

G. A. HENTY

THE CAT OF BUBASTES

A TALE OF ANCIENT EGYPT



The Cat of Bubastes

A Tale of Ancient Egypt

G. A. Henty

DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.
Mineola, New York

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

The Cat of Bubastes

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

G. A. HENTY

THE CAT OF BUBASTES

A TALE OF ANCIENT EGYPT

Enslaved 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.

Set in 1250 B.C., the time of Moses, this thrilling adventure story offers an evocative look at the ancient Egyptian world. Skillfully interwoven in the narrative thread are fascinating, accurate details about Egyptian religion and geography, the methods by which the Nile was used for irrigation, and the ways the Egyptians made war and were prepared for burial.

First published in 1888, *The Cat of Bubastes* is one among the many historical novels for young readers by George Alfred Henty. A storyteller who specialized in blending authentic historical facts with exciting fictional characters, Henty produced more than 140 books and achieved a reputation as "The Prince of Storytellers." Immensely popular and widely used in schools for many years, Henty's novels continue to fire young imaginations with their spirited tales of adventure amid exciting historical eras.

Cover illustration by Jane Wright.

\$9.95 USA

PRINTED IN THE USA

ISBN-13: 978-0-486-42363-0

ISBN-10: 0-486-42363-8



WWW.DOVERPUBLICATIONS.COM