

And he laid his hand upon the rosy cheek of his young daughter and turning up her smiling face he held the goblet to her lips. Asia, the maiden, turned loving eyes to the crowned head of her father and looking into his face, "Father," she cried, "Themistocles, I drink to thee," and draining the goblet she cast it to the ground and all the assembled guests raised their cups and drank in unison to the giver of the feast.

The Persian soldiers and the Babylonian youths leaned closer to each other and began to speak of the rumour which had come to them from the palace, that Themistocles would lead them into Greece. "Thinkest thou, Arrion," said Alorus, who was nearest to the youth, "thinkest thou that Themistocles will lead the army against Athens? We have heard that Artaxerxes has commanded him, and we are impatient to know if it be true."

Arrion shook his head and held up a

warning hand. He knew that Themistocles wished to forget himself, to be happy in the feast.

"Trouble not the Master," he said, "his friends are with him, and his children, talk not of battles and of bloodshed." But Alorus was impatient and raising his voice above the murmur of the guests and the soft sound of the harps and dulcimers he addressed Themistocles.

"Tell us of Greece, O Themistocles, for the King saith that thou wilt lead us thither. Tell us of that city of thy gods, O conqueror of Salamis!"

"Speak not of wars or bloody conflicts," replied Themistocles, "now is the time for joy and feasting," and he drained a goblet recklessly with flushing face. "O Persians, ye know not the joys of youth; rather would I tell ye of the feasts of Athens, and the Olympic games, the chariot racing and the sports. I would tell ye of the women, of Lais, of Glycera and Pantica the Grecian," he laughed and

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his great eyes blazed, "for there was time for joy in Athens, time for feasting as for victories. Ah! the women," he cried again, "Lais and Glycera, yes! and Daphne too, all the most beautiful, and I drove them in my chariot by the shore of the murmuring sea, and they were proud that they had drawn Themistocles. Ah, fickle Athens! once thou lovest me!" He drained another goblet, raising it on high.

"Athens, Athens," he cried, "pride of my youth."

"Master," said Arrion softly, "forget the ungrateful city, this is thy country."

"Forget?" replied Themistocles, "'tis an art I never learned. I have taught thee memory, boy, and I am old, yet in all my long life I have never learned oblivion. Tell me," he turned to the Assyrian poet, who having ceased his song was drunkenly twining garlands around a wine cup, "tell me poet, doth forgetfulness flow in thy river of death? Doth

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Datilla murmur to thy gods oblivion of sorrow? For then I go to the land of Ishtar and of Tammuz. I go to the land of the silver sky."

"Master, Master," said Arrion, distressed, "thou art strange to-night, what meanest thou?"

"I know not, Arrion, but to-night I am not in Babylon and this breeze blows with the fragrance of the flowers of Attica, 'tis violet-laden, and it whispereth of the sea,—the sea, and the ships."

"Thou leadest us, Commander," again spoke the captain of the guard, "Artaxerxes commands thee!"

"And Themistocles is grateful and must needs obey?" he asked, turning to the soldiers.

"Even so, Commander, and we would be avenged of Salamis," answered Alorus.

"Gratitude sleeps, O Persian!" said Themistocles.

"Not in the heart of Themistocles," answered the soldier. Themistocles was

silent, and Arrion who had been waiting for a moment when he might speak with his master came near and bending on his knees beside the couch in an eager whisper he told him of the plot of Hadar and Artaxerxes and implored his aid and counsel. Themistocles turned to Arrion's anxious face, and a pitying look softened his lips.

"Thou knowest, O Themistocles! that the King hath honoured thee and if thou leadest his army into Greece he will refuse thee nothing. Ah, Master, be merciful, thou alone canst save her."

"I might ask the release of the maiden from the King, but I am helpless with the priests. Thou hast seen Miriam, Arrion?"

"Yes, Master, and I have promised that I will be with her in the shrine and that we will die together, leaping from the tower, if there is no help."

"And thou, Arrion! fearest thou death? There are those who welcome it, but thou art young and life is fair to thee. Life is

a riddle, Arrion. I have sought its answer long, perhaps to-night,"—Themistocles paused, gazing past Arrion's imploring face up into the quiet sky.

"Answer me, O my master," urged Arrion impatiently, "thou lovest me, wouldst see me die with Miriam? Thou art wise and powerful and might help us."

"The day of Themistocles is past," he said, looking down upon the kneeling Arrion. "I would help thee, lad, for well I love thee." He paused a moment musing, and then taking a ring from his finger he put it into the hand of Arrion.

"Take it," he said, "'tis the signet of the great Xerxes given me by his son in gratitude for my services to Persia. Show it to Artaxerxes and tell him it was the wish of Themistocles that mercy should be shown to thee and Miriam, and if ever the name of Themistocles hath found favour in his sight, he may listen to thee."

The youth raised the ring to his lips,

with words of gratitude, but importunate still and trusting in his master's love for him, he murmured of the shortness of the time and begged that Themistocles would aid him with his voice and counsel.

"I know not how to answer thee, Arrion," he said gently, still with a strange and distant smile. "Wait, I must sacrifice to the gods, the omens will tell me of their will. Wait, Arrion, wait." He turned to the slaves, commanding that the bull should be slain, and that the fire should be lighted on the altar. Then advancing among the guests who had grown silent watching him, he filled a cup from the deep bowl of wine and poured it out before the altar and the statue of Artemis.

"Artemis," he cried, "lady of wise counsel, I sacrifice to thee." The slaves at this moment set free the swallows which had been imprisoned at the altar, and Themistocles, looking up to where they flew in the deep blue of the sky, raised his hands in supplication and knelt de-

voutly at the altar. Then he rose and turning to his guests, he spoke.

"Friends," he said, "I have lived among ye, and ye know me well. Think ye it is meet that I should lead a hostile army into Greece? Ye will tell me that Athens is ungrateful and I ask ye if an exile ever forgets the land that exiles him? Ye speak of gratitude, knowing not that it is measured by the love we give, and not by that which we receive. For what is gratitude? Does it bind children to their parents? Does the hero receive it from the country he has served? In my youth the glory of Miltiades filled my dreams. Did the gratitude of Greece save him from a dishonoured death? I saw him sick and old, carried on his couch before his judges, falsely accused, abandoned like the useless galleys which my father showed me on the seashore, telling me that such was the fate of heroes, when they could no longer serve their country. And I, O Persians! O Babylonians! have

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been like the tree under whose branches my countrymen took refuge, left solitary when the storm is past. Gratitude is like a shadow vanishing in sunshine, a bubble, beautiful, but hollow, and fleeting as fortune's smile. Athens has exiled me, has cast me out, and I should take revenge upon the ungrateful city, think ye?" He paused and scanned in review the attentive faces of his guests.

"We love thee, great commander," cried Alorus, "lead us thither!"

"We honour thee," cried the sages, "this is thy country."

"Not so, O Babylonians! O Persians! I may not deny the love of Greece, for in denying it, Themistocles denies himself. Ah! not for this did I dream and plan for Athens' glory. Not for this did I see the Piraeus rise from the sea with its harbor and its towered walls! Not for this did I raise my country to the heights of fame, that I should now destroy the work of my own hands and mock the dreams of youth,

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the pride of all my life. O Persians, Athens is Themistocles! Can the victor of Salamis be a traitor? No, no, Themistocles may not be false to Athens, though Athens may be false to him." Thus he spoke, standing by the altar and looking with a grave courage upon the soldiers of Artaxerxes.

A murmur spread among his guests, a murmur of praise and protest.

"But thou mayest not refuse the King," said Alorus, rising to his feet, "he hath loaded thee with honours and with benefits."

"Thou sayest truth, Alorus," said Themistocles, "I may not."

Then he turned to the altar and bending to its foot he seized a carven bowl which lay concealed among the ivy, and lifted it on high. As he held it in the flooding moonlight Arrion noticed that it was thickly wreathed about with drooping purple flowers and cherry-like scarlet fruit, and while he looked

Themistocles bent to the altar, filling the bowl with the blood of the slaughtered bull, then he raised it to his lips and with one deep breath he drained it.

A moment he stood before the astonished gaze of his guests and then with dimming eyes he reeled and sank, half falling, against the altar.

Arrion leaped to his side and picked up the bowl which lay upon the ground. "'Tis the night-shade," he cried. "The bowl is poisoned, these flowers have brought him death. No traitor couldst thou be, nor yet ungrateful, O my master!" and he supported the dying Themistocles. His daughters gathered around him weeping bitterly and presently he opened his eyes and began to speak wandering words. Arrion bent to catch them from his pale lips.

"'Tis the appointed day! The hills are moving and the sea rolls in great billows. The earth quakes with the dawning of the day. Said I not that the gods were with

us?—Ah, foolish Athenians, fickle, wavering, I have caught ye, ye must fight now, or ye will have no country to defend.—No country? said ye, Ionians? because the citadel is destroyed,—look at the triremes, there is Athens."

"He paused a moment sinking lower on the altar steps. The guests gathered about him murmuring in awe-struck whispers.

"He thinks he is at Salamis," said Alorus. "Thou hearest, Arrion? He reviews the battle."

Halalat, the astrologer, approached and began to whisper an incantation over the fallen hero, but Themistocles opened his eyes, and Arrion, raising his hand, bade him keep silence.

"More wine for my guests," said Themistocles faintly, looking about him upon the faces of his friends, "slaves, more wine."

Asia cast herself at his feet, weeping and crying out in her despair, "O father, father, leave me not."

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Themistocles' faltering hand strayed in her hair, then suddenly his whitening face gleamed with a radiant smile and raising himself he stretched out both hands as if in welcome.

"Ah, Aristides, my enemy, thou art come to help me! I knew thee noble since we fought together at Marathon. Thou knowest if Themistocles be traitor. Lie to Xerxes? Yes, if I must, to save my country. My love, O just and noble Aristides, is greater than thine. Shall a scruple let loose the hordes of Persia upon the Acropolis and the Attic hills? Thy hand is raised to strike me, O Eurybiades"—the dying eyes blazed with their old fire,—“O blind and foolish, strike then, but hear!—The Persians have shut up the outlets so that we cannot escape? Ah! the good news! Thou hast borne the message well, Syrinnis, my faithful servant, the gods will reward thee”—he paused a moment—“In the wooden walls, in the wooden walls there is safety, so

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said the oracle—I see thee, Xerxes, on the hillside by the temple. 'Tis a pretty spectacle, the destruction of Greece!—Wait, monarch, on thy golden throne! Wait, the day is but begun. Ah, how they fight! 'Tis glorious, glorious!” Here Themistocles raised himself on one arm, and shading his eyes with one hand, he seemed to be scanning the distance. “See them all! Eurybiades with his Spartans and the Ionian ships, and our brave Athenians, brave if they are fickle. Right! Right! Crowd them together—hem them in—the waves will bear ye bravely down upon them. Ha! ha! ha! ha!” he laughed wildly as the delirium mounted to his brain. “They flee, they flee, the Persians flee.” Then his voice dropped to a whisper and he sank again into the arms of Arrion, and a silence fell on all and only the sound of the women weeping disturbed the quiet garden. Presently he opened his eyes and gazed with a smile upon the moonlit sky.

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"Diana," he whispered, "Lady of victories! Smile upon us—we have saved Greece. Ah! the fire burns over Eleusis! The gods are joyful! I see ye, spirits of dead heroes, ye are with us in a cloud about the ships. The day is ours."

He ceased a moment, struggling in the arms of Arrion, then suddenly he rose to his full height, his voice ringing out full-toned and persuasive, resonant as in youth; "More ships, Athenians, more ships!" Then like a lamp extinguished, the light faded from his eyes and he fell forward, silent.

XI

The gates swung open with a loud clang, as morning broke over Babylon. The last day of the festival, which had been ushered in by the King's banquet in honour of Mithras, had arrived. From the first until the fifteenth day of Nisan the streets had been gay with processions and merry with feasting in honour of the gods of Persia and of Babylon. The palace had been open daily to the guests and subjects of the King, and thousands had sat at the royal table. All the city feasted.

As soon as morning dawned, messengers from Borsippa, bringing the news of the death of Themistocles hurried to the palace, and soon the rumour spread among the excited crowds of people who filled the streets. The insult put upon