

## THE MUMMY'S FOOT.

ONE idle day I lounged in to amuse myself examining the curiosities of one of those shops styled, in true Parisian dialect, *maisons de bric-à-brac*.

The passion for possessing antique furniture has increased wonderfully within a few years, and no elegant mansion is considered perfect without its *chambre moyen âge*; consequently these little shops have sprung up in all odd corners of Paris. Possessing, at the same time, all the characteristics of the painter's studio, the laboratory of the alchemist, the upholsterer's cabinet, and the shop of the old iron dealer, these little dimly lighted caves, where the dust and cobwebs are more ancient and authentic than the guipures, are full of fascination for the lover of the curious and antique.

The *maison de bric-à-brac* which was my favorite resort was a true Capernaum; all past centuries and all nationalities appeared to have made it a general rendezvous. There was an Etruscan lamp of red clay, standing upon an antique *armoire*, whose ebony panels were curiously inlaid with copper. There a cabinet of the time of Louis XV., with its delicate feet like a roe's, stood by the side of a massive table from the reign of Louis XIII., whose heavy spiral legs of oak were richly adorned with carving of fabulous monsters, half hidden by vine leaves. In one corner stood an embossed suit of armor from Milan, its breast-plate glistening with jewels; pottery cupids and nymphs, grotesque figures of porcelain, vases of Saxony ware and old Sevres, covered the *étagères*. There were ancient dressing-tables, with inlaid panels of Japanese work, covered with designs in red and blue, where gold filigree was intermixed with Bernard Palissy enamel, representing forms of serpents, frogs, and lizards in relief. Half falling from the shelves of open *armoires* were draperies of rich brocades, their patterns of gold and crimson shining brilliant through all the dust and duskiness of the place.

The old merchant followed me with close attention as I walked about examining the curious old furniture and other antique rubbish, now and then springing forward to guard some cherished bit of antiquity from too close contact with my coat, and watching my elbows with the anxiety of the antiquary and the usurer.

He was a singular specimen of humanity, this old *bric-à-brac* dealer; an immense bald head, surrounded by thin white hair, which contrasted strangely with the yellow color of his skin, gave him a fictitious air of patriarchal good-nature, which was forcibly contradicted by the sharp little yellow eyes, which trembled in their sockets like two Louis d'ors upon quicksilver. His nose had an aquiline outline, recalling the Oriental or Jewish type. His hands, lean, lank, covered with protruding veins, and with nails like the claws terminating the membranous wings of a bat, were constantly moving about in an uneasy, feeble way; but those nervous,

trembling hands became firm as steel pincers when they grasped any precious object—an onyx cup, a vase from Venice, or a plate of Bohemian glass.

The curious old man appeared so profoundly cabalistic and full of all manner of mysterious knowledge that, three centuries ago, he would have been burned as a magician.

"Will you not buy something to-day, monsieur?" he said. "Just look at this Malay dagger; the blade sparkles like a ray of light. See how skillfully these indentations are made to cut the flesh of the victim on drawing out the poniard. It is a magnificent specimen of a ferocious weapon, and should be placed at once in your collection. This sword is very beautiful. It belonged to Joseph of Hera. Look at the silver handle inlaid with brilliants. What superb workmanship!"

"No, no," I replied; "I have enough of these savage instruments. I wish to find a little figure, something which I can use for a paper-weight. These bronzes sold by every stationer do not please me. One finds them invariably on all writing-tables."

The old gnome, after searching among his antiquities, placed before me old bronzes, of what he designated as such—pieces of malachite, little Hindoo and Chinese idols, bits of precious stones, and some small images of Brahma and Vishnu, characters eminently suitable for a position on a table among books and papers.

I was hesitating between a porcelain dragon, warty and hideous, his jaws bristling with teeth and beard, and an ugly little Mexican fetich representing the god Wilziliputzili, when I noticed a charming foot, which I took at first for a fragment of some antique Venus. It possessed that delicate fawn-colored tint which gives such warm, living character to the Florentine bronzes, so preferable to the greenish aspect of ordinary bronzes, which impress one as statues in process of decay. Its surface glistened like satin, and its outlines were rendered exquisitely delicate by the loving kisses of twenty centuries; for I supposed it a Corinthian bronze, a work of the Middle Ages, perhaps a casting by Lysippe himself.

"This foot will answer my purpose," I said to the dealer, who handed me the desired object with an expression of singular irony and cunning.

I was startled by its lightness. It was not a foot of bronze, but a foot of flesh, a foot embalmed—the foot of a mummy! On examining it with care, I could see the delicate grains of the skin, and the almost imperceptible imprint left by the cloth bandage. The toes were small, delicately shaped, with nails perfect, and purely transparent, as agates. The great toe, slightly separated from the others in the antique fashion, gave the foot a singular grace, like that of a bird. The sole, exquisitely and delicately moulded, showed plainly that it had never touched the earth, and come in contact

only with the finest matting woven from Nile grass and downy carpets of panther-skin.

"Ha, ha! You wish to purchase the foot of the Princess Hermonthis?" said the dealer, with a strange sneer, fixing upon me eyes like an owl. "Ha, ha, ha! For a paper-weight! An original idea—an artistic idea! Old Pharaoh would have been very unpleasantly surprised had he been told that the foot of his beloved daughter would serve as a paper-weight, after he had taken the pains to hollow out a mountain of granite for her tomb, and to cover her massive coffin with hieroglyphics and beautiful paintings," added the old merchant, softly, as if speaking with himself.

"For how much will you sell me this fragment of a mummy?"

"Ah, I shall ask as much as possible, for it is a superb thing. If you paid half that it is worth, you would not have it for less than five hundred francs. The daughter of Pharaoh! Nothing could be more rare."

"Surely it is nothing common; but what will you take for it? First, I must tell you a little fact; I have only five Louis; I will buy any thing which does not cost more than that."

● "You may search through all the pockets of my coat, and in all the cases of my shop, and you will find nothing for that but a miserable tiger with five claws. Five Louis for the foot of the Princess Hermonthis—the authentic foot! It is absurd; in truth, it is nothing," said the old dealer, shaking his head, and rolling his eyeballs with well-feigned horror.

I turned away.

"Come, take it," he shrieked, seizing hold of me. "I will give you the wrapper for nothing," he added, rolling the delicate treasure in a fragment of old damask. "Beautiful, genuine old damask, damask of the Indies, which has never been redyed; how fine and soft," he muttered, passing his fingers gently over the tattered fragment, with a greediness which led him to place a certain value upon an object so poor that even he was willing to give it away.

He carefully placed the gold pieces in an old-fashioned money-bag hanging from his belt, repeating over and over to himself:

"The foot of the Princess Hermonthis for a paper-weight!"

Then fixing upon me his glistening eyes, he said, in a voice harsh as the miauling of a cat who has just swallowed a fish-bone:

"Old Pharaoh will not be contented with this. He loved his daughter, that old man!"

"You speak as if you were an intimate friend of the old Egyptian. Although you are old, you have not learned the mysteries of the Pyramids," I replied, laughing, as I left the shop.

I came home delighted with my acquisition.

On my table was a bundle of papers, rough drafts of verses, rendered nearly undecipherable by mosaic-work of crasures, articles commenced, letters written, forgotten, and left lying with other literary rubbish, instead of being put in the mail, an error often committed by absent-

minded people; on these scraps of a *littérateur's* life I placed the foot of the divine Princess Hermonthis; the effect was charming, *bizarre*, romantic.

Very well satisfied with my new ornament, I went out for a walk, passing along the street with the dignity and pride of a man who holds the advantage over all his fellow-creatures of possessing a piece of the Princess Hermonthis, daughter of Pharaoh.

I considered all those unfortunate people worthy of much sympathy who did not possess a paper-weight of such genuine antiquity; and the true ambition of every man, it appeared to me, should be to have a mummy's foot on his writing-table.

Fortunately, I met some friends who diverted my thoughts from my new treasure. I went to dine with them, for it would have been impossible to dine by myself.

When I returned home in the evening, my brain slightly excited with wine, a delicate sense of Oriental perfume pervaded the apartment. The warmth of the chamber had melted the natron, bitumen, and myrrh with which the embalmers had bathed the body of the princess. It was a perfume sweet and penetrating—a perfume which three thousand years had been powerless to evaporate.

The dream of Egypt was eternity. Its odors have the steadfastness of granite, and endure forever.

I drank with full draughts from the dark goblets of sleep. For several hours I remained unconscious—forgetfulness and nothingness held me fast in their sombre embrace.

By degrees my intellectual perceptions grew clear, and dreams began to take their silent flight.

The eyes of my soul were opened, and I saw my chamber so distinctly that I would have believed myself awake had not a strange sensation assured me that I was asleep, and that something full of wonder and mystery was about to take place.

The odor of the myrrh had increased in intensity, and I felt a slight headache, which I naturally attributed to several glasses of Champagne which we had drunk at supper to the unknown gods and our future success.

I looked about my chamber with an expectant attention which nothing justified. The furniture was standing as usual, the lamp burned upon the table, its light softened by the milky whiteness of the ground-glass shade; the water-colors showed distinctly under their glasses, the curtains hung languidly; every thing wore a sleepy and tranquil appearance.

Nevertheless, after several moments that calm interior appeared disturbed by some strange influence; the wood-work creaked stealthily; the embers, covered over with ashes, sent forth at intervals little jets of blue gas, and the gilt curtain fastenings appeared like metallic eyes, attentive, like myself, to the mysterious influence, which seemed to fill the room.

By chance my looks were directed toward the table upon which I had placed the foot of the Princess Hermonthis.

In place of remaining quiet, as would have been natural for a foot embalmed for three thousand years, it was moving, contracting and slipping about on the paper like a frightened frog; it appeared as if it was in contact with an electrical battery. I distinctly heard the scratching noise made by its little heel—hard and dry as the hoof of a gazelle.

I felt suddenly very much discontented with my new possession. Liking quietness in a paper-weight, and finding it very unnatural for feet to walk about without legs to carry, I began to experience a feeling very much resembling terror.

All at once I noticed a movement of the folds of my curtain, and could distinctly hear a noise like that made by a person hopping on one foot. I felt a shudder pass through me, a strange chill ran down my back, and my hair stood on end.

The curtains parted, and I saw a sweet, wondrous figure come forward into my chamber. It was a young girl, of a rich brown complexion, like the Bayadere Amiani, and of exquisite beauty, of the pure Egyptian type. Her delicate almond-shaped eyes were slightly raised at the corners, and her finely-arched eyebrows were a rich blue-black. Her nose was almost Greek in the fineness of its outline, and she might have been taken for a statue of Corinthian bronze, had not the prominence of her cheekbones and the rich fullness of her lips shown her to belong without doubt to the ancient race which inhabited the shores of the Nile.

Her arms, slender as those of a very young girl, were ornamented with metallic and crystal bracelets; her hair hung in long braids, and was confined across her forehead by a band of glistening gold; faint traces of rose-colored paint were visible on her rich brown cheeks, and suspended on her breast was a small figure of green plaster, which, by the emblems it carried, I recognized at once as Isis, the goddess of immortality.

Her costume was very remarkable, being simply a pair of loose trowsers and tunic, embroidered with red and black hieroglyphics, and stiff with bitumen, such as may be seen on a mummy freshly unrolled.

By one of those strange freaks of thought so frequent in dreams, I seemed to hear the harsh, croaking voice of the old *bric-à-brac* merchant, repeating over and over as a monotonous refrain those words which he had addressed to me in his shop with such mysterious intonation, "Old Pharaoh will not be contented with this. He loved his daughter, that old man!" A singular peculiarity, and one which made me feel very uncomfortable, was that the apparition had only one foot, the other leg being broken at the ankle.

The girl moved slowly toward the table, upon which the mummy's foot was slipping about with violent nervous contortion. She support-

ed herself with one delicate hand resting on my *fautail*, which stood by the table, and gazed on the foot, and I saw a tear rise and glisten in her eye. Although she did not speak, I could clearly discern her thoughts. She looked at her foot—for it was indeed hers—with an expression of infinite sadness. The little foot slid rapidly about over the table, as if it was full of electric life. Several times she stretched out her hand to seize it, but it always sprang away from her grasp.

Now between the Princess Hermonthis and her foot, which appeared to be endowed with a life of its own, began a very singular dialogue in ancient Coptic, the language spoken thirty centuries ago in the country of the Pyramids. Fortunately that night, in my dream, I understood Coptic perfectly.

The Princess Hermonthis spoke in a tone sweet and vibrating as a crystal bell:

"Alas! my dear little foot, you never allow me to catch you, notwithstanding that in times long gone by I took the best of care of you. I bathed you with perfumed water in a basin of pure alabaster; I rubbed your heel with pumice-stone soaked in palm-oil; your nails were cut with golden scissors and polished with the tooth of a hippopotamus; I chose for you the neatest embroidered slippers with turned-up toes, which were the envy of all the Egyptian maidens; you had rings for your great toe, representing the sacred scarabeus; and you carried a body as light and dainty as any lazy foot could desire."

The foot replied, with a sulky and fretful air:

"You know very well that I do not belong to myself any longer; I have been bought and paid for. The old merchant knew very well what he was doing. He intends you shall remember your refusal to marry him. This is a trick he has played you."

"The Arab who broke open your royal coffin in the subterranean vaults of the necropolis of Thebes was sent by him. He wished to prevent you from going to join the grand reunion of shadows in the cities of the underworld. Have you five pieces of gold with which to purchase me back?"

"Alas! no. My jewels, my rings, my purses of gold and silver—all were stolen from me," replied the Princess Hermonthis, with a sigh.

"Princess," I cried, "I have never retained the foot of any person. You can not give me the five Louis I paid for your foot? *Bien*; I will gladly return it to you for nothing. I should be very unhappy to render the charming Princess Hermonthis a cripple forever."

I delivered this speech with a fervor and gallantry which appeared to startle the beautiful Egyptian.

She turned suddenly toward me with an expression of deepest gratitude, and her eyes sent forth blue gleams of light.

She took her foot, which this time did not try to escape her, with the same grace as a

beautiful woman might take up her slipper, and skillfully adjusted it in its place; this operation finished, she walked up and down the chamber several times, as if to assure herself that she was no longer a cripple.

"Ah," she said, "how happy this will make my father, he who was so distressed at my mutilation, after having, from the day of my birth, put a whole nation at work to build me a tomb, so deep that I could rest there in peace and perfection until that supreme day when all souls shall be weighed in the balances of Amenthi.

"Come with me to my father; he will receive you with much pleasure, you who have given me back my foot."

I found this proposal very natural, and put on my flowered *robe de chambre*, which gave me a very *Pharaonesque* appearance. Then, drawing on my Turkish slippers, I said to the princess that I was ready to follow her.

Hermonthis, before leaving, detached from her chain the little green plaster-figure, and placed it upon the scattered papers which covered the table.

"It is only right," said she, smiling, "for me to replace your paper-weight."

She reached me her hand, which was soft and cold as a snake, and we started upon our strange journey.

For a long time we shot with the rapidity of an arrow through a damp, grayish atmosphere, all objects appearing only as indistinct silhouettes. Then we saw only sea and sky. Soon pointed obelisks began to shoot up, and on the horizon appeared the forms of the Pyramids and the Sphinx.

We had arrived.

The princess led me to a mountain of red granite, and stopped before a narrow, low opening, which it would have been difficult to distinguish from the fissures in the rock had it not been marked by a sculptured head on each side.

Hermonthis lighted a torch and entered the passage-way, motioning me to follow.

It was a gallery cut in the solid rock; the walls were covered with hieroglyphics and allegorical pictures of processions, the execution of which must have required the labor of a thousand pairs of hands during a thousand years. These galleries, of interminable length, ended in a series of square chambers, in the centre of which were caverns which we descended by spiral steps cut in the rock. These vaulted caverns led into other chambers, from which ran galleries equally covered with all manner of Egyptian sculpture—sacred plants, serpents curled in circles, ibises, cats, and processions of kings and warriors, everlasting legends cut in granite, which only the dead have leisure to read in eternity.

At last we reached a hall so vast, so immense in its proportions, that the long lines of gigantic columns stretching on all sides were lost in the distance. Livid rays of yellow light trembled through the space, half revealing the outlines of figures of which the place was full.

The Princess Hermonthis retained my hand in hers, while she gracefully saluted the mummies of her acquaintance.

My eyes gradually accustomed themselves to the dim light, and I began to distinguish the objects about me.

I saw, seated upon great thrones, the kings of the ancient races. They were tall, lean old men, wrinkled, with skin like parchment, and black with naphtha and bitumen. Their heads were crowned with bands of gold, and they wore breast-plates ornamented with precious stones. Their eyes had the fixedness of the Sphinx, and their long beards were white with the snows of ages. Behind them were their embalmed subjects, sitting upright, in the stiff, constrained Egyptian fashion, retaining eternally the attitude prescribed by the hierarchical law. Behind the people stood miauling cats, ibises beating the air with their wings, and crocodiles grinning frightfully, apparitions made hideous by their blacker swathing-clothes and bandages.

All the Pharaohs were there—Cleops, Chephnones, Psammetichus, Sesostris, Amenoteph—all the dusky rulers of the Pyramids and the Nile. Upon a plain more elevated than the others were seated the kings Chromo and Xixonthros, who lived at the time of the Deluge, and Tubal Cain, who was before it.

The beard of the king Xixonthros had grown so long that it wound seven times around the granite table on which he leaned, sleepy and dreamy.

Still farther away, in a dusty vapor, I faintly distinguished the seventy-two pre-Adamite kings. Their subjects had disappeared in the mists of eternities.

After having left me for several moments to enjoy this strange spectacle, the Princess Hermonthis presented me to Pharaoh, her father, who very majestically bowed his head.

"I have found my foot! I have found my foot!" cried the Princess, clapping her little hands together in childish delight. "This is the kind friend who gave it back to me."

The tribes of Reme, the tribes of Nahasi, all the black, bronze, and copper-colored natives, repeated in grand chorus:

"The Princess Hermonthis has found her foot!"

Xixonthros himself was moved. He raised his heavy eyelids, passed his fingers through his mustache, and looked at me with the solidity of centuries in his eyes.

"By Orms, watch-dog of hell, and by Tmei, daughter of the Sun and Truth, thou art a brave and worthy fellow," said Pharaoh, reaching toward me his sceptre tipped with a lotus-flower.

"What wilt have for thy reward?"

With the daring which comes with dreams, when nothing appears impossible, I asked for the hand of the fair Hermonthis, saying that the hand was no less than a just reward for the foot.

Pharaoh opened his large, glassy eyes, astonished at the audacity of my request.

"From what country art thou, and what is thy age?" he asked.

"I come from France, and am twenty-seven years old, venerable Pharaoh."

"Twenty-seven years! And he wishes to marry the Princess Hermonthis, who was born thirty centuries ago!" cried with one voice all the kings and all the assemblage of nations.

Hermonthis was the only one who did not appear to find my request unsuitable.

"If you were only two thousand years old," said the old king, "I would gladly give you the hand of my daughter; but now the difference is too great; and those who marry our daughters must last forever, and you no longer understand the art. Those who were brought here but five centuries ago are already only a pinch of dust. Look! my flesh is hard as basalt, my bones like bars of steel. I shall stand at the grand judgment-day with the same body and same face I had while living. My daughter Hermonthis will outlast a bronze statue. Then the winds will have scattered the last grain of thy dust; and Isis herself, whose skill could recover the last fragments of Osiris, would find it impossible to bring thy form together once more. Look, how vigorous I am, and how strong my arms are!" said he, seizing my hands and squeezing them so that my rings cut into my fingers.

He shook me so violently that I waked, and found my friend Alfred pulling me by the arms, and shouting to rouse me.

"Ah, ciel! crazy sleeper, must I drag you into the middle of the street, and fire a cannon in your ears?"

"It is afternoon. Have you forgotten that you promised to take me to see the Spanish pictures by M. Aguado?"

"Mon Dieu!" I replied, springing up to dress myself; "I forgot all about it. We will go now. I have the invitation here upon my writing-table."

I went to the table to look for it among my papers. Imagine my astonishment when I saw, in place of the mummy's foot I had purchased the evening before, the little green plaster figure left by the Princess Hermonthis!