

EGYPT OF TO-DAY.



THE Nile rises, and the thirsty soil of Egypt is covered with its fertilising waters. Life and fruitfulness, labour and wealth, attend upon this annual flood. We may fancy Middlesex an almost rainless country—lying for the most part below high-water mark—and the population of London dependent upon its agricultural produce.

Instead of the salt-water tide rising every day, imagine that flow reversed and changed into a fresh-water flood which poured from the Cotswold Hills but once a year. With what joy, what hopes, what prayers our population would watch the rising river! with what fond ceremonial they would let the waters into artificial canals and courses, to be led hither and thither for the purposes of agriculture! If the waters were not high enough for the irrigation of their lands, how they would talk of a "bad" Thames, as do the Egyptians of a "bad" Nile! The stream of the great river is the life-blood of Egypt. The reign of aridness and sterility is undisturbed where the Nile-water can neither reach nor be carried, and nothing is more remarkable in the superficial aspect of the country than the sharp transition from blooming verdure and rich production to the lifeless sands of the desert, which marks the line of liquid fertilisation. Over those sands, men and their cattle travel in much the same garb and manner as in the days of the Pharaohs; as it did then, so now the Nile runs and rises; but we mark in its flow that law of perpetual change which governs the universe. The Nile itself has changed since Herodotus wrote. The apex of the Delta was then six miles higher up the stream than it is now. In 2,300 years the force of the flow has pressed back this point to its present position near the village of Om-el-Dinar. But ceremony and religious observance still attend the rising of the Nile. Hope fixes the maximum rise at twenty-three feet; fear looks for famine following a "bad" rise of only nineteen feet; and when the waters mount to the three-and-twenty feet, which has been the happy average of seven of the last ten years, then there is alarm lest the height should grow much greater, and the rich Delta be entirely submerged.

The course of ages has altered the circumstances of Egypt, but has not affected the importance of the Nile in regard to agriculture. As a water-way, the glories of the historic river have, however, passed to the prosaic and unpicturesque channel of the Suez Canal. Englishmen will never cease to regret the

unwise policy of their rulers which discouraged them from undertaking that great enterprise. Whatever may be the future of Egypt, the name of M. de Lesseps will be held in honour. Frenchmen subscribed the capital for the construction of the Canal, in the vain belief that they were defeating the ambition of England; and we cannot be blind to the fact that the Government and people of France watch with jealous indignation the increase of English authority in Egypt. The British Government is continually urged to strengthen its hold upon Egypt, and many do not scruple to go the whole length of advocating the annexation of Egypt to the dominions of the British Crown. Nor does this policy lack friends abroad. The Russian Government would look with sympathy on such a proceeding as affording to itself high claims for territorial compensation. Egypt is not, and has never been, an object of Russian ambition; and if England, offended by the growth of Russian power and influence south of the Danube and in Armenia, saw fit to gratify her jealousy or nervous irritation, by taking possession of Egypt, no opposition need be feared on the side of Russia. And not only Russia, but also the great military Power of Germany would probably look without displeasure upon the Anglicanisation of Egypt. There is much reason to suppose that Prince Bismarck sees rather with pleasure than with annoyance the increase of English power in the dominions of the Khedive. The Germans believe that an English occupation of Egypt would be followed by lasting enmity between England and France. Frenchmen have been wont to talk of our country as "*perfidie Albion*," but perfidious indeed would she seem, so the Germans think, in the eyes of their enemy France, if at this present moment, when France is but recovering from the German conquest, England were to reach out her powerful hand and to take possession of Egypt. The civilisation of Egypt—such as it is, a miserable veneer of Parisian varnish—is essentially French, and the education of native rulers, so far as that is European, has generally been Parisian. French is the official language of the Suez Canal, and the *Code Napoleon* the basis of the modern law of Egypt. There is another Power which would not approve, though it would not actively resent, a policy of British annexation in Egypt. The unity of Italy has made known to the Italians their interests and strength in that quarter. Of all foreigners Italians are most numerous in Egypt, and of all European languages Italian is the most used throughout the Levant.

But while we could not omit these considerations in a glance at the present circumstances of Egypt, they may be dismissed by reference to the obvious fact that England has at present no plea for such a policy. Egypt is not in revolution; Egypt is not hopelessly insolvent; the misgovernment of the Khedive is not, in the opinion of the world, intolerable. We have no confidence in the capacity of the Khedive's

government for material improvement; we do not believe that any government organised upon Mussulman principles can cease from being oppressive and unjust. So long as those principles rule, women and servants must suffer from the hateful vices of polygamy and slavery. The Khedive's assaults upon slavery have been unreal; they have been but the cloak of conquest in the south. Gordon "Pasha" has taken the place of Baker "Pasha" in the work of Egyptianising the Soudan, and he is charged to suppress the traffic in slaves. He is a very able man, and is hopefully disposed to make the best of his commission. He writes:—"I am astonished at the powers which he [the Khedive] has placed in my hands. With the Governor-Generalship of the Soudan, it will be my fault if slavery does not cease, and if these vast countries are not open to the world. So there is an end of slavery if God wills, for the whole secret of the matter is in the government of the Soudan, and if the man who holds that government is against it, it must cease." But slavery has not ceased, and will not cease so long as slaves are valuable and saleable property in Egypt and in Turkey. There is not a native house in Egypt in which—from the home of the pettiest dealer to the palace of the Khedive—there is not slave-labour. In every hour of the day slaves are bought and sold in Cairo and Alexandria, not openly, but through brokers and slave-agents, whose places of business are well known and much frequented. Black boys and girls from Southern Egypt sell for £10 or £12; if the boys have been cruelly mutilated they sell for £20 or £30, or even more. Abyssinian girls, with fairer skins, have a higher price; and when Circassian parents sell, according to their practice, a beautiful daughter to the slave-dealers, she is worth from £500 to £1,000. As long as human beings are sold in Cairo, it is idle to talk of the Khedive's endeavours to abolish the slave-trade as having reality or prospect of success; and if England were to compel the abolition of slavery in Egypt, and in conjunction with Russia to do the same in Turkey, she would make a claim in which she might expect the sympathy and support of all who regard with favour the progress of civilisation and the true interests of humanity. It is always argued by the friends of Mahomedan Powers, that slavery in the East is better than slavery in the West. There can be no "better" in a condition where all is so bad. But, in truth, this plea is not valid. The apologies which are penned concerning Eastern slavery would never be written if the cruelties of Egyptian or Turkish slavery were endured on plantations, where what is done and what is suffered would probably be known. The essentially "domestic" character of Eastern slavery is really that which renders the lot of the slave the more demoralising, and the cruelty which is endured is suffered in private. In America, the slave had something like a home, liable indeed to be broken up at the pleasure of his master; but in Egypt, the slave lives in a walled house, the creature of his master; he is often beaten, he is not seldom killed; he is practically out of reach of the arm of justice.

Let us not, therefore, be misled when there is talk of "Egyptian civilisation." There are people who appear to suppose that civilisation means the construction of boulevards, the lighting of towns with gas, the making of railways; they are very confident that civilisation is nearly related to the electric telegraph and to all processes in connection with steam-power. "Steam and railways," says Sir Bartle Frere, "have done at least as much for Egypt as for almost any European country." That may be admitted, and yet, looking upon the 5,000,000 Egyptian people, it cannot be said that they are a highly-civilised people. We must grasp the truth, that these things are not civilisation, but are rather the fruits of civilisation among ourselves. We have carried these fruits to Egypt, but civilisation—which means the possession of civil rights—is not there, and cannot be wherever slavery is present in any shape or form.

There are only two "large towns," in the English sense of the words, in Egypt: these are Cairo and Alexandria—the former the official, the latter the maritime, capital. In both, the population is a mixture of many peoples and races; but in the rural districts the population is purely Arab. Upon this four millions and a half of Arab peasantry, described as "the most patient, the most pacific, the most home-loving, and withal the merriest race in the world," fall the burdens of Egyptian government. And among those burdens is that of *corvée*, or forced labour, very nearly akin to slavery. Under this system, men are forcibly taken from their homes and from the labour of their lands, and are compelled to execute public works for nominal pay, often upon very insufficient food. Under the first concession for the making of the Suez Canal, Saïd Pasha bound himself, as ruler of Egypt, to furnish M. de Lesseps with four-fifths of the labour required, by *corvée*. The English Government protested against the dragging of 20,000 heads of families from their homes to temporary serfdom, and this cruel agreement was not carried out. But at this day the estates of the Khedive are worked by *corvée*. Mr. J. C. McCoan, who was known for many years as Editor of the *Levant Herald*, and who has lately published a work upon Egypt*—to which, in this article, the writer is much indebted—is a witness of unimpeachable authority on the point. Mr. McCoan, alluding to the sugar plantations belonging to the Khedive, says:—"The wages of the rank and file range from about sixpence to elevenpence a day—part paid in brown sugar or treacle—with a ration of bread; but although receipts for full payment are exacted from the respective sheikhs, and the amount is duly debited to the *daïra* [estate], it is notorious that much of the money earned never reaches the fellahs' pockets. A large proportion, moreover, of the hands employed are furnished by *corvée*, and are therefore helpless against this and every other abuse."

It is a notable fact that the government of Egypt is, by his own act, rapidly passing out of the hands of

* "Egypt as it Is." By J. C. McCoan. Cassell, Petter & Galpin.

the Khedive. His Highness is, it is true, irresponsible and despotic; yet it is difficult to comprehend how, after filling so many of the chief offices of the State with Europeans, he could reclaim the government of Egypt for himself. In finance, he is now controlled by foreigners, recommended, if not appointed, by European Governments. "Of the seventeen foreign judges," Mr. McCoan tells us that "England, France, Austria, Italy, Germany, Russia, Denmark, and the United States have each recommended one; Belgium, Sweden, and Greece two each, and Holland three. The whole receive a uniform salary of £1,600 a year, but their native colleagues only half that amount."

The trade of Egypt can hardly have received benefit from the construction of the Suez Canal. Mr. McCoan says, "It represents a distinct and more or less permanent loss. . . . It has diverted from the Egyptian ports and railways a large and increasing transit traffic of great revenue value, against which nothing but some trivial Customs' dues will be received until the net earnings of the enterprise, after payment of debenture charges and statutory interest on shares, leave a surplus of profit, out of which only the Government is entitled to a fractional royalty of fifteen per cent." When we remember that it is no uncommon matter for a British steam-ship of 3,000 tons to pay nearly as many pounds sterling for Canal dues incurred for her outward and homeward voyage, we have evidence that the receipts must be very large. And the advantage to the vessel must be great, to enable shippers to pay this enormous price for passing through the Suez Canal. The advantage is simply this: that by the Cape of Good Hope the distance between England and Bombay is 10,860 nautical miles, whereas by the Canal it is 6,020 miles. There is, therefore, a saving of 4,840 miles; from Marseilles the saving is 5,940 miles; from St. Petersburg the same as from England, and from New York the saving is not less than 3,600 miles. A curious item in the trade of Egypt has been the traffic in "mummy-bones," which Mr. McCoan says, up to 1872, contributed "nearly as much as those of modern cattle to the yearly total of 10,000 tons, sent chiefly to England." That the bones of Cleopatra should be exported in a miscellaneous heap to fertilise an English turnip-field is at least as shocking as that—

"Imperial Caesar, dead and turned to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away."

We are glad to learn that "since then the pillage of tombs for this purpose has been prohibited," though we confess to some doubt as to the security which such a prohibition implies. Another curious branch of trade which has fallen off is the manufacture of rose-water. The decline is said to be owing to the old custom of sprinkling guests, for which the perfume was chiefly used, having largely gone out of fashion. The famous attar of roses is especially the product of the rose-farms of Turkey lying around the city of Adrianople. But the trade of Egypt increases, and might flourish, if it were not for the heavy burdens which the productive powers of the country have to

sustain. Since 1862—in the brief space of fifteen years—the Government of the Khedive has piled up a public debt which amounts to more than eighty millions sterling. The Khedive and his predecessor have been charged with heavy deductions from the nominal value of the loans, and the loans have borne high and increasing rates of interest. No one seems to think the Civil List of the Khedive extravagant, and yet it is within £85,000 a year as much as that of the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland and Empress of Hindostan. The Khedive has £300,000 a year from a revenue of about £10,000,000. If the Queen's Civil List bore the same proportion to the revenue only of the British Isles, Her Majesty would receive more than £3,000,000 per annum—about eight times as much as her Civil List. Then there is the tribute payable to the Porte, which has been augmented upon every concession made to the dynastic ambition of the Khedive. In 1866 the annual tribute was £376,000; but it has now risen to more than £685,000. The Khedive shrewdly counts on bettering his circumstances in connection with the Porte, as a result of the war. This is how the matter is put by friends who may be supposed to be in his confidence:—"Nothing can be more certain in unaccomplished event than that, suffer who may, Egypt will be a gainer by the result. If the Porte escape heavy loss and humiliation, the Khedive will have earned the right to new concessions, tending to sever the few remaining fibres of the thread that still binds him to Stamboul; while in the worst event of Turkish dismemberment, he may safely count on emerging from the general wreck, piloted by British friendship, it may be into complete independence, or at worst—or best—exchanging the costly suzerainty of the Porte for the fostering and disinterested protection of Great Britain." If the Khedive could find a decent excuse for declining to continue the payment to Turkey of £685,000 a year, we may suppose he would not be sorry. And under all circumstances it can hardly be expected that his Highness is very anxious for the complete success of his suzerain. On the other hand, it is impossible to doubt that he is somewhat distrustful of British protection. Is his Highness justified in that doubt? Will Mr. Kinglake's prophecy prove true?—"Upon ancient dynasties of Ethiopian and Egyptian kings, upon Greek and Roman, upon Arab and Ottoman conquerors, upon Napoleon dreaming of an Eastern empire, upon battle and pestilence, upon the ceaseless misery of the Egyptian race, upon keen-eyed travellers—Herodotus yesterday, Warburton to-day—upon all and more, this unworldly Sphinx has watched and watched like a providence, with the same earnest eyes and the same tranquil mien. And we, we shall die, and Islam wither away; and the Englishman, straining far over to hold his loved India, will plant a firm foot on the banks of the Nile, and sit in the seats of the Faithful; and still that shapeless rock will be watching and watching the works of the new busy race with those same sad, earnest eyes, and the same tranquil mien everlasting. You dare not mock at the Sphinx."

ARTHUR ARNOLD.