him. And so at last everything went as I would have had it. The young gentlemen are sentenced to death and Crœsus, who as usual, presumed to speak impertinently to the king, will have lived his last hour by this time. As to the Egyptian Princess, the secretary in chief has just been commanded to draw up the following order. Now listen and rejoice, my little dove!

"'Nitetis, the adulterous daughter of the King of Egypt, shall be punished for her hideous crimes according to the extreme rigor of the law, thus: She shall be set astride upon an ass and led through the streets of Babylon; and all men shall see that Cambyses knows how to punish a king's daughter, as severely as his magistrates would punish the meanest beggar.—To Boges, chief of the eunuchs, is entrusted the execution of this order.

By command of King Cambyses.
Ariabignes, chief of the Secretaries.'

"I had scarcely placed these lines in the sleeve of my robe, when the king's mother, with her garments rent, and led by Atossa, pressed hastily into the hall. Weeping and lamentation followed; cries, reproaches, curses, entreaties and prayers; but the king remained firm, and I verily believe Kassandane and Atossa would have been sent after Crœsus and Bartja into the other world, if fear of Cyrus's spirit had not prevented the son, even in this furious rage, from laying hands on his father's widow. Kassandane, however, did not say one word for Nitetis. She seems as fully convinced of her guilt as you and I can be. Neither have we anything to fear from the enamored Gaumata. I have hired three men to give him a cool bath in the Euphrates, before he

gets back to Rhagæ. Ah, ha! the fishes and worms will have a jolly time!"

Phædime joined in Boges' laughter, bestowed on him all the flattering names which she had caught from his own smooth tongue, and in token of her gratitude, hung a heavy chain studded with jewels round his neck with her own beautiful arms.

CHAPTER V.

Before the sun had reached his mid-day height, the news of what had happened and of what was still to happen had filled all Babylon. The streets swarmed with people, waiting impatiently to see the strange spectacle which the punishment of one of the king's wives, who had proved false and faithless, promised to afford. The whip-bearers were forced to use all their authority to keep this gaping crowd in order. Later on in the day the news that Bartja and his friends were soon to be executed arrived among the crowd; they were under the influence of the palm-wine, which was liberally distributed on the king's birthday and the following days, and could not control their excited feelings; but these now took quite another form.

Bands of drunken men paraded the streets, crying: "Bartja, the good son of Cyrus, is to be executed!" The women heard these words in their quiet apartments, eluded their keepers, forgot their veils, and rushing forth into the streets, followed the excited and indignant men with cries and yells. Their pleasure in the thought of seeing a more fortunate sister humbled,

vanished at the painful news that their beloved prince was condemned to death. Men, women and children raged, stormed and cursed, exciting one another to louder and louder bursts of indignation. The work-shops were emptied, the merchants closed their ware-houses, and the school-boys and servants, who had a week's holiday on occasion of the king's birthday, used their freedom to scream louder than any one else, and often to groan and yell without in the least knowing why.

At last the tumult was so great that the whip-bearers were insufficient to cope with it, and a detachment of the body-guard was sent to patrol the streets. At the sight of their shining armor and long lances, the crowd retired into the side streets, only, however, to reassemble in fresh numbers when the troops were out of sight.

At the gate, called the Bel gate, which led to the great western high-road, the throng was thicker than at any other point, for it was said that through this gate, the one by which she had entered Babylon, the Egyptian Princess was to be led out of the city in shame and disgrace. For this reason a larger number of whip-bearers were stationed here, in order to make way for travellers entering the city. Very few people indeed left the city at all on this day, for curiosity was stronger than either business or pleasure; those, on the other hand, who arrived from the country, took up their stations near the gate on hearing what had drawn the crowd thither.

It was nearly mid-day, and only wanted a few hours to the time fixed for Nitetis' disgrace, when a caravan approached the gate with great speed. The first carriage was a so-called *harmamaxa*,* drawn by four horses decked out with bells and tassels; a two-wheeled cart followed, and last in the train was a baggage-wagon drawn by mules. A fine, handsome man of about fifty, dressed as a Persian courtier, and another, much older, in long white robes, occupied the first carriage. The cart was filled by a number of slaves in simple blouses, and broad-brimmed felt hats, wearing the hair cut close to the head. An old man, dressed as a Persian servant, rode by the side of the cart. The driver of the first carriage had great difficulty in making way for his gaily-ornamented horses through the crowd; he was obliged to come to a halt before the gate and call some whip-bearers to his assistance. "Make way for us!" he cried to the captain of the police who came up with some of his men; "the royal post has no time to lose, and I am driving some one, who will make you repent every minute's delay."

"Softly, my son," answered the official. "Don't you see that it's easier to-day to get out of Babylon, than to come in? Whom are you driving?"

"A nobleman, with a passport from the king. Come, be quick and make way for us."

"I don't know about that; your caravan does not look much like royalty."

"What have you to do with that? The pass . . ."

"I must see it, before I let you into the city."

These words were half meant for the traveller, whom he was scrutinizing very suspiciously.

While the man in the Persian dress was feeling in his sleeve for the passport, the whip-bearer turned to some comrades who had just come up, and pointed out

* See vol. 1. note at foot of page 204.

the scanty retinue of the travellers, saying: "Did you ever see such a queer cavalcade? There's something odd about these strangers, as sure as my name's Giw. Why, the lowest of the king's carpet-bearers travels with four times as many people, and yet this man has a royal pass and is dressed like one of those who sit at the royal table."

At this moment the suspected traveller handed him a little silken roll scented with musk,[28] sealed with the royal seal, and containing the king's own handwriting.

The whip-bearer took it and examined the seal. "It is all in order," he murmured, and then began to study the characters. But no sooner had he deciphered the first letters than he looked even more sharply than before at the traveller, and seized the horses' bridles, crying out: "Here, men, form a guard round the carriage! this is an impostor."

When he had convinced himself that escape was impossible, he went up to the stranger again and said:

"You are using a pass which does not belong to you. Gyges, the son of Crœsus, the man you give yourself out for, is in prison and is to be executed to-day. You are not in the least like him, and you will have reason to repent having tried to pass for him. Get out of your carriage and follow me."

The traveller, however, instead of obeying, began to speak in broken Persian, and begged the officer rather to take a seat by him in the carriage, for that he had very important news to communicate. The man hesitated a moment; but on seeing a fresh band of

28. From Firdusi:
"And now he wrote on silken stuff so fine
A letter breathing fragrance musk and wine."

whip-bearers come up, he nodded to them to stand before the impatient, chafing horses, and got into the carriage.

The stranger looked at him with a smile and said: "Now, do I look like an impostor?"

"No; your language proves that you are not a Persian, but yet you look like a nobleman."

"I am a Greek, and have come hither to render Cambyses an important service. Gyges is my friend, and lent me his passport when he was in Egypt, in case I should ever come to Persia. I am prepared to vindicate my conduct before the king, and have no reason for fear. On the contrary, the news I bring gives me reason to expect much from his favor. Let me be taken to Crœsus, if this is your duty; he will be surety for me, and will send back your men, of whom you seem to stand in great need to-day. Distribute these gold pieces among them, and tell me without further delay what my poor friend Gyges has done to deserve death, and what is the reason of all this crowd and confusion."

The stranger said this in bad Persian, but there lay so much dignity and confidence in his tone, and his gifts were on such a large scale, that the cringing and creeping servant of despotism felt sure he must be sitting opposite to a prince, crossed his arms reverentially, and, excusing himself from his many pressing affairs, began to relate rapidly. He had been on duty in the great hall during the examination of the prisoners the night before, and could therefore tell all that had happened with tolerable accuracy. The Greek followed his tale eagerly, with many an incredulous shake of his handsome head, however, when the daughter of Amasis and the son of Cyrus were spoken of as having been disloyal

and false. That sentence of death had been pronounced, especially on Crœsus, distressed him visibly, but the sadness soon vanished from his quickly-changing features, and gave place to thought; this in its turn was quickly followed by a joyful look, which could only betoken that the thinker had arrived at a satisfactory result. His dignified gravity vanished in a moment; he laughed aloud, struck his forehead merrily, seized the hand of the astonished captain, and said:

"Should you be glad, if Bartja could be saved?"

"More than I can say."

"Very well, then I will vouch for it, that you shall receive at least two talents,* if you can procure me an interview with the king before the first execution has taken place."

"How can you ask such a thing of me, a poor captain? . . ."

"Yes, you must, you must!"

"I cannot."

"I know well that it is very difficult, almost impossible, for a stranger to obtain an audience of your king; but my errand brooks no delay, for I can prove that Bartja and his friends are not guilty. Do you hear? I can *prove* it. Do you think now, you can procure me admittance?"

"How is it possible?"

"Don't ask, but act. Didn't you say Darius was one of the condemned?"

"Yes."

"I have heard, that his father is a man of very high rank."

* £450.

"He is the first in the kingdom, after the sons of Cyrus."

"Then take me to him at once. He will welcome me when he hears I am able to save his son."

"Stranger, you are a wonderful being. You speak with so much confidence that . . ."

"That you feel you may believe me. Make haste then, and call some of your men to make way for us, and escort us to the palace."

There is nothing, except a doubt, which runs more quickly from mind to mind, than a hope that some cherished wish may be fulfilled, especially when this hope has been suggested to us by some one we can trust.

The officer believed this strange traveller, jumped out of the carriage, flourishing his scourge and calling to his men: "This nobleman has come on purpose to prove Bartja's innocence, and must be taken to the king at once. Follow me, my friends, and make way for him!"

Just at that moment a troop of the guards appeared in sight. The captain of the whip-bearers went up to their commander, and, seconded by the shouts of the crowd, begged him to escort the stranger to the palace.

During this colloquy the traveller had mounted his servant's horse, and now followed in the wake of the Persians.

The good news flew like wind through the huge city. As the riders proceeded, the crowd fell back more willingly, and louder and fuller grew the shouts of joy until at last their march was like a triumphal procession.

In a few minutes they drew up before the palace; but before the brazen gates had opened to admit them, another train came slowly into sight. At the head rode a grey-headed old man; his robes were brown, and rent, in token of mourning, the mane and tail of his horse had been shorn off and the creature colored blue.[29] It was Hystaspes, coming to entreat mercy for his son.

The whip-bearer, delighted at this sight, threw himself down before the old man with a cry of joy, and with crossed arms told him what confidence the traveller had inspired him with.

Hystaspes beckoned to the stranger; he rode up, bowed gracefully and courteously to the old man, without dismounting, and confirmed the words of the whip-bearer. Hystaspes seemed to feel fresh confidence too after hearing the stranger, for he begged him to follow him into the palace and to wait outside the door of the royal apartment, while he himself, conducted by the head chamberlain, went in to the king.

When his old kinsman entered, Cambyses was lying on his purple couch, pale as death. A cup-bearer was kneeling on the ground at his feet, trying to collect the broken fragments of a costly Egyptian drinking-cup which the king had thrown down impatiently because its contents had not pleased his taste. At some distance stood a circle of court-officials, in whose faces it was easy to read that they were afraid of their ruler's wrath, and preferred keeping as far from him as possible. The dazzling light and oppressive heat of a Babylonian May day came in through the open windows, and not a sound was to be heard in the great room, except the whining of a large dog of the Epirote breed, which had just received a tremendous kick from Cambyses for venturing to fawn on his master, and was the only being that ventured to disturb the solemn stillness. Just before Hystaspes was led in by the chamberlain, Cambyses had sprung up from his couch. This idle repose had become unendurable, he felt suffocated with pain and anger. The dog's howl suggested a new idea to his poor tortured brain, thirsting for forgetfulness.

29. From the mourning for Iredsch. Firdusi. *Book of Kings.* The brown mourning garment is from Rosenmüller, *Das alte und neue Morgenland,* I. p. 179.

"We will go out hunting!" he shouted to the poor startled courtiers. The master of the hounds, the equerries, and huntsmen hastened to obey his orders. He called after them, "I shall ride the unbroken horse Reksch;[30] get the falcons ready, let all the dogs out and order every one to come, who can throw a spear. We'll clear the preserves!"

He then threw himself down on his divan again, as if these words had quite exhausted his powerful frame, and did not see that Hystaspes had entered, for his sullen gaze was fixed on the motes playing in the sunbeams that glanced through the window.

Hystaspes did not dare to address him; but he stationed himself in the window so as to break the stream of motes and thus draw attention to himself.

At first Cambyses looked angrily at him and his rent garments, and then asked with a bitter smile; "What do you want?"

"Victory to the king! Your poor servant and uncle has come to entreat his ruler's mercy."

30. The celebrated war-horse of Rustem had the same name. It signifies "Lightning."

"Then rise and go! You know, that I have no mercy for perjurers and false swearers. 'Tis better to have a dead son than a dishonorable one."

"But if Bartja should not be guilty, and Darius . . ."

"You dare to question the justice of my sentence?"

"That be far from me. Whatever the king does is good, and cannot be gainsaid; but still . . ."

"Be silent! I will not hear the subject mentioned again. You are to be pitied as a father; but have these last few hours brought me any joy? Old man, I grieve for you, but I have as little power to rescind his punishment as you to recall his crime."

"But if Bartja really should not be guilty—if the gods . . ."

"Do you think the gods will come to the help of perjurers and deceivers?"

"No, my King; but a fresh witness has appeared."

"A fresh witness? Verily, I would gladly give half my kingdom, to be convinced of the innocence of men so nearly related to me."

"Victory to my lord, the eye of the realm! A Greek is waiting outside, who seems, to judge by his figure and bearing, one of the noblest of his race."

The king laughed bitterly: "A Greek! Ah, ha! perhaps some relation to Bartja's faithful fair one! What can this stranger know of my family affairs? I know these beggarly Ionians well. They are impudent enough to meddle in everything, and think they can cheat us with their sly tricks. How much have you had to pay for this new witness, uncle? A Greek is as ready with a lie as a Magian with his spells, and I know they'll do anything for gold. I'm really curious

to see your witness. Call him in. But if he wants to deceive me, he had better remember that where the head of a son of Cyrus is about to fall, a Greek head has but very little chance." And the king's eyes flashed with anger as he said these words. Hystaspes, however, sent for the Greek.

Before he entered, the chamberlains fastened the usual cloth before his mouth, and commanded him to cast himself on the ground before the king. The Greek's bearing, as he approached, under the king's penetrating glance, was calm and noble; he fell on his face, and, according to the Persian custom, kissed the ground.

His agreeable and handsome appearance, and the calm and modest manner in which he bore the king's gaze, seemed to make a favorable impression on the latter; he did not allow him to remain long on the earth, and asked him in a by no means unfriendly tone:

"Who are you?"

"I am a Greek nobleman. My name is Phanes, and Athens is my home. I have served ten years as commander of the Greek mercenaries in Egypt, and not ingloriously."

"Are you the man, to whose clever generalship the Egyptians were indebted for their victories in Cyprus?"

"I am."

"What has brought you to Persia?"

"The glory of your name, Cambyses, and the wish to devote my arms and experience to your service."

"Nothing else? Be sincere, and remember that one single lie may cost your life. We Persians have different ideas of truth from the Greeks."

"Lying is hateful to me too, if only, because, as a

distortion and corruption of what is noblest, it seems unsightly in my eyes."

"Then speak."

"There was certainly a third reason for my coming hither, which I should like to tell you later. It has reference to matters of the greatest importance, which it will require a longer time to discuss; but to-day . . ."

"Just to-day I should like to hear something new. Accompany me to the chase. You come exactly at the right time, for I never had more need of diversion than now."

"I will accompany you with pleasure, if . . ."

"No conditions to the king! Have you had much practice in hunting?"

"In the Libyan desert I have killed many a lion."

"Then come, follow me."

In the thought of the chase the king seemed to have thrown off all his weakness and roused himself to action; he was just leaving the hall, when Hystaspes once more threw himself at his feet, crying with up-raised hands: "Is my son—is your brother, to die innocent? By the soul of your father, who used to call me his truest friend, I conjure you to listen to this noble stranger."

Cambyses stood still. The frown gathered on his brow again, his voice sounded like a menace and his eyes flashed as he raised his hand and said to the Greek: "Tell me what you know; but remember that in every untrue word, you utter your own sentence of death."

Phanes heard this threat with the greatest calmness, and answered, bowing gracefully as he spoke: "From the sun and from my lord the king, nothing can be hid.

What power has a poor mortal to conceal the truth from one so mighty? The noble Hystaspes has said, that I am able to prove your brother innocent. I will only say, that I wish and hope I may succeed in accomplishing anything so great and beautiful. The gods have at least allowed me to discover a trace which seems calculated to throw light on the events of yesterday; but you yourself must decide whether my hopes have been presumptuous and my suspicions too easily aroused. Remember, however, that throughout, my wish to serve you has been sincere, and that if I have been deceived, my error is pardonable; that nothing is perfectly certain in this world, and every man believes that to be infallible which seems to him the most probable."

"You speak well, and remind me of . . . curse her! there, speak and have done with it! I hear the dogs already in the court."

"I was still in Egypt when your embassy came to fetch Nitetis. At the house of Rhodopis, my delightful, clever and celebrated countrywoman, I made the acquaintance of Crœsus and his son; I only saw your brother and his friends once or twice, casually; still I remembered the young prince's handsome face so well, that some time later, when I was in the workshop of the great sculptor Theodorus at Samos, I recognized his features at once."

"Did you meet him at Samos?"

"No, but his features had made such a deep and faithful impression on Theodorus' memory, that he used them to beautify the head of an Apollo, which the Alkmæonidæ had ordered for the new temple of Delphi."

"Your tale begins, at least, incredibly enough. How is it possible to copy features so exactly, when you have not got them before you?"

"I can only answer that Theodorus has really completed this master-piece, and if you wish for a proof of his skill would gladly send you a second likeness of . . ."

"I have no desire for it. Go on with your story."

"On my journey hither, which, thanks to your father's excellent arrangements, I performed in an incredibly short time, changing horses every sixteen or seventeen miles . . ."

"Who allowed you, a foreigner, to use the post-horses?"

"The pass drawn out for the son of Crœsus, which came by chance into my hands, when once, in order to save my life, he forced me to change clothes with him."

"A Lydian can outwit a fox, and a Syrian a Lydian, but an Ionian is a match for both," muttered the king, smiling for the first time; "Crœsus told me this story—poor Crœsus!" and then the old gloomy expression came over his face and he passed his hand across his forehead, as if trying to smooth the lines of care away. The Athenian went on: "I met with no hindrances on my journey till this morning at the first hour after midnight, when I was detained by a strange occurrence."

The king began to listen more attentively, and reminded the Athenian, who spoke Persian with difficulty, that there was no time to lose.

"We had reached the last station but one," continued he, "and hoped to be in Babylon by sunrise. I was thinking over my past stirring life, and was so haunted

by the remembrance of evil deeds unrevenged that I could not sleep; the old Egyptian at my side, however, slept and dreamt peacefully enough, lulled by the monotonous tones of the harness bells, the sound of the horses' hoofs and the murmur of the Euphrates. It was a wonderfully still, beautiful night; the moon and stars were so brilliant, that our road and the landscape were lighted up almost with the brightness of day. For the last hour we had not seen a single vehicle, foot-passenger, or horseman; we had heard that all the neighboring population had assembled in Babylon to celebrate your birthday, gaze with wonder at the splendor of your court, and enjoy your liberality. At last the irregular beat of horses' hoofs, and the sound of bells struck my ear, and a few minutes later I distinctly heard cries of distress. My resolve was taken at once; I made my Persian servant dismount, sprang into his saddle, told the driver of the cart in which my slaves were sitting not to spare his mules, loosened my dagger and sword in their scabbards, and spurred my horse towards the place from whence the cries came. They grew louder and louder. I had not ridden a minute, when I came on a fearful scene. Three wild-looking fellows had just pulled a youth, dressed in the white robes of a Magian, from his horse, stunned him with heavy blows, and, just as I reached them, were on the point of throwing him into the Euphrates, which at that place washes the roots of the palms and fig-trees bordering the high-road. I uttered my Greek war-cry, which has made many an enemy tremble before now, and rushed on the murderers. Such fellows are always cowards; the moment they saw one of their accomplices mortally wounded, they fled. I did not pursue them, but stooped down

to examine the poor boy, who was severely wounded. How can I describe my horror at seeing, as I believed, your brother Bartja? Yes, they were the very same features that I had seen, first at Naukratis and then in Theodorus' workshop, they were . . ."

"Marvellous!" interrupted Hystaspes.

"Perhaps a little too much so to be credible," added the king. "Take care, Hellene! remember my arm reaches far. I shall have the truth of your story put to the proof."

"I am accustomed," answered Phanes bowing low, "to follow the advice of our wise philosopher Pythagoras, whose fame may perhaps have reached your ears, and always, before speaking, to consider whether what I am going to say may not cause me sorrow in the future."

"That sounds well; but, by Mithras, I knew some one who often spoke of that great teacher, and yet in her deeds turned out to be a most faithful disciple of Angramainjus. You know the traitress, whom we are going to extirpate from the earth like a poisonous viper to-day."

"Will you forgive me," answered Phanes, seeing the anguish expressed in the king's features, "if I quote another of the great master's maxims?"

"Speak."

"Blessings go as quickly as they come. Therefore bear thy lot patiently. Murmur not, and remember that the gods never lay a heavier weight on any man than he can bear. Hast thou a wounded heart? touch it as seldom as thou wouldst a sore eye. There are only two remedies for heart-sickness:—hope and patience."

Cambyses listened to this sentence, borrowed from

the golden maxims of Pythagoras, and smiled bitterly at the word "patience." Still the Athenian's way of speaking pleased him, and he told him to go on with his story.

Phanes made another deep obeisance, and continued: "We carried the unconscious youth to my carriage, and brought him to the nearest station. There he opened his eyes, looked anxiously at me, and asked who I was and what had happened to him? The master of the station was standing by, so I was obliged to give the name of Gyges in order not to excite his suspicions by belying my pass, as it was only through this that I could obtain fresh horses.

"This wounded young man seemed to know Gyges, for he shook his head and murmured: 'You are not the man you give yourself out for.' Then he closed his eyes again, and a violent attack of fever came on.

"We undressed, bled him and bound up his wounds. My Persian servant, who had served as overlooker in Amasis' stables and had seen Bartja there, assisted by the old Egyptian who accompanied me, was very helpful, and asserted untiringly that the wounded man could be no other than your brother. When we had cleansed the blood from his face, the master of the station too swore that there could be no doubt of his being the younger son of your great father Cyrus. Meanwhile my Egyptian companion had fetched a potion from the travelling medicine-chest,[31] without which an Egyptian does not care to leave his native

31. A similar travelling medicine-chest is to be seen in the Egyptian Museum at Berlin. It is prettily and compendiously fitted up, and must be very ancient, for the inscription on the chest, which contained it stated that it was made in the 11th dynasty (end of the third century B. C.) in the reign of King Mentuhotep.

country. The drops worked wonders; in a few hours the fever was quieted, and at sunrise the patient opened his eyes once more. We bowed down before him, believing him to be your brother, and asked if he would like to be taken to the palace in Babylon. This he refused vehemently, and asseverated that he was not the man we took him for, but, . . ."

"Who can be so like Bartja? tell me quickly," interrupted the king, "I am very curious to know this."

"He declared that he was the brother of your high-priest, that his name was Gaumata, and that this would be proved by the pass which we should find in the sleeve of his Magian's robe. The landlord found this document and, being able to read, confirmed the statement of the sick youth; he was, however, soon seized by a fresh attack of fever, and began to speak incoherently."

"Could you understand him?"

"Yes, for his talk always ran on the same subject. The hanging-gardens seemed to fill his thoughts. He must have just escaped some great danger, and probably had had a a lover's meeting there with a woman called Mandane."

"Mandane, Mandane," said Cambyses in a low voice; "if I do not mistake, that is the name of the highest attendant on Amasis' daughter."

These words did not escape the sharp ears of the Greek. He thought a moment and then exclaimed with a smile; "Set the prisoners free, my King; I will answer for it with my own head, that Bartja was not in the hanging-gardens."

The king was surprised at this speech but not angry. The free, unrestrained, graceful manner of this Athenian towards himself produced the same impression,

that a fresh sea-breeze makes when felt for the first time. The nobles of his own court, even his nearest relations, approached him bowing and cringing, but this Greek stood erect in his presence; the Persians never ventured to address their ruler without a thousand flowery and flattering phrases, but the Athenian was simple, open and straightforward. Yet his words were accompanied by such a charm of action and expression, that the king could understand them, notwithstanding the defective Persian in which they were clothed, better than the allegorical speeches of his own subjects. Nitetis and Phanes were the only human beings, who had ever made him forget that he was a king. With them he was a man speaking to his fellow-man, instead of a despot speaking with creatures whose very existence was the plaything of his own caprice. Such is the effect produced by real manly dignity, superior culture and the consciousness of a right to freedom, on the mind even of a tyrant. But there was something beside all this, that had helped to win Cambyses' favor for the Athenian. This man's coming seemed as if it might possibly give him back the treasure he had believed was lost and more than lost. But how could the life of such a foreign adventurer be accepted as surety for the sons of the highest Persians in the realm? The proposal, however, did not make him angry. On the contrary, he could not help smiling at the boldness of this Greek, who in his eagerness had freed himself from the cloth which hung over his mouth and beard, and exclaimed: "By Mithras, Greek, it really seems as if you were to prove a messenger of good for us! I accept your offer. If the prisoners, notwithstanding your supposition, should still prove guilty you are bound to pass your whole life at

my court and in my service, but if, on the contrary, you are able to prove what I so ardently long for, I will make you richer than any of your countrymen."

Phanes answered by a smile which seemed to decline this munificent offer, and asked: "Is it permitted me to put a few questions to yourself and to the officers of your court?"

"You are allowed to say and ask whatever you wish."

At this moment the master of the huntsmen, one of those who daily ate at the king's table, entered, out of breath from his endeavors to hasten the preparations, and announced that all was ready.

"They must wait," was the king's imperious answer. "I am not sure, that we shall hunt at all to-day. Where is Bischen, the captain of police?"

Datis, the so-called "eye of the king,"[32] who held the office filled in modern days by a minister of police, hurried from the room, returning in a few minutes with the desired officer. These moments Phanes made use of for putting various questions on important points to the nobles who were present.

"What news can you bring of the prisoners?" asked the king, as the man lay prostrate before him.

"Victory to the king! They await death with calmness, for it is sweet to die by thy will."

"Have you heard anything of their conversation?"

"Yes, my Ruler."

"Do they acknowledge their guilt, when speaking to each other?"

"Mithras alone knows the heart; but you, my prince, if you could hear them speak, would believe in

32. See Vol. I. note 239.

their innocence, even as I the humblest of your servants."

The captain looked up timidly at the king, fearing lest these words should have excited his anger; Cambyses, however, smiled kindly instead of rebuking him. But a sudden thought darkened his brow again directly, and in a low voice he asked: "When was Crœsus executed?"

The man trembled at this question; the perspiration stood on his forehead, and he could scarcely stammer the words: "He is . . . he has . . . we thought . . ."

"What did you think?" interrupted Cambyses, and a new light of hope seemed to dawn in his mind. "Is it possible, that you did not carry out my orders at once? Can Crœsus still be alive? Speak at once, I must know the whole truth."

The captain writhed like a worm at his lord's feet, and at last stammered out, raising his hands imploringly towards the king: "Have mercy, have mercy, my Lord the king! I am a poor man, and have thirty children, fifteen of whom . . ."

"I wish to know if Crœsus is living or dead."

"He is alive! He has done so much for me, and I did not think I was doing wrong in allowing him to live a few hours longer, that he might . . ."

"That is enough," said the king breathing freely. "This once your disobedience shall go unpunished, and the treasurer may give you two talents, as you have so many children.—Now go to the prisoners,—tell Crœsus to come hither, and the others to be of good courage, if they are innocent."

"My King is the light of the world, and an ocean of mercy."

"Bartja and his friends need not remain any longer in confinement; they can walk in the court of the palace, and you will keep guard over them. You, Datis, go at once to the hanging-gardens and order Boges to defer the execution of the sentence on the Egyptian Princess; and further, I wish messengers sent to the post-station mentioned by the Athenian, and the wounded man brought hither under safe escort."

The "king's eye" was on the point of departure, but Phanes detained him, saying: "Does my King allow me to make one remark?"

"Speak."

"It appears to me, that the chief of the eunuchs could give the most accurate information. During his delirium the youth often mentioned his name in connection with that of the girl he seemed to be in love with."

"Go at once, Datis, and bring him quickly."

"The high-priest Oropastes, Gaumata's brother, ought to appear too; and Mandane, whom I have just been assured on the most positive authority, is the principal attendant of the Egyptian Princess."

"Fetch her, Datis."

"If Nitetis herself could . . ."

At this the king turned pale and a cold shiver ran through his limbs. How he longed to see his darling again! But the strong man was afraid of this woman's reproachful looks; he knew the captivating power that lay in her eyes. So he pointed to the door, saying: "Fetch Boges and Mandane; the Egyptian Princess is to remain in the hanging-gardens, under strict custody."

The Athenian bowed deferentially; as if he would

say: "Here no one has a right to command but the king."

Cambyses looked well pleased, seated himself again on the purple divan, and resting his forehead on his hand, bent his eyes on the ground and sank into deep thought. The picture of the woman he loved so dearly refused to be banished; it came again and again, more and more vividly, and the thought that these features could not have deceived him—that Nitetis must be innocent—took a firmer root in his mind; he had already begun to hope. If Bartja could be cleared, there was no error that might not be conceivable; in that case he would go to the hanging-gardens, take her hand and listen to her defence. When love has once taken firm hold of a man in riper years, it runs and winds through his whole nature like one of his veins, and can only be destroyed with his life.

The entrance of Crœsus roused Cambyses from his dream; he raised the old man kindly from the prostrate position at his feet, into which he had thrown himself on entering, and said: "You offended me, but I will be merciful; I have not forgotten that my father, on his dying bed, told me to make you my friend and adviser. Take your life back as a gift from me, and forget my anger as I wish to forget your want of reverence. This man says he knows you; I should like to hear your opinion of his conjectures."

Crœsus turned away much affected, and after having heartily welcomed the Athenian, asked him to relate his suppositions and the grounds on which they were founded.

The old man grew more and more attentive as the Greek went on, and when he had finished raised his

hands to heaven, crying: "Pardon me, oh ye eternal gods, if I have ever questioned the justice of your decrees. Is not this marvellous, Cambyses? My son once placed himself in great danger to save the life of this noble Athenian, whom the gods have brought hither to repay the deed tenfold. Had Phanes been murdered in Egypt, this hour might have seen our sons executed."

And as he said this he embraced Hystaspes; both shared one feeling; their sons had been as dead and were now alive.

The king, Phanes, and all the Persian dignitaries watched the old men with deep sympathy, and though the proofs of Bartja's innocence were as yet only founded on conjecture, not one of those present doubted it one moment longer. Wherever the belief in a man's guilt is but slight, his defender finds willing listeners.

CHAPTER VI.

THE sharp-witted Athenian saw clearly how matters lay in this sad story; nor did it escape him that malice had had a hand in the affair. How could Bartja's dagger have come into the hanging-gardens except through treachery?

While he was telling the king his suspicions, Oropastes was led into the hall.

The king looked angrily at him and without one preliminary word, asked: "Have you a brother?"

"Yes, my King. He and I are the only two left out of a family of six. My parents . . ."

"Is your brother younger or older than yourself?"

"I was the eldest of the family; my brother, the youngest, was the joy of my father's old age."

"Did you ever notice a remarkable likeness between him and one of my relations?"

"Yes, my King. Gaumata is so like your brother Bartja, that in the school for priests at Rhagæ, where he still is, he was always called 'the prince.'"

"Has he been at Babylon very lately?"

"He was here for the last time at the New Year's festival."

"Are you speaking the truth?"

"The sin of lying would be doubly punishable in one who wears my robes, and holds my office."

The king's face flushed with anger at this answer and he exclaimed: "Nevertheless you are lying; Gaumata was here yesterday evening. You may well tremble."

"My life belongs to the king, whose are all things; nevertheless I swear—I, the high-priest—by the most high God, whom I have served faithfully for thirty years, that I know nothing of my brother's presence in Babylon yesterday."

"Your face looks as if you were speaking the truth."

"You know that I was not absent from your side the whole of that high holiday."

"I know it."

Again the doors opened; this time they admitted the trembling Mandane. The high-priest cast such a look of astonishment and enquiry on her, that the king saw she must be in some way connected with him, and therefore, taking no notice of the trembling girl who