

INTRODUCTORY

The manuscript of which the contents are printed here was discovered among the effects of the late L. Horace Holly, though not until some years after his death. It was in an envelope on which had been scribbled a direction that it should be forwarded to the present editor "at the appointed time," words that at first he did not understand. However, in due course it arrived without any accompanying note of explanation, so that to this hour he does not know by whom it was sent or where from, since the only postmark on the packet was London, W., and the address was typewritten.

When opened the package proved to contain two thick notebooks, bound in parchment, or rather scraped goat or sheepskin, and very roughly as though by an unskilled hand, perhaps in order to preserve them if exposed to hard usage or weather. The paper of these books is extremely thin and tough so that each of them contains a great number of sheets. It is not of European make, and its appearance suggests that it was manufactured in the East, perhaps in China.

There could be no doubt as to who had owned these notebooks, because on one of them, the first, written in red ink upon the parchment cover in block letters, appears the name of Mr. Holly himself. Also on its first pages are various memoranda of travel evidently made by him and no one else. After these follow sheet upon sheet of ap-

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parently indecipherable shorthand mixed up with tiny Arabic characters. This shorthand proved to belong to no known system, and although every effort was made to decipher it, for over two years it remained unread.

At length, when all attempts had been abandoned, almost by chance, it was shown to a great Oriental scholar, a friend of the Editor, who glanced at it and took it to bed with him. Next morning at breakfast he announced calmly that he had discovered the key and could read the stuff as easily as though it were a newspaper leader. It seemed that the writing was an ancient form of contracted Arabic, mixed in places with the Demotic of the Egyptians—a shorthand Arabic and a shorthand Demotic, difficult at first, but once the key was found easily decipherable by some six or eight living men, of whom, as it chanced, the learned scholar into whose hands it had thus fallen accidentally was one.

So it came about that with toil and cost and time, at length those two closely written volumes were transcribed in full and translated. For the rest, they speak for themselves. Let the reader judge of them.

There is but one thing to add. Although it is recorded in notebooks that had been his property, clearly this manuscript was NOT written by Mr. Holly. For reasons which she explains it was written with the hand of SHE herself, during the period of her second incarnation when at last Leo found her in the mountains of Thibet, as is described in the book called "Ayesha."