

THE PYRAMIDS

Chapter V
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Through Bible Lands: Notes of Travel in Egypt, the Desert, and Palestine
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by

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The Pyramids and Sphinxes fit Symbols of Egypt—Number and Design of the Pyramids—Royal Sepulchres— Egyptian Belief in Immortality and Resurrection—The Pyramids of Gheezeh—The Great Pyramid—Ascent of the Pyramid—A Unique Panorama—The King's and the Queen's Chamber —The Great Sphinx —The Bedawin Guides—Piazzi Smyth's Theory of the Great Pyramid—A Miracle in Stone —Alleged Allusions in the Bible Refuted—The Charaboth in the Book of Job.

A VISIT to the pyramids—" the memorials of the world's youth "—is an event in a man's life. It is worth a visit to Egypt. The pyramids and the sphinxes are the fittest symbols, the best welcome, and the best farewell to the land of the Pharaohs, who themselves rose like pyramids, in solitary grandeur, far above the desert plain of slavery around them. It is a remarkable fact, that the grandest architectural achievements of men are usually found in level countries—as the banks of the Nile, the Euphrates, the Ganges, Lombardy, the Netherlands—where they can display their vastness and majesty without fear of rivalry from the mightier works of God. A pyramid or a cathedral in the Highlands of Berne, in Zermatt, or in Chamouni, would be overpeered and overshadowed by the Jungfrau, the Matterhorn, or Mont Blanc.

There were once more than seventy pyramids, representing as many kings, in the valley of the Nile, on the borders of the desert.¹ Some have disappeared entirely, the others are in a more or less ruined condition. The word is probably derived from the Egyptian "Pi-Rama," the mountain. Pyramids are mountains of stone, built for the same purpose as the rock-tombs, to hide a royal mummy in perfect security. As soon as a king ascended the throne, he began to build his monument and his sepulchre. He wished to reign even after his death. The size of the pyramid corresponded to the length of the reign.² Each year added a new pile of limestone; higher and higher rose the structure the longer

1 Brugsch-Bey (*Geschichte Ägyptens unter den Pharaonen, nach den Denkmälern*, Leipzig, 1877, p. 73) says: "Mehr als siebenzig der Pyramiden erhoben einst sich an dem Rand der Wüste, jede einen König kündend, der Grab und Denkmal sich gleichzeitig schuf." Other writers count forty-five, or sixty-five, or as many as one hundred and thirty, including all sorts of pyramidal structures, ancient and modern. Lepsius, the leader of the Prussian expedition, 1842-44, discovered no less than thirty pyramids which had escaped the attention of former travellers. Piazzi Smyth ("Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramids," 1874, p. 3) reduces the number of pyramids to thirty-eight, and gives a list of them, p. 412, sq.

2 Lepsius and Brugsch think that additions could be made to the upright sides of the stages at any time before the triangular spaces were filled in. But Wilkinson dissents from this view. See Rawlinson's "Herodotus," Vol. II., p. 173, note (Appleton's ed.).

the monarch lived, until the top was reached, and the four triangles of the royal tomb were covered with polished granite. Then the body of the dead monarch, carefully embalmed, was deposited in the stone sarcophagus previously prepared in the interior of the building, and the access was closed. The pyramids were thus the massive and impenetrable casings of a royal mummy, without windows, without doors and external opening, surrounded by a vast necropolis of the priests, relations, and high officers of the royal builders.

To account for this custom we must remember the strong belief of the ancient Egyptians in the immortality and migration of the soul and its ultimate return to the body. For this reason the mummy must be preserved with religious care. The scarabæus—the shining black beetle which lays its eggs in small balls of dirt on the Nile, rolls them along with its hind feet to the borders of the desert and deposits them in holes for burial and resurrection—was worshipped as an emblem of fertility and immortality; it was modelled in precious materials with spread wings, worn in rings, carried as a charm, used as a seal, and buried with the mummy. Scarabæi, genuine and spurious, are among the most frequent antiques offered for sale. According to Herodotus (Book II., chap. 124), the Egyptians were the first nation who held the opinion that the soul of man is immortal, and that when the body dies, it enters into the form of an animal which is born at the moment, thence repassing on from one animal into another, until it has circled through all the creatures which tenant the earth, the water, and the air, after which it enters again into a human frame and is born anew. The whole period of the transmigration is, they say three thousand years. He also relates the singular custom that at the social banquets of the rich a wooden skeleton in a coffin was carried round and shown to the guests with the words, “Look on this, and drink and be merry; for when thou art dead, such shalt thou be.” The constant thought of death, retribution, and the long migration of the lonely soul through tracts unknown, imparted to them an air of melancholy sadness which was, however, relieved by the hope of resurrection as symbolized in the myth of their chief divinity, Osiris. The famous “Book of the Dead,” or “Funeral Ritual,” of which several copies were found in the tombs, is a guide or a sort of Pilgrim’s Progress to the other world, with hymns, prayers, rubrics, and directions.³ It gives a mystical account of the adventures of the soul after death, its passage to Hades, and its judgment by Osiris. The great god is seated on his throne, his forty-two assessors seated in two rows inquire into the forty-two sins. Thoth weighs the heart in the balance; if found too light, the soul is doomed to the torments of hell, or to migrations in the body of a pig or other animal; if the heart is found sufficiently heavy, the soul ascends to the fields of bliss among the gods, while the well-preserved mummy waits for its resurrection and reunion with the immortal spirit. The monuments frequently represent pictures of this judgment scene, including the pig into which the wicked soul is sent. Pythagoras borrowed his notion of the metempsychosis, or metempsychosis, from the Egyptians.

The largest pyramids are in the neighborhood of Memphis, on the border of the Lybian desert, at Sakkara, Aboosir, Dashoor, and Gheezeh. They were erected by the Pharaohs of the Memphitic dynasties. The Pharaohs of the Theban dynasties preferred the rock-tombs which abound in Upper Egypt, and are like subterranean palaces. The three pyramids of Gheezeh⁴ are best preserved and the most interesting of all. They were built by Chufu (Sofu), Chafra, and Menkera, all of the fourth dynasty of Memphis (B. C. 3091 to 3020). They lie ten miles west of Cairo, and can now be easily reached by carriage in two hours, but the Bedawin keep the end of the road in a wretched condition

3 Best editions by Lepsius, *Das Todtenbuch der Ägypter*, Leipzig, 1842 (from a Turin papyrus), and *Älteste Texte des altägyptischen Todtenbuchs*, Berlin, 1867; by De Rougé, *Rituel funéraire*, Paris, 1861-5; and by Birch in the fifth volume of Bunsen’s great work on *Egypt*, London, 1867. See also Bunsen’s *Egypt*, Vol. V., pp. 123, sqq., and Vigouroux *La Bible et les découvertes modernes en Egypt et en Assyrie*, Paris, 1877, vol. 2, pp. 431-435.

4 The word is differently spelled, Gheezeh, Geezeh, Ghiseh, Gize, Ieezeh, Jizeh, Djiza, Dsjise, Dschiseh, etc.

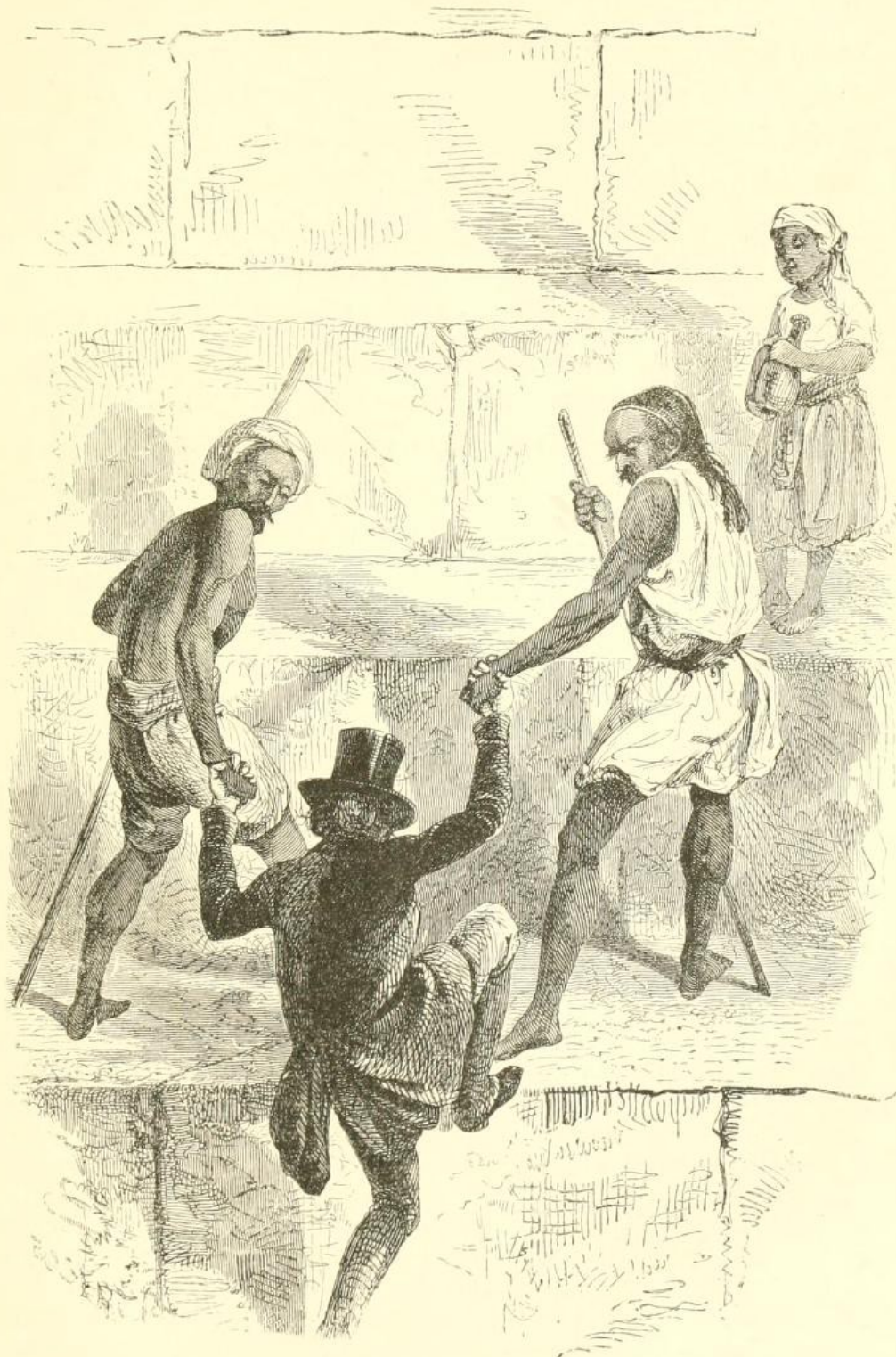
that they may have a chance to earn a few shillings by dragging the carriage through the sand, and bearing feeble or timid passengers on their shoulders.

Among these three pyramids of Gheezeh, the Pyramid of Cheops or the "Great Pyramid," is by far the most important, and worth all the rest. It is *the* pyramid, as the mysterious sphinx at its base is *the* Sphinx. It is probably the oldest and certainly the largest building in the world, though but a pigmy of yesterday as compared with God's own pyramids—the Alps. It was one of the seven wonders of the Old World, and it is a wonder and a puzzle to-day. Well might Napoleon fire his soldiers by pointing them to that hoary monarch of buildings from which "forty centuries looked down upon them." It was erected by Chufu (or Cheops, as Herodotus calls him), more than two thousand, if not three thousand, years before Christ.⁵ It was old when Rome was built, when Homer sang, when David reigned, when Moses led the children of Israel from the land of bondage, yea, when Abraham visited Pharaoh. Its base covers thirteen acres, or an area of 61,835 (formerly 65,437) square yards, and it rises to a perpendicular height of 460 (formerly 479) feet, the loftiest human structure in the world. It is computed to have contained 6,848,000 tons of solid masonry. And yet we see it only in its mutilated state. The vandalism of the Greeks, Romans, and Saracens has robbed it of the polished red granite casing, to enrich their palaces and mosques. It was built in steps or successive stages by means of machines formed of short wooden planks. The upper portion was finished first, the lowest last. Herodotus (Book II., chs. 124, 125) was informed that 100,000 workmen, changing every three months (360,000 according to Diodorus), were constantly employed for ten years in making the causeway for the conveyance of the stones, and twenty years more in building the Great Pyramid itself, at a cost of 1,600 talents of silver (about \$1,700,000, or over seven millions of German marks).

We must not forget the dark side of the picture. The pyramids, like the Tower of Babel, the Colosseum of Rome, and similar monuments of pride and folly, tell in silent eloquence a tale of tears and sorrow of a whole people which groaned under the yoke of tyrants, and cursed their memory. Even centuries after the death of the builders, when Herodotus visited the pyramids, the Egyptians remembered the sufferings and curses of their forefathers, and refused to mention the names of the kings who built the two largest pyramids (Chufu and Chafra). He was told that their bodies which were to be entombed there, were buried in unknown places from fear that they might be stolen and torn to pieces. And what did the 300,000 or more laborers get for their toil? Radish, onion, garlic, and nameless obscurity. For an inscription on the outside mentioned the quantity of these vegetables spent upon the laborers, and the amount of money it cost.

We climb over the rugged blocks to the top of the Great Pyramid, which is thirty feet square, and with the help of the Arabs we reach it in a quarter of an hour. Here we enjoy a panorama without a parallel in the world. The green garden of the Nile and the yellow desert, teeming life and boundless death bordering on each other in startling contrast! Towards the east we see the fertile fields, the stately palms, the majestic river with dahabeahs and steamers bound for Nubia, the city of Cairo with its citadel, mosques and minarets, and beyond it the Mokattam hills; towards the west an ocean of drifting sand and barren rock; towards the south the mysterious Sphinx, the neighboring pyramids of Chafra

5 Chufu reigned, according to Lepsius, Ebers, and others, B. C. 3091 to 3076. But the Egyptologists differ very widely in their chronology. Mariette puts the building of the Great Pyramid back to B. C. 4235, Brugsch to B. C. 3733; while Piazzzi Smyth puts it down to the age of Abraham and Melchisedek, B. C. 2170. Chufu was the second Pharaoh of the fourth dynasty, and reigned for some time together with his brother Nou Chufu, and this accounts for the 50 years assigned to his reign by Herodotus (Book II., ch. 127). He was followed by Chafra (the Chephren of the Greeks), who built the second pyramid of Gheezeh (B. C. 3067 to 3043), and by Menkera (the Mykerinos of the Greeks), who built the third and smallest (B.C. 3043 to 3020). According to Herodotus, Cheops and Chephren were very despotic and unpopular, Mykerinos humane and just.



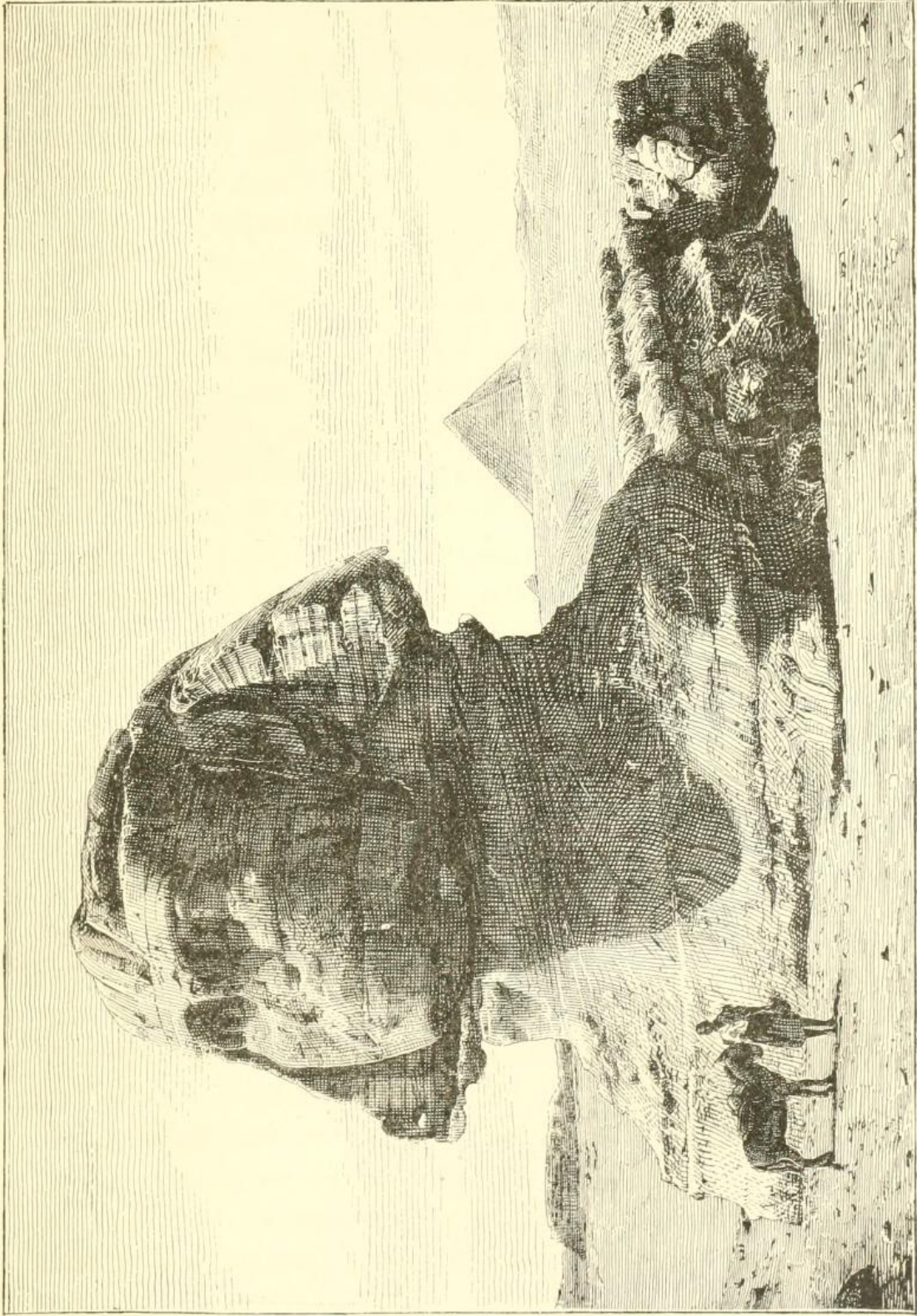
ASCENT OF A PYRAMID.

and Menkera, and the more distant pyramids of Aboosir, Sakkara, and Dashoor. The impression is spiritualized by the historical associations which involuntarily pass before the mind's eye—Abraham, Joseph, the patriarchal family, Moses, the Exodus; the Egypt of the Pharaohs, of Cambyses and the Persians, of Alexander the Great and the Ptolemies, of the Romans and the Byzantine Emperors, of the Mohammedans and Saracens, of the Turks, of the Mamelukes, of Napoleon, of Mohammed Ali, and of the present Khedive. Never did I feel so deeply the spell of antiquity. "All things fear time, but time fears the pyramids."

Having ascended to the top, we shall not shun the severer task of examining the interior, where we must literally stoop to conquer. With guides and torches we crawl through the dark, narrow, and slippery passages, first descending, then ascending to the Grand Gallery, and into the heart of the structure, the King's Chamber. This chamber is thirty-four feet long, seventeen broad, and nineteen high, and contains the only furniture in the building, an open and empty sarcophagus of polished granite, which was intended to be the resting-place of Cheops, but probably never contained his mummy. The coffin has no trace of an inscription, but its size and position have given rise to far-reaching speculations, which we shall notice below. Returning through the Grand Gallery, we pass through a horizontal passage into the Queen's Chamber, so called, which is empty. Probably the Great Pyramid was the work of two kings, as Colonel Vyse discovered the names of two Chufu or Shufu (Cheops and his brother) among the quarry marks on the blocks; and that they reigned together, is shown by the number of years ascribed to their reigns. This circumstance accounts for two chambers in this pyramid. The impression produced in these dark passages is altogether different from the one on the top; we are overwhelmed with the mystery of death and eternity. Perspiring and covered with dust, we wind our way back, and are glad to come out of this suffocating labyrinth of death into the pure air and the golden light of the sun.

We next visit the colossal Sphinx who keeps sleepless watch over the vast necropolis. He is cut out of the solid rock, about six hundred steps from the second pyramid, and raises his mutilated human head and lion paws out of the sand of the desert in which he was buried for ages. The sphinxes, like all the Egyptian gods, are a monstrous union of man and beast. They have always the body of a lion, and either the head of a man (never of a woman) or of a ram, as those which lead to the temple of Karnak. The former are called Andros-Sphinxes, the latter Krios-Sphinxes. The Assyrians provided their sphinxes with wings, as an emblem of swiftness and the power of elevation. The sphinxes are usually supposed to represent sovereign royalty—intellect combined with physical strength; but according to an inscription at Edfu, they originally symbolized the conflict of the god Horus (the son of Osiris and Isis) with the evil spirit Typhon, when, in order to avenge the death of Osiris, he assumed the shape of a lion with a human head, and slew the enemy. Of all sphinxes, the one at Gheezeh is the most imposing. He is supposed by modern Egyptologists to be as old or even older than the pyramids. And yet Herodotus makes no mention of him. The ruins of a temple of the Sphinx were discovered a few steps from the statue by Mariette in 1853. The Sphinx is merely a ruin of what he was when sacrifices were offered on the altar between his lion paws of fifty feet in length. And yet he makes an overpowering impression as, with dreamy eyes, he stares in majestic repose over the valley of the Nile and the vast wilderness towards the rising sun. The Arabs call him "*Abu'l hol*," the Father of Terror or Immensity. He reminds one of the impenetrable mysteries of eternity. "We shall die, and Islam shall wither away, and still that sleepless rock will be watching and watching the works of a new, busy race with those same sad, earnest eyes and the same tranquil mien everlastingly. You dare not mock at the Sphinx."

The visit of these monuments is made easy, vexing, and funny, by an irrepressible rabble of semi-savage Bedawin who live in miserable shanties close by, and claim a sort of ownership over the pyramids and the Sphinx, and swarm about the traveller like ravenous wolves; but they are only hungry for his money, not for his flesh. In ascending the Great Pyramid, two of these swarthy Arabs



THE SPHINX AT THE GREAT PYRAMID.

pull you in front by the hand, one or two push from behind, and encourage you with broken fragments of half a dozen languages: "I good guide, you good baksheesh—Patienza signore—Allez doucement—Chi va piano va sano e va lontano (the other half, 'chi va forte va alla morte,' is omitted)—All serene—Go ahead—Half way up—well done—I liky you—Good man—Dear doctor—baksheesh." We would willingly give them a double portion of the everlasting baksheesh, (although we have paid it already to the sheikh,) if they only would leave us for a few minutes on the top to enjoy the panorama of life and death, and to muse over the boundless past. But we cannot get rid of them; neither sticks nor hard words make any impression. One offers you a drink of water; another a chisel to engrave your name; a third has antiques for sale as old as Memphis or as new as Birmingham; still another is anxious to run down and to run up the polished casing of the pyramid of Chafra in ten minutes like a monkey, and he does it for a franc from each traveller. By-and-by some enterprising Yankee will build an elevator or lift (as they say in England) to the top of the pyramid, and charge a dollar a head. In the meantime we must put up with these human machines. There is no use to get out of humor, the best way is to bear the annoyance good-naturedly, and to play with these hungry children of the desert, who are a necessity and an amusement as well as a nuisance. Some are very handsome and intelligent-looking fellows, and might be made useful men by proper education.

We must not leave the Great Pyramid without alluding to some curious recent speculations about its real design and value. Every visitor must be impressed with its venerable age, colossal size, and unique surroundings. But some regard it after all as a very plain, unproductive, and useless building, in which nothing can be stored up excepting a corpse.⁶ In the opinion of others it is a very miracle in stone, a petrification of divine wisdom, a pre-historic revelation of the mysteries of science, and a prophecy of the first and second coming of Christ.⁷ This theory was prepared in part by the measurements of Col. Howard Vyse (1837), the discoveries and conjectures of John Taylor of London (1859 and 1864), and carried out with a great waste of learning and ingenuity by Piazzzi Smyth, the Astronomer Royal for Scotland (1874). Smyth spent with his wife four months at the Great Pyramid, and carefully examined its mechanical features and mathematical proportions with a variety of scientific instruments. He finds the proper solution of the riddle of this pyramid, not in the hieroglyphic science of the Egyptologists, but in the mathematical and physical science of our day. Its message is expressed, not in any written or spoken language, but in scientific facts and features now interpreted by science. Accordingly the pyramid is a prophetic parable in stone, constructed on principles of science, to convey a new proof to men in the present age of the existence of a personal God, his supernatural interference in patriarchal times, and his revelations of the first and second advent of Christ. The pyramid stands at the apex (or rather ten miles south of the apex) of the Delta of the Nile, and in the centre of the habitable globe, or the land surface of the earth. It stands four-square on the thirtieth parallel of latitude, its four sides facing exactly the four points of the compass, north, south, east, and west. There are in each side of the base just 365 1/4 cubits, which is the precise number of days in the year, with the six hours addition. Its chief corner-stone is not at the base, but at the top, the apex, and symbolizes Christ, "the head cornerstone." Psa. 112:22. It has no trace of idolatry in writing, painting, or sculpture. The lidless and empty coffer in the King's Chamber was never intended for a sarcophagus or royal tomb, but it is a metrological monument or standard measure of capacity and weight for all ages and nations, equivalent to the laver of the Hebrews or four quarters of English measure. It accomplishes the mathematical feat of squaring the circle, the height being to the circumference of the base as the radius is to the circumference of a circle. The very name of the pyramid means "measure of wheat" (from *πυρός*, wheat, and *μέτρον*, measure). The Grand Gallery which leads to the King's Chamber symbolizes the

6 Barham Zincke, "Egypt of the Pharaohs and of the Khedive" (London, 1873), p. 61.

7 Piazzzi Smyth, in his elaborate books, "Life and Work at the Great Pyramid in 1865" (3 vols., Edinburgh), and "Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid" (London, 1874, I vol., 526 pp., with 17 explanatory plates).

Christian dispensation, and indicates in pyramid inches the thirty-three years of the Saviour's earthly life. The first ascending passage represents the Mosaic dispensation, the other narrow passages mean lower religions. Such profound design and wisdom can only be traced to divine revelation, like the building of the Tabernacle by Moses. The Great Pyramid, though *in* Egypt, was not *of* Egypt, but stands in contrast to Egyptian idolatry and beast worship. It was probably built by Melchisedek, the friend of Abraham, the worshipper of the only true God, the priest-king who typified our Saviour. He was that mysterious stranger, the shepherd "Philitis," or "Philition," i.e., a Philistian from Palestine, who, as Herodotus was informed, fed his flocks at Gheezeh about the time when the Great Pyramid was built, and took some part in it.⁸ Cheops merely furnished the workmen and the material for his royal sepulchr; but Melchisedek executed his plan, revealed to him from God, for a monument of the pure faith in the midst of surrounding idolatry, and as a sign and wonder for after ages.

This is the astounding theory which has been adopted by several respectable English and American writers, but is silently ignored by the first Egyptologists of the age as unworthy of serious notice. I am unable to follow Piazzi Smyth into the intricacies of his scientific calculations, and measurements. I am quite ready to admit, from general impressions, that the builder of this monument was in possession of an astonishing amount of mathematical and astronomical knowledge. But the prophetic theology and Messianic symbolism of the pyramid seem to me to have no better foundation than the conjecture of the famous mediæval traveller Sir John Mandeville, who thought that the pyramids were the granaries of Joseph, built for the storage of grain for the years of famine. He did not examine the interior, being told that they were full of serpents. Piazzi Smyth has examined the interior, and put into it a vast deal of his own wisdom, after the eisegetical manner of those allegorical and typological exegetes who make the Scriptures responsible for their own pious thoughts and fancies, never dreamed of by the sacred writers. Why should the Great Pyramid be an exception to all the rest? If it is free from idolatrous inscriptions, so are the others which contain only the cartouches of the royal builders. The pyramid of Cheops, moreover, is surrounded by monuments of idolatry, as the temple of the Sphinx and the Sphinx himself, to whom divine worship was offered. If the Grand Gallery prophesies the life of Christ, it should certainly lead to something more important than a metrological coffer. This would indeed be but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous. And if the Great Pyramid was intended for a divine sign and wonder, why was its meaning hidden for forty or fifty centuries, and revealed only in our day? Why is there no mention whatever of it in the Bible?

We are indeed directed to Isa. 19:19, 20, where the prophet speaks of "an altar" and a "pillar," which shall be for "a sign and witness unto the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt;" but this is predicted as a *future* event by Isaiah, who lived many centuries *after* the building of the Great Pyramid. Smyth quotes also Jer. 32:20, where the prophet speaks of "signs and wonders," which the Lord "has set in the land of Egypt, even unto this day, and in Israel, and among other men; and has made him a name as at this day." But not to speak of the plural which cannot refer to a single building, the very next verse shows plainly that Jeremiah alludes to the miracles of Moses: "And hast brought forth thy people Israel out of

8 Herodotus was told by Egyptian priests that "Cheops, on ascending the throne, plunged into all manner of wickedness. He closed the temples and forbade the Egyptians to offer sacrifices, compelling them instead to labor, one and all, in his service," *viz.*, in building the Great Pyramid. Book II., chap. 124 (Rawlinson's transl., Vol. II., p. 169). He states moreover (chap. 128) that "the Egyptians so detest the memory of these kings [Cheops and Chephren] that they do not much like even to mention their names. Hence they commonly call the pyramids [the first and second] after Philition, a shepherd who at that time fed his flocks about the place." This Philition is no doubt a confused and anachronistic allusion to the Hyksos or shepherd kings (from Hyk, king, and sos, shepherd), who may have invaded Egypt from Palestine or Philistia, and whose memory as foreign conquerors was hated by the Egyptians. But their invasion took place after the twelfth dynasty, or nearly one thousand years after Cheops.

the land of Egypt with signs and with wonders, and with a strong hand,” etc. It is very evident that such exegesis is a poor recommendation to the allegorical interpretation of the pyramid.

The Bible, as far as I know, alludes but once to the pyramids, and then with a certain irony, namely, in Job's fearful denunciation of the day of his birth (3:11-14):

"Why at the birth did I not die—
When from the womb I came—and breathe my last?
Why were the nursing knees prepared?
And why the breasts that I should suck?
For now in silence had I lain me down;
Yea, I had slept and been at rest
With kings and legislators of the earth—
The men who built their pyramids—
Or princes once enriched with gold,
Their homes with treasure filled.”

The Hebrew word *charaboth* חרבות , which in our English version is mistranslated “desolate places,” means either ruins⁹ or (as the context favors) mausoleums, pyramids.¹⁰

9 So Geseuius, Umbreit, Schlottmann Zöckler (in Lange). Tayler Lewis, whose elegant translation (in Lange) I have otherwise given above, renders the word by “mouldering monuments,” *i.e.*, mouldering like the memory of those who built them.

10 So some of the best Hebrew scholars and commentators, as Ewald, Dillmann, Fürst, Renan, Merx, Evans (in Lange). Fürst gives as the first meaning of חרבה wilderness; as the second meaning (in the plural only) mausoleum, pyramid; and adds, by way of comment, “The vain kings of Egypt built pyramids as their palatial sepulchres, which they filled with their treasures.”