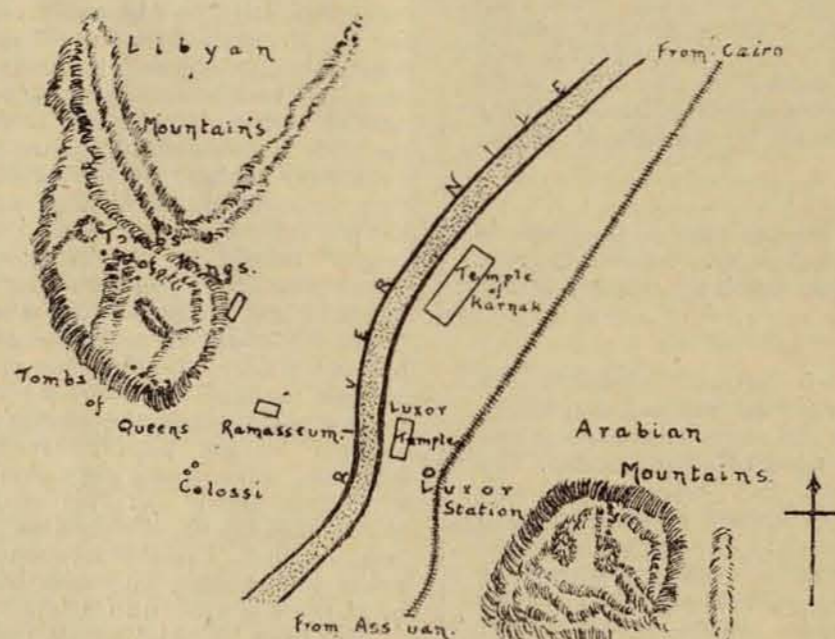


THE VALLEY OF THEBES.

(During April the members of the Unit were granted a few days' leave, and a number made a trip to Luxor. As a result no fewer than 30 reports were received for insertion in this issue. This, of course, was impossible, so they were summarised, into one account, which appears below. We managed to secure a letter which had inadvertently dropped out of the post bag, and this is also inserted, as it views the trip from a rather different standpoint. Ed.)



Rough Sketch of the Valley of Thebes.

Slightly over 400 miles south of Cairo the great, broad, Nile flows peacefully between the Arabian and Libyan Mountains through the ancient valley of Thebes. Here on both sides of the river about the year 2,000 B.C. stood Thebes, one of the ancient capitals of Egypt. To-day the town of Luxor stands on the eastern bank among the old temples, the western side being partly cultivated fields, and partly barren sand areas.

This wonderful old world valley, with its silent memories of bygone greatness is a fascinating sight. Each of the pillars

in the temples tells its own history, and to walk among the ruined piles is an inspiration. As the eyes roam over the valley, visions come of the long dead past—the ancient city (one of the greatest of its time), with its 20,000 chariots of war, magnificent temples, stately public buildings, private houses four and five storeys high; the processions of priests chanting incantations before the god Amen-Ra; the great expeditions of war; and the battles that were fought on the plain. All these visions stir the imagination to its depths.

The nearest building of the ancients to the Railway Station is Luxor Temple. It is situated in the middle of the town of Luxor, and the entrance is at the top of the steps leading from the Nile. This temple was built by Amenophis III. about 1,500 B.C., and, in accordance with a practice that obtained in the construction of all the temples, was added to by a number of subsequent rulers. Alexander the Great even added a sanctuary to this temple in his day. The walls of Luxor abound in hieroglyphics and beautiful relief carving, telling the history of those

ancient times, and one of the finest pieces shows a section of the King's army-footmen, chariots, &c., while overhead is a relief of the Sacred Boat. The statuary and pillars in this temple are splendid specimens.

Situated about a mile and a quarter from Luxor Temple is the Temple of Karnak, and in ancient times the road connecting these structures was lined on either side by an avenue of Sphinxes. Karnak Temple originally covered 137 acres, and although much destroyed, it contains some wonderful and beautiful architecture. The structures have been built by almost every ruler of Egypt from about 2,000 B.C. down to 100 B.C., including Alexander the Great and the Ptolemies. From the top of the main pylon or wall the view of the temple ruins on one side, and the Nile Valley, with the Libyan Mountains in the distance, and palm groves dotted here and there, makes an excellent picture. The great hall which contains a forest of 122 columns each 80 feet high, all covered in carvings, is the gem of the temple. By moonlight there is something ethereal about this hall, the pale light stealing down among the pillars, and the ghostly silence producing a weird, mysterious effect.

On the other side of the Nile the trip to the Tombs on donkey back is a rare experience, especially during the latter part of the journey when the road leads through barren mountains, where the modern implements of the excavator have been everywhere at work in search of royal tombs. This valley has been called the Valley of Death, and no name could better describe it. There is no life of any kind among these barren mountains among which lie the Pharaohs of yore. One can imagine the gorgeous funeral cavalcades winding up to the tombs hewn out of the living rock, and the mysterious rites performed therein. Inside the tombs there are excellent reliefs and paintings, which are as vivid and perfectly executed as if done a few days ago. For hundreds of feet the tombs penetrate the mountain, and every part is covered with this work, which largely illustrates the history of the King who was laid to rest within. The tomb of Amenophis II. contains many chambers

of singular beauty. At the end of the tomb the mummy of the King lies in a stone sarcophagus, and one cannot but be impressed with the quiet dignity of the scene.

On the other side of the mountains the temple of Queen Hat-shepsu presents a style of architecture quite distinct from the other temples. It is partly built of beautiful white limestone, and partly excavated in the side of the hill. The relief work on the walls is of the finest and the complete history of the queen can be traced. Nearer the Nile the Ramasseum, with its huge fallen statue of Rameses II. (the Pharaoh of the Oppression), weighing about 1,000 tons, and the World famous Colossi of Memnon each 65 feet high, are sights of interest. At the edge of the Libyan Mountains behind the Colossi the tombs of the Queens are to be found. The sides and ceilings of the chambers of these tombs are very rich in paintings of all colours, which are very well preserved indeed.

Such, briefly, is the Valley of Thebes to-day, wherein rest the fine Egyptians of old. Like the ancient kingdoms of Babylon and Persia, the Kingdom of Egypt flourished and passed away. Its people have gone their way, where, no one knows; but though dead their character "still speaketh," and their structures reflect a glorious history of a civilization and a code of morality which obtained many centuries before the dawn of the Christian era.

One writer at the close of his account, bursts forth:—

Flow on, thou peaceful Nilus, flow;
Thy course is wide and clear.
The only balm to Egypt's sun
Through all the passing year.

Four thousand miles thro' Afric's wastes,
Runs on thy silver gleam,
Where palms and crops of grain arise
Well watered from thy stream.

What secrets do thy valleys keep
Of years now passed away,
Of peoples now forgotten quite
Save for their ruined clay?

The ancient ones of this great land
Who didst adore thy throne,
And dwelt midst wondrous splendour—
Canst tell where they have flown?