

GEORG EBERS

HOMO SUM.

VOLUME 02

Georg Ebers

Homo Sum. Volume 02

«Public Domain»

Ebers G.

Homo Sum. Volume 02 / G. Ebers — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER V | 5 |
| CHAPTER VI | 10 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 12 |

Georg Ebers

Homo Sum – Volume 02

CHAPTER V

Thanks to the senator's potion Stephanus soon fell asleep. Paulus sat near him and did not stir; he held his breath, and painfully suppressed even an impulse to cough, so as not to disturb the sick man's light slumbers.

An hour after midnight the old man awoke, and after he had lain meditating for some time with his eyes open, he said thoughtfully: "You called yourself and us all egotistic, and I certainly am so. I have often said so to myself; not for the first time to day, but for weeks past, since Hermas came back from Alexandria, and seems to have forgotten how to laugh. He is not happy, and when I ask myself what is to become of him when I am dead, and if he turns from the Lord and seeks the pleasures of the world, my heart sickens. I meant it for the best when I brought him with me up to the Holy Mountain, but that was not the only motive—it seemed to me too hard to part altogether from the child. My God! the young of brutes are secure of their mother's faithful love, and his never asked for him when she fled from my house with her seducer. I thought he should at least not lose his father, and that if he grew up far away from the world he would be spared all the sorrow that it had so profusely heaped upon me, I would have brought him up fit for Heaven, and yet through a life devoid of suffering. And now—and now? If he is miserable it will be through me, and added to all my other troubles comes this grief."

"You have sought out the way for him," interrupted Paulus, "and the rest will be sure to come; he loves you and will certainly not leave you so long as you are suffering."

"Certainly not?" asked the sick man sadly. "And what weapons has he to fight through life with?"

"You gave him the Saviour for a guide; that is enough," said Paulus soothingly. "There is no smooth road from earth to Heaven, and none can win salvation for another."

Stephanus was silent for a long time, then he said: "It is not even allowed to a father to earn the wretched experience of life for his son, or to a teacher for his pupil. We may point out the goal, but the way thither is by a different road for each of us."

"And we may thank God for that," cried Paulus. "For Hermas has been started on the road which you and I had first to find for ourselves."

"You and I," repeated the sick man thoughtfully. "Yes, each of us has sought his own way, but has enquired only which was his own way, and has never concerned himself about that of the other. Self! self!—How many years we have dwelt close together, and I have never felt impelled to ask you what you could recall to mind about your youth, and how you were led to grace. I learnt by accident that you were an Alexandrian, and had been a heathen, and had suffered much for the faith, and with that I was satisfied. Indeed you do not seem very ready to speak of those long past days. Our neighbor should be as dear to us as our self, and who is nearer to me than you? Aye, self and selfishness! There are many gulfs on the road towards God."

"I have not much to tell," said Paulus. "But a man never forgets what he once has been. We may cast the old man from us, and believe we have shaken ourselves free, when lo! it is there again and greets us as an old acquaintance. If a frog only once comes down from his tree he hops back into the pond again."

"It is true, memory can never die!" cried the sick man. "I can not sleep any more; tell me about your early life and how you became a Christian. When two men have journeyed by the same road, and the moment of parting is at hand, they are fain to ask each other's name and where they came from."

Paulus gazed for some time into space, and then he began: "The companions of my youth called me Menander, the son of Herophilus. Besides that, I know for certain very little of my youth, for as I have already told you, I have long since ceased to allow myself to think of the world. He who abandons a thing, but clings to the idea of the thing, continues—"

"That sounds like Plato," said Stephanus with a smile.

"All that heathen farrago comes back to me today," cried Paulus. "I used to know it well, and I have often thought that his face must have resembled that of the Saviour."

"But only as a beautiful song might resemble the voice of an angel," said Stephanus somewhat drily. "He who plunges into the depths of philosophic systems—"

"That never was quite my case," said Paulus. "I did indeed go through the whole educational course; Grammar, Rhetoric, Dialectic and Music—"

"And Arithmetic, Geometry, and Astronomy," added Stephanus.

"Those were left to the learned many years since," continued Paulus, "and I was never very eager for learning. In the school of Rhetoric I remained far behind my fellows, and if Plato was dear to me I owe it to Paedonomus of Athens, a worthy man whom my father engaged to teach us."

"They say he had been a great merchant," interrupted Stephanus. "Can it be that you were the son of that rich Herophilus, whose business in Antioch was conducted by the worthy Jew Urbib?"

"Yes indeed," replied Paulus, looking down at the ground in some confusion. "Our mode of life was almost royal, and the multitude of our slaves quite sinful. When I look back on all the vain trifles that my father had to care for, I feel quite giddy. Twenty sea-going ships in the harbor of Eunostus, and eighty Nile-boats on Lake Mareotis belonged to him. His profits on the manufacture of papyrus might have maintained a cityfull of poor. But we needed our revenues for other things. Our Cyraenian horses stood in marble stalls, and the great hall, in which my father's friends were wont to meet, was like a temple. But you see how the world takes possession of us, when we begin to think about it! Rather let us leave the past in peace. You want me to tell you more of myself? Well; my childhood passed like that of a thousand other rich citizens' sons, only my mother, indeed, was exceptionally beautiful and sweet, and of angelic goodness."

"Every child thinks his own mother the best of mothers," murmured the sick man.

"Mine certainly was the best to me," cried Paulus. "And yet she was a heathen. When my father hurt me with severe words of blame, she always had a kind word and loving glance for me. There was little enough, indeed, to praise in me. Learning was utterly distasteful to me, and even if I had done better at school, it would hardly have counted for much to my credit, for my brother Apollonius, who was about a year younger than I, learned all the most difficult things as if they were mere child's play, and in dialectic exercises there soon was no rhetorician in Alexandria who could compete with him. No system was unknown to him, and though no one ever knew of his troubling himself particularly to study, he nevertheless was master of many departments of learning. There were but two things in which I could beat him—in music, and in all athletic exercises; while he was studying and disputing I was winning garlands in the palaestra. But at that time the best master of rhetoric and argument was the best man, and my father, who himself could shine in the senate as an ardent and elegant orator, looked upon me as a half idiotic ne'er-do-weel, until one day a learned client of our house presented him with a pebble on which was carved an epigram to this effect: 'He who would see the noblest gifts of the Greek race, should visit the house of Herophilus, for there he might admire strength and vigor of body in Menander, and the same qualities of mind in Apollonius.' These lines, which were written in the form of a lute, passed from mouth to mouth, and gratified my father's ambition; from that time he had words of praise for me when my quadriga won the race in the Hippodrome, or when I came home crowned from the wrestling-ring, or the singing match. My whole life was spent in the baths and the palaestra, or in gay feasting."

"I know it all," exclaimed Stephanus interrupting him, "and the memory of it all often disturbs me. Did you find it easy to banish these images from your mind?"

"At first I had a hard fight," sighed Paulus. "But for some time now, since I have passed my fortieth year, the temptations of the world torment me less often. Only I must keep out of the way of the carriers who bring fish from the fishing towns on the sea, and from Raithu to the oasis."

Stephanus looked enquiringly at the speaker, and Paulus went on: "Yes, it is very strange. I may see men or women—the sea yonder or the mountain here, without ever thinking of Alexandria, but only of sacred things; but when the savor of fish rises up to my nostrils I see the market and fish stalls and the oysters—"

"Those of Kanopus are famous," interrupted Steplianus, "they make little pasties there —" Paulus passed the back of his hand over his bearded lips, exclaiming, "At the shop of the fat cook —Philemon—in the street of Herakleotis." But he broke off, and cried with an impulse of shame, "It were better that I should cease telling of my past life. The day does not dawn yet, and you must try to sleep."

"I cannot sleep," sighed Stephanus; "if you love me go on with your story."

"But do not interrupt me again then," said Paulus, and he went on: "With all this gay life I was not happy—by no means. When I was alone sometimes, and no longer sitting in the crowd of merry boon-companions and complaisant wenches, emptying the wine cup and crowned with poplar, I often felt as if I were walking on the brink of a dark abyss as if every thing in myself and around me were utterly hollow and empty. I could stand gazing for hours at the sea, and as the waves rose only to sink again and vanish, I often reflected that I was like them, and that the future of my frivolous present must be a mere empty nothing. Our gods were of little account with us. My mother sacrificed now in one temple, and now in another, according to the needs of the moment; my father took part in the high festivals, but he laughed at the belief of the multitude, and my brother talked of the 'Primaeval Unity,' and dealt with all sorts of demons, and magic formulas. He accepted the doctrine of Iamblichus, Ablavius, and the other Neoplatonic philosophers, which to my poor understanding seemed either superhumanly profound or else debasingly foolish; nevertheless my memory retains many of his sayings, which I have learned to understand here in my loneliness. It is vain to seek reason outside ourselves; the highest to which we can attain is for reason to behold itself in us! As often as the world sinks into nothingness in my soul, and I live in God only, and have Him, and comprehend Him, and feel Him only—then that doctrine recurs to me. How all these fools sought and listened everywhere for the truth which was being proclaimed in their very ears! There were Christians everywhere about me, and at that time they had no need to conceal themselves, but I had nothing to do with them. Twice only did they cross my path; once I was not a little annoyed when, on the Hippodrome, a Christian's horses which had been blessed by a Nazarite, beat mine; and on another occasion it seemed strange to me when I myself received the blessing of an old Christian dock-laborer, having pulled his son out of the water.

"Years went on; my parents died. My mother's last glance was directed at me, for I had always been her favorite child. They said too that I was like her, I and my sister Arsinoe, who, soon after my father's death, married the Prefect Pompey. At the division of the property I gave up to my brother the manufactories and the management of the business, nay even the house in the city, though, as the elder brother, I had a right to it, and I took in exchange the land near the Kanopic gate, and filled the stables there with splendid horses, and the lofts with not less noble wine. This I needed, because I gave up the days to baths and contests in the arena, and the nights to feasting, sometimes at my own house, sometimes at a friend's, and sometimes in the taverns of Kanopus, where the fairest Greek girls seasoned the feasts with singing and dancing.

"What have these details of the vainest worldly pleasure to do with my conversion, you will ask. But listen a while. When Saul went forth to seek his father's asses he found a crown.

"One day we had gone out in our gilded boats, and the Lesbian girl Archidike had made ready a feast for us in her house, a feast such as could scarcely be offered even in Rome.

"Since the taking of our city by Diocletian, after the insurrection of Achilleus, the Imperial troops who came to Alexandria behaved insolently enough. Between some of my friends, and certain of the young officers of Roman patrician families, there had been a good deal of rough banter for some months past, as to their horses, women—I know not what; and it happened that we met these very gentry at the house of Archidike.

"Sharp speeches were made, which the soldiers replied to after their fashion, and at last they came to insulting words, and as the wine heated us and them, to loud threats.

"The Romans left the house of entertainment before we did. Crowned with garlands, singing, and utterly careless, we followed soon after them, and had almost reached the quay, when a noisy troop rushed out of a side street, and fell upon us with naked weapons. The moon was high in the heavens, and I could recognize some of our adversaries. I threw myself on a tall tribune, throttled him, and, as he fell, I fell with him in the dust. I am but dimly conscious of what followed, for sword-strokes were showered upon me, and all grew black before my eyes. I only know what I thought then, face to face with death."

"Well—?" asked Stephanus.

"I thought," said Paulus reddening, "of my fighting-quails at Alexandria, and whether they had had any water. Then my dull heavy unconsciousness increased; for weeks I lay in that state, for I was hacked like sausage-meat; I had twelve wounds, not counting the slighter ones, and any one else would have died of any one of them. You have often wondered at my scars."

"And whom did the Lord choose then to be the means of your salvation?"

"When I recovered my senses," continued Paulus, "I was lying in a large, clean room behind a curtain of light material; I could not raise myself, but just as if I had been sleeping so many minutes instead of days, I thought again directly of my quails. In their last fight my best cock had severely handled handsome Nikander's, and yet he wanted to dispute the stakes with me, but I would assert my rights! At least the quails should fight again, and if Nikander should refuse I would force him to fight me with his fists in the Palaestra, and give him a blue reminder of his debt on the eye. My hands were still weak, and yet I clenched them as I thought of the vexatious affair. 'I will punish him,' I muttered to myself.

"Then I heard the door of the room open, and I saw three men respectfully approaching a fourth. He greeted them with dignity, but yet with friendliness, and rolled up a scroll which he had been reading, I would have called out, but I could not open my parched lips, and yet I saw and heard all that was going on around me in the room.

"It all seemed strange enough to me then; even the man's mode of greeting was unusual. I soon perceived that he who sat in the chair was a judge, and that the others had come as complainants; they were all three old and poor, but some good men had left them the use and interest of a piece of land. During seed-time one of them, a fine old man with long white hair, had been ill, and he had not been able to help in the harvest either; 'and now they want to withhold his portion of the corn,' thought I; but it was quite otherwise. The two men who were in health had taken a third part of the produce to the house of the sick man, and he obstinately refused to accept the corn because he had helped neither to sow nor to reap it, and he demanded of the judge that he should signify to the other two that he had no right to receive goods which he had not earned.

"The judge had so far kept silence. But he now raised his sagacious and kindly face and asked the old man, 'Did you pray for your companions and for the increase of their labors?'

"'I did,' replied the other.

"'Then by your intercession you helped them,' the judge decided, 'and the third part of the produce is yours and you must keep it.'

"The old man bowed, the three men shook hands, and in a few minutes the judge was alone in the room again.

"I did not know what had come over me; the complaint of the men and the decision of the judge seemed to me senseless, and yet both the one and the other touched my heart. I went to sleep again, and when I awoke refreshed the next morning the judge came up to me and gave me medicine, not only for my body but also for my soul, which certainly was not less in need of it than my poor wounded limbs."

"Who was the judge?" asked Stephanus.

"Eusebius, the Presbyter of Kanopus. Some Christians had found me half dead on the road, and had carried me into his house, for the widow Theodora, his sister, was the deaconess of the town. The two had nursed me as if I were their dearest brother. It was not till I grew stronger that they showed me the cross and the crown of thorns of Him who for my sake also had taken upon Him such far more cruel suffering than mine, and they taught me to love His wounds, and to bear my own with submission. In the dry wood of despair soon budded green shoots of hope, and instead of annihilation at the end of this life they showed me Heaven and all its joys.

"I became a new man, and before me there lay in the future an eternal and blessed existence; after this life I now learned to look forward to eternity. The gates of Heaven were wide open before me, and I was baptized at Kanopus.

"In Alexandria they had mourned for me as dead, and my sister Arsinoe, as heiress to my property, had already moved into my country-house with her husband, the prefect. I willingly left her there, and now lived again in the city, in order to support the brethren, as the persecutions had begun again.

"This was easy for me, as through my brother-in-law I could visit all the prisons; at last I was obliged to confess the faith, and I suffered much on the rack and in the porphyry quarries; but every pain was dear to me, for it seemed to bring me nearer to the goal of my longings, and if I find ought to complain of up here on the Holy Mountain, it is only that the Lord deems me unworthy to suffer harder things, when his beloved and only Son took such bitter torments on himself for me and for every wretched sinner."

"Ah! saintly man!" murmured Stephanus, devoutly kissing Paulus' sheep-skin; but Paulus pulled it from him, exclaiming hastily:

"Cease, pray cease—he who approaches me with honors now in this life throws a rock in my way to the life of the blessed. Now I will go to the spring and fetch you some fresh water."

When Paulus returned with the water-jar he found Hermas, who had come to wish his father good-morning before he went down to the oasis to fetch some new medicine from the senator.

CHAPTER VI

Sirona was sitting at the open window of her bedroom, having her hair arranged by a black woman that her husband had bought in Rome. She sighed, while the slave lightly touched the shining tresses here and there with perfumed oil which she had poured into the palm of her hand; then she firmly grasped the long thick waving mass of golden hair and was parting it to make a plait, when Sirona stopped her, saying, "Give me the mirror."

For some minutes she looked with a melancholy gaze at the image in the polished metal, then she sighed again; she picked up the little greyhound that lay at her feet, and placing it in her lap, showed the animal its image in the mirror.

"There, poor Iambe," she said, "if we two, inside these four walls, want to see anything like a pleasing sight we must look at ourselves."

Then she went on, turning to the slave. "How the poor little beast trembles! I believe it longs to be back again at Arelas, and is afraid we shall linger too long under this burning sky. Give me my sandals."

The black woman reached her mistress two little slippers with gilt ornaments on the slight straps, but Sirona flung her hair off her face with the back of her hand, exclaiming, "The old ones, not these. Wooden shoes even would do here."

And with these words she pointed to the court-yard under the window, which was in fact as ill contrived, as though gilt sandals had never yet trodden it. It was surrounded by buildings; on one side was a wall with a gateway, and on the others buildings which formed a sharply bent horseshoe.

Opposite the wing in which Sirona and her husband had found a home stood the much higher house of Petrus, and both had attached to them, in the background of the court-yard, sheds constructed of rough reddish brown stones, and covered with a thatch of palm-branches; in these the agricultural implements were stored, and the senator's slaves lived. In front lay a heap of black charcoal, which was made on the spot by burning the wood of the thorny *sajala* species of acacia; and there too lay a goodly row of well smoothed mill-stones, which were shaped in the quarry, and exported to Egypt. At this early hour the whole unlovely domain lay in deep shadow, and was crowded with fowls and pigeons. Sirona's window alone was touched by the morning sun. If she could have known what a charm the golden light shed over her figure, on her rose and white face, and her shining hair, she would have welcomed the day-star, instead of complaining that it had too early waked her from sleep—her best comfort in her solitude.

Besides a few adjoining rooms she was mistress of a larger room, the dwelling room, which look out upon the street.

She shaded her eyes with her hand, exclaiming, "Oh! the wearisome sun. It looks at us the first thing in the morning through the window; as if the day were not long enough. The beds must be put in the front room; I insist upon it."

The slave shook her head, and stammered an answer, "Phoebicius will not have it so."

Sirona's eyes flashed angrily, and her voice, which was particularly sweet, trembled slightly as she asked, "What is wrong with him again?"

"He says," replied the slave, "that the senator's son, Polykarp, goes oftener past your window than altogether pleases him, and it seems to him, that you occupy yourself more than is necessary with his little brothers and sisters, and the other children up there."

"Is he still in there?" asked Sirona with glowing cheeks, and she pointed threateningly to the dwelling-room.

"The master is out," stuttered the old woman. "He went out before sunrise. You are not to wait for breakfast, he will not return till late."

The Gaulish lady made no answer, but her head fell, and the deepest melancholy overspread her features. The greyhound seemed to feel for the troubles of his mistress, for he fawned upon her, as if to kiss her. The solitary woman pressed the little creature, which had come with her from her home, closely to her bosom; for an unwonted sense of wretchedness weighed upon her heart, and she felt as lonely, friendless, and abandoned, as if she were driving alone—alone—over a wide and shoreless sea. She shuddered, as if she were cold—for she thought of her husband, the man who here in the desert should have been all in all to her, but whose presence filled her with aversion, whose indifference had ceased to wound her, and whose tenderness she feared far more than his wild irritability—she had never loved him.

She had grown up free from care among a number of brothers and sisters. Her father had been the chief accountant of the decurions' college in his native town, and he had lived opposite the circus, where, being of a stern temper, he had never permitted his daughters to look on at the games; but he could not prevent their seeing the crowd streaming into the amphitheatre, or hearing their shouts of delight, and their eager cries of approbation.

Sirona thus grew up in the presence of other people's pleasure, and in a constantly revived and never satisfied longing to share it; she had, indeed, no time for unnecessary occupations, for her mother died before she was fully grown up, and she was compelled to take charge of the eight younger children. This she did in all fidelity, but in her hours of leisure she loved to listen to the stories told her by the wives of officials, who had seen, and could praise, the splendors of Rome the golden.

She knew that she was fair, for she need only go outside the house to hear it said; but though she longed to see the capital, it was not for the sake of being admired, but because there was there so much that was splendid to see and to admire. So, when the Centurion Phoebicius, the commandant of the garrison of her native town, was transferred to Rome, and when he desired to take the seventeen-years-old girl with him to the imperial city, as his wife—she was more than forty years younger than he—she followed him full of hope and eager anticipation.

Not long after their marriage she started for Rome by sea from Massilia, accompanied by an old relative; and he went by land at the head of his cohorts.

She reached their destination long before her husband, and without waiting for him, but constantly in the society of her old duenna, she gave herself up with the freedom and eagerness of her fresh youth to the delights of seeing and admiring.

It did not escape her, while she did so, that she attracted all eyes wherever she went, and however much this flattered and pleased her at first, it spoilt many of her pleasures, when the Romans, young and old, began to follow and court her. At last Phoebicius arrived, and when he found his house crowded with his wife's admirers he behaved to Sirona as though she had long since betrayed his honor.

Nevertheless he dragged her from pleasure to pleasure, and from one spectacle to another, for it gratified him to show himself in public with his beautiful young wife. She certainly was not free from frivolity, but she had learnt early from her strict father, as being the guide of her younger sisters, to distinguish clearly right from wrong, and the pure from the unclean; and she soon discovered that the joys of the capital, which had seemed at first to be gay flowers with bright colors, and redolent with intoxicating perfume, bloomed on the surface of a foul bog.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.