

TUTANKHAMEN

AND OTHER ESSAYS

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CHAPTER VI

THE MALEVOLENCE OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN SPIRITS

DURING the recent excavations which led to the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen, Mr. Howard Carter had in his house a canary which daily regaled him with its happy song. On the day, however, on which the entrance to the tomb was laid bare, a cobra entered the house, pounced on the bird, and swallowed it. Now, cobras are rare in Egypt, and are seldom seen in winter; but in ancient times they were regarded as the symbol of royalty, and each Pharaoh wore this symbol upon his forehead, as though to signify his power to strike and sting his enemies. Those who believed in omens, therefore, interpreted this incident as meaning that the spirit of the newly-found Pharaoh, in its correct form of a royal cobra, had killed the excavators' happiness symbolised by this song-bird so typical of the peace of an English home.

At the end of the season's work, Lord Carnarvon was stung mysteriously upon the face, and died.

Millions of people throughout the world have asked themselves whether the death of the excavator of this tomb was due to some malevolent influence which came from it, and the story has been spread that there was a specific curse written upon a wall of the royal sepulchre. This, however, is not the case.

There are very few such curses known during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties in ancient Egypt, that is to say, during the century or two before and after the time of Tutankhamen, and they are not at all common at any Pharaonic period.

Whenever they do appear, their object is simply to terrify the would-be tomb-robbers of their own epoch, who might

smash up the mummy in their search for jewellery, or damage the tomb, thereby causing that loss of the dead man's identity which the Egyptians thought would injure the welfare of his spirit in the underworld. The mummy and the tomb were the earthly home of the disembodied spirit, and to wreck either was to render the spirit homeless and nameless. On the other hand, to enter a tomb for the purpose of renewing the dead man's memory was always considered by the Egyptians to be a most praiseworthy proceeding; and inscriptions are often found on the wall of a sepulchre stating that some friendly hand had been at work there, setting things to rights after a lapse of many years.

As an example of one of these curses, I will give here the translation of an inscription which is written upon a mortuary-statue of a certain Ursu, a mining engineer who lived less than a hundred years before the time of Tutankhamen. "He who trespasses upon my property," he says, "or who shall injure my tomb or drag out my mummy, the Sun-god shall punish him. He shall not bequeath his goods to his children; his heart shall not have pleasure in life; he shall not receive water (for his spirit to drink) in the tomb; and his soul shall be destroyed for ever." On the wall of the tomb of Harkhuf, at Aswân, dating from the Sixth Dynasty, these words are written: "As for any man who shall enter into this tomb . . . I will pounce upon him as on a bird; he shall be judged for it by the great god."

The fear is that the tomb or the body will be broken up; and thus the scientific modern excavators, whose object is to rescue the dead from that oblivion which the years have produced, might be expected to be blessed rather than cursed for what they do. Only the robber would come under the scope of the curse. If we are to treat these questions seriously at all, it may be said that in general no harm has come to those who have entered these ancient tombs with reverence, and with the sole aim of saving the dead from native pillage and their identity from the obliterating hand of time.

The large number of visitors to Egypt and persons interested in Egyptian antiquities who believe in the male-

volence of the spirits of the Pharaohs and their dead subjects, is always a matter of astonishment to me, in view of the fact that of all ancient peoples the Egyptians were the most kindly and, to me, the most loveable. Sober and thoughtful men, and matter-of-fact matrons, seem to vie with the lighter-minded members of society in recording the misfortunes which have befallen themselves or their friends as a consequence of their meddling with the property of the dead. On all sides one hears tales of the trials which have come upon those who, owing to their possession of some antiquity or ancient relic, have given offence to the spirits of the old inhabitants of the Nile Valley. These stories are generally open to some natural explanation, and those tales which I can relate at first hand are not necessarily to be connected with black magic. I will therefore leave it to the reader's taste to find an explanation for the incidents which I will here relate.

In the year 1909 Lord Carnarvon, who was then conducting excavations in the necropolis of the nobles of Thebes, discovered a hollow wooden figure of a large black cat, which we recognised, from other examples in the Cairo museum, to be the shell in which a real embalmed cat was confined. The figure looked more like a small tiger as it sat in the sunlight at the edge of the pit in which it had been discovered, glaring at us with its yellow painted eyes and bristling its yellow whiskers. Its body was covered all over with a thick coating of smooth, shining pitch, and we could not at first detect the line along which the shell had been closed after it had received the mortal remains of the sacred animal within; but we knew from experience that the joint passed completely round the figure—from the nose, over the top of the head, down the back, and along the breast—so that, when opened, the two sides would fall apart in equal halves.

The sombre figure was carried down to the Nile and across the river to my house, where, by a mistake on the part of my Egyptian servant, it was deposited in my *bedroom*. Returning home at dead of night, I here found it seated in the middle of the floor directly in my path from the door to the

matches ; and for some moments I was constrained to sit beside it, rubbing my shins and my head.

I rang the bell, but receiving no answer, I walked to the kitchen, where I found the servants grouped distractedly around the butler, who had been stung by a scorpion and was in the throes of that short but intense agony. Soon he passed into a state of delirium and believed himself to be pursued by a large grey cat, a fancy which did not surprise me since he had so lately assisted in carrying the figure to its ill-chosen resting-place in my bedroom.

At length I retired to bed, but the moonlight which now entered the room through the open French windows fell full upon the black figure of the cat ; and for some time I lay awake watching the peculiarly weird creature as it stared past me at the wall. I estimated its age to be considerably more than three thousand years, and I tried to picture to myself the strange people who, in those distant times, had fashioned this curious coffin for a cat which had been to them half pet and half household god. A branch of a tree was swaying in the night breeze outside, and its shadow danced to and fro over the face of the cat, causing the yellow eyes to open and shut, as it were, and the mouth to grin. Once, as I was dropping off to sleep, I could have sworn that it had turned its head to look at me ; and I could see the sullen expression of feline anger gathering upon its black visage as it did so. In the distance I could hear the melancholy wails of the unfortunate butler imploring those around him to keep the cat away from him, and it seemed to me that there came a glitter into the eyes of the figure as the low cries echoed down the passage.

At last I fell asleep, and for about an hour all was still. Then, suddenly, a report like that of a pistol rang through the room. I started up, and as I did so a large grey cat sprang either from or on to the bed, leapt across my knees, dug its claws into my hand, and dashed through the window into the garden. At the same moment I saw by the light of the moon that the two sides of the wooden figure had fallen apart and were rocking themselves to a standstill upon the floor, like two great empty shells. Between them

sat the mummified figure of a cat, the bandages which swathed it round being ripped open at the neck, as though they had been burst outward.

I sprang out of bed and rapidly examined the divided shell ; and it seemed to me that the humidity in the air here on the bank of the Nile had expanded the wood which had rested in the dry desert so long, and had caused the two halves to burst apart with the loud noise which I had heard. Then, going to the window, I scanned the moonlit garden ; and there in the middle of the pathway I saw, not the grey cat which had scratched me, but my own pet tabby, standing with arched back and bristling fur, glaring into the bushes, as though she saw ten feline devils therein.

I will leave the reader to decide whether the grey cat was the malevolent spirit which, after causing me to break my shins and my butler to be stung by a scorpion, had burst its way through the bandages and woodwork and had fled into the darkness ; or whether the torn embalming cloths represented the natural destructive work of Time, and the grey cat was a night-wanderer which had strayed into my room and had been frightened by the easily-explained bursting apart of the two sides of the ancient Egyptian figure. Coincidence is a factor in life not always sufficiently considered ; and the events I have related can be explained in a perfectly natural manner, if one be inclined to do so.

My next story tells how a little earthenware lamp once in my possession brought misfortune upon at least two persons.

It sometimes happens that people who have visited Egypt and have there purchased a few trifling antiquities are suddenly seized with the fear that these relics are bringing them bad luck ; and, in a moment of frenzy, they pack up their Egyptian purchases, and post them back to the Nile. When I was Inspector-General of Antiquities they not infrequently used to address these parcels to me or to my office at Luxor ; and without further consideration the objects were laid away on the shelves of the store-room, where soon the dust gathered upon them and they were forgotten.

Now it chanced that a little earthenware lamp was once

returned to me in this manner ; and, happening to mention the fact to some friends, I learnt that it had been returned by a lady who declared herself dogged by misfortune ever since it came into her possession, and who had often stated that she intended to get rid of it by sending it back to the unoffending official in charge of antiquities. I cannot now recall the series of misfortunes which had occurred to the owner of the lamp, but I remember that they included little incidents such as the spilling of a bottle of ink over her dress. I paid, of course, small attention to the matter, and the lamp lay unnoticed on the shelf for a year or more.

One day, a certain royal lady who was travelling in Egypt asked me to give her some trifle as a souvenir of her visit ; and, without recalling its history to my mind, I gave her the unlucky lamp, which, so far as I know, did not bring any particular ill-fortune to its owner. There the matter would have tamely ended, had it not been for a chance conversation on the subject of unlucky antiquities, which occurred one night at a dinner-party in London. One of the ladies present told me a long story of the ill-luck from which she had suffered during the whole time in which she was the owner of a little earthenware lamp which came from Egypt. To such a state of apprehension had she been brought, she said, by the intuitive feeling that this little antiquity was the cause of her troubles, that at last she went down to the Embankment and hurled it into the Thames.

Vague recollections of the story of the unlucky lamp which I had given to our illustrious visitor began to stir in my mind, and I asked with some interest how she came into possession of the malevolent object. Her reply confirmed my suspicions. The lamp had been given to her by the royal lady to whom I had presented it as a souvenir !

Most people have heard the story of the malevolent " mummy " in the British Museum. As a matter of fact, it is not a mummy at all, but simply a portion of the lid of a coffin. It was bequeathed to the museum after it had wrought havoc wherever it went, but now it is said to confine its dangerous attentions to those visitors who are dis-

respectful to it. A lady of my acquaintance told me that she had "been rude" to it, with the startling result that she fell headlong down the great staircase and sprained her ankle. There is also the well-known case of a journalist who wrote about it in jest, and was dead in a few days.

The originator of the whole affair was the late Mr. Douglas Murray, who told me the following facts. He purchased the coffin some time in the 'sixties, and no sooner had he done so than he lost his arm, owing to the explosion of his gun. The ship in which the coffin was sent home was wrecked, as also was the cab in which it was driven from the docks; the house in which it was deposited was burnt down; and the photographer who made a picture of it shot himself. A lady who had some connection with it suffered great family losses, and was wrecked at sea shortly afterwards, her life being saved, so she told me, only by the fact that she clung to a rock for the greater part of a night. The list of accidents and misfortunes charged to the spirit which is connected with this coffin is now of enormous length, a fact which is not surprising, since persons who have seen the coffin attribute all their subsequent troubles to its baneful influence, and misfortunes in this life are not so rare that they can be counted on the five fingers. Personally, I think that, if these matters are to be considered at all, we should attempt rather to incur this restless spirit's benediction by refusing to credit it with an evil purpose.

The veracity of the next story cannot be questioned. A photograph in my possession about which there is no fake, tells the tale more accurately than could any words of mine; and there can be no getting away from the fact that a shadowy human face has come between the camera and the object which was being photographed. The facts are as follows.

Some years ago we were making excavations in the tomb of a Grand Vizir of about B.C.1350, when we came upon a highly decorated coffin of a certain priest, which, by the style of the workmanship, appeared to date from some two hundred years later, and evidently must have been buried there by unscrupulous undertakers who opened up the

original tomb for its reception in order to save themselves the trouble of making a new sepulchre. Now this act of desecration might be thought to have called down upon the intruding mummy the wrath of the Vizir's spirit, whose body was probably ousted to make room for the newcomer ; but, whether this be so or not, those who believe in these powers might have reason to suppose that the priestly usurper lay restlessly in his coffin, retaining, in place of the usual quiescence of the dead, a continued activity which caused an atmosphere of malignity to linger around his mortal remains.

As soon as the coffin and mummy were deposited in my store-room, I began to feel an unaccountable sense of apprehension whenever I stood in its presence ; and every time I opened the door of the room to enter its dark recesses I glanced uneasily at the embalmed figure which lay in the now lidless coffin, as though expecting it to do me some injury. This appeared to me to be remarkable, for I had long been accustomed to the presence all around me of the embalmed dead. I had slept night after night in the tombs, sharing their comfortable shelter with the human remains which still lay therein ; I had, during a *dahabiyeh* trip in the south, filled the cabin bunkers with the skulls and bones of the dead and had worked and slept contentedly in their company ; I had eaten many a luncheon on the lid of a not empty coffin. But this particular mummy seemed to draw my eyes towards it, so that when I was at work in the room in which it lay, I caught myself glancing over my shoulder in its direction.

At length I decided to unwrap the bandages in which the mummy was rolled, and to look upon the face of the dead man who had now begun to haunt my thoughts, after which I proposed to send both it and the coffin down to the Cairo Museum. The process of unwrapping was lengthy, for of course many notes had to be taken and photographs made at the different stages of the proceedings ; but at last it was completed, and the body was placed in the packing-case in which it was to travel. Some of the linen cloths which had covered the face were of such beautifully fine texture that

I took them into the house to show them to the friends who were staying with me at the time ; and one of the servants shortly afterwards placed them upon a shelf in a bedroom wardrobe.

Now it happened that this room was occupied by a lady and her little girl, and a day or two later, while the body still lay in the portico outside the house, and the ancient linen still rested upon the shelf inside the room, the child was seized with violent illness. There followed some days of anxiety, and at length one morning, when the doctor's visit had left us distraught with anxiety, the mother of the invalid came to me with a haggard face, holding in her hands the embalmer's linen. " Here," she cried, with an intensity which I shall not soon forget, " take this horrible stuff and burn it ; and for goodness' sake send that mummy away, or the child will die."

The mummy and its linen went down to Cairo that night, and the little girl in due course recovered ; but when, a month or two later, I developed the photographs which I had taken of the unwrapped body, there, between it and my camera, stared a shadowy face. It is possible that I took two photographs upon one plate ; I do not remember, but that, and the state of my nerves, due to overwork, may account for all that happened.

I am minded now to relate an experience which befell me when I was conducting excavations in the desert behind the ancient city of Abydos. The tale does not deal with any very particular malevolence of any spirit of the past, but it bears sufficiently closely upon that subject to be recorded here. We were engaged in clearing out a vertical tomb-shaft which had been cut through the rock underlying the sandy surface of the desert. The shaft was about ten foot square ; and by the end of the second day's work we had cleared out the sand and stones, wherewith it was filled, to the depth of some twenty feet. At sunset I gave the order to stop work for the night, and I was about to set out on my walk back to the camp when the foreman came to tell me that, with the last strokes of the pick, a mummied hand had

been laid bare, and it was evident that we were about to come upon an interred body.

By lamplight, therefore, the work was continued ; and presently we had uncovered the sand-dried body of an old woman, who by her posture appeared to have met with a violent death. It was evident that this did not represent the original burial in the tomb, the bottom of the shaft not yet having been reached ; and I conjectured that the corpse before us had been thrown from above at some more recent date—perhaps in Roman times—when the shaft was but half full of debris, and in course of time had become buried by blown sand and natural falls of rock.

The workmen were now waiting for their evening meal, but I, on the other hand, was anxious to examine the body and its surroundings carefully, in order to see whether any objects of interest were to be found. I therefore sent all but one of the men back to the camp, and descended into the shaft by means of a rope ladder, carrying with me a hurricane lamp to light my search. In the flickering rays of the lamp the body looked particularly gruesome. The old woman lay upon her back, her arms outstretched upwards, as though they had stiffened thus in some convulsion, the fingers being locked together. Her legs were thrust outwards rigidly, and the toes were cramped and bent. The features of the face were well preserved, as was the whole body ; and long black hair descended to her bony shoulders in a tangled mass. Her mouth was wide open, the two rows of teeth gleaming savagely in the uncertain light, and the hollow eye-sockets seemed to stare upwards, as though fixed upon some object of horror. I do not suppose that it is often man's lot to gaze upon so ghastly a spectacle, and it was only the fact of the extreme antiquity of the body which made it possible for me to look with equanimity upon it ; for the centuries that had passed since the occurrence of this woman's tragedy seemed to have removed the element of personal affinity which sets the living shuddering at the dead.

Just as I was completing my search I felt a few drops of rain fall, and at the same time realised that the wind was

howling and whistling above me and that the stars were shut out by dense clouds. A rain storm in Upper Egypt is a very rare occurrence, and generally it is of a tropical character. If I left the body at the bottom of the shaft, I thought to myself, it would be soaked and destroyed; and since, as a specimen, it was well worth preserving, I decided to carry it to the surface, where there was a hut in which it could be sheltered. I lifted the body from the ground, and found it to be quite light, but at the same time not at all fragile. I called out to the man whom I had told to wait for me on the surface, but received no reply. Either he had misunderstood me and gone home, or else the noise of the wind prevented my voice from reaching him. Large spots of rain were now falling, and there was no time for hesitation. I therefore lifted the body on to my back, the two outstretched arms passing over my shoulders and the linked fingers clutching, as it were, at my chest. I then began to climb up the rope ladder, and as I did so I noticed with something of a qualm that the old woman's face was peeping at me over my right shoulder and her teeth seemed about to bite my right ear.

I had climbed about half the distance when my foot dislodged a fragment of rock from the side of the shaft, and, as luck would have it, the stone fell right upon the lamp, smashing the glass and putting the light out. The darkness in which I found myself was intense, and now the wind began to buffet me and to hurl the sand into my face. With my right hand I felt for the woman's head and shoulder, in order to hitch the body more firmly on to my back, but to my surprise my hand found nothing there. At the same moment I became conscious that the hideous face was grinning at me over my *left* shoulder, my movements, I suppose, having shifted it; and, without further delay, I blundered and scrambled to the top of the shaft in a kind of panic.

No sooner had I reached the surface than I attempted to relieve myself of my burden. The wind was now screaming past me and the rain was falling fast. I put my left hand up to catch hold of the corpse's shoulder, and to my dismay

found that the head had slipped round once more to my right, and the face was peeping at me from that side. I tried to remove the arms from around my neck, but, with ever increasing horror, I found that the fingers had caught in my coat and seemed to be holding on to me. A few moments of struggle ensued, and at last the fingers released their grip. Thereupon the body swung round so that we stood face to face, the withered arms still around my neck, and the teeth grinning at me through the darkness. A moment later I was free, and the body fell back from me, hovered a moment, as it were, in mid air, and suddenly disappeared from sight. It was then that I realised that we had been struggling at the very edge of the shaft, down which the old woman had now fallen, and near which some will say that she had been wildly detaining me.

Fortunately the rain soon cleared off, so there was no need to repeat the task of bringing the gruesome object to the surface. Upon the next morning we found the body quite uninjured lying at the bottom of the shaft, in almost precisely the position in which we had discovered it ; and it is now exhibited in the museum of one of the medical institutes of London.

Most people who have visited Upper Egypt will be familiar with the lioness-headed statue of Sekhmet which is to be seen in the small temple of Ptah, at Karnak. Tourists usually make a point of entering the sanctuary in which it stands by moonlight or starlight, for then the semi-darkness adds in an extraordinary manner to the dignity and mystery of the figure, and one feels disposed to believe the goddess not yet bereft of all power. Sekhmet was the agent employed by the Sun-God, Ra, in the destruction of mankind ; and she thus had a sinister reputation in olden times. This has clung to her in a most persistent manner, and to this day the natives say that she has the habit of killing little children. When the statue was discovered a few years ago, a fall of earth just in front of her terminated the lives of two of the small boys who were engaged in the work, a fact which, not surprisingly, has been quoted as an indication of the malevolence of the spirit which resides in this impressive

figure of stone. One hears it now quite commonly said that those who offend the goddess when visiting her are pursued by ill-fortune for weeks afterwards.

It actually became the custom for English and American ladies to leave their hotels after dinner and to hasten into the presence of the goddess, there to supplicate her and to appease her with fair words. On one of these occasions, a few years ago, a well-known lady threw herself upon her knees before the statue, and rapturously holding her hands aloft, cried out, "I believe, I believe!" while a friend of hers passionately kissed the stone hand and patted the somewhat ungainly feet. On other occasions lamps were burnt before the goddess and a kind of ritual was mumbled by an enthusiastic gentleman; while a famous French lady of letters, who was a victim of the delusion that she possessed ventriloquial powers, made mewling noises, which were supposed to emanate from the statue, and which certainly added greatly to the barbaric nature of the scene. So frequent did these séances become that at last I had to put an official stop to them, and thereafter it was deemed an infringement of the rules to placate the malevolent goddess in this manner. There she stands alone, smiling mysteriously at her visitors, who are invariably careful not to arouse her anger by smiling back. A native, who probably believed himself to be under her ban, burgled his way, one summer's night, into the sanctuary and knocked her head and shoulders off; but the archæologist in charge cemented them on again, and thus she continues as before to dole out misfortune to those who credit her with that ill desire.

During the winter of 1908-9 the well-known Bostonian painter and pageant-master, Joseph Lindon Smith, and his wife, were staying with my wife and myself in our house on the banks of the Nile, at Luxor, the modern town which has grown up on the site of the once mighty "hundred-gated Thebes," the old capital of Egypt. It was our custom to spend a great part of our time amongst the ruins on the western side of the Nile, for my work made it necessary for me to give constant attention to the excavations which were there being conducted, and to supervise the elaborate

system of policing and safeguarding, which is nowadays in force for the protection of the many historical and artistic treasures there on view. Mr. Smith, also, had painting work to do amongst the tombs; while the ladies of our party amused themselves in the hundred different ways which are so readily suggested in these beautiful and romantic surroundings.

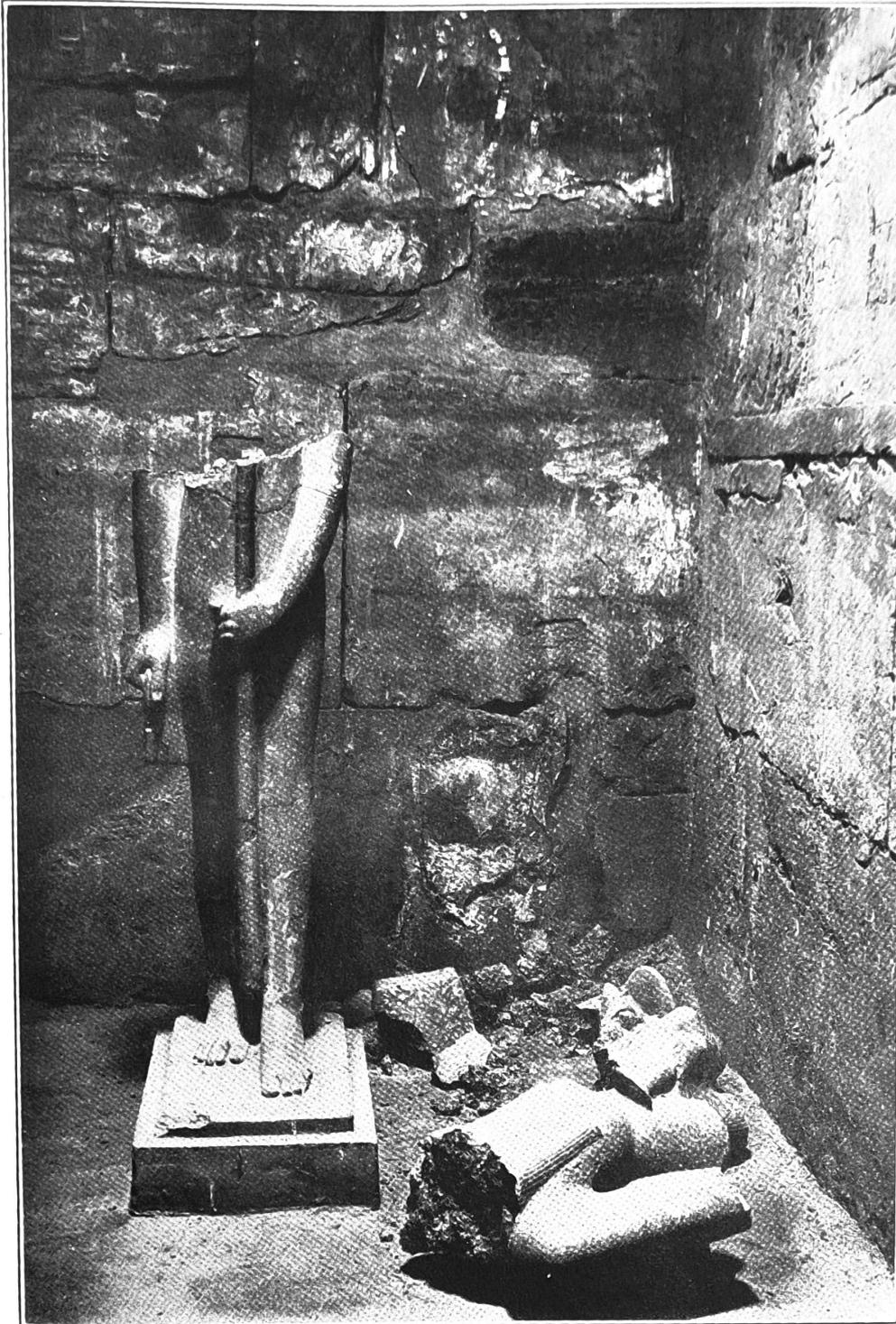
Sometimes we used to camp the night amongst the tombs, the tents pitched on the side of the hill of Shêkh abd'el Gurneh in the midst of the burial-place of the great nobles; and at sunset, after the tourists had all disappeared along the road back to Luxor, and our day's occupations were ended, we were wont to set out for long rambling walks in the desert ravines, over the rocky hills, and amongst the ruined temples; nor was it until the hour of dinner that we made our way back to the lights of the camp. The grandeur of the scenery when darkness had fallen is indescribable. In the dim light reflected from the brilliant stars, the cliffs and rocky gorges assumed the most wonderful aspect. Their shadows were full of mystery, and the broken pathways seemed to lead to hidden places barred to man's investigation. The hills, and the boulders at their feet, took fantastic shape; and one could not well avoid the thought that the spirits of Egypt's dead were at that hour roaming abroad, like us, amongst these illusory scenes.

It was during one of these evening walks that we found ourselves in the famous Valley of the Tombs of the Queens, a rock-strewn ravine in which some of Egypt's royal ladies were buried. At the end of this valley the cliffs close in, and an ancient torrent, long ago dried up, has scooped out a cavernous hollow in the face of the rock, into which, as into a cauldron, the waters must have poured as they rushed down from the hills at the back. The sides of the hollow form two-thirds of a circle, and overhead the rock somewhat overhangs. In front it is quite open to the valley, and as the floor is a level area of hard gravel, about twenty-five feet at its greatest breadth and depth, the hollow at once suggests to the mind a natural stage with the rocky valley which lies before it as the theatre. The place was well

known to us, and in the darkness we now scrambled up into the deep shadows of the recess, and, sitting upon the gravel, stared out into the starlit valley, like ghostly actors playing to a deserted auditorium. The evening wind sighed quietly around us, and across the valley the dim forms of two jackals passed with hardly a sound. Far away over the Nile we could see, framed between the hills on either side of the mouth of the ravine, the brilliant lights of Luxor shining in the placid water ; and these added the more to the sense of our remoteness from the world and our proximity to those things of the night which belong to the kingdom of dreams.

Presently I struck a match, in order to light my pipe, and immediately the rough face of the rocks around us was illuminated and made grotesque. As the flame flickered, the dark shadows fluttered like black hair in the wind, and the promontories jutted forward like great snouts and chins. An owl, startled by the light, half tumbled from its roost upon a deep ledge high above us and went floundering into the darkness, hooting like a lost soul. The match burnt out, and immediately blackness and silence closed once more about us.

“What a stage for a play !” exclaimed the amateur actor-manager ; and a few moments later we were all eagerly discussing the possibility of performing a ghostly drama here amongst the desert rocks. By the time that we had reached our camp a plot had been evolved which was based on the historical fact that the spirit of the above-mentioned Pharaoh Akhnaton was, so to speak, excommunicated by the priests and was denied the usual prayers for the dead, being thus condemned to wander without home or resting-place throughout the years. Akhnaton, the son of the powerful and beautiful Queen Tiy, reigned from B.C. 1375 to 1358 ; and being disgusted with the barbarities perpetrated at Thebes in the name of the god Amon, and believing that the only true god was Aton, the life-giving “Energy of the Sun,” overthrew the former religion and preached a wonderfully advanced doctrine of peace and love, which he associated with the worship of Aton. He removed his capital from Thebes to “The City



**THE FAMOUS STATUE OF SEKHMET AT KARNAK AFTER HAVING
BEEN SMASHED BY A NATIVE WHO BELIEVED IN ITS MALEVOLENCE**
It was later restored

The story of how at midnight she was taken across the deserted fields and over the river to our house at Luxor, would read like the narration of a nightmare. Upon the next day it was decided that she must be sent down immediately to Cairo, for there was no doubt that she was suffering from ophthalmia in its most virulent form, and there were grave fears that she might lose her sight. On this same day my wife was smitten down with violent illness, she being ordered also to proceed to Cairo immediately. On the next morning, Mr. Smith developed a low fever, and shortly afterwards, I myself, was laid low with influenza. Mr. Ogilvie, returning to his headquarters by train, came in for a nasty accident in which his mother's leg was badly injured. And thus not one of us could have taken part in the production of the play on the date announced.

For the next two or three weeks Mrs. Smith's eyes and my wife's life hung in the balance and were often despaired of. Mercifully, however, they were both restored in due time to perfect health; but none of us entertained any desire to undertake the rehearsals a second time. Many of our friends were inclined to see in our misfortunes the punishing hand of the gods and spirits of ancient Egypt; but they must not forget that the play was to be given in all solemnity and without the smallest suggestion of burlesque. For my own part, as I have said, I do not think that the possibilities of that much under-rated factor in life's events, coincidence, have been exhausted in the search for an explanation of our tragedy; but far from me be it to offer an opinion upon the subject. I have heard the most absurd nonsense talked in Egypt by those who believe in the malevolence of the ancient dead; but at the same time, I try to keep an open mind on the subject.