CHAPTER XVII

THEBAN THIEVES

THEBES was the ancient capital of Egypt, and its ruins are the most extensive in the Nile Valley. On the east bank of the river, at the modern towns of Luxor and Karnak, there are the remains of mighty temples ; and on the west bank, in the neighbourhood of the village of Gurneh, tombs, mortuary chapels, and temples literally cover the ground. The inhabitants of these three places have for generations augmented their incomes by a traffic in antiquities, and the peasants of Gurneh have, more especially, become famous as the most hardy pilferers of the tombs of their ancestors in all Egypt. In conducting this lucrative business they have lately had the misfortune to be recognised as thieves and robbers by the Government, and it used to be one of my duties to point this out to them. As a matter of fact they are no more thieves than you or I. It is as natural for them to scratch in the sand for antiquities as it is for us to pick flowers by the roadside ; antiquities, like flowers, are the product of soil, and it is largely because the one is more rare than the other that its promiscuous appropriation has been constituted an offence. The native who is sometimes child enough to put his eyes out rather than serve in the army, who will often suffer all manner of wrongs rather than carry his case to the local courts, and who will hide his money under his bed rather than trust it to the safest bank, is not likely to be intelligent enough to realise that, on scientific grounds, he is committing a crime in digging for scarabs. He is beginning to understand that in the eyes of the law he is a criminal, but he has not yet learnt so to regard himself. I here name him thief, for officially

that is his designation; but there is no sting in the word, nor is any insult intended. By all cultured persons the robbery of antiquities must be regarded as a grave offence, and one which has to be checked. But the point is ethical; and what has the Theban to do with ethics?

The robbery of antiquities is carried out in many different ways and from many different motives. Sometimes it is romantic treasure hunting that the official has to deal with; sometimes it is adventurous robbery with violence; sometimes it is the taking advantage of chance discoveries; sometimes it is the pilfering of objects found in authorised excavations; and sometimes it is the stealing of fragments smashed from the walls of ancient monuments. All these forms of robbery, except the last, may call for the sympathy of every reader of these lines who happens not to have cultivated that vaguely defined "archæological sense" which is, practically, the product of this present generation alone; and in the instances which are here to be given the point of view of the "Theban thief" will be readily appreciated.

Treasure hunting is a relic of childhood that remains, like all other forms of romance and adventure, a permanently youthful feature in our worn old hearts. It has been drilled into us by the tales of our boyhood, and, in later life, it has become part of that universal desire to get something for nothing which lies behind our most honest efforts to obtain the goods of this world. Who has not desired the hidden wealth of the late Captain Kidd, or coveted the lost treasure of the Incas? I once wrote an article which was entitled *Excavations in Egypt*, but the editor of the magazine in which it appeared hastily altered these words to *Treasure Hunting in Egypt*, and thereby commanded the attention of twice the number of readers. Can we wonder, then, that this form of adventure is so often met with in Egypt, the land of hidden treasure? The Department of Antiquities has published a collection of mediæval traditions with regard to this subject, which is known as the Book of the Pearl.

In it one is told the exact places where excavations should be made in order to lay bare the wealth of the ancients. "Go to such and such a spot," says this curious book, "and dig to the depth of so many cubits, and you will find a trapdoor; descend through this and you will find a chamber wherein are forty jars filled with gold. Take what you want, and give thanks to God." Many of the sites referred to have been literally hacked out of all recognition by the picks and spades of thousands of gold-seekers; and it may be that sometimes their efforts have been rewarded, since a certain amount of genuine information is embodied in the traditions. The late Sir Gaston Maspero, Director-General of the Cairo Museum, used to tell a story of how a native came to him asking permission to excavate at a certain spot where he believed treasure to be hidden. Sir Gaston accompanied him to the place, and a tunnel was bored into what appeared to be virgin sand and rock. At the end of the first day's work the futility of his labours was pointed out to the man, but he was not to be daunted. For two more days he stood watching the work from morn to nightfall with hope burning in his eyes, and on the following morning his reward came. Suddenly the ground gave way before the picks of the workmen, and a hole was seen leading into a forgotten cave. In this cave the implements of some mediæval coiners were discovered, and an amount of metal, false and true, was found which had been used by them in the process of their business.

A short time ago a man applied for permission to perform a similar kind of excavation at a place called Nag Hamadi, and in my absence permission was given him. On my return the following report was submitted: "... Having reached up the spot indicated the man started to blow the stones by means of the Denamits. Also he slaught a lamb, thinking that there is a treasure, and that when the lamb being slaught he will discover it at once." In plainer English, the man had blown up the rocks with dynamite, and had attempted to further his

efforts by sacrificing a lamb to the *djin* who guarded the treasure. The *djin*, however, was not thus to be propitiated, and the gold of the Pharaohs was never found. More recently the watchmen of the famous temple of Der el Bahri found themselves in trouble owing to the discovery that part of the ancient pavement showed signs of having been raised, stone by stone, in order that the ground below might be searched for the treasure which a tradition, such as those in the Book of the Pearl, had reported as lying hid there.

Almost as romantic and entertaining as treasure hunting is robbery with violence. We all remember our boyhood's fascination for piracy, smuggling, and the profession of Dick Turpin; and to the Theban peasant, who is essentially youthful in his ideas, this form of fortune hunting has irresistible attractions. When a new tomb is discovered by authorised archæologists, especially when it is situated in some remote spot such as the Valley of the Kings, there is always some fear of an armed raid; and the police guard the spot night and day until the antiquities have been removed to Cairo. The workmen who have been employed in the excavation return to their homes with wonderful tales of the wealth which the tomb contains, and in the evening the discovery is discussed by the women at the well where the water is drawn for the village, with the result that it very soon assumes prodigious proportions, inflaming the minds of all men with the greed of gold. Visitors often ask why it is that the mummies of the Pharaohs are not left to lie each in its own tomb; and it is argued that they look neither congruous nor dignified in the glass cases of the museum. The answer is obvious to all who know the country: put them back in their tombs, and, without continuous police protection, they will be broken into fragments by robbers, bolts and bars notwithstanding. The experiment of leaving the mummy and some of the antiquities *in situ* has only once been tried, and it has not been a complete success. It was done in the case of the tomb of

Amenophis II at Thebes, the mummy being laid in its original sarcophagus; and a model boat, used in one of the funeral ceremonies, was also left in the tomb. One night the six watchmen who were in charge of the royal tombs stated that they had been attacked by an armed force; and the tomb in question was seen to have been entered, the iron doors having been forced. The mummy of the Pharaoh was found lying on the floor of the burial-hall, its chest smashed in; and the boat had disappeared, nor has it since been recovered. The watchman showed signs of having put up something of a fight, their clothes being riddled with bullet-holes; but here and there the cloth looked much as though it had been singed, which suggested, as did other evidence, that they themselves had fired the guns and had acted the struggle. The truth of the matter will never be known, but its lesson is obvious. The mummy was put back into its sarcophagus, and there it has remained secure ever since; but one never knows how soon it will be dragged forth once more to be searched for the gold with which every native thinks it is stuffed.

Some years ago an armed gang walked off with a complete series of mortuary reliefs belonging to a tomb at Sakkârah. They came by night, overpowered the watchmen, loaded the blocks of stone on to camels, and disappeared into the darkness. Sometimes it is an entire cemetery that is attacked; and, if it happens to be situated some miles from the nearest police-station, a good deal of work can be done before the authorities get wind of the affair. One winter six hundred men set to work upon a patch of desert ground where a tomb had been accidentally found, and ere I received the news, they had robbed a score of little graves, many of which must have contained objects purchasable by the dealers in antiquities for quite large sums of money. At Abydos a tomb which we had just discovered was raided by the villagers, and we only regained possession of it after a rapid exchange of shots, one of which came near ending

my own gay career. But how amusing the adventure must have been for the raiders!

The appropriation of treasure-trove come upon by chance, or the digging out of graves accidentally discovered, is a very natural form of robbery for the natives to indulge in, and one which commends itself to the sympathies of all those not actively concerned in its suppression. There are very few persons even in western countries who would be willing to hand over to the Government a hoard of gold discovered in their own back garden. In Egypt the law used to be that the treasure-trove thus discovered belonged to the owner of the property; and thus there was always a certain amount of excavation going on behind the walls of the houses. It is still the law that the peasants may carry away the accumulated rubbish on the upper layers of ancient town sites, in order to use it as a fertiliser for their crops, since it contains valuable phosphates. The work is supervised by watchmen, but this does not prevent the stealing of almost all the antiquities which are found. As illegal excavators, these sebakhîn, or manure-diggers, are the worst offenders for they search for the phosphates in all manner of places, and are constantly coming upon tombs or ruins which they promptly clear of their contents. One sees them driving their donkeys along the roads, each laden with a sack of manure, and it is certain that some of these sacks contain antiquities.

In Thebes many of the natives live inside the tombs of the ancient nobles, these generally consisting of two or three rock-hewn halls from which a tunnel leads down to the burial chamber. Generally this tunnel is choked with *débris*, and the owner of the house will perhaps come upon it by chance, and will dig it out, in the vain hope that earlier plunderers have left some of the antiquities undisturbed. It recently happened that an entire family was asphyxiated while attempting to penetrate into a newly-discovered tunnel, each member entering to ascertain the fate of the previous explorer, and each being

overcome by the gases. On one occasion I was asked by a native to accompany him down a tunnel, the entrance of which was in his stable, in order to view a sarcophagus which lay at the bottom. We each took a candle, and crouching down to avoid the low roof, we descended the narrow, winding rabbit-hole of a passage, the loose stones sliding beneath our feet. The air was very foul; and below us there was a thunderous roar of thousands of wings beating through the echoing passage—the winds of evil-smelling bats. Presently we reached this uncomfortable zone. So thickly did the bats hang from the ceiling that the rock itself seemed to be black; but as we advanced, and the creatures took to their wings, this black covering seemed to peel off the grey rock. During the entire descent this curious spectacle of regularly receding blackness and advancing grey was to be seen a yard or so in front of us. The roar of wings was now deafening, for the space into which we were driving the bats was very confined. My guide shouted to me that we must let them pass out of the tomb over our heads. We therefore crouched down, and a few stones were flung into the darkness ahead. Then, with a roar and a rush of air, they came, bumping into us, entangling themselves in our clothes, slapping our faces and hands with their unwholesome wings, and clinging to our fingers. At last the thunder died away in the passage behind us, and we were able to advance more easily, though the ground was alive with the bats maimed in the frantic flight which had taken place, floundering out of our way and squeaking shrilly. The sarcophagus proved to be of no interest, so the encounter with the bats was to no purpose.

The pilfering of antiquities found during the course of authorised excavations is one of the most common forms of robbery. The overseer cannot always watch the workmen sufficiently closely to prevent them pocketing the small objects which they find, and it is an easy matter to carry off the stolen goods even though the men are searched at the end of the day. A little girl minding her

father's sheep and goats in the neighbourhood of the excavations, and apparently occupying her hands with the spinning of flax, is perhaps the receiver of the objects. Thus it is more profitable to dig for antiquities even in authorised excavations than to work the water-hoist, which is one of the usual occupations of the peasant. Pulling the hoisting-pole down, and swinging it up again with its load of water many thousands of times in a day, is monotonous work ; whereas digging in the ground, with the eyes keenly watching for the appearance of antiquities, is always interesting and exciting. And why should the digger refrain from appropriating the objects which his pick reveals ? If he do not make use of his opportunities and carry off the antiquities, the western director of the works will take them to his own country and sell them for his own profit. All natives believe that the archæologists work for the purpose of making money. Speaking of Professor Flinders Petrie, a peasant said to me once : " He has worked five-and-twenty years now ; he must be *very* rich." He would never believe that the antiquities were given to museums without any payment being made to the finder.

The stealing of fragments broken out of the walls of " show " monuments is almost the only form of robbery which will receive general condemnation. That this vandalism is also distasteful to the natives themselves is shown by the fact that several better-class Egyptians living in the neighbourhood of Thebes subscribed, at my invitation, the sum of £50 for the protection of certain beautiful tombs. When they were shown the works undertaken with their money, they expressed themselves in a letter to me as being " pleased with the delicate inscriptions in the tombs, but very awfully angry at the damage which the devils of ignorant people had made." A native of moderate intelligence can quite appreciate the argument that whereas the continuous warfare between the agents of the Department of Antiquities and the illegal excavators of small graves is what might be

called an honourable game, the smashing of public monuments cannot be called fair-play from whatever point of view the matter is approached. Often revenge or spite is the cause of this damage. It is sometimes necessary to act with severity to the peasants who infringe the rules of the Department, but a serious danger lies in such action, for it is the nature of the Thebans to revenge themselves not on the official directly but on the monuments which he is known to love. Two years ago a native illegally built himself a house on Government ground, and I was obliged to go through the formality of pulling it down, which I did by obliging him to remove a few layers of brickwork around the walls. A short time afterwards a famous tomb was broken into and a part of the paintings destroyed; and there was enough evidence to show that the owner of this house was the culprit, though unfortunately he could not be convicted. One man actually had the audacity to warn me that any severity on my part would be met by destruction of monuments. Under these circumstances an official finds himself in a dilemma. If he mantains the dignity and prestige of his Department by punishing any offences against it, he endangers the very objects for the care of which he is responsible; and it is hard to say whether under a lax or a severe administration the more damage would be done.

The produce of these various forms of robbery is easily disposed of. When once the antiquities have passed into the hands of the dealers there is little chance of further trouble. The dealer can always say that he came into possession of an object years ago, before the antiquity laws were made, and it is almost impossible to prove that he did not. You may have the body of a statue and he the head: he can always damage the line of breakage, and say that the head does not belong to that statue, or, if the connection is too obvious, he can say that he found the head while excavating twenty years ago on the site where now you have found the body. Nor is it desirable

to bring an action against the man in a case of this kind, for it might go against the official. Dealing in antiquities is regarded as a perfectly honourable business. The official, crawling about the desert on his stomach in the bitter cold of a winter's night in order to hold up a convoy of stolen antiquities, may use hard language in regard to the trade, but he can see that in the eyes of the natives there is not much against it. One of the Theban dealers led so holy a life that he will assuredly be regarded as a saint by future generations.

The sale of small antiquities to tourists was prohibited by me on the public roads, except at certain places; but of course it could be done with impunity by the exercise of a little care. Men and boys and even little girls as they pass will stare at you with studying eyes, and if you seem to be a likely purchaser, they will draw from the folds of their garments some little object which they will offer for sale. Along the road in the glory of the setting sun there will come as fine a young man as you will see on a day's march. Surely he is bent on some noble mission: what lofty thoughts are occupying his mind, you wonder. But, as you pass, out comes the scarab from his pocket, and he shouts, "Wanty scarab, mister?—two shillin'," while you ride on your way a greater cynic than before.

Some years ago a large inscribed stone was stolen from a certain temple, and was promptly sold to a man who sometimes traded in such objects. This man carried the stone, hidden in a sack of grain, to the house of a friend, and having deposited it in a place of hiding, tramped home, with his stick across his shoulders, in an attitude of deep unconcern. An enemy of his, however, had watched him, and promptly gave information. Acting on this the police set out to search the house. When we reached the entrance we were met by the owner, and a warrant was shown to him. A heated argument followed, at the end of which the infuriated man waved us in with a magnificent and most dramatic gesture. There were some twenty rooms in the house, and the stifling heat of

a July noon made the task none too enjoyable. The police inspector was extremely thorough in his work, and an hour had passed before three rooms had been searched. He looked into the cupboards, went down on his knees to peer into the ovens, stood on tiptoe to search the fragile wooden shelves (it was a heavy stone which we were looking for), hunted under the mats, and even peeped into a little tobacco-tin. In one of the rooms there were three or four beds arranged along the middle of the floor. The inspector pulled off the mattresses, and out from under each there leapt a dozen rats, which, if I may be believed, made for the walls and ran straight up them, disappearing in the rafter-holes at the top. The sight of countless rats hurrying up perpendicular walls may be familiar to some people, but, being abstemious, I venture to call it an amazing spectacle, worthy of record. Then came the opening of one or two travelling-trunks. The inspector ran his hand through the clothes which lay therein, and out jumped a few more rats, which likewise went up the walls. The searching of the remaining rooms carried us well through the afternoon; and at last, hot and weary, we decided to abandon the hunt. Two nights later a man was seen walking away from the house with a heavy sack on his back; and the stone is now, no doubt, in the Western hemisphere.

I must here relate the story of a very remarkable "deal" in which I became involved, and which caused quite a sensation in Cairo in the winter of 1912-13.

One of my native inspectors came to me in Cairo one day, and reported that strange events were taking place by night at a certain point upon the Suez Canal. Some Bedouin were camped in the desert upon the far side of the Canal, and were said to be in possession of some fine antique bronzes which were believed to have come from Turkey or Syria; and a certain Bulgarian dealer, named Nikola Yamani, was endeavouring to purchase these, and to bring them secretly into Egypt for sale. I therefore gave the inspector the necessary instructions, with the

result that as soon as Nikola had made his purchase he was asked to bring the objects to the nearest office of the Department of Antiquities, which happened to be at the town of Zagazig, and there to give me the opportunity of buying them from him for the Cairo museum. Now it so happened that one of the Diplomatic Secretaries at the British Agency was anxious to finance some excavations amongst the ruins of the ancient Bubastis, near Zagazig; and when I went down by train a few days later to look at these bronzes, he came with me to look at the site of his proposed excavations.

This simple fact caused all the trouble which I am about to relate; for destiny moved in the following manner. The coming of the Diplomatic Secretary, shining in the reflected glory of his chief, Lord Kitchener, was telegraphed to the Egyptian provincial Governor, who lived at Zagazig; the Governor met us and took us in semi-state to lunch with him; Nikola Yamani saw the procession, thought the whole might of the British Empire had come to seize his antiquities, dashed off to the Inspector's office, bribed the native clerk in charge to hide the one and only fine piece in the collection, and then sat down to await our arrival, satisfied that, even if we seized all the pieces, he would still be in possession of the important bronze statuette which now was hidden under a couch in an adjoining room.

Later, when we came to the office, I decided at once that the bronzes which were shown to me were not worth purchasing for the nation; and, when we returned to Cairo, I described them to the head of the Museum, Sir Gaston Maspero, and we officially rejected them. Their owner, therefore, went to the office to claim them; and his rage may be imagined when the rogue of a clerk, whom he had bribed to hide the best piece, looked him in the face and told him that he must have been bewitched, for no bronze had ever been hidden at all. A lie of this kind, which sounds so blatant to our ears, can easily pass muster in Egypt by the introduction of this suggestion

that the victim has been bewitched; for it is common knowledge there that persons who have fallen into the power of the *djins* often believe themselves possessed of imaginary wealth.

Nikola, angry and perplexed, at length decided to come to me in Cairo and to confess the truth; and he arrived, a very tragic figure, with tears pouring from his eyes. "I listened to that wicked clerk," he said, "who told me that Lord Kitchener's Secretary would certainly seize the one good bronze for England, or you would seize it for Cairo; and now my deceit has turned upon myself." He paced about the room, wringing his hands, as he spoke; and I could but forgive him his deception, which had been due to a very natural fear, and promise to do my best to recover the bronze for him, since he had lost it while it had been at the office of my Department.

As a result of the steps which I took, the clerk was arrested, but denied all knowledge of the stolen antiquity; Nikola, meanwhile, more or less burgled the house of the clerk, and was chased out by the inmates at the point of a revolver; and at length, after strange adventures in the native underworld, we traced the bronze to a well-known Arab dealer, who, of course, declared that he knew nothing of the matter.

I then invited the above-mentioned Diplomatic Secretary, and a well-known colleague of his at the British Agency to help me, my idea being that the fear of the redoubtable Lord Kitchener, which had been the cause of the trouble, might now be employed to some purpose; and these two good friends readily joined in the hunt. Space will not allow me to describe the exciting events which followed, and which might have formed the plot of a Sherlock Holmes adventure—our trapping the Arab dealer and holding him prisoner while a certain niding-place of his was searched; the false scents which he caused us to follow up; our final exasperation with him, and the giving of a time-limit in which he was to confess if he wished to save himself from the deepest and darkest

dungeon in Cairo. Suffice it to say that, one minute before the time-limit expired, the man confessed that he had bought the missing bronze from the Zagazig clerk, and had sold it to a well-known Italian dealer.

We then approached this latter dealer, telling him that the object which he had bought had been stolen from Nikola, and must be returned; and, after further adventures, the bronze was at last handed back to its owner, who came to me and, with tears of gratitude, blessed me and my posterity unto the end of the world.

Up to this point I had not seen the object in question; but now my two friends saw it and described it to me, and again I discussed with Sir Gaston Maspero the desirability of purchasing it for the Museum. He objected, however, to spend public money on an antiquity found outside Egypt; and he therefore gave Nikola permission to dispose of it as he pleased. The man promptly offered it to one of these two friends of mine, who as promptly bought it; and I then saw it for the first time. It represented a boy dressed in the ancient costume of Armenia or Media, and wearing the royal crown of Armenia such as that seen on the coins of Tigranes; and it evidently dated from Roman times. It was more interesting than beautiful; but it was certainly immensely valuable; and, having suggested to its new owner that he should give some big museum the opportunity of purchasing it, I introduced him to the representative of the Metropolitan Museum of New York, who, however, did not take the matter up.

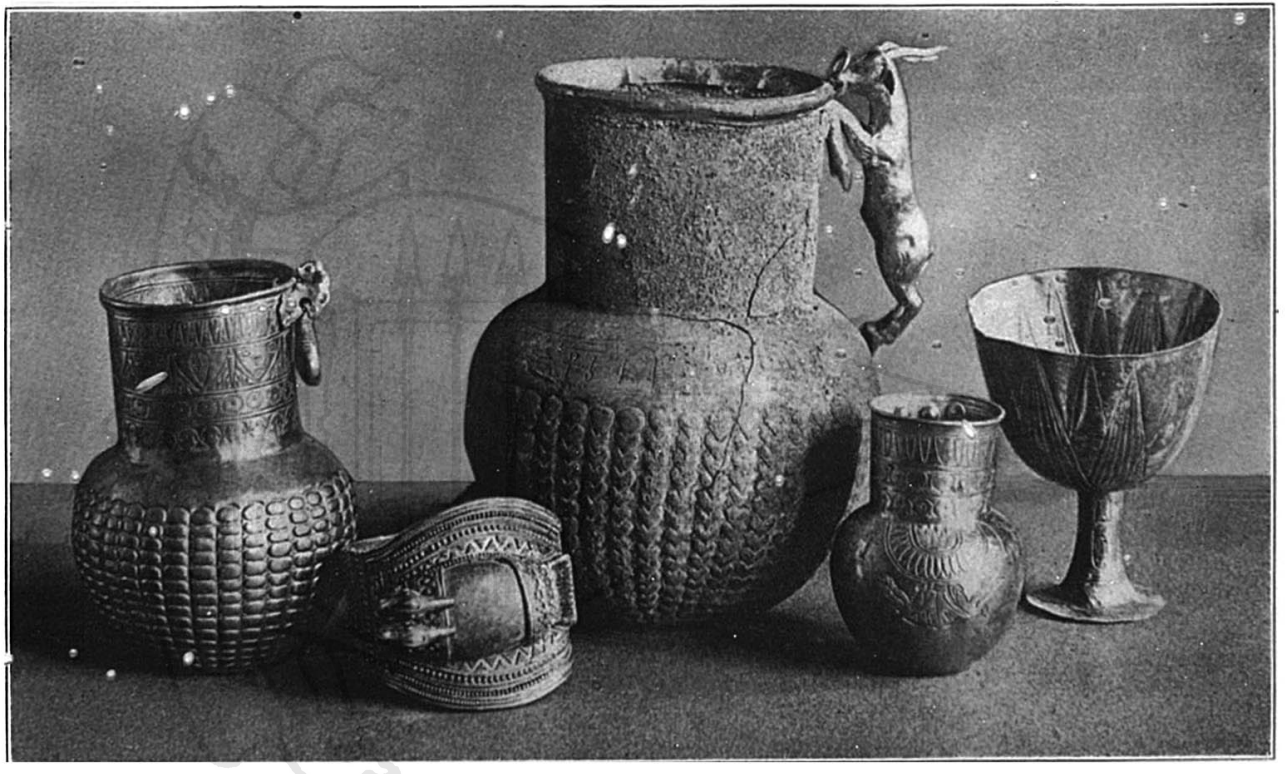
My friend later explained to his colleague and myself that he could not think of claiming sole possession of this statuette, since we three together had rescued it and brought it back to its original owner, and that, if it were sold, he would wish us to have a share of the profits. He then placed the figure in the hands of a well-known dealer, and at length it was sold for a rather disappointing sum.

Such was my only personal adventure into commerce;

and even this, accidental as it was, would not have been permissible had the bronze been Egyptian, or found in Egypt, or had it been an object which the Cairo Museum ought to have acquired.

The attempt to regain a lost antiquity is seldom crowned with success. It is so extremely difficult to obtain reliable information; and as soon as a man is suspected his enemies will rush in with false accusations. Thirty-eight separate accusations were sent in against a certain head watchman during the first days after the fact had leaked out that he was under suspicion. Not one of them could be shown to be true. Sometimes one man will bring a charge against another for the betterment of his own interests. Here is a letter from a watchman who had resigned, but wished to rejoin. "To his Exec. Chief Director of the tembels. I have honour to inform that I am your servant X, watchman on the tembels before this time. Sir from one year ago I work in the Santruple (?) as a watchman about four years ago. And I not make anything wrong and your Exec. know me. Now I want to work in my place in the tembel, because the man which in it be not attintive to His, but always in the coffee . . . He also steal the scribed stones. Please give your order to point me again. Your servant, X." "The coffee" is, of course, the *café* which adjoins the temple.

Once a young man came to me with an accusation against his own father, who, he said, had stolen a statuette. The tale which he told was circumstantial, but it was hotly denied by his infuriated parent. He looked, however, a trifle more honest than his father, and when a younger brother was brought in as witness, one felt that the guilt of the old man would be the probable finding. The boy stared steadfastly at the ground for some moments, however, and then launched out into an elaborate explanation of the whole affair. He said that he asked his father to lend him four pounds, but the father had refused. The son insisted that that sum was



Gold cups and armlet of about B.C. 1000, found accidentally by a native in a mound by a roadside in Lower Egypt. Now in Cairo Museum

due to him as his share in some transaction, and pointed out that though he only asked for it as a loan, he had in reality a claim to it. The old man refused to hand it over, and the son therefore, waited his opportunity and stole it from his house, carrying it off triumphantly to his own establishment. Here he gave it into the charge of his young wife, and went about his business. The father, however, guessed where the money had gone; and while his son was out, invaded his house, beat his daughter-in-law on the soles of her feet until she confessed where the money was hidden, and then, having obtained it, returned to his home. When the son came back to his house he learnt what had happened, and, out of spite, at once prepared the accusation which he had brought to me. The story appeared to be true in so far as the quarrel over the money was concerned, but that the accusation was invented proved to be untrue.

Sometimes the peasants have such honest faces that it is difficult to believe that they are guilty of deceit. A lady came to the camp of a certain party of excavators at Thebes, holding in her hand a scarab. "Do tell me," she said to one of the archæologists, "whether this scarab is genuine. I am sure it must be for I bought it from a boy who assured me that he had stolen it from your excavations, and he looked such an honest little fellow that I am sure he was speaking the truth."

In order to check pilfering in a certain excavation in which I was assisting we made a rule that the selected workmen should not be allowed to put unselected substitutes in their place. One day I came upon a man whose appearance did not seem familiar, although his back was turned to me. I asked him who he was, whereupon he turned upon me a countenance which might have served for the model of a painting of St. John, and in a low sweet voice he told me of the illness of the real workman, and of how he had taken over the work in order to obtain money for the purchase of medicine for him, they being friends from their youth up. I sent him away and told

him to call for any medicine he might want that evening. I did not see him again until about a week later, when I happened to meet him in the village with a policeman on either side of him, from one of whom I learned that he was a well-known thief. Thus is one deceived even in the case of real criminals: how then can one expect to get at the truth when the crime committed is so light an affair as the stealing of an antiquity?

The following is a letter received from one of the greatest thieves in Thebes, who, when I last heard of him, was serving a term of imprisonment in the provincial gaol:—

"Sir General Inspector,—I offer this application stating that I am from the natives of Gurneh, saying the following:—

On Saturday last I came to your office and have been told that my family using the sate to strengthen against the Department. The result of this talking that all these things which somebody pretends are not the fact. In fact I am taking great care of the antiquities for the purpose of my living matter. Accordingly, I wish to be appointed in the vacant of watching to the antiquities in my village and promise myself that if anything happens I do hold myself responsible."

I have no idea what "using the sate to strengthen" means.

It is sometimes said that the European excavators are committing an offence against the sensibilities of the peasants by digging up the bodies of their ancestors. Nobody will repeat this remark who has walked over a cemetery plundered by the natives themselves. Here bodies may be seen lying in all directions, torn limb from limb by the gold-seekers; here beautiful vases may be smashed to atoms in order to make more rare the specimens preserved. The peasant has no respect whatsoever for the sanctity of the ancient dead, nor does any superstition in this regard deter him in his work of destruction. Fortunately superstition sometimes checks other forms of

robbery. *Djins* are believed to guard the hoards of ancient wealth which some of the tombs are thought to contain, as, for example, in the case of the tomb in which the family was asphyxiated, where a fiend of this kind was thought to have throttled the unfortunate explorers. Twin brothers are thought to have the power of changing themselves into cats at will; and a certain Huseyn Osman, a harmless individual enough, and a most expert digger, would often turn himself into a cat at night-time, not only for the purpose of stealing his brother Mohammed Osman's dinner, but also in order to protect the tombs which his patron was occupied in excavating. One of the overseers in some recent excavations was said to have the power of detecting all robberies on his works. The archæologist, however, is unfortunately unable to rely upon this form of protection, and many are the schemes for the prevention of pilfering which are tried.

In some excavations a sum of money is given to the workman for every antiquity found by him, and these sums are sufficiently high to prevent any outbidding by the dealers. Work thus becomes very expensive for the archæologist, who is sometimes called upon to pay £10 or £20 in a day. The system has also another disadvantage, namely, that the workmen are apt to bring antiquities from far and near to "discover" in their diggings in order to obtain a good price for them. Nevertheless, it would appear to be the most successful of the systems. In the Government excavations it is usual to employ a number of overseers to watch for the small finds, while for only the really valuable discoveries is a reward given.

For finding the famous gold hawk's head at Hieraconopolis a workman received £14, and with this princely sum in his pocket he went to a certain Englishman to ask advice as to the spending of it. He was troubled, he said, to decide whether to buy a wife or a cow. He admitted that he had already one wife, and that two of them would be sure to introduce some friction into what was now a peaceful household; and he quite realised that a cow

would be less apt to quarrel with his first wife. The Englishman, very properly, voted for the cow, and the peasant returned home deep in thought. While pondering over the matter during the next few weeks, he entertained his friends with some freedom, and soon he found to his dismay that he had not enough money left to buy either a wife or a cow. Thereupon he set to with a will, and soon spent the remaining guineas in riotous living. When he was next seen by the Englishman he was a beggar, and, what was worse, his taste for evil living had had several weeks of cultivation.

The case of the fortunate finder of a certain great *cache* of mummies was different. He received a reward of £400, and this he buried in a very secret place. When he died his possessions descended to his sons. After the funeral they sat round the grave of the old man, and very tightly discussed his virtues until the sun set. Then they returned to the house and began to dig for the hidden money. For some days they turned the sand of the floor over; but failing to find what they sought, they commenced operations on a patch of desert under the shade of some tamarisks where their father was wont to sit of an afternoon. It is said that for twelve hours they worked like persons possessed, the men hacking at the ground, and the boys carrying away the sand in baskets to a convenient distance. But the money was never found.

It is not often that the finders of antiquities inform the authorities of their good fortune, but when they do so an attempt is made to give them a good reward. A letter from the finder of an inscribed statue, who wished to claim his reward, read as follows: "With all delight I please inform you that on 8th Jan. was found a headless temple of granite sitting on a chair and printed on it."

I will end this chapter as I began it, in the defence of the Theban thieves. In a place where every yard of ground contains antiquities, and where those antiquities may be so readily converted into golden guineas, can one

wonder that every man, woman, and child makes use of his opportunities in this respect to better his fortune? The peasant does not take any interest in the history of mankind, and he cannot be expected to know that in digging out a grave and scattering its contents, through the agency of dealers, over the face of the globe, he loses for ever the facts which the archæologist is striving so hard to obtain. The scientific excavator does not think the antiquities themselves so valuable as the record of the exact arrangement in which they were found. From such data alone can he obtain his knowledge of the manners and customs of this wonderful people. When two objects are found together, the date of one being known and that of the other unknown, the archæological value of the find lies in the fact that the former will place the latter in its correct chronological position. But if these two objects are sold separately, the find may perhaps lose its entire significance. The trained archæologist records every atom of information with which he meets; the native records nothing. And hence, if there is any value at all in the study of the history of mankind, illegal excavation must be stopped.