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FANTASTIC

Novels

MAGAZINE

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THE WRATH OF AMEN-RA



By

William
Holloway

*He set out to tear down the last mysteries
of a world long dead—only to find it ma-
lignantly alive!*

THROUGHOUT the strange chain of events that uncoiled itself beneath the blazing Egyptian sky, Jimmy Stayner remained a skeptic. For one thing, Egypt bored him inexpressibly. The colossal temples were too colossal, the mighty statues entirely too mighty, while the tombs, carved with hieroglyphics, gave him that nightmare feeling of the morning after.

To be perfectly honest, an X-ray of Jimmy Stayner's mind would have shown a profound conviction that the cigarette and not the pyramids has made Egypt famous. What wonder then that he attributed the odd things he saw merely to coincidence?

There was, of course, no question about his meeting with Professor Upton. That was chance, entirely chance—if there is such a thing in this marvelously balanced universe. And had the encounter taken place in America, Jimmy would have passed on his way without a word. But in the desert, miles from human habitation, the sight of a human being in distress calls for different treatment; wherefore he gave the two quick whistles which ordered Hassan, his Bedouin guide, to bring the tiny caravan to a halt.

The camel Jimmy was riding was a peculiarly sad-faced, musty, misbegotten specimen of an overadvertized race. After two days of suffering Jimmy had become

so accustomed to him that he was beginning to think that in a year or two he might care to take some solid food. Now as the brute began to sink to its knees with that peculiar motion that is compounded of the movements of a bucking bronco mingled with the uplift produced by the discharge of a depth bomb, Jimmy shut his eyes and decided that the year or two should be lengthened. Next instant the churning ceased and he set foot upon the sandy floor of the desert.

The sun being high in the heavens the sand was unpleasantly hot, wherefore Jimmy, like King Agag, walked "delicately." Dangling from his fingers was the old police-whistle—gift of a friend—which had once halted crowds in far-off Pittsburgh, and which, a minute before, had brought the caravan to a standstill. And, seated on a camp-stool, beneath the shelter of a large white umbrella, was the gray old man whose sudden appearance in the midst of the desert had so surprised him.

"I am Stayner—Jimmy Stayner," he announced; "thought you might be in trouble, so I stopped." He glanced about the deserted encampment, where overturned equipment and scattered supplies told of hasty, apparently unpremeditated flight. "All alone?"

"My name is Upton," answered the old man with a quick lift of cold gray eyes which Stayner, least fanciful of men,



There would be the rustling of vast wings—the monstrous procession of the ancient gods. . .

found oddly disturbing. "James Upton, professor of the Egyptian and Coptic languages and of Egyptian archaeology in—" He gazed expectantly at Stayner as he paused, but that individual giving no signs of having heard the name before, the old man shrugged his shoulders and went on. "In a western university, making a trip to a buried temple. All, my dragoman and his rascals deserted me this morning."

"That's odd!" commented Stayner. He gazed past Professor Upton at Hassan, who was making frantic gestures behind the old man's back, in a vain endeavor to arrest his employer's attention. What the man meant by his ridiculous antics Stayner had no means of knowing; nor did he greatly care. "What was the trouble with them?"

"Superstition!" was the curt reply. "You know what the natives are like. Well, then—"

Hassan's gestures were growing more emphatic. What did he mean? Probably something was the matter with the caravan—something of no importance to any one but Hassan. Jimmy Stayner looked about him at the kneeling camels, at the desert shimmering peacefully in the sunshine, and a vague feeling of annoyance crept over him that any man should disturb that stately calm.

Besides, when you save an Arab's life in a native brawl in Wady Halfa and in addition hire him as guide through the Libyan Desert, you scarcely expect to find him waving windmill arms behind the first white man you encounter.

Consequently, Jimmy, shaking his head at Hassan, proceeded to explain his own presence in the desert.

He was an engineer, he said briefly, killing time while British experts at Cairo went over the details of an important engineering project he had brought from Pittsburgh. Part of his boyhood had been spent in Arizona, which accounted for the call of the desert. He was on his way, for no particular reason, to a small oasis of which his guide had spoken. And if Professor Upton would care to join him—

The old man inclined his snowy head politely as he expressed his thanks; and Jimmy Stayner, half fellow, well met with half the world, went forward to give instructions to Hassan regarding the new member of the caravan. He was doing a good turn to an entire stranger, but it never occurred to him that this was at all

eccentric. Hassan promptly undeceived him.

"The mad American!" he whispered hoarsely.

"The one you were telling me of last night?" Jimmy was frankly incredulous. The story of the night before had been a strange one. It had possessed a certain sinister attraction, told in the moonlight, with the desert full of strange shadows, but here in open day, and applied to Professor Upton, the thing seemed too ridiculous for words. "That man is just as mad as you or I."

HASSAN, who had traversed the desert many times from Biskra to Sinai and who had picked up a surprising command of English from a long line of tourists, exhausted his knowledge in a long explanation. The mad American had been coming to Egypt for many years. He came for the reason Hassan had mentioned the night before. Else why should Ali have deserted him, a dragoman above reproach and a true believer of the tribe Ouled Nall?

"Ah, shucks!" cried Jimmy Stayner. "That old man isn't mad at all. And why shouldn't he come to Egypt every year if he wants to? Forget it!"

"There are ancient devils in this land—devils such as no man dreams of," said Hassan firmly. "He comes to talk to them."

Stayner stared blankly as the son of the desert went on with his explanation. Before the coming of the true faith of Islam there had been other gods in Egypt, gods of majesty and power. These false gods fled before the caliphs, the servants of Allah. Some went to other lands; others remained in Egypt and took refuge in lonely mountain passes or in hidden tombs.

They were not gods, of course. There is but one god—here Hassan eyed his employer proudly—he who begets not nor is begotten. These were devils. And it was these the mad American came each year to seek. No! He was not like the wise men, who study the great pylons at Karnak. Hassan had been dragoman for many of these. This old man was different.

Jimmy Stayner drew a deep breath of satisfaction. Then he smiled. "I never thought I'd catch up with the Arabian Nights," he remarked. "But I've done it all right."

Hassan's face relaxed in turn at mention of the great classic of his race. "The Thousand Nights and One!" he exclaimed. "There it tells of Suliman the Magnificent

—the one of the unbelievers call Solomon—who imprisoned the jinn in bottles of brass and sealed them with a holy seal. But that was not in Egypt. In Egypt the jinn were left free.”

“Holy mackerel!” exclaimed Jimmy Stayner. He stood looking at the Arab an instant in comical amazement; then, the combined influence of Pittsburgh and the engineering profession asserted itself.

“We make our midday camp right here, Hassan,” he said quietly. “The old gentleman goes with us, but don’t talk to the men about him. See?”

Hassan, who belonged to the oldest and most well-bred race in the world, bowed gravely. He had given warning of the danger. If his employer disregarded the danger, death would probably tap him on the shoulder. That would be a pity. But it was Kismet. And, mindful of a certain evening in Wady Halfa, when the young man had saved his life at the risk of his own, Hassan knew that he would follow him to the end. Which, also, was Kismet.

The next few hours Stayner spent in the seclusion of his tent, in a restless doze. The sun was reaching his full power now and the surface of the desert shimmered with waves of heat that rose from the blistering sand. Above, the sun blazed in a cloudless sky, its rays striking down with the force of bullets.

No wonder, thought Stayner dreamily, that the superstitious Egyptians had made Amen-Ra, the god of the sun, the chief deity of their religion; for if ever there was a country where the sun deserved to be a god Egypt is that very country. He grew more and more sure of it as the day wore on and his tent thermometer mounted to unbelievable heights.

That evening Professor Upton made a curious proposal. Seated like Abraham before their tent “in the cool of the evening,” he turned suddenly to the younger man.

“Know anything about Amen-Ra?”

“The old-timer, who was the big noise around Egypt?” asked Jimmy. “The Sun-God?”

“Exactly!” was the quiet answer. “Amen-Ra!”

“The father of the gods and the most powerful,” remarked Stayner slowly. “That’s the limit of my knowledge.”

“The most powerful? That is the common opinion, which I do not share. But that is of no importance just now. What matters is that I was on my way to an ancient shrine of Amen-Ra’s, when Ali

deserted; a ruined temple hidden in an almost inaccessible mountain gorge. And I have been wondering this afternoon if you would care to go there with me.”

“I’ll try anything once,” answered Jimmy Stayner flippantly, and the next instant regretted his decision. There would be another row with Hassan, of course, and, anyway, hunting up old temples is not the liveliest sport in the world. So that presently he fell silent and sat watching the moon rise over the desert.

Now to Jimmy Stayner what men term the mystery of Egypt was absolutely non-existent. When he spoke of Egypt he referred to modern Egypt only and not to the ancient land, which lies hidden beneath the sand of the desert. But this evening, with the Etesian wind blowing waves of grateful coolness in his face, the fathomless sky throbbing with stars, the moonlight beginning to cast strange shadows, everything seemed different.

Of course, he assured himself, it was all very foolish, all a reflex of his conversation with the old man; yet the fact remained that for the first time he was seeing the land as others saw it. The weight and oppression of long-dead centuries seemed upon the dreaming sand ocean. Other deserts—the Mojave for example—give a feeling of loneliness and death; this seemed clamorous with thoughts of a mysterious alien life, the roots of which were ages deep in the past.

He mentioned the thought to Professor Upton, who stooped down and caught up a handful of sand, which he allowed to trickle slowly through his fingers. “I doubt if there is a single grain of sand in the Nile Valley that has not once formed part of some human organism,” he said quietly. “Think of the narrow land, the enormous population and the almost endless centuries!”

THEY broke camp next morning when dawn was visible only in a faint glow upon the horizon. Hassan, hearing from his employer of the change in his plans, made no protest, much to the other’s surprise. It is true that for a moment his dark face wore a look of horror, but this passed quickly.

“Better not tell the men,” he suggested. “They will find out soon enough.”

“You think they will desert when they know?” asked Stayner with some curiosity.

Hassan nodded gravely. It was only a question of time, he explained.

"And you?" was Stayner's blunt question.

The Bedouin did not reply directly. For a moment his black eyes were full upon Stayner's face, and Jimmy, watching, saw a gleam appear and then disappear in their soundless depths. Thinking back, it always reminded him of a flash of lightning reflected in a quiet mountain pool. Then Hassan said quietly, "Wady Halfa." And it was as though everything had been spoken that could be spoken.

The little caravan moved westward through the tremulous glories of the dawn. Dew lay upon scattered thorn bushes and upon stray patches of halfa grass in faintest tracery. Camel bells tinkled with an immemorial sound, swarthy Bedouins strode across the sand as their ancestors had done for countless centuries, and Jimmy Stayner, gazing about him, felt himself for the first time part of the pageant of history.

That evening two of the camel drivers deserted. There was nothing underhanded nor evasive in their procedure. They merely unloaded the beasts of burden which they had hired to Hassan, and announced their intention of turning back. There followed a long discussion in which Hassan—so Stayner judged by his gestures—tried to persuade the two men to continue. A waving of hands followed, mingled with gestures toward Professor Upton's tent. Then the voice died away and the two departed, leaving the remainder of Hassan's men visibly uneasy.

A change had come over the spirit of the expedition. That night the men made a larger fire than usual, utilizing thorn bushes recklessly. Yet Stayner noticed that there was none of the usual camp-fire gaiety in the air. Perhaps gaiety is too strong an impression for the quiet Oriental. At all events there was none of the telling of ancient stories that is the customary amusement of the desert camp-fire. It grew strangely chill as the sunlight faded and the Arabs gathered closely about the blaze. But it was a silent group and not once did a voice raise itself above the others.

Next day the appearance of the country began to change. Mountains loomed in sight; not in picturesque peaks, but in long, flat ranges of barren rock, scarred by sandstorms with a sort of dry erosion until they represented the ultimate extent of barren, reddish-yellow desolation. Among the crags and the sand-dunes the little expedition wound its way, Hassan speaking

gently to his men in an evident endeavor, as Stayner interpreted it, to coax them to continue as long as possible. But they were plainly uneasy as their questioning glances showed. Once, when turning a corner of rock, a small hare ran quickly across the track and more than one man started at the sight.

Professor Upton had curiously little to say. Perched on top of a camel, he passed the day in a kind of feverish doze, raising his head at intervals to gaze about him and then closing his eyes. At night he was almost as uncommunicative, though once or twice he began to speak, only to break off abruptly and resume his silent brooding.

There was something on the old man's mind. Of that Jimmy Stayner was positive. What it might be, of course he could not tell, but it was a fair conjecture that it related in some way to the subject of his quest. Jimmy was curious, but questions did not seem in order; so he talked to Hassan and waited patiently for the situation to develop.

An odd change had taken place in Jimmy Stayner's view of the expedition. He was much like a man who unwillingly sits down at the card-table and contemplates his first hand with a feeling of complete boredom, only to draw a card that changes his whole outlook on the game. He had agreed to go upon Professor Upton's search in a mood of careless good fellowship. Now he was vitally interested in the expedition. Hassan's attitude and that of his people had helped to change him. And the actions of the old Egyptologist had completed the turn about.

There was something odd about the old man; there was no question of that. When a man welcomes the dawn with the ritual of an ancient religion, he is, to put it mildly, peculiar. And it was Professor Upton's fad or folly to stand with arms upraised, chanting an invocation in the stately tongue of dead Egypt.

THE second morning Jimmy Stayner yawned profoundly.

"I always used a 'pony' when I studied foreign languages, professor," he said frankly. "Can you run that stuff off in English?"

"It is a prayer written over three thousand years ago by the Pharaoh Amenhotep IV to the god, Aton, the greatest god of Egypt. He is represented by the sun."

"I thought old Amen-Ra was the sun god

and the big noise generally," interrupted the other.

The old man's face grew black.

"Fools thought so in ancient Egypt," he said shortly, "but Amenhotep IV destroyed the worship of Amen-Ra and set up that of Aton in its place. This prayer begins—"

He lifted up his hands, closed his eyes and spoke in a curious, singsong voice:

"Thy dawning is beautiful in the horizon of heaven, O thou, Aton, initiator of life.

"When thou risest in the east, thou fillest the earth with thy beauty; thou art beautiful, sublime and exalted above the earth. Thy beams envelop the lands and all that thou hast made."

"Oh, all right," interrupted Jimmy hastily. "I get you. Some little prayer!"

What had caused a man as entirely unromantic as Jimmy Stayner to call a halt was a very simple thing. Trained in the rough-and-tumble school of life it was one of his boasts that he could tell whether or not a man believed what he was saying. Now a shiver ran through him as he realized that the little ceremony he had witnessed was not a mere intellectual amusement, such as, for example, the reciting of the Rubáiyát, but an act of religious devotion.

The old man really believed what he was saying. Jimmy would have sworn to that. Yet that meant that from Jimmy's standpoint he was crazy. And if there are advantages in exploring ancient tombs in company with a madman they had hitherto escaped Jimmy's attention.

On the fourth day of this strange expedition the children of the desert succumbed to their fears and refused to go further, despite Hassan's entreaties and verbal scourgings. Rocks hemmed them in on all sides now; the scenery had become indescribably grim and awe-inspiring; they seemed entering upon untrodden ways that might lead who knows where. Stayner could scarcely blame them as he saw them hastily beginning the march back to civilization, though he was well aware that their departure meant a doubling and trebling of the difficulties of the expedition.

It throws a sharp side light upon Jimmy Stayner's character to report that it never once entered his head that Professor Upton should in the slightest degree change his plans. He had drawn cards in a curious game; he was going to stay in it to the end.

The caravan now consisted of only three

camels. Professor Upton, with some of his baggage, accounted for one. The other two, piled with traveling equipment and supplies, padded softly on their way behind Hassan and his employer. It was the first time Jimmy had taken charge of one of the creatures on foot, and for some moments he had a vague impression that the brute behind him was only waiting occasion to pasture on his ears.

The road grew momentarily more difficult. They were now working their way through a narrow gorge, cloven in the rock ages since, the frowning sides of which threw somber shadows across their path.

Here and there were huge boulders, set in little mounds of eroded rock, which the wind at intervals set dancing in clouds of gritty, brownish-yellow dust that irritated the lungs almost to the point of suffocation.

After several hours' travel the gorge ended abruptly in an overhanging rock, and the caravan came to a sudden halt. The younger man glanced doubtfully at Professor Upton, whose face wore a smile of satisfaction.

"Once before I came this far and had to turn back," he explained. "Short of water!"

"I don't see any gate," remarked Stayner, glancing at the rocky barrier. "I suppose there is a way up."

"We leave the animals here," said the old man. "There is a footpath behind the rock, leading to the plateau above. On that plateau, sunken in the sand I expect to find a temple of Amen-Ra's. It is unique because I think it about the only one of its kind that was left untouched when Amenhotep IV destroyed the worship of Amen-Ra and set up in its place that of Aton. All the temples of Amen-Ra were forcibly entered, the sanctuaries violated, the name of Amen-Ra chiseled from the stone inscriptions, the priesthood—the most powerful in the world—driven into exile. But this temple hidden in the desert, escaped the fate of the others. It was in charge of a very famous high priest, whose mummy I feel sure we shall be able to discover."

"And then," asked Stayner, "what are you going to do?"

"You will see," was the enigmatic answer.

Hassan attended to the matter-of-fact camels and the upward climb began. Professor Upton, who showed surprising agility, leading the way. They had ascended perhaps fifty feet when Stayner, who

was second in line, was startled to observe the old man stumble over a projecting spur of rock and fall forward on his face, a distance of several feet, his cork helmet ricocheting down the trail like a spent bullet.

To leap to his side was the work of only an instant. He was not injured, Stayner could see at a glance, although somewhat shaken. But his forehead, damp with perspiration, had evidently been in contact with the earth for, marked upon it, evidently by pressure, was a curious oval containing within it a distinct impression of some kind of figures, the exact nature of which Stayner could not determine in the first quick glance allowed him.

Professor Upton rose slowly to his feet and smiled reassuringly. No! He was not hurt in the least. He had been careless. He hoped he had given no alarm to his companions—all of which was spoken in a firm, even voice that testified to the strength of his nerves. He was about to add something else when his gaze fell upon a fragment of sculpture lying in the sand.

"Excellent! Excellent!" he cried with unconcealed delight. "A cartouch of Amen-Ra!" He pointed at a strange mark, not unlike a picture of the sun. "See! The sign of Amen-Ra! We are on the right track."

Stayner made no reply. With wide eyes he was staring at the old man's forehead, across which lay an oval mark, having within it the sign of Amen-Ra. There was, of course, no mystery about it. Professor Upton had merely chanced to stumble in such a manner that his forehead, damp with perspiration, had come into close contact with the cartouch of Amen-Ra. There was absolutely nothing to it, yet Jimmy Stayner could not help but smile as he thought of the absurdity of the old Egyptologist being even momentarily marked with the sign of the god whose temple they were about to invade. Poetic justice? That was about what they would call it, Jimmy decided.

"You fell on it," he explained, "and it left a mark on your forehead. The sign of Amen-Ra!"

For a moment he expected that the old man's anger would surely strangle him, so furious was it. With passionate swiftness he swept his handkerchief across his forehead in an endeavor to remove all traces of the mark of Amen-Ra. In this he was partly successful, though the sign of the

great god still remained in blurred red upon the skin. Then, Hassan having retrieved the missing cork helmet, the march upward was resumed.

SOMETIMES the slightest incident will change the current of a man's thoughts. The thing now happened to Jimmy Stayner. Hitherto the expedition had bored him inexpressibly; he had only continued in it because it was one way of killing time and because he had foolishly given a promise. But now he began to see that there might be a comic side to the affair. This little incident of the cartouch of Amen-Ra being marked across the forehead of a man who despised the god's power struck him as decidedly amusing. When they reached the temple of the ancient god there was a good prospect of more fun. Wherefore, Jimmy smiled to himself and possessed his soul in patience.

He had not long to wait. They mounted the crest of rock and stood looking down upon an amphitheater perhaps a couple of miles in width, sunken in the far recesses of the Libyan desert. What in primeval times had apparently been a series of terraces lifted in slow undulations to the opposite wall of rock, from which projected the facade of a great temple. A lane of sphinxes of huge size led to the massive pylon, or entrance gate, a vast structure in two parts, between which was the gateway to the outer court of the temple. So much was plain at the first glance.

A second and more careful inspection showed a second terrace some yards above the first and in the distance beyond it yet another. On the second terrace was another court, surrounded by a double row of pillars, and adorned with two small temples, one on either side. What there might be on the third terrace, which melted into the background of the eternal rocks, Stayner could not determine. Coming from the dimness of the gully into the glare of the noonday sun, his eyes were dazzled by the rays that beat upon the shining white wall opposite. But he saw enough to understand that the temple of Amen-Ra, facing him, was no mean huddle of buildings, but a structure or structures of the highest class.

He turned to Professor Upton. There was a curious glint in the old man's eyes that might have meant a number of things. Stayner did not pause to analyze it. Now that the end of the journey was in sight he was anxious to have the matter

over and done with. Their position in the recesses of the Libyan desert had unpleasant features about it. He for one, and no doubt Hassan for two, wished he were on the homeward trail. Wherefore, despite the fact that the noonday heat made rest imperative, he suggested an exploration of the temple.

Professor Upton agreed with suspicious alacrity.

"It will only take a couple of hours," the old man said hastily. "Then my errand will be finished and we can make camp."

Jimmy Stayner was very thoughtful as they descended to the sandy amphitheater beneath. All inclination to laugh was gone. When a man undergoes trouble and privation in order to reach a given point and then announces that his errand will take only a couple of hours it is obvious that he knows exactly the object of his search and where it is to be found. Now what but treasure of some sort, the hiding-place of which he had in some manner discovered, could have brought the old man to this desolate mass of ruins? And that there are immense possibilities for "finds" in such situations is merest commonplace. So that, from this point on, Jimmy Stayner began to take the expedition very seriously.

The other member of the trio, Hassan, took the matter even more seriously. This was evidenced a moment later, when he flatly refused to proceed. He knew the place now. It was accursed, haunted by a mighty jinn. This was the reason why the Arabs of the desert gave it a wide berth. He would remain where he was until they returned.

Stayner nodded as he heard Hassan give his decision. Professor Upton was fumbling with a heavy knapsack which he wore, and Stayner was anxious to see the reason. A minute later the old man produced a hammer and chisel. Evidently, Jimmy Stayner told himself, they were about to burglarize the temple in the distance.

Whether this were so or not, Professor Upton had other and more immediate uses for the hammer, for presently he paused before a narrow slab of limestone, upon which were cut various names of Amen-Ra, and, hastily, almost savagely, began defacing the hieroglyphics with quick strokes of the hammer. Stayner, whose ideas of hieroglyphics were somewhat vague, although he fancied he did recognize one of the emblems of the Sun God, asked point-

blank for an explanation. When one did come it was peculiar.

"I think I told you that Amenhotep IV, after forbidding the worship of Amen-Ra, ordered all Amen-Ra's emblems to be chiseled from the stone of the temples and monuments. It was done all over Egypt except here. This particular temple was probably saved because of its distance from the rest of the world. At any rate, there took refuge here the man you might call the high priest of Amen-Ra. It was he who afterward restored the worship of Amen-Ra and destroyed the pure worship of Aton. The symbols I am destroying are those of Amen-Ra."

"Yes," remarked Jimmy Stayner politely. "Rather a nice temple." The old man was, of course, queer, but there is always something to be learned from a study of the engineering problems of ancient structures; and the terracing of this series of rock temples afforded interesting comparisons with other work of the sort Stayner had studied in America. So the ill-assorted pair went on their way, Hassan perched like a dejected fly on the hillside behind them.

THE lane of sphinxes, leading to the pylon gate, was of extraordinary interest; but neither paid it much attention. Then came the first court, after which the ground rose about fifty feet to the terrace which formed the second court. The stone work here was exquisitely finished as Stayner noticed, the wall of white limestone in the rear being a gem of construction. On either side of the white limestone wall were temples. The old man pointed to each in turn. "Hathor!" he said curtly. "Anubis!" And Stayner knew he was looking upon shrines that Egyptologists would probably rave over.

What puzzled him was the fact that Professor Upton paid no attention to the two temples. With face set and eyes gleaming he mounted the central incline to still another and higher terrace that lay beyond. Here, passing through a granite portico, they entered a vestibule rectangular in shape and considerably smaller than either of the two outer courts, though nevertheless of considerable size. This vestibule was built against the mountainside, a doorway leading through the rock into the innermost temple, the Holy of Holies, within the mountain.

They paused momentarily before the doorway, Stayner to look about him, the

older man to wipe the perspiration from his damp forehead. It was very warm where they stood in the full rays of the Egyptian sun, yet a faint cooling current made itself felt from the opening in the mountainside and suggested unbelievable depths of coolness within. But Jimmy Stayner was not concerned with the temperature. For the first time he was seeing a bit of ancient Egypt without being annoyed by tourists, guide-book in hand, in search of souvenirs; and for the first time Egypt had begun to bind him with her spell.

The sky was clear, yet he could fancy it dark with the wings of the mighty gods who had here accepted worship at their shrines. A vague sense of unknown presences, ancient beyond all telling, seemed to hover about them. It was all fancy, he told himself an instant later as he flung the thought from him; but while it lasted it certainly gave a man a jolt.

He turned to look at Professor Upton, who was now replacing his cork helmet. The old man's face was crimson; his eyes sparkled with excitement; he appeared worn and tired and old, as though wearied with the very violence of his emotions. As Stayner surveyed him, he saw him strike angrily with his hammer at a hieroglyphic inscription of Amen-Ra which adorned the wall near the doorway.

The blow was a glancing one and a slender spear of stone, flashing upward under the stroke, struck into the soft flesh of his neck. There was a tiny smear of blood as the old man brushed the splinter aside, but Stayner was quite grave. A trifle to one side and there might have been serious trouble with one of the larger blood-vessels. As it was the thing was of no importance whatever, unless a man was superstitious—and Stayner was surely not that.

The coolness of the temple within the mountain was peculiarly refreshing. In a moment it seemed to Stayner that he was revived and strengthened. Leaving to Professor Upton the task of penetrating to the interior of the shrine, Jimmy Stayner perched himself upon a mass of diorite and waited. A stray bat blew out of the dark recesses within and brushed his ears as it passed, without attracting his attention.

He was debating several little problems of interest as he sat there. When the Englishmen gave him the contract—for, of course, they would do that—he would

leave this God-forsaken country on the jump. Imagine a country dependent on the whims of a single river! Suppose the river got balky? He smiled at the idea as he lit his pipe. Of course, too, he was going to get that contract. He could hear Professor Upton hammering within the Holy of Holies now. The old boy was certainly active for such a hot day.

THE pipe had been smoked and so had its successor before the old man appeared from the dim recesses of the temple and put an end to the desultory current of his thoughts. Professor Upton's face was flushed with triumph as he dragged behind him the shrouded figure of a mummy.

"The easiest mummy-case I ever opened," he said cheerfully, lowering the mummy to the floor. "Generally a man of his importance has a heavier case than usual; but this brute"—he touched the shrouded and recumbent figure contemptuously with his foot—"somehow didn't."

There was something decidedly unpleasant in the old man's voice and manner. After all, as Stayner told himself, this prostrate form had once been instinct with the mystery of human life, had once played a great part in the affairs of a vanished people. To treat it with disrespect seemed a childish bit of impertinence. Yet, Professor Upton was acting in just that way. And Stayner admitted to himself that he was puzzled.

"But what is the whole thing about?" he asked. "Why did you come here? And what are you going to do with the mummy?"

Professor Upton now unbent.

"I suppose you think me crazy," he said with a smile. "Well, I am not; though I own to being a bit of a crank on some phases of Egyptian history. For one thing I have always been interested in Amen-hotep IV and his attempts to do away with the worship of Amen-Ra. The fact of his failure does not alter the other fact that he was the greatest religious reformer the world has ever known. The only trouble is that he died before he had entirely uprooted the influence of Amen-Ra. This was chiefly due to the high priest of Amen-Ra, whose mummy lies yonder. He it was who led the forces of the old god to triumph. The temples of the new god, Aton, were destroyed and the reformed worship overthrown.

"Now, many years ago I heard of this lonely temple in the desert and I de-

terminated"—the old man smiled reminiscently as a man might smile at the follies of his youth—"that if I ever found the temple my first step would be to unwind the mummy of the high priest and throw it out upon the sands of the desert to decay."

"But what's the big idea?" protested Stayner. "I don't quite get you."

"If I do that," the older man explained, "I practically destroyed the man body and soul, according to Egyptian philosophy. I suppose it's a small thing to do, but I've had it in my mind for thirty years, and I intend to do it now."

There was a curious ring of triumph in Professor Upton's voice, and Jimmy Stayner, glancing at him, saw that he was smiling to himself as though highly pleased. "You see," he continued, "the Egyptians embalmed the body because they thought the soul would one day return to earth, when the man would need his body again. Should the soul come back and find the body destroyed, it meant practical annihilation. That is what is going to happen to the high priest of Amen-Ra."

Stayner thought rapidly. The destruction of one mummy or a thousand meant absolutely nothing to him. What did matter was the conviction that the old man was undeniably crazy. The very fact of his chanting hymns to an Egyptian god was proof enough of that. Men, Stayner knew, have studied insanity for years only to become insane themselves; in a similar manner Professor Upton had studied the religion of Amenhotep IV until he actually, incredible as it seemed, believed it. And not only was he crazy, but his insanity, judging from his excited eyes and reddened face, had reached a climax.

It might have been the sudden termination of his long search that had finally upset him. It was more likely, Stayner told himself, the sudden change from the coolness of the rock temple to the blazing sun of noonday. At all events, when Stayner glanced at him again, he was dancing about the rocky floor in triumph, pausing at intervals to kick the prostrate mummy as he passed, his face working convulsively. The sight was so unpleasant that the younger man acted promptly.

"Suppose we go back to the camels?" he suggested. "You are ill."

Professor Upton looked at Stayner with an air of profound attention. Then, without saying a word, he began unwinding

from around his waist several yards of heavy cord, such as tent-dwellers use in bracing tent-poles. Still in complete silence he went to one of the pillars which guarded the entrance to the rock-cavern, and fastened securely around it one end of his cord, after which he turned briskly about again. "If you will come over here I'll be obliged," he said quietly.

"I don't get you," began Jimmy Stayner; "that is, I—" The words seemed to choke him for, staring him full in the face, was a little round circle of steel, which he dimly knew to be the muzzle of a revolver.

"Hurry up!" came the sharp command. "I have no time to waste."

There was such a note of inflexible determination in the old man's voice that Jimmy Stayner did exactly as ordered. It was only when he knew himself to be bound securely to the pillar that he uttered a protest.

"Say! What the devil are you trying to do?" he asked hotly.

Professor Upton, kneeling beside the mummy, was beginning to unfasten its bandages of fine linen. As he did so a strong aromatic odor that spoke of tropical spices, floated out upon the air. "I told you I was going to unwrap the mummy of the high priest of Amen-Ra, and let it decay in the sun. Maybe I'll set fire to it. That's all; but I have been planning to do that very thing for thirty years, so do you think it likely I would tolerate any interference? Afterward, I'll untie you and we'll go back to the camels. My life work will then be finished."

AS HE spoke the crazy old man was busy with the linen bandages that swathed the mummy; bandages that ages before had been wrapped about it by the priests of ancient Egypt and sealed with mighty enchantments to protect it from harm. As Stayner watched the unrolling of the yards of aromatic linen a sense of the futility of it all came over him. There were charms upon that soft, stained linen that should, by all rights, have blasted Professor Upton where he stood. Yet, nothing occurred. The old Egyptologist went on with his gruesome work as calmly as though it were the most usual thing in the world, while, above, the Egyptian sun blazed down remorselessly.

Presently the task was ended and the ancient figure of the high priest of Amen-Ra lay bare and dishonored upon the blistering pavement of the temple court.

From the yards upon yards of discarded wrappings a heavy smell of spices floated up in the warm air. And the gods of Egypt, deified in the person of the high priest, gave no sign. By all rights, Jimmy Stayner told himself, there should have been the rustling of vast wings, a quivering in the atmosphere as the monstrous procession of the ancient gods, headed by Amen-Ra, came to avenge the violator of their hoary faith. But there was absolutely nothing but a great peace.

Yes! There was something. And it came, strangely enough, from the old man. His face darkened with anger as he pointed toward a small, insignificant snake, with markings curiously like a sprawling cross upon its brown and yellow back. He stamped his feet while he spoke.

"It came out of the rock temple. I suppose I disturbed it," he explained. "It interrupted my prayer to Aton."

"Dangerous?" asked Stayner indifferently. "Better kill it, hadn't you?"

The little reptile crawled slowly across the pavement toward the pile of aromatic linen wrappings, doubtless attracted by their strong perfume. Both men watched it an instant; then Jimmy Stayner turned his attention to the mummy of the high priest.

For the sun, the emblem of Amen-Ra, was beginning to work upon the shrunken limbs of the dead man. He saw the brownish-yellow limbs writhe and twist with a sickening simulation of real life, saw the body of the high priest move upon his shoulders, lift partly from the ground, and falling back, struggle once more to move.

It was, of course, only a coincidence that the action of the sunlight should have made it seemingly endeavor to move toward Professor Upton. It merely chanced, as Stayner assured himself, that the sun drew more strongly in that direction. But the effect was as though the dumb, dead thing, centuries old, that lay upon the pavement, were vainly striving to reach the man who had violated its solemn repose.

Professor Upton apparently noticed it also, for his face wore a startled look and he drew back. Then, once more he stepped forward, close to the mummy, watching its stirrings with gloating eyes. The tiny snake, which had been crawling toward the linen wrappings on the other side of the mummy, reached them, circle about them and twined up the high priest's arm.

where it partly uncoiled to raise a menacing head, after which it ran down to the upturned right palm.

What followed came so quickly that Jimmy Stayner had no time to cry out. The body, which had not ceased to stir with an odious semblance to life, was suddenly violently contorted as Professor Upton bent forward to watch. The right hand straightened and lifted from the ground as the body twisted, until it fell across the shrunken breast, while the snake, poised upon the palm, was tossed lightly in Professor Upton's face. There was a sharp cry from the old Egyptologist, one hand flung the reptile far across the pavement while the other clutched fast to his throat.

"It got me!" he cried thickly.

To Stayner, bound helplessly to the stone pillar, the happenings of the next half-hour seemed to fill years. He could see the sightless gaze of the mummy fixed upon his enemy as the suffering man sank upon the pavement with an expression of abiding malice. Then, the sun having done its work, its limbs gradually grew quiet again. It seemed to settle down upon the pavement much as it had done at first, and much as Professor Upton was doing now.

For the latter, bitten in the throat, there was never the remotest chance in the world. Even had he been able to loosen Stayner's bonds, the latter would have been able to do nothing more than watch his passing. The end came speedily. An hour later Jimmy Stayner was watching the black and horribly swollen face of a dead man, when Hassan stole furtively into view. He had grown uneasy, he said, as he untied the rope, and though he mentioned no names, Jimmy Stayner knew he was reaping the reward of a good evening at Wady Halfa.

For a moment the two stared at the two bodies that lay near. "Surely there are devils in these old places," said Hassan.

"Devils your grandmother!" cried Jimmy Stayner. "That's all bunk. It was just the sun's heat moving the mummy. But it was odd. It gave me the creeps. But, shucks! There was nothing to it." He looked about him. "If you hand me that stick, Hassan, I'll kill that useless snake and then we can see about the body."

He paused a minute. "The cartouch was a little queer, but there was nothing to it but chance."

And the silent mummy of the high priest of Amen-Ra lay with calm face upturned to the sun, the symbol of his god.