

CHAPTER IX

THE SWEARING OF THE OATH

TWO or three days after this conversation, I forget exactly which it was, Maqueda held her council in the great hall of the palace. When we entered the place in charge of a guard, as though we were prisoners, we found some hundreds of Abati gathered there who were seated in orderly rows upon benches. At the farther end, in an apse-shaped space, sat the Child of Kings herself on a gilded or perhaps a golden chair of which the arms terminated in lions' heads. She was dressed in a robe of glittering silver, and wore a ceremonial veil embroidered with stars, also of silver, and above it, set upon her dark hair, a little circlet of gold, in which shone a single gem that looked like a ruby. Thus attired, although her stature is small, her appearance was very dignified and beautiful, especially as the gossamer veil added mystery to her face.

Behind the throne stood soldiers armed with spears and swords, and at its sides and in front of it were gathered her court to the number of a hundred or more, including her waiting-ladies, who in two companies were arranged to the right and left. Each member of this court was gorgeously dressed according to his profession.

There were the generals and captains with Prince Joshua at the head of them in their Norman-like chain armour. There were judges in black robes and priests in gorgeous garments; there were territorial lords, of

whose attire I remember only that they wore high boots, and men who were called Market-masters, whose business it was to regulate the rate of exchange of products, and with them the representatives of other trades.

In short, here was collected all the aristocracy of the little population of the town and territory of Mur, every one of whom, as we found afterwards, possessed some high-sounding title answering to those of our dukes and lords and Right Honourables, and knights, to say nothing of the Princes of the Blood, of whom Joshua was the first.

Really, although it looked so fine and gay, the spectacle was, in a sense, piteous, being evidently but a poor mockery and survival of the pageantry of a people that had once been great. The vast hall in which they were assembled showed this, since, although the occasion was one that excited public interest, it was after all but a quarter filled by those who had a right to be present.

With much dignity and to the sound of music we were marched up the broad nave, if I may describe it thus, for the building, with its apse and supporting cedar columns, bore some resemblance to a cathedral, till we reached the open space in front of the throne, where our guards prostrated themselves in their Eastern fashion, and we saluted its occupant in our own. Then, chairs having been given to us, after a pause a trumpet blew, and from a side chamber was produced our late guide, Shadrach, heavily manacled and looking extremely frightened.

The trial that followed I need not describe at length. It took a long while, and the three of us were called upon to give evidence as to the quarrel between our companion, the Professor, and the prisoner about the dog Pharaoh and other matters. The testimony, however, that proclaimed the guilt of Shadrach was that of his companion guides, who, it appeared, had been threatened with floggings unless they told the truth.

These men swore, one after the other, that the abandonment of Higgs was a preconceived plan. Several of them added that Shadrach was in traitorous communication with the Fung, whom he had warned of our advent by firing the reeds, and had even contrived to arrange that we were to be taken while he and the other Abati, with the camels laden with our rifles and goods which they hoped to steal, passed through in safety.

In defence Shadrach boldly denied the whole story, and especially that he had pushed the Gentile, Higgs, off his dromedary, as was alleged, and mounted it himself because his own beast had broken down or been injured.

However, his lies availed him little, since, after consultation with the Child of Kings, presently one of the black-robed judges condemned him to suffer death in a very cruel fashion which was reserved for traitors. Further, his possessions were to be forfeited to the State, and his wife and children and household to become public slaves, which meant that the males would be condemned to serve as soldiers, and the females allotted to certain officials in the order of their rank.

Several of those who had conspired with him to betray us to the Fung were also deprived of their possessions and condemned to the army, which was their form of penal servitude.

Thus amidst a mighty wailing of those concerned and of their friends and relatives ended this remarkable trial, of which I give some account because it throws light upon the social conditions of Abati. What hope is there for a people when its criminals are sent, not to jail, but to serve as soldiers, and their womenfolk however innocent, are doomed to become the slaves of the judges or whoever these may appoint. Be it added, however, that in this instance Shadrach and his friends deserved all they got, since, even allowing for a certain amount of false evidence, undoubtedly, for the purposes

of robbery and private hate, they did betray those whom their ruler had sent them to guide and protect.

When this trial was finished and Shadrach had been removed, howling for mercy and attempting to kiss our feet like the cur he was, the audience who had collected to hear it and to see us, the Gentile strangers, dispersed, and the members of the Privy Council, if I may call it so, were summoned by name to attend to their duties. When all had gathered, we three were requested to advance and take seats which had been placed for us among the councillors.

Then came a pause, and, as I had been instructed that I should do, I advanced and laid Sheba's ring upon a cushion held by one of the court officers, who carried it to Maqueda.

"Child of Kings," I said, "take back this ancient token which you lent to me to be a proof of your good faith and mine. Know that by means of it I persuaded our brother who is captive, a man learned in all that has to do with the past, to undertake this mission, and through him the Captain Orme who stands before you, and his servant, the soldier."

She took it and, after examination, showed it to several of the priests, by whom it was identified.

"Though I parted from it with fear and doubt, the holy ring has served its purpose well," she said, "and I thank you, Physician, for returning it to my people and to me in safety."

Then she replaced it on the finger from which it had been withdrawn when she gave it to me many months before.

There, then, that matter ended.

Now an officer cried .

"Walda Nagasta speaks!" whereon every one repeated, "Walda Nagasta speaks," and was silent.

Then Maqueda began to address us in her soft and pleasant voice.

"Strangers from the Western country called England,"

she said, "be pleased to hear me. You know our case with the Fung—that they surround us and would destroy us. You know that in our extremity I took advantage of the wandering hither of one of you a year ago to beg him to go to his own land and there obtain firestuffs and those who understand them, with which to destroy the great and ancient idol of the Fung. For that people declare that if this idol is destroyed they will leave the land they dwell in for another, such being their ancient prophecy."

"Pardon, O Child of Kings," interrupted Orme, "but you will remember that only the other day Barung, Sultan of the Fung, said that in this event his nation would still live on to avenge their god, Harmac. Also he said that of all the Abati he would leave you alive alone."

Now at these ill-omened words a shiver and a murmur went through the Council. But Maqueda only shrugged her shoulders, causing the silver trimmings on her dress to tinkle.

"I have told you the ancient prophecy," she answered, "and for the rest words are not deeds. If the foul fiend, Harmac, goes I think that the Fung will follow him. Otherwise, why do they make sacrifice to Earthquake as the evil god they have to fear? And when some five centuries ago, such an earthquake shook down part of the secret city in the bowels of the mountains that I will show to you afterwards, why did they fly from Mur and take up their abode in the plain, as they said, to protect the god?"

"I do not know," answered Oliver. "If our brother were here, he whom the Fung have captured, he might know, being learned in the ways of idol-worshipping, savage peoples."

"Alas! O Son of Orme," she said, "thanks to that traitor whom but now we have condemned, he is not here and, perhaps, could tell us nothing if he were. At least, the saying runs as I have spoken it, and for many

generations, because of it, we Abati have desired to destroy the idol of the Fung to which so many of us have been offered in sacrifice through the jaws of their sacred lions. Now I ask," and she leaned forward, looking at Oliver, "will you do this for me?"

"Speak of the reward, my niece," broke in Joshua in his thick voice when he saw that we hesitated what to answer, "I have heard that these Western Gentiles are a very greedy people, who live and die for the gold which we despise."

"Ask him, Captain," exclaimed Quick, "if they despise land also, since yesterday afternoon I saw one of them try to cut the throat of another over a piece not bigger than a large dog-kennel."

"Yes," I added, for I confess that Joshua's remarks nettled me, "and ask him whether the Jews did not despoil the Egyptians of their ornaments of gold in the old days, and whether Solomon, whom he claims as a forefather, did not trade in gold to Ophir, and lastly whether he knows that most of his kindred in other lands make a very god of gold."

So Orme, as our spokesman, put these questions with great gusto to Joshua, whom he disliked intensely, whereat some of the Council, those who were not of the party of the Prince, smiled or even laughed, and the silver ornaments upon Maqueda's dress began to shake again as though she also were laughing behind her veil. Still, she did not seem to think it wise to allow Joshua to answer—if he could—but did so herself, saying:

"The truth is, O my friends, that here we set small store by gold because, being shut in and unable to trade, it is of no use to us save as an ornament. Were it otherwise, doubtless we should value it as much as the rest of the world, Jew or Gentile, and shall do so when we are freed from our foes who hem us in. Therefore, my uncle is wrong to claim as a virtue that which is only a necessity, especially when, as your servant says," and she pointed to the Sergeant, "our people make land their

gold and will spend their lives in gaining more of it, even when they have enough."

"Then do the Gentiles seek **no** reward for their services?" sneered Joshua.

"By no means, Prince," answered Oliver, "we are soldiers of fortune, since otherwise why should we have come here to fight your quarrel (laying an unpleasant emphasis on the "your") "against a chief who, if half savage, to us seems to have some merits, those of honour and courage, for instance? If we risk our lives and do our work, we are not too proud to take whatever we can earn. Why should we be, seeing that some of us need wealth, and that our brother, who is as good as dead yonder, owing to the treachery of those who were sent to guard him, has relatives in England who are poor and should be compensated for his loss?"

"Why, indeed?" ejaculated Maqueda. "Listen, now, my friends. In my own name and that of the Abati people I promised to you as many camel-loads of this gold as you can carry away from Mur, and before the day is done I will show it to you if you dare follow me to where it lies hid."

"First the work, then the pay," said Oliver. "Now tell us, Child of Kings, what is that work?"

"This, O Son of Orme. You must swear—if this is not against your consciences as Christians—that for the space of one year from to-day you will serve me and fight for me and be subject to my laws, striving all the while to destroy the idol Harmac by your Western skill and weapons, after which you shall be free to go whither you will with your reward."

"And if we swear, Lady," asked Oliver after reflection, "tell us what rank shall we hold in your service?"

"You shall be my chief captain for this enterprise, O Son of Orme, and those with you shall serve under you in such positions as you may please."

At these words a murmur of dissatisfaction arose from the mail-clad generals in the Council.

"Are we then, to obey this stranger, O Child of Kings?" queried Joshua as their spokesman.

"Aye, my uncle, so far as this great enterprise is concerned, as I have said. Can you handle the firestuffs of which they alone have the secret? Could any three of you have held the gate of Harmac against the armies of the Fung and sent it flying skyward?"

She paused and waited in the midst of a sullen silence.

"You do not answer because you cannot," continued Maqueda. "Then for this purpose be content to serve awhile under the command of those who have the skill and power which you lack."

Still there was no answer.

"Lady," said Orme in this ominous quiet, "you are so good as to make me a general among your soldiers, but will they obey me? And who are your soldiers? Does every man of the Abati bear arms?"

"Alas! no," she replied, fixing upon this latter question perhaps because she could not answer the first. "Alas! no. In the old days it was otherwise, when my great ancestresses ruled, and then we did not fear the Fung. But now the people will not serve as soldiers. They say it takes them from their trades and the games they love; they say they cannot give the time in youth; they say that it degrades a man to obey the orders of those set over him; they say that war is barbarous and should be abolished, and all the while the brave Fung wait without to massacre our men and make our women slaves. Only the very poor and the desperate, and those who have offended against the laws will serve in my army, except it be as officers. Oh! and therefore are the Abati doomed," and, throwing back her veil, suddenly, she burst into tears before us all.

I do not know that I ever remember seeing a sight more pathetic in its way than that of this beautiful and high-spirited young woman weeping in the presence of her Council over the utter degeneracy of the race she was called upon to rule. Being old and accustomed

to these Eastern expressions of emotion, I remained silent, however; but Oliver was so deeply affected that I feared lest he should do something foolish. He went red, he went white, and was rising from his seat to go to her, had I not caught him by the arm and pulled him back. As for Quick, he turned his eyes to the ceiling, as though engaged in prayer, and I heard him muttering:

"The Lord help the poor thing, the Lord help her: the one pearl in the snout of all these gilded swine! Well, I understand I am a bit of a general now, and if I don't make 'em sit up for her sake my name ain't Samuel Quick."

Meanwhile there was much consternation and indignant murmuring amongst the Court, which felt that reflections had been thrown upon it collectively and individually. At such a crisis, as usual, Prince Joshua took the lead. Rising from his seat, he knelt, not without difficulty, before the throne, and said:

"O Child of Kings, why do you distress us with such words? Have you not the God of Solomon to protect you?"

"God protects those who protect themselves," sobbed Maqueda.

"And have you not many brave officers?"

"What are officers without an army?"

"And have you not me, your uncle, your affianced, your lover?" and he laid his hand where he conceived his heart to be, and stared up at her with his rolling, fish-like eyes. "Had it not been for the interference of these Gentiles, in whom you seem to put such trust," he went on, "should I not have taken Barung captive the other day, and left the Fung without a head?"

"And the Abati without such shreds of honour as still belong to them, my uncle."

"Let us be wed, O Bud of the Rose, O Flower of Mur, and soon I will free you from the Fung. We are helpless because we are separate, but together we

shall triumph. Say, O Maqueda, when shall we be wed?"

"When the idol Harmac is utterly destroyed, and the Fung have departed for ever, my uncle," she answered impatiently. "But is this a time to talk of marriage? I declare the Council closed. Let the priests bring the rolls that these strangers from the West may take the oath, and then pardon me if I leave you."

Now from behind the throne appeared a gorgeous gentleman arrayed in a head-dress that reminded me faintly of a bishop's mitre, and wearing over his robes a breastplate of precious stones roughly polished, which was half hidden by a very long white beard.

This person, who it seemed was the high priest, carried in his hand a double roll of parchment written over with characters which we afterward discovered were bastard Hebrew, very ancient and only decipherable by three or four of the Abati, if indeed any of them could really read it. At least it was said to be the roll of the law brought by their forefathers centuries ago from Abyssinia, together with Sheba's ring and a few other relics, among them the cradle (a palpable forgery), in which the child of Solomon and Maqueda, or Belchis, the first known Queen of Sheba, was traditionally reported to have been rocked. This roll of the law, which for generations had been used at all important ceremonies among the Abati, such as the swearing-in of their queens and chief officers, was now tendered to us to hold and kiss while we took the oath of obedience and allegiance in the names of Jehovah and of Solomon (a strange mixture, it struck us), solemnly vowing to perform those things which I have already set out.

"This seems a pretty wide promise," said Oliver, after it had been read to us and translated by me to Quick. "Do you think that we ought to take it on?"

I answered "Yes," that was from my point of view, since otherwise I saw no chance of achieving the object that had caused me to enter upon this adventure

Then, being especially requested to do so, the Sergeant, after reflecting awhile, gave his considered opinion.

"Sir," he said to Orme, "we are three white men here consorting with a mob of quarter-bred African Jews and one real lady. It seems to me that we had best swear anything they want us to, trusting to the lady to see us through the mess, since otherwise we shall be mere filibusters in the country without official rank, and liable therefore to be shot on sight by the enemy, or any mutineers who get the upper hand here. Also, we have the Professor and the Doctor's son to think of. Therefore I say: Swear to anything in reason, reserving allegiance to the Crown of Great Britain, and trust to luck. You see, Captain, we are in their power anyway, and this oath may help, but can't hurt us, while to refuse it must give offence to all these skunks, and perhaps to the lady also, which is of more consequence."

"I think you are probably right, Sergeant," said Orme. "Anyway, in for a penny, in for a pound."

Then he turned to Maqueda, who had been watching this conference in an unknown tongue with some anxiety, or so it seemed to me, and added in Arabic: "O Child of Kings, we will take your oath, although it is wide, trusting to your honour to protect us from any pitfalls which it may cover, for we would ask you to remember that we are strangers in your land who do not understand its laws and customs. Only we stipulate that we retain our allegiance to our own ruler far away, remaining the subjects of that monarch with all rights thereto appertaining. Also, we stipulate that before we enter on our duties, or at any rate during those duties, we shall be at full liberty to attempt the rescue of our friend and companion, now a prisoner in the hands of the Fung, and of the son of one of us who is believed to be a slave to them, and that we shall have all the assistance which you can give us in this matter. Moreover, we demand that if we should be tried for any offence under this oath, you to whom we swear allegiance shall

be our judge alone, none others intermeddling in the trial. If you accept these terms we will swear the oath; otherwise we swear nothing, but will act as occasion may arise."

Now we were requested to stand back while the Child of Kings consulted with her advisers, which she did for a considerable time, since evidently the questions raised involved differences of opinion. In the end, however, she and those who supported her seemed to overrule the objectors, and we were called up and told that our terms had been accepted and engrossed upon the form of the oath, and that everything there included would be faithfully observed by the Ruler and Council of the Abati.

So we signed and swore, kissing the book, or rather the roll, in the civilized fashion. Afterwards, very tired, for all this business had been anxious, we were conducted back to our own quarters to lunch, or rather to dine, for the Abati ate their heaviest meal at midday, taking a siesta after it according to the common Eastern custom.

About four o'clock of that afternoon I was awakened from my nap by the growls of Pharaoh, and looked up to see a man crouching against the door, evidently in fear of the dog's fangs. He proved to be a messenger from Maqueda, sent to ask us if we cared to accompany her to a place that we had never seen. Of course we answered "Yes," and were at once led by the messenger to a disused and dusty hall at the back of the palace, where presently Maqueda and three of her ladies joined us, and with them a number of men who carried lighted lamps, gourds of oil, and bundles of torches.

"Doubtless, friends," said Maqueda, who was unveiled and appeared to have quite recovered from her outburst of the morning, "you have seen many wonderful places in this Africa and other lands, but now I am about to show you one that, I think, is stranger than them all."

Following her, we came to a door at the end of the hall which the men unbolting and shut again behind us, and thence passed into a long passage cut in the rock, that sloped continuously downwards and at length led through another doorway to the vastest cave that we had ever heard of or seen. So vast was it, indeed, that the feeble light of our lamps did not suffice to reach the roof, and only dimly showed to right and left the outlines of what appeared to be shattered buildings of rock.

"Behold the cave city of Mur," said Maqueda, waving the lamp she held. "Here it was that the ancients whom we believe to have been the forefathers of the Fung, had their secret stronghold. These walls were those of their granaries, temples, and places of ceremonial, but, as I have told you, centuries ago an earthquake shattered them, leaving them as they are now. Also, it broke down much of the cave itself, causing the roof to fall, so that there are many parts where it is not safe to enter. Come now and see what is left."

We followed her into the depth of the wonderful place, our lanterns and torches making little stars of light in that great blackness. We saw the ruins of granaries still filled with the dust of what I suppose had once been corn, and came at length to a huge, roofless building of which the area was strewn with shattered columns, and among them overthrown statues, covered so thick by dust that we could only discover that most of them seemed to be shaped like sphinxes.

"If only Higgs were here," said Oliver with a sigh, and passed on to Maqueda, who was calling him to look at something else.

Leaving the temple in which it was unsafe to walk, she led us to where a strong spring, the water supply of the place, bubbled up into a rock basin, and overflowing thence through prepared openings, ran away we knew not whither.

"Look, this fountain is very ancient," said Maqueda,

pointing to the lip of the basin that was worn away to the depth of several inches where those who drew water had for many generations rested their hands upon the hard rock.

"How did they light so vast a cavern?" asked Oliver.

"We do not know," she answered, "since lamps would scarcely have served them. It is a secret of the past which none of the Abati have cared to recover, and another is how the air is always kept fresh so deep in the bowels of the mountain. We cannot even say whether this place is natural, as I think, or hollowed out by men."

"Both, I expect," I answered. "But tell me, Lady, do the Abati make any use of this great cave?"

"Some corn is still stored here in pits in case of siege," she replied, adding sadly, "but it is not enough to be of real service, since almost all of it comes from the estates of the Child of Kings. In vain have I prayed the people to contribute, if only a hundredth part of their harvest, but they will not. Each says that he would give if his neighbour gave, and so none give. And yet a day may come when a store of corn alone would stand between them and death by hunger—if the Fung held the valley, for instance," and she turned impatiently and walked forward to show us the stables where the ancients kept their horses and the marks of their chariot wheels in the stone floor.

"Nice people, the Abati, sir," said Quick to me. "If it weren't for the women and children, and, above all, for this little lady, whom I am beginning to worship like my master, as in duty bound, I'd like to see them do a bit of hungering."

"There is one more place to show you," said Maqueda, when we had inspected the stables and argued as to what possible cause could have induced the ancients to keep horses underground, "which perhaps you will think worth a visit, since it holds the treasures that are, or shall be, yours. Come!"

We started forward again along various passages, the last of which suddenly widened into a broad and steep incline of rock, which we followed for quite fifty paces, till it ended in what seemed to be a blank wall. Here Maqueda bade her ladies and attendants halt, which indeed they seemed very anxious to do, though at the moment we did not know why. Then she went to one end of the wall where it joined that of the passage, and, showing us some loose stones, asked me to pull them out, which I did, not without difficulty. When an aperture had been made large enough for a man to creep through, she turned to her people and said :

“You, I know, believe this place to be haunted, nor would the bravest of you enter it save by express command. But I and these strangers have no such fears. Therefore give us a gourd of oil and some torches and bide where you are till we return, setting a lamp in the hole in the wall to guide us in case our own should become extinguished. No, do not reason but obey. There is no danger, for though hot, the air within is pure, as I know who have breathed it more than once.”

Then she gave her hand to Oliver, and with his assistance crept through the hole. We followed, to find ourselves in another cavern, where, as she had said, the temperature was much hotter than that without.

“What is this place?” asked Orme in a low voice, for its aspect seemed to awe him.

“The tomb of the old kings of Mur,” she replied. “Presently you shall see,” and once more she took his hand, for the slope was sharp and slippery.

On we went, always descending, for perhaps four hundred yards, our footfalls echoing loudly in the intense silence, and our lamps, round which the bats circled in hundreds, making four stars of light in the utter blackness, till at length the passage widened out into what appeared to be a vast circular arena, with a lofty dome-like roof of rock. Maqueda turned to the

right, and, halting before some objects that glimmered whitely, held up her light, saying, "Look!"

This was what we saw: A great stone chair and, piled upon its seat and upon its base, human bones. Amongst these was a skull, and on it, grotesquely tilted, a crown of gold, while other ornaments—sceptres, rings, necklaces, weapons and armour—were mingled with the bones. Nor was this all, for in a wide circle round the chair were other skeletons, fifty or more of them, and amongst them the ornaments that their owners had worn.

Also, in front of each stood a tray of some metal, which we afterwards discovered to be silver or copper, and heaped upon it every kind of valuable, such as golden cups and vases, toilet utensils, necklaces, pectorals, bracelets, leglets, earrings and beads that seemed to be cut from precious stones, piles of ring money, and a hundred other things such as have been prized by mankind since the beginning of civilization.

"You understand," said Maqueda, as we stared open-mouthed at this awful and marvellous sight, "he in the chair was the king. Those about him were his officers, guards, and women. When he was buried they brought his household here, bearing his wealth, sat them down about him, and killed them. Blow away the dust, and you will see that the rock beneath is still stained with their blood; also, there are the sword-marks on their skulls, and, neckbones."

Quick, who was of an inquiring mind, stepped forward and verified these statements.

"Golly!" he said, throwing down the skull of a man over whom the tired executioners had evidently bungled badly, "I'm glad I didn't serve the old kings of Mur. But the same game goes on in a small way to-day in Africa, for when I was campaigning on the West Coast I came across it not a fortnight old, only there they had buried the poor beggars living."

"Perhaps," said Maqueda, when the Sergeant's re-

marks had been translated to her. "Yet I do not think the custom is one that my people would love," and she laughed a little, then added, "forward, friends, there are many more of these kings and oil does not burn for ever."

So we moved on, and at a distance of some twenty paces found another chair with scattered bones on and about the seat, lying where each had fallen as the dead man decayed. Round it were the skeletons of the unfortunates who had been doomed to accompany him upon his last journey, every one of them behind his tray of golden objects, or of simple treasure. In front of this king's chair also were the bones of a dog with a jewelled collar.

Again we proceeded to a third mortuary, if it may so be called, and here Maqueda pointed out the skeleton of a man, in front of which stood a tray piled up with what evidently had been the medicine bottles of the period and among them a number of rude surgical instruments.

"Say, O Physician Adams," she remarked with a smile, "would you have wished to be court doctor to the kings of Mur, if indeed that was then their city's name?"

"No, Lady," I answered; "but I do wish to examine his instruments if I have your leave," and while she hurried forward I stooped down and filled my pockets. Here I may remark, that upon subsequent inspection I found among these instruments, manufactured I know not what number of thousands of years ago—for on that point controversy rages among the learned—many that with modifications are still in use to-day.

Of that strange and dreadful sepulchre there is little more to tell. From monarch to monarch we marched on till at length we grew weary of staring at bones and gold. Even Quick grew weary, who had passed his early youth in assisting his father, the parish sexton, and therefore, like myself, regarded these relics with professional interest, though of a different degree. At any rate he remarked that this family vault was uncommonly hot, and perhaps,

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if it pleased her Majesty, as he called Maqueda, we might take the rest of the deceased gentlemen as read, like a recruit's attestation questions.

But just then we came to No. 25, according to my counting, and were obliged to stop to wonder, for clearly this king had been the greatest of them all, since round him lay about two or three times the average number of dead, and an enormous quantity of wealth, some of it in the form of little statues of men and women, or perhaps of gods. Yet, oddly enough, he was hunchback with a huge skull, almost a monstrosity indeed. Perhaps his mind partook of the abnormal qualities of his body, since no less than eleven little children had been sacrificed at his obsequies, two of whom, judging from their crooked bones, must have been his own.

One wonders what chanced in Mur and the surrounding territories which then acknowledged its sway when King Hunchback ruled. Alas! history writes no record.

