

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

lay at his feet, he asked: "Do you know this woman?"

"Yes, my King. I obtained for her the situation of upper attendant to the—may Auramazda forgive her!—King of Egypt's daughter."

"What led you,—a priest,—to do a favor to this girl?"

"Her parents died of the same pestilence, which carried off my brothers. Her father was a priest, respected, and a friend of our family; so we adopted the little girl, remembering the words: 'If thou withhold help from the man who is pure in heart and from his widow and orphans, then shall the pure, subject earth cast thee out unto the stinging-nettles, to painful sufferings and to the most fearful regions!' Thus I became her foster-father, and had her brought up with my youngest brother until he was obliged to enter the school for priests."

The king exchanged a look of intelligence with Phanes, and asked: "Why did not you keep the girl longer with you?"

"When she had received the ear-rings* I, as priest, thought it more suitable to send such a young girl away from my house, and to put her in a position to earn her own living."

"Has she seen your brother since she has been grown up?"

"Yes, my King. Whenever Gaumata came to see me I allowed him to be with her as with a sister; but on discovering later that the passionate love of youth had begun to mingle with the childish friendship of

* See vol. I. note 236.

former days, I felt strengthened in my resolution to send her away."

"Now we know enough," said the king, commanding the high-priest by a nod to retire. He then looked down on the prostrate girl, and said imperiously: "Rise!"

Mandane rose, trembling with fear. Her fresh young face was pale as death, and her red lips were blue from terror.

"Tell all you know about yesterday evening; but remember, a lie and your death are one and the same."

The girl's knees trembled so violently that she could hardly stand, and her fear entirely took away the power of speaking.

"I have not much patience," exclaimed Cambyses.

Mandane started, grew paler still, but could not speak. Then Phanes came forward and asked the angry king to allow him to examine the girl, as he felt sure that fear alone had closed her lips and that a kind word would open them.

Cambyses allowed this, and the Athenian's words proved true; no sooner had he assured Mandane of the good-will of all present, laid his hand on her head and spoken kindly to her, than the source of her tears was unlocked, she wept freely, the spell which had seemed to chain her tongue, vanished, and she began to tell her story, interrupted only by low sobs. She hid nothing, confessed that Boges had given her his sanction and assistance to the meeting with Gaumata, and ended by saying: "I know that I have forfeited my life, and am the worst and most ungrateful creature in the world; but none of all this would have hap-

pened, if Oropastes had allowed his brother to marry me."

The serious audience, even the king himself, could not resist a smile at the longing tone in which these words were spoken and the fresh burst of sobs which succeeded them.

And this smile saved her life. But Cambyses would not have smiled, after hearing such a story, if Mandane, with that instinct which always seems to stand at a woman's command in the hour of her greatest danger, had not known how to seize his weak side, and use it for her own interests, by dwelling much longer than was necessary, on the delight which Nitetis had manifested at the king's gifts.

"A thousand times" cried she, "did my mistress kiss the presents which were brought from you, O King; but oftenest of all did she press her lips to the nosegay which you plucked with your own hands for her, some days ago. And when it began to fade, she took every flower separately, spread out the petals with care, laid them between woollen cloths, and, with her own hands, placed her heavy, golden ointment-box upon them, that they might dry and so she might keep them always as a remembrance of your kindness."

Seeing Cambyses' awful features grow a little milder at these words, the girl took fresh courage, and at last began to put loving words into her mistress's mouth which the latter had never uttered, professing that she herself had heard Nitetis a hundred times murmur the word "Cambyses" in her sleep with indescribable tenderness. She ended her confession by sobbing and praying for mercy.

The king looked down at her with infinite contempt,

though without anger, and pushing her away with his foot said: "Out of my sight, you dog of a woman! Blood like yours would soil the executioner's axe. Out of my sight!"

Mandane needed no second command to depart. The words "out of my sight" sounded like sweet music in her ears. She rushed through the courts of the palace, and out into the streets, crying like a mad woman: "I am free! I am free!"

She had scarcely left the hall, when Datis "the king's eye" reappeared with the news that the chief of the eunuchs was nowhere to be found. He had vanished from the hanging-gardens in an unaccountable manner; but he, Datis, had left word with his subordinates that he was to be searched for and brought, dead or alive.

The king went off into another violent fit of passion at this news, and threatened the officer of police, who prudently concealed the excitement of the crowd from his lord, with a severe punishment, if Boges were not in their hands by the next morning.

As he finished speaking, a eunuch was brought into the hall, sent by the king's mother to ask an interview for herself with her son.

Cambyses prepared at once to comply with his mother's wish, at the same time giving Phanes his hand to kiss, a rare honor, only shown to those that ate at the king's table, and saying: "All the prisoners are to be set at liberty. Go to your sons, you anxious, troubled fathers, and assure them of my mercy and favor. I think we shall be able to find a satrapy a-piece for them, as compensation for to-night's undeserved imprisonment. To you, my Greek friend, I

am deeply indebted. In discharge of this debt, and as a means of retaining you at my court, I beg you to accept one hundred talents* from my treasury."

"I shall scarcely be able to use so large a sum," said Phanes, bowing low.

"Then abuse it," said the king with a friendly smile, and calling out to him, "We shall meet again at supper," he left the hall accompanied by his court.

In the meantime there had been sadness and mourning in the apartments of the queen-mother. Judging from the contents of the letter to Bartja, Kassandane had made up her mind that Nitetis was faithless, and her own beloved son innocent. But in whom could she ever place confidence again, now that this girl, whom she had looked upon as the very embodiment of every womanly virtue, had proved reprobate and faithless—now that the noblest youths in the realm had proved perjurers?

Nitetis was more than dead for her; Bartja, Croesus, Darius, Gyges, Araspes, all so closely allied to her by relationship and friendship, as good as dead. And yet she durst not indulge her sorrow; she had to restrain the despairing outbursts of grief of her impetuous child.

Atossa behaved like one deprived of her senses when she heard of the sentences of death. The self-control which she had learnt from Nitetis gave way, and her old impetuosity burst forth again with double vehemence.

* £ 22,500.

Nitetis, her only friend,—Bartja, the brother whom she loved with her whole heart,—Darius, whom she felt now she not only looked up to as her deliverer, but loved with all the warmth of a first affection—Croesus to whom she clung like a father,—she was to lose every one she loved in one day.

She tore her dress and her hair, called Cambyses a monster, and every one who could possibly believe in the guilt of such people, infatuated or insane. Then her tears would burst out afresh, she would utter imploring supplications to the gods for mercy, and a few minutes later, begin conjuring her mother to take her to the hanging-gardens, that they might hear Nitetis' defence of her own conduct.

Kassandane tried to soothe the violent girl, and assured her every attempt to visit the hanging-gardens would be in vain. Then Atossa began to rage again, until at last her mother was forced to command silence, and as morning had already begun to dawn, sent her to her sleeping-room.

The girl obeyed, but instead of going to bed, seated herself at a tall window looking towards the hanging-gardens. Her eyes filled with tears again, as she thought of her friend—her sister—sitting in that palace alone, forsaken, banished, and looking forward to an ignominious death. Suddenly her tearful, weary eyes lighted up as if from some strong purpose, and instead of gazing into the distance, she fixed them on a black speck which flew towards her in a straight line from Nitetis' house, becoming larger and more distinct every moment; and finally settling on a cypress before her window. The sorrow vanished at once from her lovely face and with a deep sigh of relief she sprang up, exclaiming:

"Oh, there is the Homai,³³ the bird of good fortune! Now everything will turn out well."

It was the same bird of paradise which had brought so much comfort to Nitetis that now gave poor Atossa fresh confidence.

She bent forward to see whether any one was in the garden; and finding that she would be seen by no one but the old gardener, she jumped out, trembling like a fawn, plucked a few roses and cypress twigs and took them to the old man, who had been watching her performances with a doubtful shake of the head.

She stroked his cheeks coaxingly, put her flowers in his brown hand, and said: "Do you love me, Sabaces?"

"O, my mistress!" was the only answer the old man could utter, as he pressed the hem of her robe to his lips.

"I believe you, my old friend, and I will show you how I trust my faithful, old Sabaces. Hide these flowers carefully and go quickly to the king's palace. Say that you had to bring fruit for the table. My poor brother Bartja, and Darius, the son of the noble Hystaspes, are in prison, near the guard-house of the Immortals. You must manage that these flowers reach them, with a warm greeting from me, but mind, the message must be given with the flowers."

"But the guards will not allow me to see the prisoners."

"Take these rings, and slip them into their hands."

"I will do my best."

"I knew you loved me, my good Sabaces. Now make haste, and come back soon."

³³. The bird of paradise is called in Persian Homai. See Malcolm, *Persia*, p. 53.

The old man went off as fast as he could. Atossa looked thoughtfully after him, murmuring to herself: "Now they will both know, that I loved them to the last. The rose means, 'I love you,' and the evergreen cypress, 'true and steadfast.'" The old man came back in an hour; bringing her Bartja's favorite ring, and from Darius an Indian handkerchief dipped in blood.

Atossa ran to meet him; her eyes filled with tears as she took the tokens, and seating herself under a spreading plane-tree, she pressed them by turns to her lips, murmuring: "Bartja's ring means that he thinks of me; the blood-stained handkerchief that Darius is ready to shed his heart's blood for me."

Atossa smiled as she said this, and her tears, when she thought of her friends and their sad fate, were quieter, if not less bitter, than before.

A few hours later a messenger arrived from Croesus with news that the innocence of Bartja and his friends had been proved, and that Nitetis was, to all intents and purposes, cleared also.

Kassandane sent at once to the hanging-gardens, with a request that Nitetis would come to her apartments. Atossa, as unbridled in her joy as in her grief, ran to meet her friend's litter and flew from one of her attendants to the other crying: "They are all innocent; we shall not lose one of them—not one!"

When at last the litter appeared and her loved one, pale as death, within it, she burst into loud sobs, threw her arms round Nitetis as she descended, and covered her with kisses and caresses till she perceived that her friend's strength was failing, that her knees gave way,

and she required a stronger support than Atossa's girlish strength could give.

The Egyptian girl was carried insensible into the queen-mother's apartments. When she opened her eyes, her head—more like a marble piece of sculpture than a living head—was resting on the blind queen's lap, she felt Atossa's warm kisses on her forehead, and Cambyses, who had obeyed his mother's call, was standing at her side.

She gazed on this circle, including all she loved best, with anxious, perplexed looks, and at last, recognizing them one by one, passed her hand across her pale forehead as if to remove a veil, smiled at each, and closed her eyes once more. She fancied Isis had sent her a beautiful vision, and wished to hold it fast with all the powers of her mind.

Then Atossa called her by her name, impetuously and lovingly. She opened her eyes again, and again she saw those loving looks that she fancied had only been sent her in a dream. Yes, that was her own Atossa—this her motherly friend, and there stood, not the angry king, but the man she loved. And now his lips opened too, his stern, severe eyes rested on her so beseechingly, and he said: "O Nitetis, awake! you must not—you cannot possibly be guilty!" She moved her head gently with a look of cheerful denial and a happy smile stole across her features, like a breeze of early spring over fresh young roses.

"She is innocent! by Mithras, it is impossible that she can be guilty," cried the king again, and forgetful of the presence of others, he sank on his knees.

A Persian physician came up and rubbed her forehead with a sweet-scented oil, and Nebenchari

approached, muttering spells, felt her pulse, shook his head, and administered a potion from his portable medicine-chest. This restored her to perfect consciousness; she raised herself with difficulty into a sitting posture, returned the loving caresses of her two friends, and then turning to Cambyses, asked: "How could you believe such a thing of me, my King?" There was no reproach in her tone, but deep sadness, and Cambyses answered softly, "Forgive me."

Kassandane's blind eyes expressed her gratitude for this self-renunciation on the part of her son, and she said: "My daughter, I need your forgiveness too."

"But I never once doubted you," cried Atossa, proudly and joyfully kissing her friend's lips.

"Your letter to Bartja shook my faith in your innocence," added Kassandane.

"And yet it was all so simple and natural," answered Nitetis. "Here, my mother, take this letter from Egypt. Croesus will translate it for you. It will explain all. Perhaps I was imprudent. Ask your mother to tell you what you would wish to know, my King. Pray do not scorn my poor, ill sister. When an Egyptian girl once loves, she cannot forget. But I feel so frightened. The end must be near. The last hours have been so very, very terrible. That horrible man, Boges, read me the fearful sentence of death, and it was that which forced the poison into my hand. Ah, my heart!"

And with these words she fell back into the arms of Kassandane.

Nebenchari rushed forward, and gave her some more drops, exclaiming: "I thought so! She has taken poison and her life cannot be saved, though this antidote may possibly prolong it for a few days."

Cambyses stood by, pale and rigid, following the physician's slightest movements, and Atossa bathed her friend's forehead with her tears.

"Let some milk be brought," cried Nebenchari, "and my large medicine-chest; and let attendants be called to carry her away, for quiet is necessary, above all things."

Atossa hastened into the adjoining room; and Cambyses said to the physician, but without looking into his face: "Is there no hope?"

"The poison which she has taken results in certain death."

On hearing this the king pushed Nebenchari away from the sick girl, exclaiming: "She *shall* live. It is my will. Here, eunuch! summon all the physicians in Babylon—assemble the priests and Mobeds!³⁴ She is not to die; do you hear? she must live, I am the king, and I command it."

Nitētis opened her eyes as if endeavoring to obey her lord. Her face was turned towards the window, and the bird of paradise with the gold chain on its foot, was still there, perched on the cypress-tree. Her eyes fell first on her lover, who had sunk down at her side and was pressing his burning lips to her right hand. She murmured with a smile: "O, this great happiness!" Then she saw the bird, and pointed to it with her left hand, crying: "Look, look, there is the Phœnix, the bird of Ra!"

After saying this she closed her eyes and was soon seized by a violent attack of fever.

34. Mobeds are priests. They are not mentioned in the Avesta. Spiegel derives the name from *nmāna paiti*. Rogge prefers, with Tiele, Haug's derivation from *magu pat*, Lord of the Magi.

CHAPTER VII.

PREXASPES, the king's messenger, and one of the highest officials at court, had brought Gaumata, Mandane's lover, whose likeness to Bartja was really most wonderful, to Babylon, sick and wounded as he was. He was now awaiting his sentence in a dungeon, while Boges, the man who had led him into crime, was nowhere to be found, notwithstanding all the efforts of the police. His escape had been rendered possible by the trap-door in the hanging-gardens, and greatly assisted by the enormous crowds assembled in the streets. Immense treasures were found in his house. Chests of gold and jewels, which his position had enabled him to obtain with great ease, were restored to the royal treasury. Cambyses, however, would gladly have given ten times as much treasure to secure possession of the traitor.

To Phædime's despair the king ordered all the inhabitants of the harem, except his mother, Atossa and the dying Nitētis, to be removed to Susa, two days after the accused had been declared innocent. Several eunuchs of rank were deposed from their offices. The entire caste was to suffer for the sins of him who had escaped punishment.

Oropastes, who had already entered on his duties as regent of the kingdom, and had clearly proved his non-participation in the crime of which his brother had been proved guilty, bestowed the vacant places exclusively on the Magi. The demonstration made by the