

GAUTIER THÉOPHILE

THE WORKS OF
THEOPHILE GAUTIER,
VOLUME 5

Théophile Gautier
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Gautier, Volume 5

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*The Works of Theophile Gautier, Volume 5 / The Romance of a Mummy and
Egypt:*

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The Romance of a Mummy

Introduction

The subject of "The Romance of a Mummy" was possibly suggested to Théophile Gautier by Ernest Feydeau, the author of "Fanny" and other works of purely light literature, who published in 1858 a "General History of Funeral Customs and Burials among the Ancients." This book was reviewed by Gautier when it appeared, and it is most likely that he had been previously made acquainted with its contents and had discussed Egyptian funeral rites and modes of sepulture with the author, for it was to Feydeau that he dedicated his novel when it was published in book form by Hachette in 1858. An omnivorous reader, Gautier

had no doubt also perused the far more important works of Champollion, the decipherer of the inscriptions on the Rosetta stone, who first gave the learned world the key to the mysterious Egyptian hieroglyphic alphabet. Champollion's "Monuments of Egypt and Nubia" had appeared in four volumes from 1835 to 1845, and a continuation by himself and the Vicomte Emmanuel de Rougé was completed in 1872. Champollion-Figeac's "Ancient Egypt" had been published in 1840, having been preceded by Lenormant's "The Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in the Louvre," in 1830, and followed by Prisse d'Avennes' "Monuments of Egypt" in 1847. The explorations and discoveries of Mariette, summed up in that writer's "Selected Monuments and Drawings," issued in 1856, and the steady growth of the Egyptian Museum in the Louvre, to which was added in 1852 the magnificent Clot-Bey collection, must have attracted the attention of Gautier, always keenly interested in art, literature, and erudition.

The account he gives, in his novel, of the ancient city of Thebes, of the great necropolis in the valley of Biban el Molûk, of the subterranean tombs, of the precautions taken by the designers to baffle curiosity, of the form and ornamentation of the sarcophagi, of the mummy-cases, of the mummy itself, of the manners, customs, dress, and beliefs of the ancient Egyptians, are marvellously accurate. Nothing is easier than to verify his descriptions by reference to the works of Champollion, Mariette, Wilkinson, Rawlinson, Erman, Edwards, and Maspero. Scarcely

here and there will the reader find a possible error in his statements. It is evident that he has not trusted alone to what Feydeau told him, or to what he read in his book or in the works of Egyptologists; he examined the antiquities in the Louvre for himself; he noted carefully the scenes depicted on monuments and sarcophagi; he traced the ornamentation in all its details; he studied the poses, the attitudes, the expressions; he marked the costumes, the accessories; in a word, he mastered his subject, and then only did he, with that facility and certainty that amazed Balzac, write in swift succession the chapters of the novel which appeared in the numbers of the "Moniteur Universel" from March 11 to May 6, 1857.

His remark on Feydeau's book, "Picturesqueness in no wise detracts from accuracy," might well be applied to his own "Romance," which fascinates the reader with its evocation of a long vanished past and its representation of a civilisation buried for centuries in mystery. The weaving in of the wonders wrought by Moses and Aaron, of the overwhelming of the Pharaoh, whether Thotmes or Rameses, is skilfully managed, and imparts to the portions of the Biblical narrative used by him a verisimilitude and a sensation of actuality highly artistic. The purely erudite part of the work would probably not have interested the general public, indifferent to the discoveries of archæology, but the introduction of the human element of love at once captivated it; the erudite appreciated the accuracy of the restoration of ancient times and manners; the merely

curious were pleased with a well told story, cleverly set in a framework whose strangeness appealed to their love of exoticism and novelty.

There have been added by the editor, as bearing upon the subject of the "Romance of a Mummy," two or three chapters from the volume entitled "The Orient," which is made up of a collection of sketches and letters of travel written at different times, and of reviews of books upon Eastern subjects, whether modern or ancient. The chapter describing a trip to Egypt was the result of a flying visit paid to that country on the occasion of the official opening of the Suez Canal in November, 1869. Gautier embarked on board the steamship "Moeris," of the Messageries Impériales, at Marseilles. The very first night out he slipped and fell down the companion steps, and broke his left arm above the elbow. This painful accident did not prevent his fulfilling his promise to keep the "Journal Officiel," with which he was then connected, fully supplied with accounts of the land and the inauguration ceremonies.

Prologue

"I have a presentiment that we shall find in the valley of Biban el Molûk a tomb intact," said to a high-bred-looking young Englishman a much more humble personage who was wiping, with a big, blue-checked handkerchief, his bald head, on which stood drops of perspiration, just as if it had been made of porous clay and filled with water like a Theban water-jar.

"May Osiris hear you!" replied the English nobleman to the German scholar. "One may be allowed such an invocation in the presence of the ancient *Diospolis Magna*. But we have been so often deceived hitherto; treasure-seekers have always forestalled us."

"A tomb which neither the Shepherd Kings nor the Medes of Cambyses nor the Greeks nor the Romans nor the Arabs have explored, and which will give up to us its riches intact," continued the perspiring scholar, with an enthusiasm which made his eyes gleam behind the lenses of his blue glasses.

"And on which you will print a most learned dissertation which will give you a place by the side of Champollion, Rosellini, Wilkinson, Lepsius, and Belzoni," said the young nobleman.

"I shall dedicate it to you, my lord, for had you not treated me with regal munificence, I could not have backed up my system by an examination of the monuments, and I should have died in my little town in Germany without having beheld the marvels of

this ancient land," replied the scholar, with emotion.

This conversation took place not far from the Nile, at the entrance to the valley of Biban el Molúk, between Lord Evandale, who rode an Arab horse, and Dr. Rumphius, more modestly perched upon an ass, the lean hind-quarters of which a fellah was belabouring. The boat which had brought the two travellers, and which was to be their dwelling during their stay, was moored on the other side of the Nile in front of the village of Luxor. Its sweeps were shipped, its great lateen sails furled on the yards. After having devoted a few days to visiting and studying the amazing ruins of Thebes, gigantic remains of a mighty world, they had crossed the river on a sandal, a light native boat, and were proceeding towards the barren region which contains within its depths, far down mysterious hypogea, the former inhabitants of the palaces on the other bank. A few men of the crew accompanied Lord Evandale and Dr. Rumphius at a distance, while the others, stretched out on the deck in the shadow of the cabin, were peacefully smoking their pipes and watching the craft.

Lord Evandale was one of those thoroughly irreproachable young noblemen whom the upper classes of Britain give to civilisation. He bore everywhere with him the disdainful sense of security which comes from great hereditary wealth, a historic name inscribed in the "Peerage and Baronetage" – a book second only to the Bible in England – and a beauty against which nothing could be urged, save that it was too great for a man. His clear-

cut and cold features seemed to be a wax copy of the head of Meleager or Antinoüs; his brilliant complexion seemed to be the result of rouge and powder, and his somewhat reddish hair curled naturally as accurately as an expert hairdresser or clever valet could have made it curl. On the other hand, the firm glance of his steel-blue eyes and the slightly sneering expression of his lower lip corrected whatever there might be of effeminate in his general appearance.

As a member of the Royal Yacht Squadron, the young nobleman indulged occasionally in a cruise on his swift yacht *Puck*, built of teak, fitted like a boudoir, and manned by a small crew of picked seamen. In the course of the preceding year he had visited Iceland; in the present year he was visiting Egypt, and his yacht awaited him in the roads of Alexandria. He had with him a scholar, a physician, a naturalist, an artist, and a photographer, in order that his trip might not be unfruitful. He was himself highly educated, and his society successes had not made him forget his triumphs at Cambridge University. He was dressed with that accuracy and careful neatness characteristic of the English, who traverse the desert sands in the same costume which they would wear when walking on the pier at Ramsgate or on the pavements of the West End. A coat, vest, and trousers of white duck, intended to repel the sun's rays, composed his costume, which was completed by a narrow blue necktie with white spots, and an extremely fine Panama hat with a veil.

Rumphius, the Egyptologist, preserved even in this hot

climate the traditional black coat of the scholar with its loose skirts, its curled up collar, its worn buttons, some of which had freed themselves of their silk covering. His black trousers shone in places and showed the warp. Near the right knee an attentive observer might have remarked upon the greyish ground of the stuff a systematic series of lines of richer tone which proved that he was in the habit of wiping his pen upon this portion of his clothes. His muslin cravat, rolled in the shape of a cord, hung loosely around his neck, on which stood out strongly the Adam's apple. Though he was dressed with scientific carelessness, Rumphius was not any the handsomer on that account. A few reddish hairs, streaked with gray, were brushed back behind his protruding ears, and were puffed up by the high collar of his coat. His perfectly bald skull, shining like a bone, overhung a prodigiously long nose, spongy and bulbous at the end, so that with the blue discs of his glasses he looked somewhat like an ibis, – a resemblance increased by his head sunk between his shoulders. This appearance was of course entirely suitable and most providential for one engaged in deciphering hieroglyphic inscriptions and scrolls. He looked like a bird-headed god, such as are seen on funeral frescoes, who had transmigrated into the body of a scholar.

The lord and the doctor were travelling towards the cliffs which encircle the sombre valley of Biban el Molûk, the royal necropolis of ancient Thebes, indulging in the conversation of which we have related a part, when, rising like a Troglodyte

from the black mouth of an empty sepulchre – the ordinary habitation of the fellahs – another person, dressed in somewhat theatrical fashion, abruptly entered on the scene, stood before the travellers, and saluted them with the graceful salute of the Orientals, which is at once humble, caressing, and noble.

This man was a Greek who undertook to direct excavations, who manufactured and sold antiquities, selling new ones when the supply of the old happened to fail. Nothing about him, however, smacked of the vulgar exploiter of strangers. He wore a red felt fez from which hung a long blue silk tassel; under the narrow edge of an inner linen cap showed his temples, evidently recently shaved. His olive complexion, his black eyebrows, his hooked nose, his eyes like those of a bird of prey, his big moustaches, his chin almost divided into two parts by a mark which looked very much like a sabre-cut, would have made his face that of a brigand, had not the harshness of his features been tempered by the assumed amenity and the servile smile of a speculator who has many dealings with the public. He was dressed in very cleanly fashion in a cinnamon-coloured jacket embroidered with silk of the same colour, gaiters of the same stuff, a white vest adorned with buttons like chamomile flowers, a broad red belt, and vast bulging trousers with innumerable folds.

He had long since noted the boat at anchor before Luxor. Its size, the number of the oarsmen, the luxury of the fittings, and especially the English flag which floated from the stern, had led

his mercantile instinct to expect a rich traveller whose scientific curiosity might be exploited, and who would not be satisfied with statuettes of blue or green enamelled ware, engraved scarabæi, paper rubbings of hieroglyphic panels, and other such trifles of Egyptian art.

He had followed the coming and going of the travellers among the ruins, and knowing that they would not fail, after having sated their curiosity, to cross the stream in order to visit the royal tombs, he awaited them on his own ground, certain of fleecing them to some extent. He looked upon the whole of this funereal realm as his own property, and treated with scant courtesy the little subaltern jackals who ventured to scratch in the tombs.

With the swift perception characteristic of the Greeks, no sooner had he cast his eyes upon Lord Evandale than he quickly estimated the probable income of his lordship and resolved not to deceive him, reasoning that he would profit more by telling the truth than by lying. So he gave up his intention of leading the noble Englishman through hypogea traversed hundreds of times already, and disdained to allow him to begin excavations in places where he knew nothing would be found; for he himself had long since taken out and sold very dear the curiosities they had contained.

Argyropoulos (such was the Greek's name), while exploring the portion of the valley which had been less frequently sounded than others because hitherto the search had never been rewarded by any find, had come to the conclusion that in a certain spot,

behind some rocks whose position seemed to be due to chance, there certainly existed the entrance to a passageway masked with peculiar care, which his great experience in this kind of search had enabled him to recognise by a thousand signs imperceptible to less clear-sighted eyes than his own, which were as sharp and piercing as those of the vultures perched upon the entablature of the temples. Since he had made that discovery, two years before, he had bound himself never to walk or look in that direction lest he might give a hint to the violators of tombs.

"Does your lordship intend to attempt excavations?" said he in a sort of cosmopolitan dialect which those who have been in the ports of the Levant and have had recourse to the services of the polyglot dragomans – who end by not knowing any language – are well acquainted with. Fortunately, both Lord Evandale and his learned companion knew the various tongues from which Argyropoulos borrowed. "I can place at your disposal," he went on, "some hundred energetic fellahs who, under the spur of whip and bakshîsh, would dig with their finger-nails to the very centre of the earth. We may try, if it pleases your lordship, to clear away a buried sphinx or a shrine, or to open up a hypogeum."

On seeing that his lordship remained unmoved by this tempting enumeration, and that a sceptical smile flitted across the doctor's face, Argyropoulos understood that he had not to deal with easy dupes, and he was confirmed in his intention to sell to the Englishman the discovery on which he reckoned to complete his fortune and to give a dowry to his daughter.

"I can see that you are scholars, not ordinary tourists, and that vulgar curiosity does not bring you here," he went on, speaking in English less mixed with Greek, Arabic, and Italian. "I will show you a tomb which has hitherto escaped all searchers, which no one knows of but myself. It is a treasure which I have carefully preserved for a person worthy of it."

"And for which you will have to be paid a high price," said his lordship, smiling.

"I am too honest to contradict your lordship; I do hope to get a good price for my discovery. Every one in this world lives by his trade. Mine is to exhume Pharaohs and sell them to strangers. Pharaohs are becoming scarce at the rate at which they are being dug up; there are not enough left for everybody. They are very much in demand, and it is long since any have been manufactured."

"Quite right," said the scholar; "it is some centuries since the undertakers, dissectors, and embalmers have shut up shop, and the Memnonia, peaceful dwellings of the dead, have been deserted by the living."

The Greek, as he heard these words, cast a sidelong glance at the German, but fancying from his wretched dress that he had no voice in the matter, he continued to address himself exclusively to the young nobleman.

"Are a thousand guineas too much, my lord, for a tomb of the greatest antiquity, which no human hand has opened for more than three thousand years, since the priests rolled rocks before

its mouth? Indeed, it is giving it away; for perhaps it contains quantities of gold, diamond, and pearl necklaces, carbuncle earrings, sapphire seals, ancient idols in precious metals, and coins which could be turned to account."

"You sly rascal!" said Rumphius, "you are praising up your wares, but you know better than any one that nothing of the sort is found in Egyptian tombs."

Argyropoulos, understanding that he had to do with clever men, ceased to boast, and turning to Lord Evandale, he said to him, "Well, my lord, does the price suit you?"

"I will give a thousand guineas," replied the young nobleman, "if the tomb has not been opened; but I shall give nothing if a single stone has been touched by the crow-bar of the diggers."

"With the additional proviso," added Rumphius the prudent, "that we carry off everything we shall find in the tomb."

"Agreed!" said Argyropoulos, with a look of complete confidence. "Your lordship may get ready your bank-notes and gold beforehand."

"Dr. Rumphius," said Lord Evandale to his acolyte, "it strikes me that the wish you uttered just now is about to be realised. This man seems sure of what he says."

"Heaven will it may be so!" replied the scholar, shaking his head somewhat doubtfully; "but the Greeks are most barefaced liars, *Cretæ mendaces*, says the proverb."

"No doubt this one comes from the mainland," answered Lord Evandale, "and I think that for once he has told the truth."

The Greek walked a few steps ahead of the nobleman and the scholar like a well-bred man who knows what is proper. He walked lightly and firmly, like a man who feels that he is on his own ground.

The narrow defile which forms the entrance to the valley of Biban el Molûk was soon reached. It had more the appearance of the work of man than of a natural opening in the mighty wall of the mountain, as if the Genius of Solitude had desired to make this realm of death inaccessible. On the perpendicular rocky walls were faintly discernible shapeless vestiges of weather-worn sculptures which might have been mistaken for the asperities of the stone imitating the worn figures of a half-effaced *basso-relievo*. Beyond the opening, the valley, which here widened somewhat, presented the most desolate sight. On either side rose steep slopes formed of huge masses of calcareous rock, rough, leprous-looking, worn, cracked, ground to sand, in a complete state of decomposition under the pitiless sun. They resembled bones calcined in the fire, and yawned with the weariness of eternity out of their deep crevices, imploring by their thousand cracks the drop of water which never fell. The walls rose almost vertically to a great height, and their dentelated crests stood out grayish-white against the almost black indigo of the sky, like the broken battlements of a giant ruined fortress. The rays of the sun heated to white heat one of the sides of the funeral valley, the other being bathed in that crude blue tint of torrid lands which strikes the people of the North as untruthful when it is

reproduced by painters, and which stands out as sharply as the shadows on an architectural drawing.

The valley sometimes made sudden turns, sometimes narrowed into defiles as the boulders and cliffs drew closer or apart. The thoroughly dry atmosphere in these climates being perfectly transparent, there was no aerial perspective in this place of desolation. Every detail, sharp, accurate, bare, stood out, even in the background, with pitiless dryness, and the distance could only be guessed at by the smaller dimensions of objects. It seemed as though cruel nature had resolved not to conceal any wretchedness, any sadness of this bare land, deader even than the dead it contained. Upon the sun-lighted cliff streamed like a cascade of fire a blinding glare like that which is given out by molten metal; every rock face, transformed into a burning-glass, returned it more ardent still. These reflections, crossing and recrossing each other, joined to the flaming rays which fell from heaven and which were reflected by the ground, produced a heat equal to that of an oven, and the poor German doctor had hard work to wipe his face with his blue-checked handkerchief, which was as wet as if it had been dipped in water.

There was not a particle of loam to be found in the whole valley, consequently not a blade of grass, not a bramble, not a creeper, not even a patch of moss to break the uniformly whitish tone of the torrified landscape. The cracks and recesses of the rocks did not hold coolness enough for the thin, hairy roots of the smallest rock plant. The place looked as if it held the

ashes of a chain of mountains, consumed in some great planetary conflagration, and the accuracy of the parallel was completed by great black strips looking like cauterised cicatrices which rayed the chalky slopes.

Deep silence reigned over this waste; no sign of life was visible; no flutter of wing, no hum of insect, no flash of lizard or reptile; even the shrill song of the cricket, that lover of burning solitudes, was unheard. The soil was formed of a micaceous, brilliant dust like ground sandstone, and here and there rose hummocks formed of the fragments of stone torn from the depths of the chain, which had been excavated by the persevering workmen of vanished generations, and the chisel of the Troglodyte labourers who had prepared in the shadow the eternal dwelling-places of the dead. The broken entrails of the mountain had produced other mountains, friable heaps of small rocks which might have been mistaken for the natural range.

On the sides of the cliffs showed here and there small openings surrounded with blocks of stone thrown in disorder: square holes flanked by pillars covered with hieroglyphs, the lintels of which bore mysterious cartouches on which could yet be made out in a great yellow disc the sacred scarabæus, the ram-headed sun, and the goddesses Isis and Nephthys standing or kneeling.

These were the tombs of the ancient kings of Thebes. Argyropoulos did not stop there, but led the travellers up a sort of steep slope, which at first glance seemed nothing but a break on the side of the mountain, choked in many places by fallen

masses of rock, until they reached a narrow platform, a sort of cornice projecting over the vertical cliff on which the rocks, apparently thrown together by chance, nevertheless exhibited on close examination some symmetrical arrangement.

When the nobleman, who was a practised athlete, and the doctor, who was much less agile, had succeeded in climbing up to him, Argyropoulos pointed with his stick to a huge stone and said with triumphant satisfaction, "There is the spot!"

He clapped his hands in Oriental fashion, and straightway from the fissures of the rocks, from the folds of the valley, hastened up pale, ragged fellahs, who bore in their bronze-coloured arms crow-bars, pick-axes, hammers, ladders, and all necessary tools. They escalated the steep slope like a legion of black ants; those who could not find room on the narrow ledge on which already stood the Greek, Lord Evandale, and Dr. Rumphius, hung by their hands and steadied themselves with their feet against the projections in the rock. The Greek signed to three of the most robust, who placed their crow-bars under the edges of the boulder. Their muscles stood out upon their thin arms, and they pressed with their whole weight on the end of the levers. At last the boulder moved, tottered for a moment like a drunken man, and, urged by the united efforts of Argyropoulos, Lord Evandale, Rumphius, and a few Arabs who had succeeded in climbing the ledge, bounded down the slope. Two other boulders of less size went the same way, one after another, and then it was plain that the belief of the Greek was

justified. The entrance to a tomb, which had evidently escaped the investigations of the treasure-seekers, appeared in all its integrity.

It was a sort of portico squarely cut in the living rock. On the two side-walls a couple of pairs of pillars exhibited capitals formed of bulls' heads, the horns of which were twisted like the crescent of Isis. Below the low door, with its jambs flanked by long panels covered with hieroglyphs, there was a broad, emblematic square. In the centre of a yellow disc showed by the side of the scarabæus, symbol of successive new births, the ram-headed god, the symbol of the setting sun. Outside the disc, Isis and Nephthys, incarnations of the Beginning and the End, were kneeling, one leg bent under the thigh, the other raised to the height of the elbow, in the Egyptian attitude, the arms stretched forward with an air of mysterious amazement, and the body clothed in a close fitting gown girdled by a belt with falling ends. Behind a wall of stone and unbaked brick, that readily yielded to the pickaxes of the workmen, was discovered the stone slab which formed the doorway of the subterranean monument. On the clay seal which closed it, the German doctor, thoroughly familiar with hieroglyphs, had no difficulty in reading the motto of the guardian of the funeral dwellings, who had closed forever this tomb, the situation of which he alone could have found upon the map of burial-places preserved in the priests' college.

"I begin to believe," said the delighted scholar to the young nobleman, "that we have actually found a prize, and I withdraw

the unfavourable opinion which I expressed about this worthy Greek."

"Perhaps we are rejoicing too soon," answered Lord Evandale, "and we may experience the same disappointment as Belzoni, when he believed himself to be the first to enter the tomb of Menephtha Seti, and found, after he had traversed a labyrinth of passages, walls, and chambers, an empty sarcophagus with a broken cover; for the treasure-seekers had reached the royal tomb through one of their soundings driven in at another point in the mountain."

"Oh, no," answered the doctor; "the range is too broad here and the hypogeum too distant from the others for these wretched people to have carried their mines as far as this, even if they scraped away the rock."

While this conversation was going on, the workmen, urged by Argyropoulos, proceeded to lift the great stone slab which filled up the orifice of the passage. As they cleared away the slab in order to pass their crow-bars under it, for Lord Evandale had ordered that nothing should be broken, they turned up in the sand innumerable small statuettes a few inches in height, of blue and green enamelled ware, of admirable workmanship, – tiny funeral statuettes deposited there as offerings by parents and friends, just as we place flowers on the thresholds of our funeral chapels; only, our flowers wither, while after more than three thousand years these witnesses of long bygone griefs are found intact, for Egypt worked for eternity only.

When the door was lifted away, giving for the first time in thirty-five centuries entrance to the light of day, a puff of hot air escaped from the sombre opening as from the mouth of a furnace. The light, striking the entrance of the funeral passage, brought out brilliantly the colouring of the hieroglyphs engraved upon the walls in perpendicular lines upon a blue plinth. A reddish figure with a hawk's-head crowned with the *pschent*, the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, bore a disc containing a winged globe, and seemed to watch on the threshold of the tomb. Some fellahs lighted torches and preceded the two travellers, who were accompanied by Argyropoulos. The resinous flame burned with difficulty in the dense, stifling air which had been concentrated for so many thousands of years under the heated limestone of the mountain, in the labyrinths, passages, and blind ways of the hypogeum. Rumphius breathed hard and perspired in streams; the impassible Evandale turned hot and felt a moisture on his temples. As for the Greek, the fiery wind of the desert had long since dried him up, and he perspired no more than would a mummy.

The passage led directly to the centre of the chain, following a vein of limestone of remarkable fineness and purity. At the end of the passageway a stone door, sealed as the other had been with a clay seal and surmounted by a winged globe, proved that the tomb had not been violated and pointed to the existence of another passageway sunk deeper still into the mountain.

The heat was now so intense that the young nobleman threw

off his white coat, and the doctor his black one. These were soon followed by their vests and shirts. Argyropoulos, seeing that they were breathing with difficulty, whispered a few words to a fellah, who ran back to the entrance and brought two large sponges filled with fresh water, which the Greek advised the two travellers to place on their mouths so that they might breathe a fresher air through the humid pores, as is done in Russian baths when the steam heat is raised to excess.

The door was attacked and soon gave way. A steep staircase cut in the living rock was then seen descending. Against a green background edged with a blue line were ranged on either side of the passageway processions of symbolical statues, the colours of which were as bright and fresh as if the artist's brush had laid them on the day before. They would show for a second in the light of the torches, then vanish in the shadow like the phantoms of a dream. Below these narrow frescoes, lines of hieroglyphs, written perpendicularly like Chinese writing and separated by hollow lines, excited the erudite by the sacred mystery of their outlines. Along that portion of the walls which was not covered with hieratic signs, a jackal lying on its belly, with outstretched paws and pointed ears, and a kneeling figure wearing a mitre, its hand stretched upon a circle, seemed to stand as sentries on either side of the door, the lintel of which was ornamented with two panels placed side by side, in which were figured two women wearing close-fitting gowns and extending their feathered arms like wings.

"Look here!" said the doctor, taking breath when he reached the foot of the staircase, and when he saw that the excavation sank deeper and deeper still. "Are we going down to the centre of the earth? The heat is increasing to such a degree that we cannot be far from the sojourn of the damned."

"No doubt," answered Lord Evandale, "they followed the vein of limestone, which sinks in accordance with the law of geological undulations."

Another very steep passage came after the steps. The walls were lower, covered with paintings, in which could be made out a series of allegorical scenes, explained, no doubt, by the hieroglyphs inscribed below. This frieze ran all along the passage, and below it were small figures worshipping sacred scarabæi and the azure-coloured symbolical serpent.

As he reached the end of the passage, the fellah who carried the torch threw himself back abruptly, for the path was suddenly interrupted by the mouth of a square well yawning black at the surface of the ground.

"There is a well, master," said the fellah, addressing himself to Argyropoulos; "what am I to do?"

The Greek took the torch, shook it to make it blaze up, and threw it into the small mouth of the well, bending cautiously over the opening. The torch fell, twisting and hissing. Soon a dull sound was heard, followed by a burst of sparks and a cloud of smoke, then the flame burned up bright and clear, and the opening of the well shone in the shadow like the bloodshot eye

of a Cyclops.

"Most ingenious!" said the young nobleman. "This labyrinth, interrupted by oubliettes, must have cooled the zeal of robbers and scholars."

"Not at all," replied the doctor. "Those seek gold, these truth, which are the two most precious things in the world."

"Bring the knotted rope!" cried Argyropoulos to his Arabs. "We shall explore and sound the walls of the well, for the passage no doubt runs far beyond it."

Eight or ten men hung on to the rope, the end of which was let fall into the well. With the agility of a monkey or of an athlete, Argyropoulos caught hold of the swinging rope and let himself down some fifteen feet, holding on with his hands and striking with his heels the walls of the well. Wherever he struck the rock it gave out a dead, dull sound. Then Argyropoulos let himself fall to the bottom of the well and struck the ground with the hilt of his kandjar, but the compact rock did not resound. Lord Evandale and the doctor, burning with eager curiosity, bent over the edge at the risk of falling in headlong, and watched with intense interest the search undertaken by the Greek.

"Hold hard!" cried he at last, annoyed at finding nothing; and he seized the rope with his two hands to ascend.

The shadow of Argyropoulos, lighted from below by the torch which was still burning at the bottom of the well, was projected against the ceiling and cast on it a silhouette like that of a monstrous bird. His sunburned face expressed the liveliest

disappointment, and under his moustache he was biting his lips.

"There is not a trace of a passage!" he cried; "and yet the excavation cannot stop here."

"Unless," said Rumphius, "the Egyptian who ordered this tomb died in some distant nome, on a voyage, or in battle, the work being then abandoned, as is known to have been the case occasionally."

"Let us hope that by dint of searching we shall find some secret issue," returned Lord Evandale; "otherwise we shall try to drive a transverse shaft through the mountain."

"Those confounded Egyptians were clever indeed at concealing the entrances to their tombs, – always trying to find out some way of putting poor people off the track. One would think that they laughed in anticipation at the disappointment of searchers," grumbled Argyropoulos. Drawing to the edge of the well, the Greek cast a glance, as piercing as that of a night-bird, upon the wall of the little chamber which formed the upper portion of the well. He saw nothing but the ordinary characters of psychostasia, – Osiris the judge seated on his throne in the regulation attitude, holding the crook in the one hand, the whip in the other, and the goddesses of Justice and Truth leading the spirit of the dead to the tribunal of Amenti. Suddenly he seemed to be struck with a new idea, and turned sharply around. His long experience as an excavator recalled to him a somewhat analogous case. In addition, the desire of earning the thousand guineas of his lordship spurred up his faculties. He took a pick-axe from

the hands of a fellah, and began, walking backward, to strike sharply right and left on the surface of the rock, often at the risk of damaging some of the hieroglyphs or of breaking the beak or the wing-sheath of the sacred hawk or the scarabæus.

The wall, thus questioned, at last answered the hammer and sounded hollow. An exclamation of triumph broke from the Greek and his eyes flashed; the doctor and the nobleman clapped their hands.

"Dig here," said Argyropoulos, who had recovered his coolness, to his men.

An opening large enough to allow a man to pass through was made. A gallery running within the mountain around the obstacle which the well offered to the profane, led to a square hall, the blue vault of which rested upon four massive pillars ornamented by the red-skinned, white-garmented figures which so often show, in Egyptian frescoes, the full bust and the head in profile. This hall opened into another, the vault of which was somewhat higher and supported by two pillars only. Various scenes – the mystic bark, the bull Apis bearing the mummy towards the regions of the West, the judgment of the soul and the weighing of the deeds of the dead in the supreme scales, the offerings to the funeral divinities – adorned the pillars and the hall. They were carved in flat, low relief with sharp outline, but the painter's brush had not completed the work of the chisel. By the care and delicacy of the work might be judged the importance of the personage whose tomb it had been sought to conceal from the knowledge of men.

After having spent a few moments in examining these carvings, which were in the purest manner of the fine Egyptian style of the classical age, the explorers perceived that there was no issue from the hall, and that they had reached a sort of blind place. The air was becoming somewhat rarified, the torches burned with difficulty and further augmented the heat of the atmosphere, while the smoke formed a dense pall. The Greek gave himself to the devil, but that did no good. Again the walls were sounded without any result. The mountain, thick and compact, gave back but a dead sound; there was no trace of a door, of a passage, or of any sort of opening.

The young nobleman was plainly discouraged, and the doctor let fall his arms by his side. Argyropoulos, who feared losing his thousand guineas, exhibited the fiercest despair. However, the party was compelled to retreat, for the heat had become absolutely suffocating.

They returned to the outer hall, and there the Greek, who could not make up his mind to see his golden dream vanish in smoke, examined with the most minute attention the shafts of the pillars to make certain that they did not conceal some artifice, that they did not mask some trap which might be discovered by displacing them; for in his despair he mingled the realism of Egyptian architecture with the chimerical constructions of the Arab tales. The pillars, cut out of the mountain itself, in the centre of the hollowed mass, formed part of it, and it would have been necessary to employ gunpowder to break them down. All

hope was gone.

"Nevertheless," said Rumphius, "this labyrinth was not dug for nothing. Somewhere or another there must be a passage like the one which goes around the well. No doubt the dead man was afraid of being disturbed by importunate persons and he had himself carefully concealed; but with patience and perseverance you can get anywhere. Perhaps a slab carefully concealed, the joint of which cannot be seen, owing to the dust scattered over the ground, covers some descent which leads, directly or indirectly, to the funeral hall."

"You are right, doctor," said Evandale; "those accursed Egyptians jointed stones as closely as the hinges of an English trap. Let us go on looking."

The doctor's idea struck the Greek as sound, and he made his fellahs walk about every part and corner of the hall, tapping the ground. At last, not far from the third pillar a dull resonance struck on the practised ear of the Greek. He threw himself on his knees to examine the spot, brushing away with the ragged burnouse one of his Arabs had thrown him the impalpable dust of thirty-five centuries. A black, narrow, sharp line showed, and, carefully followed out, marked out on the ground an oblong slab.

"Did I not tell you," cried the enthusiastic doctor, "that the passage could not end in this way?"

"I am really troubled," said Lord Evandale, in his quaint, phlegmatic British fashion, "at disturbing the last sleep of the poor unknown body which did expect to rest in peace until the

end of the world. The dweller below would willingly dispense with our visit."

"The more so that a third party is lacking to make the presentation formal," replied the doctor. "But do not be anxious, my lord, I have lived long enough in the days of the Pharaohs to present you to the illustrious personage who inhabits this subterranean passage."

Crow-bars were applied to the narrow fissure, and after a short time the stone moved and was raised. A staircase with high, steep steps, sinking into darkness, awaited the impatient travellers, who rushed down pell-mell. A sloping gallery painted on both walls with figures and hieroglyphs came next, then at the end of the gallery some more steps leading to a short corridor, a sort of vestibule to a hall in the same style as the first one, but larger and upborne by six pillars cut out of the living rock. The ornamentation was richer, and the usual motives of funeral paintings were multiplied on a yellow background. To the right and to the left opened in the rock two small crypts or chambers filled with funeral statuettes of enamelled ware, bronze, and sycamore wood.

"We are in the antechamber of the hall where the sarcophagus is bound to be!" cried Rumphius, his clear gray eyes flashing with joy from below his spectacles, which he had pushed back over his forehead.

"Up to the present," said Lord Evandale, "the Greek has kept his word. We are the first living men who have penetrated so far

since the dead, whoever he may be, was left with eternity and the unknown in this tomb."

"Oh, he must be some great personage," replied the doctor; "a king or a king's son, at the very least. I shall tell you later when I have deciphered his cartouche. But first let us enter this hall, the finest, the most important, which the Egyptians called the Golden Hall."

Lord Evandale walked ahead, a few steps before the less agile scholar, though perhaps the latter deferentially wished to leave the pleasure of the discovery to the young nobleman.

As he was about to step across the threshold, Lord Evandale bent forward as if something unexpected had struck him. Though accustomed not to manifest his emotions, he was unable to repress a prolonged and thoroughly British "Oh!" On the fine gray powder which covered the ground showed very distinctly, with the imprint of the toes and the great bone of the heel, the shape of a human foot, – the foot of the last priest or the last friend who had withdrawn, fifteen hundred years before Christ, after having paid the last honours to the dead. The dust, which in Egypt is as eternal as granite, had moulded the print and preserved it for more than thirty centuries, just as the hardened diluvian mud has preserved the tracks of the animals which last traversed it.

"See," said Evandale to Rumphius, "that human footprint which is directed towards the exit from the hypogeum! In what narrow passage of the Libyan chain rests the mummified body

that made it?"

"Who knows?" replied the scholar. "In any case, that light print, which a breath would have blown away, has lasted longer than empires, than religions and monuments believed eternal. The noble dust of Alexander was used perhaps to stop a bung-hole, as Hamlet says, but the footprint of this unknown Egyptian remains on the threshold of a tomb."

Urged by a curiosity which did not allow them much time for recollection, the nobleman and the doctor entered the hall, taking care, nevertheless, not to efface the wondrous footprint. On entering, the impassible Evandale felt a strange emotion; it seemed to him, as Shakespeare says, that the time was out of joint. The feeling of modern life vanished, he forgot Great Britain and his name inscribed on the rolls of the peerage, his seat in Lincolnshire, his mansion in the West End, Hyde Park, Piccadilly, the Queen's Drawing-Room, the Yacht Squadron, and all that constituted his English existence. An invisible hand had turned upside down the sand-glass of eternity, and the centuries which had fallen one by one, like the hours, in the solitude of the night, were falling once more. History was as if it were not: Moses was living, Pharaoh was reigning, and he, Lord Evandale, felt embarrassed because he did not wear his beard in ringlets, and had not an enamelled neck-plate and a narrow vestment wrinkling in folds upon his hips, – the only suitable dress in which to be presented to a royal mummy. A sort of religious horror filled him, although there was nothing sinister about the

place, as he violated this palace of death so carefully protected against profanation. His attempt seemed to him impious and sacrilegious, and he said to himself, "Suppose this Pharaoh were to rise on his couch and strike me with his sceptre." For one moment he thought of letting fall the shroud half lifted from the body of this antique, dead civilisation, but the doctor, carried away by scientific enthusiasm, and not a prey to such thoughts, shouted in a loud voice, "My lord, my lord, the sarcophagus is intact!"

These words recalled Lord Evandale to reality. By swift projection of his thought he traversed the thirty-five hundred years which he had gone back in his reverie, and he answered, "Indeed, dear doctor, intact?"

"Oh, unexpected luck! oh, marvellous chance! oh, wondrous find!" continued the doctor, in the excitement of a scholarly joy.

Argyropoulos, on beholding the doctor's enthusiasm, felt a pang of remorse, – the only kind of remorse that he could feel, – at not having asked more than twenty-five thousand francs. "I was a fool!" he said to himself. "This shall not happen again. That nobleman has robbed me."

In order to enable the strangers to enjoy the beauty of the spectacle, the fellahs had lighted all their torches. The sight was indeed strange and magnificent. The galleries and halls which led to the sarcophagus hall were flat-ceiled and not more than eight or ten feet high; but the sanctuary, the one to which all these labyrinths led, was of much greater proportions. Lord

Evandale and Dr. Rumphius remained dumb with admiration, although they were already familiar with the funereal splendours of Egyptian art. Thus lighted up, the Golden Hall flamed, and for the first time, perhaps, the colours of the paintings shone in all their brilliancy. Red and blue, green and white, of virginal purity, brilliantly fresh and amazingly clear, stood out from the golden background of the figures and hieroglyphs, and attracted the eye before the subjects which they formed could be discerned. At first glance it looked like a vast tapestry of the richest stuffs. The vault, some thirty feet high, formed a sort of azure velarium bordered with long yellow palm-leaves. On the walls the symbolical globe spread its mighty wings and the royal cartouches showed around. Farther on, Isis and Nephthys waved their arms furnished with feathers like wings; the uræus swelled its blue throat, the scarabæus unfolded its wings, the animal-headed gods pricked up their jackal ears, sharpened their hawk's-beaks, wrinkled their baboon faces, and drew into their shoulders their vulture or serpent necks as if they were endowed with life. Mystical consecrated boats (*baris*) passed by on their sledges drawn by figures in attitudes of sadness, with angular gestures, or propelled by half-naked oarsmen, they floated upon symbolical undulating waves. Mourners kneeling, their hand placed on their blue hair in token of grief, turned towards the catafalques, while shaven priests, leopard-skin on shoulder, burned perfumes in a spatula terminating in a hand bearing a cup under the nose of the godlike dead. Other personages offered to the funeral genii lotus

in bloom or in bud, bulbous plants, birds, pieces of antelope, and vases of liquors. Acephalous figures of Justice brought souls before Osiris, whose arms were set in inflexible contour, and who was assisted by the forty-two judges of Amenti, seated in two rows and bearing an ostrich-plume on their heads, the forms of which were borrowed from every realm of zoölogy.

All these figures, drawn in hollowed lines in the limestone and painted in the brightest colours, were endowed with that motionless life, that frozen motion, that mysterious intensity of Egyptian art, which was hemmed in by the priestly rule, and which resembles a gagged man trying to utter his secret.

In the centre of the hall rose, massive and splendid, the sarcophagus, cut out of a solid block of black basalt and closed by a cover of the same material, carved in the shape of an arch. The four sides of the funeral monolith were covered with figures and hieroglyphs as carefully engraved as the intaglio of a gem, although the Egyptians did not know the use of iron, and the grain of basalt is hard enough to blunt the best-tempered steel. Imagination loses itself when it tries to discover the process by which that marvellous people wrought on porphyry and granite as with a style on wax tablets.

At the angles of the sarcophagus were set four vases of oriental alabaster, of most elegant and perfect outline, the carved covers of which represented the man's head of Amset, the monkey head of Hapi, the jackal head of Tuamutef, and the hawk head of Kebhsnauf. The vases contained the viscerae of the mummy

enclosed in the sarcophagus. At the head of the tomb an effigy of Osiris with plaited beard seemed to watch over the dead. Two coloured statues of women stood right and left of the tomb, supporting, with one hand a square box on their head, and holding in the other a vase for ablutions which they rested on their hip. The one was dressed in a simple white skirt clinging to the hips and held up by crossed braces; the other, more richly costumed, was wrapped in a sort of narrow shift, covered with scales alternately red and green. By the side of the first there were three water-jars, originally filled with Nile water, which, as it evaporated, had left its mud, and a plate holding some alimentary paste, now dried up. By the side of the second, two small ships, like the model ships made in seaports, which reproduced accurately, the one the minutest details of the boats destined to bear the bodies from Diospolis to Memnonia, the other the symbolical boat in which the soul is carried to the regions of the West. Nothing was forgotten, – neither the masts, nor the rudder formed of one long sweep, nor the pilot, nor the oarsmen, nor the mummy surrounded by mourners and lying under the shrine on a bed with feet formed of lion's claws, nor the allegorical figures of the funeral divinities fulfilling their sacred functions. Both the boats and the figures were painted in brilliant colours, and on the two sides of the prow, beak-like as the poop, showed the great Osiris' eye, made longer still by the use of antimony. The bones and skull of an ox scattered here and there showed that a victim had been offered up as a scapegoat

to the Fate which might have disturbed the repose of the dead. Coffers painted and bedizened with hieroglyphs were placed on the tomb; reed tables yet bore the final offerings. Nothing had been touched in this palace of death since the day when the mummy in its cartonnage and its two coffins had been placed upon its basalt couch. The worm of the sepulchre, which can find a way through the closest biers, had itself retreated, driven back by the bitter scent of the bitumen and the aromatic essences.

"Shall I open the sarcophagus?" said Argyropoulos, after Lord Evandale and Doctor Rumphius had had time to admire the beauty of the Golden Hall.

"Unquestionably," replied the nobleman; "but take care not to chip the edges of the cover as you put in your crow-bars, for I propose to carry off the tomb and present it to the British Museum."

The whole company bent their efforts to displacing the monolith. Wooden wedges were carefully driven in, and presently the huge stone was moved and slid down the props prepared to receive it. The sarcophagus having been opened, showed the first bier hermetically sealed. It was a coffer adorned with paintings and gilding, representing a sort of shrine with symmetrical designs, lozenges, quadrilles, palm leaves, and lines of hieroglyphs. The cover was opened, and Rumphius, who was bending over the sarcophagus, uttered a cry of surprise when he discovered the contents of the coffin, having recognised the sex of the mummy by the absence of the Osiris beard

and the shape of the cartonnage. The Greek himself appeared amazed. His long experience in excavations enabled him to understand the strangeness of such a find. The valley of Biban el Molûk contains the tombs of kings only: the necropolis of the queens is situated farther away, in another mountain gorge. The tombs of the queens are very simple, and usually consist of two or three passage-ways and one or two rooms. Women in the East have always been considered as inferior to men, even in death. Most of these tombs, which were broken into at a very distant period, were used as receptacles for shapeless mummies carelessly embalmed, which still exhibit traces of leprosy and elephantiasis. How did this woman's coffin come to occupy this royal sarcophagus, in the centre of this cryptic palace worthy of the most illustrious and most powerful of the Pharaohs?

"This," said the doctor to Lord Evandale, "upsets all my notions and all my theories. It overthrows the system most carefully built upon the Egyptian funeral rites, which nevertheless have been so carefully followed out during thousands of years. No doubt we have come upon some obscure point, some forgotten mystery of history. A woman did ascend the throne of the Pharaohs and did govern Egypt. She was called Tahoser, as we learn from the cartouches engraved upon older inscriptions hammered away. She usurped the tomb as she usurped the throne. Or perhaps some other ambitious woman, of whom history has preserved no trace, renewed her attempt."

"No one is better able to solve this difficult problem than you,"

said Lord Evandale. "We will carry this box full of secrets to our boat, where you will, at your leisure, decipher this historic document and read the riddle set by these hawks, scarabæi, kneeling figures, serrated lines, winged uræus, and spatula hands, which you read as readily as did the great Champollion."

The fellahs, under the orders of Argyropoulos, carried off the huge coffer on their shoulders, and the mummy, performing in an inverse direction the funeral travel it had accomplished in the days of Moses, in a painted and gilded bari preceded by a long procession, was embarked upon the sandal which had brought the travellers, soon reached the vessel moored on the Nile, and was placed in the cabin, which was not unlike, so little do forms change in Egypt, the shrine of the funeral boat.

Argyropoulos, having arranged about the box all the objects which had been found near it, stood respectfully at the cabin door and appeared to be waiting. Lord Evandale understood, and ordered his valet to pay him the twenty-five thousand francs.

The open bier was placed upon rests in the centre of the cabin; it shone as brilliantly as if the colours had been put on the day before, and framed in the mummy, moulded within its cartonnage, the workmanship of which was remarkably fine and rich. Never had ancient Egypt more carefully wrapped up one of her children for the eternal sleep. Although no shape was indicated by the funeral Hermes, ending in a sheath from which stood out alone the shoulders and the head, one could guess there was under that thick envelope a young and graceful

form. The gilded mask, with its long eyes outlined with black and brightened with enamel, the nose with its delicate nostrils, the rounded cheek-bones, the half-open lips smiling with an indescribable, sphinx-like smile, the chin somewhat short in curve but of extreme beauty of contour, presented the purest type of the Egyptian ideal, and testified by a thousand small, characteristic details which art cannot invent, to the individual character of the portrait. Numberless fine plaits of hair, tressed with cords and separated by bandeaux, fell in opulent masses on either side of the face. A lotus stem, springing from the back of the neck, bowed over the head and opened its azure calyx over the dead, cold brow, completing with a funeral cone this rich and elegant head-dress.

A broad necklace, composed of fine enamels cloisonnés with gold and formed of several rows, lay upon the lower portion of the neck, and allowed to be seen the clean, firm contour of two virgin breasts like two golden cups.

The sacred ram-headed bird, bearing between its green horns the red disc of the setting sun and supported by two serpents wearing the pschent and swelling out their hoods, showed on the bosom of the figure its monstrous form full of symbolic meaning. Lower down, in the spaces left free by the crossed zones, and rayed with brilliant colours representing bandages, the vulture of Phra, crowned with a globe, with outspread wings, the body covered with symmetrically arranged feathers, and the tail spread out fanwise, held in its talons the huge Tau, emblem of

immortality. The funeral gods, green-faced, with the mouths of monkeys or jackals, held out with a gesture hieratic in its stiffness the whip, the crook, and the sceptre. The eye of Osiris opened its red ball outlined with antimony. Celestial snakes swelled their hoods around the sacred discs; symbolical figures projected their feathered arms; and the two goddesses of the Beginning and the End, their hair powdered with blue dust, bare down to below the breasts and the rest of the body wrapped in a close-fitting skirt, knelt in Egyptian fashion on green and red cushions adorned with heavy tufts.

A longitudinal band of hieroglyphs, springing from the belt and running down to the feet, contained no doubt some formal funeral ritual, or rather, the names and titles of the deceased, a problem which Dr. Rumphius promised himself to solve later.

The character of the drawing, the boldness of the lines, the brilliancy of the colours in all these paintings denoted in the plainest manner to a practised eye that they belonged to the finest period of Egyptian art. When the English nobleman and his companion had sufficiently studied this outer case, they drew the cartonnage from the box and set it up against the side of the cabin, where the funeral form, with its gilded mask, presented a strange spectacle, standing upright like a materialised spectre and with a seeming attitude of life, after having preserved so long the horizontal attitude of death on a basalt bed in the heart of the mountain, opened up by impious curiosity. The soul of the deceased, which had reckoned on eternal rest and which had

taken such care to preserve its remains from violation, must have been moved, beyond the worlds, in the circuit of its travels and transmigrations.

Dr. Rumphius, armed with a chisel and a hammer, to separate the two parts of the cartonnage of the mummy, looked like one of those funeral genii which wear a bestial mask and which are seen in the paintings of the hypogea crowding around the dead in the performance of some frightful and mysterious rite; the clean profile of Lord Evandale, calm and attentive, made him look like the divine Osiris awaiting the soul to be judged.

The operation having been at length completed – for the doctor wished not to scale off the gilding, – the box, resting on the ground, was separated into two parts like the casing of a cast, and the mummy appeared in all the brilliancy of its death toilet, coquettishly adorned as if it had wished to charm the genii of the subterranean realms. On opening the case, a faint, delightful, aromatic odour of cedar liquor, of sandal powder, of myrrh and cinnamon spread through the cabin of the vessel; for the body had not been gummed up and hardened with the black bitumen used in embalming the bodies of ordinary persons, and all the skill of the embalmers, the former inhabitants of Memnonia, seemed to have been directed to the preservation of these precious remains.

The head was enveloped in a network of narrow bands of fine linen, through which the face showed faintly. The essences in which they had been steeped had dyed the tissue a beautiful tawny tint. Over the breast a network of fine tubes of blue glass,

very like the long jet beads which are used to embroider Spanish bodices, with little golden drops wherever the tubes crossed, fell down to the feet and formed a pearly shroud worthy of a queen. The statuettes of the four gods of Amenti in hammered gold shone brilliantly, and were symmetrically arranged along the upper edge of the network, which ended below in a fringe of most tasteful ornaments. Between the statuettes of the funeral gods was a golden plate, above which a lapis-lazuli scarabæus spread out its long golden wings. Under the mummy's head was placed a rich mirror of polished metal, as if it had been desired to give the dead soul an opportunity of beholding the spectre of its beauty during the long night of the tomb. By the mirror lay a coffer of enamelled ware, of most precious workmanship, which contained a necklace composed of ivory rings alternating with beads, gold, lapis-lazuli, and cornelian. By the side of the beauty had been placed also a narrow, square sandal-wood basin in which, during her lifetime, the dead woman had performed her perfumed ablutions. Three vases of wavy alabaster fastened to the bier, as was also the mummy, by a layer of natron, contained, the first two, essences, the scent of which could still be noticed, and the third, antimony powder and a small spatula for the purpose of colouring the edge of the eyelids and extending the outer angle according to the antique Egyptian usage, still practised at the present time by Eastern women.

"What a touching custom!" said Dr. Rumphius, excited by the sight of these treasures; "what a touching custom it was to bury

with a young woman all her pretty toilet articles! For it is a young woman unquestionably that these linen bands, yellow with time and with essences, envelop. Compared with the Egyptians, we are downright barbarians; hurried on by our brutal way of living, we have lost the delicate sense of death. How much tenderness, how much regard, how much love do not these minute cares reveal, these infinite precautions, these useless caresses bestowed upon a senseless body, – that struggle to snatch from destruction an adored form and to restore it intact to the soul on the day of the supreme reunion!"

"Perhaps," replied Lord Evandale, very thoughtful, "our civilisation, which we think so highly developed, is, after all, but a great decadence which has lost even the historical remembrance of the gigantic societies which have disappeared. We are stupidly proud of a few ingenious pieces of mechanism which we have recently invented, and we forget the colossal splendours and the vast works impossible to any other nation, which are found in the ancient land of the Pharaohs. We have steam, but steam is less powerful than the force which built the Pyramids, dug out hypogea, carved mountains into the shapes of sphinxes and obelisks, sealed halls with one great stone which all our engines could not move, cut out monolithic chapels, and saved frail human remains from annihilation, – so deep a sense of eternity did it already possess."

"Oh, the Egyptians," said Dr. Rumphius, smiling, "were wonderful architects, amazing artists, and great scholars. A priest

of Memphis and of Thebes could have taught even our German scholars; and as regards symbolism, they were greater than any symbolists of our day. But we shall succeed eventually in deciphering their hieroglyphs and penetrating their mysteries. The great Champollion has made out their alphabet; we shall easily read their granite books. Meanwhile, let us strip, as delicately as possible, this young beauty who is more than three thousand years of age."

"Poor woman!" murmured the young lord. "Profane eyes will now behold the mysterious charms which love itself perhaps never saw. Truly, under the empty pretext of scientific pursuit, we are as barbarous as the Persians of Cambyses, and if I were not afraid of driving to despair this worthy scholar, I should enclose you again, without having stripped off your last veil, within the triple box of your bier."

Dr. Rumphius raised from the casing the mummy, which was no heavier than a child's body, and began to unwrap it with motherly skill and lightness of touch. He first of all undid the outer envelope of linen, sewed together and impregnated with palm wine, and the broad bands which here and there girdled the body. Then he took hold of the end of a thin, narrow band, the infinite windings of which enclosed the limbs of the young Egyptian. He rolled up the band on itself as cleverly as the most skilful embalmer of the City of the Dead, following it up in all its meanderings and circumvolutions. As he progressed in his work, the mummy, freed from its envelope, like a statue

which a sculptor blocks out of the marble, appeared more slender and exquisite in form. The bandage having been unrolled, another narrower one was seen, intended to bind the body more closely. It was of such fine linen, and so finely woven, that it was comparable to modern cambric and muslin. This bandage followed accurately every outline, imprisoning the fingers and the toes, moulding like a mask the features of the face, which was visible through the thin tissue. The aromatic balm in which it had been steeped had stiffened it, and as it came away under the fingers of the doctor, it gave out a little dry sound like that of paper that is being crushed or torn. There remained but one turn to be taken off, and familiar though he was with such work, Dr. Rumphius stopped for a moment, either through respect for the dead, or through that feeling which prevents a man from breaking open a letter, from opening a door, from raising a veil which hides a secret that he burns to learn. He ascribed his momentary pause to fatigue, and as a matter of fact, the perspiration was dripping from his forehead without his thinking of wiping it with his great blue-checked handkerchief; but fatigue had nothing to do with it. Meanwhile the dead form showed through the fine, gauze-like stuff, and some gold work shone faintly through it as well.

The last wrapping taken off, the young woman showed in the chaste nudity of her lovely form, preserving, in spite of so many centuries that had passed away, the fulness of her contours, and the easy grace of her pure lines. Her pose, an infrequent one in the case of mummies, was that of the Venus of Medici, as if

the embalmers had wished to save this beautiful body from the set attitude of death and to soften the inflexible rigidity of the cadaver.

A cry of admiration was uttered at the same time by Rumphius and Evandale at the sight of the marvel. Never did a Greek or Roman statue present a more beautiful appearance. The peculiar characteristics of the Egyptian ideal gave indeed to this lovely body, so miraculously preserved, a slenderness and a grace lacking in antique marbles, – the long hands, the high-bred, narrow feet, the nails shining like agate, the slender waist, the shape of the breasts, small and turned up like a sandal beneath the veil which enveloped it, the slightly protruding contour of the hip, the roundness of the thigh, the somewhat long leg recalling the slender grace of the musicians and dancers represented on the frescoes of funeral repasts in the Thebes hypogea. It was a shape still childish in its gracefulness, yet possessing already all the perfections of a woman which Egyptian art expresses with such tender suavity, whether it paints the walls of the passages with a brush, or whether it patiently carves the hard basalt.

As a general rule mummies which have been filled with bitumen and natron resemble black simulacra carved in ebony; corruption cannot attack them, but the appearance of life is wholly lacking; the bodies have not returned to the dust whence they came, but they have been petrified in a hideous shape, which one cannot contemplate without disgust and terror. In this case, the body, carefully prepared by surer, longer, and more costly

processes, had preserved the elasticity of the flesh, the grain of the skin, and almost its natural colour. The skin, of a light brown, had the golden tint of a new Florentine bronze, and the amber, warm tone which is admired in the paintings of Giorgione and Titian covered with a smoky varnish, was not very different from what must have been the complexion of the young Egyptian during her lifetime. She seemed to be asleep rather than dead. The eyelids, still fringed with their long lashes, allowed eyes lustrous with the humid gleam of life to shine between their lines of antimony. One could have sworn they were about to shake off, as a light dream, their sleep of thirty centuries. The nose, delicate and fine, preserved its pure outline; no depression deformed the cheeks, which were as round as the side of a vase; the mouth, coloured with a faint blush, had preserved its imperceptible lines, and on the lips, voluptuously moulded, fluttered a melancholy and mysterious smile, full of gentleness, sadness, and charm, – that tender and resigned smile which pouts so prettily the lips of the adorable heads which surmount the Canopean vases in the Louvre.

Around the forehead, low and smooth in accordance with the laws of antique beauty, was massed jet-black hair divided and plaited into a multitude of fine tresses which fell on either shoulder. Twenty golden pins stuck into the tresses, like flowers in a ball head-dress, studded with brilliant points the thick dark hair which might have been thought artificial, so abundant was it. Two great earrings, round discs resembling small bucklers,

shimmered with yellow light by the side of the brown cheeks. A magnificent necklace, composed of three rows of divinities and amulets in gold and precious stones, encircled the neck of the coquettish mummy, and lower down upon her breast hung two other collars, the pearl, gold, lapis-lazuli, and cornelian rosettes of which alternated symmetrically with the most perfect taste. A girdle of nearly the same design enclosed her waist with a belt of gold and gems. A double bracelet of gold and cornelian beads adorned her left wrist, and on the index of the left hand shone a very small scarabæus of golden cloisonné enamel, which formed a seal ring and was held by a gold thread most marvellously plaited.

Strange were the sensations of the two men as they found themselves face to face with a human being who had lived in the days when history was yet young and was collecting the stories told by tradition; face to face with a body contemporary with Moses, which yet preserved the exquisite form of youth; as they touched the gentle little hand impregnated with perfumes, which a Pharaoh perhaps had kissed; as they fingered the hair, more durable than empire, more solid than granite monuments. At the sight of the lovely dead girl, the young nobleman felt the retrospective desire often inspired by the sight of a statue or a painting representing a woman of past days famous for her beauty. It seemed to him that he would have loved, had he lived three thousand years earlier, that beauty which nothingness had refused to destroy; and the sympathetic thought perhaps reached

the restless soul that fluttered above its profaned frame.

Far less poetic than the young nobleman, Dr. Rumphius was making the inventory of the gems, without, however, taking them off; for Evandale had ordered that the mummy should not be deprived of this last frail consolation. To take away gems from a woman, even dead, is to kill her a second time. Suddenly a papyrus roll concealed between the side and arm of the mummy caught the doctor's eye.

"Oh!" said he, "this is no doubt a copy of the funeral ritual placed in the inner coffin and written with more or less care according to the wealth and rank of the person."

He unrolled the delicate band with infinite precautions. As soon as the first lines showed, he exhibited surprise, for he did not recognise the ordinary figures and signs of the ritual. In vain he sought in the usual places for the vignettes representing the funeral, which serve as a frontispiece to such papyri, nor did he find the Litany of the Hundred Names of Osiris, nor the soul's passport, nor the petition to the gods of Amenti. Drawings of a peculiar kind illustrated entirely different scenes connected with human life, and not with the voyage of the shade to the world beyond. Chapters and paragraphs seemed to be indicated by characters written in red, evidently for the purpose of distinguishing them from the remainder of the text, which was in black, and of calling the attention of the reader to interesting points. An inscription placed at the head appeared to contain the title of the work, and the name of the grammarian who had written

or copied it, – so much, at least, did the sagacious intuition of the doctor make out at the first glance.

"Undoubtedly, my lord, we have robbed Master Argyropoulos," said he to Evandale, as he pointed out the differences between the papyrus and the usual ritual. "This is the first time that an Egyptian manuscript has been found to contain anything else than hieratic formulæ. I am bound to decipher it, even if it costs me my sight, even if my beard grows thrice around my desk. Yes, I shall ferret out your secret, mysterious Egypt! Yes, I shall learn your story, you lovely dead; for that papyrus pressed close to your heart by your lovely arm surely contains it. And I shall be covered with glory, become the equal of Champollion, and make Lepsius die of jealousy."

The nobleman and the doctor returned to Europe. The mummy, wrapped up again in all its bandages and replaced within its three cases, rests within Lord Evandale's park in Lincolnshire, in the basalt sarcophagus which he brought at great expense from Biban el Molûk and which he did not give to the British Museum. Sometimes Lord Evandale leans upon the sarcophagus, sinks into a deep reverie, and sighs.

After three years of unflagging application, Dr. Rumphius succeeded in deciphering the mysterious papyrus, save in some damaged parts, and in others which contained unknown signs. And it is his translation into Latin – which we have turned into French – that you are about to read, under the name, "The Romance of a Mummy."

I

Oph (that is the name of the city which antiquity called Thebes of the Hundred Gates, or Diospolis Magna), seemed asleep under the burning beams of the blazing sun. It was noon. A white light fell from the pale sky upon the baked earth; the sand, shimmering and scintillating, shone like burnished metal; shadows there were none, save a narrow, bluish line at the foot of buildings, like the inky line with which an architect draws upon papyrus; the houses, whose walls sloped well inwards, glowed like bricks in an oven; every door was closed, and no one showed at the windows, which were closed with blinds of reeds.

At the end of the deserted streets and above the terraces stood out in the hot, transparent air the tips of obelisks, the tops of pylons, the entablatures of palaces and temples, whose capitals, formed of human faces or lotus flowers, showed partially, breaking the horizontal lines of the roofs and rising like reefs amid the mass of private buildings. Here and there above a garden wall shot up the scaly trunk of a palm tree ending in a plume of leaves, not one of which stirred, for never a breath blew. Acacias, mimosas, and Pharaoh fig-trees formed a cascade of foliage that cast a narrow blue shadow upon the dazzling brilliancy of the ground. These green spots refreshed and enlivened the solemn aridity of the picture, which but for them would have been that of a dead city.

A few slaves of the Nahasi race, black complexioned, monkey-faced, with bestial gait, alone braving the heat of the day, were bearing to their masters' homes the water drawn from the Nile in jars that were hung from a stick placed on their shoulder. Although they wore nothing but striped drawers wrinkling on their hips, their torsos, brilliant and polished like basalt, streamed with perspiration as they quickened their pace lest they should scorch the thick soles of their feet on the pavements, which were as hot as the floor of a vapour bath. The boatmen were asleep in the cabins of their boats moored to the brick wall of the river quay, sure that no one would waken them to cross to the other bank, where lay the Memnonia quarter. In the highest heaven wheeled vultures, whose shrill call, that at any other time would have been lost in the rumour of the city, could be plainly heard in the general silence. On the cornices of the monuments two or three ibises, one leg drawn up under their body, their long bill resting on their breast, seemed to be meditating deeply, and stood out against the calcined, whitish blue which formed the background.

And yet all did not sleep. From the walls of a great palace whose entablature, adorned with palmettoes, made a long, straight line against the flaming sky, there came a faint murmur of music. These bursts of harmony spread now and then through the diaphanous shimmer of the atmosphere, and the eye might almost have followed their sonorous undulations. Deadened by the thickness of the walls, the music was strangely sweet. It was

a song voluptuously sad, wearily languorous, expressing bodily fatigue and the discouragement of passion. It was full of the eternal weariness of the luminous azure, of the indescribable helplessness of hot countries. As the slave passed by the wall, forgetting the master's lash he would suspend his walk and stop to breathe in that song, impregnated with all the secret homesickness of the soul, which made him think of his far distant country, of his lost love, and of the insurmountable obstacles of fate. Whence came that song, that sigh softly breathed in the silence of the city? What restless soul was awake when all around was asleep?

The straight lines and the monumental appearance of the façade of the palace, which looked upon the face of the square, were typical of the civil and religious architecture of Egypt. The dwelling could belong to a princely or a priestly family only. So much was readily seen from the materials of which it was built, the careful construction, and the richness of the ornamentation.

In the centre of the façade rose a great building flanked by two wings surmounted by a roof in the form of a truncated triangle. A broad, deeply cut moulding of striking profile ended the wall, in which was visible no opening other than a door placed, not symmetrically in the centre, but in the corner of the building, no doubt to allow ample space for the staircase within. A cornice in the same style as the entablature surmounted this single door. The building projected from a wall on which rested like balconies two stories of galleries, resembling open porticoes, composed

of pillars singularly fantastic in style. The bases of these pillars represented huge lotus-buds, from the capsule of which, as it opened its dentelated rim, sprang the shaft like a giant pistil, swelling below, more slender at the top, girdled under the capital by a collar of mouldings, and ending in a half-blown flower. Between the broad bays were small windows with their sashes in two parts filled with stained glass. Above ran a terraced roof flagged with huge slabs of stone.

On the outer galleries great clay vases, rubbed inside with bitter almonds and closed with leaves, resting upon wooden pedestals, cooled the Nile water in the draughts of air. Tables bore pyramids of fruits, sheaves of flowers and drinking-cups of different shapes; for the Egyptians love to eat in the open air, and take their meals, so to speak, upon the public street. On either side of the main building stretched others rising to the height of one story only, formed of a row of pillars engaged half-way up in a wall divided into panels in such a manner as to form around the house a shelter closed to the sun and the gaze of the outer world. All these buildings, enlivened by ornamental paintings, – for the capitals, the shafts, the cornices, and the panels were coloured, – produced a delightful and superb effect.

The door opened into a vast court surrounded by a quadrilateral portico supported by pillars, the capitals of which showed on each face a woman's head, with the ears of a cow, long, narrow eyes, slightly flattened noses, and a broad smile; each wore a thick red cushion and supported a cap of hard

sandstone. Under the portico opened the doors of the apartments, into which the light came softened by the shade of the galleries. In the centre of the court sparkled in the sunshine a pool of water, edged with a margin of Syêné granite. On the surface of the pond spread the heart-shaped leaves of the lotus, the rose and blue flowers of which were half closed as if overcome by the heat in spite of the water in which they were plunged. In the flower-beds around the pool were planted flowers arranged fanlike upon small hillocks, and along the narrow walks laid out between the beds walked carefully two tame storks, which from time to time snapped their bills and fluttered their wings as if about to take flight. At the angles of the court the twisted trunks of four huge persæas exhibited a mass of metallic green foliage. At the end a sort of pylon broke the portico, and its large bay, framing in the blue air, showed at the end of a long avenue a summer kiosk of rich and elegant design. In the compartments traced on the right and on the left of the arbour by dwarf trees cut into the shape of cones, bloomed pomegranates, sycamores, tamarinds, periplocas, mimosas, and acacias, the flowers of which shone like coloured lights on the deep green of the foliage which overhung the walls.

The faint, sweet music of which we have spoken proceeded from one of the rooms which opened into the interior portico. Although the sun shone full into the court, the ground of which blazed in the flood of light, a blue, cool shadow, transparently intense, filled the apartment, in which the eye, blinded by the

dazzling reverberation, sought to distinguish shapes and at last made them out when it had become accustomed to the semi-light. A tender lilac tone overspread the walls of the room, around which ran a cornice painted in brilliant tones and enriched with small golden palm-branches. Architectural designs skilfully combined formed on the plain spaces panels which framed in ornaments, sheaves of flowers, birds, diapers of contrasted colours, and scenes of domestic life.

At the back, near the wall, stood a strangely shaped bed, representing an ox wearing ostrich-feathers with a disc between its horns, broadening its back to receive the sleeper upon a thin red mattress, and stiffening by way of feet its black legs ending in green hoofs, while its curled-up tail was divided into two tufts. This quadruped bed, this piece of animal furniture, would have seemed strange in any other country than Egypt, where lions and jackals are also turned into beds by the fancy of the workmen.

In front of the couch was placed a stool with four steps, which gave access to it: at the head, a pillow of Oriental alabaster, destined to support the neck without deranging the head-dress, was hollowed out in the shape of a half moon. In the centre a table of precious wood carved with exceeding care, stood upon a richly carved pedestal. A number of objects were placed upon it: a pot of lotus flowers, a mirror of polished bronze on an ivory stand, a vase of moss agate filled with antimony powder, a perfume spatula of sycamore wood in the shape of a woman bare to the waist stretching out as if she were swimming, and appearing to

attempt to hold her box above the water.

Near the table, on an armchair of gilded wood picked out with red, with blue feet, and with lions for arms, covered with a thick cushion of purple stuff starred with gold and crossed with black, the end of which fell over the back, was seated a young woman, or rather, a young girl of marvellous beauty, in a graceful attitude of nonchalance and melancholy.

Her features, of ideal delicacy, were of the purest Egyptian type, and sculptors must have often thought of her as they carved the images of Isis and Hathor, even at the risk of breaking the rigorous hieratic laws. Golden and rosy reflections coloured her warm pallor, in which showed her long black eyes, made to appear larger by lines of antimony, and full of a languorous, inexpressible sadness. Those great dark eyes, with the eyebrows strongly marked and the eyelids coloured, gave a strange expression to the dainty, almost childish face. The half-parted lips, somewhat thick, of the colour of a pomegranate flower, showed a gleam of polished white and preserved the involuntary and almost painful smile which imparts so sympathetic a charm to the Egyptian face. The nose, slightly depressed at the root, where the eyebrows melted one into another in a velvety shadow, rose in such pure lines, such delicate outlines, and with such well-cut nostrils that any woman or goddess would have been satisfied with it in spite of its slightly African profile. The chin was rounded with marvellous elegance and shone like polished ivory. The cheeks, rather rounder than those of the beauties

of other nations, added to the face an expression of extreme sweetness and gracefulness.

This lovely girl wore for head-dress a sort of helmet formed of a Guinea fowl, the half-closed wings of which fell upon her temples, and the pretty, small head of which came down to the centre of her brow, while the tail, marked with white spots, spread out on the back of her neck. A clever combination of enamel imitated to perfection the plumage of the bird. Ostrich-feathers, planted in the helmet like an aigrette, completed this head-dress, which was reserved for young virgins, as the vulture, the symbol of maternity, is worn only by women. The hair of the young girl, of a brilliant black, plaited into tresses, hung in masses on either side of her smooth, round cheeks, and fell down to her shoulders. In the shadowy masses of the hair shone, like suns in a cloud, great discs of gold worn as earrings. From the head-dress hung gracefully down the back two long bands of stuff with fringed ends. A broad pectoral ornament, composed of several rows of enamels, gold and cornelian beads, and fishes and lizards of stamped gold, covered her breast from the lower part of the neck to the upper part of the bosom, which showed pink and white through the thin warp of the calasiris. The dress, of a large checkered pattern, was fastened under the bosom with a girdle with long ends, and ended in a broader border of transverse stripes edged with a fringe. Triple bracelets of lapis-lazuli beads, divided here and there by golden balls, encircled her slender wrists, delicate as those of a child; and her lovely,

narrow feet with long, supple toes, were shod with sandals of white kid stamped with designs in gold, and rested on a cedar stool incrustated with red and green enamel.

Near Tahoser (for this was the name of the young Egyptian) knelt, one leg drawn back under the thigh and the other forming an obtuse angle, in the attitude which the painters love to reproduce on the walls of hypogea, a female harpist placed upon a sort of low pedestal, destined no doubt to increase the resonance of the instrument. A piece of stuff striped with coloured bands, the ends of which, thrown back, hung in fluted lappets, bound her hair and framed in her face, smiling mysteriously like that of a sphinx. A narrow dress, or rather sheath, of transparent gauze outlined closely the youthful contours of her elegant, slender form. Her dress, cut below the breast, left her shoulders, chest, and arms free in their chaste nudity. A support, fixed to the pedestal on which was placed the player, and traversed by a bolt in the shape of a key, formed a rest for the harp, the weight of which, but for that, would have borne wholly upon the shoulders of the young woman. The harp, which ended in a sort of keyboard, rounded like a shell and covered with ornamental paintings, bore at its upper end a sculptured head of Hathor surmounted by an ostrich-plume. The nine cords were stretched diagonally and quivered under the long, slender hands of the harpist, who often, in order to reach the lower notes, bent with a sinuous motion as if she were about to float on the waves of music and accompany the vanishing harmony.

Behind her stood another musician, who might have been thought nude but for the faint white haze which toned the bronze colour of her body. She played on a sort of guitar with an exceedingly long handle, the three cords of which were coquettishly adorned at their extremity with coloured tufts. One of her arms, slender yet round, grasped the top of the handle with a sculptural pose, while the other upheld the instrument and touched the strings.

A third young woman, whose enormous mass of hair made her look all the more slender, beat time upon a tympanum formed of a wooden frame slightly curved inward, on which was stretched an onager-skin.

The harpist sang a plaintive melody, accompanied in unison, inexpressibly sad. The words breathed vague aspirations, vague regrets, a hymn of love to the unknown, and timid plaints of the rigour of the gods and the cruelty of fate. Tahoser, leaning upon one of the lions of her armchair, her hand under her cheek and her finger curved against her temple, listened with inattention more apparent than real, to the song of the musician. At times a sigh made her breast heave and raised the enamels of her necklace. Sometimes a moist light caused by a growing tear shone in her eye between the lines of antimony, and her tiny teeth bit her lower lip as if she were fighting her own emotion.

"Satou," she said, clapping her delicate hands together to silence the musician, who at once deadened with her palm the vibrations of the harp, "your song enervates me, makes me

languid, and would make me giddy like overpowerful perfumes. The strings of your harp seem to be twisted with the vibrations of my heart and sound painfully within my breast. You make me almost ashamed, for it is my soul that mourns in your music. Who can have told you my secrets?"

"Mistress," replied the harpist, "the poet and the musician know everything; the gods reveal hidden things to them; they express in their rhythm what the thought scarcely conceives and what the tongue confusedly stammers. But if my song saddens you, I can, by changing its mode, bring brighter ideas to your mind." And Satou struck the cords of her harp with joyous energy, and with a quick measure which the tympanum marked with more rapid strokes.

After this prelude she began a song praising the charms of wine, the intoxication of perfumes, and the delight of the dance. Some of the women, who, seated upon folding-stools formed of the necks of blue swans, whose yellow bills clasped the frame of the seat, or kneeling upon scarlet cushions filled with the down of thistles, had assumed under the influence of Satou's music poses of utter languor, shivered; their nostrils swelled; they breathed in the magic rhythm; they rose to their feet, and, moved by an irresistible impulse, began to dance. A head-dress, in the shape of a helmet cut out around the ear, enclosed their hair, some locks of which escaped and fell upon their brown cheeks, which the ardour of the dance soon turned rosy. Broad golden circles beat upon their necks, and through their long

gauze shifts, embroidered at the top with pearls, showed their golden bronze bodies which moved with the ease of an adder. They twisted, turned, swayed their hips, bound with a narrow black girdle, threw themselves back, bowed down, inclined their heads to right and left as if they found a secret voluptuousness in touching their polished chins with their cold, bare shoulders, swelled out their breasts like doves, knelt and rose, pressed their hands to their bosom or voluptuously outspread their arms, which seemed to flutter as the wings of Iris or Nephthys, dragged their limbs, bent the knee, displayed their swift feet with little staccato movements, and followed every undulation of the music. The maids, standing against the wall to leave free space for the evolutions of the dancers, marked the rhythm by snapping their fingers or clapping their hands together. Some of these maids, absolutely nude, had no other raiment than a bracelet of enamelled ware; others wore a narrow cloth held by straps, and a few sprays of flowers twisted in their hair. It was a strange and graceful sight. The buds and the flowers, gently moving, shed their perfume through the hall, and these young women, thus wreathed, might have suggested fortunate comparisons to poets.

But Satou had overestimated the power of her art. The joyous rhythm seemed to increase Tahoser's melancholy. A tear rolled down her fair cheek like a drop of Nile water on a nymphœa, and hiding her face in the breast of her favourite maid, who leaned upon the armchair of her mistress, she uttered with a sob, dovelike in its sadness, "Oh, my dear Nofré, I am very sad and

very unhappy!"

II

Nofré, anticipating some confidence, made a sign, and the harpist, the two musicians, the dancers, and the maids silently withdrew one by one, like the figures painted on frescoes. When the last had gone, the favourite said to her mistress in a petting, sympathetic tone, like a young mother soothing her child's tender grief, —

"What is the matter, dear mistress, that you are sad and unhappy? Are you not young, so fair that the loveliest envy you, and free to do what you please? And did not your father, the high-priest Petamounoph, whose mummy rests concealed within a rich tomb, — did he not leave you great wealth to do with as you please? Your palace is splendid, your gardens vast and watered by transparent streams, your coffers of enamelled ware and sycamore wood are filled with necklaces, pectorals, neck-plates, anklets, finely wrought seal-rings. Your gowns, your calasiris, your head-dresses are greater in number than the days of the year. Hopi, the father of waters, regularly covers with his fertilising mud your domains, which a vulture flying at top speed could scarce traverse from sunrise to sunrise. And yet your heart, instead of opening joyously like a lotus bud in the month of Hathor or of Choeak, closes and contracts painfully."

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