

OUR NEIGHBORS, THE ANCIENTS

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

THIS is a thoroughly delightful book.¹ It contains a dozen chapters, some of them studies of special phases of the life of the ancient Egyptians, and others in the nature of essays on archæology in general and Egyptian archæology in particular. The former are admirable because they combine the virtues of accuracy and charm—two qualities generally deemed mutually inconsistent by archæologists of the straight and narrow sect, who are quite ignorant of the elemental fact that no book they write can be put in the first rank unless it is both truthful and interesting.

The chapter headed "The Misfortunes of Wenamon" is not only of extreme interest, but is most amusing as well, and it could be told as Mr. Weigall tells it only by a man who, in addition to being thoroughly grounded in the skeletal parts of his profession, is also intimately acquainted with the Egyptian of to-day, and moreover possesses the priceless gift of historic imagination. Wenamon was a priest who over three thousand years ago was sent from Egypt to Lebanon to buy cedar wood for the construction of a ceremonial barge. His superior, the High Priest, gave Wenamon a sum of money, a number of letters addressed to Egyptian and Syrian princes, and a particularly sacred little image of Amon-Ra, as a token of the official nature of his embassy. The envoy was a faithful, fussy, self-important, and not very competent Egyptian, whose like abounds at the present day. No sooner did he set sail on a Syrian trading boat than he discovered that he had left his letters behind; and in the first port they put into, a settlement of Sicilian merchant

adventurers, under their own king, all his money was stolen from him—a sum equivalent in purchasing value to about fifteen thousand dollars of our money. It is, by the way, exceedingly interesting to find that at that time—centuries before a Greek colony had settled in Sicily, and indeed when the Greek, the Roman, and the Jew, as they are familiar to us historically, were almost as much creatures of the future as the Englishman, Frenchman, and German—the inhabitants of Sicily had already developed a considerable culture, and were sending their sea rovers to form settlements on shores as distant as the Ægean. Wenamon, penniless and letterless, after in vain seeking redress from the Sicilian kinglet, continued his voyage, passing Tyre, and after various adventures reached the sea town at the foot of the hills of Lebanon where he hoped to get the great cedars of his quest. In his report to the High Priest the envoy gives in a couple of lines a picture of a local city king. "I found the Prince," he writes, "sitting in his upper chamber, leaning his back against the window, while the waves of the great Syrian sea beat against the wall below." The further adventures and misadventures of Wenamon must be sought in Mr. Weigall's pages, and any one who reads them will be impressed by the extraordinary touch of human interest and the unconscious humor which mark the story.

One of the Egyptian kings whose life has an especial fascination for Mr. Weigall is the visionary reformer and peace-lover Akhnaton, who, with the best of intentions and in the loftiest spirit, wrought incalculable harm to his native land. Poor Akhnaton! One cannot but feel attracted to him and sorry for him, and yet his career is most interesting because of the warning it ought to convey to the men who do so much harm at the present day by their

¹ The Treasury of Ancient Egypt: Miscellaneous Chapters on Ancient Egyptian History and Archæology. By Arthur E. P. B. Weigall, Inspector-General of Upper Egypt, Department of Antiquities. William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh and London.

refusal or inability to recognize the grim facts of actual life. Akhnaton hated courtly pretense and detested formalism, and he endeavored to bring not only Egypt but all the world to a knowledge of better things under a single religion to be worshiped everywhere; and he worshiped peace, refused to go to war, and held that war would cease forever if only the simple doctrines of love, truth, and peace could be preached from every temple. If in actual life it were possible—which it is not—to separate the ideal from the real, we would say that this was a noble ideal. In practice it resulted in untold mischief, plunging the country into a series of wars which caused the loss of all her Asiatic dominions, and exciting at home a hatred and contempt which culminated after the King's death in a revolution and the restoration of the old conditions under a succession of strong-handed, cool-headed soldiers and administrators who once more raised Egypt to the height from which the visionary had precipitated her. Like every other nation, Egypt lost not only her greatness but her power of usefulness in the world when she lost the virile fighting virtues for the lack of which no abounding material prosperity, no skill in mechanical industry, no fastidious culture, no sentimental mock humanitarianism, can in any way atone.

Chapters such as these, chapters such as that which tells the "Arabian Nights" story of the Shipwrecked Sailor, are very interesting; and still more so such a chapter as that treating of the temperament of the ancient Egyptians, telling of their love songs, and making us realize, what so very few of us do realize, that lightheartedness was the keynote of the philosophy, the keynote of the lives, of the pleasure-loving ancient people whom we tend to think of only as wrapped in ceaseless thought of death. This is almost as fascinating a chapter as that relating to the misadventures of Wenamon.

But, after all, the best chapters of Mr. Weigall are those in which he preaches the codes which he himself so admirably practices. His doctrine is that archæology should be studied as much as possible in the open; that archæologists, in order to reach the highest point in their profession, should be not merely antiquarians but out-

of-door men, and, above all, gifted with that supreme quality of the best type of historian, the quality of seeing the living body through the dry bones, and then making others see it also. In fact, this is just what the archæologist is: a historian. The best archæologist ought to be a man whose books would be as fascinating as Thucydides or Tacitus, Gibbon or Macaulay; as fascinating and as fundamentally truthful as Herodotus himself. His account of the campaigns of Rameses should as far as possible have the charm that we find in de Joinville's story of the campaign which Saint Louis waged against the Saracens in Egypt twenty-five hundred years after the great Egyptian King had warred against the Hittites in Syria. Mr. Weigall makes the most emphatic protest against the doctrine of those learned but unspeakably dreary little men who regard truth and interest as antithetical qualities, and who feel that nothing is accurate unless it is both dry and dull. Mr. Weigall contends that the true archæologist must know stories, if he only has the wit to repeat them, which will thrill the veins of the listeners; for the flags and pennants have not faded from his sight; he has knowledge of the state secrets of kings, he is the intimate spectator of the crowded pageantry of history, and to him the caravan masters of the elder days and the captains of the archers and the spearmen have told their tales of daring and adventure; he has heard the war-cry of vanished hosts, the love song of dead lovers; he has hearkened to the sound of the harp, he has watched armies from forgotten battlements, he has feasted with sultans, and kings have held goblets to his lips; he has watched when Uriaah the Hittite was sent to the forefront of the battle.

Only he to whom these things are living realities can make others see them. The man who has such vision has in him the stuff out of which great historians, and therefore great archæologists, are made. Mr. Weigall is right. The archæologist who can give us only musty facts about musty relics no more deserves to rank with the highest of his craft than the industrious delver in Elizabethan archives ranks with Shakespeare and Spenser. The true archæologist must be a historian, able to conjure up the past, able to call

before the curtain of the mind the mighty dead as they lived. Says Mr. Weigall: "It is the business of the archaeologist to awaken the dead, not to send the living to sleep."

Incidentally we should all be in hearty agreement with what Mr. Weigall says as to the proper function of museums, and with his protest against robbing the great monuments of the past by taking fragments of them to America and Europe. This practice always inflicts tenfold the damage in mutilation that it does good by transplantation. An obelisk should be left in Egypt; it is absurd, it is shockingly inappropriate, to plump down such an obelisk in Paris, New York, or London, where it is utterly out of place and has no reason for its presence. As Mr. Weigall puts it, a museum has three justifications for its existence: it is a proper repository for storing objects which otherwise would be lost or which cannot be safely left in their own countries; it is a proper storehouse for historical documents, being for this purpose a kind of public library, capable of unlimited expansion; and it should be a permanent exhibition for the instruction of the public, for

which purpose not original articles, but casts, facsimiles, models, and reproductions of all sorts are necessary. To turn it into a collection of Greek or Egyptian originals which can safely be left in Greece or Egypt is to make it an agent of vandalism.

By the way, Mr. Weigall states an eminently common-sense and much-needed truth as to the proper place for antiquities when he says that there are also only three justifications for the man who surrounds himself with antiquities in a private house: he must do so because they are examples of good workmanship, or because they are beautiful, or because they are endeared to him by family uses. Hideous old things, valued merely because they are old, have no place outside of a museum.

Mr. Weigall's book is exceedingly interesting; it is the work of a thorough scholar, not merely accurate, but truthful with the truth that comes only from insight and broad-minded grasp of essential facts, added to exhaustive study and wide learning; and it teaches certain lessons which it is of capital importance to learn and apply.