CHAPTER XV.

EXAMINATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THEBES.

The instability of all human grandeur has been the constant and favorite theme of philosophers in every age; and every moment of man's existence furnishes proof of the lesson which the Sages inculcate. The appeal may issue from a mouldering wall, a crazy bench, or a tottering throne; but it comes with irresistible force upon the heart, amid the ruins of an ancient and mighty capital. Thebes is celebrated, in the language of Homer, as the city with 100 gates, through each of which 200 men on horses and in chariots issued to the field. It was 140 furlongs in circumference, adorned with magnificent temples, public buildings, and private houses of four and five stories high. It was the richest and most beautiful city, not only in Egypt, but in all the world. Let us see how time has respected this boasted labour of man.

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Next morning, the 14th of January, we proceeded, in company with Mr. Salt, to view the antiquities which the diligent and faithful Greek had collected for the noble traveller, during his absence in Nubia, and with whose industry and success there was every reason to be satisfied; one of the most curious and interesting articles which he had discovered, was an ancient door made of what appeared to be common deal. It was nearly eight feet high, about three feet and a half broad, and the boards were fastened on with pins. There were nails in it; but they appeared to be of a more modern date than the door itself, and not to have been any way connected with its original construction. A round projecting peg of the wood on one side, at the top and bottom of the door, served as a tenon, which being received into a mortise above and below, formed the hinges on which the door readily turned backward and forward. A few hieroglyphics with a figure of Osiris were carved on the outside of it. He is represented in a sitting posture, with his hands crossed over his breast, holding the crook and scourge. So that in Thebes Osiris appears to have been the guardian god of the door, as Saint Januarius is of the wine casks at Naples, in the present day.

This ancient relic was found near one of the tombs that have been cut in the southern aspect of the mountain above the village of Gournou, a little
to the west of the road that leads into the valley of the tombs of the kings. It is in an excellent state of preservation. The noble Earl made a present of it to Mr. Salt, and it is now in the British Museum. The remaining products of the labours of the Greek consisted of stone jars with moveable tops, representing a wolf's, a dog's, or a hawk's head, with a number of scarabei, small statues, and stones covered with deities, offerings, priests, and hieroglyphics; all of which were sufficiently curious and interesting.

After this examination we proceeded up the valley of the tombs of the kings, where Mr. Salt and Mr. Beechy had taken up their abode, and had assiduously employed themselves, during our Nubian excursion, in taking drawings of the finest groups and figures in the newly discovered tomb. We were favoured with a sight of their labours, immediately on our arrival, and had reason to admire the accuracy of the representations, and the warmth and force of colouring, with which they had imitated, but not surpassed, the original.

We next proceeded to compare the labours of the French Savans, in the large French work, with what they professed to represent. We began with that which is called the Harp Tomb, on account of its containing the representation of that musical instrument, which occurs twice in one of the chambers, and which was first copied by the
celebrated Bruce, and his secretary; and the representation which they have given of the instruments, and the group of dilettanti, will certainly not yield in respect of accuracy to that of their wise successors. The priest who plays on the harp, on the left hand side, is dressed in a long white robe shot with small red stripes: his head is shaved and his feet bare, according to the custom of the ancient Egyptian priests. The Savans have attired him in a fine flowing black mantle. If they meant to make any changes for decency’s or comfort’s sake, they ought to have bestowed on him a night cap, and a pair of sandals or shoes. The gentleman too who is seated on a chair at a small distance listening to the music, and who in the original is habited in a short loose robe, falling a little way down the thighs, with anklets and bracelets, the rest of the thighs, arms and legs being bare, him they have dressed in a pair of nice blue pantaloons a la françois, and a strait waistcoat of the same colour, and his head-dress which reaches up to the ceiling, they have curtailed into a short snug bonnet, like a cap of liberty. Thus giving the whole group, a sort of general resemblance, but as unlike in the detail as possible. The work of the Savans is equally incorrect in other parts of the colouring and drawing, as in that of the mantle and the head-dress; making that blue which should be red, or black which should be
white, yellow which should be green, short which should be long, &c. Thus looking at any thing but the object before them, and representing any thing but the truth. After so many misrepresentations in the works of the wisemen, it will be no great difficulty to decide whose names should precede the verb in the very courtly inscription of Bruce est un Menteur; and if we might not, with some degree of propriety, address the wisemen in the words of the Roman bard, mutato nomine, de te fabula narratur. Wisemen are generally considered as a singular and collective body, so that there is no occasion to put the words in the plural number. I shall not pursue the ungracious task of detailing their blunders in the other parts of this chamber; but I beg leave to mention that Mr. Salt has made a correct drawing of it, exactly as it is, without supplying any of the ravages that time has made in the original work, and without omitting any of the names or inscriptions that different visitors have left upon the walls. It is to be hoped that this drawing will one day see the light, and then the difference between truth and the performances of the wisemen, in a work that costs only 600 guineas, will be visible to all the world.

But this chamber is not the only one in which these wisemen have attempted to paint and compose for the ancient Egyptians. In a small room
on the opposite side of the same tomb, there is represented in one place a number of chairs with people sitting on them. The chairs in the tomb are so elegantly shaped that they might challenge a comparison with any pattern of modern times. The same wisemen have given drawings of them, but both the drawing and colouring are so different from the truth, blue, black, or green occupying the place of red, white, or yellow, that on bringing the drawing and the original together, the difficulty is not to find out wherein they differ, but wherein they agree, and to conceive how any men, letting alone wisemen, wishing to exhibit a true representation of ancient art, could possibly offer to the world such a thing as they have done in the 603 guinea work. The carelessness or want of fidelity to their originals, shewn by the wisemen, is equally glaring in other tombs, which we had occasion to examine, as in that in which I have specified it; a circumstance which I believe the count Forbin can testify, having seen the same comparison that I have now described. And every person, and every friend of art, must especially regret that the late French government should have so much misplaced its confidence, as to have expended so much money in employing men who would not, or who could not tell the truth; and in publishing their work, which no person can trust, as a guide in his Egyptian researches; being unable
to tell when it is faithful to the original, and when it is not. The world would have been relieved from this dilemma had the authors of the different drawings condescended to inform us when they exhibited what was really ancient Egyptian, and which might of course be judged of as specimens of ancient art, and when they were treating us with the splendid lucubrations of their own genius, which would of course be amenable to the laws of modern criticism. Truth is the agreement of word and deed, and though those who set them at variance may call themselves wisemen, posterity will find out another name by which to designate them.

Having made a general survey of the field, we proceeded, each as his inclination led him, to examine the ruins of Thebes in detail. The noble traveller who kept a number of Arabs constantly at work, set an example of the most commendable industry and perseverance to the whole. The man who toils for bread could not return more regularly to the performance of his stated task, than the noble traveller to direct and superintend the operations of his labourers. The superb collection which he has brought to this county is the best attestation of his zeal and the success which crowned his efforts.

In describing the ruins of Thebes, I shall begin at the village of Gornou, because it is nearest the river, and the first object which the traveller encounters in his tour through the ruins, on the west
side of the Nile, from which it is distant about a quarter of a mile. This village stands in a grove of palm-trees, where the cultivated soil joins the rocky flat, exactly at the spot where the road turns off to the right to go to the tombs of the kings. It consists of a number of houses of unburnt brick, generally small, but some of them much larger and of superior workmanship to the average of ruined houses in this country. At the time when we visited it, it was quite uninhabited. The natives had abandoned it, and retired to the caves in the adjoining rocky flat; because from the low situation, and the filling up of the canals, the village is liable to be overflowed during the time of the inundation. However, when the river subsides, and the ground becomes dry, they quit their rocky tenements and return to their mansions of clay, which are more conveniently situated for water, grazing and agriculture. This village is sometimes called Gornou or Corner, which is the name of the district on the north side or end of the valley, and which now contains several separate small villages, of which however this appears once to have been the chief, from the circumstance of its containing a ruined temple, which none of the others do, though some of them are larger than it. Both in Egypt and Nubia the name of the district and the name of the principal village are generally the same. This village has also been called Ebek, and on asking the name of the
ruin from the Arab guide who was a native of the place, he called it Cassr el Gornou. The ruined temple here has been very little mentioned by travellers, though but for it, I don’t think even the village would be named. It is small indeed, when compared with the Memnonium and Medinat Habou; yet it is much longer than those of Northern Dair, Dair el Medinat, and Southern Dair, which are seldom omitted. It is so much dilapidated that it is difficult to make out what has been the extent of it. The principal entry appears to have been from the south, where there is a row of eight columns running along the front of the wall. The height is about five diameters, and both shafts and capitals are reeded. Over the door is the usual ornament of the globe with serpent and wings. From the passage we entered into a chamber, from each side of which passages go off into other chambers, or courts. Some of the chambers are small, and so much filled up with rubbish, that it is almost impossible to enter them. They are also distributed in a different manner from what chambers usually are in the interior of the temples, hence this building has by some travellers been called a palace; but the size of the apartments, would, in my opinion, be equally inconvenient for that; besides, it is ornamented with sculpture and hieroglyphics in the same manner as the other temples; and from the frequent occurrence of the ram’s head upon the wall
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both among the sculpture, and hieroglyphics, it would appear that Jupiter Ammon was the principal object of worship in this as well as in the great temples. Emblems frequent on other temples are also met with, as sphinxes with the globe over their heads, Osiris with a scourge and crook in the one hand, and a hatchet in the other. The figures are remarkably well cut, but it is difficult to preserve any thing like a continued story in the sculpture, on account of the wall being so much dilapidated; besides there being no remains of stone houses in any of the towns, which have been great, and celebrated, and seats of trade and opulence, and even of royalty itself, I hardly think it would be presuming too much to infer that stone houses were very sparingly used by the ancient Egyptians. The external air in this country is so uniformly delightful, that any thing which interrupts its free circulation is felt as disagreeable, and a fine house instead of being a luxury would really be an inconvenience. Truly to enjoy the climate of Upper Egypt, a person should sit in the shady side of his tent, or in the door of his rocky cave, where he inhales the breath of heaven as it passes by uncontaminated, or if mixt with foreign ingredients, it is the odour of flowers.

Proceeding west from the temple of Gornou along the edge of the rocky flat, for about three quarters of a mile, where it turns in a southerly