

G. A. HENTY

# THE CAT OF BUBASTES

A TALE OF ANCIENT EGYPT



## Preface

Dear Reader,

Thanks to the care with which the Egyptians depicted upon the walls of their sepulchres the minutest doings of their daily life, to the dryness of the climate which has preserved these records uninjured for so many thousand years, and to the indefatigable labour of modern investigators, we know far more of the manners and customs of the Egyptians, of their methods of work, their sports and amusements, their public festivals, and domestic life, than we do of those of peoples comparatively modern. My object in the present story has been to give you as lively a picture as possible of that life, drawn from the bulky pages of Sir J. Gardner Wilkinson and other writers on the same subject. I have laid the scene in the time of Thotmes III., one of the greatest of the Egyptian monarchs, being surpassed only in glory and the extent of his conquests by Ramses the Great. It is certain that Thotmes carried the arms of Egypt to the shores of the Caspian, and a people named the Rebu, with fair hair and blue eyes, were among those depicted in the Egyptian sculptures as being conquered and made tributary. It is open to discussion whether the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt took place in the reign of Thotmes or many years subsequently, some authors assigning it to the time of Ramses. Without attempting to enter this much discussed question, I have assumed that the Israelites were still in Egypt at the time of Thotmes, and by introducing Moses just at the time he began to take up the cause of the people to whom he belonged, I leave it to be inferred that the Exodus took place some forty years later. I wish you to

understand, however, that you are not to accept this date as being absolutely correct. Opinions differ widely upon it; and as no allusion whatever has been discovered either to the Exodus, or to any of the events which preceded it, among the records of Egypt, there is nothing to fix the date as occurring during the reign of any one among the lone line of Egyptian kings. The term Pharaoh used in the Bible throws no light on the subject, as Pharaoh simply means king, and the name of no monarch bearing that appellation is to be found on the Egyptian monuments. I have in no way exaggerated the consequences arising from the slaying of the sacred cat, as the accidental killing of any cat whatever was an offence punished by death throughout the history of Egypt down to the time of the Roman connection with that country.

Yours sincerely,  
G.A. Henty

# Chapter 1

The sun was blazing down upon a city on the western shore of the Caspian. It was a primitive city, and yet its size and population rendered it worthy of the term. It consisted of a vast aggregation of buildings, which were for the most part mere huts. Among them rose, however, a few of more solid build and of higher pretensions. These were the abodes of the chiefs and great men, the temples, and places of assembly. But although larger and more solidly built, these buildings could lay no claim to architectural beauty of any kind, but were little more than magnified huts, and even the king's palace was but a collection of such buildings closely adjoining each other.

The town was surrounded by a lofty wall with battlements and loopholes, and a similar but higher wall girt in the dwellings of the king and of his principal captains. The streets were alive with the busy multitude; and it was evident that although in the arts of peace the nation had made but little progress, they had in everything appertaining to war made great advances. Most of the men wore helmets closely fitting to the head and surmounted by a spike. These were for the most part composed of hammered brass, although some of the head-pieces were made of tough hide, studded with knobs of metal. All carried round shields—those of the soldiers, of leather stiffened with metal; those of the captains, of brass, worked with considerable elaboration.

In their belts all wore daggers, while at their backs were slung quivers of iron; painted bows hung over one shoulder, and some had at their waist a pouch of smooth flat stones and leather

slings. Their chief garment was a sort of kilt falling to the knee. Above the waist some wore only a thin vest of white linen, others a garment not unlike the nightgown of modern times, but with short sleeves. The kilt was worn over this. Some had breast-pieces of thick leather confined by straps behind; while in the case of the officers the leather was covered with small pieces of metal, forming a cuirass.

All carried two or three javelins in the left hand, and a spear some ten feet long in the right. Horsemen galloped about at full speed to and from the royal palace, while occasionally chariots, drawn sometimes by one, sometimes by two horses, dashed along. These chariots were small, the wheels not exceeding three feet in height. Between them was placed the body of the vehicle, which was but just large enough for two men to stand on. It consisted only of a small platform, with a semicircular rail running round the front some eighteen inches above it. A close observer would have perceived at once that not only were the males of the city upon the point of marching out on a military expedition, but that it was no mere foray against a neighbouring people, but a war on which the safety of the city depended.

Women were standing in tearful groups as they watched the soldiers making towards the gates. The men themselves had a resolute and determined look, but there was none of the light-hearted gaiety among them which betokened the expectation of success and triumph. Inside the palace the bustle of preparation was as marked as without. The king and his principal councillors and leaders were assembled in the great circular hut which formed the audience-room and council-chamber. Messengers arrived in close succession with news of the progress and strength of the enemy, or with messages from the neighbouring towns and tribes as to the contingents they had furnished, and the time at which these had set out to join the army.

The king himself was a tall and warlike figure, in the prime of life. He had led his warriors on many successful expeditions far to the west, and had repulsed with great loss the attempts of the Persians to encroach upon his territory. Standing behind him was his son, Amuba, a lad of some fifteen years of age. The king and his councillors, as well as all the wealthier inhabitants of the

city, wore, in addition to the kilt and linen jacket, a long robe highly coloured and ornamented with fanciful devices, and having a broad rich border. It was fastened at the neck with a large brooch, fell loosely from the shoulders to the ankles, and was open in front. The girdles which retained the kilts and in which the daggers were worn were highly ornamented, and the ends fell down in front and terminated in large tassels.

All wore a profusion of necklaces, bracelets, and other ornaments of gold; many of the chiefs wore feathers in their helmets, and the greater portion of all ranks had figures tattooed on their arms and legs. They were fair in complexion, with blue eyes; their hair was for the most part golden or red, and they wore their beards short and pointed. The young Prince Amuba was attired for the field; his helmet was of gold, and his cuirass covered with plates of the same metal. He listened with suppressed impatience to the arguments of his elders, for he was eager to be off, this being the first time that he had been permitted to take part in the military expeditions of his country.

After listening for some time and perceiving that there was no prospect of the council breaking up, he retired to the large hut adjoining the council-chamber. This served as the dwelling-place of the ladies and their family. It was divided into several apartments by screens formed of hide sewn together and hidden from sight by coloured hangings. In one of these a lady was seated on a low couch covered with panthers' skins.

"They have not done talking yet, mother. It has been a question as to where we shall assemble to give battle. It does not seem to me to make much difference where we fight, but they seem to think that it is most important; and of course they know more about it than I do. They have fixed upon a place at last—it is about fifteen miles from here. They say that the ground in front is marshy and can hardly be traversed by the enemy's chariots; but if they cannot get at us, it seems to me that we cannot get at them. Messengers have been sent off to order all the contingents to assemble at that spot. Six thousand men are to remain behind to guard the city; but as we mean to beat them I do not think there can be much occasion for that; for you think we shall beat them—don't you mother?"

"I hope so, Amuba; but I am very fearful."

"But we have several times repulsed them when they have invaded our country, mother; why should we not do so this time?"

"They are much stronger than they have ever been before when they have come against us, my boy; and their king is a great warrior, who has been successful in almost every enterprise he has undertaken."

"I cannot think why he wants to conquer us, mother. They say the riches of Egypt are immense and the splendour of their temples and buildings such as we have no idea of. We have no quarrel with them if they will but let us alone."

"No country is so rich that it does not desire more, my son. We have gold and are skilled in the working of it, and no doubt they anticipate that they will capture much treasure in the land; besides, as you say, their expeditions against the Rebu have been several times repulsed, and therefore their monarch will reap all the greater honour if he should defeat us. As to their having no quarrel with us, have we not made many expeditions to the west, returning with captives and much booty? And yet the people had no quarrel with us—many of them, indeed, could scarcely have known us by name when our army appeared among them. Some day, my son, things may be managed differently; but at present kings who have power make war upon people that are weaker than themselves, spoil them of their goods, and make slaves of them.

"I hope, Amuba, you will not expose yourself too much in the conflict. You have not come to man's strength yet; and remember you are my only child. See that your charioteer covers you with his shield when you have entered the battle, for the Egyptians are terrible as archers. Their bows carry much further than do ours, and the arrows will pierce even the strongest armour. Our spearmen have always shown themselves as good as theirs—nay, better, for they are stronger in body and full of courage. It is in the goodness of her archers and the multitude of her chariots that the strength of Egypt lies. Remember that although your father, as king, must needs go into the thick of the battle to encourage his soldiers, there is no occasion why you, who are yet a boy, should so expose yourself.

"It will doubtless be a terrible battle. The Egyptians have the memory of past defeats to wipe out, and they will be fighting under the eye of their king. I am terrified, Amuba. Hitherto when your father has gone out to battle I have never doubted as to the result. The Persians were not foes whom brave men need dread; nor was it difficult to force the hordes passing us from the eastward towards the setting sun to respect our country, for we had the advantage in arms and discipline. But the Egyptians are terrible foes, and the arms of their king have been everywhere victorious. My heart is filled with dread at the thought of the approaching conflict, though I try to keep up a brave face when your father is with me, for I would not that he should deem me cowardly."

"I trust, mother, that your fears are groundless, and I cannot think that our men will give way when fighting for their homes and country upon ground chosen by themselves."

"I hope not, Amuba. But there is the trumpet sounding; it is the signal that the council have broken up and that your father is about to start. Bless you, my dear boy, and may you return safe and sound from the conflict!"

The queen fondly embraced her son, who left the apartment hastily as his father entered in order that the latter might not see the traces of tears on his cheeks. A few minutes later the king, with his captains, started from the palace. Most of them rode in chariots, the rest on horseback. The town was quiet now and the streets almost deserted. With the exception of the garrison, all the men capable of bearing arms had gone forth; the women with anxious faces stood in groups at their doors and watched the royal party as it drove out.

The charioteer of Amuba was a tall and powerful man; he carried a shield far larger than was ordinarily used, and had been specially selected by the king for the service. His orders were that he was not to allow Amuba to rush into the front line of fighters, and that he was even to disobey the orders of the prince if he wished to charge into the ranks of the enemy.

"My son must not shirk danger," his father said, "and he must needs go well into the fight; but he is still but a boy, not fit to enter upon a hand-to-hand contest with the picked warriors of



Egypt. In time I hope he will fight abreast of me, but at present you must restrain his ardour. I need not bid you shield him as well as you can from the arrows of the Egyptians. He is my eldest son, and if aught happens to me he will be the King of the Rebu; and his life is therefore a precious one."

Half an hour later they came upon the tail of the stragglers making their way to the front. The king stopped his chariot and sharply reproved some of them for their delay in setting out, and urged them to hasten on to the appointed place. In two hours the king arrived at this spot, where already some forty thousand men were assembled. The scouts who had been sent out reported that although the advance-guard of the Egyptians might arrive in an hour's time the main body were some distance behind, and would not be up in time to attack before dark.

This was welcome news, for before night the rest of the forces of the Rebu, fully thirty thousand more, would have joined. The king at once set out to examine the ground chosen by his general for the conflict. It sloped gently down in front to a small stream which ran through soft and marshy ground, and would oppose a formidable obstacle to the passage of chariots. The right rested upon a dense wood, while a village a mile and a half distant from the wood was held by the left wing.

A causeway which led from this across the marsh had been broken up, and heavy blocks of stone were scattered thickly upon it to impede the passage of chariots. The archers were placed in front to harass the enemy attempting to cross. Behind them were the spearmen in readiness to advance and aid them if pressed. The chariots were on the higher ground in the rear ready to dash in and join in the conflict should the enemy succeed in forcing their way through the marsh.

The visit of inspection was scarcely finished when a cloud of dust was seen rising over the plain. It approached rapidly. The flash of arms could be seen in the sun, and presently a vast number of horses were seen approaching in even line.

"Are they horsemen, father?" Amuba asked.

"No, they are chariots, Amuba. The Egyptians do not, like us, fight on horseback, although there may be a few small bodies of horsemen with the army; their strength lies in their chariots.

See, they have halted; they have perceived our ranks drawn up in order of battle."

The chariots drew up in perfect line, and as the clouds of dust blew away four lines of chariots could be made out ranged at a distance of a hundred yards apart.

"There are about a thousand in each line," the king said, "and this is but their advance guard; we have learned from fugitives that there are fully fifteen thousand chariots with their army."

"Is there no other place where they can pass this swamp, father?"

"Not so well as here, Amuba; the valley deepens further on, and the passage would be far more difficult than here. Above, beyond the wood, there is a lake of considerable extent, and beyond that the ground is broken and unsuited for the action of chariots as far as the sea. Besides, they have come to fight us, and the pride of their king would not permit of their making a detour. See, there is some great personage, probably the king himself, advancing beyond their ranks to reconnoiter the ground."

A chariot was indeed approaching the opposite brow of the depression; there were two figures in it; by the side walked numerous figures, who, although too far off to be distinguished, were judged to be the attendants and courtiers of the king. The sun flashed from the side of the chariot, which appeared at this distance to be composed of burnished gold. Great fans carried on wands shaded the king from the heat of the sun.

He drove slowly along the edge of the brow until he reached a point opposite the wood, and then, turning, went the other way till he reached the causeway which passed on through the village. After this he rode back to the line of chariots and evidently gave a word of command, for instantly the long line of figures seen above the horses disappeared as the men stepped off the chariots to the ground. No movement took place for an hour; then there was a sudden stir, and the long lines broke up and wheeled round to the right and left, where they took up their position in two solid masses.

"The main army are at hand," the king said. "Do you see that great cloud, ruddy in the setting sun? That is the dust raised by

their advance; in another hour they will be here, but by that time the sun will have set, and assuredly they will not attack until morning."

The front line were ordered to remain under arms for a time; the others were told to fall out and prepare their food for the night. The Egyptian army halted about a mile distant, and as soon as it was evident that no further movement was intended, the whole of the soldiers were ordered to fall out. A line of archers were placed along the edge of the swamp, and ere long a party of Egyptian bowmen took up their post along the opposite crest. Great fires were lighted, and a number of oxen, which had been driven forward in readiness, were slaughtered for food.

"If the Egyptians can see what is going on," the king said to his son, "they must be filled with fury, for they worship the oxen as among their chief gods."

"Is it possible, father, that they can believe that cattle are gods?" Amuba asked in surprise.

"They do not exactly look upon them as gods, my son, but as sacred to their gods. Similarly they reverence the cat, the ibis, and many other creatures."

"How strange!" Amuba said. "Do they not worship, as we and the Persians do, the sun, which, as all must see, is the giver of light and heat, which ripens our crops and gives fertility in abundance?"

"Not, so far as I know, Amuba; but I know that they have many gods who they believe give them victory over their enemies."

"They don't always give them victory," Amuba said, "since four times they have been repulsed in their endeavours to invade our land; perhaps our gods are more powerful than theirs."

"It may be that, my son; but so far as I can see the gods give victory to the bravest and most numerous armies."

"That is to say, they do not interfere at all, father."

"I do not say that, my son; we know little of the ways of the gods. Each nation has its own, and as some nations overthrow others, it must be that either some gods are more powerful than others, or that they do not interfere to save those who worship

them from destruction. But these things are all beyond our knowledge. We have but to do our part bravely, and we need assuredly not fear the bulls and the cats and other creatures which the Egyptians trust."

Some hours were spent by the king, his leaders, and his captains in going about among the troops seeing that all the contingents had arrived well-armed and in good order, notifying to the leaders of each the position they should take up in the morning, and doing all in their power to animate and encourage the soldiers. When all was done the king sat down on a pile of skins which had been prepared for him, and talked long and earnestly with his son, giving him advice as to his conduct in future, if aught should befall him in the coming fight.

"You are my heir," he said, "and as is customary to the country the throne goes down from father to son. Were I to survive for another eight or ten years you would, of course, succeed me, but should I fall to-morrow and should the Egyptians overrun the land, things may happen otherwise. In that case the great need of the people would be a military leader who would rouse them to prolonged resistance and lead them again and again against the Egyptians until these, worn out by the perpetual fighting, abandon the idea of subjecting us and turn their attention to less stubborn minded people.

"For such work you are far too young, and the people would look to Amusis or one of my other captains as their leader. Should success crown his efforts they may choose him as their king. In that case I would say, Amuba, it will be far better for you to acquiesce in the public choice than to struggle against it. A lad like you would have no prospect of success against a victorious general, the choice of the people, and you would only bring ruin and death upon yourself and your mother by opposing him.

"I can assure you that there is nothing so very greatly to be envied in the lot of a king, and as one of the nobles of the land your position would be far more pleasant here than as king. A cheerful acquiescence on your part to their wishes will earn you the good-will of the people, and at the death of him whom they may choose for their king their next choice may fall upon you. Do all in your power to win the good-will of whoever may take

the place of leader at my death by setting an example of prompt and willing obedience to his orders. It is easy for an ambitious man to remove a lad from his path, and your safety absolutely demands that you shall give him no reason whatever to regard you as a rival.

"I trust that all this advice may not be needed, and that we may conquer in to-morrow's fight, but if we are beaten the probability that I shall escape is very small, and it is therefore as well that you should be prepared for whatever may happen. If you find that in spite of following my advice the leader of the people, whoever he may be, is ill-disposed towards you, withdraw to the borders of the country, collect as large a band as you can—there are always plenty of restless spirits ready to take part in any adventure—and journey with them to the far west, as so many of our people have done before, and establish yourself there and found a kingdom.

"None of those who have ever gone in that direction have returned, and they must therefore have found space to establish themselves, for had they met with people skilled in war and been defeated, some at least would have found their way back, but so long as traditions have been handed down to us tribes from the east have poured steadily westward to the unknown land, and no band has ever returned."

His father spoke so seriously that Amuba lay down that night on his couch of skins in a very different mood to that in which he had ridden out; he had thought little of his mother's forebodings, and had looked upon it as certain that the Rebu would beat the Egyptians as they had done before, but his father's tone showed him that he too felt by no means confident of the issue of the day.

As soon as daylight broke the Rebu stood to their arms, and an hour later dense masses of the Egyptians were seen advancing. As soon as these reached the edge of the slope and began to descend towards the stream, the king ordered his people to advance to the edge of the swamp and to open fire with their arrows.

A shower of missiles flew through the air and fell among the ranks of the Egyptian footmen who had just arrived at the edge

of the swamp. So terrible was the discharge that the Egyptians recoiled and, retreating half-way up the slope where they would be beyond the reach of the Rebu, in turn discharged their arrows. The superiority of the Egyptian bowmen was at once manifest; they carried very powerful bows, and standing sideways drew them to the ear, just as the English archers did at Crecy, and therefore shot their arrows a vastly greater distance than did their opponents, who were accustomed to draw their bows only to the breast.

Scores of the Rebu fell at the first discharge, and as the storm of arrows continued, they, finding themselves powerless to damage the Egyptians at that distance, retired half-way up the side of the slope. Now from behind the lines of the Egyptian archers a column of men advanced a hundred abreast, each carrying a great faggot; their object was evident, they were about to prepare a wide causeway across the marsh by which the chariots could pass. Again the Rebu advanced to the edge of the swamp and poured in their shower of arrows; but the Egyptians, covering themselves with the bundles of faggots they carried, suffered but little harm, while the Rebu were mown down by the arrows of the Egyptian archers shooting calmly and steadily beyond the range of their missiles.

As soon as the front rank of the Egyptian column reached the edge of the swampy ground the men of the front line laid down their faggots in a close row, and then retired in the intervals between their comrades behind them. Each rank as it arrived at the edge did the same. Many fell beneath the arrows of the Rebu, but the operation went on steadily, the faggots being laid down two deep as the ground became more marshy, and the Rebu saw, with a feeling approaching dismay, the gradual but steady advance of the causeway two hundred yards wide across the swamp.

The king himself and his bravest captains, alighting from their chariots, went down among the footmen and urged them to stand firm, pointing out that every yard the causeway advanced their arrows inflicted more fatal damage among the men who were forming it. Their entreaties, however, were in vain; the ground facing the causeway was already thickly encumbered

with dead, and the hail of the Egyptian arrows was so fast and deadly that even the bravest shrank from withstanding it. At last even their leaders ceased to urge them, and the king gave the order for all to fall back beyond the range of the Egyptian arrows.

Some changes were made in the formation of the troops, and the best and most disciplined bands were placed facing the causeway so as to receive the charge of the Egyptian chariots. The two front lines were of spearmen, while on the higher ground behind them were placed archers whose orders were to shoot at the horses, and pay no heed to those in the chariots; then came the chariots, four hundred in number. Behind these again was a deep line of spearmen; on the right and left extending to the wood and village were the main body of the army, who were to oppose the Egyptian footmen advancing across the swamp.

The completion of the last portion of the causeway cost the Egyptians heavily, for while they were exposed to the arrows of the Rebu archers these were now beyond the range of the Egyptians on the opposite crest. But at last the work was completed. Just as it was finished and the workmen had retired, the king leaped from his chariot, and, leading a body of a hundred men carrying blazing brands, dashed down the slope. As soon as they were seen the Egyptian archers ran forward and a storm of arrows was poured into the little band. Two-thirds of them fell ere they reached the causeway; the others applied their torches to the faggots.

The Egyptian footmen rushed across to extinguish the flames, while the Rebu poured down to repel them. A desperate fight ensued, but the bravery of the Rebu prevailed, and the Egyptians were driven back. Their attack, however, had answered its purpose, for in the struggle the faggots had been trodden deeper into the mire, and the fire was extinguished. The Rebu now went back to their first position and waited the attack which they were powerless to avert. It was upwards of an hour before it began, then the long line of Egyptian footmen opened, and their chariots were seen fifty abreast, then with a mighty shout the whole army advanced down the slope. The Rebu replied with their war-cry.

At full speed the Egyptian chariots dashed down the declivity to the causeway. This was the signal for the Rebu archers to draw their bows, and in an instant confusion was spread among the first line of chariots. The horses wounded by the missiles plunged madly. Many, stepping between the faggots, fell. For a moment the advance was checked, but the Egyptian footmen, entering the swamp waist-deep, opened such a terrible fire with their arrows that the front line of the Rebu were forced to fall back, and the aim of their archers became wild and uncertain.

In vain the king endeavoured to steady them. While he was doing so, the first of the Egyptian chariots had already made their way across the causeway, and behind them the others poured on in an unbroken column. Then through the broken lines of spearmen the Rebu chariots dashed down upon them, followed by the host of spearmen. The king's object was to arrest the first onslaught of the Egyptians, to overwhelm the leaders, and prevent the mass behind from emerging from the crowded causeway.

The shock was terrible. Horses and chariots rolled over in wild confusion, javelins were hurled, bows twanged, and the shouts of the combatants and the cries of the wounded as they fell beneath the feet of the struggling horses created a terrible din. Light and active, the Rebu footmen mingled in the fray, diving under the bellies of the Egyptian horses, and inflicting vital stabs with their long knives or engaging in hand-to-hand conflicts with the dismounted Egyptians. Amuba had charged down with the rest of the chariots. He was stationed in the second line, immediately behind his father; and his charioteer, mindful of the orders he had received, strove, in spite of the angry orders of the lad, to keep the chariot stationary; but the horses, accustomed to manoeuvre in line, were not to be restrained, and in spite of their driver's efforts charged down the slope with the rest.

Amuba, who had hunted the lion and leopard, retained his coolness, and discharged his arrows among the Egyptians with steady aim. For a time the contest was doubtful. The Egyptian chariots crowded on the causeway were unable to move forward, and in many places their weight forced the faggots so deep in the mire that the vehicles were immovable. Meanwhile,



along the swamp on both sides a terrible contest was going on. The Egyptians, covered by the fire of their arrows, succeeded in making their way across the swamp, but here they were met by the Rebu spearmen, and the fight raged along the whole line.

Then two thousand chosen men, the body-guard of the Egyptian king, made their way across the swamp close to the causeway, while at the same time there was a movement among the densely packed vehicles. A tremendous impulse was given to them from behind: some were pressed off into the swamp, some were overthrown or trampled under foot, some were swept forward on to the firm ground beyond, and thus a mass of the heaviest chariots drawn by the most powerful horses forced their way across the causeway over all obstacles.

In their midst was the King of Egypt himself, the great Thotmes.

The weight and impetus of the mass of horses and chariots pressed all before it up the hill. This gave to the chariots which came on behind room to open to the right and left. The king's body-guard shook the solid formation of the Rebu spearmen with their thick flights of arrows, and the chariots then dashed in among them. The Rebu fought with the valour of their race. The Egyptians who first charged among them fell pierced with their arrows, while their horses were stabbed in innumerable places. But as the stream of chariots poured over without a check, and charged in sections upon them, bursting their way through the mass of footmen by the force and fury with which they charged, the infantry became broken up into groups, each fighting doggedly and desperately.

At this moment the officer in command of the Rebu horse, a thousand strong, charged down upon the Egyptian chariots, drove them back towards the swamp, and for a time restored the conflict; but the breaks which had occurred between the Rebu centre and its two flanks had enabled the Egyptian body-guard to thrust themselves through and fall upon the Rebu chariots and spearmen, who were still maintaining the desperate conflict. The Rebu king had throughout fought in the front line of his men, inspiring them with his voice and valour. Many times, when his chariot was so jammed in the mass that all movement

was impossible, he leapt to the ground, and, making his way through the throng, slew many of the occupants of the Egyptian chariots.

But his efforts and those of his captains were unavailing. The weight of the attack was irresistible. The solid phalanx of Egyptian chariots pressed onward, and the Rebu were forced steadily back. Their chariots, enormously outnumbered, were destroyed rather than defeated. The horses fell pierced by the terrible rain of arrows, and the wave of Egyptians passed over them. The king, looking round in his chariot, saw that all was lost here, and that the only hope was to gain one or other of the masses of his infantry on the flank, and to lead them off the field in solid order. But as he turned to give orders, a shaft sent by a bowman in a chariot a few yards away struck him in the eye and he fell back dead in his chariot.

## Chapter 2

Amuba saw his father fall, and leaping from his chariot, strove to make his way through the mingled mass of footmen and chariots to the spot. Jethro followed close behind him. He, too, had caught sight of the falling figure, and knew what Amuba did not—that the Rebu had lost their king. He was not forgetful of the charge which had been laid on him, but the lad was for a moment beyond his control, and he, too, was filled with fury at the fall of the king, and determined if possible to save his body. He reached Amuba's side just in time to interpose his shield between the boy and an Egyptian archer in a chariot he was passing. The arrow pierced the shield and the arm that held it. Jethro paused an instant, broke off the shaft at the shield, and seizing the point, which was projecting two inches beyond the flesh, pulled the arrow through the wound.

It was but a moment's work, but short as it was it almost cost Amuba his life, for the archer, leaning forward, dropped the end of his bow over the lad's head—a trick common among the Egyptian archers—and in a moment dragged him to the ground, while his comrade in the chariot raised his spear to despatch him. Jethro sprang forward with a shout of rage, and with a blow of his sword struck off the head of the spear as it was descending. Then shortening his sword, he sprang into the chariot, ran the man holding the bow through the body, and grappled with the spearman.

The struggle was a short one. Leaving his sword in the body of the archer, Jethro drew his dagger and speedily despatched his foe. Then he jumped down, and lifting Amuba, who was

insensible from the sharp jerk of the bowstring upon his throat and the violence of his fall, carried him back to his chariot. This with the greatest difficulty he managed to draw out of the heat of the conflict, which was for the moment raging more fiercely than before. The Rebu who had seen the fall of their king had dashed forward to rescue the body and to avenge his death. They cleared a space round him, and as it was impossible to extricate his chariot, they carried his body through the chaos of plunging horses, broken chariots, and fiercely struggling men to the rear.

Then it was placed in another chariot, and the driver started with it at full speed for the city. Jethro, on emerging from the crowd, paused for a moment to look round. He saw at once that the battle was lost. The centre was utterly broken, and the masses of the Egyptians who had crossed the swamp were pressing heavily on the flanks of the Rebu footmen, who were still opposing a firm stand to those attacking them in front. For the moment the passage of the Egyptian chariots was arrested; so choked was the causeway with chariots and horses which were imbedded in the mire, or had sunk between the faggots, that further passage was impossible, and a large body of footmen were now forming a fresh causeway by the side of the other.

This would soon be completed, for they were now working undisturbed by opposition, and Jethro saw that as soon as it was done the Egyptian host would sweep across and fall upon the rear of the Rebu. Jethro ran up to two mounted men, badly wounded, who had like himself made their way out of the fight. "See," he said, "in a quarter of an hour a new causeway will be completed, and the Egyptians will pour over. In that case resistance will be impossible, and all will be lost. Do one of you ride to each flank and tell the captains that the king is dead, that there are none to give orders here, and that their only chance to save their troops is to retreat at full speed but keeping good order to the city."

The horsemen rode off immediately, for Jethro, as the king's own charioteer, was a man of some importance. After despatching the messengers he returned to his chariot and at once drove

off. Amuba was now recovering, and the rough motion of the vehicle as it dashed along at full speed aroused him.

"What is it, Jethro? What has happened?"

"The battle is lost, prince, and I am conveying you back to the city. You have had a rough fall and a narrow escape of your life, and can do no more fighting even if fighting were of any good, which it is not."

"And the king, my father?" Amuba said, struggling to his feet. "What of him? Did I not see him fall?"

"I know nought of him for certain," Jethro replied. "There was a terrible fight raging, and as I had you to carry out I could take no share in it. Besides, I had an arrow through my left arm—if I had been a moment later it would have gone through your body instead. And now, if you do not mind taking the reins, I will bandage it up. I have not had time to think about it yet, but it is bleeding fast, and I begin to feel faint."

This was indeed true; but Jethro had called Amuba's attention to his wound principally for the sake of diverting his thoughts for a moment from his fear for his father. As Amuba drove, he looked back. The plain behind him was covered with a mass of fugitives.

"I see that all is lost," he said mournfully. "But how is it that we are not pursued?"

"We shall be pursued before long," Jethro answered. "But I fancy that few of the Egyptians chariots which first passed are in a condition to follow. Most of them have lost horses or drivers. Numbers were broken to pieces in the *melée*. But they are making a fresh causeway, and when that is completed those who cross will take up the pursuit. As for their footmen, they have small chance of catching the Rebu."

"Surely our men ought to retreat in good order, Jethro. Scattered as they are, they will be slaughtered in thousands by the Egyptian chariots."

"They could not oppose much resistance to them anyhow," Jethro replied. "On a plain footmen cannot withstand a chariot charge. As it is, many will doubtless fall; but they will scatter to the right and left, numbers will reach the hills in safety, some will take refuge in the woods and jungles, while many will outrun

the chariots. The new causeway is narrow, and a few only can cross abreast, and thus, though many of our men will be overtaken and killed, I trust that the greater part will escape."

"Let us draw up here for a short time, Jethro. I see there are several chariots and some horsemen behind, and as they are with the main body of the fugitives, they are doubtless friends. Let us join them and proceed in a body to the town. I should not like to be the first to enter with the news of our defeat."

"You are right, prince. As our horses are good, we need not fear being overtaken. We can therefore wait a few minutes."

A score of chariots presently came up, and all halted on seeing Amuba. One of them contained Amusis, the chief captain of the army. He leaped from his chariot when he saw Amuba, and advanced to him.

"Prince," he said, "why do you delay? I rejoice at seeing that you have escaped in the battle, for I marked you bravely fighting in the midst; but let me beg you to hasten on. A few minutes and the host of Egyptian chariots will be upon us."

"I am ready to proceed, Amusis, since you have come. Have you any news of my father?"

"The king has been sorely wounded," the general said, "and was carried off out of the battle; but come, prince, we must hasten on. Our presence will be sorely needed in the city, and we must get all in readiness for defence before the Egyptians arrive."

The chariots again started, and reached the city without seeing anything of the Egyptians, who did not indeed arrive before the walls until an hour later, having been delayed by the slaughter of the fugitives. As the party entered the town they found confusion and terror prevailing. The arrival of the body of the king was the first intimation of disaster, and this had been followed by several horsemen and chariots, who had spread the news of the defeat of the army. The cries of women filled the air; some in their grief and terror ran wildly here and there; some sat at their doors with their faces hidden by their hands, wailing loudly; others tore their garments and behaved as if demented.

On their way to the palace they met the troops who had been left behind to guard the city, moving down stern and silent to

take their places on the wall. During this drive Amusis, who had driven in Amuba's chariot had broken to the boy the news that his father was dead, and Amuba was prepared for the loud lamentation of women which met him as he entered the royal inclosure.

"I will see my mother," he said to Amusis, "and then I will come down with you to the walls and will take whatever part you may assign me in the defence. It is to your experience and valour we must now trust."

"I will do all that I can, prince. The walls are strong, and if, as I hope, the greater part of our army find their way back, I trust we may be able to defend ourselves successfully against the Egyptian host. Assure your royal mother of my deep sympathy for her in her sorrow, and of my devotion to her personally."

The general now drove off, and Amuba entered the royal dwellings. In the principal apartment the body of the king was laid upon a couch in the middle of the room. The queen stood beside it in silent grief, while the attendants raised loud cries, wrung their hands, and filled the air with their lamentation, mingled with praises of the character and bravery of the king. Amuba advanced to his mother's side. She turned and threw her arms round him.

"Thank the gods, my son, that you are restored to me; but what a loss, what a terrible loss is ours!"

"It is indeed, mother. No better father ever lived than mine. But I pray you, mother, lay aside your grief for a while; we shall have time to weep and mourn for him afterward. We have need of all our courage. In a few hours the Egyptian hosts will be before our walls, and every arm will be needed for their defence. I am going down to take my place among the men, to do what I can to encourage them; but the confusion in the city is terrible. None know whether they have lost husbands or fathers, and the cries and lamentations of the women cannot but dispirit and dishearten the men. I think, mother, that you might do much if you would; and I am sure that my father in his resting place with the gods would far rather see you devoting yourself to the safety of his people than to lamentations here."

"What would you have me do?"

"I should say, mother, mount a chariot and drive through the streets of the town; bid the women follow the example of their queen and defer their lamentation for the fallen until the foe has been repelled. Bid each do her part in the defence of the city; there is work for all—stones to be carried to the walls, food to be cooked for the fighting men, hides to be prepared in readiness to be carried to the ramparts where the attack is hottest, to shield our soldiers from arrows. In these and other tasks all can find employment, and in thus working for the defence of the town, the women would find distraction from their sorrows and anxieties."

"Your advice is wise, Amuba, and I will follow it. Order a chariot to be brought down. My maidens shall come with me; and see that two trumpeters are in readiness to precede us. This will insure attention and silence, and my words will be heard as we pass along. How did you escape from the conflict?"

"The faithful Jethro bore me off, mother, or I, too, should have fallen; and now, with your permission, I will go to the wall."

"Do so, Amuba, and may the gods preserve you. You must partake of some food before you go, for you will need all your strength, my son."

Amuba hastily ate the food that was placed before him in another apartment, and drank a goblet of wine, and then hurried down to the wall.

The scene was a heart-rending one. All over the plain were scattered groups of men hurrying towards the city, while among them dashed the Egyptian chariots, overthrowing and slaying them; but not without resistance. The Rebu were well disciplined, and, as the chariots thundered up, little groups gathered together, shield overlapping shield, and spears projecting, while those within the circle shot their arrows or whirled stones from their slings. The horses wounded by the arrows often refused to obey their drivers, but rushed headlong across the plain; others charged up only to fall pierced with spears, while the chariots were often empty of their occupants before they broke into the phalanx.

Thus, although many fell, many succeeded in gaining the gates of the town, and the number of men available for the



defence had already largely increased when Amuba reached the walls. Although the Egyptian chariots came up in great numbers, night fell without the appearance of the main body of the Egyptian army. After darkness set in great numbers of the Rebu troops who had escaped to the hills made their way into the town. The men of the contingents furnished by the other Rebu cities naturally made their way direct to their homes, but before morning the six thousand men left behind to guard the city when the army set out had been swelled to four times their numbers.

Although this was little more than half the force which had marched out to battle, the return of so large a number of the fugitives caused a great abatement of the panic and misery that had prevailed. The women whose husbands or sons had returned rejoiced over those whom they had regarded as lost, while those whose friends had not yet returned gained hopes from the narratives of the fresh comers that their loved ones might also have survived, and would ere long make their way back. The example of the queen had already done much to restore confidence. All knew the affection that existed between the king and her, and the women all felt that if she could lay aside her deep sorrow, and set such an example of calmness and courage at such a time, it behoved all others to set aside their anxieties and do their best for the defence of the town.

Amusis gave orders that all those who had returned from the battle should rest for the night in their homes, the troops who had remained in the city keeping guard upon the walls. In the morning, however, all collected at the trumpet-call, and were formed up according to the companies and battalions to which they belonged. Of some of these which had borne the brunt of the combat there were but a handful of survivors, while of others the greater portion were present; weak battalions were joined to the strong, fresh officers were appointed to take the place of those who were missing; the arms were examined, and all deficiencies made good from the public stores.

Ten thousand men were set aside as reserve to be brought up to the points most threatened, while to the rest were allotted those portions of the wall which they were to occupy. As soon as morning broke the women recommenced the work that had

been interrupted by night, making their way to the walls in long trains, carrying baskets of stones on their heads. Disused houses were pulled down for the sake of their stones and timber, parties of women with ropes dragging the latter to the walls in readiness to be hurled down upon the heads of the enemy. Even the children joined in the work, carrying small baskets of earth to those portions of the wall which Amusis had ordered to be strengthened.

The position of the city had been chosen with a view to defence. It stood on a plateau of rock raised some fifty feet above the plain. The Caspian washed its eastern face; on the other three sides a high wall, composed of earth roughly faced with stones, ran along at the edge of the plateau; above it, at distances of fifty yards apart, rose towers. The entire circuit of the walls was about three miles. Since its foundation by the grandfather of the late king the town had never been taken, although several times besieged, and the Rebu had strong hopes that here, when the chariots of the Egyptians were no longer to be feared, they could oppose a successful resistance to all the efforts of the enemy.

At noon the Egyptian army was seen advancing, and, confident as the defenders of the city felt, they could not resist a feeling of apprehension at the enormous force which was seen upon the plain. The Egyptian army was over three hundred thousand strong. It moved in regular order according to the arms or nationality of the men. Here were Nubians, Sardinians, Etruscans, Oscans, Dauni, Maxyes, Kahaka, a race from Iberia, and bodies of other mercenaries from every tribe and people with whom the Egyptians had any dealings.

The Sardinians bore round shields, three or four spears or javelins, a long straight dagger, and a helmet surmounted by a spike, with a ball at the top. The Etruscans carried no shields, and instead of the straight dagger were armed with a heavy curved chopping-knife; their head-dress resembled somewhat in shape that now worn by the Armenians. The Dauni were Greek in the character of their arms, carrying a round shield, a single spear, a short straight sword, and a helmet of the shape of a cone.

The Egyptians were divided according to their arms. There were regiments of archers, who carried, for close combat, a slightly-curved stick of heavy wood; other regiments of archers carried hatchets. The heavy infantry all bore the Egyptian shield, which was about three feet long. It was widest at the upper part, where it was semicircular, while the bottom was cut off straight. The shields had a boss near the upper part. Some regiments carried, in addition to the spears, heavy maces, others axes. Their helmets all fitted closely to the head; most of them wore metal tassels hanging from the top. The helmets were for the most part made of thick material, quilted and padded; these were preferred to metal, being a protection from the heat of the sun.

Each company carried its own standard; these were all of religious character, and represented animals sacred to the gods, sacred boats, emblematic devices, or the names of the king or queen. These were in metal, and were raised at the ends of spears or staves. The standard-bearers were all officers of approved valour. Behind the army followed an enormous baggage-train; and as soon as this had arrived on the ground the tents of the king and the principal officers were pitched.

“What a host!” Jethro said to Amuba, who, after having his arm dressed on his arrival at the palace, had accompanied the young prince to the walls. “It seems a nation rather than an army. I do not wonder now that we were defeated yesterday, but that we so long held our ground, and that so many escaped from the battle.”

“It is wonderful, truly, Jethro. Look at the long line of chariots moving in as regular order as the footmen. It is well for us that they will now be forced to be inactive. As to the others, although they are countless in numbers, they cannot do much against our walls. No towers that they can erect upon the plains will place them on a level with us here, and the rock is so steep that it is only here and there that it can be climbed.”

“It would seem impossible for them to take it, prince; but we must not be too confident. We know that many towns which believed themselves impregnable have been captured by the Egyptians, and must be prepared for the most daring enterprises. The gates have been already fastened, and so great a

thickness of rocks piled against them, that they are now the strongest part of the wall; those parts of the roads leading up to them that were formed of timber have been burned, and they cannot now reach the gates except by climbing, as at other points. We have provisions enough to last for well-nigh a year, for all the harvest has been brought in from the whole district round, together with many thousands of cattle; of wells there are abundance."

"Yes, I heard the preparations that were being made, Jethro, and doubt not that if we can resist the first onslaught of the Egyptians we can hold out far longer than they can, for the difficulty of victualling so huge an army will be immense. In what way do you think they will attack? For my part I do not see any method which offers a hope of success."

"That I cannot tell you. We know that to us and to the peoples around our cities seem impregnable. But the Egyptians are skilled in all the devices of war. They have laid siege to and captured great numbers of cities, and are doubtless full of plans and expedients of which we know nothing. However, to-morrow morning will show us something. Nothing will be attempted to-day. The generals have first to inspect our walls and see where the assault is to be delivered, and the army will be given a day's rest at least before being called upon to assault such a position."

In the afternoon a cortege of chariots made the circuit of the walls from the shore of the sea round the great plateau to the sea again, keeping just beyond the range of arrows.

"If we had but a few of their archers here," Jethro said, "the Egyptian king would not be so overbold in venturing so near. It is wonderful how strongly they shoot. Their arrows have fully double the range of ours, and their power is sufficient to carry them through the strongest shields, even when strengthened with metal. Had I not seen it I should have thought it impossible that living men, and those no bigger or stronger than we, could have sent their arrows with such power. They stand in a different attitude to that of our archers, and though their shafts are fully a foot longer than ours they draw them to the head. I regarded myself as a good bowman till I met the Egyptians, and now I feel as a child might do when watching a man performing feats of strength of which he had not even imagined a possibility."

In the evening the great council met. It included all the principal officers of the army, the priests, the royal councillors, and the leading men in the state. After a discussion it was determined that in the present crisis it were best to postpone taking any steps to appoint a successor to the late king, but that so long as the siege lasted Amosis should be endowed with absolute powers. In order that there should be no loss of time for the necessity of consulting anyone Amuba was present with his mother at the council, though neither of them took any active part in it. But at its commencement an announcement was made in their name that they were willing to abide by whatever the council should decide, and that indeed both mother and son desired that while this terrible danger hung over the state the supreme power should be placed in the hands of whomsoever the general voice might select as the person best fitted to take the command in such an extremity.

That night the body of the king was consumed on a great funeral pile. Under ordinary occasions the ceremony would have taken place on a narrow promontory jutting out into the sea, about five miles from the city. Here the previous monarchs had been consumed in sight of a multitude of their people, and had been buried beneath great mounds of earth. The priests had long ago pronounced this place the most sacred in the kingdom, and had declared that the anger of the gods would fall upon any who ventured to set foot upon the holy ground. But it was impossible for the present to lay the ashes of the king by the side of those of his forefathers, and the ceremony was therefore conducted within the royal inclosure, only the officiating priests and the wife and son of the deceased being present. When all was over the ashes were collected and were placed in a casket, which was destined, when better times returned, to be laid, in the sight of the whole people, in the sacred inclosure on the promontory.

Early next morning the trumpets of the guards on the walls called all the troops to arms. As soon as Amuba reached his post, he saw the Egyptian army marching against the city. When they arrived within bow-shot the archers, who formed the front lines, opened fire upon the defenders on the walls. Their arrows, however, for the most part fell short, while those of the besieged

rained down upon them with effect. They were therefore withdrawn a short distance, and contracting their ranks a vast number of footmen poured through, and in irregular order ran forward to the foot of the rock, where they were sheltered from the arrows of those on the wall.

"What can they be going to do now?" Amuba exclaimed, laying aside his bow.

Jethro shook his head.

"They are working with a plan," he said. "We shall see before long. Listen."

Even above the din caused by so vast a multitude a sharp metallic sound was presently heard like that of innumerable hammers striking on steel.

"Surely," Amuba exclaimed, "they can never be thinking of quarrying the rock away! That is too great a task even were the whole people of Egypt here."

"It certainly is not that," Jethro agreed; "and yet I cannot think what else can be their intentions."

It was nigh an hour before the mystery was solved. Then, at the blast of a trumpet sounded at the post where the Egyptian king had placed himself, and taken up along the whole of the line, a great number of heads appeared along the edge of rock at the foot of the walls. The Egyptians had been employed in driving spikes in the crevices of the rock. Standing on the first so driven, they then inserted others three feet higher, and so had proceeded until a number of men had climbed up the face of the rock. These let down ropes, and ladders had been hauled up the steepest places. Great numbers of ropes were hung down to assist those who followed in the ascent, and the men who first showed themselves over the brow were followed by a stream of others, until the ledge, which was in most cases but a few feet wide, was crowded with soldiers.

The ladders were now hauled up and placed against the wall, and the Egyptians swarmed up in great numbers; but the Rebu were prepared for the assault, and a storm of stones, beams of wood, arrows, javelins, and other missiles rained down on the Egyptians. Many of the ladders, in spite of the number of men upon them, were thrown back by the defenders, and fell with a

crash over the edge of the rock to the plain below. Here and there the Egyptians gained a footing on the wall before the Rebu had recovered from their first surprise at their daring manner of attack; but so soon as they rallied they attacked the Egyptians with such fury that in every case the latter were slain fighting or were thrown over the embattlements.

For several hours the Egyptians continued their efforts, but after losing vast numbers of men without obtaining any success they were recalled by the sound of the trumpet.

"That has not been very serious, Jethro," Amuba said, wiping the perspiration from his forehead; for he had been encouraging the men by assisting in the lifting and casting over the massive stones and beams of wood.

"It was not difficult to repulse them under such conditions," Jethro said; "but the manner of their attack was a surprise indeed to us, and they have fought with the greatest bravery. You will see that the next time they will have benefited by the lesson, and that we shall have some new device to cope with. Now that they have once found a way to scale the rock we may expect but little rest."

The fight was not renewed until evening, when, just as darkness fell, a large number of the Egyptians again ascended the rock. As before, the Rebu poured missiles down upon them; but this time only a sufficient number had climbed up to be able to stand along close to the foot of the wall, where they were to a great extent sheltered from the missiles from above. The night was a dark one, and all night long the Rebu continued to shower down missiles upon their invisible foe, of whose continued presence they were assured by the sounds which from time to time were heard.

When daylight enabled the defenders to see what was going on at the foot of their walls they raised a shout of surprise and dismay. During the night the Egyptians had hoisted up by ropes a quantity of the timber brought with them for the construction of shelters for those who were engaged on siege operations. The timbers were all cut and prepared for fitting together, and were easily jointed even in the dark. Thus then, when the besiegers looked over, they saw forty or fifty of these shelters erected

G. A. HENTY

# THE CAT OF BUBASTES

## A TALE OF ANCIENT EGYPT

**E**nslaved by a conquering army, the young prince Amuba finds friendship in the house of an Egyptian high priest, where he acts as a companion to the priest's son, Chebron. The entire household plunges into peril when Chebron accidentally kills a cat—and not just any cat, but the cat designated as the sacred cat of the great temple at Bubastes. A riot ensues, and the boys must flee, embarking on a long and hazardous journey to Amuba's homeland of Rebu.

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