

THE PHARAOHS HAVE VANISHED; THE PYRAMIDS REMAIN.

AN ambition to see the Pyramids came to me in the early days and survived the test of geography lessons. In my hours of tribulation, when I stood before maps of the world and located Calcutta in Japan and Rangoon in Beluchistan to an unfeeling master's grim delight, the desire to visit the land of the Arabian Nights passed away, neither the North nor South Pole tempted me, and I nursed resentment against the islands that Robert Louis Stevenson has since immortalised, because they would hide away in small places on those cruel school-room maps. Yet even in those days, when the

world was doing its best by means of irregular shape and deceptive colouring to make my young life wretched, Egypt with its Nile and Pyramids occupied a place in my heart without taking up too much room. I think that the affection was born with the earliest readings of the Bible and the consequent explanations I but half understood. Be that as it may, I looked forward to the vague day in

a distant future when I should travel to the land of the Pharaohs and see the awful Sphinx keeping watch over the limitless ocean of sand, and the great Pyramid of Cheops defying time and staring defiantly

at the blazing African sky. Travellers' tales increased the respect and veneration with which I started, and my enjoyment of other countries and other old-world cities was always clouded by the reflection that Egypt was yet unvisited.

At last the long-desired day came when I was one of the passengers by the train that reaches Cairo from Alexandria. Some few miles from the ancient city I had seen the

Pyramids of Gizeh gleaming in the sun far away to the right, and that momentary view kindled all the hopes that I had ever enjoyed. To wait was impossible, and so soon as Cairo was reached and lunch was over, I drove away with a voluble dragoman, who seemed to have taken all Egypt under his special care and patronage. I saw the Khedive, and later, Sir Herbert Kitchener, the Sirdar; but I could



THE GREAT PYRAMID OF GIZEH.

not look at either twice. There was the Nile covered with dahabeahs. Gizeh was near at hand, and these facts took all my power of thought. The beggars by the roadway, the long teams of camels, passed unnoticed. I was scarcely conscious of the great heat. There was but one feeling predominant when we drove along the last hundred yards of road and the greatest of the Pyramids was comparatively within reach—a feeling of deep delight. Then I received a severe shock; for on the right of the road, facing the imperishable monument of the mighty son of Snefru, I saw a modern hotel, hideous because of its modernity, and by one of the entrance-gates was a signboard with the awful word “BAR.” The train of thought that was carrying my most secret reflections nearly five thousand years away into the heart of the fourth great dynasty of Egypt came into violent collision with this hard fact. There was a dreadful cry, and the line was strewn with mental wreckage. The ideals that had come to me so many years before were in one short moment put to a horrible death. The dragoman thought I was suffering from heat, and recommended a short interval for refreshments. I snubbed him sternly. We drove on round the curved hill, whereon the sand was gathering thickly, and soon the horses were pulled up panting by the side of the great Pyramid. Forthwith we were surrounded by men with camels and donkeys, who wished to take us to the Sphinx, which lies farther along the sandy plain, over which a carriage cannot travel. With difficulty they were shaken off, and then I looked with respect upon the mighty mass before me. Some adventurous traveller had climbed to the top with two Arab guides; the three men looked absurdly small, and far away. I remained overwhelmed with thoughts, commonplace enough no doubt, but inevitable at such a time and in such a place. Someone pulled my arm; I turned round and saw an old Arab. In language he took to be English, he offered to run up and down that great Pyramid in ten minutes for a couple of shillings. Had he threatened to do this unless I gave him two shillings he would have been

a wealthier beggar; as it was, the vulgarity of the idea made me wish to assault him, and I hissed out “Mafisch”—*i.e.*, “I have nothing for you,” just as though I could have made other remarks in Arabic had I been so minded. When he had gone, disconsolate, I tramped over the cruel sand to the lesser Pyramids of Chefred, and Menkara, trying hard to forget the incongruities around me. I noticed that at least one of the Egyptian plagues—that of flies—was still left to remind the survivors of an ancient race of the Captivity, and, feeling again in tranquil mood, turned my steps in the direction of the Sphinx.

For the first few minutes I was too impressed to notice more than the grand figure that has baffled time and knowledge since days before the Pyramids had risen. In sight of this wonder of the world, emotion is apt to run riot. Not for long in my case. My sleeve was pulled again: a photographer stood by my side as though he had risen from one of Chefred's Temples below us. He pointed to his stock-in-trade, and offered to photograph me, with the Sphinx for a background. I told him briefly what I thought of him, and he went wondering to his old place. Then a brief quarter of an hour passed, bringing no troubles save flies, and I watched the strong noon light playing over the battered features of the great Enigma, and giving them—or so I thought—varying expressions. There seemed at times to be some expression of grief too deep for words, as though the thousands of years passed in ceaseless vigil had wearied the Sphinx beyond all endurance. Disintegration and burial, far away from the horrors of sand, sun, and tourists, these seemed to be what the vast structure was praying for; and upon its seeming prayers there came a sudden sound of shouting and singing: Tommy Atkins was out for a holiday. He came in his might in kharkee dress and pith helmet, he spread himself all over the place, bargained with clamorous camelmen, played pitch-and-toss with bits of broken marble from the Temples of Chefred, sang songs of the music-hall,

gambolled cheerfully and heartlessly. With him familiarity had bred contempt, reverence had never been. He could not hear the Sphinx groan with real anguish or see the despair in the stony glance bent eternally against the blinding light. It is more than likely that Tommy Atkins never heard of Vandals. He stayed till the full limit of time was up, then camels were once more requisitioned and bargained for; the noisy troop departed, and ere their last cries died away, a yet more horrid one replaced them, for two

treads upon the heels of disillusion. I noticed that there were golf-links at the foot of the Pyramids, and in an adjoining field Tommy Atkins, oblivious of heat, was playing football. A hansom cab came along the road. I dare say it was bringing yet more Americans along. The dragoman said that the authorities were talking of connecting Cairo with the Pyramids of Gizeh by means of a small railway line. Doubtless this, too, will come to pass.

The man who wishes to feel that his



THE SPHINX.

real American tourists came along, dragging their bicycles over the sand. It was too much; full of sympathy for the silent sufferer I turned away, leaving it to be discussed in tones whose twang made the very flies forget to bite, and wandered back disconsolate. The driver said the horses needed rest, and so perforce I went into the hotel facing the Pyramid of Cheops. There one or two Englishmen lounged about in flannels. I saw that there was an installation of electric light, and every improvement that the nineteenth century has brought in its train; but, oh! how incongruous it seemed, this modern hotel named after the founder of the First Egyptian Dynasty!

The drive home had all the sadness that

impressions of the Pyramids and Sphinx are realised should keep away from them. The Pyramids may, perhaps, be seen safely from a great distance, but the Sphinx, being on lower ground, had better remain unseen, for to-day degradation reigns supreme.

Some day an American millionaire will probably buy the whole of the Gizeh collection, and the monuments of the Fourth Dynasty, together with the Sphinx of yet earlier date, will find their way to the grounds of some Chicago park. A big order, but Americans are very enterprising; and, after all, if these records must be shamed, it is well to think that they are not shamed on the scene of their ancient honour.

S. L.