

## THE GOD OF IBREEZ.

By MARK WELLS.

El-gebel, surnamed the Terrible, rode northwards on his sacred stallion. The way was steep; before him towered the mighty range of the Mountains of the Bull, their snows stained red by sunset. The King laughed and turned in his saddle. He looked over the forests of pine (whose spears seemed to him, in his poetic mood, like those of his own cavalry) to where in the dying light the flames of that city which is now called Tarsus began to shine lurid through the dust of that sultry air of the great plain. It was the climax of his life; never in all history had any army passed through those tremendous gorges, jagged wounds torn by the swords of warring gods his ancestors, where the way wound among prodigious precipices of red rocks and gray, often so narrow that two men could not ride abreast, often so steep and rugged that even the sure step of mountain-bred horses sometimes faltered.

He felt himself at last worthy even of those great gods; his heart beat high to feel that they could look on him with pride. Like the great golden eagle, he had swooped on Tarsus that never dreamed of danger from the north. In one fierce battle he had overwhelmed the unready levies of the city; the timid and effeminate burgesses had hastened to surrender the gates, but the grim warrior had put all to fire and sword. His men were laden with spoils great and goodly, gold and silver and copper, tapestries and silks, a thousand things precious beyond all price, since he had never even dreamed beauty such as theirs. He had not only conquered an enemy; he had discovered a new world. More than that, he had the jewel of all, the wonder of his eyes, a thing the thought of which made his heart ache within him, so marvelous was it beyond all the imaginations of his soul. And even as his thought turned thither, the sacred stallion ceased to climb. He had come to the crest of the first range; before him lay a stretch of meadow land, spacious and gracious. He called to his equerry to give the order to pitch camp.

The equipment of the raiding hillmen was of the simplest order. For all shelter the men stripped blankets of goats' hair, which during the day they used as saddles, from their chargers, and fastened them to spears fixed in the ground. For meat they had dried goats' flesh and flat cakes of unleavened meal. Each man was thus entirely independent of nature for three weeks, or, with economy, a month, providing only that he could find water at intervals of three or four days. For the goat was still the saviour of the tribe, his skin not only furnishing an excellent receptacle for water, but conferring upon it the blessing of a fall all its own.

The King's own equipment was hardly more elaborate. His tent was larger than those of his men, and made of camels' hair, dyed red and blue in stripes. Instead of goats' flesh he had dried venison, and his cakes were specially baked for him daily; also they had much more salt in them than any common soldier could afford.

El-gebel had not earned the title of The Terrible without deserving it. His accession to power had not been devoid of incident as that of most modern monarchs. His line combined the sacerdotal with the kingly function; the person in office was expected not only to govern — in fact, government was looked upon as a sort of necessary evil — but to insure the daily rising

of the sun and the periodical supply of rain. He was expected to keep the goats from disease and even from wandering; and the apple and walnut and mulberry harvests, as well as those of maize and rice, were as dependent on his energy and activity as the success of a state ball to-day is upon the urbanity of the monarch. Consequently when the king fell ill or became old, his self-forgetful care for the welfare of his people would induce him to call attention to the fact of his incapacity, and to suggest that he should be slain so that his spirit might pass into the vigorous body of his heir. Sometimes, the failing body would infect even the mind, so that the King did not appreciate the urgency of the matter. In such a case kind friends would remind him. Now El-gebel, who was the eldest surviving son of his royal father, the first born having been piously sacrificed according to custom, discovered that a younger brother was supplanting him in his father's affections. This, to El-gebel, was a sure sign of the King's infirmity. He put the point before several powerful chiefs in whose wisdom he had the utmost confidence, although (by a curious coincidence) they were themselves in disgrace at court, and the upshot was that they decided that the safety of the community demanded the immediate succession of El-gebel.

It would be undeniably serious if one fine morning the sun failed to rise!

So they paid a visit to the decrepit ruler, who, though taken by surprise, killed three of the patriots before succumbing to a spear-thrust in the back from the hand of El-gebel himself.

Once upon the throne, El-gebel showed himself worthy of the trust reposed in him. Aware that stability of rule is above all to be desired in any community, is, in fact, the prime condition of its prosperity, and not forgetful of the fact that the brethren of a King are often envious of him, he overmastered his family affection in the interests of the state, and inviting his brothers to a banquet in celebration of his accession, he poisoned them.

As to the chiefs who had aided him in the painful but necessary task of supplanting his sire, he reasoned rightly that they were turbulent persons with no respect for established authority; he had himself seen them in the very act of regicide. Of this crime, which, the King being also a priest, was not only murder but sacrilege, he accordingly convicted them; and they suffered the penalty of decapitation. This course of action commended itself to all the best and most conservative elements in the state; such uprightness, combined with such self-sacrificing devotion to duty, commanded both respect and obedience.

Now it was decreed by Fate that a certain enterprising merchant of Tarsus, seeking a new market, should determine to journey across the Mountains of the Bull with four asses laden with choice wares.

The King, like Columbus when he saw the jetsam thrown by the Gulf Stream on the shores of Europe, divined the existence of boundless wealth beyond his frontier, and, cutting off the ears of the explorer as evidence that he was no effeminate and luxurious potentate with no thought beyond his own pleasure, but a serious ruler who desired only the prosperity of his people, inquired minutely as to the distance of his city, its population, its army, its defenses, its wealth, as became an earnest seeker