

which need to be answered separately, and at some length.

We do know that most if not all of these personages were originally buried in sepulchres of their own.

It is certain that marauders grew bold as the law grew weak, and that an organized system of spoliation was carried on almost unchecked in the necropolis of Thebes. Still there was one place into which the tomb-breakers had apparently not yet ventured, namely, the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings. This remote and desolate gorge lies at the back of the mountain range which bounds the western plains of Thebes. The way to it is long and wearisome. The gorge itself is not only a cul-de-sac, but it originally had no entrance. Like a coral-reef atoll, it was entirely shut in by mountain walls. Through the lowest of these walls some Pharaoh of old—presumably Rameses I.—caused a passage to be hewn, in order that his sepulchre might be prepared in the appalling solitude within. Inclosed by limestone precipices calcined to a white heat by the pitiless sun, shut away from the breeze of the desert and the breath of the Nile, it is a place utterly without moisture, without verdure, without life. Not a lichen relieves the scintillating whiteness of those skeleton cliffs. Not a lizard makes its home in their crevices. In the palmy days of the new empire, when the treasury overflowed with the spoils of conquest, and the Pharaohs were as gods, the base of the cliffs of the upper end of the Valley of the Shadow of Death became gradually honeycombed with subterraneous palaces of enormous extent and extraordinary splendour of decoration, in each of which a mummied king, with his arms, his jewels, his illuminated papyrus, and all his funerary treasures, was walled up for ever.

If we turn back to the now half-

forgotten pages of Belzoni, we learn that the entrance to the tomb of Seti I., when he discovered it in 1819, was built up with massive masonry, and hidden under a cataract of debris from the cliffs above. Belzoni broke through the masonry, and found himself on the threshold of a series of staircases and passages leading to a deep pit, the walls of which, like the walls of the preceding staircases and passages, were covered with texts and illustrations from the Ritual, all exquisitely sculptured, covered with a thin coat of cement, and brilliantly coloured. One wall of this pit, however, despite the hieroglyphs and paintings upon its surface, proved to be mason's work, and not excavated rock. A breach was made, and the entrance to a magnificent hall was disclosed. Beyond this lay a second hall. Then came more passages, more chambers, a third hall, and a vaulted saloon containing the beautiful alabaster sarcophagus which is now in the Soane Museum.

Warned by the sacrilegious deeds which had been done among the tombs of their predecessors, the priest-kings had made their own last home, not for splendour, but for security. To this end they elected—apparently for the first time in Egyptian history—to be buried, generation after generation, in one common sepulchre, it being obviously less difficult to keep guard over one catacomb (and that catacomb on the Theban side of the mountain) than to keep guard over many. They were therefore laid together in this vault, the approach to which was so well concealed "that one might have passed it twenty times without observing it."

Through all the changes and all the ages that followed, it remained undiscovered. The Ethiopian, the Persian, the Greek, the Roman, the Arab, the Turk, conquered and ravaged in turn, and still the Phar-