CLEOPATRA:

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE FALL AND VENGEANCE OF HARMACHIS, THE ROYAL EGYPTIAN, AS SET FORTH BY HIM IN HIS OWN HAND.

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CHAPTER IX.

OF THE COMING OF CHARMION, AND OF THE WRATH OF SEPA.

That same night, while we sat at supper in the house, there came a knock upon the door. It was opened, and a woman passed in wrapped from head to foot in a large dark peplos or cloak in such fashion that her face could not be clearly seen.

My uncle rose, and as he did so the womax uttered the secret word.

"I am come, my father," she said in a sweet, clear voice, "though of a truth it was not easy to escape the revels at the palace. But I told the Queen that the sun and the riot in the streets had made me sick, and she let me go."

"It is well," he answered. "Unveil thyself; here thou art safe."

With a little sigh of weariness she unclasped the peplos and let it slip from her, giving to my sight the face and form of that beauteous girl who had stood to fan Cleopatra in the chariot. For she was very fair and pleasant to look upon, and her Grecian robes clung sweetly about her supple limbs and budding form. Her wayward hair, flowing in a hundred little curls, was bound in with a golden fillet, and on her feet were sandals. Her cheeks blushed like a flower, and her dark, soft eyes were downcast, as though with modesty, but smiles and dimples trembled about her lips.

My uncle frowned when his eyes fell upon her dress.

"Why comest thou in this garb, Charmion?" he asked sternly. "Is not the dress thy mothers wore good enough for thee? This is no time or place for woman's vanities. Thou are not here to conquer, but to obey."

"Nay, be not wroth, my father," she answered softly; "perchance thou knowest not that she whom I serve will have none of our Egyptian dress: it is out of fashion. To wear it would have been to court suspicion—also I came in haste." And as she spoke I saw that all the while she watched me covertly through the long lashes which fringed her modest eyes.

"Well, well," he said sharply, fixing his keen glance upon her face, "doubtless thou speakest truth, Charmion. Be ever mindful of thy oath, girl, and of the cause to which thou art sworn. Be not light minded, and I charge thee forget the beauty wherewith thou hast been cursed. For mark thou this, Charmion: fail us but one jot, and vengeance shall fall on thee—the vengeance of man and the vengeance of the Gods! To this service," he continued, lashing himself to anger as he went on till his great voice rang in the narrow room, "hast thou been bred; to this end hast thou been instructed and placed where thou art to gain the ear of that wicked wanton whom thou seemest to serve. See thou forget it not; see that the luxury of yonder court doth not corrupt thy purity and divert thy aim, Charmion," and his eyes flashed and his small form seemed to grow till it attained to dignity—nay, almost to grandeur. "Charmion," he said, advancing toward her with outstretched finger, "I say to thee that at times I do not trust thee. But two nights gone I dreamed I saw thee standing in the desert. I saw thee laugh and lift thy hand to heaven, and therefrom fell a rain of blood; then the sky sank down on the land of Khem and covered it. Whence came the dream, girl, and what is its meaning? Naught have I against thee as yet; but hearken! On the moment that I have, though thou art of my kin, as I have loved thee—on that moment, I say, will I doom those delicate limbs, which thou lovest so much to show, to the kite and to the jackal, and the soul within thee to all the tortures of the Gods! Unburied shalt thou lie, and bodiless and accursed shalt thou wander in Amenti!—ay, forever and ever!"

He paused, for his sudden burst of passion had spent itself. But by it, more clearly than before, I saw how deep a heart had this man beneath the cloak of his merriness and simplicity of mein, and how fiercely the mind within him was set upon his aim. As for the girl, she shrank from him terrified, and, placing her hands before her face, began to weep.

"Nay, speak not so, my father," she said, between her sobs; "for what have I done? Naught know I of the evil wandering of thy dreams. I am no soothsayer that I should read dreams. Have I not carried out all things according to thy desire? Have I not been ever mindful of that dread oath?"—and she trembled. "Have I not played the spy and told thee all? Have I not won the heart of the Queen so that she loves me as a sister, refusing me nothing, aye, and the hearts of those about her? Why dost thou affright me thus with thy words and threats?" and she wept afresh, looking even more beautiful in her sorrow than she was before.

"Enough, enough," he answered; "what I have said I have said. Be warned, and affront our sight no more with this wanton dress. Thinkest thou that we would feed our eyes upon those rounded arms—we whose stake is Egypt and who are dedicated to the gods of Egypt? Girl, behold thy cousin and thy King!"

She ceased weeping, wiping her eyes with her chiton, and I saw that they seemed but the softer for her tears.

"Methinks, most Royal Harmachis and beloved cousin," she said, as she bent before me, "that we are already made acquainted."

"Yea, cousin," I answered, not without shamefacedness, for never before had I spoken to so fair a maid; "thou wert in the chariot with Cleopatra this day when I struggled with the Nubian."

"Assuredly," she said, with a smile and a sudden lighting of the eyes, "it was a gallant fight and gallantly didst thou overthow that black brute. I saw the fray, and, though I knew thee not, greatly did I fear for one so brave. But I paid him for my fright, for it was I who put it into the mind of Cleopatra to bid the guards strike off his hand—now, knowing who thou art, I would I had said his head." And she looked up, shooting a glance at me, and then smiled.

"Enough," put in my Uncle Sepa, "the time draws on. Tell thou thy mission, Charmion, and be gone."

Thereon her manner changed; she folded her hands meekly before her and spake:

"Let Pharaoh hearken unto his handmaiden. I am the daughter of Pharaoh's uncle, the brother of his father, who is now long dead, and therefore in my veins also flows the Royal blood of Egypt. Also I am of the ancient faith, and hate these Greeks, and to see thee set upon the throne has been my dearest hope now for many years. To this end have I, Charmion, become serving-woman to Cleopatra, that I might cut a notch wherein thou couldst set thy foot when the hour came to climb the throne. And behold! O Pharaoh, the notch is cut.

"This, then, is our plot, Royal cousin. Thou must gain an entrance to the Household and learn its ways and secrets, and, so far as may be, suborn the eunuchs and captains, some of whom I have already tempted. This done, and all things being prepared without, thou must slay Cleopatra, and, aided by me, with those whom I control, in the confusion that shall ensue throw wide the gates, and, admitting those of our party who are in waiting, put such of the troops as remain faithful to the sword and seize the Bruchium. Which being done, thou shalt within two days hold this fickle Alexandria. At the same time, those who are sworn to thee in every city in Egypt shall rise in arms, and within ten days from the death of Cleopatra thou shalt be Pharaoh indeed. This is the counsel which has been taken, and thou seest, Royal cousin, that, though our uncle yonder doth think so ill of me, I have learned my part—aye, and played it."

"I hear thee, cousin," I answered, marvelling that so young a woman, for she had but twenty years, could weave so bold a plot, for in its origin the scheme was hers. But in those days I little knew Charmion. "Go on; how then shall *I* gain entrance to the palace of Cleopatra?"

"Nay, cousin, as things are it is easy. Thus—Cleopatra loveth to look upon a man, and—give me pardon!—thy face and form are fair. To-day she noted them, and twice she said she would she had asked where that astrologer might be found, for she held that an astrologer who could well nigh slay a Nubian gladiator with his bare hands, must indeed be a master of the stars. I answered her that I would cause inquiry to be made. So hearken, Royal Harmachis—at midday Cleopatra sleeps in her inner hall that looks over the gardens to the harbor. At that hour, then, will I meet thee at the gates of the Palace, whither come thou boldly asking for the Lady Charmion. I will make appointment for thee with Cleopatra, so that she shall see thee alone when she wakes, and the rest shall be for thee, Harmachis. For much she loves to play with the mysteries of magic, and whole nights have I known her stand watching the stars and making a pretence to read them. And but lately hath she sent away Dioscorides the Physician, in that, poor fool! he ventured on a prophecy from the conjunction of the stars that Cassius would defeat Mark Antony. Thereon Cleopatra despatched to the General Allienus, bidding him add the legions she had sent to Syria to help Antony to the army of Cassius, whose victory, forsooth, was—according to Dioscorides—written on the stars. But, as it chanced, Antony beat Cassius first and Brutus afterward, and so Dioscorides hath departed, and now he lectures for his bread on herbs in the museum, and hates the name of stars. But his place is empty, and thou shalt fill it, and then we will work in secret and in the shadow of the sceptre. Aye, we will work like the worm at the heart of a fruit, till the time of plucking comes, and on thy dagger's touch, Royal cousin, the fabric of this Grecian throne crumbles to nothingness, and the worm that rotted it bursts his servile covering, and, in the sight of empires, spreads his royal wings o'er Egypt."

I gazed at this strange girl once more astonished, and saw that her face was lit up with such a light as I had never seen upon the face of woman.

"Ah," broke in my uncle, who was watching her, "ah, I love to see thee so, girl. There is the Charmion that I knew and I bred up—not the Court girl, whom I loved not, draped in silks of Cos and fragrant with essences. Let thy heart harden in this mould—aye, stamp it with the fervid zeal of patriot faith, and thy reward shall find thee. And now cover up that shameless dress of thine and leave us, for it grows late. To-morrow shall Harmachis come, as thou hast said. And so, farewell."

Charmion bowed her head, and, turning, wrapped her dark-hued peplos round her. Then, taking my hand, she touched it with her lips and without any further word she went.

"A strange woman!" said Sepa, when she had gone; "a most strange woman and an uncertain!"

"Methought, my uncle," I said, "that thou wast somewhat harsh with her."

"Aye," he answered, "but not without a cause. Look thou, Hamachis; beware of this Charmion. She is too wayward, and, I fear me, may be led away. In truth, she is a very woman; and, like a restive horse, will take the path that pleases her. Brain she has, and fire; and she loves our cause; but I pray that the cause come not face to face with her desires, for what her heart is set on that will she do—at any cost will she do it. Therefore did I frighten her now, while I may; for who can know but that she will pass beyond my power? I tell thee, that in this one girl's hand lie all our lives; and if she play us false, what then? Alas! and alas! that we must use such tools as these! But it was needful: there was no other way; and yet I misdoubt me. I pray that it may be well; and still, at times, I fear my niece Charmion—she is too fair, and the blood of youth runs too warm in those blue veins of hers. Oh, woe to the cause that builds its strength upon a woman's faith; for women, I say, are faithful only where they love, and when they love their faithlessness becomes their faith. They are not fixed as men are fixed; they rise more high and sink more low—they are strong and changeful as the sea. I say to thee, Harmachis, beware of this Charmion: for, like the ocean, she may float thee home; or, like the ocean, she may wreck thee, and, with thee, all the hope of Egypt!"

CHAPTER X.

OF THE COMING OF HARMACHIS TO THE PALACE; HOW HE DREW PAULUS THROUGH THE GATES; CLEOPATRA SLEEPING; AND THE MAGIC WHICH HARMACHIS SHOWED UNTO HER.

Thus it came to pass that on the next day I arrayed myself after the fashion of a magician or astrologer, in a long and flowing robe. I placed on my head a cap, about which were broidered images of the stars, and in my belt a scribe's palette and a roll of papyrus written o'er with mystic spells and signs. In my hand I held a wand of ebony, tipped with ivory, such as is used by priests and masters of magic. Among these, indeed, I held high rank, filling by knowledge of their secrets which I had learned at On what I lacked in that skill of hand which comes from use. And so, with no small shame, for I love not such play, and hold this common magic in contempt, I set forth through the Bruchium to the palace on the Lochias, being guided on my way by my uncle Sepa. At length, passing up the avenue of Sphinxes, we came to the great marble gateway and the gates of bronze within which is the guard house. And here my uncle left me, breathing many prayers for my safety and success. But I advanced with an easy air to the gate, where I was roughly challenged by the Gallic sentries, and asked of my name, following, and business. I gave my name, Harmachis, the astrologer, saying that my business was with the Lady Charmion, the Queen's lady. Thereon the man made as though to let me pass in, when a Captain of the Guard, a Roman named Paulus, came forward and forbade it. Now, this Paulus was a large-limbed man, with a woman's face, and a hand that shook from wine-bibbing. Nevertheless, he knew me again.

"Why," he cried, in the Latin tongue, to one who came with him, "this is the fellow who wrestled yesterday with the Nubian gladiator, that same who now howls for his lost hand underneath my window. Curses on the black brute! I had a bet upon him for the games! I have backed him against Caius, and now he'll never fight again, and I must lose my money, all through this astrologer. What is it thou sayest—thou hast business with the Lady Charmion? Nay, then, that settles it. I will not let thee through. Fellow, I worship the Lady Charmion—ay, we all worship her, though she gives us more slaps than sighs. And dost thou think that we will suffer an astrologer with such eyes and such a chest as thine to cut in the game? By Bacchus, no! She must come out to keep the tryst, for in thou shalt not go."

"Sir," I said humbly and yet with dignity, "I pray that a message may be sent to the Lady Charmion, for my business will not brook delay."

"Yo Gods!" answered the fool, "whom have we hear that he cannot wait? A Caesar in disguise? Nay, be off—be off! if thou wouldst not learn how a spear prick feels behind."

"Nay," put in the other officer, "he is an astrologer; make him prophesy—make him play tricks."

"Ay," cried the others who had sauntered up, "let him show his art. If he is a magician he can pass the gates, Paulus or no Paulus."

"Right willingly, good sirs!" I answered; for I saw no other means of entering. "Wilt thou, my young and noble Lord"—and I addressed him who was with Paulus—"suffer that I look thee in the eyes; perchance I may read what is written there?"

"Right," said the youth; "but I wish that the Lady Charmion was the sorceress. I would stare her out of countenance, I warrant me."

I took him by the hand and gazed deep into his eyes. "I see," I said, "a field of battle at with, and about it bodies stretched—among them is *thy* body, and a hyena tears at its throat. Most noble Sir! thou shalt die by sword thrusts within a year."

"By Bacchus!" said the youth, turning white to the gills, "thou art an ill-omened sorcerer!" And he slunk off—shortly afterward, as it chanced, to meet this very fate. For he was sent on service and slain in Cyprus.

"Now for thee, great Captain!" I said, speaking to Paulus. "I will show thee how I will pass those gates without thy leave—ay, and draw thee through them after me. Be pleased to fix thy princely gaze upon the point of this wand in my hand."

Being urged thereto by his comrades, this he did, not willingly; and I let him gaze till I saw his eyes grow empty as an owl's eyes in the sun. Then suddenly I withdrew the wand, and, shifting my own countenance into the place of it, I seized him with my will and stare, and, beginning to turn round and round, drew him after me, his face, fierce and drawn, fixed, as it were, almost to my own. Then I slowly moved backward till I had passed the gates, still drawing him after me, and having passed, I jerked my head away. But he felled to the ground, to rise wiping his brow and looking exceeding foolish.

"Art thou content, most noble Captain?" I said. "Thou seest we have passed the gates. Would any other noble sir here present wish that I should show more of my skill?"

"By Taranis, Lord of Thunder, and all the Gods of Olympus thrown in, no!" growled an old Centurion, a Gaul named Brennus. "I like thee not, I say. The man who could drag our Paulus through those gates by the eye, as it were, is not a man to play with. Paulus, too, who always goes the way you don't want him—backward, like an ass—Paulus! Why, sirrah, thou must have a woman in one eye and a wine cup in the other to draw our Paulus thus."

At this moment the talk was broken, for, coming down the marble walk, followed by an armed slave, was Charmion herself. She walked calm and careless, her hands folded behind her and her eyes gazing at nothingness, as it were. But it was when Charmion thus looked upon nothing that she saw most. And as she came the officers and men of the guard made way for her bowing, for, as I learned afterward, this girl, next to Cleopatra's self, wielded more power than any one about the palace.

"What is this tumult, Brennus?" she said, speaking to the Centurion, and making as if she saw me not; "knowest thou not that the Queen sleeps at this hour, and if she be awakened it is thou who must answer for it, and that dearly?"

"Nay, Lady, said the Centurion, humbly; "but it is thus. We have here"—and he jerked his thumb toward me—"a magician of the most pestilent—um, I crave his pardon, of the very best sort, for he hath but just now, only by placing his eyes close to the nose of the worthy Captain Paulus, dragged him, the said Paulus, through the gates that Paulus swore the magician should not pass. By the same token, Lady, the magician says he has business with you—which grieves me for your sake."

Charmion turned and looked at me carelessly. "Ay, I remember," she said; "and so he hath—at least the Queen would see his tricks; but if he can do none better than cause a sot"—here she cast a glance of scorn at the wondering Paulus—"to follow his nose through the gates he guards, he had better go whence he came. Follow me, Sir Magician; and for thee, Brennus, I say, keep thy riotous crew more quiet. For thee, most honorable Paulus, get thee sober, and next time I am asked for at the gates give him who asks a hearing." And with a queenly nod of her small head she turned and led the way, followed at a distance by myself and the armed slave.

We passed up the marble walk which runs through the garden grounds, and is set on either side with marble statues, for the most part of heathen Gods and Goddesses, whereat these Lagidæ were not ashamed to delile their royal dwellings. At length we came to a portico with fluted columns very beautiful to see, but of the Grecian style of art, where we found more guards, who made way for the lady Charmion. Crossing the portico, we reached an outer marble hall wherein a fountain softly plashed, and thence by a low doorway a second chamber, known as the Alabaster Hall, most beautiful to see. Its roof was upheld by light columns of black marble, but all its walls were panelled with alabaster, whereon were graven Grecian legends. Its floor was of rich and many-hued mosaic that told the tale of the passion of Psyche for the Grecian God of Love, and about it were set chairs of ivory and gold. At the doorway of this chamber Charmion bade the armed slave stay, so that we passed in alone, for the place was empty save for two eunuchs who stood with drawn swords before the curtains at the further end.

"I am vexed, my Lord," she said, speaking very low and shyly, "that thou shouldst have met with such affronts at the gate; but the guard there served a double watch, and I had given my commands to the officer of the company that should have relieved it. They are ever insolent, these Roman officers, who, though they seem to serve, know well that Egypt is their plaything. But it is not altogether ill, for these rough soldiers are superstitious, and hereafter they will fear thee. Now bide thou here while I pass into Cleopatra's chamber, where she sleeps. But now have I sung her to sleep, and if she be awakened I will call thee, for she waits thy coming." And without more words she glided from my side.

In a little time she returned, and coming to my side spoke:

"Wouldst see the fairest woman in all the world asleep?" she whispered. "If so, follow thou me. Nay, fear not; when she awakes she will but laugh, for she bade me be sure to bring thee instantly, whether she slept or woke. See, I have her signet."

So we passed up the beautiful chamber till we came to where the eunuchs stood with drawn swords, and these would have barred my entry; but Charmion frowned, and drawing the signet from her bosom held it before their eyes. Thereon, having examined the writing that is on the ring, they bowed, dropping their sword points, and we passed through the heavy curtains, broidered o'er with gold, into the resting place of Cleopatra. Beautiful it was beyond imagining—beautiful with many colored marbles, with gold and ivory, gems and flowers—all art can furnish and all luxury can dream of were here. Here were pictures so real that birds might have pecked the painted fruits; here were statues of woman's loveliness frozen into stone; here were draperies fine as softest silk, but woven of a web of gold; here were couches and carpets such as I never saw. Here the air was sweet with perfume, while through the open window places came the far murmur of the sea. And at the further end of the chamber, on a couch of gleaming silk and sheltered by a net of finest gauze, Cleopatra lay asleep. There she lay—the fairest thing that man ever saw—fairer than a dream, and all about her flowed the web of her dark hair. One white, rounded arm made a pillow for her head and one hung downward to the ground. Her rich lips were parted in a smile, showing the ivory lines of teeth; and her rosy limbs were draped in so thin a robe of the silk of Cos, held about her by a jewelled girdle, that the white gleam of flesh shone through it. I stood astonished, and though my thoughts had little bent that way, the sight of all her beauty struck me like a blow, so that for a moment I lost myself as it were in the vision of its power, and at heart was grieved that I must slay so fair a thing.

Turning suddenly from the sight, I found Charmion watching me with her quick eyes—watching as though she would search my heart. And, indeed, something of my thought must have been written on my face in a language that she could read, for she whispered in my ear:

"Aye, it is pity, is it not? Harmachis being after all a man, methinks thou wilt need all thy ghostly strength to nerve thee to the deed!"

I frowned, but before I could frame an answer she touched me lightly on the arm and pointed to the Queen. A change had come upon her; her hands were clenched, and about her face, all rosy with the hue of sleep, gathered a cloud of fear. Her breath came quick, she raised her arms as though to ward away a blow, and then with a stifled moan sat up and opened the windows of her eyes. Dark they were, dark as night; but when the light found them they grew blue even as the sky grows blue before the blushing of the dawn.

"Cæsarion?" she said; "where is Cæsarion? Was it then a dream? I dreamed that Julius—Julius who is dead—came to me, his bloody toga wrapped about his face, and, having thrown his arms about his child, led him away. Then I dreamed I died—died in blood and agony; and one I might not see mocked me as I died! Ah! who is that man?"

"Peace, Madam! peace!" said Charmion. "'Tis but the magician Harmachis, whom thou didst bid me bring to thee at this hour."

"Ah! the magician—that Harmachis who overthrew the giant? I remember me now. He is welcome. Tell me, Sir Magician, can thy magic mirror forth an answer to this dream? Nay, how strange a thing is sleep, that wrapping the mind in a web of darkness, straightly compels it to its will. Whence, then, come those images of fear rising on the horizon of the soul like some untimely moon upon the twilight sky? Who grants them power to stalk so lifelike from Memory's thronging halls and, pointing to their wounds, thus confront the Present with the Past? Are they, then, messengers? Doth the semi-death of sleep give them a foothold in our brains, and thus upknit the severed thread of human kinship? That was Cæsar's self, I tell thee, who but now stood at my side and murmured through his muffled robe warning words whereof the memory is lost to me. Read me this riddle, thou Egyptian Sphinx, and I'll show thee a rosier path to fortune than all thy stars can point. Thou hast brought the omen, solve thou its problem."

"In a good hour do I come, most mighty Queen," I made answer, "for I have some skill in the mysteries of sleep, which is, as thou hast rightly guessed, a stair whereby those who are gathered to Osiris may from time to time enter at the gateways of our living sense, and, by signs and words that can be read of mortals thereto duly learned, repeat the echoes of that Hall of Truth which is their habitation. Thereby also the messengers of the guardian Gods may descend in many shapes upon the half-loosed spirit of their choice. For, O Queen, to those who hold the key, the madness of our dreams can show a clearer purpose and speak more certainly than all the acted wisdom of our waking life, which is a dream, indeed. Thou didst see great Cæsar in his bloody robe, and he threw his arms about the Prince Cæsarion and led him hence. Hearken now to the secret of thy vision. 'Twas Cæsar's self thou sawest coming to thy side from Amenti in such a guise as might not be mistaken. When he embraced the child Cæsarion he did it for a sign that to him, and him alone, had passed his greatness and his love. When he seemed to lead him hence he led him forth from Egypt to be crowned in the Capitol, crowned the Emperor of Rome and Lord of all the lands. For the rest, I know it not. It is hid from me."

Thus, then, I read the vision, though to my sense it had a more evil meaning. But it is not well to prophesy evil unto Kings.

Meanwhile Cleopatra had risen, and, having thrown back the gnat gauze, was seated upon the edge of her couch, her eyes fixed upon my face, the while her fingers played with her girdle's jewelled ends.

"Of a truth," she cried, "thou art the best of all magicians, for thou readest my heart, and out of the rough shell of evil omen drawest the hidden sweet!"

"Ay, O Queen," said Charmion, who stood by with downcast eyes, and methought there was bitter meaning in her soft notes; "may no rougher words ever affront thy ears, and no evil presage less closely tread upon its happy sense."

Cleopatra placed her hands behind her head, and leaning back looked with half-shut eyes.

"Come, show us of thy magic, Egyptian," she said. "It is yet hot abroad, and I am a-weary of those Hebrew Ambassadors and their talk of Herod and Jerusalem. I hate that Herod, as he shall find—and I will have none of the Ambassadors to-day, though a little do I yearn to try my Hebrew on them. What canst thou do? Hast thou no new trick? By Serapis! if thou canst conjure as well as thou canst prophesy, thou shalt have a place at Court, with pay and perquisites to boot, and thy lofty soul doth not scorn perquisites."

"Nay," I answered, "all tricks are old; but there are some forms of magic to be rarely used, and with discretion, that may, perchance, be new to thee, O Queen! Art thou afraid to venture on the charm?"

"Naught I fear; go on and do thy worst. Come, Charmion, and sit thou by me. But, stay, where are all the girls?—Iris and Merir?—they, too, love magic."

"Not so," I said; "the charms work ill before so many. Now behold!" and, gazing at the twain, I cast down my wand upon the marble and murmured a spell. For a moment it was still, and then, as I muttered, the rod slowly began to writhe. It bent itself, it stood on end, and of its own motion moved. Next it put on scales, and behold it was a serpent that crawled and fiercely hissed.

"Fie on thee!" cried Cleopatra, clapping her hands; "callest thou that magic? Why, 'tis an old trick that any wayside conjurer can do. I have seen it a score of times."

"Wait, O Queen," I answered, "thou hast not seen all." And even as I spoke, the serpent seemed to break in fragments, and from each fragment grew a new serpent. And these, too, broke in fragments and bred others, till in a little space the place, to their glamored sight, was a seething sea of snakes, that crawled, hissed, and knotted themselves in knots. Then I made a sign, and the serpents gathered themselves about me, and seemed slowly to twine themselves about my body and my limbs, till, save my face, I was wreathed thick with hissing snakes.

"Oh, horrible! horrible!" cried Charmion, hiding her countenance in the skirt of the Queen's garment.

"Nay, enough! Magician, enough!" said the Queen; "thy magic overwhelms us."

I waved my snake-wrapped arms, and all was gone. There at my feet lay the black wand tipped with ivory, and naught beside.

The two women looked one upon another and gasped with wonder. But I took up the wand and stood with folded arms before them.

"Is the Queen content with my poor art?" I asked most humbly.

"Aye, that am I, Egyptian; never did I see its like! Great astronomer art thou from this day forward, with right of access to the Queen's presence. Hast thou more of such magic at thy call?"

"Yea, Royal Egypt; suffer that the chamber be a little darkened and I will show thee one more thing."

"Half am I afeard," she answered; "nevertheless do thou, Charmion, even as this Harmachis says."

So the curtains were drawn and the chamber made as though the twilight were at hand. I came forward and stood me beside Cleopatra.

"Gaze thou there!" I said sternly, pointing with the wand to the empty space where I had been, "and thou shalt behold that which is in thy mind."

Then for a little space was silence, while the two women gazed fixedly and half fearful at the spot.

And as they gazed a cloud gathered before them. Very slowly it took shape and form, and the form it took was the form of a man, though as yet he was but vaguely mapped upon the twilight, and seemed now to grow and now to melt away.

Then I cried, with a loud voice:

"Shade, I conjure thee, *appear!*"

And even as I cried the Thing, perfect in every part, leapt into form before us, sudden as the flash of fire. His shape was the shape of Royal Cæsar, the toga thrown about his face and on his form a vestment bloody from a hundred wounds. An instant so he stood, then I waved my wand and he was gone.

I turned me to the two women on the couch, and then I saw Cleopatra's lovely face all stretched in error. Her lips were ashy white, her eyes stared wide, and the flesh was shaking on her bones.

"Man!" she gasped; "man! what art thou who canst bring the dead before our eyes?"

"I am the Queen's astronomer, magician, servant—what the Queen wills," I answered, laughing. "Was this the form that was on the Queen's mind?"

She made no answer, but, rising, left the chamber by another door.

Then Charmion rose and took her hands from her face, for she, too, had been stricken with dread.

"How dost thou these things, Royal Harmachis?" she said. "Of a truth I fear thee."

"Be not afraid," I answered. "Perchance thou didst see naught but what was in my mind. All things are shadows. How canst thou then know their nature, or what is and what only seems to be? But how goes it? Remember thou, this sport is played to an end."

"It goes well," she said. "By to-morrow's dawn these tales will have gone round, and thou wilt be more feared than any man in Alexandria. Follow me, I pray thee."

(To be Continued.)

THE AWFUL IDLENESS AT SING SING.

Our State Prison System as Seen by an English Inspector of Prisons.

Major Arthur Griffiths, one of her Majesty's Inspectors of Prisons in England, is now in this city on a brief visit, partly for pleasure and partly for business. So far as time would permit, he has been looking at our prison system, and he kindly consented to state for THE SUN his first impressions. Major Griffiths said:

"One of the objects of my visit was to inspect your prison institutions. As I am so closely identified with prison administration in my own country, and, having been a rather voluminous writer on prison subjects, it was but natural that I should see all I could in that direction. I have visited most of the European prisons, and my life for twenty years has been more or less identified with prison matters.

"I spent some time in Sing Sing a few days ago, and thoroughly investigated the state of affairs there. If you ask me what I think of the present system, or, more exactly, absence of system, I must answer that I was perfectly aghast at the state of affairs, which, as I am informed, has arisen out of the Yates bill. It was to me one of the most monstrous and, I may say, painful sights, speaking purely as a prison official, to see that enormous mass of prison labor standing absolutely idle.

"The very first principles of prison management centre in the adequate and continuous employment of the criminals whose liberties have been forfeited through their offences against the laws of the land. At Sing Sing I saw over 1,600 prisoners eating the bread of idleness, making no return to the honest, hard-working taxpayers whom they have already heavily mulcted by their depredations, and who will now have to put their hands deep in their pockets to pay the charges of this vast prison.

"I am told that the Yates bill was introduced and passed in obedience to the demands of labor committees. It is not easy, nor would it be seemly for me as a stranger, to pass any opinion upon your political institutions. I can only speak of what I saw. I only saw the idleness. Serious consequences of that idleness will soon be sharply felt in the expense, which must be entailed upon the public purse. But what struck me as especially painful was the manifest injury that was being worked upon these prison inmates themselves.

"From what I had read of the American prison system I had always understood that it was the proud boast of your prison administration, especially yours in New York State, that the labor available from the inmates of your prisons was directed into such useful channels that the individual prisoner was enormously benefited; that the man himself learned some handicraft, from which, on his release, he might earn an honest livelihood; that his unremitting daily toil gave him habits of industry—all first installments of a return to honest ways—and, humanely speaking, was distinctly improved.

"What will be the consequence now? The idle thief who did nothing but thieve before will return to thieving again, having learned nothing during his enforced absence from society. These are sufficient reasons to condemn this deplorable change in your system. There are others which seem convincing to my mind. It is simply impossible to keep prisoners incarcerated in their cells for any length of time, whether employed or unemployed. If you have no work for your prisoners outside they must, perforce, remain in their cells. This must have an inevitably deteriorating effect on their moral and sanitary conditions.

"After a patient trial in England the rule was absolutely arrived at that no prisoner could bear to be continuously in his cell from day to day for more than a year. A physical and mental break down invariably showed itself at the end of that time. But, with Mr. Yates's law unrepealed, with men's sentences ranging from three years upward, you are preparing to keep men indefinitely locked up. It is easy to perceive that you will soon arrive at a most disastrous—possibly a fatal climax—unless the law is speedily repealed.

"The Sing Sing prison is not designed upon modern lines. The cells are satisfactory in themselves, but they date back to a time when prison construction was not as well understood as it is at present. The dimensions fall far short of the accepted size on our side. Your methods of ventilation also appear to me to be old fashioned. I must say, as an expert, that if the Sing Sing prison cell was brought before me in the course of my official duty for a certificate as to its fitness for occupancy, I should unhesitatingly condemn it as unfit for a longer occupancy than eight or ten hours in any one day."

"Have you, in England, been met with a similar demand from the trades unions to that which resulted in the Yates bill?"

"Not exactly from trades unions, but from influential persons representing interests of the labor market. On more than one occasion the question has been raised akin to that which led to the Yates bill. Protest has been made in England against the application of prison labor to the manufacture of goods which might unfairly compete with free labor.

"This has been especially the case with reference to the manufacture of cocoanut mats and matting, at one time a very large prison industry. The complaints made were, in a measure justified, and it was plain that our lines of labor were directed too exclusively upon this one class of goods. In some parts of England, under the old administration of the local authorities, machinery and other appliances were allowed with questionable liberality, and free labor was sometimes undersold. This was a very plausible and proper complaint, and it was met by us as soon as the State replaced the local authorities in the management, which happened about ten years ago.

"Steps were taken to reduce immediately the output of mats and to divert the use of machinery into other channels. This brings me naturally to what I would suggest as a likely remedy for the existing state of affairs in the New York prisons.

"There is no doubt some excuse to be made for the champions of the trades unions, although probably close investigation would show that the actual competition with free labor is exceedingly small. Still, such competition, if backed up by machinery and the control of the capital naturally available to an unlimited extent where State funds are used, might press hardly on individuals. With a view to avoid the semblance of complaint, our prison labor, with all its appliances, has been turned mainly into channels of manufacture for State purposes. For instance, in the Wakefield prison, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, one of our largest and at one time most recently manufacturing prisons, the looms which were formerly employed with steam power for the exclusive manufacture of mats and matting are now applied to the making of blankets, clothing, and the materials used in our own prisons.

"This change alone reduced the output of mats about two-thirds, and silenced the objections of the dissatisfied mat manufacturers.

"Surely, with the extraordinary ingenuity seen in this country in every stage where machinery is dealt with, it should be easy to devise similar methods for the employment of your prisoners at Sing Sing, Auburn, and Dannemora to an unlimited extent for the manufacture of various articles for prison use.

"For example, the clothing worn by the prisoners might be entirely manufactured by themselves. Their shoes and underclothing could be made in the same way. Again, it might be found feasible to employ prisoners in gang labor, as is done in England. At Sing Sing and other points it is possible to introduce the methods of our great dockyard establishments of England. It may be objected that your prisons are already planted in sites where such enterprises are neither wanted nor feasible. To this I answer that the permanency of a prison in one spot is no longer indispensable—we move our corpses about as we move as you do a house. The prisoners, so to speak, become snails and carry their houses on their backs. There has been a change, a perfect revolution, indeed, in our ideas as to what a prison should be. A very slight and simple structure would replace the solid massive buildings, the high walls and heavy bars of past times. A one-storied barrack of cells, built of corrugated iron on a wooden framework will serve to house and safely keep the principal consideration, of course, any number of prisoners for any length of time. We have tried this in England with manifest success, planting down these light and temporary prisons just where they are wanted, in the near neighborhood of the new works to be undertaken. The barrack is only used for sleeping and meals. All daylight the prisoners spend outside. When the works are completed the prison and its inmates are moved on elsewhere. There has been no inconvenience or danger from this method of holding the prisoners, and it is obvious, as a fact, that, if effectively guarded under the constant watchful supervision of keepers than by bolts and bars. This principle once accented, it is easy to perceive the vast application possible. Such an employment of labor would silence all objections, for it would be the business of the State authorities to devote the energies of the prisoners to public works that would not be otherwise undertaken. This is what our prison administrators can fairly claim to have accomplished in England.

"An enormous amount of valuable work—work that would have continued undone, unattempted even—has been turned out in this way by our criminals within the past twenty years. The great breakwater at Portland is entirely the work of convict hands. Two thousand locks are used in the naval yards at Chatham and Portsmouth were the product of utilized convict labor. These are similar works to those which I am informed were carried out by the New York Commissioners of Charities and Correction in the construction of the Blackwell's Island institutions.

"All the prison buildings in England have in the same way been built by convict labor. It was my good fortune to start a prison at Wormwood Scrubs, in the neighborhood of London, about ten years ago, with nine special convicts. In four years we had built three large blocks of 350 cells each, and the population had increased from nine to between 700 and 800. Every single item of work had been done by the convicts themselves. They dug the clay and made the bricks in the enclosure. They raised the building from its foundation, doing the masonry and carpentry, the iron work, the thousand and one intricate fittings and arrangements of the prison interior. Especial interest attaches to the Wormwood Scrubs building because it was done in an identically similar way to that practised at Sing Sing, if I can believe your historical records. It appears that in 1822 a celebrated man, Elam Lynds, camped upon the present site of Sing Sing, and then commenced the erection of the building which stands to-day. It is humiliating to think that on that very site where Lynds laid the foundation of prison reform, there should be now 1,600 able-bodied but useless idlers, all through the unfortunate action of what I may perhaps be permitted to call hastily passed and ill-digested law.

"I cannot believe that the common sense of the people will not soon apply the proper remedy. If abstract arguments are needed, there are others which support those of expediency. The fact that a man is locked up in jail can hardly be said to deprive him of his right and duty as a citizen to labor. It is surely the overlasting right of every man to work, not only for himself, but in order that he shall not be kept at the expense of the taxpayer.

"This thought is the germ of the principle of restitution which has been urged as the very essence of criminal jurisprudence. If a man has stolen from another, does that give the State the right to take all his labor or to keep him in idleness while the man whom he has robbed gets no compensation? At least one step in the line of restitution is to make the criminal restore to the State the expense of his keeping. To maintain him in idleness is unjust and demoralizing. The community is entitled to so much of his services as will prevent his being a burden on the public."

"How did the discipline of Sing Sing strike you?" inquired the reporter.

"The discipline, as far as it goes, is effective. It is, however, much easier than ours. The food is apparently more ample. The prisoner has various privileges that we never allow, such as frequent intercourse with friends, newspapers, and a weekly ration of tobacco.

"The English prison tobacco is called 'snout,' and when it is smuggled in it is purchased with food, which is the prison circulating medium. There are all sorts of subterfuges and schemes among the prisoners to get tobacco. There is much temptation to bribery. The punishment is severe. The current rate of exchange is 'an ounce loaf for a chaw.'

"I was surprised at Sing Sing to see the familiarity of keepers with convicts, the conversations of convicts with keepers and visitors, and the monthly hamper of delicacies which the orderly convict is permitted to receive, and the facilities for communication with friends. Few of these privileges exist in the English prisons. I noticed also a class of entertaining fiction in the library which is not seen in our prison libraries. But altogether Sing Sing struck me as a prison maintained on humane and intelligent lines. In the officials, high and low, from Warden Brush, who is evidently a man of broad experience and deep and earnest conviction, to the most junior keeper, I noticed a loyal determination to do their duty and carry out the rules as laid down by their official superiors. It is possible, nay, probable, that they do not like the present do-nothing system, but naturally they did not speak of it to me; they are good servants of the State, trained to carry out the orders received without comment or complaint. I have learned the lesson myself as a soldier and State official, but do not feel the