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THE PRIESTESS OF AMEN-RA!

BY MRS. DONALD SHAW.

A POST who possessed an insight beyond the veil, which limits the vision of ordinary mortal eyes says in one of his best known and most often quoted plays:—

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

The older I grow and the more I see of the world the deeper the truth of this strikes home to me, and the incidents which I am going to record are amongst those which have forced its intrinsic meaning upon my mind.

Before going any further, let me say that I do not in any mind walking under ladders nor having my knives crossed at dinner; I have lived in more than one haunted house, and emerged from it with my hair no whiter than when it went in, and at a spiritualistic seance I am a horrible failure, for things absolutely and definitely decline to happen while I am present, and I am informed by those who know that I am too positive and that my presence has a squelching effect upon would-be manifestors.

In view of this, therefore, it will readily be understood that I should not believe in the remarkable series of catastrophes which have followed in the wrestling from an Egyptian tomb of the mummy case of the Priestess of Amen Ra without justification and against my will. It is the end of the story which has just reached us, and which appeared in The Mail and Empire a few days ago, which leads me to tell to readers, many of whom have probably never before heard of the inmate of the British Museum who was known as the "Diabolic Mummy," and who may therefore be interested in hearing some of the events which brought about her reputation and her end.

The story is best told in simple narrative style, and those who are sceptical enough to disbelieve at the beginning may perhaps at the end be able to explain in some other way than I can the reason why it has all happened as it has.

I am unfortunately unable to give all the exact detail as to dates that I should like to owing to the fact that some few years ago my papers connected with this particular case were destroyed, not by accidental fire, but by deliberate conflagration; in due course I will explain this. Sufficient is it here to say that the mummy case of the Priestess of Amen Ra was torn from its rightful tomb by an Englishman, who either sold it to another of his countrymen or brought it to England himself. On that point I am not certain, but to England it came some ten or twelve years ago. The ship in which it travelled had a terrible passage, accompanied by disaster from the moment of sailing; nevertheless the case arrived intact, and was set up in the house of its looter or the person to whom he despatched it.

Whichever it may be, the poignant fact is that the family were prosperous and wealthy up to the moment when the mummy case crossed the



threshold; from that moment disaster after disaster fell upon them until at length in despair they decided to get rid of it. At this point the story reached the ears of a lady who is a noted psychical investigator. The would-be owners had decided to present the case to the British Museum, but Mrs. Hill intervened and asked that it should be sent to her house. I believe in any case its sojourn there was brief in the extreme, and it was removed to the Museum without loss of time, some accident, trivial or serious, attending every person who assisted in its packing and transportation.

At that particular point in its career I came within the orbit of the priestess' malignant vengeance. I was then secretary to the day editor of The London Daily Express, a Mr. Bertram Fletcher Robinson, at that time regarded as one of the most brilliant young journalists in London, a man who was looked upon as one bound to rise in a very short space of time to the top of the tree. He was already destined to stand as a Devonshire member at the forthcoming election, and he was a man, moreover, of magnificent physique and one who had practically never known a day's illness or indisposition. Mrs. Hill, the investigator, happened to be a personal friend of Mr. Robinson's, and told him the story of the mummy case and the trail of disaster left in its wake.

Never in all my life have I seen a man so obsessed by an idea as he was with the mummy case. It seemed as though he could not separate himself from her. I am quite sure that his own wife never extracted from him a tithe of the rapturous infatuation that the priestess did. I remember, as if it was yesterday, when he sent for me. He had come in from lunch, and a boy came to fetch me hurriedly. My chief was usually of a phlegmatic type, very seldom ruffled and rarely out of temper. He was careering around his room in a manner that would have indicated that war with Germany at least had been declared within the hour. However, it turned out to be nothing more than that he had got the "biggest story he ever had in his life," which had to be written, transcribed and set at the first possible moment. Which it was! and nobody breathed until he had the first proof of it in his hands.

He had commissioned a photographer to get photographs suitable for reproduction, and two days later I received a frantic and instantaneous message—Mr. Robinson wanted me at once!!!!

When I reached him he was holding two photographic proofs and his hands were shaking, his blue eyes absolutely gleaming with excitement. The first was a sketch of the mummy, the second was a fully-developed proof of a photograph taken of the case, at his order by a London photographer. Now, as I said before, I am not superstitious nor imaginative, nor easily carried away, but when I saw that proof I could say nothing.

Reproduction of it have been given in various papers, but no reproduction ever gave or could give a realistic idea of what the transformation was. It is a fact, an indisputable fact, and I saw it with my own eyes. The

face was that of a living woman, the eyes were full of life and light, and such an intensity of gaze that you could scarcely bear to look at them. What had been flat carved wooden features, obviously artificial, had, under the camera come to life, and the photographs were the photographs of a living woman and not of a carved mummy. There can be no question, there never has been any question in the minds of those who, like myself, saw those photographs and were involved in that dread cycle of catastrophes, that it was a woman who was pictured and not a carved case.

Two days later the photographer died. He, poor man, was in a state of abject and piteous terror beforehand and could scarcely be persuaded to finish the order, and previous to and shortly after his death there were two or three other accidents and deaths among people who had been in various ways connected with the mummy case.

There came then a lull. The case was actually in the museum. The story had been published, had aroused the usual newspaper correspondence, and, after the fashion of newspaper stories, dropped out of the people's minds.

In the interim I married. We were ordered to the North of England, and my newspaper connection was for some years very variable and uncertain. But it was not long afterwards that I had a letter from a man on The Express staff saying that Fletcher Robinson had died very suddenly and sending me a copy of the paper containing his obituary. Over a year passed before I went back to London, but shortly after my return I was dining in company with a man who was a close personal friend of Fletcher Robinson's and my own, and naturally the first subject that cropped up was that of the latter's death. (To be continued)

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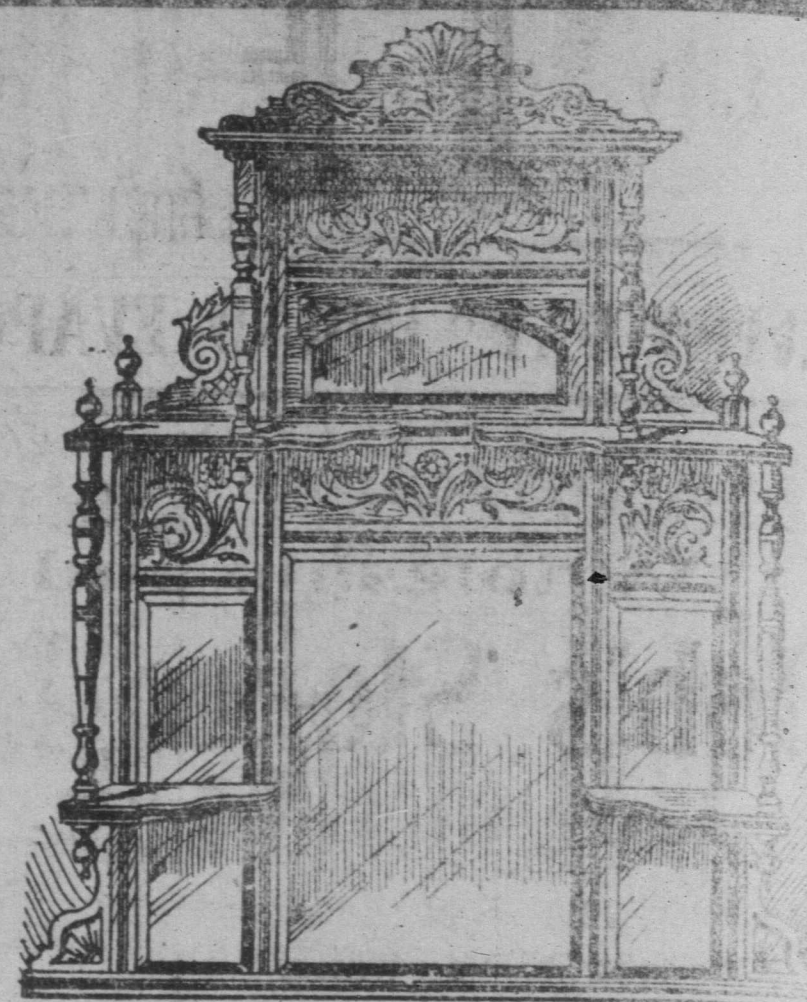
On the upper left of the accompanying group is shown an elaborate piece of neckwear of satin and lace. The scalloped revers and collar are of white satin piped with wistaria satin and trimmed with buttons covered with the same. Around the outer edge of these revers cream lace is pleated and a frill of chiffon falls from the bottom. The little vest is made of shirred chiffon crossed by straps of the satin. Fine batiste was used for the little shirt front effect shown. The outer portion was of the plain batiste finished with a narrow ruffle of "Val" lace. The little chemise is of the tucked batiste. Tiny pearl buttons trim the front. The girdle and peplum combined shown on the upper right was of Roman striped ribbon, buckle covered with the same.

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