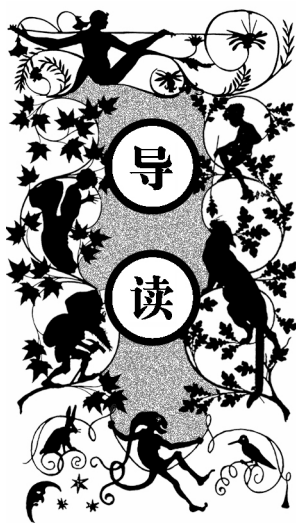


5. 暂留埃及

A Home in Egypt



犹太人本是淳朴的牧人，但在异国的长期生活让他们开始喜欢起大城市的奢侈，忘记了他们的祖先。

后来，埃及经历了改朝换代。犹太人处境尴尬，备受仇恨和蔑视。作为不受欢迎的新来者，他们与埃及人之间爆发了种族暴乱。

是去？是留？犹太人犹豫不决地过了几百年。直到摩西这位伟大的领袖把他们团结起来，率领他们离开埃及，回到迦南。

*B*UT THE JEWS WERE ORIGINALLY A SIMPLE PEOPLE OF SHEPHERDS, AND CITY LIFE IN A FOREIGN LAND WAS NOT GOOD FOR THEM. RAPIDLY THEY BECAME EGYPTIANISED AND INSTEAD OF BEING FREE AND INDEPENDENT MEN AND WOMEN, THEY BECAME COMMON LABOURERS WHO WORKED FOR THE KING OF EGYPT AND WHO WERE TREATED AS SLAVES

UNTIL a hundred years ago, we could not read the language of the Egyptians. As soon as the key to their hieroglyphics (or sacred script) had been discovered, a vast new store-house of historical information was opened up to

us. Now we no longer depend upon the accounts of the Old Testament for our exclusive knowledge of this period.

In the fifteenth century before the birth of Christ, it seems that Egypt had been conquered by a tribe of Arabian shepherds, who were called the Hyksos. They were of the same Semitic stock to which the Jews themselves belong. As soon as the Hyksos were the masters of the entire land, they built a new capital, many hundred miles away from the old Egyptian centre of Thebes. Then they settled down to enjoy themselves. For almost three hundred years, they remained the undisputed masters of the valley of the Nile.

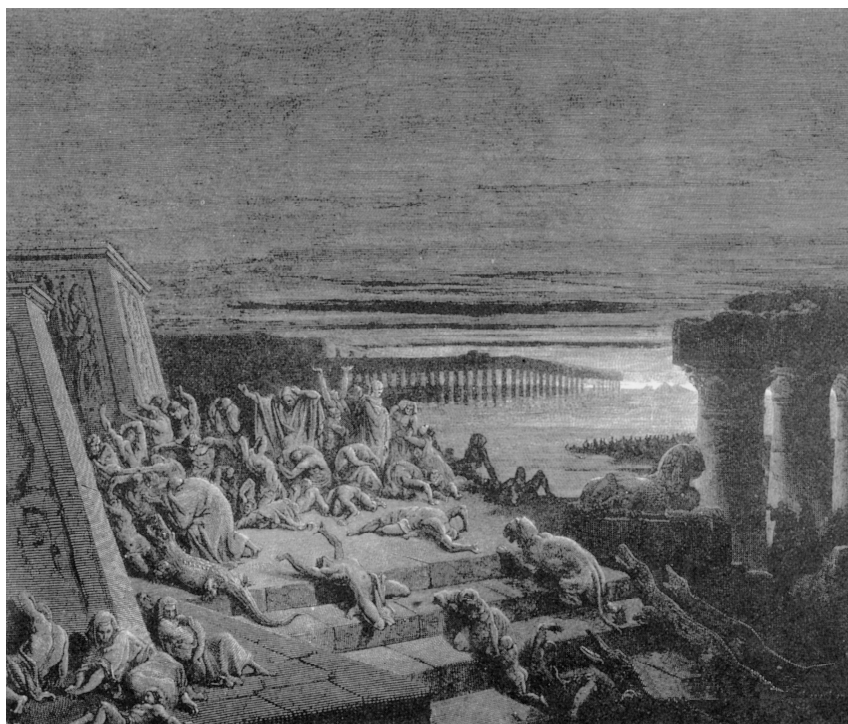
Joseph came to Egypt when Apepa was Pharaoh. But this king was the last ruler of the Hyksos dynasty. After many unsuccessful attempts, the Egyptians finally succeeded in getting rid of their oppressors. Under a king of their own, called Ashmes (a native of the former capital of Thebes), they drove away the Hyksos and once more regained control of their own country. This, of course, made the position of the Jews a very difficult one. They had been the close friends of the foreign conquerors. Joseph had been a conspicuous figure in the court life of the Shepherd Kings. He had been a high state official and he had shown great favour to his own relatives, at the expense of the natives. All this the Egyptians remembered long after they had forgotten how Joseph had saved their grandfathers from starvation. And of course, they showed it in their conduct towards the Jews, whom they treated with hatred and with contempt.

As for the descendants of Abraham, the long sojourn in the pleasant valley of the Nile had proved a very mixed blessing.

The Jews thus far had been shepherds, accustomed to the simple life of the open fields. Now they had come into contact with a people who preferred to live in cities. They saw the luxury and the comfort of the palaces of Thebes and Memphis and Sais. Soon they began to despise the rude tents in which their ancestors had lived contentedly for so many centuries.

They sold their flocks, they left their farms in the land of Goshen, and they moved to the towns.

But the towns were already overcrowded.



埃及人遭受黑暗之灾

The newcomers were not wanted. The Egyptians regarded them as people who had come to take the bread out of their own mouths.

Soon there was bad feeling between Jews and Egyptians. Ere long, this showed itself in unpleasant race riots.

The Jews were given the choice of becoming Egyptians or of leaving the country.

Of course, they tried to compromise, as every one would have done under the circumstances. This was even worse. The situation was becoming intolerable for both sides.

A famine had originally brought the brothers of Joseph to Egypt. Their descendants often talked of a possible return to the land of Canaan. But the journey was long and difficult. The fleshpots of Egypt were well filled. Life in the desert would be terrible. Life in the cities, on the other hand, was very pleasant.

The Jews found it very difficult to make up their minds.

They feared the uncertainty of the future more than the perils of the present. And so they did nothing. For the moment, they remained where they were, in the slums of the Egyptian cities.

But the moments grew into days and the days grew into years, and the years grew into centuries, and everything remained as before.

Then a great leader arose, He gathered the different Jewish tribes into one nation. He took them away from the too fertile fields of Egypt, where life was made for ease (but where ease did not make for strength of character), and he guided them back to the land of Canaan, which Abraham and Isaac and Jacob had regarded as their true home.