

# AN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN COFFIN IN THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM.

Translations and Explanations of the Hieroglyphs

BY

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(Plate xxvii.)

One of the most interesting and valuable objects in the Archaeological Collection of the Australian Museum, Sydney, is undoubtedly the wooden box-shaped ancient Egyptian coffin which was found some few years ago, in a tomb, at a place in Upper Egypt called Beni-Hasan. According to the printed descriptive label attached to the glass containing case, it seems that when the tomb was opened up it was discovered that the grave had been rifled and the mummy removed from the coffin. It is quite possible that the latter itself has suffered somewhat as the result of the depredations of the unknown thieves, for the inscriptions and paintings are in a rather poor state of preservation; indeed, in some instances, the hieroglyphs are entirely obliterated.

The style of the coffin shows us that we can date it to the 12th Dynasty, that is to say, to somewhere about 2,300 B.C., at which time Amen-em-hat III. was the ruler of Egypt. This king carried out large irrigation works in connection with the great natural reservoir in the Fayyum, which was known to the Greeks as Lake Moeris. He is also thought to have built the Labyrinth, which the old historian Herodotus says contained twelve courts, and three thousand chambers, one thousand five hundred above ground and one thousand five hundred under ground, and covered an area about 1,000 feet long and 800 feet broad; this huge building was dedicated to the crocodile-god Sebek, and many sacred crocodiles were buried in a place specially set apart for them.

At the early date of which we are speaking the great Babylonian Empire had not been founded; the whole of Europe—with the exception, perhaps, of the isles of Cyprus and Crete, which were in the Early Bronze Age—was in the Stone Age culture; while the great Aryan influx from west central Asia did not take place for at least another two hundred years. The Hebrews, themselves, must have been simply wandering tribes living in Bedawin fashion amid the vast sandy wastes of Northern Mesopotamia, where they possibly originated, and worshipping the tribal god Yaweh, whom, at a later date, they identified with the God of the Universe. As a matter of fact, it is generally held that it was not until the time of Khammurabi, a king of the First Babylonian Dynasty (about B.C. 2,000) that the traditional tribal leader Abraham led the Hebrews down from Northern Mesopotamia, through Syria, where he defeated the five kings, to Southern Canaan.