

The Joy of the Sun

by

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Preface

There are few things in the history of any land or time as beautiful as the short life of Akhnaton, king of Egypt in the early fourteenth century B.C. Some men are celebrated for their extraordinary intelligence; others are famous as great artists; others have become immortal account of their goodness. But few have been intellectual geniuses, artists and saints at the same time, in the natural perfection of their being. Akhnaton was such a man. He was one of those rare historic figures whose very existence is sufficient to make one proud to be a man, in spite of all the atrocities that have dishonoured our species from the beginning up to now. And yet, such is the irony of fate that the public at large hardly knows his name.

At the opening of this year 1942 A.D. — exactly three thousand three hundred years after Akhnaton's death, if we accept the chronology of some historians — I present this simple book to the young people of all the world in the hope that it may teach them to love that most lovable of men. My own life would have been richer and more beautiful, had I had the privilege to know of him when I was twelve years old. To try to give that privilege to others seems to me the best way of amending for long years of neglect, and of keeping up King Akhnaton's thirty-third centenary in the midst of our troubled times.

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Calcutta, 14th of February 1942.

Chapter I

1400 B.C.

In the time in which this true story begins — nine hundred years before the Buddha and Lao-Tse were born, fourteen hundred years before Christ, and more than two thousand years before the Prophet Mohamed — the world was already old. It was different in many ways, but yet the same as it is now — much the same as it always was. There were fewer people and more wastelands, more forests, more wild animals than there are today. It took, also, very much longer to go from one place to

another. Of course, there were no newspapers; and apart from merchants, sailors and warriors, scarce were those who ever visited foreign lands. Special messengers took weeks to go from Egypt to Syria and back. The world seemed much broader than it does now. But there were good and bad people in it, as there are still; there were rich and poor, wise and foolish. There were states and empires, and wars between them. There were peasants, traders and money-lenders; craftsmen and slaves; soldiers and physicians and priests. And just as in all times, the seekers of wealth were more common than the seekers of truth, and superstition more common than religion.

The countries that are nowadays the most spoken about — Germany, Britain, Russia — were then hardly known to the rest of the world. And among the nations that we look upon as “very ancient,” many had not yet risen to prominence; others did not even exist. Assyria was still an ‘unimportant’ semi-barbaric kingdom; the Acropolis of Athens was but an obscure Mycenaean fortress; and, seven hundred years were yet to pass before the first huts were to appear on the spot that was, one day, to become Rome. Countries, most of which have for centuries, lost their place in the world, were then the ruling nations, the centres of all activity worth mentioning.

Among them, India and China, highly civilised as

they were, were so far away that the rest of mankind looked upon them almost as we do upon another planet. Now and then in some port of the Persian Gulf, a ship would unload its precious cargo: perfumes and peacocks, jade and sandal-wood, and strange tales would spread about the unreachable lands of dawn beyond the Indian Ocean.

In the other half of the world, Babylonia, Egypt, the Aegean Isles — the ruling powers — were already more than twice as old as Britain and Germany are now. That is to say that many happenings had taken place since the far-gone days when the gods, it was said, had ruled on earth, each one in his particular area. Mighty kingdoms had risen and fallen; new gods and goddesses had become popular while others had been forgotten. Crete, the mistress of the waves for centuries, was now in her decline. Daring Phoenician sea-farers were beginning to take the place of hers, while old Babylon, famous for her star-gazers and her trade, and second only to Thebes in splendour, was slumbering under the uneventful rule of a foreign dynasty. In the centre of Asia Minor a warrior-like nation — the Hittites — was slowly rising in strength; but nobody feared it yet. And to the south-east of the Hittite boundaries, bordering the outskirts of the Egyptian empire, there was the small kingdom of Mitanni, an ally of Egypt.

Egypt was the one uncontested “great power” of the time. Within a few generations, she had extended her sway eastwards across the Syrian desert, into a part of what is now Iraq; northwards, beyond the Upper Euphrates, to lands where winter brings snow, and southwards, past the Fourth Cataract of the Nile to regions of depressing heat and pouring rain, unknown to the Egyptians themselves. People, then, must have spoken of the Egyptian empire somewhat as they do of the British empire today.

And the emperor of those many dominions, the greatest monarch of the world, was the Pharaoh Amenhotep the Third — Amenhotep the Magnificent, as some modern historians have called him. Thebes, his capital, was one of the largest and most beautiful cities that had ever existed. Its palaces and gardens were famous, but nothing exceeded the splendour of its temples dedicated to all the gods of Upper and Lower Egypt. From a great distance, one could see the sacred flags fluttering like waves of purple above the gigantic pylons and the golden tops of the obelisks glittering in the sun. And one could never forget the royal avenue bordered with rows of sphinx, which led to the enclosure of the main temple — the great temple of Amon — nor the courtyards, the halls, the shrines therein; the huge columns, so big that twenty men stretching their arms hardly sufficed to embrace one of them, so high that their

summits seemed lost in the darkness; the golden hieroglyphics that shone on a background of dark granite, proclaiming the words of the god to the Conqueror, his son “I have come; I have, granted thee to trample over the great ones of Syria . . .”

In those days, not merely every country but every city had its own gods and goddesses, who were not those of the neighbouring city. Nobody even imagined that there could only one God for all the world. But they found it natural to worship gods of other cities, even of distant lands, when these had proved themselves efficient by making their people powerful. That is how Amon the god of Thebes, the royal city, had become the main god of all Egypt. Nay, even outside Egypt, in Syria, in Palestine, in Nubia, throughout the Empire, temples were erected to him and people worshipped him. They feared him, as they who had feared Egypt; for it was he, they were told, guided the armies of the Conqueror, Thotmose the Third — the ruling Pharaoh’s great-grandfather — from victory to victory, and made Egypt invincible ever since.

The priests of Amon were so rich that they did not know what to do with their wealth. They possessed immense stretches of good land — corn-fields and palm groves and pastures and maize-fields — ever-increasing revenues, huge flocks of cattle and numberless slaves. A great part of the tribute of the conquered cities was given to them. Their power was second only to that of

the king and their influence was felt everywhere. The commoners, poor and ignorant folk, looked up to them as if they were gods on earth, and even the king — the son of the Sun; himself a god — feared to displease them. They had long given up the habit of pious meditation and the simple life they had once led before they became rich. Now, they spent their time intriguing so as to extort more and more privileges from the king; they urged the people to offer costly sacrifices and to make donations to the temples. And they lived in luxury.

There were many foreigners in Thebes. Syrian princes — sons and grandsons of defeated kings — were sent there to learn Egyptian manners. Lybian and Nubian soldiers serving in the Egyptian army met there with Cretan craftsmen, with sailors from Cyprus and the Aegean Isles. Babylonians had settled there; they made a living by lending money or by telling fortunes, or else by giving lessons in their native language — then the international medium of commerce and diplomacy — to the sons of rich Theban merchants or to the future clerks of the Egyptian Foreign Office. Sometimes, in the slave-market, one would come across natives of strange lands: some tall pink and white barbarian, with blue eyes, brought by the Phoenicians from the misty Isles at the western end of the world, or, more often, dark-skinned, thick-lipped hunters from the farthest South, who bore shields of antelope hide and long poisonous arrows, stuck

red and green feathers in their woolly hair, and dwelt in unknown damp forests full of rhinoceros and wild elephants.

All these people came and went, toiled and traded, made merry and suffered, and worshipped each one his native gods, occasionally propitiating the foreign ones too, when they thought it would be of some good. They all looked upon Egypt as if her empire would last forever and her splendour never decline. They enjoyed the refinements of her sophisticated life; they, admired the art of her craftsmen; they admired and feared her military power which had proved invincible. But above all they feared Amon, her great god, and his priests; and they feared King Amenhotep, her Pharaoh, though he had never led an army through Syria, as his father and forefathers had.

As for the Egyptians, they had always been a proud nation. Two hundred years of constant victory had made them prouder than ever. They were kind and hospitable to strangers, but thought themselves superior to the rest of men, whoever they might be. They were deeply attached to their national gods — especially to Amon — and they looked up to their king as to the Sun in heaven.

And so, the western half of all the civilised world lay at the feet of Egypt, and Egypt at the feet of her king, Amenhotep the Third, son of the Sun, the first king of the world — the favourite of Amon, the great god of Egypt.

Chapter II

Dawn

King Amenhotep had many wives: one, a Mitannian princess, one the sister of the king of Babylon, and a number of others, from different countries far and near. But his chief wife, Queen Tiy, was the one he loved the best.

He built a summer house for her, on the bank of the Nile, so that she might spend there long hours with him, amidst luxuriant flower beds and groves of rare trees. And he caused a lake to be dug out for her nearby, so that she might sail with him across its smooth waters, in a gilded boat with sails as delicate and beautiful as the wings of a butterfly. He gave her authority over his other wives, and put all his confidence in her.

She was clever and ambitious. She was not contented merely with her power in the palace, but helped her husband to rule Egypt and the Empire. She governed

them alone, when King Amenhotep had grown weary of his heavy duties.

Queen Tiy had been married for twenty-six years. She had, several daughters, but yet no son; and as she was getting old — she was over thirty-five, and perhaps not far from forty — her disappointment was great. She had prayed to many gods, and goddesses; she had worn charms, gone on pilgrimages, touched miraculous statues and drank from sacred tanks water that was said to give sons even to barren women. But it had been of no avail. Yet, she still kept on praying and hoping.

And she was right, for her prayers and hopes were not in vain; at last, her wish was fulfilled, and a son was born to her. There was great joy in the palace and merriment throughout the land. Food was distributed to the poor, and forgiveness granted to criminals on the occasion, so that the hearts even of the most wretched might greet in happiness the coming of the new-born prince.

Astrologers were consulted about the child's destiny, and they said that he would become the greatest of all the kings of Egypt. One of them — a man of profound wisdom — said that he would “show the world the true face of his Father.” But when asked to make his prophecy more clear, he kept silent. Queen Tiy kept the strange words in her heart, but years were to pass until she could grasp their full meaning.

The little prince was named after his father, Amenhotep, which means "Amon is pleased." He was a sickly baby who hardly had the strength to cry, and looked as if he would not live. His mother loved him all the more. She watched over him day and night, as one watches over a priceless treasure that one fears to lose. The child was brought up in all the luxury of the Egyptian court. He was given the best of food, the best of clothing, and the most marvellous toys that cunning workmanship could produce for his delight. He was given companions of his age to play with. But, though he loved them, he did not usually share their games for long. He was of a quiet and dreamy disposition, and sought the company of grown-up people. He liked to sit with his mother and have her tell him stories of the times when there were giants and monsters, and animals who could speak, and men who had the power of making themselves invisible. Or else, he would remain lying on a cushion, smelling an open lotus as if he were slowly drinking its soul, or silently gazing at the sky. In the palace, as in all Egyptian houses, the windows were small and built high in the walls, on account of the glare and the heat. Seen from a low couch or from the floor, through the narrow opening above, the cloudless sky, so far away, seemed still more blue and still more distant. The little prince felt as if he were himself melting away into the shapeless glowing depth; and that feeling was

for him the greatest joy. But it was beyond words, and he could not express it even to his mother.

The prince was eager to learn, and like all intelligent children, he often asked questions that were not easy to answer, such as: “Why don’t animals speak nowadays?” or: “What is light made of?” or “Why doesn’t Gilu wear a wig?” (In Egypt, in those days, both men and women used to wear wigs, but Gilukhipa, the king’s Mitannian wife, did not follow that fashion).

“Now, I have told you already not to call her ‘Gilu’; she is your step-mother,” said Queen Tiy, trying to avoid his question.

“But she has told me herself that I may,” retorted the child. He had a ready reply to everything.

One day, he was taken to a part of the palace where he had never been before, and there, in a hall all decorated with gold and lapis lazuli, was made to sit upon a dais, by the side of his mother. Many people were seated all around. They stood up and saluted him and the queen. The king was absent, on account of ill-health. The child saw an old man in strange clothes — a foreigner — come up to a certain distance from the dais and make the customary bows. It was the Hittite ambassador, who was soon to return to his country with important messages from Egypt. “What will he bring for me, when he comes back?” said the boy, though he was not expected to speak.

“What would the prince like me to bring?” asked the foreign envoy with a smile.

The prince had heard that in the land of the Hittites, something white, cold and beautiful, as light as feathers — snow — used to fall from heaven. It covered the hills and meadows, and made them look like silver as the Sun shone upon them. But he had not heard any more about it, and he was not more than four years old. He answered quite seriously “Bring me some snow,” and this time everybody smiled. “You silly boy,” his mother whispered into his ear, “how can one bring you snow? It would melt on the way.” And turning to the ambassador she said: “You can bring him some pet to play with; he loves animals.” But the child kept on asking, louder and louder: “Why does snow melt? Do tell me, mother, why does it melt?”

“The prince has an inquisitive mind; he will seek the cause of everything as he does now of melting snow and will be a philosopher,” said an official of the palace to the one seated next to him. “I would prefer him to be a soldier,” answered the man, “the Empire needs a strong hand to keep it whole.”

Prince Amenhotep was growing in loveliness. He had a slender body, a long and graceful neck, and delicate hands like those of a girl; he had a light bronze

complexion, and large jet-black eyes with long lashes. Sometimes one would see in those eyes a sadness that was not of his age. He was handsome and affectionate, and everybody loved him. Gilukhipa and the other ladies of the royal harem used to take him to their rooms, give him sweets, and tell him tales of their native lands; the courtiers spoke of his precocious intelligence; and the people, though they never saw him — for it was not the custom that royalty should appear in front of commoners — adored him as a young god, their future king.

When he was six, he was given learned masters to teach him all that a king should know. At first, he learnt how to draw upon clay tablets the picture-signs of the Egyptian alphabet — what we now call “hieroglyphics,” and to read aloud, with rhythm, and recite by heart verses of the ancient poets, and maxims and proverbs of the wise men of old. Then, as he grew older, he was taught something of the noble sciences: arithmetic and geometry, the history of the birth of the gods and of the creation of the world, the names of the stars and the list of the kings of Egypt. He was told of the excellence of certain numbers which, cannot be divided or which, when combined, express the measurement of a perfect figure, such as a triangle with a right angle. He was taught how his ancestors had freed Egypt from the yoke of the Shepherd Kings, and how his

great-great-grandfather, Thotmose the Conqueror, had slain her enemies before Amon, his god, and made her the most powerful of nations. Not only would he grasp at once all what they taught him, but he would try to discuss with his teachers, and the remarks he made and the questions he put were disquieting, sometimes. His teachers marvelled at his intelligence and at the same time were a little anxious. "His mind is not that of a child," they used to say.

Once, one of his preceptors was telling him how under Queen Hatshepsut, during a solemn procession, the sacred image of Amon suddenly stopped in front of the young prince Thotmose — the one who was to become the Conqueror — and nodded to him, thus showing that it was the god's will that he and none other should wear the Double Crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. "And this miracle is true," he added, "for there were hundreds of people present, who saw it happen; and it was recorded upon stone. . ." But the child did not let him finish. "I don't believe a word of it," he said with as much assurance as if he had himself witnessed the whole scene, "there was no miracle; it was the priests who did it." It was not proper, of course, to contradict a teacher; but he simply could not conceal what he knew to be true.

The teacher tried to find out who had influenced his royal pupil. He suspected one of the other preceptors of the prince, a man who had been a priest of the Sun in the

sacred city of On; for there was rivalry between the Priests of On and those of Thebes. But the child refused to say who had told him the story of the faked miracle. He had heard it from his mother.

Another day, he was being told about the deeds of his warrior-like great-grandfather and namesake, King Amenhotep the Second. "As there was unrest in Syria in his days," the teacher was saying, "he set out with a great army and numberless war-chariots. He crossed the desert like an angry lion, rushed through Syria, defeated the rebels, and captured their seven chiefs alive. He had them hung, head downwards, in front of his royal boat, as he sailed back in triumph down the Nile. And he slew them with his own axe, before Amon, the king of the gods, so that he might rejoice at the sight; for it was Amon alone who had given him victory over his enemies."

The little prince had a vivid imagination and a kind heart; he shuddered while he pictured to himself the torture of the seven Syrians hanging, head downwards, under the burning sun: their faces all blue, their features distorted with pain, their groans. He felt suddenly as if there were a lump in his throat; his eyes were filled with tears and his mouth quivered. But the teacher was so thrilled by the remembrance of Egypt's victories, and by his own eloquence, that he paid no attention, and went on with his narration. "Then," said he, "the king caused

the bodies of six among the captives to be hung on the walls of Thebes; and he caused the seventh one to be sent to the South, and hung upon the walls of Napata, the capital of Nubia, so that the dwellers in the South might also see the great works accomplished by Amon, the mighty god, through the king, his son, and be filled with fear.”

But the child could not put up with it any longer. “The horrible man and the horrible god!” he burst out at last, as tears of indignation, disgust and shame rolled down his cheeks. “And they call me, too, ‘son of Amon’! But I don’t want to be! And I shall not be I . . .” His teacher tried to soothe him. He was dumbfounded with amazement at the prince’s impious words, and perhaps still more so at the tone of his voice: a tone of passionate determination that he had never assumed before. But he remembered that the prince was only a child. He explained to him that the Syrian chiefs had waged war against their lawful ruler, the king of Egypt, which was surely a great crime. He told him that it is right to put down: rebellion, for “rebellion displeases the gods and weakens the Empire.”

“How can it be right, to cause suffering?” answered, the little prince.

He loved all living things and had never remained indifferent to a cry of distress. Only a few days before, while wandering by himself in the gardens around the

palace, as he often did, he had found a poor little bird at the foot of a tree, where it had fallen from its nest. He had picked it up with infinite care, and carried it home, and fed it until it was strong enough to fly away. He remembered how he had felt the tiny heart beating in his hand. And, then, he thought again about the unfortunate Syrian chiefs. "Rebels" he was told; but what were rebels, after all? Suddenly, an incredible truth struck the mind of the prince — something so simple and so strange that nobody seemed to have thought of it before (and milleniums were to pass before some men would think once more in the same light). "And what harm had the Syrians done?" he said, without waiting for the teacher to answer his first question, "They fought against us just as we fought against the Shepherd Kings, for their freedom."

The old teacher was stupefied. How could anyone compare the Syrian agitators with the great kings who had brought about, the liberation of the land of Egypt? Was there any common measure between Egypt and the peoples she had conquered? Between her gods and their gods? He tried to explain this to the child, but in vain. The child did not understand where the difference lay. Such obvious distinctions that were familiar to everybody seemed alien to his mind, as if he were the child of a different world.

On that very day, the prince was sitting with his mother on one of the terraces of the palace. He was telling her about his history lesson. He could not overcome the impression that the story of the captives' torture had produced on him. "Do all the gods want us to be cruel?" he asked at last. The Sun was setting. The queen pointed to the glorious orb above the western hills. "No," she answered, "not all of them; not *He*. See how beautiful He is." And she spoke to him of Aton — the Sun-disk — the oldest god of Egypt, the god she loved. "He is kind," she said in a tender voice, "He causes the corn to ripen and the lilies to come forth; He is the Father of all life whom they worship in the sacred city of On from the beginning of the world."

"Then, why do the priests say that Amon is the same as the Sun?" asked the prince.

"Priests talk a lot of nonsense, when it suits their purpose," said Queen Tiy, as if speaking to herself. And she added in a louder voice, with a smile: "Don't listen to the priests, my son, listen to your own heart."

The child was happy. A fiery glow rested upon his innocent face as he followed the Disk going down and down, until it disappeared behind: the dark hills in the distance. It seemed to him as if the kind god were smiling at him, as his mother did.

Meanwhile, in a room where nobody else could hear him, the prince's teacher was saying to an intimate friend

of his: “May Amon and all the gods prove my words false! But my mind is troubled. I fear that one day of our Lord the King will lose the Empire.”

Chapter III

Rising Sun

Queen Tiy was anxious to get her son married. The king's health was sinking, and it was good that the prince, his heir, should have a wife. Tiy fixed her choice on a beautiful princess named Nefertiti, and with all the customary royal pomp and splendour, the bride and bridegroom were wedded.

The prince was a little more than ten years old. He loved little girls because they were mild and gentle, like himself; but he would surely take a long time to understand how one of them could become, for him, more than only a playmate or even a friend. Nefertiti, who was nine, was sweet and shy; she was afraid of boys. Yet the newly married children soon grew tenderly attached to each other. The princess loved her husband because his voice was soft and his manners gentle; he never used to tease her; nor would he, when she talked of some game she played, say that it was "good enough for girls," and laugh;

nor would he frighten her with stories of awe. She felt happy when his large dreamy eyes rested upon her, and she showed him so. She would not play without him. She told him her favourite tales. If anyone gave her anything beautiful or precious, she would not be pleased until he had seen it and admired it. And as he liked flowers, she often used to go and pluck lotuses in the ponds around the palace, and bring them to him, all fresh and sparkling with drops of water. The prince's sensitive nature responded to her affection; he grew more and more fond of her, not only because she was prettier than all the other girls he had seen, but because he felt that he had a place in her heart.

The skill of physicians had been of no avail; nor did the gods of Egypt seem willing to prolong the king's life by a miracle. At last, at the request of the Pharaoh's brother-in-law and faithful ally, Dushratta, king of Mitanni, the powerful goddess Ishtar had left her shrine and travelled all the way from Nineveh to Thebes. Stirred with hope and curiosity, people had flocked to see her pass in her precious litter carried by the priests. But she could do no more than the other gods had done and as his hour had come, King Amenhotep died. He was embalmed and buried, with unprecedented magnificence, in the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, where

his ancestors lay. And the prince, his son, became Amenhotep the Fourth, King of Egypt, Emperor of all the lands from the Upper Euphrates to the Fourth Cataract of the Nile.

He was merely twelve years old and Queen Tiy, for some time, kept on ruling the Empire as she had done before. But she helped her son to take more and more interest in the exercise of his power. When messengers from distant countries brought him clay tablets written in Babylonian — letters addressed to him by foreign kings — she saw to it that he read them out carefully, and she discussed their contents with him; she told him what her long experience had taught her about the character of their writers. “Just see,” she would say, pointing to the last lines of a dispatch from Dushratta, the king of Mitanni, “even while congratulating you on your accession, he cannot forget to ask for gold. Still, I like him. From the days of your grandfather, his family has been connected with ours. His grief for your father is sincere. He loved him, and he loves you too.”

“So does the king of Babylon love me, does not he?”

“Of course,” answered Tiy, with a little irony; “he is busy building some new temple every time he writes and needs gold to complete it. But he is harmless.” And she added, reminding him of the king of Asia Minor whose envoy was waiting for an audience: “As for the Hittite, he is like a crafty old spider in his web. Don’t

believe half what he says. It is not your friendship but your territories that he wants.”

The child soon got accustomed to be the “good god” of Egypt, as all Pharaohs were called, and took his exalted duties seriously. It was as if everything, in the palace and outside, were regulated to impress upon him the consciousness of his divine origin. High officials, ministers and generals, delegates from the provinces and foreign envoys would bow to the ground as soon as he appeared and address him as one of the immortals. If he went out, a number of heralds would precede him and announce him, and people would lie flat on their belly, with their face in the dust, while he passed by in his gorgeous litter, on a dais inlaid with gems. In fact, when on those grand occasions he was seated with the glittering royal tiara upon his head, wearing his most beautiful jewels, he really did shine like a young god.

He was also less free than before. A long tradition fixed the succession of his daily occupations. But both the etiquette and the pomp of the court were things too well-known and too natural for him to be either bored or over-pleased. He accepted the bondage of royal life with simplicity, and took his own divinity as a matter of course.

Only at times, when he was allowed to relax, he enjoyed all the more the company of his own soul. In the hot hours of the afternoon, as he reclined on his ivory

couch, he often used to gaze at the sky, as he had done years before. And just as then, it seemed to him as though he were himself melting away in the distant abyss of nothingness and light; as though the painted walls of his room and the whole world had vanished, and there were nothing left but the fathomless sky and himself — light and soul — and the two were one. Through the narrow window above, the rays of the almighty Sun reached straight down into the half-dark chamber. They caressed the young king's naked body. And it was as if, through their glowing touch, subtle like that of love, he felt the thrill of life that sustains the whole world, the stars and the Milky Way. And he was happy.

For years already — ever since that day his heart had revolted against the cruelty of Amon — the young king had ceased loving the great god of Thebes. He worshipped the Sun under the different names under which he was known in the sacred city of On, where stood his most ancient altar; and he refused to believe that Amon was but another name for the Sun.

On his accession he had insisted that instead of being called like other Pharaohs “high-priest of Amon,” he should be called “high priest of Aton” — the Sun-disk — in the succession of titles that were, henceforth, to follow his official designation. But his mother, though herself

a worshipper of the Disk, had found it better to use, in the official list, a more popular and less simple name of the god of On; and the sentence ran: “High-priest of Ra-Horakhti-of-the-Two-Horizons, rejoicing in his horizon in his name: ‘Heat-which-is-in-the-Disk’.” Queen Tiy had even added to the many titles of her son that of “beloved of Amon,” to please the priests of Thebes, for she was a worldly-wise woman who knew the art of governing. The young king had protested, but it was too late. The official list of his titles had already been dispatched in letters written in his name to provincial governors and to vassals, and all the Empire knew it.

The king had built a beautiful temple to Aton. On its walls, at his command, he had been pictured lifting his arms in prayer while, from the Sun-disk above his head, long rays ending in hands — Aton’s arms — stretched down to him, holding the looped-cross “ankh,” the hieroglyphic sign that meant: life. A part of the revenues appointed by former Pharaohs to the temples of Amon had been transferred to the new shrine. And everybody knew that Aton was the god of the king. The priests of On were pleased; but the priests of Thebes, the servants of Amon, were angry. They did not yet openly show their displeasure; they had merely started murmuring and spreading rumours against the king. But hardly anyone paid heed to them, for the people loved the king and did not care which god enjoyed his offerings as long as corn

was plentiful and life easy. Moreover the king, though he favoured Aton, did not deny or persecute the other gods.

At court, from the days of the king's father, religious discussions had become fashionable. Queen Tiy liked to hear priests of different gods explain old myths in the light of far-fetched allegories and foreigners relate strange religious customs and legends of their different countries. She was fond of novelties. But the young Pharaoh hardly ever spoke about religion even if pressed to do so. "Words nothing but words," he would say of the courtiers' discussions. "They prattle about that of which they have no knowledge, just to pass time." And in the solitude of his chamber he thought of his God — the almighty Sun.

The glorious Disk shone above him, far away in the cloudless sky, so brilliant that one could not set one's eyes upon it. And its rays poured into the room, straight down upon the king. It was these rays that he had wished to picture on the many-coloured reliefs that decorated the walls of the temple of Aton, though no work of man could express their beauty.

"They may say what they like," thought the king, remembering the idle talks of the priests, "but Aton is not like those gods that dwell in a particular place. He is honoured in On, but all the world sees His light and lives by His touch. His abode is the sky; His rays

embrace the whole world as they do me. Aton is the God of all the world.”

And as he thought this, it was as if the expanse of the world were before him. He knew that, past the boundaries of his empire, there were other countries: Babylonia and Mitanni, the land of the Hittites and Crete, and the Isles in the midst of the sea and unknown countries beyond the desert and beyond the Waterfalls. Their people had different gods; but the sky spread over them all and it was the same sky; and above them all, the Sun shone in His glory, and it was the same Sun — Aton. They knew their local sun-gods, but knew Him not. Somewhere perhaps, further than Babylon, among the nations Of Dawn from whose lands He rises, there were men who knew Him. It was difficult to say. But whether in ignorance or in knowledge, all people were seeking to worship Him.

The young king felt a thrill of enthusiasm run through his body, as if he could already behold, beyond time and space, the vision of that which nobody had dreamt before: one God — the Sun; and one people — the human race — united in the love of Him.

And he composed a hymn to the universal God:

*Glorious is Thy dawning in the horizon of heaven,
Living Aton, Lord and beginning of life.
When Thou risest in the East,
Thou fillest every land with Thy beauty . . .*

It was but fair that the God of all the world should have, in the hearts of men, a greater place than those gods whose realm was limited to a city, a kingdom, or even an empire. So the king decided to honour Aton above all the gods of Egypt. And he drafted two decrees one by which an extra portion of the revenues formerly ascribed to the temples of Amon was to be used for the glorification of the universal Sun; and another saying that it was his will that Thebes the city of Amon should henceforth be called "City-of-the-brightness-of-Aton."

Queen Tiy listened with sympathetic interest to all what her son told her about his conception of Aton, but she opposed the decrees.

"Perhaps you are right," she said to him, though his idea of a God, Who, was the God of all nations seemed rather strange, even to her; "but religion is one thing, and government is another. You will only provoke the priests by your decrees. And they, in turn, will stir up the mob."

"Then what am I to do?"

"Let things be as they are. Let the priests make money, as they are used to, and let the people worship their many gods according to age-old customs. One cannot make a camel drink when it is not thirsty; nor can one force knowledge unto people who do not seek it."

“But,” said the king, “I know that Aton, my Father, is the God of all the world, as far above all other gods as heaven is above the earth. Am I to neglect Him and deceive my people in order to please the priests? No. I shall check the arrogance of the priests, preach the truth and teach the people to worship the God of gods, all over the Empire and beyond.” He spoke with such vehemence that Tiy understood that he was determined to carry out his plans to the bitter end. Still, she made a last appeal, and said, summarising the experience of her whole life:

“Men don’t want truth; they want peace. You will learn that one day, provided the priests let you rule long enough.”

“It is not peace they want, but slumber of the soul,” said the king; “I shall awaken them.” And he added, expressing in simple words the ultimate experience of man in all ages: “There can be no real peace apart from Truth.”

His mother gazed at him in surprise. The king was a mere boy of fifteen; where had he learnt his strange wisdom, so different from hers and from everybody’s? Tiy remembered the prophecy that had been made about him at the time of his birth: “He will show the world the true face of his Father.” Now, she understood: this meant not the late Pharaoh, Amenhotep the Third, but the eternal Sun, the ancestor of his race.

Perhaps the boy's strange wisdom was His. Tiy, as she thought of this, did not say anything more. And the decrees were announced throughout the Empire.

The priests of Amon, this time, did not hide their displeasure. They sent the king long petitions in which the sacredness of the national religion was mentioned several times. But the king did not revoke his decrees. Now, for nearly two years they were in force. And as time passed, the priests made new outbursts of anger. Men who had received gold from them went about the city, whispering that the Pharaoh was possessed by an evil spirit, hostile to the land of Egypt, and that he was about to wage war on all the gods. Others said that Aton, his God, was not in reality the venerable old Sun-god of On — whom the people called also Ra — but a foreign god, in the eyes of whom the Syrians were the equals of the Egyptians.

One day a man was caught, who had tried to set fire to the temple of Aton. He was brought before the king who asked him gently why he had done it. "The high-priest of Amon paid me to destroy the temple," the man said; "I am a poor Man; so I took the money. Had I succeeded, the priests would have told the people that Amon himself had done it."

"Quite like them," said the king; "They have grown

fat on the people's sweat and now they pay them the interest of the spoils as the wages of crime." And he sent the man home unharmed.

The courtiers seemed to be on the king's side. Yet, as the sovereign was still a very young man, without experience, some of them tried to urge him to compromise with the priests who, they said, represented an old tradition

"No tradition however old and sacred, can be older and more sacred than truth, which is of all times," replied the king; "and I tell you: there is no other God but Aton, my Father. Before the world existed, He was; and after All things have perished, He shall still be. If tradition helps the people to know Him and to worship Him, then I say it is good. But if, instead, it turns them away from Him, then it is bad, and I must destroy it; I must destroy whatever leads to idolatry."

One of the courtiers begged to speak and said: "What is idolatry?"

The king was thoughtful for a minute, and replied: "Idolatrous is anyone who worships a symbol, instead of God whom it symbolises. Idolatrous is he, also, who puts undue stress upon ceremonies and sacrifices, theological controversies, and all such things which are not essential, while he neglects the one essential thing which is to realise that God is, and that there is no other god but Him."

But used as they were to vain subtleties, this was too simple for the courtiers to understand. Some praised the king's words, but in such a way that he could at once see how little they grasped of their meaning. Most of them kept respectfully silent. One or two ventured to ask for an explanation. How could it be, they said, that Aton — the Sun — was the sole God? Were there not also the Moon-god, the Nile-god, and a number of others? Was not all Nature peopled with gods and goddesses? No doubt, the Sun was by far the greatest of them all; but did the king really mean that he denied the existence of the others?

The king did not answer at once.

Ever since he had had the strange intuition that his God was the God of all the world, he had been thinking more and more about Him. Long ago, he had put to himself the very question that the courtiers were now asking him. And he had answered it; and he knew his answer was the right one; it was as clear to him as a visible reality. But would he be able to make his knowledge clear to others? His mother herself — from whom he had once received the first glimpse of Aton's glory — had not understood him when he had told her that the real Aton was invisible. Would the courtiers understand him better? But he could neither avoid their question nor hide the truth. And at length he spoke.

“If the living Aton, Whom I worship,” he said,

“were but the visible Sun-disk, then your remarks would be justified. But He is something different. I call Him Aton because His glory shines through the visible Disk better than through any other thing. But He has no shape. He is the invisible Essence of all being; not ‘a’ god, but God. That is why Egypt and the Empire and the whole world should bow down to Him alone.”

Soon after, the will of the king was again proclaimed. The court, the priests, the people, all were to recognise the sole Lord of the Universe, Aton, as their only God, and to worship none but Him. The traditional cults were abolished. The temples of Amon and of the thousand gods of Egypt were closed. And the name of Amon and the word “gods” were to be erased from the monuments and even from the tombs, throughout the land. The king even changed his own name from Amenhotep — “pleasing to Amon” — to Akhnaton, “Joy of the Sun,” the name by which he is now known in history.

“I shall efface all trace of the false gods, those empty symbols through which the people are led astray and made to ignore the real God; I shall uproot the vain mummery that men call ‘religion,’ and give them the religion of Truth,” he said. Yet, he did not wish to teach the people through fear, but through love. And though many remained attached to their familiar deities,

none were persecuted. Only the haughty priests of Amon — “deceivers of the people, and source of all mischief,” as the king called them — were dispossessed of their wealth for disobeying the royal decrees.

They took up the challenge, and openly denounced Akhnaton as a heretic, a criminal, an enemy of Egypt and of the gods. With what they had managed to conceal of their treasures, they stirred up riots in Thebes, and even paid scoundrels to attempt the king’s life. Along with many old conventions, Akhnaton had discarded his former aloofness from his people. He used to appear unguarded in his chariot, by the side of his young queen, in the streets of Thebes. And it was easy to approach him. Still, the attempt failed, and the henchmen of the priests were arrested. There was great indignation among the courtiers and all expected the assailants to die. But the Pharaoh ordered them to be set free. “I wish not to return evil for evil,” he said; “nothing comes of violence.”

And he continued to preach the glory and the love of Aton, the only God, in spite of all opposition. Many listened to him, but few could grasp the meaning of his teaching.

Thebes was the stronghold of Amon; his spirit was present in the very air one breathed there. From the top-most

terrace of his palace, as he rose to greet the rising Sun, King Akhnaton could see across the river the towering pylons of the temple of the god he was struggling to overthrow. He could see its outer enclosure, stretching over miles: the halls, the avenues, the open court-yards, the chapels erected to his glory, the glittering obelisks inscribed with hymns of praise to him. From the deserted monuments of his forefathers, closed by his orders, it was as if a cry of defiance reached the king — the cry of Thebes: “Amon shall remain our god forever.”

And Akhnaton decided to leave Thebes, once and for all, and build himself a new capital.

Chapter IV

Meridian Sun

In the sixth year of his reign, King Akhnaton sailed up the Nile to a place about 190 miles south of the site of modern Cairo, and he laid there the foundations of his new capital, Akhetaton — “the City of the Horizon of Aton” — of which the ruins are known today by the name of Tell-el-Amarna.

The City was to be built on the eastern bank of the river in a beautiful bay surrounded by low hills. The king himself chose its site and set its limits. Followed by his nobles, he appeared in stately pomp, with young Queen Nefertiti by his side. He made offerings of food and wine, gold, incense and sweet-smelling flowers to Aton, and he solemnly consecrated to Him the future City and the whole area around it on both sides of the Nile, up to the white cliffs of the desert which closed the landscape. Huge boundary-stones were set up north,

south, east and West, Marking the border of the sacred territory.” And the area within these limits belongs to Aton, my Father: mountains, deserts, meadows, islands, upper-ground, lower-ground, land, water, villages, embankments, men, beasts, groves, and all things which Aton, my Father, shall bring into existence for ever and ever” — so ran one of the inscriptions upon boundary-stones.

The king built two other cities, which he consecrated to Aton: one in Syria — in the North — and the other in Nubia — in the South — so that both North and South might hear his message of truth, and foreigners as well as Egyptians worship the God of the universe. He expected that, from those remote centres, his teaching would spread even beyond the frontiers of the Empire and his joy was great as he dreamt of the future.

At the Pharaoh’s command, hundreds of diggers and brick-layers, masons and carpenters and craftsmen of all sorts flocked to the site of the new capital. Stone quarries were opened in the neighbourhood; granite and alabaster, ivory, gold and lapis lazuli, and cedar, and various kinds of precious wood were brought from Upper Egypt and Nubia, from Sinai and Syria, and even farther still. All the Empire contributed to the great work of the king. And within two or three years, temples, gardens,

cottages and villas sprang out of the desert. The town was yet far from complete, but it was inhabitable. And the king and queen left Thebes and settled there with all the court and many thousands of people who had accepted the king's Teaching.

The new City — five miles long and three-quarters of a mile wide — stretched between the desert and the fields and groves bordering the Nile. It seemed small, compared to Thebes. But it was lovely, with a plenty of open spaces, palm-trees and flowers.

With the coming of the court all sorts of luxuries were needed and many labourers and craftsmen remained in the City, as there was enough work for them all. Those who knew the art of producing glass of different colours were especially in demand, for the use of glass had come into fashion. And the new industry rapidly flourished. King Akhnaton promoted it by ordering large supplies of coloured glazes for the decoration of his palace. He encouraged all the arts, and did everything he could to make the people feel that his sacred City was their own. The poor-tillers of the fields and workmen in the glass-factories were allowed to build their humble homes of dried mud by the side of the elegant villas of the nobles, and even in the neighbourhood of the Pharaoh's palace.

They sometimes had a glimpse of the royal procession as it passed along the street that led to the great temple

of Aton at the time of worship. The king and queen, and the little Princess Meritaton, their first-born child, stood in a beautiful chariot of electrum that shone like gold. The prancing white horses wore picturesque tufts of ostrich feathers on their heads. The king held the bridles, while the queen spoke to him smiling. The little princess, leaning over the edge of the chariot, was trying to play with the horses' tails. Never before had Pharaoh permitted the common folk to set their eyes on him in all simplicity. Akhnaton was dressed in pleated white linen as fine as muslin, but on ordinary occasions, wore no jewels. The courtiers, who found it well done, whatever he did, praised him for his simple taste. "The Sun on earth, the visible god the only Son of the living Aton," they said, "needs no gems to adorn his beauty." And they spoke the truth, for Akhnaton actually was lovely to look upon. But the people's comment was different though no less accurate: "The good god does not lavish his gold upon himself," they said, "but he builds cities, providing work and bread for us." And many added: "He does not take our sons to send them to war. May the 'good god' live for ever!" Thus they spoke, for there was peace in the land, while of occasional unrest in distant Syria they knew nothing. They had enough to eat and spare, and were happy. Therefore they loved the king.

In ancient Egypt, the mansions of the living were

never expected to last for more than a generation; the tomb, not the house, was the “eternal dwelling” to endure forever. So the king’s palace — a huge structure, covering a length of half a mile — was mainly built of light bricks. But it was magnificently decorated, for Akhnaton was a lover of art, and he was happy to see beautiful things around him.

On the walls and pavements were painted lovely scenes of natural life: here, a young bull was running through high grasses and tall, red poppies; there, were birds and butterflies, flying in the sunshine over marshy expanses full of pink and blue lotuses, and fishes playing hide-and-seek between the stems of the water-reeds; with shades of pale blue and gold and purple, their scales, glittered as the Sun shone upon them through the water; the birds’ wings fluttered with Joy, and the frisking bull crushed the poppies in an outburst of overflowing life, the tender lilies opened their golden hearts to the kiss of the Life-giver — the Sun. When looking at those paintings — true to life as Egyptian art had never been before and was never to be again after Akhnaton’s reign — one was reminded of the hymns that the young king had written to the glory of his heavenly Father:

*The flowers in the waste lands thrive at Thy dawning,
They drink themselves drunk of Thy radiance, before Thy face*

*All cattle gambol upon their feet,
All birds rise from their nest and flap their wings with joy,
And circle round in praise of Thee.*

.....

The fish in the river leap up before Thee . . .

The most gorgeous chamber in the palace was the immense reception hall where foreign ambassadors and vassals were admitted in the presence of the king and court. There stood 542 pillars shaped like palm-trees with palms of massive gold. Fragments of lapis lazuli and many-coloured glazes, deep-set between the thick curbs of gold, marked the intervals between the leaves. At dusk, under the rays of the sinking Sun, the golden columns glowed like red hot embers and the resplendent capitals glistened with all the colours of the rainbow. The envoys of distant kingdoms, when they beheld such wealth could not help thinking: "Verily, in the land of Egypt, gold is as common as dust."

On state occasions, the young king would appear in this hall, seated in great apparel upon a magnificent throne of gold. On such days he wore his most splendid ornaments: broad necklaces of gold and lapis lazuli, heavy gold ear-rings and bracelets and snake-shaped armlets, all studded with precious stones. The tall traditional tiara rested upon his head, and rolled around

it was the golden cobra — a symbol of divine royalty, that alone a Pharaoh could wear. At the back of the throne a large, golden falcon — another emblem of kingship — stretched its glittering wings above him, while on his right and left the fan-bearers, with softly cadenced movements, lifted and lowered enormous fans of ostrich feathers, fixed on long gilded poles.

Akhnaton was then in the full bloom of youth and at the height of his power. From all sides, the effulgence of gold and gems put around his intelligent face a halo of untold splendour. And both the courtiers who saw him every day and the foreigners who had travelled weeks and weeks and crossed deserts in order to behold his majesty were dazzled at his sight, for he shone upon his throne as the Sun above a fiery cloud. But brighter than all, in his large dark eyes shone the heavenly light of infinite kindness; and those who saw it could never forget him.

The great temple of Aton lay in the northern part of the City, not far from the king's palace. It was the finest building in the beautiful new capital. From outside, it looked much like the classical Egyptian temples of the time; lofty pylons, with their usual flag-staves from which floated long pennons of purple, stood at the entrance both of the

temple itself and of the vast enclosure that surrounded it. But as one walked through seven successive court-yards that led to the innermost altar one felt oneself in presence of an entirely new cult. Here there was nothing of the mystery and sacred awe that filled the temples of Amon and of the other gods; there were no dimly-lit lamps hanging from gloomy ceilings; no precious images buried in the depth of pitch-dark sanctuaries, like stolen treasures in a cave. But worship was carried on in broad daylight. In the first, sixth, and seventh courtyards stood an altar, on a flight of steps. There, at different times of the day, wine and beautiful flowers were offered to the invisible God whose only symbol — the Sun — shone far above, and clouds of incense went up to Him and disappeared, dissolved in the golden light of the sky.

In the old cults — in Egypt and in the rest of the world — the holy images were bathed and fed, and put to sleep as if they were living creatures; and this absorbed time and presupposed a complicated ritual. But here, worship was at once simpler and more spiritual. There were no statues, no pictures, no representations whatsoever of Aton: “The Unreachable One, whose presence fills the universe, abides not in the clumsy works of men,” had said the king; “images were invented only to help people to think of God, but nowadays men cling to them as if they were all in all, and do not wish to know the real God. The priests have become magicians and

the images have become idols, and I must suppress both, lest they kill the soul of the people.” It was then that he had dismissed not only the priests of Amon but those of all the national gods, closed the temples, and forbidden the use of all images save that of the Sun-disk with rays ending in hands. And that even was not to be worshipped, but only to stand as a sign reminding men of the power and kindness of the Almighty, manifested through the Sun.

There were many musicians, men and women, attached to the temple, and a special choir of blind singers whom the king had appointed because of their remarkable voices. He desired that even those who could not see the Sun should praise his radiance, for the Power within it is invisible; it is the Soul of the Sun. Akhnaton had written

*When Thou dawnest in the East,
All arms are stretched in Praise of Thy ‘Ka’ (soul)*

All the hymns that were sung at dawn, at sunrise, at noon and at sunset were inspired poems composed by the king himself. They contained no allusions to any mythology, no mention of any name, save that of Aton, no reference to any dogma, custom or history; but in simple and beautiful words they told the joy of light, the joy of life, and the glory of Him Who is infinite love and

Infinite beauty and Who shines in the Sun's splendour, and radiates in the Sun's heat. They told the vastness of the world and its unity within amazing diversity, and the oneness of life in man and beast and bird and every living thing, even in the plants of the marshes. They told the growth of the young bird in the egg and the growth of the baby in his mother's womb — the marvel of birth; they told the rhythm of day and night — work and rest — and the dance of the seasons ordained by the course of the Sun in heaven, and the sacred thrill with which all flesh salutes His rising.

The words were so simple, that the humble folk could understand them no less than the learned, and the ideas they expressed were accessible to foreigners as well as Egyptians. But the inspiration at the back of them was new. Neither in Egypt, nor in Syria, nor in Babylon, nor in any land that the Egyptians could think of, had the God Whom the king praised been revealed to men.

Behind the great temple and within the same enclosure, there was a smaller one, with only one open courtyard and one altar. On each side of its pillared gateway stood statues of the king and queen. And there were several other temples all over the City, and minor shrines in the beautiful gardens that lay on the south of the capital. They had pretty names. One that stood in a small island, within an artificial lake, was called "the House-of-Rejoicing"; another, specially

designed for worship at the time of sunset, was the “House-of-putting-Aton-to-rest.” There Queen Nefertiti herself presided over the sacred rites.

King Akhnaton found no objection in a virtuous woman taking a leading part in the public cult, though it was not the custom. “He who despises womankind sins against his own mother,” he used to say. And he was doing all he could to raise the condition of women. He had set an example by always appearing in public with the young queen by his side, and by hardly ever having himself represented without her. He loved her dearly, and ever since the early years of their married life — while he was still a boy — he had taken her into his confidence, spoken to her of the real God Whom he adored, and made her his first disciple. And though she had borne him no son, he had taken no other wives, as was usual with the Pharaohs.

Nefertiti loved him in return with all her heart, and admired him both for his graceful countenance, for his kindness and for his wisdom. She did not understand everything he said, but she believed in his message and had implicit faith in his success. “Aton will help His son to reveal His love to Egypt and to all lands,” she thought. And she was proud of her lord. She looked up to him as if indeed he were a god in human form, pleased to live with her on earth for the brief span of mortal life.

Mother of three little princesses, she was now about nineteen, and as beautiful as ever. She had a fair complexion and perfect features, tinted with indefinable melancholy. She knew she had a remarkable face, but she was not vain for her mind strove for a world of light, beyond visible beauty. One day, as a lady-in-waiting ventured to compliment her on her appearance, she said, pointing to her own reflexion in a golden mirror: "This face will be forgotten for ages while 'his' Teaching will still rule men's lives, and 'his' name will still live." But alas, she made a mistake; a marvellous bust of painted limestone in which an artist of the court had immortalised her features is nowadays the most popular masterpiece of Egyptian sculpture, and millions have seen it, or copies of it, and know the name of Nefertiti, while very few, besides scholars, know anything about King Akhnaton.

A few miles to the east of the City stood the white cliffs of the desert, an even range of limestone hills that glowed at sunset with hues of reflected gold and purple, long after the plain lay in darkness. There, in a desolate valley, the king had caused a tomb to be prepared for himself and for the queen. "And there shall be made for me a sepulchre in the eastern hills," ran the inscription on one of the great boundary-stones that limited the newly-founded capital; "my burial shall be

made there in the multitude of jubilees that Aton, my Father, hath ordained for me and the burial of the Queen shall be made there in that multitude of years.”

As time passed on, the Pharaoh caused other tombs to be hewn out of the neighbouring rocks for his most beloved courtiers and disciples. These were composed of several successive chambers, carved out in the live rock as it was the custom in Egypt. Massive pillars cut out of a single block and shaped like lotus-buds sustained the heavy roofs, while the walls were decorated with exquisite paintings and reliefs. The scenes they represented were taken from the life of those for whom the sepulchres were designed. They contained no image of the forbidden gods, not even of those who were supposed to protect the dead, but they often pictured the king and his family, for the courtiers put special emphasis upon their dealings with their royal lord. They portrayed him, not only in religious solemnity — with his hands lifted in prayer towards the Sun — but in the familiar attitudes of daily life: eating, resting, or playing with his children; listening to music, or talking affectionately to his wife while enjoying a cup of good wine that she poured out to him. Never before had any king of Egypt been represented in, such an unconventional style. But Akhnaton liked the pictures because they were true to life.

Some artists, however, in their zeal to please the

king, stressed every feature in his face, exaggerated every curve in his body so much so that their portraits remind us of the “futurist” art of today. In other times, those paintings would have been looked upon as sacrilegious insults to the divine majesty of the sovereign. But now the king followed with interest the evolution of the art he himself had inspired. He rewarded the painters of the new style, when their productions were really good; “the expression counts more than the lines,” he said to those who were inclined to be a little upset at the sight of too much novelty. And when the pictures were bad, he merely smiled at the distorted representation of himself.

In all the paintings and reliefs, however familiar might be the depicted scenes, one could always see the Sun-disk with beams ending in hands — the sacred symbol of Aton — radiating above the head of the king and queen; for God is present everywhere and at all times to those who know Him, and “life itself is prayer” as the Pharaoh often used to say.

The inscriptions in the new sepulchres contained no prayers to the gods of the netherworld, no magical formulas for the welfare of the souls of the dead, as were to be found in all Egyptian tombs, from time immemorial. They simply referred to the titles and career of the courtiers who were to be buried there, and especially to the favour the Pharaoh had shown them. “I was a man

of humble birth; I had never enjoyed the company of princes; but the king has raised me, because I hearkened to his Teaching,” ran one of the records of a dignitary’s life. “His Majesty has doubled me his gifts in gold and silver,” stated another inscription. Elsewhere, one could see the picture of a courtier looking up to the king and to the Sun — to the Sun, through the King, who bore his name and was like unto Him; and the words the man addressed to the God within the Disk were a song of praise to Akhnaton, the “Joy of the Sun”: “Thy rays are on Thy bright Image, the Ruler of Truth, who proceeded from Eternity. Thou givest him Thy duration and Thy years As long as Heaven is, he shall be.”

The king looked to the welfare of the labourers who dug out the tombs in the desert hills, as he did to that of the workers of the glass factories in the City. He built model villages for them, some of which have been discovered and excavated by modern archaeologists. Each workman was given there a separate house for himself and his family, an airy house with a parlour in front, bedrooms behind, and accommodation outside for the beasts of burden that helped him during the working hours. Naive paintings in bright colours — the product of the men’s inspiration during their leisure — decorated the walls of their homes. The workmen who

had large families were given extra rooms, that they might live as human beings.

Numberless charms and amulets picked up in the ruins of those settlements show that Akhnaton's rational Teaching never reached the labourers, or at least did not affect them. The saintly king, in fact, never tried to convert them. Not that he despised them; he counted among his best friends many a man of obscure birth. But he believed that the poor must first of all be treated as men and given the elementary comforts of existence, and then only taught what to think about the unknown. "Half of the world's superstitions would simply disappear if the rich and high-born did not exploit the people, and if there were no priests to take advantage of their wretchedness," he used to say.

To the south of the City lay beautiful gardens.

Canals and artificial lakes kept thy earth forever moist, and beds of flowers of every kind and colour, and trees of every shade of green thrived there. At the king's command the desert had bloomed into a fragrant paradise, a marvel of beauty, freshness and peace.

The lakes were full of pink and blue lotuses; and the canals were crossed by wooden bridges delicately carved, painted and gilded like precious toys.

In an island in the middle of one of the lakes the king

had built a small temple. He often came to worship there, alone or with the queen. As he stood before the altar, in the sun-lit courtyard, the sight of the whole gardens stretched before his eyes, through the broad doorway that led out of the temple. Between deep patches of green, the ponds reflected the ethereal blue of the heavens; on the large floating leaves of the water-plants, drops of dew sparkled in the dazzling light and subtle perfumes went up to the Sun from the newly opened flowers. A flight of pink ibis sailed through the sky with a flapping of silvery wings. There was beauty everywhere. Heaven and earth seemed as one divine dance of light. And Akhnaton was happy. The presence of God filled his heart. And he gave expression to his joy in some new hymn, composed in a flow of inspiration:

*How manifold are Thy works,
O sole God Whose Power none other possesses . . .*

There was a beautiful summer palace inside the gardens. It was built near a lake and had a richly decorated reception hall where the king often sat with official guests. Banquets were also held there in his presence, with all the artistic display that was common in Egypt at that time. The hall was decorated with flowers, and langorous perfumes floated in the air; pretty

dancing girls — the ornament of all ancient feasts — displayed their rhythmic skill, and musicians played and sang while delicious wines were served to the party in cups of gold. They sang love and merriment, the thrill of the passing minute, the illusion of time, and the reality of life. The king looked at the dances and was pleased, because they were lovely. He listened to the music and songs, and he enjoyed them. He was too pure to find any harm either in their languid tunes or in their words of passion. To him, they did but express, through the magic beauty of sound and verse, an essential stage of life. He enjoyed them as a lily enjoys a ripple of fresh water at its feet.

At times, he spoke pleasantly to his guests, listened to the stories they had to tell, smiled at their jokes. For he was not one of those gloomy philosophers who despise the tonic of laughter. His friendly manners made everyone feel at ease. Creatures on earth do not know how far away is the Sun; yet they are happy in his light. So the king's guests, who ate and drank and made merry in his presence, were hardly conscious how far above them all he was, how much more he knew and understood. Yet, they loved to be with him, without being able to say why.

Akhnaton used to spend long hours in the gardens

teaching his favourite disciples, or explaining the essentials of his simple and strange religion to foreigners who came to visit him. Among the courtiers, very few could really follow all what he said; and fewer still seriously tried to model their lives on his example. Most of them lacked the insight to recognise the same man in the inspired preacher of the One God, and the tolerant Pharaoh who presided over their banquets. Of the two, they liked the latter; but they listened to the former for the sake of court discipline and out of an innate veneration for royalty.

In the early morning or at dusk, after the service at the altar of Aton, the Pharaoh would take them to some particularly beautiful spot, to a place where there was a plenty of shade and a plenty of water, and from which one's eyes could command a broad view either of the Nile or of the desert. There they sat with him and heard from him of the marvel of unity at the bottom of differences — the mystery of God and creation. They used to put questions to him. He encouraged them to do so; not to accept all what he said just because it was he, the king, who said it, but to try to understand his teaching. "Superstition and mummery begin where reason ceases," he said, meaning by these words that there is only one step from the blind submission to religious authority, to the blind routine of meaningless rites and observances.

Once a zealous disciple was hesitating to ask about something that puzzled him. “I would not like to look as if I were criticising the actions of Your Divine Majesty . . .” he began, in a subdued voice. “Fear not,” said the king, “and tell me what is wrong with my actions. Where truth is concerned, there is no divine majesty save that of the living God.”

“It is about the bull of On; I was wondering . . .” the man continued. But he broke down in sheer confusion, without finishing his sentence. The king understood: a sacred bull — “the Sun incarnate,” as once the priests of On used to call it — had recently died of old age, and it had been buried with great solemnity by the Pharaoh’s orders, in the new royal City consecrated to Aton. The zealous disciple wondered why.

The king smiled. “I loved the dear old bull,” he said; “that is why I wished it to have here a decent place of rest. And if I gave it an unusual burial, it was not to prompt people to make once more a fetish of ‘sacred’ animals. I rather did it so that they may not forget that all living things are sacred, and that life is one.”

He paused for a while, and continued: “That was indeed the teaching at the bottom of all the care given to certain beasts in the name of religion, whether they be sacred bulls or sacred cats, ichneumons or crocodiles. Most superstitions do contain a kernel of sound doctrine; cast away that which is superfluous, that which merely

diverts your minds from truth; but keep the precious kernel; grasp the truth, and live up to it.”

Ever since the beginning of his personal rule in Thebes, Akhnaton had added to his official titles that of “Living in Truth.” It was all his Teaching, all his being, expressed in three words. And no man ever deserved such a glorious title more than he.

A courtier asked, as many were to ask ever since, up to the present day: “What is truth?” And the Pharaoh replied: “Truth is that which never changes.”

A flush of wind suddenly blew and the large fan-like palm-leaves rustled. A bird flew from a branch across the sun-lit sky. “Does not everything change all the time?” said one of the foreigners, an old man from the Aegean Isles. He had been a youth at the time the capital of Crete, magnificent Knossos, was sacked and burnt, some fifty years before. And since then he had travelled from the Black Sea to the Arabian desert and seen more changes than any man.

“Everything changes,” said the king, “but the laws according to which changes occur have been and will be for ever the same. They are the laws of being, and I would add ‘the laws of thought’ if thought were not inseparable from all conceivable existence. All the happenings of the universe, from the fall of a feather to the fall of a star are but the movements of one everlasting dance; the laws that link each movement to the other

and to the whole rhythmic scheme in time and space, are eternal. They are true.”

And as he said this, his face beamed as if he could actually behold the endless dancing harmony and hear the divine music of the stars spinning round and round.

There was a young enthusiast who had only recently joined the circle of the king’s disciples. He loved the Teaching, but many of its fundamentals yet escaped his knowledge. “They are true because God. Has established them,” he ventured to say, referring to the laws of being.

“On the contrary, it is because they are true that we say ‘God is’,” answered Akhnaton. “It is because they are true that we know that the world of change and strife is not all. It is because they are true that we behold Something indestructible behind all things that appear and vanish, Something that *is* behind all things that seem to be. That unique essence is what we call God. It is unknown — perhaps unknowable. But there are moments when one gets a direct glimpse of it in a way that words cannot explain, for as it is at the bottom of all things, so it is too at the bottom of our own being.”

The disciples remembered one of the king’s hymns to Aton:

Thou, Lord, art in my heart . . .

They were carried away by the young Pharaoh’s

enthusiasm, as he spoke of the inmost Reality. But, simple as they were, his words were far from clear to them. “If God is to be sought within ourselves,” said one of them at last, “why do we praise Him in the Sun?”

“It is not the fiery Disk, the visible Sun we praise, but the invisible Energy which radiates in it as light and heat — the Soul of the Sun,” said the Pharaoh. “That Energy is the very same which manifests itself in all life and lies at the bottom of our own soul, for light and heat and the spark of life are but different expressions of the same Principle: Radiant Energy, which is God. And we praise it as Aton — the Disk — because nowhere its manifestation is more glorious than in the Sun, and because the rays of the Sun are the sustainer of all life and the, source of all power in the world.”

He stopped speaking and remained for a while as though lost in thought. “Invisible Energy is at the basis of everything,” he continued; “visible and invisible, existence all proceed from it. That is why we call Aton ‘Father’ and ‘Creator’; that is why we sing to Him:

Thou art alone, but millions of vitalities are in Thee . . .

“I have told you the universe is as one everlasting dance, and so it is. Every different form of the one

invisible Energy depends upon a particular rhythm of its own,” he added, anticipating the result of scientific discoveries that were to take place thirty-three hundred years later. “The rhythm that produces light is not the same as that which produces heat, or sound. And at the root of life — the marvel of creation — there is also rhythm. When we feel that rhythm as distinctly as we see a visible object, then we realise God’s harmony within ourselves.” He paused again, and said: “There are forms of Energy of which we do not even suspect the existence; of which, perhaps, men will never know. Yet I tell you: each one of them corresponds to a different rhythm, but they are all manifestations of the One Essence which radiates in the Sun, both as heat and light, and which is Aton, the only living God, Whom I have tried to reveal to you.”

The Sun was getting hot. Akhnaton and his disciples got up, and walked towards the summer palace. There were important officials and foreign envoys waiting there to see the king.

And many marvelled at the king’s wisdom; for he was a youth little more than twenty, and this was not the first time that he had spoken of his God, in words so simple that one could not but listen to him,

and so extraordinary that, after hearing, one did not know what to think. The old men wondered, as Queen Tiy had done, in Thebes, years before: “Wherefrom did he acquire his strange knowledge, if not from the Sun himself, the divine Ancestor of his race?” And the young men said in amazement: “Others have conquered by the sword; he shall conquer by the spirit. From the beginning of time, no king of Egypt ever was as great as he.” And the foreigners said: “The Egyptians, in their pride, call all their Pharaohs gods; but this one is truly godlike.”

And as years passed, the world at large came to know that the young king “Living in Truth,” the ruler of Egypt, Nubia and Syria, and of the lands bordering the Upper Euphrates, was a man of divine wisdom. The friendly king of Mitanni was proud to count him as one of his relatives. And the king of Babylon betrothed his son and heir to one of Akhnaton’s daughters. He sent the little girl — then not more than five or, six, years old — a beautiful necklace of more than a thousand precious gems.

Many learned and wise men among the foreigner’s who had heard of the Pharaoh’s Teaching, recognised in the universal Being, Aton, the God Whom all religions praise under different names and with different symbols. And, for the first time, the idea that God is One dawned upon their minds. The Mitannians said: “He is no

other than the 'Lord of Rays' praised by our forefathers in the East, long long ago. And the Syrians and the Babylonians, said: "Does not the king of Egypt call Him 'Lord of Life', and 'the-One-Who vivifieth all hearts with His beauty, which is life'? Surely He is none but the god who dies, year after year and every spring rises from the dead, raising the dead world with him"; for the cult of such a god was, popular, both in Syria and in Babylon. And had Akhnaton's fame reached in his days the mystic shores of India, no doubt the men of that land would have said: "His God is none other than the Supreme Soul of the universe, Whom our sages seek in meditation."

But the world was not yet then as shrunken as it has become now. The world was ever so large. Each country, each region, more different from the neighbouring lands than we can imagine today, was like a separate world in itself.

Yet Akhnaton saw the unity of God above and within the world's diversity. "Many countries; but one sky and one Sun," he thought; "and one flow of life through all creation," he added, remembering the animals and plants, which all render praise in their own manner to divine light and heat—the Energy within the Sun.

And stretching his hands towards the sky, before the altar of Aton, he sang to the Sun:

*Thou Lord of them all, resting among them,
Thou Lord of every land, Who risest for them,
Thou Sun of the day, great in majesty . . .*

The Nile in the distance was like silver, and in the opposite direction glowed the barren cliffs of the desert — the hills of rest. The world seemed ablaze under the meridian Sun. And the king's face beamed. He knew how few understood his Teaching, even among his close friends. But he was young and God was with him. The rays of the Sun carried to him from heaven, the message of eternal life. His Teaching would live through ages "until the swan turns black and the crow turns white," as a courtier had once said. One day, ignorance and strife would cease; truth would conquer; and all the world would know God.

From all countries far and near, even from those of which the king had never heard — from Isles so faraway that that it would have taken years to reach them, from undiscovered continents — an endless song of praise rose already to the Sun. Many a time Akhnaton had listened to its echo in his heart. Confused and discordant as it was, it was the first hymn of all the human race groping in quest of the real God. And his would be the last, the song of a purified world in which science and religion would no longer remain separate, the hymn of a future

mankind that would perhaps take millenniums; to appear, but of which he was the forerunner and the seer.

And a thrill of boundless joy ran through his body as he thought of those distant glorious days to come.

Chapter V

Setting Sun

Years passed. In King Akhnaton's sacred City, the new capital of Egypt, everything was so beautiful and serene that time seemed not to exist.

Once Queen Tiy came all the way from Thebes to see her son; and there were great rejoicings on the occasion of her visit.

When the king and court had departed from the old capital, she had for a while wished to follow them. But she had not been able to bring herself to do so; she loved the old palace, the lake over which she had sailed with King Amenhotep, the groves he had planted for her delight and the splendid city — the first in the world — where she had spent all the years of her happy life.

She was glad to meet King Akhnaton again. He was still the handsome youth he had been at the threshold of manhood, with the same graceful body and delicate features. Only she could detect, at times, a stamp of

strenuous determination upon his serene face and more sadness than ever in his large jet-black eyes. She was glad to see her beautiful daughter-in-law and her grandchildren, whom she loved. When the king had left Thebes, he had only one child; now, he had six. "All daughters, unfortunately," the young queen said with a sigh, when alone with Tiy.

"An heiress can be as good as an heir; Egypt has had great queens in the past" answered the king's mother, by way of consoling her. But she remembered how much she had herself longed to have a son. "Of course," she added, "our times are hard; men have never been so unmanageable as they are now."

She spoke thus, for she had heard rumours of growing unrest in Syria and Canaan, and she knew more than the king did himself about the secret intrigues of the dispossessed priests of Amon in Thebes. She knew, for instance, that the former high-priest of Amon who was supposed to be dead, was in reality living in a hidden place and keeping constantly in touch with all sorts of conspirators, trying to overthrow the king and destroy his work.

She told her son all what she knew, and warned him against the increasing discontent not only of the priests but of many rich and powerful people who had sided with them.

"And what do you wish me to do?" asked the king.

“Well, either nip rebellion in the bud by having the evil-doers arrested at once, or else come to terms with them and gain time. The cult of Aton will triumph in the end only if you are tactful about it. If not . . .” She did not finish, but he understood: “If not, it will perish for ever.”

A shadow passed over his face, for her words were painful to him. Her anxious zeal was that of the men of the world for whom tangible achievements mean everything. He felt that with all her love she would never understand him. And his heart was grieved.

“Mother,” he said, “why do you speak to me like they all do?”

And he continued, after a pause “It is easy to nip rebellion in the bud. But would men become any the wiser if I did so? Those who now love me would fear me, and those who hate me would hate me all the more, and they would hate the name of Aton along with mine. Aton, my Father, is the Lord of all life; He is love and harmony; I cannot preach His glory through means of violence. Nor shall I compromise and hide that Truth which He Himself has revealed unto me, repent of what I have done and allow superstition and black magic to govern the hearts of the people once more, instead of the knowledge of God. I have done no harm. Why should I repent and come to terms? To silence the intriguers and gain time, so that my work may take roots in the land and be

lasting? But my work is established in Truth which endures forever. Am I to shake its very basis? Am I to dishonour the pure cult of Aton in order to that it may get the support of crafty men and thrive among the superstitious mob throughout Egypt and the Empire? It would be better then, ten-thousand times better, for my work to die at once and leave no trace; for what is the cult without the spirit of Aton? And what is the Teaching, without its soul?

“All men seek success,” said Queen Tiy; “don’t you?”

“I do too,” said Akhnaton, with a smile of happiness. “How many times have I not delighted in the dream of God’s Teaching spreading to the limits of the earth! How many times have I not craved for the advent of a new order in which knowledge and inspiration, reason and love, will go hand in hand; in which man will worship truth with even more fervour than he has worshipped fiction! I do not think it impossible, even if it takes thousands of years. But if, to assure myself that immense success among men, I must hide something of God’s truth, then I would rather fail, for Truth is worth more than success.”

Tiy admired the new City, the marvellous gardens, the palace and above all the temples. And she heard

her son explain his Teaching to those in whom he had placed his confidence and his hope. Her thoughts went back to the far-gone days when she had first spoken to him about-Aton, her favourite god. "How far his mind has evolved, since then!" she remarked within herself. She could hardly recognise the old solar deity whom she cherished in that immaterial Essence of all things which he taught men to worship as the only God.

She was happy to see that he had built several shrines to his ancestors within the sacred City. "It is good to honour the memory of the dead," said the king; we know not what death is, but we know that it is our forefathers who have made us what we are; it is they who have given us our body." He treated his mother with great deference and would have liked her to remain with him for good. But she wished to see Thebes once more, and died a short time after returning there. And when the king came to know that she was no more, he wept, for he loved her dearly; and all the court mourned for her.

The eldest of the king's children was about ten; the youngest was yet an infant. Though they were all daughters, Akhnaton loved them none the less. He often used to play with them or fondle them in his arms. At dawn, as he went out to greet the rising of the Sun he often stopped for a moment and watched the youngest one asleep by her mother's side. At the sight of the

delicate body, softly breathing, of the tiny mouth half open like a flower-bud, his heart overflowed with tenderness. "My little treasure," he whispered, as he put a kiss on the baby's head.

The little girl inherited from their father and mother, refined, features and a graceful countenance. I second one, Makitaton, was the prettiest and the cleverest. She used to take part in the daily service to Aton, in the great temple, rattling the sistrum with her sisters while the king stretched out his hand over the altar and consecrated the offerings. She was of a quiet nature. And while her sisters ran after each other around the flowerbeds, she often used to come and sit down near her father and ask him to tell her a story. She liked to put questions to him, and would talk to him for hours. She adored him.

Her health had always been very delicate. She suddenly fell sick. She had high fever for a few days and then seemed getting a little better. Queen Nefertiti, her mother, as usual watched over her day and night. One evening, she called the king and tried to put her arms around his neck, but was so weak that she hardly could do so. "I am going away," she said in a whisper, so gently that he alone could hear her; "you must not cry; I am happy. There was a heavenly smile upon her lips and a heavenly light in her eyes, as though she could see, through the vanishing daylight, the glory

of an eternal morning. And she softly died in her father's arms.

She was embalmed, as it was the custom, and put to rest in a side-chamber of the king's own tomb in the white cliffs of the desert. All the court was in sorrow for her; her sisters wept over her and missed her for a long time; but her father and mother never got over their grief entirely. An irresistible sadness filled the king's heart, each time he thought of his lost child. And though the same deep peace as before, did abide within him, there was some change: he had experienced how complete is man's helplessness, and the memory of it persisted him.

Akhnaton believed in the eternal life of the soul; though I he laid no special stress in his Teaching upon the problem of the hereafter.

"You know not what is life; why do you seek to learn what is death?" he often said to those of his disciples who questioned him about the survival of the soul; "you first learn how to live in accordance with the true laws of life." And at other times, he used to say, "If men spent as much time and energy in helping the living as they waste over vain mummeries supposed to better the fate of the dead, there would be less wretchedness in the world."

He spoke thus, for the idea of death and of service to the dead occupied an enormous place in the life of the Egyptians. And there was a great deal of magic connected with it. It was believed, for instance, that certain formulas, inscribed upon rolls of papyrus and placed in the tombs had the power of helping the dead in their progress in the next world, or even of altering divine justice in their favour, whatever be their sins.

King Akhnaton allowed none of these practices and strongly condemned the idea behind them. "It is foolishness and impiety on the part of men," he said, "to try to change the immutable laws of action and reaction with a view to further their petty interests." He forbade also the inscription, in tombs, of the time-honoured prayers to the gods of the netherworld, and the representation of those gods or of any others. But he changed nothing of that which he considered to be merely harmless customs. And under him, in Egypt, the dead continued to be embalmed as they had been for time immemorial. "Nothing is so futile as change for the sheer sake of change," the king had once told a courtier who talked at length against the popular faith in the old national gods, without much understanding the spirit of the new religion; "there is no need of destroying ancient beliefs unless one knows them to be false, or of abolishing ancient practices unless one replaces them by new ones more rational or more beautiful."

As time went on, disquieting news from Syria reached the king in his peaceful capital. Messengers brought letters from loyal vassals and from governors of cities complaining of rebellion right and left. A growing disaffection towards Egyptian rule was sweeping over the land. A crafty local princeling, secretly aided by the king of the Hittites, was leading the movement “Behold, this man is seeking to capture all the cities of the king,” wrote the most devoted of all the king’s vassals, Ribaddi of Byblos.

Akhnaton’s mind was troubled, for he loved peace and he had done what he thought the best to establish forever goodwill among men.

He had suppressed the corrupt priesthood that exploited the people; he had fought against the superstitions that divided them and taught them all to worship the Sun’s life-giving radiance and to love one another, and all living things. He had built in Syria a City of peace — a second Akhetaton — that his Teaching might spread from there and conquer the world. And now Syria was rising in arms against his gentle rule. And those who were loyal to him were in peril. “As a bird in the fowler’s snare, so is the city of Simyra; night and day the enemies are against it, both from land and, from the sea,” ran one of the letters recently brought to him in all haste. And in another message the elders of another Syrian town appealed: “Let not the breath of the king depart

from us, for mighty is the enmity against us, mighty indeed.”

The help that the king’s servants asked for was slight, and easy to give. “May it seem good to the king, the Sun of the lands, to send me three hundred soldiers and forty war-chariots,” begged the faithful Ribaddi, “and I will be able to hold the city.” Akhnaton had but a word to utter, but an order to give, and the Syrian rebellion would have been crushed forever and the Empire saved. But he did not utter that word.

He remembered the horrors of war during the days of his fathers, the punitive expeditions that the former Pharaohs led regularly against periodical outbreaks of what we would call, today, “Syrian nationalism” — the seven chiefs captured by King Amenhotep the Second, tortured and then slain before the image of Amon as a thanksgiving sacrifice for the victory of Egypt.

“Are all the gods cruel?” he had once asked his mother, nearly twenty years before, after hearing of those past atrocities.

“Not all of them; not He,” she had answered, pointing to the life-giving Disk — Aton — the visible face of the invisible God of gods. And ever since then, Aton had been linked, within his heart, with peace and love towards all creatures, including rebels.

Was he now to forget the gentle Teaching he preached all his life and hearken to the call of battle?

Was he to march into the disloyal lands and come back dragging behind him hordes of captives in chains, like the other kings of Egypt had done? He recalled the famous Hymn of Victory of his great-great-grandfather, Thotmose the Conqueror — the words of the god Amon to the triumphant king:

I have come; I have granted thee to trample over the great ones of Syria;

I have hurled them beneath thy sandals in their lands . . .

But his God was not that one. His God was not the god of Egypt alone, but of Syria too, and of the whole world; not a magnified tribal chieftain rejoicing in the blast of trumpets and cries of war, but the unknown Power that radiates in the Sun and keeps the universe together.

Akhnaton lifted his eyes to the sky. The Sun was there, high above the world and its turmoil, unreachable in the blue immensity — the fathomless depth of eternal peace. Its radiance pervaded the world.

*Thou fillest every land with Thy beauty;
Thou bindest them by Thy love, . . .*

. . .

Breath of life is to see Thy beams . . .

The king recalled the words of his own hymn to the One and only Lord of Life, Aton.

“If only they knew Him, there would be peace,” he said to himself as the practical exigencies of war thrust themselves once more upon his mind. He remembered the intrigues of the king of the Hittites to encroach upon his territories, the ambitions of his many disloyal vassals, the appeals for help of the few loyal ones, their mutual accusations of treason, their base flatteries, their conflicting lies, and all what he knew of the whole Syrian tangle.

“Greed, the source of war, has no place in the heart which He fills with His light,” he thought; “and even as smoke vanishes in the sunlit heaven and there is no trace of it, so do hatred and strife disappear in the love of Him. Indeed, if they knew Him, there would be peace on earth as there is in the pure blue sky.”

But they knew Him not, and there was endless conflict, as there had always been. The Pharaoh’s Teaching might have reached foreign lands. But nobody seemed to have grasped the spirit of it. And the king was sad. For the first time, he doubted the future of his mission. “What if I have come in vain,” he thought, “and men reject the Truth?” Yet, there was peace in his heart in spite of sadness. And he decided to abide by the law of love, which is the law of God, and not to wage war.

The head of the Syrian rebellion was killed in a

skirmish with local troops loyal to Egypt. But his sons succeeded him. One of them, named Aziru, surpassed his father in duplicity and intrigue no less than in military skill and in hatred of foreign rule. He aimed at unifying all Syria under the rule of his own people, the Amorites, one of the many races that dwelt in that land. He wrote to Akhnaton in the flattering style his father had used: "To the King, the Sun, my Lord, thy servant, the dust of thy feet. Beneath the feet of the King, my Lord, seven times and seven times I fall. Lo, I am a servant of the King and his house-dog and the whole land I guard for the King, my Lord." And at the same time, he promised his friendship to the king of the Hittites, if only he would help him to shake off the Pharaoh's domination. He intrigued with the king of Sidon and other princes, vassals of Egypt, and persuaded them to break their old bonds of allegiance and become his allies. And he took the cities that remained loyal to Akhnaton one after the other, slaying the Egyptian garrisons and driving the inhabitants into slavery.

News from Syria became more scarce, and even more disquieting. Rebellion now broke out in Palestine also, where the king's enemies were seeking to overthrow Egyptian rule with the help of the Habiru, the wild plundering tribes of the desert. From the Upper Euphrates down to Sinai, one by one the king's strongholds were stormed or forced to surrender, and his vassals

became the allies of his enemies. The tribute in gold and silver was no longer sent to Egypt. Only messengers came to announce each time the fall of some other fortress, and to hand over to the king more distressed appeals for help on behalf of Ribaddi of Byblos, or of the loyal governor of Jerusalem, the only two men who had not gone over to the rebels.

“The enemy does not depart from the gates of Byblos. Who will defend me?” wrote Ribaddi, in a pathetic letter. “If the king, my Lord, would only defend his servants, and send men and horses from Egypt speedily, then surely I would be delivered . . .” And the faithful governor of Jerusalem appealed in the same strain: “All the lands of the king, my Lord, are going to ruin. If no troops come this year, all the land of the king, my Lord, will be lost.” The caravan carrying the royal mail was robbed only some ten or fifteen miles from Jerusalem, and such was the fear of the Habiru and the lawlessness of the land that the governor could do nothing either to prevent it or to trace and punish the robbers.

Meanwhile, numbers of Egyptian and Syrian refugees — men, women and children — kept pouring into Egypt across the desert of Sinai, ragged and starving, having lost all what they possessed. They spoke of their plundered cities, of their fields and vineyards set on fire, of their dear ones slaughtered before their eyes or dragged into captivity, and of all the scenes of murder and outrage

that haunted their memory. Their story was but one long tale of horror. The people who heard it became indignant. And the dispossessed priests of Amon, always seeking after some new means of causing harm to the king whom they hated, seized this opportunity. They told the new-comers: "The king has betrayed

Amon, the great, god; no wonder he has betrayed you also, and let the enemies overrun Syria." And they told the dwellers in Egypt: "The wrath of Amon is upon this land because of the king's impiety. Soon the Amorites and the Habiru will be crossing the desert, and they will treat Egypt worse than they have treated Syria, for the gods have waged war on him who rose against them." And the people were in great fear, and they believed the priests.

The Pharaoh was deeply distressed when he heard of the plight of his subjects, for nobody loved the people more than he did. He ordered the governors of the bordering provinces to feed the hungry crowd and to accommodate each family the best they could. Physicians were appointed to attend to the sick. From the confiscated estates of the priests, land was given to all those who wished to settle. Many received even more than they had lost; but they still kept on murmuring. "The king has pity upon us now," they said, "but had he defended us, we would not have deserted our happy homes."

And as the rumours of disaster travelled down the Nile from mouth to mouth, a general disaffection towards the king and his God was felt in the country. Even in new capital consecrated to Aton, many of the court dignitaries lost their former fervour. Others continued to pay a verbal homage to the king's Teaching, but no longer loved it. "The Pharaohs of old," they whispered among themselves, "slew prisoners of war before the image of Amon, but they made Egypt the head of all nations. The present king does not worship idols; but he sacrifices the Empire to his one God — an unusual sacrifice indeed!"

When Ribaddi saw that his letters were of no avail, he sent his son to Egypt to beg for help. But the king hesitated to see him. "For years you have been hearing from me that Aton is the God of all life and that His law is love," he said to his courtiers; "and yet, you know Him not and desire war. How shall I get this young man to understand why I cannot send troops to his father or to anyone?" And when, after waiting three months, Ribaddi's son was at last granted an audience, he was actually amazed at the king's strange utterances about Aton being the God of all peoples as well as of Egypt. He left the capital in despair, thinking that the Pharaoh had lost his good sense. Some of the courtiers were not far from thinking the same, though they were silent about it. Others believed that an evil spirit, hostile to Egypt,

had entered the king and was leading him astray. “When the king was still a child, I was already told he would one day lose the Empire,” said an old official, recalling the statement of a priest who had been one of Akhnaton’s preceptors during his boyhood; “now, the prediction has come true and ruin is drawing nigh.”

Then came the news of the fall of Byblos and of the death of Ribaddi. The king’s faithful vassal had been captured alive; he had begged his victor to send him to Egypt, that he might spend there the rest of his days in peace. But the fierce Aziru, the head of the rebel forces, instead of complying with his request, handed him over to the Amorite princes, his enemies, who put him to death.

The king was profoundly grieved. If he had not helped his faithful servant, it was only because he looked upon war as a crime and did not wish to keep Syria under his sway by means of violence. But he loved Ribaddi. The idea that this man had suffered and died with the bitter feeling of being abandoned was intolerable to him. Moreover, he bore no enmity towards Aziru; he did not take his demonstrations of loyalty too seriously, but he could not blame him for fighting for his people’s independence, and he trusted him when he promised to rebuild the towns he had destroyed during the struggle.

He could not imagine Aziru handing over a helpless captive to his deadly enemies.

He sent the traitor a long indignant letter; “Dost not thou write to the king, thy lord: ‘I am thy servant’? Yet hast thou committed this crime . . . Didst thou not know the hatred of these men for Ribaddi? . . . Why hast thou not arranged for sending him to Egypt, as he had begged thee to do?”

To send Ribaddi to Egypt so that his accusing voice might be heard there was the last thing which Aziru would have done. But Akhnaton was too good even to suspect such an amount of deceit, meanness and cruelty as that of his unworthy vassal. The darkest side of human nature, suddenly thrust before him by hard facts, was to him an object of painful disappointment.

The news of the fall of Byblos shattered the whole country, for not only was Byblos a great city, but its connection with Egypt was very old; there were temples built there in honour of Egyptian gods fifteen hundred years before the conquests of King Thotmose.

The generals of the army, brought up in the warrior-like tradition of the past, could hardly hide their anger. “Now, Syria is lost for ever,” they said, “though it could have been saved.” How they would have rushed to save it and punish the rebels, if only the king had let them

do so! And at the thought of the triumphs of which he had deprived them their anger increased. They hated the king and his universal God.

The dispossessed priests went about cursing the one whom they already called “the apostate” and “the criminal” in their secret councils. It happened that the floods of the Nile had been insufficient, so that crops were meagre and famine threatened the land. The priests attributed both defeat and drought to the displeasure of the gods, especially of Amon, and they blamed the Pharaoh for the “bad Niles” as well as for the loss of the Empire, and stirred up the people’s minds against him on every occasion. But they hated him so much, that they welcomed even disaster, provided it hastened his downfall, and while their lips uttered words of patriotic despair a devilish glee coarsened their faces. “Now the apostate’s days are numbered,” they thought, “and we will soon rule Egypt once more and get back, our treasures — this time for ever.”

The people, ignorant and fickle as in all times, and frightened by what they were told to be signs of divine anger, ceased to love the best of kings. His beautiful cult was too simple and too rational to appeal to them; they had never taken to it. And the good he had done to them was quickly forgotten.

The courtiers grew more and more indifferent to the Pharaoh’s Teaching while keeping up an appearance of

loyalty to it as a state-religion. There was a very brilliant and learned disciple to whom the king had once said, some years before, on making him the high-priest of Aton, "No one has understood my Teaching as you have. . ." Now even that man began to doubt the value of a religion that was costing Egypt so much.

And Akhnaton was alone. He felt the rejection of those who had once loved him, the hostility of an entire nation, the disapproval of the whole world. Waves of hatred were swelling against him from all sides as a roaring sea; and there was no help for him, and no hope! He knew now that his work would perish. And his heart was filled with overwhelming sadness.

He raised his eyes to the sky and sought communion with his Father. The west was crimson. The Nile was a stripe of liquid gold between the dark palm-groves, and in the east, the white cliffs of the desert — the hills of rest — shone with opalescent shades of pink, deep blue and purple, against the transparent background of a violet-coloured sky. He watched the fiery Disk sinking behind the remote western hills. A serene glow rested upon his face. A sweet-scented breeze, soft like a caress brought to him now and then the simple music of a flute far away. A restful splendour pervaded heaven and earth and soothed the king's soul. "O Lord," he thought, "Thou art peace; Thou art love. May I never fail to proclaim Thy truth!"

And as he was absorbed in prayer, a messenger was announced to him. It was not the proper time to speak to the Pharaoh, but the man had insisted on seeing him at once because his errand was of great importance. He came from distant Tunip, a place in north-eastern Syria, and had already lost a lot of time in his journey, avoiding the highways that were infested with robbers and enemy soldiers. He handed over to the king a letter from the elders of Tunip — a desperate appeal for help.

Akhnaton took the clay tablet and read: “Who would formerly have plundered Tunip without being plundered by King Thotmose? The gods of Egypt dwell in Tunip, but we no more belong to Egypt. . . . And now, Tunip, thy city, weeps and her tears are running and there is no help for us. For years we have been sending messengers to our Lord, the king of Egypt, but there has not come to us one word of encouragement, not one.”

He spoke, and his voice slightly trembled. “I would like to be alone,” he said. The messenger left the room.

The king read the letter over again. The Sun had set. The cuneiform writing, cut deep in the clay, showed darker in the scarlet afterglow. Akhnaton could dimly see the last words of his pitiable subjects: “Tunip, thy city; weeps, and her tears are running and, there is no help for us . . .” Then, it all vanished, and night came. The air grew fresh. Soon millions of stars appeared out of the blue infinity and there was silence

on earth — such silence that it seemed as though life had ceased for ever.

*Thou settest in the western horizon,
And the land is in darkness, like the dead,*

the king had written in one of his hymns;

*The night shines with all its lights,
And the land lies in silence
For He who made them resteth in His horizon . . .*

Now, he tried to think of his God, but he could not. He looked up to the stars, but in their cold brilliance there was no answer to the agony of his soul. The cry of his far-away people was a torture to him. “Tunip, thy city, weeps, . . .” He could not forget it. And suddenly his spirits broke down, and he wept.

But he did not betray his heavenly Father. The next morning, when he stretched out his hands in praise to the Sun and greeted His rising, there was a strange fervour in his voice.

*Thou didst create the world according to Thy will:
 The foreign countries, Syria, Nubia, the land of Egypt;
 Thou settest every one in his Place,
 Thou suppliest their needs . . .
 Their languages are different,
 And different are their features, and the colour of their skin;
 For Thou hast made each people distinguishable from the other,
 . . .
 Thou Lord of them all, even in their weakness
 Thou Lord of the world, Who risest for them,
 Thou Aton of the day, revered in every distant land; Thou maker of life.*

It was the hymn to the God of the foreigners as well as of Egypt, to the One Who shines over all lands and wishes none to perish.

The king continued:

*Thou placest a Nile in heaven, that it may rain upon them,
 Watering their hills and their fields abundantly . . .*

*How excellent are Thy ways, O Lord of Eternity!
The Nile in heaven is for the foreign People,*

...

*The Nile that cometh from below the earth is for
the land of Egypt,
That it may nourish every field.*

It is difficult for us to realise, now, how novel was all this to the men of these far-gone times. Nobody knew, then, where the sources of the Nile were. They had only seen its mighty cataracts, and they believed the great river came leaping down from heaven in successive falls, as over a gigantic stair-case. Their fathers had always worshipped it as a god. But Akhnaton, rationalist as he was, told them that all rivers come from underground, the venerable Nile included. He told them that the rain that fertilises other countries, as the floods of the Nile do Egypt, is equally a gift of God — “a Nile in heaven” — drawn up from the rivers and from the sea by the power of the Sun’s rays and released in showers upon the thirsty earth. He taught them that there is no privileged nation, no “chosen people” in the eyes of the One God, and that those who, in their pride, say the contrary, conceive divinity in their own image and deny the real Lord — radiant Energy, the impersonal Essence of all being.

He had told them those things over and over again. They once used to listen to him with pious reverence. But with the news of the Empire being lost, the aggressively national spirit of old was growing strong again.

Some of the courtiers, while sitting in council with him, urged the king for the last time to wage war and re-establish the prestige of Egypt from the desert of Sinai to the Upper Euphrates. "It is time yet," they said. They were the descendants of those who had fought under his ancestors: Thotmose the Conqueror and Amenhotep, the Second — the terror of the Syrian rebels.

But gentle Akhnaton refused. He had not forgotten the desperate cry of Tunip, his loyal city; but even to save it, he could not renounce the Truth. "My fathers have conquered the Empire by the sword," he said; "I do not wish to keep it by the sword. It was the first time in history that such unusual words were uttered. There was a deep silence. "I know my generals are skilled in warfare and my soldiers ready," the king continued, looking towards those court dignitaries who insisted on fighting. "I know my chariots greatly outnumber those of the Syrians and that war, even now, would mean victory. But I have not any desire to shed blood in order to keep conquered land under my sway. The land does not belong to me, but to Aton, my Father.

And His law is not the law of the sword, but that of love and reason.”

Somebody asked him if he felt no sympathy for those who were still loyal to him in Syria.

“I certainly do,” he answered; and as he remembered the pathetic letter of the elders of Tunip and the death of faithful Ribaddi a shadow passed over his face. “I certainly do, but I cannot forsake the Teaching which Aton Himself has sent me to uphold in His name. They call me the “One-who-liveth-in-Truth”; I shall live up to that motto till the end . . .”

He paused, as though pursuing in his heart the vision of a lost dream, and then spoke again. “I wanted to rebuild the world according to God’s Truth,” he said; “my fathers have subdued many nations by force of arms; I desired to unite them in one brotherhood, through the love of the real God; nay, I wished the dwellers in the lands beyond the limits of the Empire — the men of all the world, over whom the same Sun sheds his rays — would one day hearken to the Teaching of reason and love, give up their false gods and their false boundaries, and with all their diversities, become one people under the one true Lord, Aton, my Father — *their* Father.

“But now, I see it has all been an empty dream, perhaps never to be realised among men, in any age. Let it be, if it cannot be helped. Even if one day the Teaching and the very name of Aton be forgotten, it will

still remain a fact that the beautiful dream has once been dreamt and Truth valued higher than vain glory.”

There was such inexpressible sadness in his voice and in his large black eyes that many could not withdraw a meed of sympathy for him. For a minute they set aside their patriotic grievances and only remembered how good their Pharaoh was and how he loved them.

Among them was Pnahesi the Ethiopian, a man upon whom the king had bestowed great honours for his devotion to his Teaching; he had given him in the hills of the desert a tomb more magnificent than that of any other courtier and he called him his friend. Pnahesi was now one of the few who still remained sincerely attached to Akhnaton. He wanted men to venerate his name all over the earth, and the loss of Syria was to him a matter of sorrow not for the sake of Egyptian prestige, but because he had nourished the hope that the king's Teaching would spread from there to remoter countries. As the Pharaoh was leaving the hall, he followed him and begged to speak to him “Is not the Empire necessary if the name of Aton is to be glorified?” he said. “Temples have been built to Him, and cities consecrated in His honour in the North and in the South. If the land be lost, then what will come of it all?”

But Akhnaton gazed at him with a weary smile. “You too, Pnahesi, have not understood me, though you love me,” he said; “Aton dwells neither in temples nor

in consecrated cities, but in the hearts of those who know Him. You do not know Him, Pnahesi — not even you.” And his face was more sad than ever.

Sorrow was undermining the Pharaoh’s health. His arms and legs and whole body had grown so thin that it was painful to look at him: his bones could be seen through the transparent linen of his garment. His face was so marred that one could hardly recognise him if not for the serene expression of his eyes. His cheek-bones were jutting out. Two deep wrinkles were visible on each side of his mouth. There was so great a change in all his appearance that those who were still attached to him began to fear for his life. Some suspected that his enemies had been trying to kill him by slow poison; others believed his pitiable thinness was the result of a wasting disease.

There was a change in his ways, too, as if he had ceased to belong to this world. His entire attention seemed to be concentrated on something within himself. He hardly spoke, even when urged to do so. To those who asked him why he no longer sat among them and explained his Teaching as he did before, he answered simply: “I have nothing more to say.” Sometimes, he would add with a penetrating look full of infinite sadness — as if his eyes, staring searchingly into his courtiers’

souls, could read there nothing but an idle curiosity. “Why do you lie to me and say ‘We want to know about the Teaching’? I have given you whatever truth I could express. But you did not want it.”

The troubles in Syria were coming to an end; there was no territory left to be lost. With resignation, Akhnaton heard the last messenger announce to him the fall of his last fortress. It was not the loss of the Empire that saddened him but the world’s indifference to his beautiful Teaching — the negation of all his dreams.

His treacherous vassal, Aziru the Amorite, whom he had summoned to Egypt years ago, appeared at last before him. He was now the master of the whole of Syria. He sailed up the Nile in gaudy apparel and arrived in the sacred City with a large number of retainers. He expected to impress the courtiers. But he was himself dazzled by the splendour of Akhnaton’s palace and amazed at the unearthly detachment with which the king spoke of state affairs as though they no longer concerned him. He wondered how, with such incredible wealth at his disposal, the king of Egypt had done nothing to defend his dominions in Asia. “With so much gold,” he said to himself, “one could have bought the world. And this monarch did not even send a battalion of mercenaries to protect his land.”

Akhnaton bore no grudge against him and recognised his domination in Syria. “Rule over them, since it is your desire and theirs,” he told him, remembering how readily most of the Syrian princes had responded to Aziru’s call and sought his alliance. But as he recalled in his mind the death of Ribaddi, he could not help mentioning it. “You have committed a crime,” he said calmly to the Amorite, controlling his feelings; “I do not desire your death in return; vengeance is the delight of the weak. Yet remember that, as long as I live, the memory of my devoted servant whom you gave away to be tortured and killed will remain painfully vivid, as a wound in my heart.”

But Aziru could not perceive what an amount of suffering there was in the Pharaoh’s words, or if he did, it made no difference to him. He was only glad to go back to Syria as a practically independent ruler, and thought nothing more of his brief interview with the noblest of kings.

As his health was growing feebler day by day, Akhnaton married his eldest daughter, then aged twelve, to a young man of royal blood named Smenkhkara, and proclaimed him co-regent. In ancient Egypt, the eldest daughter of the king was the heiress to the kingdom and the prince whom she wedded ruled by her right.

Smenkhkara, wishing to show his dependence upon his father-in-law and his obligation to him, took, in official documents, the title of “beloved of Akhnaton.”

As for the Pharaoh himself, he left his palace in the City for his summer residence in the southern gardens, and remained practically confined there. He knew that his end was not far away. He spent his last days peacefully. Queen Nefertiti waited upon him. She was perhaps the only one who loved him as much as and even more than before. She had never questioned the divine inspiration of his Teaching, never discussed his actions. She loved him and admired him and to her all what he did or said was perfect. Even after the tragic disappointments through which he had gone, she could not believe that the Truth he had given to the world would be lost for ever. She knew the tenacious hatred of the priests, the cowardice of most of the courtiers, the forgetfulness of the people, and could foresee something of the terrible reaction that was to sweep over Egypt after the king's death. Still, in her love, she imagined for him, after temporary oblivion, endless centuries of glory in the memory of men.

Akhnaton was too weak to speak much, but he watched her come and go and was happy. As in the early days of their marriage, when they were children, she brought him roses from the flower-beds and fresh lotuses from the ponds, that he might smell them. She

poured out to him a cup of good old wine, to strengthen his spirits. She disposed his cushions nicely, that he might sit up on his couch, and see from the terrace adjoining his room the whole expanse of the gardens, the desert, reddish-yellow like a lion's mane, and the eastern hills behind which the Sun was rising. She fanned him herself, while he slept, during the hot hours of the day.

The king was not well enough to go and carry on the daily service in the lake-temple, as he once used to do. But an altar was erected to Aton upon one of the terraces of the summer palace and there, as long as he could stand, he offered incense and flowers and prayed in presence of the queen and of one or two intimates, at sunrise and sunset.

But that also he could not do indefinitely. A time came when his ill-health forced him to remain lying in bed. Then, the queen would draw the curtain that hung before the door of his room and let him see the open sky. He did not speak, but his large dark eyes looked at her intently, and he gave her a faint smile that meant: "How well you know all what my heart desires!"

He gazed at the sky for hours, as though forgetting all that was around him. The Sun slowly rose higher and higher and then declined, following his eternal course. Occasionally, a flight of birds with silvery wings sailed through the boundless blue abyss. From the couch where he lay, the king could see neither the gardens

nor the desert, nor the Nile, nor the hills in the distance. His eyes could embrace nothing but the deep blue sky that the Sun filled with his glory. He felt as though his very soul were melting away in the dazzling abyss, becoming one with that infinite expanse of nothingness and light, which was all he could see. Years before, while yet a child, he had felt a similar thrill at the sight of the sky. Perhaps there was nothing more to feel in a man's life. The dazzling abyss was the visible reflection of that invisible and unnamable Reality which he knew to exist and had striven in vain to express, all his years.

Was that Reality to remain for ever unexpressed? Would the mysterious oneness of heat and light be forgotten, when he passed away? Would the law of love and reason, that he read in heaven, be also forgotten? he thought sometimes, after his long meditations. It seemed as if the clearer his intuition of the supreme truth grew, the more he became aware of the impossibility of expressing it.

One day, as his strength was rapidly declining, he called the queen before dawn.

"I am here," she said softly, "Do you need anything? Why don't you sleep? It is night still." From the open door one could see the dark starry sky, rent in two by the Milky Way.

Akhnaton smiled at his wife. He stretched out his

hand — so thin that it looked already like the hand of a skeleton — and took hers. He knew his end had come.

“To-day, I shall greet His rising for the last time,” he said calmly. “I wish to praise Him standing up. It is night still, but dawn will soon come. I must get ready.” And before she had time to overcome her emotion and give him an answer, he added in a voice in which there was no sadness and no weakness: “My time has come. I shall soon be forgotten. It does not matter. The Sun will continue shining, as beautiful as ever. Through him I have had a glimpse of the Only One.”

Nefertiti’s eyes were full of tears. “You must not think they will forget you,” she said tenderly, as with a loving gesture she helped him to sit up; “how can anybody forget you?”

“But they will,” the king answered, in a tone of gentle detachment. “And what difference does it make? Truth is independent of persons.”

The queen gazed at him, and then at the starry sky. His face and body were so frightfully thin that she shuddered. But there was a happy smile upon the pale lips, and in the eyes that had seen God there was the same peace as in the deep glowing heavens.

“May be, you are right,” she said at last, thoughtfully; “They will curse you and force the world to forget your name. But never, never shall they destroy

the light that you brought from heaven. For centuries the world may live in ignorance, and strife may spread from sea to sea, all the more terrible as time goes on. But one day will come when the Truth you proclaimed will be known once more; and men of unknown countries will look upon you as more than a man.”

She spoke as though a sudden inspiration had possessed her. “You have lost an empire for the sake of Truth,” she continued; “And one day Truth will triumph. As surely as the Sun will rise, I tell you : your Teaching will never die; it is eternal. Even if they did forget you, they would have one day to rediscover it.”

The sky grew paler in the East. “It is time,” the king said; and gathering, in a supreme effort, all the strength and youth he had left, he got up, bathed and dressed. Then he decked the altar with flowers and waited for the Lord of Rays.

The Sun rose in majesty behind the white cliffs of the desert, the barren hills where the king was soon to rest. The warm beams, falling straight upon Akhnaton’s face, poured a new life into him. His eyes drank the divine light. His lips smiled to the Sun as a child to its father. He threw incense into the fire that burnt upon the altar, and as the sweet-scented coils of smoke rose to heaven, he stretched out his hands and intoned the hymn:

*Glorious is Thy rising in the East,
Living Aton, Lord and beginning of Life . . .*

He sang the beauty of the Sun, the joy of life in every man, beast and bird, the miracle of fertility . . . For months he had not shown such youthful enthusiasm. Then, in a flash, he remembered the agony he had suffered; the ruin of his body; the indifference of men to his message. But what of it all? He knew his God and that was enough. And one person at least had put in him all her confidence and made his knowledge hers through love of him.

With joy, as though he could already behold the invisible Soul of the Sun beyond the gates of eternity, he said, raising his hands to the East for the last time:

*Thou, Lord, art in my heart,
And no one knoweth Thee save I, Thy Son,
To whom Thou hast given understanding of Thy Power.*

. . .

*When Thou laidest the foundations of the earth,
Thou didst reveal Thy will to Thy Son, who came forth from Thy
substance,
And to Thy beloved daughter, Nefertiti,
Living and young for ever . . .*

And, having spent his strength, he sat, exhausted,

upon the steps of the altar. The queen rushed to him. Lifting his eyes, he saw her once more dimly, as through a veil. Then he let his head drop upon her lap, and expired peacefully. The Sun embraced him for the last time. And the queen softly closed his eyes. He was only twenty-nine years old.

The Pharaoh's body, once embalmed, was wrapped in double sheets of pure gold and buried in the sepulchre prepared for him in the hills of the desert. At the foot of the coffin, inlaid with precious stones, was inscribed a prayer he had composed himself in adoration of the God for Whom he had lost everything:

I breathe the sweet breath which comes forth from Thy mouth. I behold Thy beauty every day. It is my desire that I may hear Thy sweet voice, even in the north wind, that my limbs may be rejuvenated with life through love of Thee. Give me Thy hands, holding Thy spirit, that I may receive it and live by it. Call Thou upon my name unto eternity, and it shall never fail.

On the top of the coffin, the name and titles of the king shone in bright hieroglyphics:

The beautiful Prince, the Chosen-one of the Sun, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Living in Truth, Lord of the Two Lands, Akhnaton, the beautiful Child of the living Aton, whose name shall live for ever and ever.

Chapter IV

The Sun Beneath the Horizon

The religion of the one impersonal God was swept out of Egypt. The whole country returned to its legions of local deities. And the priests of Amon became more powerful than ever.

After the ephemeral reign of Smenkhara, they set up as a puppet king a young noble without any personality or will of his own, and married him to Akhnaton's third daughter in order to legitimise his claim to the throne. They forced him to change his name from Tutankhaton — “the living image of Aton” — to Tutankhamon — “the living image of Amon” — and to transfer the seat of the government from the City consecrated to the God they hated, back to the old capital, Thebes, the city of Amon.

They re-established the cult of Amon in all its former splendour. Solemn sacrifices were again offered

in honour of the national god all over the land, and miracles were performed in his name by his clever servants to impress the ignorant populace.

King Akhnaton's body was taken away from the sepulchre in which he had repeatedly expressed his desire to rest, and put into the tomb of his mother, in the Valley near Thebes. But the priests did not let him remain there long in peace. They had the tomb re-opened once more and the mummy of Queen Tiy removed to another place. They considered it a disgrace to her, so they said, to lie by the side of her beloved son, whom they called a heretic and a criminal. The gentle king had never persecuted them during his lifetime. But they pursued him with their hatred even beyond death, and with a refinement of cruelty, sought to torture his immortal soul. It was believed in ancient Egypt that a nameless soul, deprived of the comfort of funeral offerings and of prayers for the dead, found no rest in eternity. Accordingly, the priests erased the name of Akhnaton wherever they found it, even from the ribbons of gold foil that encircled his mummy, that he might, as they thought, wander in hunger and agony for ever and ever.

The City of peace which he had built, they caused to be systematically ruined. Each of its monuments was pulled down stone by stone and the fragments re-used in the construction of other buildings in Thebes and elsewhere, so that nothing was left of it. The animals

which the king had loved were abandoned to die slowly of hunger, in their stables and kennels, in the midst of the deserted place, where their bones have been found by modern excavators. The beautiful gardens were left to decay. In a short time, successive waves of drifting sands had covered over the entire expanse of the holy City. There was nothing more to be seen of it. And men began to forget the very site where it had once stood.

All traces of Akhnaton's work were effaced. The priests of Amon, in an explosion of ferocious joy, composed a hymn to their god—a hymn of hate that has come down to us:

*Thou findest him who transgresses against thee;
Woe to him who assails thee!
Thy city endures,
But he who assails thee falls . . .*

. . .

*The sun of him who knows thee not goes down, O Amon
But as for him who knows thee, he shines.
The abode of him who assailed thee is in darkness,
But the rest of the earth is in light . . .
Whoever puts thee in his heart, O Amon,
Lo, his sun dawns.*

A curse was proclaimed throughout Egypt and what was left of the Empire, and the memory of Akhnaton was anathematised. The severest penalties were

pronounced against any man who would henceforth utter his name. In official documents, whenever they could not do without mentioning him, he was referred to as “the apostate,” “the heretic,” or “the criminal.” Horemheb, the Pharaoh who succeeded Tutankhamon, dated his reign from the end of that of Amenhotep the Third, Akhnaton’s father, so that no trace of the rationalist king or even of his sons-in-law might remain in history.

And the world forgot him completely.

Nefertiti alone continued to cherish his memory as if he had been living still. “He is living,” she used to say; “he can never die.”

She lived an austere life, in retirement, thinking of him and waiting to meet him again after death.

She saw one Pharaoh succeed another, and grew old. She heard people speak of new military expeditions against Syria, of the rebuilding of the Empire which her husband had sacrificed to his lofty principles. But the victories of Egypt did not over-impress her. She remembered with bitterness how the priests — the actual rulers of the land — had treated the one whom she loved during his life and after his death. And it pained her still more to think of the behaviour of those courtiers who had once called themselves Akhnaton’s disciples, but who hastened to deny him and his Teaching the very moment his enemies came to power. “Egypt has persecuted the best

of kings,” she said in her sorrow; “she will never be great again, unless and until she repents of her crime and honours him once more.”

People remained silent, for nobody believed that such a day could come. But Nefertiti did believe that it would. “For centuries, perhaps for milleniums he may lie in oblivion,” she said; “but one day, in exchange of the lost Empire, he will get dominion over souls. When, somewhere in the world, even one person’s life will be transformed through the love of his memory, then the day of his glorification will dawn and a new era begin.”

And it came to pass, indeed, that Egypt never recovered her pristine greatness. For a time, she struggled to rebuild her empire, but soon new warring nations rose to power and she was overrun. The priests of Amon, who from king-makers became kings, could do nothing to stem the tide of decay. And four hundred years after Akhnaton the Assyrians rushed through the land as a whirlwind and left Thebes a heap of smoking ruins. Then the Ethiopians came; then the Persians, then the Greeks, then the Romans, then the Arabs, then the Turks, then, finally, the French and the British. Never more did a prince of the soil wear the Double Crown of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Once, while the Greeks were the masters of the land,

their king asked an Egyptian priest, named Manetho, to write a list of the Pharaohs of old and of their deeds. Manetho's book, written in Greek, was for long the only source of information the outside world had about the ancient kings of the Nile Valley. But Akhnaton was not on the list; his memory had been so thoroughly destroyed for centuries that nobody knew of him in Manetho's days.

Truths similar to those he had taught — the oneness and universality of God, the immutable order of nature, the law of love — were preached later on by other great souls. They became common tenets of international religions or of world-renowned philosophies. But nobody knew that Akhnaton had preached them centuries before.

The body of the world's first rationalist still lay in the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, in the desert near the ruins of Thebes. When the priests had left the tomb, after effacing the king's name from the coffin and from the gold ribbons around the mummy itself, they did not care to seal it properly; so that the dampness from the Nile, slowly penetrating the lonely chamber through an opening, caused the embalmed flesh to decay. The king's body had become a skeleton. And years passed on; and the world changed its face many times.

A day came when, in a land that was hardly known in Akhnaton's time, men of science discovered and demonstrated a fundamental law of existence which they

called the principle of conservation of energy. “Heat and light,” they said, “are only two different manifestations of the same unknown agent, Energy, which is at the basis of everything. Motion, sound, electricity, hertzian waves . . . are all different manifestations of the same. And the universe is but one divine harmony in which a different rhythm — a different length of wave — corresponds to each quality of existence.” But nobody knew that an inspired youth within his teens had been gifted with the intuition of that very same truth, three thousand three hundred years before, and that he made it the basis of a Teaching which would have been the first scientific world-religion, had men accepted it.

It is only a little more than fifty years since the City that Akhnaton built was discovered and excavated by modern archaeologists. Then for the first time, through fragments of his hymns found in the tombs of the nobles, in the hills near the City, a few people began to get an idea of his greatness. Sir Flinders Petrie, the famous English Egyptologist, paid to him a magnificent tribute. “If this,” he writes, “were a new religion invented to satisfy our modern scientific conceptions, we could not find a flaw in the correctness of Akhnaton’s view of the energy of the solar system . . . ; he had certainly bounded forward in his views and symbolism to a position which

we cannot logically improve upon at the present day. Not a rag of superstition or of falsity can be found clinging to this new worship.”

In 1907, two archaeologists, Weigall and Ayrton, discovered the remains of the young king in the tomb where they were put after the return of the court to Thebes. They lie now in the Cairo Museum.

There are few things in history as beautiful as Akhnaton’s short life. Yet, the world at large does not know of him. Much noise has been made, in recent years, around the name of his insignificant son-in-law, Tutankhamon, for the sake of a few pieces of gilded furniture found in his tomb. But no public recognition has been given to the king who sacrificed the greatest empire of his time to that very ideal of peace towards which nations are still striving in vain. By a sad irony of fate, the Pharaoh who was a great thinker, a great artist and a spotless soul, enjoys no popular fame.

We are growing weary of science without God, as well as of fictitious religions without a scientific background. The harmonious synthesis to which we aspire, the blending of scientific knowledge and religious inspiration, has been conceived thirty three centuries ago by a man of eternal vision, to whom knowledge and love, truth and beauty were identical. Akhnaton is preeminently the first modern man, whose Teaching is in advance even of our present age.

