



THE THLOBBON OF SAPPANAL

Translated by LORD DUNSANY

ACT VII

SCENE : The great hall at Ilaunos.

TIME : The year after the fifteenth festival of the Akneian mysteries.

The King is seated on the Throne of Skyadax, in the midst of the splendid hall, looking out through the window over the golden plains towards Heliostahn. Queen Thyape is near him with attendants.

Twelve men, entirely in grey, pass slowly over the stage at intervals of seven paces. They can scarcely see in the strong morning light, because they have never before left the caverns beneath the palace. Each one salutes the King by uplifted hand as he passes the crystal throne, and says to him "This is the day." The King motions at once to two of his spear-guard, who slip away from the hall.

The King (to Thyape)—So we shall never go to Heliostahn.

Thyape—We shall even yet go to Heliostahn, and sing there pastoral song. (To the King's Envoy): Summon the thakbars and the loyal and the sworn. Bid them come armed at once. It is the day.

The King—We shall never come to the gates of Heliostahn, nor sit by the river of Kyfe.

Thyape—It was an idle prophecy.

The King—Is not the sky bloodshot? Is there no trouble among the winds?

An Attendant (leaning from the window)—There is no trouble among the winds to-day. The sky is like a turquoise that the mountaineers have found.

The King—Doth nothing evil come from Ektherana?

Attendant—Nothing from Ektherana, save a far speck of dust.

[From now on the chiefest of the loyal come in by twos and threes.

Presently the two spearsmen of the guard come back to the hall, dragging between them the slave who is destined to be king. Again the King casts his spear at him, and weeps when it harmlessly strikes a pillar of cedar.]

The King—At least let him be flogged.

[The spearguard set upon the slave and wound and beat him before the King.]

All the King's thakbars and soldanos are by now gathered round him with weapons in their hands. On a sign from Thakbar Odwahn, they say in unison the oath to the dynasty of Skyadax.

A sound of musick is heard far off.]

A Spearsman of the Guard (looking out by the window)—A company of camels is coming from Ektherana.

[There is a silence among those assembled but for the moans of the slave and the sound of the spearsmen wounding him.]

A Thakbar (to the Chieftain of the spear-guard)—The musick has a sound as of silver drums.

Chieftain—It is like to silver drums.

Thakbar—Silver drums strangely beaten.

Several Voices at once—It is the tune of the prophecy.

[Henceforward, all listen, rapt to the strange musick which continues to grow louder ; nobody speaks, and all forget the King.]

The King (to the Prophet of the Dynasty)—It is the tune of the prophecy.

[The Prophet of the Dynasty does not notice him, but stands listening to the musick.]

The King (clutching his wrist)—It is the tune of the prophecy.

[The Prophet of the Dynasty nods his head.]

The spearsmen of the guard cease wounding the slave and listen to the musick. It grows so loud that his moans are audible no longer.

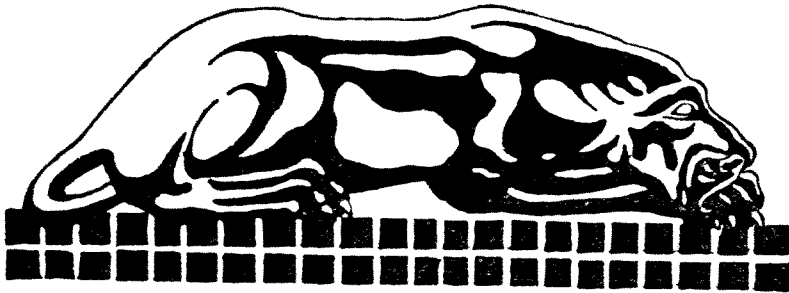
Four powerful men enter. They have grizzly beards and are blind. By the taps and touches whereby they sign to each other, they appear to be also dumb. They move apart and bend forward, each stretching out a hand, and moving grotesquely with a kind of dance, in step to the tune outside, they grope about the hall. It is clear that they are hunting for the King. Still all the King's men stand motionless, still listening to the tune. The King sits pale and silent, not deigning to descend from the Throne of Skyadax. The four men draw silver pipes with their left hands out of their tunics and play on them as they move, and by the sound they keep in perfect line. The tune is the same as the one that is played outside. When their clutching right hands touch one of the thakbars or soldanos, they withdraw it and keep on searching.

At last one lays a crooked hand on the Throne of Skyadax ; his pipe utters a sudden and shrill skirl. The other three draw in. They grip the King, who neither speaks nor resists, and walking erect, he is led away between their ungainly figures.

Presently, by an unseen hand outside, his crown is thrown into the hall, and is gently placed by the Prophet of the Dynasty on the slave's bleeding forehead as he lies on the onyx floor, the rest continuing as it were in a trance. And as soon as this is accomplished, the sound of the magical tune grows rapidly fainter and fainter.

At seven paces interval, the twelve grey men return, and each uplifts his hand as he passes the slave.]

CURTAIN.



N. THEOPHILAKTOFF