, and lusts contrary to nature; and in their dogmas he perceived vain discourse and deception. But he forbade none of his subjects to offer up sacrifices to a favourite god, and he even built upon the Mount of Olives an idol-temple for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, at the supplication of the beautiful, pensive Ellaan, the Moabite, the then favorite wife of the king. One thing only could not Solomon abide and pursued with death,—the bringing of children in sacrifice.

And he saw in his seekings that that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts, even one thing befalleth them: as one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preëminence above a beast. And the king understood, that in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge

increaseth sorrow. He also learned that even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of mirth is heaviness. And so one morning he dictated to Elihoreph and Ahiah:

"'All is vanity of vanities and vexation of spirits'—thus saith Ecclesiastes."

But at that time the king did not yet know that God would soon send him a love so tender and ardent, so devoted and beautiful,—more precious in itself than riches, fame, and wisdom; more precious than life itself, for it values not even life, nor hath fear of death.

IV.

T The king had a vineyard at Baal-hamon, upon the southern slope of Bath-El-Khav, to the south of the idol-temple of Moloch; thither did the king love to withdraw in the hours of his great meditations. Pomegranate,—olive,—and wild apple-trees, interspersed with cedars and cypresses, bordered it on three sides upon the mountain, while on the fourth it was fenced off from the road by a high stone wall. And other vineyards, lying about, also belonged to Solomon; he let them out unto keepers, each one for a thousand pieces of silver.

Only with the dawn came to an end in the palace the magnificent feast which the King of Israel was giving in honour of the emissaries of the King of Assyria, the good Tiglath-Pileser. Despite his fatigue, Solomon could not fall asleep this morn. Neither wine nor hippocras had befogged the stout heads of the Assyrians, nor loosened their canny tongues. But the penetrating mind of the wise king had already forestalled their plans, and was, in its turn, already weaving a fine political net, wherein he would enmesh these proud men with supercilious eyes and of flattering speech. Solomon would be able to preserve the necessary amity with the potentate of Assyria, yet at the same time, for the sake of his eternal friendship with Hiram of Tyre, would save from pillage the latter's kingdom, which, with its countless riches,

hid in subterranean vaults underneath narrow streets, had for a long time drawn the covetous gazes of oriental sovereigns.

And so at dawn Solomon had commanded himself to be borne to Mount Bath-El-Khav; had left the litter far down the road, and is now seated alone upon a simple wooden bench, above the vineyard, under the shade of the trees, still hiding in their branches the dewy chill of night. The king has on a simple white mantle, fastened at the right shoulder and at the left side by two Ægyptian clasps of green gold, in the shape of curled crocodiles,—the symbol of the god Sebekh. The hands of the king lie motionless upon his knees, while his eyes, overshadowed by deep thought, unwinking, are directed toward the east, in the direction of the Dead Sea,—there, where from the rounded summit of Anaze the sun is rising in the flame of dawn.

The morning wind is blowing from the east and spreads the fragrance of the grape in blossom,—a delicate fragrance, like that of mignonette and mulled wine. The dark cypresses sway their slender tops pompously and pour out their resinous breath. The silvery-green leaves of the olives hurriedly converse among themselves.

But now Solomon arises and hearkens carefully. An endearing feminine voice, clear and pure as this dewy morn, is singing somewhere not far off, beyond the trees. The simple and tender motive runs on and on, of its own accord, like a ringing rill in the mountains, repeating the five or six notes, always the same. And its unpretentious, exquisite charm calls forth a smile in the eyes of the touched king.

Nearer and nearer sounds the voice. Now it is already here, alongside, behind the spreading cedars, behind the dark verdure of the junipers. Then the king cautiously parts the branches with his hands, quietly makes his way between the prickly branches, and comes out upon an open place.

Before him, beyond the low wall, rudely built of great yellow stones, the vineyard spreads upward. A girl, in a light garment of blue, walks between the rows of vines,

bending down over something below, and again straightening up, and she is singing. Her ruddy hair flames in the sun:

The breath of the day is coolness,

And the shadows flee away.

Turn, my beloved,

And be thou like a roe or a young hart,

Within the clefts of the rocks....

Thus sings she, tying up the grapevines, and slowly descends, nearer and nearer the stone wall behind which the king is standing. She is alone, none sees nor hears her; the scent of the grapes in blossom, the joyous freshness of the morning, and the warm blood in her heart are like wine unto her, and now the words of the naïve little song are born spontaneously upon her lips and are carried away by the wind, to be forgotten forever:

Take us the foxes,

The little foxes

That spoil the vines:

For our vines have tender grapes.

In this manner does she reach the very wall, and, without noticing the king, turns about and walks on, climbing the hill lightly, along the neighbouring row of vines. Now her song sounds less distinctly:

Make haste, my beloved,

And be thou like to a roe or a young hart

Upon the mountains of spices.

But suddenly she grows silent and bends so low to the ground that she can not be seen behind the vines.

Then Solomon utters in a voice that caresses the ear:

“Maiden, show me thy face; let me hear thy voice anew.”

She straightens up quickly and turns her face to the king. A strong wind arises at this second and flutters the light garment upon her, suddenly making it cling tightly around her body and between her legs. And the king, for an instant, until she turns her back to the wind, sees all of her beneath the raiment, as though naked,—tall and graceful, in the vigorous bloom of thirteen years; sees her little, round, firm breasts and the elevations of her nipples, from which the cloth spreads out in rays; and the virginal abdomen, round as a bason; and the deep line that divides her legs from the bottom to the top, and there parts in two, toward the rounded hips.

“For sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance comely,” says Solomon.

She draws nearer and gazes upon the king with trembling and with rapture. Her swarthy and vivid face is inexpressibly beautiful. Her heavy, thick, dark-red hair, into which she has stuck two flowers of the scarlet poppy, covers her shoulders in countless resilient ringlets and spreads over her back, and, transpierced by the rays of the sun, glows in flame, like aureate purple. A necklace which she had made herself out of some red, dried berries, naïvely winds twice about her long, dark, slender neck.

“I did not notice thee!” she says gently, and her voice sounds like the song of a flute. “Whence didst thou come?”

“Thou sangst so well, maiden!”

She bashfully casts down her eyes and turns red, but beneath her long lashes and in the corners of her lips trembles a secret smile.

“Thou sangst of thy dear. He is as light as a roe, as a young hart upon the mountains. For he is very fair, thy dear,—is not that the truth, maiden?”

Her laughter is ringing and musical, as though silver were falling upon a golden

platter.

“I have no dear. It is but a song. I have yet had no dear....”

For a minute they are silent, and intently, without smiling, gaze at each other.... Birds loudly call one another among the trees. The maiden’s bosom quickly rises and falls under the worn linen.

“I do believe thee, beautiful one. Thou art so fair....”

“Thou dost mock me. Behold, how black I am....”

She lifts up her small, dark arms, and the broad sleeves lightly slide down towards her shoulders, baring her elbows, that have such a slender and rounded outline.

And she says plaintively:

“My brethren were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyard,—and now behold how the sun hath scorched me.”

“O, nay, the sun hath made thee still more fair, thou fairest among women. Lo, thou hast smiled,—and thy teeth are like white twin-lambs, which come up from the washing, and none among them hath a blemish. Thy cheeks are like the halves of a pomegranate within thy locks. Thy lips are scarlet,—yea, pleasant to gaze upon. As for thy hair ... Dost know what thy hair is like? Hast thou ever beheld a flock of sheep come down from Mount Gilead at eve? It covers all the mountain, from summit to foot, and from the light of the evening glow and from the dust it seems even as ruddy and as wavy as thy locks. Thine eyes are as deep as the two fishponds in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. O, how fair art thou! Thy neck is straight and graceful, like the tower of David!...”

“Like the tower of David!” she repeats in rapture.

“Yea, yea, thou fairest among women. A thousand bucklers hang upon the tower of David, all shields of vanquished chieftains. Lo, I hang my shield also upon thy tower....”

“O, speak on, speak on....”

“And when thou didst turn around in answer to my call, and the wind arose, I did see beneath thy raiment thy two nipples and methought: Here be two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies. This thy stature was like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes.”

The girl cries out faintly, hides her face with her palms, and her bosom with her elbows, and blushes so that even her ears and neck turn crimson.

“And I saw thy hips. They are shapely, like a precious vase, the work of the hands of a cunning workman. Take away thy hands, therefore, maiden. Show me thy face.”

She submissively let her hands drop. A deep, golden radiance glows from the eyes of Solomon and casts a spell over her, makes her head dizzy, and in a sweet, warm tremour streams over the skin of her body.

“Tell me, who art thou?” she says slowly, in perplexity. “Never have I seen any like to thee.”

“I am a shepherd, my beauty. I graze my splendid flocks of white lambs upon the mountains, where the green grass is pied with narcissi. Wilt thou not come with me, unto my pasture?”

But she quietly shakes her head:

“Canst thou think that I will believe this? Thy face has not grown rough from the wind, nor is it scorched by the sun, and thy hands are white. Thou hast on a costly chiton, and the buckle upon it is worth the yearly rental that my brothers bring for our vineyard to Adoniram, the king’s tax-gatherer. Thou hast come from yonder, from beyond the wall. Thou art, surely, one of the men near to the king? Meseems I saw thee once upon the day of a great festival; I even remember running after thy chariot.”

“Thou hast guessed it, maiden. It is hard to be hid from thee. And verily, why

shouldst thou be a wanderer nigh the flocks of the shepherds? Yea, I am one of the king's retinue. I am the chief cook of the king. And thou didst see me when I rode in the chariot of Ammi-nadib on the gala-day of Passover. But why dost thou stand distant from me? Draw nearer, my sister! Sit down here upon the stones of the wall and tell me something of thyself. Tell me thy name."

"Sulamith," she says.

"Then, Sulamith, why have thy brothers grown wroth with thee?"

"I am ashamed to speak of it. They received moneys from the sale of their wine, and sent me to the city to buy bread and goat-cheese. But I ..."

"And thou didst lose the money?"

"Nay, still worse...."

She bends her head low and whispers:

"Besides bread and cheese I bought a little of attar of roses,—oh, so little!—from the Ægyptians in the old city."

"And thou didst keep this from thy brethren?"

"Yea...."

And she utters in a barely audible voice:

"Attar of roses hath so goodly a smell!"

The king caressingly strokes her little rough hand.

"Surely, thou must be lonesome, all alone in thy vineyard?"

"Nay, I work, I sing.... At noon food is brought me, and at evening one of my brothers relieves me. At times I dig for the roots of the mandragora, that look like little mannikins.... The Chaldæan merchants buy them from us. It is said they make a sleeping potion out of them.... Tell me, is it true that the berries of the mandragora help in love?"

“Nay, Sulamith, only love can help in love. Tell me, hast thou a father or a mother?”

“Only a mother. My father died two years ago. My brethren are all older than I,—they are from the first marriage; only my sister and I have sprung from the second.”

“Is thy sister as comely as thou?”

“She is little. She is but nine.”

The king laughs quietly, embraces Sulamith, draws her to him, and whispers into her ear:

“Therefore, she hath no such breast as thine? A breast as proud, as warm?...”

She is silent, burning with shame and happiness. Her eyes glow and grow dim, with the mist of a happy smile over them. The king feels the riotous beating of her heart within his hand.

“The warmth of thy garments hath a goodlier smell than myrrh, than nard,” he is saying, avidly touching her ear with his lips. “And when thou breathest, the smell of thy nostrils is like that of apples unto me. My sister, my beloved, thou hast ravished my heart with one glance of thy eyes, with one chain of thy neck.”

“O, gaze not upon me!” implores Sulamith. “Thine eyes stir me.”

But of her own accord she bends backward and lays her head upon Solomon’s breast. Her lips glow over the gleaming teeth, her eyelids tremble with intense desire. Solomon’s lips cling greedily to her enticing mouth. He feels the flame of her lips and the slipperiness of her teeth, and the sweet moistness of her tongue; and he is all consumed of an unbearable desire, such as he has never yet known in his life.

Thus passes one minute; then two.

“What dost thou with me!” says Sulamith faintly, closing her eyes.

But Solomon passionately whispers near her very mouth:

“Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under thy

tongue.... O, come away with me, speedily. Here, behind the wall, it is dark and cool. None shall see us. The green is soft here underneath the cedars."

"Nay, nay, leave me. I desire it not, I can not."

"Sulamith ... thou dost desire it, thou dost desire it.... Come to me, my sister, my beloved!"

Some one's steps resound below, upon the highway, below the wall of the vineyard, but Solomon detains the frightened girl by her hand.

"Tell me, quickly,—where dwellest thou? This night shall I come to thee," he is hurriedly saying.

"Nay, nay, nay ... I shall not tell thee this. Let me go. I shall not tell thee."

"I shall not let thee go, Sulamith, till thou dost tell.... My desire is unto thee!"

"It is well, I shall tell thee.... But first promise not to come this night.... Also, come thou not the following night ... nor the night after that ... My king! I charge thee by the roes and the hinds of the field, that thou stir not up thy beloved till she please!"

"Yea, I pledge thee this.... Where is thy dwelling, Sulamith?"

"If on the way to the city thou dost pass over the Kidron, upon the bridge above Siloam, thou shalt see our dwelling nigh the spring. There are no other dwellings there."

"And which is thy window there, Sulamith?"

"Why shouldst thou know this, beloved? O, gaze not thus upon me. Thy gaze casts a spell over me.... Do not kiss me.... Beloved! Kiss me again...."

"But which is thy window, my only one?"

"The window on the south side. Ah, I must not tell thee this.... A small, high window with a lattice."

"And doth the lattice open from within?"

“Nay, it is a fixed window. But around the corner is a door. It leads directly into the room where I sleep with my sister. But thou hast promised me!... My sister sleeps lightly. O, how fair art thou, my beloved! Truly, hast thou not promised?”

Solomon quietly smoothes her hair and cheeks.

“I shall come to thee this night,” he says insistently. “At midnight I shall come. Thus, thus shall it be. I desire it.”

“Beloved!”

“Nay. Thou shalt await me. But have no fear, and put thy trust in me. I shall cause thee no grief. I shall give thee such joy compared with which all things upon earth are without significance. Now farewell. I hear them coming after me.”

“Farewell, my beloved ... O, nay, go not yet! Tell me thy name,—I know it not.”

For a moment, as though undecided, he lowers his lashes, but immediately raises them again.

“The King and I have the same name. I am called Solomon. Farewell. I love thee.”

V.

R Radiant and joyous was Solomon upon this day, as he sat upon his throne in the hall of the House at Lebanon and meted out justice to the people who came before him.

Forty columns, four in a row, supported the ceiling of the Hall of Judgment, and they were all faced with cedar and terminated in capitals in the form of lilies; the floor consisted of cypress boards, all of a piece; nor was the stone upon the walls to be seen anywhere for the cedar finish, ornamented with gold carving, shewing palms, pineapples, and cherubim. In the depth of the hall, with its triple-tiered windows, six steps led up to the elevation of the throne, and upon each step stood two bronze lions, one on each side. The throne itself was of ivory with gold

incrustation and with elbow-rests of gold, in the form of recumbent lions. The high back of the throne was surmounted by a golden disc. Curtains of violet and purple stuffs hung from the ceiling down to the floor at the entrance to the hall, dividing off the entry, where between the columns thronged the plaintiffs, supplicants, and witnesses, as well as the accused and the criminals under a strong guard.

The king had on a red chiton, while upon his head was a simple, narrow crown of sixty beryls, set in gold. At his right hand stood the throne for his mother, Bathsheba; but of late, owing to her declining years, she rarely showed herself in the city.

The Assyrian guests, with austere, black-bearded faces, were seated along the walls upon benches of jasper; they had on garments of a light olive colour, broidered at the edges with designs of red and white. While still at home, in their native Assyria, they had heard so much of the justice of Solomon that they tried to let no single word of his slip by, in order to tell later of the judgment of the King of the Israelites. Among them sat the commanders of Solomon’s armies, his ministers, the governors of his provinces, and his courtiers. Here was Benaiah, at one time executioner to the king; the slayer of Joab, Adonijah, and Shimei,—a short, corpulent old man, with a sparse, long, gray beard; his faded, bluish eyes, rimmed by red lids that seemed turned inside out, had a look of senile dullness; his mouth was open and moist, while his fleshy, red lower lip drooped down impotently, and was slightly trembling. Here also were Azariah, the son of Nathan,—a jaundiced, tall man, with a lean, sickly face and dark rings under his eyes; and the good-natured, absent-minded Jehoshaphat, historiographer; and Ahishar, who was over the court of Solomon; and Zabud, who bore the high title of the King’s Friend; and Ben-Abinadab, which had Taphath, the eldest daughter of Solomon, to wife; and Ben-Geber, the officer over the region of Argob, which is in Bashan: to him pertained threescore cities, surrounded by walls, with gates of brasen bars; and Baanah, the son of Hushai, at one time famed for his skill in casting a spear to the distance of thirty parasangs; and

many others. Sixty warriors, their helmets and shields gleaming, stood in a rank to the left of the throne and the right; their head officer this day was the handsome Eliab, of the black locks, son of Ahilud.

The first to come before Solomon with his complaint was one Achior, a lapidary by trade. Working in Bel of Phœnicia he had found a precious stone, had cut and polished it, and had asked his friend Zachariah, who was setting out for Jerusalem, to give the stone to his—Achior's—wife. After some time Achior also returned home. The first thing that he asked about upon beholding his wife was the stone. But she was very much amazed at her husband's question, and repeated under oath that she had received no stone of any sort. Whereupon Achior set out for an explanation to his friend Zachariah, but he asseverated, and also to an oath, that he had, immediately upon arrival, given the stone over as instructed. He even brought witnesses, who affirmed having seen Zachariah give the stone in their presence to the wife of Achior.

And now all four,—Achior, Zachariah, and the two witnesses,—were standing before the throne of the King of Israel.

Solomon gazed into the eyes of each one in turn and said to the guard:

"Lead each one to a separate chamber, and lock up each one apart."

And when this was done, he ordered four pieces of unbaked clay to be brought.

"Let each one of them," willed the king, "fashion out of clay that form which the stone had."

After some time the moulds were ready. But one of the witnesses had made his mould in the shape of a horse's head, as precious stones were usually fashioned; the other, in the shape of a sheep's head; only two of them—Achior and Zachariah—had their moulds alike, resembling in form a woman's breast.

And the king spake:

“Now it is evident even to one blind that the witnesses are bribed by Zachariah. And so, let Zachariah return the stone to Achior, and together with it pay him thirty shekels, of this city, of law costs, and give ten shekels to the priests for the temple. As for the self-revealed witnesses, let them pay into the treasury five shekels each for bearing false witness.”

Three brothers then drew nigh to Solomon’s throne; they were at court about an inheritance. Their father had told them before his death: “That ye may not quarrel at division, I myself shall apportion ye in justice. When I die, go beyond the knoll that is in the midst of the grove behind the house, and dig therein. There shall ye find a box with three divisions: know, that the topmost is for the eldest brother; the middle one for the second; the lowest for the youngest.” And when, after his death, they had gone, and had done as he had willed, they had found that the topmost division was filled to the top with golden coins, whereas in the middle one were lying only common bones, and in the lowest naught but pieces of wood. And so among the younger brothers arose envy for the eldest, and enmity; and in the end their life had become so unbearable that they decided to turn to the king for counsel and judgment. And even here, standing before the throne, they could not refrain from mutual recriminations and affronts.

The king shook his head, heard them out, and spake:

“Cease quarreling; a stone is heavy, and the sand weighty, but a fool’s wrath is heavier than them both. Your father was, it is plain to see, a wise man and a just, and he has expressed his wishes in his testament just as clearly as though it had been consummated before an hundred witnesses. Is it possible that ye have not surmised at once, ye sorry brawlers, that to the eldest brother he left all his moneys; to the second, all his cattle and all his slaves; while to the youngest,—his house and plow-land? Depart, therefore, in peace; and be no longer enemies among yourselves.”

And the three brothers—but recently enemies—with beaming faces bowed to the king's feet and walked out of the Hall of Judgment arm in arm.

And the king decided also another suit at inheritance, begun three days ago. A certain man, dying, had said that he was leaving all his goods to the worthier of his two sons. But since neither one of them would consent to call himself the worse one, they had therefore turned to the king.

Solomon questioned them as to their pursuits, and, having heard them answer that they were both hunters with the bow, he spake:

"Return home. I shall order the corpse of your father to be stood up against a tree. We shall first see which one of you shall hit his breast more truly with an arrow, and then decide your suit."

Now both brothers had returned in the custody of a man sent by the king for their surveillance. He it was whom the king questioned about the contest.

"I have fulfilled all that thou hast commanded," said his man. "I stood the corpse of the old man against a tree, and gave each brother his bow and arrows. The elder was the first to shoot. At a distance of an hundred and twenty ells he hit just the place where, in a living man, the heart beats."

"A splendid shot," said Solomon. "And the younger?"

"The younger ... Forgive me, O King,—I could not insist upon thy command being fulfilled exactly.... The younger did make his string taut, but suddenly lowered the bow to his feet, turned around, and said, weeping: 'Nay, this I can not do.... I will not shoot at the corpse of my father.'"

"Therefore, let the estate of his father belong to him," decided the king. "He has proven the worthier son. As for the elder, if he desire, he may join the number of my bodyguards. I have need of such strong and rapacious men, sure of hand and true of eye, and with a heart grown over with wool."

Next three men came before the king. Carrying on a mutual traffic in merchandise, they had amassed much money. And so, when the time had come for them to journey to Jerusalem, they had sewn up the gold in a leathern belt and had set out on their way. On the road they had spent a night in a forest, and, for safe-keeping, had buried the belt in the ground. But when they awoke in the morning, they found no belt in the place where they had put it.

They all accused one another of the secret theft, and since all three seemed to be men of exceeding cunning, and subtile of speech, the king therefore said unto them:

“Ere I decide your suit, hearken unto that which I shall relate to you. A certain fair maiden promised her beloved, who was setting out upon a journey, to await his return, and to yield her virginity to none save him. But, having gone away, he within a short while married another maiden, in another city, and she came to know of this. In the absence of her beloved, a wealthy and kind-hearted youth in her city, a friend of her childhood, paid court to her. Constrained by her parents she durst not, for shame and fear, tell him of her pact, and took him to spouse. But when, at the conclusion of the marriage feast, he led her to the bed-chamber, and would lay down with her, she began to implore him: ‘Allow me to go to the city where my former beloved dwelleth. Let him relieve me of my vow; then shall I return to thee, and do all thy desire!’ And since the youth loved her exceedingly, he did agree to her request, allowed her to go, and she went. On the way a robber fell upon her, disheveled her, and was about to ravish her. But the maiden fell down on her knees before him, and, in tears, implored him to spare her virtue, telling the robber all that had befallen her, and her reason for travelling to a strange city. And the robber, having heard her out, was so astounded by her faithfulness to her word, and so touched by the goodness of her bridegroom, that not only did he let the girl depart in peace, but also returned to her the valuables he had taken. Now I ask you, who of all these three did best before the countenance of God,—the maiden, the bridegroom, or the robber?”

And one of the plaintiffs said that the maiden was the most worthy of praise, for her steadfastness to her oath. Another marvelled at the great love of her bridegroom; the third, however, found the action of the robber the most magnanimous one.

And the king said to the last:

“Therefore, it is even thou who hast stolen the belt with the common gold, for thou art by nature covetous, and dost desire that which is not thine.”

But this man, having given his travelling staff to one of his companions, spake, raising his hands aloft as though for an oath:

“I witness before Jehovah that the gold is not with me, but him!”

The king smiled and commanded one of his warriors:

“Take this man’s rod and break it in half.”

And when the warrior had carried out Solomon’s order, gold coins poured out upon the floor, for they had been concealed within the hollowed-out stick; as for the thief, he, struck by the wisdom of the king, fell down before his throne and confessed his misdeed.

There also came into the House of Lebanon a woman, the poor widow of a stone-cutter, and she spake:

“I cry for justice, O King! For the last two dinarii left me I bought flour, put it into this large earthen bowl, and started to carry it home. But a strong wind suddenly arose and did scatter my flour. O wise king, who shall bring back this my loss? I now have naught wherewith to feed my children.”

“When was this?” asked the king.

“It happened this morning, at dawn.”

And so Solomon commanded that there be summoned to him several merchants, whose ships were to set out this day with merchandise for Phœnicia, by way of Jaffa. And when, in alarm, they appeared in the Hall of Judgment, the king asked

them:

“Did ye pray God, or the gods, for a favourable wind for your ships?”

And they answered:

“Yea, O King. We did so. And our offerings were pleasing to God, for He did send us a propitious wind.”

“I rejoice on your account,” said Solomon. “But the same wind has scattered a poor woman’s flour that she was carrying in a bowl. Do ye not deem it just, if ye have to recompense her?”

And they, made glad that the king had summoned them only for this, at once filled the bowl by casting into it small and large silver coin. And when, with tears, she began to thank the king, he smiled radiantly and said:

“Wait, this is not yet all. This morning’s wind has bestowed joy upon me as well, which I did not expect. And therefore, to the gifts of these merchants, I shall add my kingly gift also.”

And he commanded Adoniram, the treasurer, to put on top of the money of the merchants enough gold coin to cover the silver entirely out of sight.

Solomon desired to see none unhappy on this day. He distributed more rewards, pensions, and gifts than he sometimes did within a whole year, and he pardoned Ahimaaz, the governor of the land of Naphtali, against whom his wrath had flamed before, because of his lawless levies; and he commuted the faults of many who had transgressed the law, nor did he overlook any of the petitions of his subjects,—save one.

When the king was passing out from the House at Lebanon through the small southern door, one in a garment of yellow leather stood up in his path,—a squat, broad-shouldered man, darkly-ruddy and morose of face, with a black, bushy beard, with a neck like a bull’s, and an austere gaze from underneath shaggy, black

eyebrows. This was the high priest of Moloch's temple. He uttered but one word in a supplicating voice:

"King!..."

In the bronze belly of his god were seven divisions: one for meal, another for doves, the third for sheep, the fourth for rams, the fifth for calves, the sixth for beeves; but the seventh, meant for living infants brought by their mothers, had long stood empty at the interdict of the king.

Solomon walked in silence past the priest, but the latter stretched out his hands after him and exclaimed with supplication:

"King! I adjure thee by thy joy!... Show me this kindness, O king, and I shall reveal to thee what danger threatens thy life."

Solomon made no reply; and the eyes of the priest, who had clenched his powerful hands into fists, followed him to the exit with a ferocious glare.

VI.

A At nightfall Sulamith went to that spot in the old city where, in long rows, stretched the shops of the moneychangers, usurers, and dealers in sweet-smelling condiments. There she sold to a jeweller for three drachmas and one dinar her only valuable,—her earrings for festal days; of silver, in the form of rings, each with a little golden star.

Then she paid a visit to a seller of perfumes. In the deep, dark, stone niche, in the midst of jars with gray Arabian amber, packets of frankincense from Lebanon, bunches of aromatic herbs, and phials with oils, was sitting an Ægyptian, a castrate,—old, obese, wrinkled, immobile, all fragrant himself; his legs tucked under him, and blinking his lazy eyes. He carefully counted out of a Phœnician flask into a little clay flagon just as many drops of myrrh as there were dinarii among all the

moneys of Sulamith; and when he had finished this task he said, gathering up with the stopper the remnant of the oil around the neck of the bottle, and laughing slyly:

“Swarthy maiden, beautiful maiden! When this day thy beloved shall kiss thee between thy breasts and say: ‘How fragrant is thy body, O my beloved!’—recall me at that moment. I have poured over three extra drops for thee.”

And so, when night had come, and the moon had risen over Siloam, blending the blue whiteness of its houses with the black blueness of the shadows and the dull green of the trees, Sulamith did arise from her humble couch of goats’-wool and hearkened. All was quiet in the house. Her sister was breathing evenly upon the floor, nigh the wall. Only outside, in the wayside bushes, the cicadas chirped stridently and passionately; and the blood throbbed noisily in her ears. The shadow of the window-lattice, etched by the light of the moon, lay, sharp and oblique, upon the floor.

Trembling with timidity, expectation, and happiness, Sulamith loosened her garments, let them down to her feet, and, stepping over them, was left naked in the middle of the room, facing the window, in the light of the moon falling through the bars of the lattice. She poured the thick, sweet-smelling myrrh upon her shoulders, upon her bosom, upon her abdomen; and, fearing to lose even one precious drop, began to rub the oil over her legs, under her armpits, and about her neck. And the smooth, slippery touch of her palms and elbows against her body compelled her to shiver with sweet anticipation. And, smiling and trembling, she gazed out of the window, where, beyond the lattice, two poplars showed,—dark on one side, silvered on the other,—and whispered to herself:

“This is for thee, my love; this is for thee, my beloved. My beloved is the chiefest among ten thousand, his head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven. His lips are most sweet; yea, he is all desire. This is my beloved, and this is my brother, O daughters of Jerusalem!...”

And now, fragrant with myrrh, she lay down upon her couch. Her face is turned toward the window; her hands, like a child, she has squeezed between her knees; her heart fills the room with its loud beating. Much time passes. Scarce closing her eyes, she is plunged into dozing, but her heart keeps vigil. As in a dream, it seems to her that her dear is lying beside her. In a joyous fright she casts off her drowsiness; she seeks her beloved near her on the couch, but finds no one. The moon's design upon the floor has crept nearer the wall, is dwindled and more oblique. The cicadas are calling; the Brook of Kidron babbles on monotonously; the doleful chant of a night watchman is heard in the city.

"What if he comes not to-day?" thinks Sulamith; "I did implore him,—and what if he hath suddenly obeyed me?... I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roses and lilies of the field: awake not love till it come.... But now my love hath come to me. Make haste, my beloved! Thy bride awaits thee. Make haste like to a young hart upon the mountains of spices."

The sand crunches in the yard under light steps. And the soul of the maiden deserts her. A cautious hand knocks at the window. A dark face shows on the other side of the lattice. The low voice of her beloved is heard:

"Open to me, my sister, my dove, my undefiled! For my head is filled with dew."

But a charmed numbness has suddenly taken possession of Sulamith's body. She wants to rise, and can not; wants to move her hand, and can not. And, without understanding what is taking place with her, she whispers, gazing through the window:

"Ah, his locks are filled with the drops of the night! But I have put off my chiton. How shall I put it on?"

"Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. The morn is nigh, flowers appear on the earth, and the vines with the tender grape give a goodly smell; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle dove is heard from the

mountains.”

“I have washed my feet,” whispers Sulamith; “how shall I defile them?”

The dark head disappears from the window-lattice; the resounding steps pass around the house and cease at the door. The beloved cautiously puts in his hand by the hole of the door. His fingers can be heard groping for the inner bolt.

Then does Sulamith rise up, pressing her palms hard against her breasts, and whispers in affright:

“My sister sleeps—I fear to awaken her.”

She irresolutely dons her sandals, puts a light chiton upon her naked body, throws a vail over it, and opens the door, leaving marks of myrrh upon the handles of the lock. But there is no longer anyone upon the road that glimmers whitely in its solitude between the dark bushes in the gray murk of morning. The beloved had not waited, and was gone; not even his steps were to be heard. The moon has dwindled and paled, and floats on high. In the east, above the waves of the mountains, the sky is putting on a chilly pink before the dawn. In the distance the walls and towers of Jerusalem glimmer whitely.

“My beloved! King of my life!” Sulamith calls into the humid darkness. “I am here. I await thee.... Return!”

But none responds.

“I will run upon the highway; I shall, I shall overtake my beloved,” Sulamith says to herself. “I will go about the city in the streets and in the broad ways; I will seek him whom my soul loveth. O that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breast of my mother! When I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yea, I should not be despised. I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother’s house. Thou wouldst instruct me; I would cause thee to drink of the juice of my pomegranates. I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him I am smitten by love.”

Thus does she commune with herself, and with light, docile steps runs upon the road toward the city. At the Dung Gates near the wall, two watchmen that had gone about the city at night are sitting and dozing in the chill of the morning. They awaken and stare with astonishment at the running girl. The younger arises and blocks her way with outstretched arms.

“Stay, stay, thou fair!” exclaims he with laughter. “Whither so fast? Thou hast passed the night on the sly in the bed of thy dear and art yet warm from his embraces; whereas we have been chilled through by the dampness of the night. It would be but fair if thou wert to sit a while with us.”

The elder also arises and wants to embrace Sulamith. He does not laugh; he breathes heavily, fast, and with wheezing; he is licking his blue lips with his tongue. His face, made hideous by great scars of healed leprosy, seems frightful in the pallid murk. He speaks in a voice hoarse and snuffling:

“Yea, of a truth. What is thy beloved more than other men, sweet maiden! Shut thy eyes, and thou canst not tell me apart from him. I am even better, for, of a certainty, I am more experienced than he.”

They clutch at her bosom, her shoulders, her arms and raiment. But Sulamith is lithe and strong, and her body, anointed with oil, is slippery. She tears herself away, leaving in the hands of the watchmen her outer vail, and runs back still faster along the same road. She has experienced neither offense nor fear,—she is all swallowed up in thoughts of Solomon. Passing by her house, she sees the door out of which she had just gone still left open, a gaping black quadrangle in the white wall. But she merely catches her breath, shrinks within herself, like a young cat, and runs by on her tip-toes with never a sound.

She crosses the bridge of Kidron, avoids the outskirt of the village of Siloam, and by a stony road gradually climbs the southern slope of Beth-El-Khav, into her vineyard. Her brother is still sleeping among the vines, wrapped up in a woolen blanket all wet

from the dew. Sulamith rouses him, but he can not awaken, enchained by the morning sleep of youth.

As yesterday, the dawn is flaming over Anaze. A wind springs up. The fragrance of the grape in blossom streams through the air.

“I shall come away and look upon that place of the wall where my beloved hath stood,” Sulamith is saying. “I shall feel with my hands the stones that he hath touched; I shall kiss the ground beneath his feet.”

She glides lightly between the vines. The dew falls from them, chilling her feet and spattering her elbows. And now a joyous cry from Sulamith fills the vineyard! The king is standing beyond the wall. With a radiant face he stretches out his arms to meet her.

More lightly than a bird Sulamith surmounts the enclosure, and, without words, with a moan of happiness, entwines the king.

Several minutes pass thus. Finally, tearing his lips away from her mouth, Solomon speaks, enraptured, and his voice trembles:

“Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair!”

“O, how fair art thou, my beloved!”

Tears of delight and gratefulness,—blessed tears,—sparkle upon Sulamith’s pale and beautiful face. Languishing with love, she sinks to the ground and whispers words of madness in a barely audible voice.

“Our bed is green. The beams of our house are cedars.... Kiss me with the kisses of thy mouth—for thy love is better than wine....”

After a brief space Sulamith is lying with her head upon Solomon’s breast. His left arm is embracing her.

Bending to her very ear, the king is whispering something to her; the king is tenderly apologizing, and Sulamith reddens from his words and closes her eyes. Then, with

an inexpressibly lovely smile of confusion, she says:

“My mother’s children made me the keeper of the vineyard.... But mine own vineyard have I not kept.”

But Solomon takes her little swarthy hand and presses it fervently to his lips.

“Thou dost not regret this, Sulamith?”

“O nay, my king, my beloved. I regret it not. Wert thou to arise this minute and go from me, and were I condemned never to see thee after, I would to the end of my life utter thy name with gratitude, Solomon!”

“Tell me one thing else, Sulamith.... Only, I beseech thee, speak the truth, my undefiled.... Didst thou know who I am?”

“Nay,—even now I know it not. Methought.... But I am shamed to confess it.... I fear thou wilt laugh at me.... They tell, that here, upon Mount Beth-El-Khav, pagan gods do oft wander.... Many of them, it is said, are beautiful.... And methought: art thou not Hor, the son of Osiris; or else some other god?”

“Nay, I am but a king, beloved. But here, upon this spot, I kiss thy dear hand, scorched of the sun, and swear to thee that never yet—neither in the time of first love longings, nor in the days of my glory—has my heart flamed with such an insatiable desire as that which is awakened within me by thy mere smile, by the mere touch of thy flaming locks,—the mere curve of thy purple lips! Thou art comely as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains in the temple of Solomon! Thy caresses intoxicate me. Behold thy breasts—they are fragrant. Thy nipples are as wine!”

“O, yea,—gaze, gaze upon me, beloved. Thy eyes arouse me! O, what joy!—for thy desire is unto me,—me! Thy locks are scented. As a bundle of myrrh thou dost lie betwixt my breasts!”

Time ceases its current and closes over them in a solar cycle. Their bed is the green; their roof is of cedars; and their walls are of cypresses. And the banner over their

tent is love.

VII.

T The king had a pool in his palace,—an octagonal, fresh pool of white marble. Steps of dark-green malachite ran down to its bottom. A facing of Ægyptian jasper, snowy-white, with pink, barely perceptible little veins, served as a frame for the pool. The best of ebony had gone for the ornamentation of the walls. Four lions' heads of pink sardonyx cast forth the water in thin jets into the pool. Eight mirrors of polished silver, the height of a man and of excellent Sydonian workmanship, were set into the walls, between the slender columns of white.

Before Sulamith was to enter the pool, young maid-servants poured aromatic compounds into it, that made the water to turn white and blue and to play with all the colours of a milky opal. The female slaves disrobing Sulamith gazed with delight upon her body; and, when they had disrobed her, they led her up to a mirror. Not a single blemish was there upon her beautiful body, made aureate like a tawny, ripe fruit by the golden down of soft hair. And she, gazing upon her naked self in the mirror, turned red and thought:

"All this is for thee, my king!"

She came out of the pool fresh, cool, and fragrant, covered with quivering drops of water. The female slaves put upon her a short white tunic of the finest Ægyptian linen, and a chiton of precious Sargonian byssin, of such a refulgent golden colour that the garment seemed woven out of the rays of the sun. They shod her feet in red sandals made from the skin of a young kid; they dried her dark, flaming locks and bound them with strings of large black pearls; and they adorned her arms with tinkling bracelets.

In such array did she come before Solomon, and the king exclaimed joyously:

"Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun? O,

Sulamith, thy beauty is more terrible than an army with flaunted banners! Seven hundred wives have I known and three hundred concubines, and virgins without number,—thou art but one, my fair! The queens shall behold thee and extoll thee, and all women upon earth shall praise thee. O, Sulamith, that day when thou wilt become my spouse and queen shall be the happiest my heart has known."

Whereupon she walked up to the door of carved olive, and, pressing her cheek against it, said:

"I desire to be but thy slave, Solomon. Behold, I have put my ear to the post of the door. I beseech thee,—in accordance with the law of Moses, nail down my ear in witness of my voluntary bondage before thee."

Then Solomon did command to be brought out of his treasure house precious pendants of deep-red carbuncles, fashioned to resemble elongated pears. He himself put them upon the ears of Sulamith, and said:

"I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine."

And, taking Sulamith by the hand, the king brought her to the banqueting house, where his companions and familiars were already awaiting him.

VIII.

S Seven days had sped since Sulamith had stepped into the palace of the king. Seven days had she and the king taken joyance in love, yet could not be sated therewith.

Solomon loved to adorn his beloved with precious things. "How beautiful are thy little feet in sandals!" he would exclaim in rapture, and, getting down on his knees before her, he would kiss each toe in turn, and put upon them rings with stones so splendid and rare that their like was not to be found even upon the ephod of a high-priest. Sulamith would listen, entranced, whenever he discoursed upon the inner nature of stones, their magic properties and secret significations.

“Here is anthrax, the sacred stone from the land of Ophir,” the king would say. “It is hot and moist. Behold, it is red, like blood, like the evening glow, like the blown flower of the pomegranate, like thick wine from the vineyards of En-gedi, like thy lips, my Sulamith, in the morning after a night of love. This is the stone of love, wrath, and blood. Upon the hand of a man languishing in a fever or made drunk by desire, it waxes warmer and glows with a red flame. Put it upon thy hand, my beloved, and thou shalt see it enkindle. If it be brayed to a powder and taken in water, it imparts a glow to the face, allays the stomach, and maketh the soul to rejoice. He that weareth it attaineth power over men. It is a curative for the heart, brain, and memory. But it ought not be worn nigh children, for it doth arouse the passions of love around it.

“Here is a transparent stone, the colour of copper verdigris. In the land of the Æthiopians, where it is gotten, it is called Mgnadis-Phza. It was given me by the father of my wife, Queen Astis,—by Shishak, the Pharaoh of Ægypt, into whose hands it came through a captive king. Thou seest,—it is not beautiful; yet is its value beyond computation, for but four men on earth possess the stone Mgnadis-Phza. It possesses the unusual property of attracting silver to it, just like a covetous man that loveth the metal. I give it thee, my beloved, for that thou are not covetous.

“Gaze upon these sapphires, Sulamith. Some of them resemble in colour corn-flowers among wheat; others, an autumn sky; others still, the sea in fine weather. This is the stone of virginity,—chill and pure. During far and difficult voyages it is placed in the mouth to allay thirst. It also cureth leprosy and all malignant growths. It bestoweth clarity to thoughts. The priests of Jupiter in Rome wear it upon the index finger.

“The king of all stones is the stone Shamir. The Greeks name it Adamas,—which signifieth, the invincible. It is the hardest of all substances on earth and remains uninjured in the fiercest of fires. It is the light of the sun, concentrated in the ground

and cooled by time. Admire it, Sulamith,—it playeth with all colours, but in itself remaineth translucent, like a drop of water. It shineth in the darkness of night; but loseth its radiance, even in the daytime, upon the hand of a murderer. The Shamir is tied to the hand of a woman tortured in heavy travail with child; and it is also put upon the left hand by warriors setting out for battle. He that weareth the Shamir findeth favour with kings and hath no dread of evil spirits. The Shamir driveth the mottled colour off the face, purifieth the breath, giveth quiet slumber to lunaticks, and induceth a sweat curative of near proximity to poison. The Shamir stones are male and female; buried deep in the ground they are capable of multiplying.

“The moonstone, pale and mild, like the shining of the moon,—it is the stone of the Chaldæan and Babylonian magi. Before divination it is placed under the tongue, and it imparts to them the gift of seeing the future. It hath a strange tie with the moon, for during a new moon it groweth chill and shineth more brightly. It is beneficial to woman during that year when from a child she is becoming a woman.

“Wear thou this ring with a smaragd constantly, my beloved, for the smaragd is the favourite stone of Solomon, King of Israel. It is green, pure, gay, tender, like grass in the spring of the year, and when one gazeth at it for long the heart waxeth radiant; if thou wilt look upon it in the morning, all the day shall hold no hardship of thee. I shall hang a smaragd over thy night couch, my comely one; let it drive evil dreams away from thee; let it lull the beating of thy heart, and divert black thoughts. Serpents and scorpions come not nigh him that weareth a smaragd; but if a smaragd be held before the eyes of a serpent, water shall flow from them, and continue flowing, till it go blind. Pounded smaragd, together with camel’s milk, is given an empoisoned man, that the poison may go off in transpiration; mixed with attar of roses, smaragd cureth the bites of venomous reptiles; while ground with saffron and applied to ailing eyes it eradicates night blindness. It also helps in dysentery and the black cough that is incurable by any human means.”

The king also bestowed upon his beloved Lybian amethysts, whose colour resembled early violets, that put forth in forests at the foot of the Lybian mountains,—amethysts, possessed of the wondrous property of curbing wind, mollifying wrath, preserving from intoxication, and helping at the trapping of wild beasts; turquoise of Persepolis, that bringeth happiness in love, endeth connubial quarrels, turneth away the wrath of kings, and is propitious in the breaking and selling of horses; and cat's-eye,—that guardeth the property, reason, and health of its possessor; and the pale beryllion, blue-green, like sea-water near shore,—a good travelling companion for pilgrims and a remedy against cataract and leprosy; and the vari-coloured agate: he that weareth it hath no dread of the evil machinations of enemies, and avoideth the danger of being crushed in an earthquake; and the apple-green, turbidly-pellucid onychion,—its master's guardian from fire and madness; and iaspis, that maketh beasts to tremble; and the black swallow-stone, that endoweth with eloquence; and the eagle-stone, esteemed of pregnant women,—eagles put it in their nests when the time comes for their young to break out of their shells; and zaberzate out of Ophir, shining like little suns; and yellow-aureate chrysolite,—the friend of merchants and thieves; and sardonyx, beloved of kings and queens; and the crimson ligurion: it is found, as all know, in the stomach of the lynx, whose sight is so keen that it can see through walls,—and for that reason he that weareth a ligurion is also noted for keen sight, and besides this it stoppeth bleeding of the nose, and healeth all wounds, save wounds inflicted by stone or iron.

The king also put upon Sulamith's neck carcanets of great price, of pearls that had been dived for in the Persian Sea by his subjects; and the pearls put on a living lustre and a soft colour from the warmth of her body. And corals became redder upon her swarthy breast; and turquoise came to life upon her fingers; and those baubles of yellow amber which were brought from far northern seas, in gift to the king, by the doughty ship-masters of Hiram, King of Tyre, emitted crackling sparks in her hands.

With marigolds and lilies did Sulamith deck her couch, preparing it for the night; and, reposing upon her breast, the king would say in the joyousness of his heart:

“Thou are like to the king’s decked, masted boat in the Land of Ophir, O my beloved; a light, golden boat that floats, swaying, upon the sacred river, among white fragrant blossoms.”

Thus did his first—and last—love come to Solomon, the greatest of kings and wisest of sages.

Many ages have passed since then. There have been kingdoms and kings, and of them no trace has been left, as of a wind that has sped over a desert. There have been prolonged, merciless wars, after which the names of the commanders shone through the ages, like ensanguined stars; but time has effaced even the very memory of them.

But the love of the lowly maiden of the vineyard and the great king shall never pass away nor be forgotten,—for love is strong as death; for every woman who loves is a queen; for love is beautiful.

IX.

S Seven days had sped since Solomon,—poet, sage, and king,—had brought into his palace the lowly maiden he had met in the vineyard at dawn. For seven days did the king take joyance in her love, nor could be sated therewith. And a great joy irradiated his countenance, like to the golden light of the sun.

It was the time of light, warm, moonlit nights,—sweet nights of love.... Upon a couch of tiger fells lay the naked Sulamith; and the king, sitting upon the floor at her feet, filled his emerald goblet with the aureate wine of Mauretus, and drank to the health of his beloved, rejoicing with all his heart, and narrated to her the sage, strange legends of eld. And Sulamith’s hand rested upon his head, stroking his wavy black hair.

“Tell me, my king,” Sulamith had once asked, “is it not wonderful that I fell in love with thee so instantly? I now call all things to mind, and meseems I began belonging to thee from the very first moment, when I had not yet had time to behold thee, but had merely heard thy voice. My heart began to flutter and did open to meet thee, as a flower opens to the south wind on a night in summer. How hast thou taken me so, my beloved?”

And the king, quietly bending his head toward the soft knees of Sulamith, smiled tenderly and answered:

“Thousands of women before thee, O my comely one, have put this question to their beloveds, and hundreds of ages after thee will they be asking their beloveds about this. There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: the way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid. This is not my wisdom, Sulamith,—these are the words of Agur, son of Jakeh, heard from him by his disciples. But let us honour the wisdom of others also.”

“Yea,” said Sulamith pensively, “mayhap it is even true that man shall never comprehend this. To-day, during the banquet, I wore a sweet-smelling cluster of stacte upon my breast. But thou didst leave the table, and my flowers ceased to give out their smell. Meseems, thou must be beloved, O king, of women, and men, and beasts, and even of flowers. I oft ponder, yet comprehend not: how can one love any other save thee?”

“And any save thee, save thee, Sulamith! Every hour do I render thanks to God for that He has set thee in my path.”

“I remember, I was sitting upon a stone of the wall, and thou didst put thy hand on mine. Fire ran through my veins; my head was dizzied. I said within me: Behold, there is my lord, my king, my beloved!”

“I remember, Sulamith, how thou didst turn around to my call. Under the thin

raiment I saw thy body, thy beautiful body, that I love as I love God. I love it,—covered with its golden down, as though the sun had left its kiss upon it. Thou art graceful, like to a filly in the Pharaoh's chariot; thou art fair like the chariot of Ammi-nadib. Thy eyes are as two doves, sitting by the rivers of waters."

"O, beloved, thy words stir me. Thy hand sears me sweetly. O, my king, thy legs are as pillars of marble. Thy belly is like an heap of wheat, set about with lilies."

Surrounded, irradiated, by the silent light of the moon, they forgot time and place; and thus hours would pass, and they with wonder beheld the rosy dawn peeping through the latticed windows of the chamber.

Sulamith also said once:

"Thou hast known, my beloved, wives and virgins without number, and they were all the fairest women on earth. I become ashamed whenever I consider myself,—a simple, unschooled girl,—and my poor body, scorched of the sun."

But, touching her lips with his, the king would say, with infinite love and gratefulness:

"Thou art a queen, Sulamith! Thou wast born a true queen. Thou art brave and generous in love. Seven hundred wives have I, and three hundred concubines, and virgins without number have I known; but thou, my timid one, art my only one,—thou fairest among women. I have found thee like as a diver in the Gulf of Persia, that filleth a great number of baskets with barren shells and pearls of little price, ere he get from the bed of the sea a pearl worthy a king's crown. My child, a man may love thousands of times, yet he loveth but once. People without number think they love, yet only to two of them doth God send love. And when thou didst yield thyself up to me among the cypresses, under the rafters of cedars, upon the bed of green, I did with all my soul render thanks to God, so gracious to me."

Sulamith also asked once:

"I know that they all loved thee, for not to love thee is impossible. The Queen of

Sheba did come to thee from her domain. They say, that she was the wisest and fairest of all women that had ever been on earth. As in a dream, I recall her caravans. I know not why, but since my earliest childhood I have been drawn to the chariots of the great. I was then perhaps seven, perhaps eight. I remember the camels in golden harness, covered with caparisons of purple, laden with heavy burthens; I remember the mules with the little bells of gold between their ears; I remember the droll monkeys in silvern cages; and the wondrous peacocks. There was a multitude of servants in garments of white and blue, marching; they led tame tigers and panthers upon ribbands of red. I was but eight then."

"O child, thou wert but eight then," said Solomon with sadness.

"Didst thou love her more than me, Solomon? Wilt tell me something of her?"

And the king told her all pertaining to this amazing woman. Having heard much of the wisdom and beauty of the King of Israel, she had come to him from her domain with rich gifts, desiring to prove his wisdom and subdue his heart. This was a magnificent woman of forty, who was already beginning to fade. But through secret, magic means she contrived to make her body, that was growing flabby, seem graceful and supple, like a girl's, while her face bore an impress of an awesome, inhuman beauty. But her wisdom was ordinary wisdom, and the petty wisdom of a woman to boot.

Desiring to test the king with riddles, she at first sent to him fifty youths of tenderest age, and fifty maidens. They were all so cunningly dressed that the keenest eye could not have discerned their sex. "I shall call thee wise, O King," said Balkis, "if thou shalt tell me which of them is woman, and which man."

But the king burst out laughing, and ordered that every he and she sent him be brought a separate bason of silver, and a separate ewer of silver, for laving. And whereas the boys bravely splashed in the water and cast it in handfuls at their faces, drying their skin vigorously, the girls acted as women always do at their ablutions.

They lathered each hand gently and solicitously, bringing it closely to their eyes.

In so easy a manner did the king solve the first riddle of Balkis-Mâkkedah.

Next she sent Solomon a large diamond, the size of a hazel nut. This stone had a thin, exceedingly tortuous flaw, that perforated its entire body with a narrow, intricate path. The task was to put a silken thread through the jewel. And the wise king let into the opening a silk worm, which, having passed through, left the finest of silken webs in its wake.

Also, the beauteous Balkis sent King Solomon a precious goblet of carved sardonyx, of magnificent workmanship. “This goblet shall be thine,” she had commanded that the king be told, “if thou fillest it with moisture taken neither from earth nor heaven.” And Solomon, having filled the goblet with froth falling from the body of a fatigued steed, ordered it to be carried to the queen.

Many such hard questions did the queen put to Solomon, but could not belittle his wisdom; nor with all her secret charms of love’s passion in the night might she contrive to retain his love. And when she had finally palled upon the king, he had cruelly, hurtfully made mock of her.

Everybody knew that the Savvian queen never showed her lower extremities to anyone, and for that reason wore a garment reaching to the ground. Even in the hours of love caresses did she keep her legs closely covered with raiment. Many strange and droll legends had sprung up on this account.

Some averred, that the queen had legs like a goat, grown over with wool; others swore, that instead of human feet she had webbed feet, like a goose. And they even related how the mother of Balkis had once, after bathing, sat down upon sand where just before a certain god, temporarily metamorphosed into a gander, had left his seed, and that through this she had borne the beauteous Queen of Sheba.

And so Solomon one day commanded to be built, in one of his chambers, a transparent floor of crystal, with an empty space beneath it, which was filled with

water and stocked with live fish. All this was done with such extraordinary art that one not forewarned could never possibly notice the glass, and would take an oath that a pool of clear, fresh water lay before him.

And when all was in readiness, Solomon invited his regal guest to an interview. Surrounded by all the pomp of her retinue, she paced through the chambers of the House at Lebanon, and came up to the treacherous pool. At the other end of it sat the king, resplendent with gold and precious stones, and with a welcoming look in his dark eyes. The door opened before the queen, and she took a step forward,—but cried out and....

Sulamith claps her palms and laughs, and her laughter is joyous and child-like.

“She stoops and lifts up her raiment?” asks Sulamith.

“Yea, my beloved, she acted as any among women would have acted. She raised up the hem of her garment, and although this lasted for but a moment, not only I but all my court saw that the beauteous Savvian Queen, Balkis-Mâkkedah, had ordinary human legs, but crooked and grown over with coarse hair. On the very next day she set off, without bidding me farewell, and departed with her magnificent caravan. I had not meant to offend her. I sent after her a trustworthy runner, whom I ordered to give to the queen a bundle of a rare mountain herb,—the best means for the extirpation of hair upon the body. But she returned to me the head of my emissary in a bag of costly purple.”

Solomon also told his beloved many things out of his life, which none other among men and women knew, and which Sulamith carried with her into the grave. He told her of the long and weary years of his wanderings, when, fleeing from the wrath of his brethren, he was forced to hide under an assumed name in foreign lands, enduring fearful poverty and privations. He told her how, in a far-off, unknown country, while he was standing in the market place, in expectation of being hired to work somewhere, the king’s cook had approached him and said:

“Stranger, help me carry this hamper of fish into the palace.”

Through his wit, adroitness, and skilled demeanor, Solomon so pleased the officers of the court, that in a short while he had made himself at home in the palace, and when the head cook died he had taken his place. Further, Solomon told of how the king’s only daughter,—a beautiful, ardent maiden,—had fallen in love with the new cook and had confessed her love to him; how they fled from the palace one night, and had been re-taken and brought back; how Solomon had been condemned to die; and how, by a miracle, he succeeded in escaping from the dungeon.

Avidly did Sulamith listen to him, and, when he grew silent, amidst the stillness of the night their lips joined, their arms entwined each other, and breast touched breast. And when morning drew near, and Sulamith’s body seemed a foamy pink, and the fatigue of love encircled her splendid eyes with blue shadows, she would say with a tender smile:

“Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick with love.”

X.

I In the temple of Isis, upon Mount Beth-El-Khav, the first part of the great mystery, to which the faithful of the lesser initiation were admitted, was just over. The priest on duty,—an ancient elder in white vestment, with shaven head, and neither moustache nor beard,—had turned from the elevation of the altar toward the people, and pronounced in a quiet, tired voice:

“Dwell in peace, my sons and daughters. Wax perfect through deeds. Extoll the name of the goddess. And may her blessings be over ye for ever and aye.”

He raised his hands on high over the people, in benediction. And immediately all the initiates into the lesser rank of the mysteries prostrated themselves on the floor, and then, arising, softly and in silence made their way to the exit.

To-day was the seventh day of the month Phamenoth, sacred to the mysteries of Osiris and Isis. Since evening the solemn procession had thrice made the circuit of the temple with lamps, palm-leaves, and amphoræ; with the occult symbols of the gods and the sacred images of the Phallus. In the midst of the procession, upon the shoulders of the priests and the minor prophets, was reared the closed naos of costly wood, ornamented with pearl, ivory, and gold. Therein dwelt the goddess herself,—She, The Invisible, The Bestower of Fecundity, The Mysterious; Mother, Sister, and Wife of gods.

The evil Seth had enticed his brother, the divine Osiris, to a feast; through craftiness he made him to lie down in a magnificent sarcophagus, and, having clapped down the lid over him, cast the sarcophagus with the body of the great god into the Nile. Isis, who had just given birth to Horus, with yearning and tears searches all the world over for the body of her spouse, and for long can not find it. Finally, slaves inform her that the body had been borne out to sea by the waves, and that it had been cast up at Byblos, where an enormous tree had sprung up about it, enclosing within its trunk the body of the god and his floating dwelling. The king of that domain had commanded a mighty column to be made out of the enormous tree, not knowing that within it reposed the god Osiris himself, the great bestower of life. Isis goes to Byblos; she arrives there fatigued with sultriness, thirst, and the toilsome, stony road. She liberates the sarcophagus out of the midst of the tree, carries it with her, and buries it in the earth near the city wall. But Seth again secretly steals away the body of Osiris, cuts it up into fourteen parts, and strews them over all the towns and settlements of Upper and Lower Ægpyt.

And again with great grief and lamentations Isis set out in search of the sacred members of her spouse and brother. Her sister, the goddess Nephthys, and the mighty Thoth, and the son of the goddess, the radiant Horus,—Horus of the Horizon,—all join their plaints to her weeping.

Such was the hidden meaning of the present procession in the first half of the sacred service. Now, upon the departure of the common believers, and after a short rest, the second part of the great mystery was about to be consummated. In the temple were left only those initiated into the higher degrees,—mystagogues, epopts, prophets and sacrificators.

Boys in white vestments bore about, upon salvers of silver, flesh, bread, dried fruits, and sweet wine of Pelusium. Others poured hippocras out of narrow-necked Tyrian vessels,—a drink given in those days to condemned criminals before execution, to arouse their manhood, but which also possessed the great virtue of generating and sustaining in men the fire of a sacred madness.

At a sign from the priest on duty the boys withdrew. A priest who was also the keeper of the gates locked all doors. Then he attentively made the rounds of all those who remained, scrutinizing their faces and testing them with secret words that constituted the pass-orders for this night. Two other priests drew a silvern thurible upon wheels down the length of the temple and around each of its columns. The temple filled with the blue, thick, heady, aromatic fumes of incense, and through the layers of smoke grew barely visible the vari-coloured flames of the lamp,—lamps made of translucent stones, lamps set in carved gold and suspended from the ceiling upon long chains of silver. In the times of eld this temple of Osiris and Isis was known for its small extent and its poverty, and was hollowed out like a cavern in the heart of the mountain. A narrow subterranean corridor led to it from without. But in the days of the reign of Solomon, who had taken under his protection all religions save those which permitted the offering of children in sacrifice, and thanks to the zeal of Queen Astis, an Ægyptian born, the temple had expanded in depth and height, and had become adorned with rich offerings.

The former altar still remained inviolate in its primordial, austere simplicity, together with a great number of small chambers surrounding it and serving for the

keeping of treasures, sacrificial objects, and priestly appurtenances, as well as for special secret purposes during the most occult mystic orgies.

But then, the outer court was truly magnificent, with its pylons in honour of the goddess Hathor, and with a four-sided colonnade of four and twenty columns. The inner, subterranean, hypostylic hall for worshippers was built still more magnificently. Its mosaic floor was all adorned with cunningly wrought images of fishes, beasts, amphibians and reptiles; while the ceiling was overlaid with blue lazure, and upon it shone a sun of gold, glowed a moon of silver, innumerable stars twinkled, and birds soared upon outspread wings. The floor was the earth, the ceiling the sky, and they were joined by round and many-sided columns, like mighty tree trunks; and since all the columns were surmounted by capitals in the form of the tender flowers of lotus or the slender cylinders of the papyrus, the ceiling they supported did in reality seem as light and æthereal as the sky.

The walls to the height of a man were faced with plates of red granite, brought at the desire of Queen Astis out of Thebes, where the local master workers could impart to the granite a smoothness like that of a mirror, together with an amazing polish. Higher, to the very ceiling, the walls, as well as the columns, were gay with graven and limned images with the symbols of the gods of both Ægypts. Here was Sebekh, honoured in Fayum in the form of a crocodile; and Thoth, the god of the moon, depicted as an ibis in the city of Khmunu; and the sun-god Horus, to whom a small idol-temple was consecrated in Edfu; and Bast of Bubastis, in the form of a cat; Shu, the god of the air, as a lion; Ptah,—an Apis; Hathor, the goddess of mirth,—a heifer; Anubis, the god of embalming, with the head of a jackal; and Menthu out of Hermon; and the Coptic Minu; and Neith of Sais, the goddess of the sky; and, finally, in the form of a ram,—the dread god whose name was never uttered, and who was called Khenti-Amentiu, which signifieth: The Dweller in the West.

The half-dark altar reared above the entire temple, and the gold upon the walls of the

sanctuary that hid the images of Isis gleamed within its depths. Three gates,—a large one in the middle, and two small ones flanking it,—opened into the sanctuary. Before the middle one stood a small sacrificial altar with a sacred stone knife of Æthiopian obsidian. Steps led up to the altar, and upon them were disposed young priests and priestesses with tympani and sistrums, with flutes and tabours.

Queen Astis was reclining within a little, secret chamber. A small quadrangular opening, artfully concealed by a large curtain, led directly to the altar, and permitted one to follow all the details of the sacred service without betraying one's presence. A light, closely-fitting dress of linen gauze, interwoven with silver, tightly enveloped the body of the queen, leaving the arms bare up to the shoulders, and the legs half-way to the calf. Her skin gleamed pinkly through the diaphanous material, and one could see the pure lines and elevations of her graceful body, which, despite the queen's age of thirty, still had lost none of its litheness, beauty and freshness. Her hair, stained a blue colour, was spread loosely over her shoulders and back, and was adorned with innumerable little aromatic pomanders. Her face was much rouged and whitened; while her eyes, finely outlined by kohl, seemed enormous and glowed in the darkness, like those of some powerful beasts of the feline species. A sacred uræus of gold hung down from her neck, separating the half-bared breasts.

Ever since Solomon had cooled toward Queen Astis, tired of her unbridled sensuality, she, with all the ardour of southern love-passion, and with all the jealousy of a woman scorned, had given herself up to those secret orgies of perverted lust that constituted the highest cult of the castrates' service of Isis. She always showed herself surrounded by priests-castrates, and, even now, as one of them fanned her head with measured strokes of a fan made of peacock feathers, others were seated upon the floor drinking in the beauty of the queen with eyes of insane bliss. Their nostrils were dilating and quivering from the scent of her body wafted to them, and they sought with trembling fingers to touch unperceived the hem of her light raiment, barely stirring in the breeze. Their excessive, never satiated

sensuousness spurred on their imagination to its utmost limits. Their inventiveness in the pleasures of Kybele and Ashera surpassed all human possibilities. And being jealous of the queen toward one another, toward all men, women, and children—being jealous of her own self—they adored her even more than Isis, and, loving her, hated her as an inexhaustible, fiery fountain-head of delectable and cruel sufferings.

Dark, evil, fearful, and fascinating rumours were current about Queen Astis in Jerusalem. The parents of beautiful boys and girls hid their children from her gaze; men dreaded to utter her name upon the conjugal couch, as an omen of defilement and disaster. But agitating, irresistible curiosity drew all souls to her, and gave all bodies up into her power. They who had but once experienced her ferocious, sanguinary caresses could nevermore forget her, and became her lifelong, pitiful, spurned slaves. Ready, for a renewed possession of her, to commit every sin, to endure every degradation and crime, they came to resemble those unfortunates who, having once tasted of the bitter drink of the poppy from the Land of Ophir,—the drink that bestoweth sweet dreams,—will never more draw away from it, bowing down before it only and honouring it alone, until exhaustion and madness cut short their life.

The fan swayed slowly in the sultry air. In silent rapture the priests contemplated their dread sovereign. But she seemed to have forgotten their presence. Having moved the curtain slightly aside, she was ceaselessly gazing across toward that part of the altar where at one time, out of the dark fissures of the ancient curtains of beaten gold, was to be seen the beautiful, radiant countenance of the king of Israel. Him alone did the spurned queen, the cruel and lecherous Astis, love with all her flaming and depraved heart. His glance of a fleeting moment, a kind word of his, the touch of his hand, did she seek everywhere, and found not. Upon triumphal levees, court banquets, and upon the days of judgment, did Solomon pay his respects, due a queen and the daughter of a king; but his soul was not quick unto her. And the proud

queen would often command herself to be borne at set hours past the House at Lebanon, to glimpse, even though afar and unnoticed, through the heavy stuffs of her litter, the proud, unforgettably splendid visage of Solomon, in the midst of the throng of courtiers. And long since her flaming love had grown so closely joined to searing hatred that Astis herself was unable to tell them apart.

In former days Solomon also had visited the temple of Isis on great festal days, had brought the goddess offerings, and had even accepted the title of her hierophant,—second after that of the Pharaoh of Ægypt. But the horrible mysteries of "The Sanguine Sacrifice of Fecundation" had turned his mind and heart from the service of the Mother of Gods.

"He that is castrated through ignorance or by force, or through accident or disease, is not abased before God," the king hath said. "But woe be unto him that doth maim himself with his own hand."

And now for a whole year his couch in the temple had remained vacant. And in vain did the flaming eyes of the queen now gaze feverishly at the unstirred hangings.

In the meanwhile, the wine, hippocras, and the stupefying burnt perfumes were already having a perceptible effect upon those gathered within the temple. Cries, and laughter, and the ring of silver vessels falling upon the stone floor came with greater frequency. The grand, mysterious moment of the sanguinary sacrifice was approaching. Ecstasy was overcoming the faithful.

With an abstracted gaze the queen surveyed the temple and the believers. Many honoured and illustrious men of Solomon's retinue and many of his generals were here: Ben-Geber, ruler over the region of Argob; and Ahimaaz, who had Basmath, the daughter of the king, to wife; and the witty Ben-Dekar; and Zabud, who bore, in accordance with eastern customs, the high title of the King's Friend; and the brother of Solomon by the first marriage of David,—Dalaiah, a debilitated, half-dead man, who had prematurely fallen into idiocy through excesses and drinking. They were

all—some through faith, some through ulterior designs, others out of adulation, and still others for lecherous purposes,—the adorants of Isis.

And now the eyes of the queen rested, long and attentively, intent in thought, on the comely, youthful face of Eliab, one of the officers of the king's bodyguards.

The queen knew why his swarthy face was aflame with such a vivid colour, why his eyes were directed with such passionate yearning hitherward, upon the curtains, scarce stirring from the touch of the queen's beautiful hands. Once, almost in jest, submitting to a momentary caprice, she had made Eliab to pass a whole night of felicity with her. In the morning she had let him depart, but ever since, for many days running, she had beheld everywhere,—in the palace, in the temple, in the streets,—two enamoured, submissive, yearning eyes, that followed her entranced.

The dark eyebrows of the queen contracted, and her green, elongated eyes suddenly darkened from a fearful thought. With a barely perceptible motion of her hand she ordered the castrate to lower the fan and said quietly:

"Get hence, all of you. Hushai, thou shalt go and summon to me Eliab, the officer of the king's guard. Let him come alone."

XI.

T Ten priests, in white vestments, maculated with red, stepped out to the centre of the altar. Following them came two other priests, clad in feminine garments. It was their duty to-day to represent Nephthys and Isis, bewailing Osiris. Then out of the depths of the altar came one in a white chiton, without a single ornament, and the eyes of all the men and women were eagerly drawn to him. This was the very same desert anchorite who had undergone a heavy trial of ten years' wrestling with the flesh upon the mountains of Lebanon, and was now to bring a great, voluntary bloody sacrifice to Isis. His face, emaciated by hunger, wind-beaten and scorched, was stern and pallid, the eyes austerely cast down; and a supernatural horror was

wafted from him upon the throng.

Finally, the chief priest of the temple also made his appearance,—a centenarian ancient, with a tiara upon his head, with a tiger skin upon his shoulders, in an apron of brocaded samite adorned with the tails of jackals.

Turning to the worshippers, he uttered in a senile voice, meek and tremulous:

“Suton-di-hotpu.” (“The king bringeth the sacrifice.”)

And then, turning around to the sacrificial altar, he took from the hands of an acolyte a white dove with little red feet, cut off the bird’s head, took the heart out of her breast, and sprinkled the sacrificial altar and the consecrated knife with her blood.

After a brief silence he proclaimed:

“Let us weep for Osiris, the god of Atum, the Great On-Nefer-Hophra, the god Ona!”

Two castrates in female garments,—Isis and Nephthys,—at once commenced the lamentation, in harmonious, high-pitched voices:

“Return to thy dwelling, O beauteous youth! To behold thee is bliss.

“Isis charges thee,—Isis, that was conceived in the one womb with thee,—Isis, thy spouse and thy sister.

“Show us thy countenance anew, radiant god. Here is Nephthys, thy sister. She is deluged in her tears and plucks out her hair in her grief.

“In a yearning like unto death do we seek after thy beauteous body. Return to thy dwelling, Osiris!”

Two other priests joined their voices to those of the first two. These were Horus and Anubis lamenting for Osiris, and each time they concluded a stanza, the chorus, disposed upon the steps of the staircase, repeated it to a solemn and sad motif.

Then with the same chant the elder priests brought out of the sanctuary the statue of the goddess, no longer covered with the naos. A black mantle, strewn over with

golden stars, now enveloped the goddess from head to foot, leaving visible only her silvern feet, entwined by a serpent, as well as, over her head, a silvern disc, confined within the horns of a cow. And slowly, to the tinkling of the censers and sistra, with mournful weeping, the procession of the goddess Isis set out from the steps of the altar, down into the temple, along its walls, and in and out between the columns.

Thus did the goddess gather up the scattered members of her spouse, that she might resuscitate him with the aid of Thoth and Anubis.

“Glory to the city of Abydos, that preserved thy fair head, Osiris.

“Glory to thee, city of Memphis, where we did find the right hand of the great god,—the hand of war and protection.

“And to thee also, O city of Sais, that didst harbour the left hand of the radiant god,—the hand of justice.

“And be thou blessed, city of Thebes, where the heart of On-Nefer-Hophra did repose.”

Thus did the goddess make the round of the entire temple, coming back to the altar, and more and more passionate and loud did the singing of the chorus become. A sacred exaltation was taking possession of the priests and those praying. All the parts of the body of Osiris had Isis found, save one,—the sacred Phallus, impregnating the maternal womb, creating new life eternal. Now was approaching the grandest act in the mystery of Osiris and Isis....

“Is it thou, Eliab?” the queen asked the youth, who had quietly entered the door.

In the darkness near the couch he noiselessly sank at her feet and pressed to his lips the hem of her raiment. And the queen felt him weeping with rapture, shame, and desire. Lowering her hand upon his curly, tousled head, the queen uttered:

“Tell me, Eliab, all that thou knowest of the king and this girl of the vineyard.”

“How thou dost love him, O queen!” said Eliab with a bitter moan.

“Speak!...” commanded Astis.

“What can I tell thee, queen? My heart is rent by jealousy.”

“Speak!”

“Never yet has the king loved any as he loveth her. He doth not part from her for an instant. His eyes shine with happiness. He lavishes favours and gifts all about him. He, the Abimelech5 and sage,—he, like a slave, lieth at her feet and, like a dog, taketh not his eyes off her.”

“Speak!”

“O, how thou dost torture me, queen! And she ... she is all love, all tenderness and caresses! She is meek and abashed, she sees and knows naught save her love. She arouses wrath, envy, or jealousy in none....”

“Speak!” furiously moaned out the queen, and, clutching with her pliant fingers the black curls of Eliab, she pressed his head against her body, scratching his face with the silver embroidery of her diaphanous chiton.

And in the meanwhile, at the altar, around the image of the goddess covered with its black pall, the priests and priestesses were careering in a holy frenzy, with shouts resembling barking, to the clashing of tympani and the jarring strum of sistrums.

Certain ones among them were flaying themselves with many-tailed whiplashes of rhinoceros hide; others were inflicting long, slashing wounds upon their own breasts and shoulders with short knives; others still were tearing their mouths with their fingers, tearing at their ears, and excoriating their faces with their nails. In the midst of this mad round-dance, at the very feet of the goddess, with inconceivable rapidity the anchorite from the mountains of Lebanon was whirling on one spot, in snowy-white, waving raiment. The head priest alone remained motionless. In his hand he was holding the sacred sacrificial knife of Æthiopian obsidian, ready to pass it over at the ultimate, frightful moment.

“The Phallus! The Phallus! The Phallus!” the maddened priests were crying in an ecstasy. “Where is thy Phallus, O radiant god? Come, fecundate the goddess! Her bosom languishes with desire! Her womb is like a desert in the sultry months of summer!”

And now a fearful, insane, piercing scream for an instant drowned all sound of the chorus. The priests quickly parted, and all those in the temple beheld the anchorite of Lebanon, utterly nude, horrible with his tall, gaunt, yellow body. The high priest held out the knife to him. The temple grew unbearably still. And he, quickly stooping, made some motion, straightened up, and with a wail of pain and rapture suddenly cast at the feet of the goddess a formless, bloody piece of flesh.

He was tottering. The high priest carefully supported him, putting his arm around his back; led him up to the image of Isis, painstakingly covered him with the black pall, and left him thus for a few moments, in order that in secret, unseen of the others, he might imprint his kiss upon the lips of the impregnated goddess.

Immediately thereafter he was laid upon a stretcher and borne from the altar. The priest who kept the gates went outside the temple. He struck an enormous copper disc with a wooden mallet, proclaiming to all the universe that the great mystery of the fecundation of the goddess had been consummated. And the high, singing sound of the copper floated away over Jerusalem....

Queen Astis, her body still quivering without cease, threw back Eliab’s head. Her eyes were aflame with an intense, red fire. And she spake slowly, word by word:

“Eliab, wouldst have me make thee king over Judæa and Israel? Wouldst thou be sovereign over all Syria and Mesopotamia, over Phœnicia and Babylon?”

“Nay, queen, I desire thee alone....”

“Yea, thou shalt be my lord. All my nights shall belong to thee. My every word, my every glance, my every breath shall be thine. Thou knowest the shibboleth. Thou shalt go this day into the palace and slay them. Thou shalt slay them both! Thou

shalt slay them both!”

Eliab was fain to speak. But the queen drew him to her, and her burning lips and tongue clung to his mouth. This lasted excruciatingly long. Then, suddenly tearing the youth away from her, she said curtly and imperiously:

“Go!”

“I go,” answered Eliab, submissively.

XII.

A And it was the seventh night of Solomon’s great love.

Strangely quiet and deeply tender were the caresses of the king and Sulamith on this night. Some pensive melancholy, some cautious timidity, some distant premonition, seemed to have cast a slight shadow over their words, their kisses and embraces.

Gazing through the window at the sky, where night was already vanquishing the sinking flame of the evening, Sulamith let her eyes rest upon a bright, bluish star that trembled meekly and tenderly.

“What is that star called, my beloved?” she asked.

“That is the star Sopdit,” answered the king. “It is a sacred star. Assyrian magi tell us that the souls of all men dwell upon it after the death of the body.”

“Dost thou believe it, my king?”

Solomon made no reply. His right hand was under Sulamith’s head, and his left did embrace her; and she felt his aromatic breath upon her,—upon her hair, upon her temple.

“Mayhap we shall see each other there, my king, after we have died?” asked Sulamith uneasily.

The king again kept silence.

“Give me some answer, beloved,” timidly implored Sulamith.

Whereupon the king said:

“Brief is the life of man, but time is without end, and matter hath no death. Man dieth and maketh the earth fertile with the corruption of his body; the earth nourisheth the blade; the blade bringeth forth grain; man consumeth bread, and feedeth his body therewith. Multitudes, and multitudes upon multitudes, of ages shall pass; all things in the universe repeat themselves,—men, beasts, stones, plants,—all repeat themselves. In the multiform vortex of time and matter we, too, are repeated, my beloved. It is just as true as that, if thou and I were to fill a large bag up to the top with sea gravel, and were to cast therein but one precious sapphire,—though we were to take pebbles out of the bag many, many times, we still would, sooner or later, draw out the precious stone as well. Thou and I will meet, Sulamith, nor shall we know each other; but our hearts, with rapture and yearning, will strive to meet, for thou and I have already met,—my meek, my fair Sulamith,—though we remember it not.”

“Nay, my king, nay! I remember. When thou didst stand beneath the window and didst call to me: ‘My fair, come out, for my locks are filled with the drops of the night!’ I knew thee, I remembered thee; and fear and joy possessed my heart. Tell me, my king,—tell me, Solomon: if I were, say, to die on the morrow, wouldst thou recall thy swarthy maiden of the vineyard, thy Sulamith?”

And the king, pressing her to his breast, whispered in emotion:

“Never speak thus.... Speak not thus, O Sulamith! Thou art chosen of God, thou art the veritable one, thou art the queen of my soul.... Death shall not touch thee....”

The strident sound of brass suddenly soared over Jerusalem. For long it trembled mournfully and wavered in the air, and when it had grown silent its quavering echoes still floated on for a long while.

“This marks the ending of the mystery in the temple of Isis,” said the king.

“I am afraid, my comely one,” whispered Sulamith. “A dark terror has penetrated into my soul.... I do not want to die.... I have not yet had time to enjoy my fill of thy embraces.... Embrace me.... Press me closer to thee.... Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm!...”

“Fear not death, Sulamith! For love is strong as death.... Drive sad thoughts from thee.... Wouldst have me tell thee of the wars of David, of the feasts and hunts of the Pharaoh Shishak? Wouldst hear one of those fairy tales that come from the land of Ophir?... Wouldst have me tell thee of the wonders of Bakramaditiah?”

“Yea, my king. Thou dost know thyself that when I hearken to thee, my heart doth expand from happiness! But I would ask a boon of thee....”

“O Sulamith, all that thou dost desire! Ask my life of me,—I shall render it up to thee with delight. I shall only regret having paid too small a price for thy love.”

Then Sulamith smiled in the darkness for happiness, and, entwining the king with her arms, whispered in his ear:

“I beseech thee, when the morning cometh let us go together there ... to the vineyard.... There, where it is green, and the cypresses are, and the cedars; where, nigh the stone wall, thou didst take my soul with thy hands.... I beseech thee to do this, my beloved.... There will I give thee my loves anew....”

In a transport of delight the king kissed the lips of his love.

But Sulamith suddenly raised herself up on the couch and hearkened.

“What is it, my child?... What hath frightened thee?” asked Solomon.

“Stay, my beloved.... Some one is coming hither.... Yea ... I hear steps.”

She became silent. And the stillness was such that they marked the beating of their hearts.

A slight rustling was heard beyond the door, and it was suddenly thrown ajar, quickly and without a sound.

“Who is there?” cried out Solomon.

But Sulamith had already sprung up from the bed, and with one move dashed toward the dark figure of a man with a gleaming sword in his hand. And immediately, stricken through by a short, quick stroke, she fell down to the floor with a faint cry, as though of wonder.

Solomon shattered with his hand the screen of carnelian that shaded the light of the night-lamp. He beheld Eliab, who was standing near the door, stooping a little over the body of the girl, swaying like one in wine. The young warrior raised his head under Solomon’s gaze, and, when his eyes met the wrathful, awesome eyes of the king, he blanched and groaned. An expression of despair and terror distorted his features. And suddenly, stooping, hiding his face in his mantle, he began timidly, like a frightened jackal, to slink out of the room. But the king stayed him, saying but three words:

“Who compelled thee?”

All a-tremble and with teeth chattering, with eyes grown white from fear, the young warrior let drop dully:

“Queen Astis....”

“Get thee hence,” commanded Solomon. “Tell the guard on duty to watch thee.”

Soon people with lights commenced running through the innumerable rooms of the palace. All the chambers were illuminated. The leeches came; the friends and the military officers of the king gathered.

The chief leech said:

“King, neither science nor God will now avail. She will die the instant we draw out the sword left in her breast.”

But at this moment Sulamith came to and said with a calm smile:

“I would drink.”

And when she had drunk, her eyes rested with a tender, beautiful smile upon the king, nor did she again take them away, the while he stood upon his knees before her couch, all naked, even as she, without perceiving that his knees were laved in her blood, nor that his hands were encrimsoned with the scarlet of her blood.

Thus, with difficulty, gazing upon her beloved and smiling gently, did the beautiful Sulamith speak:

“I thank thee, my king, for all things: for thy love, for thy beauty, for thy wisdom, to which thou didst allow me to set my lips, as to a sweet well of living waters. Let me to kiss thy hands; take them not away from my mouth till such time when the last breath shall have fled from me. Never has there been, nor ever shall there be, a woman happier than I. I thank thee, my king, my beloved, my fair. Think ever and anon upon thy slave, upon thy Sulamith, scorched of the sun.”

And the king made answer to her, in a deep, slow voice:

“As long as men and women shall love one another; as long as beauty of soul and body shall be the best and sweetest dream in the universe,—so long, I swear to thee, Sulamith, shall thy name be uttered through many ages with emotion and gratefulness.”

Toward morning Sulamith ceased to be.

Then did the king rise up, command the means for laving to be brought to him, and, donning his most magnificent chiton of purple, broidered with golden scarabæ, he placed upon his head a crown of blood-red rubies. After this he did call Benaiah to him, and spake calmly:

“Benaiah, thou shalt go and put Eliab to death.”

But the old man covered his face with his hands and fell prostrate before the king.

“Eliab is my grandson, O King.”

“Didst thou hear me, Benaiah?”

“Forgive me, O King,—threaten me not with thy wrath; command some other to do this. Eliab, having come out of the palace, did run to the temple, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. I am old, my death is nigh; I dare not take upon my soul this two-fold crime.”

But the king retorted:

“Nevertheless, when I did instruct thee to put to death my brother Adonijah, who had likewise caught hold on the sacred horns of the altar, didst thou not hearken to me, Benaiah?”

“Forgive me! Spare me, King!”

“Lift up thy face,” commanded Solomon.

And when Benaiah did raise up his face, and beheld the king’s eyes, he quickly rose up from the floor and obediently made his way to the exit.

Then, turning to Ahishar, who was the seneschal, and over the household, he commanded:

“I do not want to give the queen up to death; let her live as she wishes, and die when she wishes. But nevermore shall she behold my countenance. This day, Ahishar, thou shalt fit out a caravan and escort the queen to the harbour at Jaffa; and thence to Ægypt, to the Pharaoh Shishak. Now let all get hence.”

And, left alone face to face with the body of Sulamith, he long contemplated her beautiful features. Her face was pale, and never had it been so fair during her life. The half-parted lips that Solomon had been kissing but half an hour ago were smiling enigmatically and beautifully; and her teeth, still humid, gleamed very faintly from between them.

For long did the king gaze upon his dead leman; then, he softly touched with his fingers her brow, already losing the warmth of life, and with slow steps withdrew from the chamber.

Beyond the doors the high priest Azariah, son of Zadok, was awaiting him. Approaching the king, he asked:

“What shall we do with the body of this woman? It is now the Sabbath.”

And the king recalled how, many years ere this, his father had expired and lay upon the sand, already beginning to decompose rapidly. Dogs, drawn by the scent of carrion, were already prowling about with eyes glaring from hunger and greediness. And, even as now, the high priest, a decrepit old man, the father of Azariah, had then asked him:

“Here lieth thy father; the dogs may rend his corpse.... What are we to do? Honour the memory of the king and profane the Sabbath; or observe the Sabbath but leave the corpse of thy father to be devoured of dogs?”

Thereupon Solomon made answer:

“Leave him. A living dog is better than a dead lion.”

And when now, after the words of the high priest, he did recall this, his heart did contract from sadness and fear.

Having made no answer to the high priest, he went on, into the Hall of Judgment.

As always of mornings, two of his scribes, Elihoreph and Ahiah, were already reclining upon mats, one on either side of the throne, holding in readiness their inks, reeds, and rolls of papyrus. Upon the king’s entrance they arose and salaamed to the ground before him. And the king sat down upon his throne of ivory with ornaments of gold, leant his elbow upon the back of a golden lion, and, bowing his head upon his palm, commanded:

“Write!

“Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a ring upon thy hand; for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as hell: the arrows thereof are arrows of fire.”

And, having kept a silence so prolonged that the scribes held their breath in alarm,

he said:

“Leave me to myself.”

And all day, till the first shadows of evening, did the king remain alone with his thoughts; nor durst any enter the vast, empty Hall of Judgment.

Tamam Shud

NOTES BY THE TRANSLATOR

(1) The Russian version of this passage reads: “... jealousy is cruel as the grave: the arrows thereof are arrows of fire.” In this, I have been given to understand, it adheres more closely than does the English Bible to the original Hebrew.

(2) “Which is the second month...” I KINGS; vi:1.

(3) “Which is the eighth month...” I KINGS; vi:38.

(4) “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” PROVERBS; xxv:11.

(5) Abimelech; i. e., Father-King.

(flyleaf image)

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