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Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Dostoyevsky Smith Willis  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Henry Willis  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Gogol Busch  
Darwin Zola Lawrence Twain Plato Scott  
Potter Freud Jowett Stevenson Dickens Harte  
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**The Weavers: a tale of England  
and Egypt of fifty years ago -  
Volume 4**

Gilbert Parker

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## CHAPTER XXVIII

### NAHOUM TURNS THE SCREW

Laughing to himself, Higli Pasha sat with the stem of a narghileh in his mouth. His big shoulders kept time to the quivering of his fat stomach. He was sitting in a small court-yard of Nahoum Pasha's palace, waiting for its owner to appear. Meanwhile he exercised a hilarious patience. The years had changed him little since he had been sent on that expedition against the southern tribes which followed hard on David's appointment to office. As David had expected, few of the traitorous officers returned. Diaz had ignominiously died of the bite of a tarantula before a blow had been struck, but Higli had gratefully received a slight wound in the first encounter, which enabled him to beat a safe retreat to Cairo. He alone of the chief of the old conspirators was left. Achmet was still at the Place of Lepers, and the old nest of traitors was scattered for ever.

Only Nahoum and Higli were left, and between these two there had never been partnership or understanding. Nahoum was not the man to trust to confederates, and Higli Pasha was too contemptible a coadjutor. Nahoum had faith in no one save Mizraim the Chief Eunuch, but Mizraim alone was better than a thousand; and he was secret—and terrible. Yet Higli had a conviction that Nahoum's alliance with David was a sham, and that David would pay the price of misplaced confidence one day. More than once when David's plans had had a set-back, Higli had contrived a meeting with Nahoum, to judge for himself the true position.

For his visit to-day he had invented a reason—a matter of finance; but his real reason was concealed behind the malevolent merriment by which he was now seized. So absorbed was he that he did not heed the approach of another visitor down an angle of the court-yard. He was roused by a voice.

"Well, what's tickling you so, pasha?"

The voice was drawling, and quite gentle; but at the sound of it, Higli's laugh stopped short, and the muscles of his face contracted. If there was one man of whom he had a wholesome fear—why, he could not tell—it was this round-faced, abrupt, imperturbable American, Claridge Pasha's right-hand man. Legends of resourcefulness and bravery had gathered round his name. "Who's been stroking your chin with a feather, pasha?" he continued, his eye piercing the other like a gimlet.

"It was an amusing tale I heard at Assiout, effendi," was Higli's abashed and surly reply.

"Oh, at Assiout!" rejoined Lacey. "Yes, they tell funny stories at Assiout. And when were you at Assiout, pasha?"

"Two days ago, effendi."

"And so you thought you'd tell the funny little story to Nahoum as quick as could be, eh? He likes funny stories, same as you—damn, nice, funny little stories, eh?"

There was something chilly in Lacey's voice now, which Higli did not like; something much too menacing and contemptuous for a mere man-of-all-work to the Inglesi. Higli bridled up, his eyes glared sulkily.

"It is but my own business if I laugh or if I curse, effendi," he replied, his hand shaking a little on the stem of the narghileh.

"Precisely, my diaphanous polyandrist; but it isn't quite your own affair what you laugh at—not if I know it!"

"Does the effendi think I was laughing at him?"

"The effendi thinks not. The effendi knows that the descendant of a hundred tigers was laughing at the funny little story, of how the two cotton-mills that Claridge Pasha built were burned down all in one night, and one of his steamers sent down the cataract at Assouan. A knock-down blow for Claridge Pasha, eh? That's all you thought of, wasn't it? And it doesn't matter to you that the cotton-mills made thousands better off, and started new industries in Egypt. No, it only matters to you that Claridge Pasha loses half his fortune, and that you think his feet are in the quicksands, and 'll be

sucked in, to make an Egyptian holiday. Anything to discredit him here, eh? I'm not sure what else you know; but I'll find out, my noble pasha, and if you've had your hand in it—but no, you ain't game-cock enough for that! But if you were, if you had a hand in the making of your funny little story, there's a nutcracker that 'd break the shell of that joke—"

He turned round quickly, seeing a shadow and hearing a movement. Nahoum was but a few feet away. There was a bland smile on his face, a look of innocence in his magnificent blue eye. As he met Lacey's look, the smile left his lips, a grave sympathy appeared to possess them, and he spoke softly:

"I know the thing that burns thy heart, effendi, to whom be the flowers of hope and the fruits of merit. It is even so, a great blow has fallen. Two hours since I heard. I went at once to see Claridge Pasha, but found him not. Does he know, think you?" he added sadly.

"May your heart never be harder than it is, pasha, and when I left the Saadat an hour ago, he did not know. His messenger hadn't a steamer like Higli Pasha there. But he was coming to see you; and that's why I'm here. I've been brushing the flies off this sore on the hump of Egypt while waiting." He glanced with disdain at Higli.

A smile rose like liquid in the eye of Nahoum and subsided, then he turned to Higli inquiringly.

"I have come on business, Excellency; the railway to Rosetta, and—"

"To-morrow—or the next day," responded Nahoum irritably, and turned again to Lacey.

As Higli's huge frame disappeared through a gateway, Nahoum motioned Lacey to a divan, and summoned a slave for cooling drinks. Lacey's eyes now watched him with an innocence nearly as childlike as his own. Lacey well knew that here was a foe worthy of the best steel. That he was a foe, and a malignant foe, he had no doubt whatever; he had settled the point in his mind long ago; and two letters he had received from Lady Eglington, in which she had said in so many words, "Watch Nahoum!" had made him vigilant and intuitive. He knew, meanwhile, that he was following the trail

of a master-hunter who covered up his tracks. Lacey was as certain as though he had the book of Nahoum's mind open in his hand, that David's work had been torn down again—and this time with dire effect—by this Armenian, whom David trusted like a brother. But the black doors that closed on the truth on every side only made him more determined to unlock them; and, when he faltered as to his own powers, he trusted Mahommed Hassan, whose devotion to David had given him eyes that pierced dark places.

"Surely the God of Israel has smitten Claridge Pasha sorely. My heart will mourn to look upon his face. The day is insulting in its brightness," continued Nahoum with a sigh, his eyes bent upon Lacey, dejection in his shoulders.

Lacey started. "The God of Israel!" How blasphemous it sounded from the lips of Nahoum, Oriental of Orientals, Christian though he was also!

"I think, perhaps, you'll get over it, pasha. Man is born to trouble, and you've got a lot of courage. I guess you could see other people bear a pile of suffering, and never flinch."

Nahoum appeared not to notice the gibe. "It is a land of suffering, effendi," he sighed, "and one sees what one sees."

"Have you any idea, any real sensible idea, how those cotton-mills got afire?" Lacey's eyes were fixed on Nahoum's face.

The other met his gaze calmly. "Who can tell! An accident, perhaps, or—"

"Or some one set the mills on fire in several places at once—they say the buildings flamed out in every corner; and it was the only time in a month they hadn't been running night and day. Funny, isn't it?"

"It looks like the work of an enemy, effendi." Nahoum shook his head gravely. "A fortune destroyed in an hour, as it were. But we shall get the dog. We shall find him. There is no hole deep enough to hide him from us."

"Well, I wouldn't go looking in holes for him, pasha.

"He isn't any cave-dweller, that incendiary; he's an artist—no palace is too unlikely for him. No, I wouldn't go poking in mud-huts to find him."

"Thou dost not think that Higli Pasha—" Nahoum seemed startled out of equanimity by the thought. Lacey eyed him meditatively, and said reflectively: "Say, you're an artist, pasha. You are a guesser of the first rank. But I'd guess again. Higli Pasha would have done it, if it had ever occurred to him; and he'd had the pluck. But it didn't, and he hadn't. What I can't understand is that the artist that did it should have done it before Claridge Pasha left for the Soudan. Here we were just about to start; and if we'd got away south, the job would have done more harm, and the Saadat would have been out of the way. No, I can't understand why the firebug didn't let us get clean away; for if the Saadat stays here, he'll be where he can stop the underground mining."

Nahoum's self-control did not desert him, though he fully realised that this man suspected him. On the surface Lacey was right. It would have seemed better to let David go, and destroy his work afterwards, but he had been moved by other considerations, and his design was deep. His own emissaries were in the Soudan, announcing David's determination to abolish slavery, secretly stirring up feeling against him, preparing for the final blow to be delivered, when he went again among the southern tribes. He had waited and waited, and now the time was come. Had he, Nahoum, not agreed with David that the time had come for the slave-trade to go? Had he not encouraged him to take this bold step, in the sure belief that it would overwhelm him, and bring him an ignominious death, embittered by total failure of all he had tried to do?

For years he had secretly loosened the foundations of David's work, and the triumph of Oriental duplicity over Western civilisation and integrity was sweet in his mouth. And now there was reason to believe that, at last, Kaid was turning against the Inglesi. Everything would come at once. If all that he had planned was successful, even this man before him should aid in his master's destruction.

"If it was all done by an enemy," he said, in answer to Lacey, at last, "would it all be reasoned out like that? Is hatred so logical?"

Dost thou think Claridge Pasha will not go now? The troops are ready at Wady- Halfa, everything is in order; the last load of equipment has gone. Will not Claridge Pasha find the money somehow? I will do what I can. My heart is moved to aid him."

"Yes, you'd do what you could, pasha," Lacey rejoined enigmatically, "but whether it would set the Saadat on his expedition or not is a question. But I guess, after all, he's got to go. He willed it so. People may try to stop him, and they may tear down what he does, but he does at last what he starts to do, and no one can prevent him—not any one. Yes, he's going on this expedition; and he'll have the money, too." There was a strange, abstracted look in his face, as though he saw something which held him fascinated.

Presently, as if with an effort, he rose to his feet, took the red fez from his head, and fanned himself with it for a moment. "Don't you forget it, pasha; the Saadat will win. He can't be beaten, not in a thousand years. Here he comes."

Nahoum got to his feet, as David came quickly through the small gateway of the court-yard, his head erect, his lips smiling, his eyes sweeping the place. He came forward briskly to them. It was plain he had not heard the evil news.

"Peace be to thee, Saadat, and may thy life be fenced about with safety!" said Nahoum.

David laid a hand on Lacey's arm and squeezed it, smiling at him with such friendship that Lacey's eyes moistened, and he turned his head away.

There was a quiet elation in David's look. "We are ready at last," he said, looking from one to the other. "Well, well," he added, almost boyishly, "has thee nothing to say, Nahoum?"

Nahoum turned his head away as though overcome. David's face grew instantly grave. He turned to Lacey. Never before had he seen Lacey's face with a look like this. He grasped Lacey's arm. "What is it?" he asked quietly. "What does thee want to say to me?"

But Lacey could not speak, and David turned again to Nahoum.

"What is there to say to me?" he asked. "Something has happened—what is

it?

. . . Come, many things have happened before. This can be no worse.

Do thee speak," he urged gently.

"Saadat," said Nahoum, as though under the stress of feeling, "the cotton-mills at Tashah and Mini are gone—burned to the ground."

For a moment David looked at him without sight in his eyes, and his face grew very pale. "Excellency, all in one night, the besom of destruction was abroad," he heard Nahoum say, as though from great depths below him. He slowly turned his head to look at Lacey. "Is this true?" he asked at last in an unsteady voice. Lacey could not speak, but inclined his head.

David's figure seemed to shrink for a moment, his face had a withered look, and his head fell forward in a mood of terrible dejection.

"Saadat! Oh, my God, Saadat, don't take it so!" said Lacey brokenly, and stepped between David and Nahoum. He could not bear that the stricken face and figure should be seen by Nahoum, whom he believed to be secretly gloating. "Saadat," he said brokenly, "God has always been with you; He hasn't forgotten you now.

"The work of years," David murmured, and seemed not to hear.

"When God permits, shall man despair?" interposed Nahoum, in a voice that lingered on the words. Nahoum accomplished what Lacey had failed to do. His voice had pierced to some remote corner in David's nature, and roused him. Was it that doubt, suspicion, had been awakened at last? Was some sensitive nerve touched, that this Oriental should offer Christian comfort to him in his need—to him who had seen the greater light? Or was it that some unreality in the words struck a note which excited a new and subconscious understanding? Perhaps it was a little of all three. He did not stop to inquire. In crises such as that through which he was passing, the mind and body act without reason, rather by the primal instinct, the certain call of the things that were before reason was.

"God is with the patient," continued Nahoum; and Lacey set his teeth to bear this insult to all things. But Nahoum accomplished

what he had not anticipated. David straightened himself up, and clasped his hands behind him. By a supreme effort of the will he controlled himself, and the colour came back faintly to his face. "God's will be done," he said, and looked Nahoum calmly in the eyes. "It was no accident," he added with conviction. "It was an enemy of Egypt." Suddenly the thing rushed over him again, going through his veins like a poisonous ether, and clamping his heart as with iron. "All to do over again!" he said brokenly, and again he caught Lacey's arm.

With an uncontrollable impulse Lacey took David's hand in his own warm, human grasp.

"Once I thought I lost everything in Mexico, Saadat, and I understand what you feel. But all wasn't lost in Mexico, as I found at last, and I got something, too, that I didn't put in. Say, let us go from here. God is backing you, Saadat. Isn't it all right – same as ever?"

David was himself again. "Thee is a good man," he said, and through the sadness of his eyes there stole a smile. "Let us go," he said. Then he added in a businesslike way: "To-morrow at seven, Nahoum. There is much to do."

He turned towards the gate with Lacey, where the horses waited. Mahommed

Hassan met them as they prepared to mount. He handed David a letter.

It was from Faith, and contained the news of Luke Claridge's death. Everything had come at once. He stumbled into the saddle with a moan.

"At last I have drawn blood," said Nahoum to himself with grim satisfaction, as they disappeared. "It is the beginning of the end. It will crush him-I saw it in his eyes. God of Israel, I shall rule again in Egypt!"

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE RECOIL

It was a great day in the Muslim year. The Mahmal, or Sacred Carpet, was leaving Cairo on its long pilgrimage of thirty-seven days to Mecca and Mahomet's tomb. Great guns boomed from the Citadel, as the gorgeous procession, forming itself beneath the Mokattam Hills, began its slow march to where, seated in the shade of an ornate pavilion, Prince Kaid awaited its approach to pay devout homage. Thousands looked down at the scene from the ramparts of the Citadel, from the overhanging cliffs, and from the tops of the houses that hung on the ledges of rock rising abruptly from the level ground, to which the last of the famed Mamelukes leaped to their destruction.

Now to Prince Kaid's ears there came from hundreds of hoarse throats the cry: "Allah! Allah! May thy journey be with safety to Arafat!" mingling with the harsh music of the fifes and drums.

Kaid looked upon the scene with drawn face and lowering brows. His retinue watched him with alarm. A whisper had passed that, two nights before, the Effendina had sent in haste for a famous Italian physician lately come to Cairo, and that since his visit Kaid had been sullen and depressed. It was also the gossip of the bazaars that he had suddenly shown favour to those of the Royal House and to other reactionaries, who had been enemies to the influence of Claridge Pasha.

This rumour had been followed by an official proclamation that no Europeans or Christians would be admitted to the ceremony of the Sacred Carpet.

Thus it was that Kaid looked out on a vast multitude of Muslims, in which not one European face showed, and from lip to lip there passed the word, "Harrik—Harrik—remember Harrik! Kaid turns from the infidel!"

They crowded near the great pavilion—as near as the mounted Nubians would permit—to see Kaid's face; while he, with eyes

wandering over the vast assemblage, was lost in dark reflections. For a year he had struggled against a growing conviction that some obscure disease was sapping his strength. He had hid it from every one, until, at last, distress and pain had overcome him. The verdict of the Italian expert was that possible, but by no means certain, cure might come from an operation which must be delayed for a month or more.

Suddenly, the world had grown unfamiliar to him; he saw it from afar; but his subconscious self involuntarily registered impressions, and he moved mechanically through the ceremonies and duties of the immediate present. Thrown back upon himself, to fight his own fight, with the instinct of primary life his mind involuntarily drew for refuge to the habits and predispositions of youth; and for two days he had shut himself away from the activities with which David and Nahoum were associated. Being deeply engaged with the details of the expedition to the Soudan, David had not gone to the Palace; and he was unaware of the turn which things had taken.

Three times, with slow and stately steps, the procession wound in a circle in the great square, before it approached the pavilion where the Effendina sat, the splendid camels carrying the embroidered tent wherein the Carpet rested, and that which bore the Emir of the pilgrims, moving gracefully like ships at sea. Naked swordsmen, with upright and shining blades, were followed by men on camels bearing kettle-drums. After them came Arab riders with fresh green branches fastened to the saddles like plumes, while others carried flags and banners emblazoned with texts and symbols. Troops of horsemen in white woollen cloaks, sheikhs and Bedouins with flowing robes and huge turbans, religious chiefs of the great sects, imperturbable and statuesque, were in strange contrast to the shouting dervishes and camel-drivers and eager pilgrims.

At last the great camel with its sacred burden stopped in front of Kaid for his prayer and blessing. As he held the tassels, lifted the gold-fringed curtain, and invoked Allah's blessing, a half-naked sheikh ran forward, and, raising his hand high above his head, cried shrilly: "Kaid, Kaid, hearken!"

Rough hands caught him away, but Kaid commanded them to desist; and the man called a blessing on him; and cried aloud:

"Listen, O Kaid, son of the stars and the light of day. God hath exalted thee. Thou art the Egyptian of all the Egyptians. In thy hand is power. But thou art mortal even as I. Behold, O Kaid, in the hour that I was born thou wast born, I in the dust without thy Palace wall, thou amid the splendid things. But thy star is my star. Behold, as God ordains, the Tree of Life was shaken on the night when all men pray and cry aloud to God—even the Night of the Falling Leaves. And I watched the falling leaves; and I saw my leaf, and it was withered, but only a little withered, and so I live yet a little. But I looked for thy leaf, thou who wert born in that moment when I waked to the world. I looked long, but I found no leaf, neither green nor withered. But I looked again upon my leaf, and then I saw that thy name now was also upon my leaf, and that it was neither green nor withered; but was a leaf that drooped as when an evil wind has passed and drunk its life. Listen, O Kaid! Upon the tomb of Mahomet I will set my lips, and it may be that the leaf of my life will come fresh and green again. But thou—wilt thou not come also to the lord Mahomet's tomb? Or"—he paused and raised his voice—"or wilt thou stay and lay thy lips upon the cross of the infidel? Wilt thou—"

He could say no more, for Kaid's face now darkened with anger. He made a gesture, and, in an instant, the man was gagged and bound, while a sullen silence fell upon the crowd. Kaid suddenly became aware of this change of feeling, and looked round him. Presently his old prudence and subtlety came back, his face cleared a little, and he called aloud, "Unloose the man, and let him come to me." An instant after, the man was on his knees, silent before him.

"What is thy name?" Kaid asked.

"Kaid Ibrahim, Effendina," was the reply.

"Thou hast misinterpreted thy dream, Kaid Ibrahim," answered the Effendina. "The drooping leaf was token of the danger in which thy life should be, and my name upon thy leaf was token that I should save thee from death. Behold, I save thee. Inshallah, go in peace! There is no God but God, and the Cross is the sign of a false prophet. Thou art mad. God give thee a new mind. Go."

The man was presently lost in the sweltering, half-frenzied crowd; but he had done his work, and his words rang in the ears of Kaid as he rode away.

A few hours afterwards, bitter and rebellious, murmuring to himself, Kaid sat in a darkened room of his Nile Palace beyond the city. So few years on the throne, so young, so much on which to lay the hand of pleasure, so many millions to command; and yet the slave at his door had a surer hold on life and all its joys and lures than he, Prince Kaid, ruler of Egypt! There was on him that barbaric despair which has taken dreadful toll of life for the decree of destiny. Across the record of this day, as across the history of many an Eastern and pagan tyrant, was written: "He would not die alone." That the world should go on when he was gone, that men should buy and sell and laugh and drink, and flaunt it in the sun, while he, Prince Kaid, would be done with it all.

He was roused by the rustling of a robe. Before him stood the Arab physician, Sharif Bey, who had been in his father's house and his own for a lifetime. It was many a year since his ministrations to Kaid had ceased; but he had remained on in the Palace, doing service to those who received him, and—it was said by the evil-tongued—granting certificates of death out of harmony with dark facts, a sinister and useful figure. His beard was white, his face was friendly, almost benevolent, but his eyes had a light caught from no celestial flame.

His look was confident now, as his eyes bent on Kaid. He had lived long, he had seen much, he had heard of the peril that had been foreshadowed by the infidel physician; and, by a sure instinct, he knew that his own opportunity had come. He knew that Kaid would snatch at any offered comfort, would cherish any alleviating lie, would steal back from science and civilisation and the modern palace to the superstition of the fellah's hut. Were not all men alike when the neboot of Fate struck them down into the terrible loneliness of doom, numbing their minds? Luck would be with him that offered first succour in that dark hour. Sharif had come at the right moment for Sharif.

Kaid looked at him with dull yet anxious eyes. "Did I not command that none should enter?" he asked presently in a thick voice.

"Am I not thy physician, Effendina, to whom be the undying years? When the Effendina is sick, shall I not heal? Have I not waited like a dog at thy door these many years, till that time would come when none could heal thee save Sharif?"

"What canst thou give me?"

"What the infidel physician gave thee not—I can give thee hope. Hast thou done well, oh, Effendina, to turn from thine own people? Did not thine own father, and did not Mehemet Ali, live to a good age? Who were their physicians? My father and I, and my father's father, and his father's father."

"Thou canst cure me altogether?" asked Kaid hesitatingly.

"Wilt thou not have faith in one of thine own race? Will the infidel love thee as do we, who are thy children and thy brothers, who are to thee as a nail driven in the wall, not to be moved? Thou shalt live— Inshallah, thou shalt have healing and length of days!"

He paused at a gesture from Kaid, for a slave had entered and stood waiting.

"What dost thou here? Wert thou not commanded?" asked Kaid.

"Effendina, Claridge Pasha is waiting," was the reply.

Kaid frowned, hesitated; then, with a sudden resolve, made a gesture of dismissal to Sharif Bey, and nodded David's admittance to the slave.

As David entered, he passed Sharif Bey, and something in the look on the Arab physician's face—a secret malignancy and triumph—struck him strangely. And now a fresh anxiety and apprehension rose in his mind as he glanced at Kaid. The eye was heavy and gloomy, the face was clouded, the lips once so ready to smile at him were sullen and smileless now. David stood still, waiting.

"I did not expect thee till to-morrow, Saadat," said Kaid moodily at last.

"The business is urgent?" "Effendina," said David, with every nerve at tension, yet with outward self-control, "I have to report—" He paused, agitated; then, in a firm voice, he told of the disaster which had befallen the cotton-mills and the steamer.

As David spoke, Kaid's face grew darker, his fingers fumbled vaguely with the linen of the loose white robe he wore. When the tale was finished he sat for a moment apparently stunned by the news, then he burst out fiercely:

"Bismillah, am I to hear only black words to-day? Hast thou naught to say but this—the fortune of Egypt burned to ashes!"

David held back the quick retort that came to his tongue.

"Half my fortune is in the ashes," he answered with dignity. "The rest came from savings never made before by this Government. Is the work less worthy in thy sight, Effendina, because it has been destroyed? Would thy life be less great and useful because a blow took thee from behind?"

Kaid's face turned black. David had bruised an open wound.

"What is my life to thee—what is thy work to me?"

"Thy life is dear to Egypt, Effendina," urged David soothingly, "and my labour for Egypt has been pleasant in thine eyes till now."

"Egypt cannot be saved against her will," was the moody response. "What has come of the Western hand upon the Eastern plough?" His face grew blacker; his heart was feeding on itself.

"Thou, the friend of Egypt, hast come of it, Effendina."

"Harrik was right, Harrik was right," Kaid answered, with stubborn gloom and anger. "Better to die in our own way, if we must die, than live in the way of another. Thou wouldst make of Egypt another England; thou wouldst civilise the Soudan—bismillah, it is folly!"

"That is not the way Mehemet Ali thought, nor Ibrahim. Nor dost thou think so, Effendina," David answered gravely. "A dark spirit is on thee.

Wouldst thou have me understand that what we have done together, thou and

I, was ill done, that the old bad days were better?"

"Go back to thine own land," was the surly answer. "Nation after nation ravaged Egypt, sowed their legions here, but the Egyptian has lived them down. The faces of the fellaheen are the faces of Thotmes and Seti. Go back. Egypt will travel her own path. We are of the East; we are Muslim. What is right to you is wrong to us. Ye would make us over— give us cotton beds and wooden floors and fine flour of the mill, and cleanse the cholera-hut with disinfectants, but are these things all? How many of your civilised millions would die for their prophet Christ? Yet all Egypt would rise up from the mud-floor, the dourha-field and the mud-hut, and would come out to die for Mahomet and Allah— ay, as Harrik knew, as Harrik knew! Ye steal into corners, and hide behind the curtains of your beds to pray; we pray where the hour of prayer finds us —in the street, in the market-place, where the house is building, the horse being shod, or the money-changers are. Ye hear the call of civilisation, but we heap the Muezzin—"

He stopped, and searched mechanically for his watch. "It is the hour the Muezzin calls," said David gently. "It is almost sunset. Shall I open the windows that the call may come to us?" he added.

While Kaid stared at him, his breast heaving with passion, David went to a window and opened the shutters wide.

The Palace faced the Nile, which showed like a tortuous band of blue and silver a mile or so away. Nothing lay between but the brown sand, and here and there a handful of dark figures gliding towards the river, or a little train of camels making for the bare grey hills from the ghiassas which had given them their desert loads. The course of the Nile was marked by a wide fringe of palms showing blue and purple, friendly and ancient and solitary. Beyond the river and the palms lay the grey-brown desert, faintly touched with red. So clear was the sweet evening air that the irregular surface of the desert showed for a score of miles as plainly as though it were but a step away. Hummocks of sand— tombs and fallen monuments gave a feeling as of forgotten and buried peoples; and the two vast pyramids of Sakkarah stood up in the plaintive glow of the evening skies, majestic and solemn, faithful to the dissolved and absorbed races who had built them. Curtains of mauve and saffron-red were hung behind them, and through a break of cloud fringing the hori-

zon a yellow glow poured, to touch the tips of the pyramids with poignant splendour. But farther over to the right, where Cairo lay, there hung a bluish mist, palpable and delicate, out of which emerged the vast pyramids of Cheops; and beside it the smiling inscrutable Sphinx faced the changeless centuries. Beyond the pyramids the mist deepened into a vast deep cloud of blue and purple, which seemed the end to some mystic highway untravelled by the sons of men.

Suddenly there swept over David a wave of feeling such as had passed over Kaid, though of a different nature. Those who had built the pyramids were gone, Cheops and Thotmes and Amenhotep and Chefron and the rest. There had been reformers in those lost races; one age had sought to better the last, one man had toiled to save—yet there only remained offensive bundles of mummied flesh and bone and a handful of relics in tombs fifty centuries old. Was it all, then, futile? Did it matter, then, whether one man laboured or a race aspired?

Only for a moment these thoughts passed through his mind; and then, as the glow through the broken cloud on the opposite horizon suddenly faded, and veils of melancholy fell over the desert and the river and the palms, there rose a call, sweetly shrill, undoubtingly insistent. Sunset had come, and, with it, the Muezzin's call to prayer from the minaret of a mosque hard by.

David was conscious of a movement behind him—that Kaid was praying with hands uplifted; and out on the sands between the window and the river he saw kneeling figures here and there, saw the camel-drivers halt their trains, and face the East with hands uplifted. The call went on—"La ilaha illa-llah !"

It called David, too. The force and searching energy and fire in it stole through his veins, and drove from him the sense of futility and despondency which had so deeply added to his trouble. There was something for him, too, in that which held infatuated the minds of so many millions.

A moment later Kaid and he faced each other again. "Effendina," he said, "thou wilt not desert our work now?"