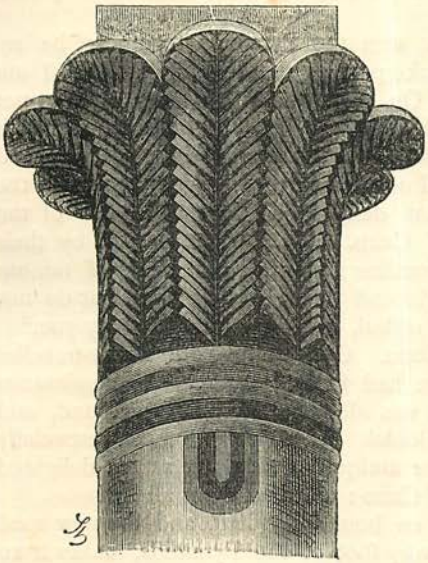
THE PYRAMIDS OF EGYPT.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Letters from Majorca," etc., etc.



INSENSIBLY as the needle points to the Pole, so the gaze of all who visit Cairo is directed towards the Pyramids.

It is possible to see them in the distance from the heights of the Citadel, forming part of that wonderful view already described. Beyond the windings of the sacred Nile rise the well-known outlines, centre of interest in this matchless panorama. If you wander away into the outskirts of the desert, still afar off you may see those tombs rising in solitary grandeur. Only when you have scoured many miles of this waste land, and placed many brown and yellow sandhills and undulations between you and the Pyramids, do they finally disappear from view.

And then you have turned your back upon the world, and stand face to face with Nature; and night and day succeed each other, and suns rise and set, and nothing meets the eye but a wide wilderness; unbounded plains of white glistening sand on which the sun pours his hot relentless rays, or the moon sheds down her soft and silvery light.

Here indeed is the majesty of an almost eternal silence: a solitude to all intents and purposes never broken; the rest David longed for when he wished for the wings of a dove—but of which he would soon have grown weary. Only a despondent mood could long bear with the sameness and desolation of the desert, and David's was no morbid mind. He felt keenly for the moment, and his self-reproaches were profound and bitter whilst they lasted; but once over, his thoughts recovered their tone and his songs were no longer set in a minor key.

So one day we also turned our faces towards the Pyramids, and our backs upon Cairo.

Passing out by the road leading to Old Cairo, we soon branched off from it over the great iron bridge which spans the Nile, to the credit of the French who built it. To the right lay the magnificent park and palace of Gezêreh, but we had nothing to do with that to-day, for our road lay sharply to the left.

So to the left we turned. Osman was not our companion. Important and unexpected official news had caused him to remain with the Khedive, and very reluctantly we had to bid each other a temporary farewell.

"I hoped we should have seen the Pyramids together," he remarked; "but so long as I take part in the diplomatic world, I am not master of my own time. On such occasions I almost regret not having withdrawn from it all ere now; but one likes to live with some object in view, and do some little good in one's day and generation. After all, you will not find in these mighty Pyramids the subtle charm and beauty that delight one in the Tombs of the Caliphs and the Mosques of Cairo. They will awe you by their size, their simple majesty of outline; but the refinement of minute detail is absent from them. Ascend them by all means, but do not attempt the interior. It is an ordeal, with very little to repay you."

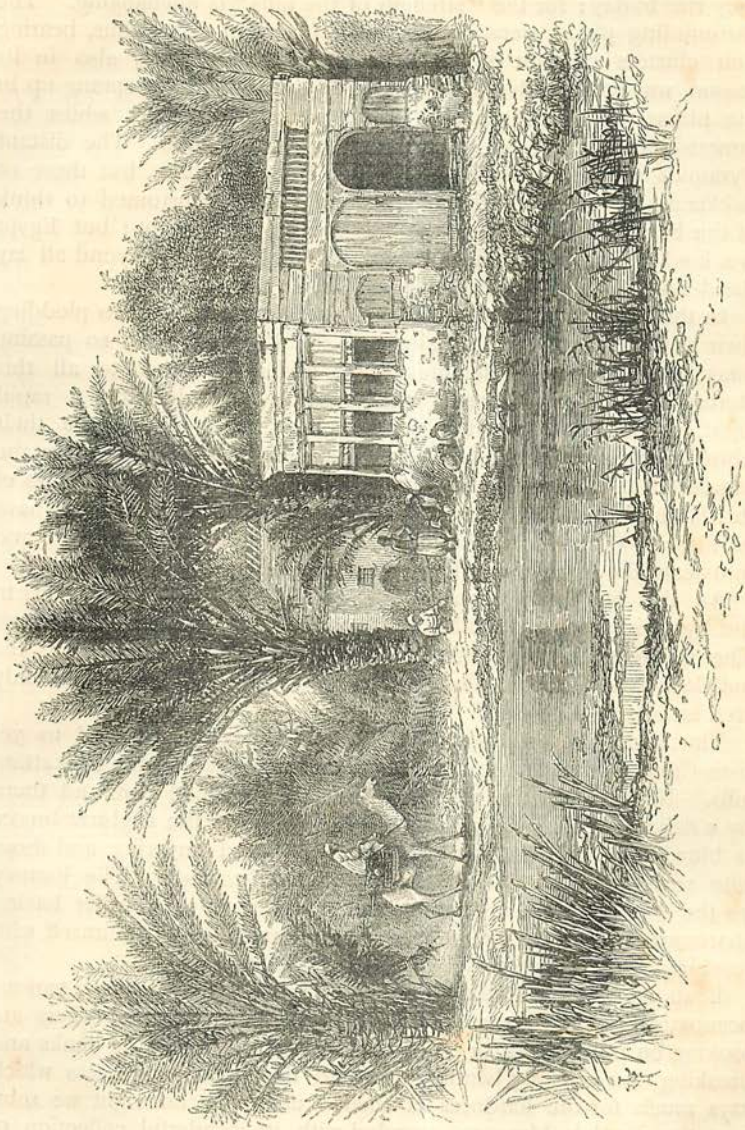
So we departed, yet not alone. General A.—our fellow-traveller from Marseilles, with whom we had formed a pleasant acquaintance—joined us. To him also it was all old and familiar ground, and our visits together to the Boulak Museum had been especially interesting. He revelled in its antiquities as much as we delighted in the Tombs and Mosques of Cairo: and had them all by heart.

The drive occupies about an hour and a half, and the new road stretching from Cairo to the very foot of the Pyramids, makes it an easy journey.

It has, however, taken away much of the romance of the situation. By this new road the Pyramids seem almost in touch with the capital, linked with civilisation. The possibility of adventure, the charm of the picturesque, have almost disappeared. Side by side with the venerable waters of the Nile this macadamised road runs straight as engineering skill could make it. Beautiful trees overshadow it, but they are not the picturesque date-palm or the noble sycamore: for the sycamore of Egypt rivals the stately oak of England.

In past times a journey to the Pyramids from Cairo was a very different matter from a visit of to-day. The present road is built upon a broad embankment, high and dry above all inundations. At the time of the rising of the waters, these escape and spread into the surrounding country through two bridges, and the traveller passing over them, may keep on his way dryshod. Not so in days gone by. Then, at the overflowing, the canals intersecting the wide plains were lost in broad sheets of water, laden with fertilising influence but unpleasant to encounter. It was a journey accomplished

more often with the help of donkeys or camels than in any other way. The road was necessarily circuitous and eccentric; possessing some-



EGYPTIAN WELLS.

thing of the charm of an old-fashioned house, where unexpected passages and staircases meet you at every turn.

The whole panorama, to right and left, was essentially Egyptian. Behind you lay the old capital, with its citadel, as yet uncrowned by the Mosque of Hassan. Beyond rose the Mokattam Hills, just as they rise to-day: for the "strength of the hills" is unchanging. The surrounding plains were covered with forests of date-palms, bearing rich clusters of fruit in their season. The ground, also in its season, was green with waving blades of corn. Villages sprang up in the plains, and mosques and tombs were conspicuous, whilst the tamarisk and acacia led up to them in shady groves. The distant Pyramids were always visible, not only those of Gîzeh, but those of Sakkarah, Aboosir and others. Some of us are accustomed to think of the Pyramids of Gîzeh as the only Pyramids of Egypt; but Egypt is a land of pyramids, and there are many of them. Beyond all lay the desert with its grey sandhills and barren rocks.

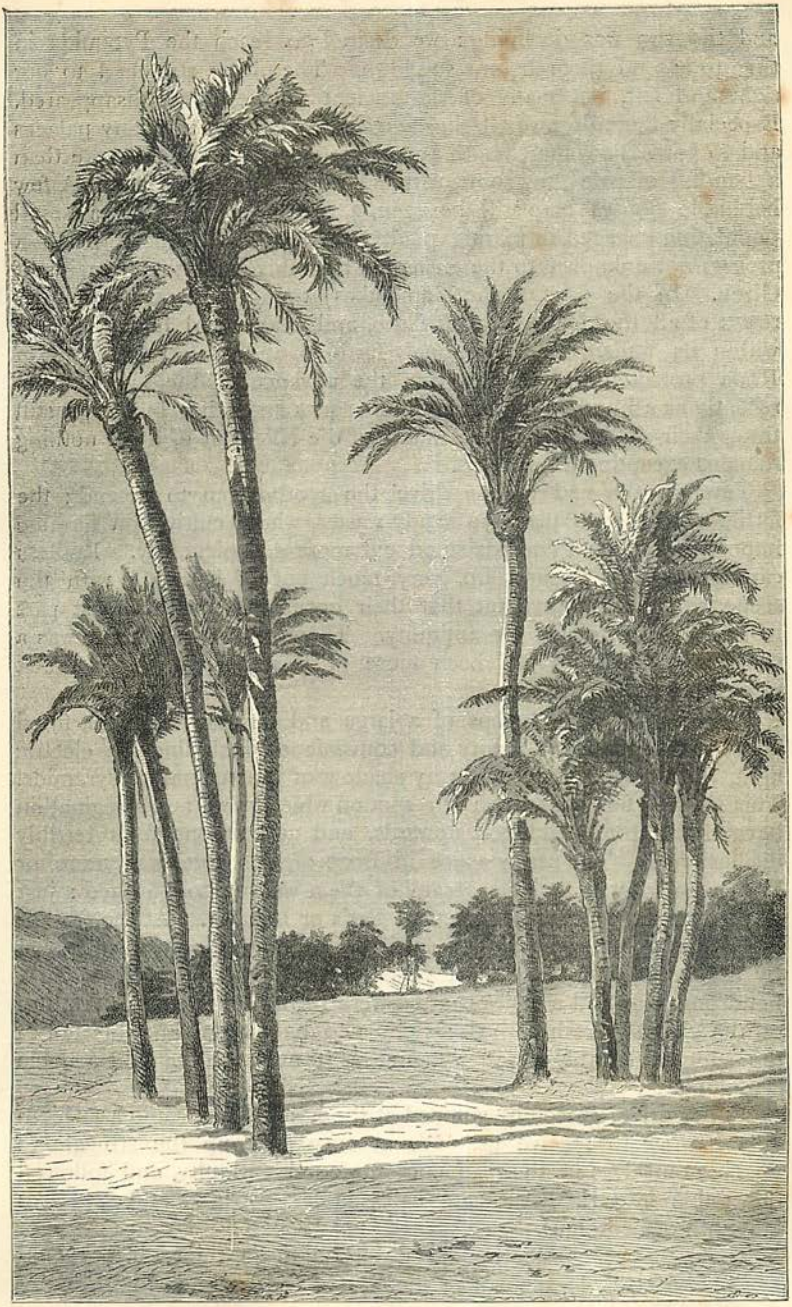
In those days herds of camels and buffaloes might be seen plodding their patient way between Cairo and the Pyramids, and so passing away into the desert: features which added so much to all this picturesque Oriental charm. Large flocks of birds, after a rapid flight, would alight on the watery plains, and contemplate their white reflections with serene pleasure. All was intensified by the wonderful rarefied air, and above all reposed the clear blue skies of this land of corn and wine, of milk and honey. Air and sky have no little to do with its charm; they appeal to the imagination and intoxicate the senses: but it is a power in which no evil dwells.

All this has been changed, and people now comfortably bowl to the Pyramids over a smooth road in modern landaus and barouches. The donkeys are still there for those who prefer them; but the buffaloes have become almost a tradition, and the camels are only used as beasts of burden.

The scene, nevertheless, still has much beauty. Behind us yet rises Cairo, with its mosque-crowned citadel backed by the Mokattam hills. Near us flow the waters of the Nile, enlivened here and there by a dahabeeyeh or a barge with sails full set if the slightest breeze is blowing. At best their progress is slow and lingering, and those who travel by them need patience and self-control. The journey up the Nile often seems interminable, and many a traveller having chartered his dahabeeyeh for the second cataract, contents himself with reaching the first, and imagining the remainder.

Boats are moored to the banks, and natives are busy at their various occupations. Some are carrying bundles of sugar-cane, others are looking on in idleness, or perhaps are squatting upon the banks and breaking the cane by bending it round their heads, a process which says much for the hardness of their skulls. On our right we soon pass the Boulak Museum, crowded with its wonderful collection of antiquities.

To-day we did not stay to renew our wonder and admiration. There had been a little delay in starting and time pressed. It was afternoon



PALM TREES.

and the sun was declining: we desired to reach the Pyramids in time to ascend them before sundown. The plains stretched to our right and left, but many of the ancient villages have disappeared. Especially the village of Gîzeh, once said to contain so many palaces and to possess so much wealth and importance, is now little more than a handful of pale grey ruins, with no sign of greatness left. A few habitable houses may still be seen, a few neglected cafés, a small population engaged in rearing poultry by means of artificial heat—a process not unknown to the ancients: and this is all that remains of Gîzeh. In the days of the Mamelukes it was a favourite summer resort of all the rich people of Cairo, and wealth and luxury reigned within its walls. It was strongly fortified, and with the Island of Roda protected the capital from the advance of the enemy. As recently as a hundred years ago its mosques and other buildings still threw their shadows upon the waters of the Nile, but of these nothing remains excepting a few ruins.

Towards the end of the drive the road began to ascend; the fertile plains gave place to sandy wastes, where cultivation became impossible. The Pyramids stood out more conspicuously. Endless carriages passed to and fro, very much out of harmony with the scene, whilst it was evident that their occupants for the most part had as little reverence for antiquity. The end of our journey was a shock for which we had been more or less prepared, but a shock nevertheless.

We drew up at the steps of a large and fashionable hotel, fitted up with every modern luxury and convenience, including the electric light, all reposing under the very shadow of the venerable Pyramids. This is one's first impression of a spot on which mind and imagination have dwelt from childhood upwards, and at first one feels terribly disillusioned. The sandy space in front of the hotel was more or less crowded with vehicles, many of them waiting to be hired: just as they might wait in the streets of Paris or London. At the further end, towards the Pyramids, a small crowd of Bedouins, controlled by a Sheykh or Patriarch—a venerable-looking being with a dark, handsome face and a white beard—were restlessly moving to and fro, on the alert for fresh arrivals: victims to be pushed and hoisted to the summit of the Great Pyramid with undue haste and ignoble ceremony.

As our driver gracefully stopped at the hotel, down came a fashionable *Portier* to receive us. We at once gave up the struggle to imagine ourselves in the regions of profound antiquity, and followed our guide into richly-carpeted halls, endless corridors and a perfect labyrinth of bedrooms.

There was very little time to dwell on these things before consigning ourselves to the tender mercies of the Bedouins, told off by the Sheykh as our escort.

On first approaching the Pyramids a sense of disappointment is

inevitable. For years imagination has magnified them into monuments almost piercing the skies. One expects to be more overwhelmed than when gazing upon the highest mountains of Switzerland or a towering chain of the Himalayas. At the first moment we wonder why so much should have been made of these structures, which scarcely excite our surprise. But it is a feeling that very soon begins to wear away, and presently disappears. The more we see of the Pyramids, the more we marvel, the greater their influence upon us. Standing at their base and looking upwards, we become more and more impressed and lost in astonishment. Only very gradually does their size make itself truly felt and realized: and never, perhaps, from the very nature of their construction, is it quite understood.

To-day all we could see and gather was a wonderful structure, of which the enormous stones were piled one upon the other; and which —we felt with a sort of despair—had to be climbed. Three Bedouins were assigned to us, three to H. General A., to whom the ascent was nothing new, decided to enjoy the sunset from *terra firma.*

It can scarcely be said that we climbed up the Great Pyramid. The advance guard of two men dragged us up by the arms, which once or twice just escaped dislocation. The office of the third Bedouin was to act as a sort of propeller, and assist the advance guard by vigorously pushing up from behind. At this undignified proceeding, however, we drew the line, and dispensed with his services; a concession for which he showed far less gratitude than it deserved. The stones were enormous, and often beyond anything less than the stride of a giant. Fortunately the advance guard kept a good hold upon us, and the arms refused to leave their sockets; otherwise, instead of seeing the sun set from the top of the Great Pyramid, we should have been comfortably reposing in unconscious fragments at the bottom.

A breathless ascent of fourteen minutes, and we reached the top, feeling that our last moments were approaching. But we had exaggerated the evil, judging of the probable result by our sensations. A minute's rest restored us to a normal condition, and we were able to look around.

We stood on a platform of about twelve square yards. After the rapid ascent, the small footholds of stone after stone, it seemed a huge space, on which one felt a sense of freedom and security. Quite a small crowd could have been accommodated here without danger. Happily we had it to ourselves, and the magnificent view and sunset were disturbed only by some half-dozen Bedouins who seem to haunt the platform, and pressed us to buy worthless "antiquities." We had to yield for the sake of peace and quietness and the sunset.

Originally this platform was far smaller, and the pyramid has been lowered by thirty feet. This was done centuries ago, when the stones were removed to help in the building of Cairo. It is almost as puzzling to conceive how they were brought down, as how, in

remote ages, they were taken up. The secret will never be known; but we do know that the ancients possessed powers and possibilities and secrets, of which we cannot even dream: a tenacity of purpose, a greatness of conception and idea, a physical energy, altogether out of proportion with man's seventy years: which pass "as a dream that is told."

We turned to the view. Nothing could exaggerate its charm and magnificence, its apparently boundless extent. There are two distinct views and impressions to be gained from the top of the Great Pyramid, according to the season of the year: what time the waters are out upon the earth, and the vast surrounding plains look as though another deluge were coming upon them; and again when the waters have long disappeared, and a green and fertile country on the one hand, stands out in strange contrast with the sandy wastes of the desert on the other.

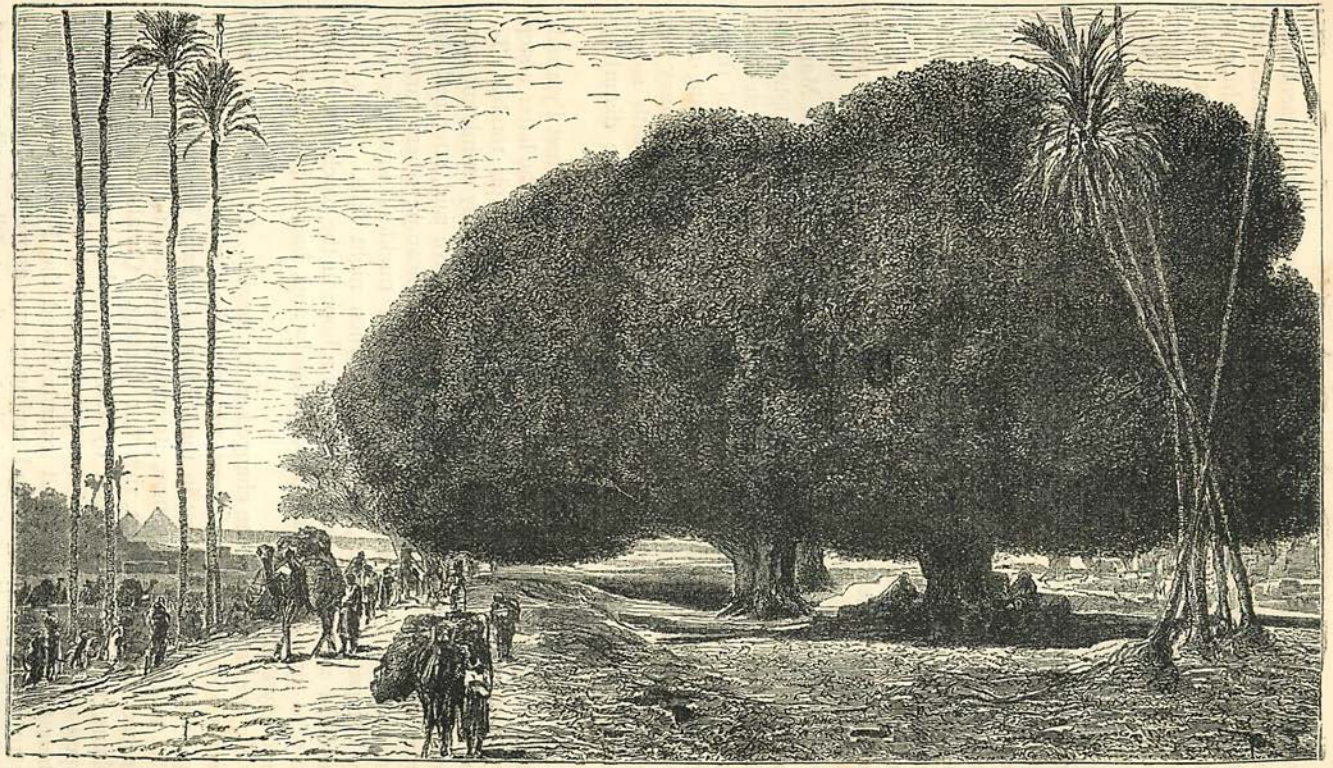
So was it to-day.

It was not the time of the inundations, and we could trace far and near the winding waters of the Nile, which ran a serpent-like course between rich plains, studded here and there with small villages; those of Gîzeh, Fostat, and Boulak especially visible. From this point, all the picturesque craft moving upon the water, or moored to the banks, looked like small dream vessels. The sun was nearing the horizon; all the glare of day had disappeared; the sky was putting on a deeper tone; the air was almost intoxicating. Afar off the domes and minarets of Cairo, the citadel crowned by the Mosque of Hassan, were distinctly outlined against the clear sky. The rarefied atmosphere seemed to diminish half the distance. Everything—domes, minarets, citadel—was touched and gilded by the setting sun; or rather was flushed to a rosy red. The Mokattam hills behind the citadel were also steeped in this glorious light, which, as the sun descended, turned to a rich, delicious purple, the true Eastern bloom. Amongst these Mokattam hills are the quarries of Masarah, which, thousands of years ago, furnished many of the stones with which the pyramids were built. Cairo also, in this fading light, looked like a dream city.

The contrast in the scene spread at our feet was wonderful and marked. On the one hand cultivated plains, full of repose, in time ripening to harvest: emblem of life. On the other hand the sandy desert, stretching away into infinitude, white and warm under the setting sun, but desolate and barren, incapable of yielding the fruits of the earth: emblem of death. Each divided by a clear and distinct boundary.

Close to us was the second great Pyramid, and far below, looking out upon the boundless wastes of sand, a scene eternal in its unchanging aspect, was the Sphinx.

It was too far down to be seen in detail, but it was impossible, even from here, to look upon it for the first time without a thrill of



SYCAMORES: VALLEY OF THE NILE.

emotion. In a moment we seemed to pass out of the present into touch with the ancients and the far-off past. Here for thousands of years this mysterious image, of whose origin and age nothing is known, has kept a steady outlook upon the distant horizon, the everlasting skies, in eternal silence and solitude. Abdellatif might well observe in the centuries gone by: "Everything fears Time, but Time fears the Pyramids."

Other pyramids were visible from our position. Near the two great Pyramids of Gîzeh, yet separated by a certain distance, are several smaller ones. All these stand upon a plateau of rock about a hundred feet above the level of the plain. Nothing in the shape of monument could be more in harmony with the vast desert. Simple and severe in outline, matching in colour the desert sand, large enough to look gigantic even in this boundless area, a sense of fitness at once takes possession of the mind. They also possess a majesty and repose which equally adapt themselves to the wilderness: a wilderness indeed, in the days when the Pyramids were built. Towns and villages gradually arose: Gîzeh, in the time of the Mamelooks, became lively and frequented; but the immediate neighbourhood of the Pyramids was left to silence and solitude. Only in these days, when nothing is sacred, have the spirit and atmosphere of these ancient tombs been desecrated, and music and dancing, feasting and revelry are found under their very shadow. One day, it may be, the Sphinx will awaken from its long slumber endued with supernatural power, and in righteous anger will cause all the disturbing element to vanish into thin air.

To the south, as we looked from the platform of the Great Pyramid, rose the Pyramids of Aboosîr, Dashoor and Sakharah; the latter, a step Pyramid, with its wonderful interior corridors and Apis tombs. To the north were the Pyramids of Abû Roâsh, with hilly undulating outlines in the background. Beyond all, as we have said, stretched the great desert, in the heart of which Bedouins encamp; where caravanseries wend their weary way across the trackless wastes, guided by compasses by day, by the stars when night falls. There the deceitful mirage has awakened many a hope in the parched traveller, only to quench it again more certainly and hasten in despair his untimely end.

To the east, the scene changed as by magic. All the yellow and brown of death and the desert, turned to the green of vitality, lighted up by precious water that in the wilderness means life to the dying. The river wound its course, its waters this evening, in the sunset, flushed to a warm tint, rich but fleeting. Canals intersected the plains, their courses traced by the beautiful palm-trees that grew upon their banks. Other trees, in groves and clusters, spread out their fan-like branches and overshadowed the Fellah villages that were raised on mounds and embankments above the level of the plain, out of reach of the periodical overflow. Like a silver thread

BEDOUIN ENCAMPMENT.

ran the high road to Cairo, not aggressive here, but reminding one of civilisation and the world and disillusion: a hundred thoughts one would like to banish.

The sun sank, a round red ball, clear to the very end. It touched the horizon, then gradually disappeared. Almost immediately the sky in the east and north became flushed with a deep orange glow, more gorgeous than anything ever seen out of these latitudes. The whole sky seemed to catch the reflection and throw it back to earth, where with the light of day it soon departed. The Mokattam hills took on their lovely purple, and their outlines grew faint and misty. We felt that the short twilight must be given up to descending: bad as the ascent had been, the return journey would be still more unpleasant. Yet it cannot be said that either experience was really objectionable. Danger has been suggested, but of danger there can be little or none. To some the commencement of the going down may be a little appalling. There are no ropes or handrails to guide your steps, such as, we believe, have now been put up the side of the North Cape: a descent infinitely more trying than the descent of the Great Pyramid.

Down we went, jumping from one step to another, closely accompanied by the guides, who would not leave us for an instant. Twilight faded, the surrounding country grew more and more indistinct. One object after another went out, as if Nature had taken up her roll call and dismissed them; the shadows on the plains cast by the waving palm-trees disappeared; Cairo itself passed into a recollection; the silver thread of the Nile grew dark; and with some relief we found ourselves once more on a level with the world.

Here the Sheykh with his venerable beard and imposing turban came up, hoped we had not been disappointed in our expedition, and that the guides had done their duty. He urged us to make acquaintance with the interior on the morrow; but remembering Osman's warning, we left the morrow to decide the question.

Darkness had nearly fallen; all the surrounding country was shut out; the Bedouins of the Pyramids—they have lost all the nobility and fine character of the true Bedouin of the desert—were leaving to gather in rest fresh strength for other victims on the morrow; the Pyramids began to loom out in gigantic outlines against the darkening sky; lights gleamed from every window in the hotel; laughter and talking streamed from the great central hall; all the solemn silence and repose of the summit of the Pyramid had departed. There we had passed out of touch with earth; had almost hovered on the very borders of the unseen; nothing but Nature surrounded us, very much of it untouched by Time and the hand of man. Down on this lower level we came back to the ordinary concerns of every-day life.

The hall was furnished in true Oriental fashion. Rugs were thrown

upon the marble floor; mushrabeeyeh screens were cunningly disposed in corners and recesses; Oriental *portières*, magnificent and weighty, hung in front of many of the doors; Moorish lamps shed around a subdued and very picturesque light. Small groups were standing in all directions, laughing, talking, excited; in remote and conveniently shaded corners, sundry couples had disposed themselves on soft couches and were devoting the golden moments to the bad habit of flirting. This is as certain to be met with everywhere as sundry well-known advertisements, and if a bird of the air could carry the tale, which would be found the more commonplace? At best it is reversing the order of things. Marriage should contain the true romance, the lofty ideal; instead of which, marriage too often brings the awakening.

Amidst all this luxury and light, all this noise and laughter, all these fashionable costumes of people waiting for the gong to announce dinner, it was difficult, nay, impossible, to picture oneself as dwelling under the very shadow of the eternal Pyramids. If the kings of old could have imagined their tombs so desecrated, the silence and repose of death so broken, would they not have carried their work to the very centre of the great desert? Perhaps it is well that they do not rest in their tomb-chambers, or ghosts might haunt the precincts of the Pyramids to the terror of frail and frivolous humanity.

In the drawing-room were many luxurious couches, the floor was thickly carpeted, all the ordinary English papers lay about the tables; and here, too, Moorish and other lamps were cunningly disposed to great purpose.

But the most startling effect was reserved for the dining-room. A gong sounded, the doors were thrown open, and a stream of light came forth.

We went down a few steps, and found ourselves in an immense chamber, very lofty, very brilliant with electric light. The walls were painted in Egyptian decorations; large Moorish arches here and there broke the monotony of the outlines; the tables, perfectly appointed, glittering with glass and plate, looked everything that was refined and civilised. Never, in any hotel in any country, had we seen a dining-room so effectively arranged; and seldom, taking it all round, any hotel so perfectly organised. We ceased to wonder that there are those who spend a whole winter at the Mena House, for in addition to this wealth of luxury they breathe the dry air of the desert, which is so much purer than that of Cairo.

Night had long fallen when we once more turned our backs upon all this light and luxury, and passed out into what, by comparison, was an Egyptian darkness.

And yet it was very far from being a dark night. The moon, no longer quite at the full, but still far from her third quarter, was shedding down upon the earth the intensely soft and silvery light she bears in the East. We went forth under the guidance of General A.,

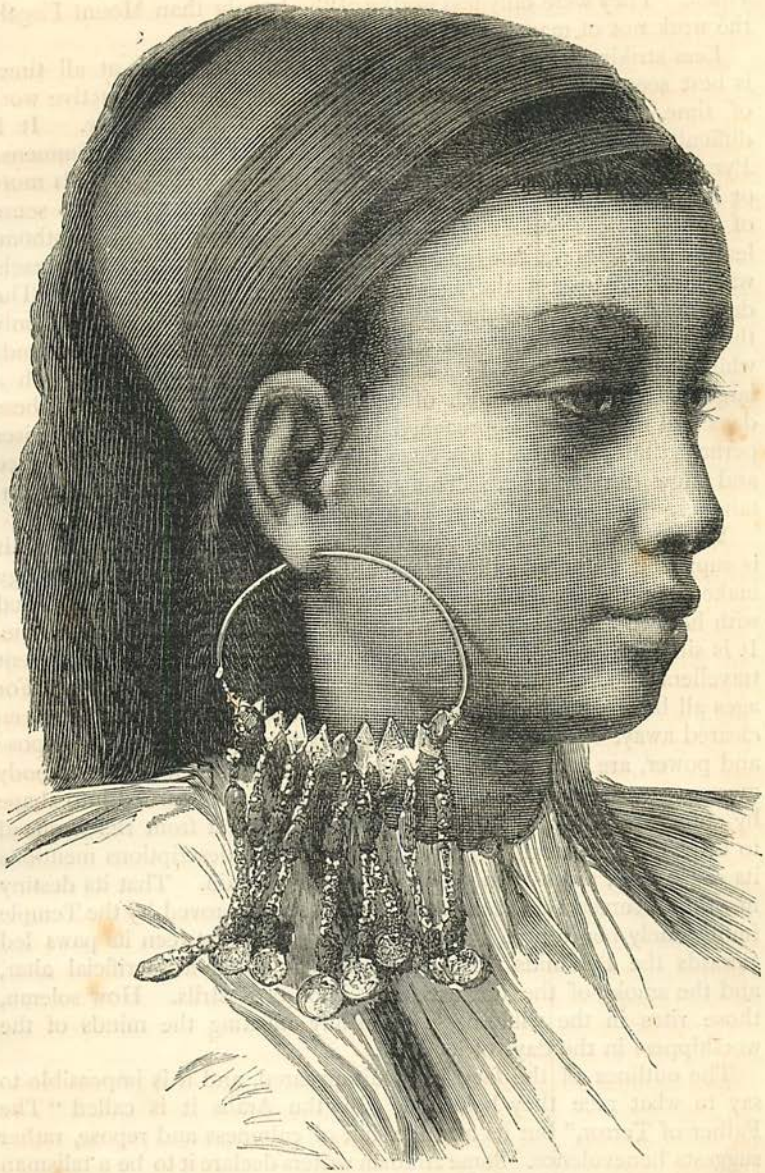
to whom it was all familiar ground and sacred. Like ourselves he deplored the incongruous element of the hotel, but also made the best of it. There were compensations; and to the greater part of the assemblage, attractions; for not six people out of all that number went out to gaze upon the Pyramids by moonlight. We profited by their indifference, for we had the scene to ourselves, and were able to dismiss all recollections and effects of crowds and electric lighting, luxuriously-appointed dining-rooms, and subdued and sentimental corners.

We left the hotel and shook off its dust from our feet, which, however, was soon replaced by the sand of the desert. The latter might be very poetical, but was not comfortable. Under the General's escort we were able to dispense with those formidable-looking Bedouins who wander about the sandhills at night in search of work, clad in dark cloaks and closely-fitting turbans, their noiseless footsteps giving them a sense of mystery which strikes upon you with disagreeable sensations. They are gifted with the eyes of hawks, for they see you in the darkness from a considerable distance. Suddenly, on the brow of a sandhill, you perceive one of these mysterious objects spring up and stand out in the moonlight. In a moment he has espied you in the sheltered hollow, and is leaping down to offer his services, his long cloak flying, his staff flourishing. If you did not know him for a wandering Arab, too often harmless but vagabond, you might invest him with the dignity of a simple shepherd watching his flocks by night, after the manner of the shepherds in the early ages of the world.

We passed round to the other side of the Pyramids, where by day or night, happily, all signs of hotel or any other life have disappeared. Here indeed we may gaze upon these wonderful structures and imagine ourselves out of reach of civilisation. Here the Sphinx looks out upon the desert and the far-off horizon, and nothing need trouble its repose but the cry of the night owl or the howling of the distant jackal.

It was an intensely bright and beautiful night. The warmth of the day had given place to a cool delicious freshness, and the stars shone with unrivalled brilliancy; it was the very place and hour for romance. Higher rose the lovely moon.

We stood facing the Sphinx. The sandhills gleamed pure and cold in the pale light. The shadows of the Pyramids were clearly defined, as were their outlines against the night sky. As the moments fled and the hours passed, their true influence fell upon us. No one has really felt and appreciated the great Pyramids until he has seen them by moonlight. Emblem of death, tombs for the dead, night and darkness are essentially their element. Then, indeed, they looked almost superhuman, full of unspeakable solemnity and repose, of majesty and grandeur. Their very simplicity of outline adds to their influence. The eye, arrested by no particular detail, takes in the general effect of the whole stupendous structures. It seemed



ABYSSINIAN SLAVE—FOR CAIRO.

impossible to intrude upon their eternal silence. Almost they seemed to commune with the stars. Here Moses might have stood when he received the Commandments and veiled his face from the children of

Israel. They were only less worthy of the honour than Mount Pisgah, the work not of man, but of God.

Less striking, more mysterious, was the Sphinx. This at all times is best seen by moonlight, which softens down the destructive work of time, and throws the mutilated features into shadow. It is difficult to realise its enormous size. Behind it are the immense Pyramids; below it is no object of comparison, whilst sandhills more or less surround it. To-night its solemn attitude of repose, its sense of mystery, were perfect. It seemed immovable as the earth, fathomless as the skies; a safe guardian of the great Pyramids; an oracle waiting the course of the ages for utterance: biding its time. The destiny of the world might have hung upon its lips. One could only think with strange awe and admiration of the minds and the hands which had accomplished these wonders in the far-gone ages, with a largeness of soul, a breadth of conception difficult to realise in these days and never to be approached. The world has grown older; wiser perhaps; but its wisdom has been the result of chance and experience and slow development. The greatness of the ancients was spontaneous. Life seemed long, Time endless, nothing daunted them.

Yet the Sphinx was not placed there to guard the Pyramids, for it is supposed to be of still greater antiquity. The Greek Mythology makes the Sphinx feminine, but the ancients who carved it adorned with helmet and beard, signs of royalty, intended it to be masculine. It is singular how veiled is its origin and its past, many of the ancient travellers who describe the Pyramids not even alluding to it. For ages all but its head and body was buried in sand, but this has been cleared away. Its huge and stately paws fifty feet long, full of repose and power, are now visible, with their Greek inscriptions. The body measures 140 feet, and is formed of the natural rock turned into shape by clumsy masonry. The head measures 30 feet from the forehead to the chin, and is 14 feet wide. Pliny in his descriptions mentions its red colour, some portions of which still remain. That its destiny must have served some religious purpose, seems proved by the Temple immediately beneath it. The stone pavement between its paws led towards the Pyramids. Beneath its heart stood a sacrificial altar, and the smoke of the fire ascended into its nostrils. How solemn, those rites in the wilderness, powerfully affecting the minds of the worshippers in the days of its glory.

The outlines of the face have disappeared, and it is impossible to say to what race they belonged. By the Arabs it is called "The Father of Terror," but its attitude, full of calmness and repose, rather suggests benevolence. Some Arabian writers declare it to be a talisman for keeping away the sand from the fields and pastures beyond, and it was supposed to lose its power, when, according to tradition, a fanatic in the 14th century partially destroyed the face. What now remains is as hideous as a face without a nose can be: but suggests that, like many of the Chinese idols, its countenance was smiling and serene.

PYRAMIDS AND SPHINX.

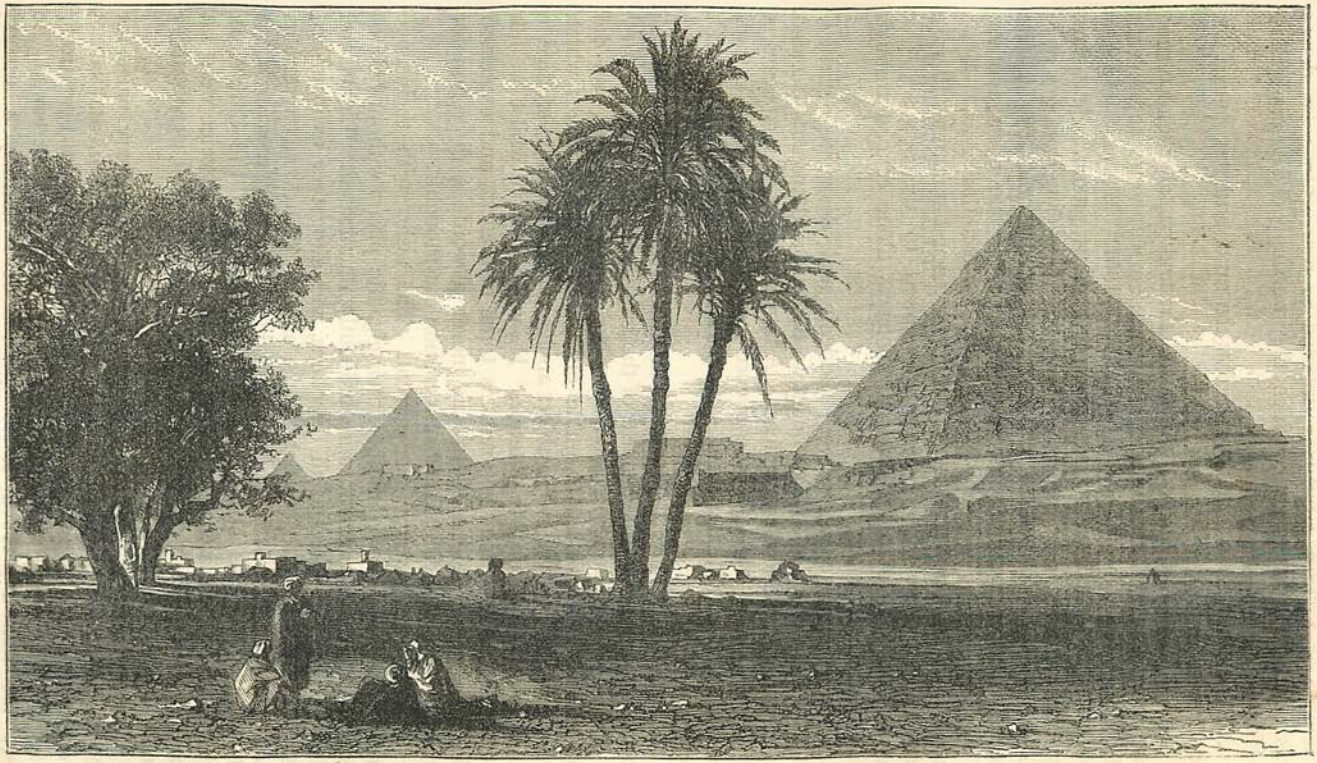
We have said that its destiny was probably religious, for it seems to guard the granite Temple of the Sphinx, as it is called, which Mariette, devoted Egyptologist of ceaseless energy, discovered in 1853.

The Temple lies a little to the south-east of the Sphinx, which overlooks the granite flights leading into the interior. Looking backward, the huge head is ever visible, as if guarding the sacred precincts from the approach of Evil. Here the statue of Khafra, now in the Boulak Museum, was found at the bottom of a well; suggesting that the temple might have been constructed in his reign. If so, it is the only known temple handed down to us from the days of the primæval monarchy.

Nothing can be more simple than the construction, nothing more stupendous than the labour it must have cost. It is entirely built of huge blocks of red granite from Assooan, varied here and there by equally large blocks of alabaster. At the end of the staircase is a long narrow passage, ending in a large open chamber. This is divided into three aisles by square columns: immense blocks of marble reposing one upon another: an arrangement which has been compared to Stonehenge. But Stonehenge is more rugged and barbarous. The Temple of the Sphinx, more perfect in design, suggests a very different people from the mystic Druids. The well in which the statue of Khafra was found is in the second and smaller transept, and is now filled up.

Leading from the greater hall is a mortuary chamber with six niches for mummies: tombs supposed to have been constructed by Khafra for his own family. All, however, is lost in obscurity. Not an inscription has been discovered, not the smallest detail of decoration, to guide the explorer in giving its origin a date. This very fact—the silence and nakedness of its stones—suggests an age anterior to all Egyptian art and influence. They, full of signs and symbolic writing, would surely have left some record of their work behind them. These Egyptians, who worked for posterity, were not likely to leave such a labour without its "sign-manual." All other monuments belonging to ancient Egypt, down to its most remote period, bear their inscriptions; the Temple of the Sphinx is as silent and mysterious as the Sphinx itself, which guards its secret only too well. The oracle is dumb, and will be dumb for ever.

The construction of the Temple points to a period when the science of architecture had scarcely dawned upon the world. Rude and rough as the Temple of Stonehenge, but with more plan and system, its huge blocks of hard, imperishable granite marvellously and beautifully cut. Whatever its age and origin, it was undoubtedly the work of a mighty and powerful people. Some have thought that this was the Temple of Osiris, situated to the south of the Sphinx: others that it was the Temple of the Sphinx itself: for the Sphinx had no secondary cause for existence: it was not in itself a tomb or



SECOND AND THIRD PYRAMID.

a temple or a shrine: but was supposed to represent a solar deity: was one of the forms under which they worshipped Har-em-Khu—"Horus in the dazzling sun."

All this marvellous temple lies below the sand, and was buried for ages in silence and obscurity.

To-night as we went down the dark stairs and passages, and turned into the central hall, the moonlight streamed in with weird and solemn effect, with deep mysterious lights and shadows. We were in a new world. Much of it was buried in profoundest gloom. The dark starlit sky formed our canopy. The passages leading from one aisle to another were impenetrably dark. Where the moonlight fell we traced the enormous blocks of stone, reposing one upon another. Their mere weight had kept them in place for countless ages. As we gazed upon the tomb-recesses, we almost expected mummies to arise and bid us depart from precincts hallowed to themselves. Our voices alone broke the silence, our footsteps alone echoed through these wonderful aisles.

Even as we looked we were suddenly and desperately startled. One of the mummies—which ought to be here and are not—seemed to have come to life in very deed. A faintest footstep was heard, a voice whispered through the silence with awful effect. A form loomed out, mysterious, clad in sable garments, apparently of gigantic height.

For an instant one's heart stood still, from the very effects of the surroundings, the unexpectedness of the intrusion.

It was only a wandering Arab who had scented his prey, and did not even ask permission to guide our steps. With gestures which were evidently meant to be abject apologies, he suddenly kindled a torch and lighted up the interior. He was wise, and whilst we felt impelled to follow him, he used his torch with effect, and expressed himself by dumb motions, but said never a word: a discretion for which we excused him this intrusion upon our thoughts.

To these he gave a fresh current. The aisles with their huge granite blocks one upon another, their gigantic pillars without base or capital or any adornment, were brilliantly illuminated. Lights and shadows fell and flitted in all directions, and altogether extinguished the softer, more mysterious light of the moon. Weird and mysterious was our guide, his dark flashing eyes lighted up by the torch, the closely-fitting turban standing out in contrast with the dark cloak which these Arabs wear so gracefully. Silent as his voice were his footsteps: noiselessly as a ghost he glided about; the least obtrusive guide we had ever met.

Then, when his work was done, without unnecessary pause or repetition, he extinguished his torch, and with a deep Oriental salutation, waited our liberality. Who could have withheld his hand? His very tact and sagacity merited reward. This bestowed, he put the finishing touch to his perfect behaviour by a second

obeisance, and an instant departure, leaving us once more to the solitude of the temple with its moon-cast lights and shadows.

We also soon bade farewell to the solemn precincts, and went up once more to the regions of the Sphinx and the Pyramids. The moon was higher than when we had gone down, the shadows had shortened. There in the solemn night stood the wonderful creations. The Sphinx looked down upon us, nor seemed to rebuke us for intruding upon the precincts of its sacred temple. Wonderful the outlines of the Pyramids beyond, looking in very truth as if Time might fear them. All about us were sandy hills and undulations.

We climbed to the top of one of these hills. Crossing the plain, a black, solitary, receding image, was our late guide, passing on with slow and dignified strides, his long cloak gathered about him, his staff keeping time to his step. In the distance we heard the howling of a jackal: sharp, angry, eager: as if seeking its prey and baffled therein. Far off to the right, visible in the moonlight, we saw a string of camels plodding their way towards Cairo. These probably had come through the desert from some far-off town—Jeddah, it might be, where our mother Eve is said to be buried—and were now in touch with their well-earned rest: patient, plodding beasts of burden, obedient to the will of man and asking only a little kindness in return. Who would not deal tenderly with the dumb animals of creation?

In all the wide plain we saw no other signs of life. It was a hushed and sleeping world: as far as we were concerned, it might almost have been a desert, dead world. The river ran its silent course: the wonderful Nile, with its atmosphere of romance, almost of holiness. The flushed waters of sunset were now turned into pale silver by the moon, where its rays fell athwart them. As we looked at the Pyramids, a longing took possession of us to climb once more to the top and look out upon the world in all its solemn silence and darkness. We were, however, sufficiently sane to restrain our ardour and not attempt the impossible.

But all travellers, in all times, have fallen under the charm and influence of the Pyramids. Their fascination is in proportion to their size and grandeur. For ages their destiny was a contested point. The opinions even of great men were divided: some thought one thing, some another. Only recently has the matter been finally set at rest. These great Pyramids of Egypt, like all the lesser Pyramids, were intended for tombs. This in no way prevented their being constructed on geometrical principles, but rather added to their interest and perfection. Thought had been brought to bear upon them. Such labours could not be lightly undertaken, and are perfect in every detail.

The building of pyramids in Egypt stretches over a period of some 700 years. It commenced, in round numbers, 3000 years before the Christian era, and ended about the year 2300. When the Pharaohs removed their capital from Memphis to Thebes, their ideas changed:

in place of mausoleums above ground, they preferred tombs cut out of the solid rock of the earth.

Nearly all the Pyramids are found between the Delta and the Fayoum. Many are small, many in ruins. Only a few, such as the great Pyramids of Gizeh, seem built to defy time itself. Even the step Pyramid of Sakharah, with its immense tomb-corridors and chambers, its gigantic Apis sarcophagi, seems wearing away under the influence of the ever-rolling stream. The construction of each Pyramid commenced from the centre or interior, and was gradually carried upwards and outwards. Every monarch on ascending the throne immediately began building his tomb, and was anxious to finish it as soon as possible, lest death should overtake him. Once completed it could be enlarged and built up more and more, according to the length of the reign. This is a reason given for the varying sizes of the monuments.

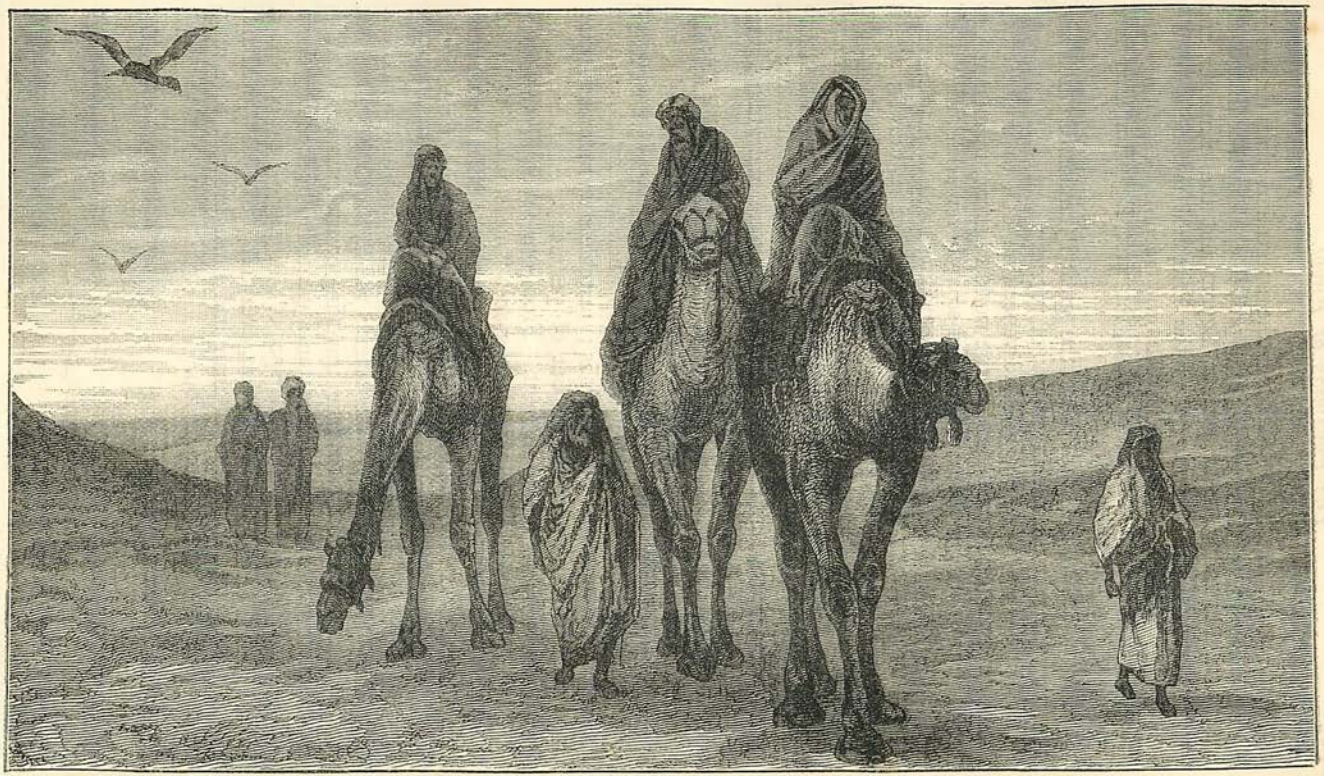
The Pyramids of Gizeh take us back to the 4th Dynasty, or Primæval Monarchy: and Khufu, or Cheops, is supposed to have built the Great Pyramid. Herodotus is the first ancient historian whose record has been handed down. Everything he saw he described vividly, but his historical facts were not always correct. It was probably as difficult to arrive at the truth of things in his day as in ours. To Cheops he ascribes every wickedness, a character apparently not deserved. He is said to have oppressed the Egyptians, and certainly made them work. The construction of the causeway for conveying the stones alone took ten years.

The great Pyramid itself is said to have taken 100,000 men twenty years to build. Tradition has it that it cost £200,000, or 1600 talents, to supply the men with raphanus roots, onions and garlic alone: one of the least considerable of the items. According to Pliny, not 100,000 but 360,000 men were employed twenty years in building the Pyramid: and it really seems as if oppression or slavery alone could have produced such gigantic results.

The present height of the great Pyramid is 451 feet: it was originally 481 feet, higher than the highest building in existence, for even the spire of Strasburg Cathedral is only 461 feet. The length of each side is 775 feet: the area of the base was 63,444 square yards: its solid contents about 85,000,000 cubic feet.

As soon as a king died his mausoleum was hastily finished with an outer covering of hard and polished granite: the steps used in construction were thus filled in and the opening leading to the tomb-chamber disappeared for ever from view. Only one or two chambers of the kings of short reign were decorated, and these not elaborately: those of longer reign carefully painted their passages and chambers, covering them profusely with historical and symbolic legends.

Few subjects have received greater thought, investigation and speculation than these Pyramids of Egypt. Probably all that ever can be said or known about them has been stated; no new discovery



CROSSING THE DESERT.

can well give rise to a new theory; the suggestion that they were tombs and tombs only, is sensible and probable, altogether in accordance with the traditions of ancient Egypt, and the character and superstitions handed down to us of the Primæval monarchs of the Memphite dynasties: the earliest known records, excepting the Thinite, which commences with Mena, the first Egyptian king and founder of Ancient Memphis.

But when all is said and done, the great Pyramids of Gîzeh will remain enveloped in a certain amount of mystery.

To them belongs the homage and veneration due to antiquity, to labours and results unparalleled in the world's history, to monuments that as the Arabian physician of Bagdad so aptly remarked, time itself may fear. Even here, as we see, the despoiling hand of man has not been found wanting; the great Pyramid is shorn of its crown; and it is well for the world that only 30 feet have been taken from its height. The pathway to the top is worn by pilgrims—just as the iron toe of St. Peter's statue at Rome is fast disappearing under the kisses of the faithful; otherwise time has spared the wonderful monument; not wearing the stones, but covering them with a tone and atmosphere, beautiful and refined.

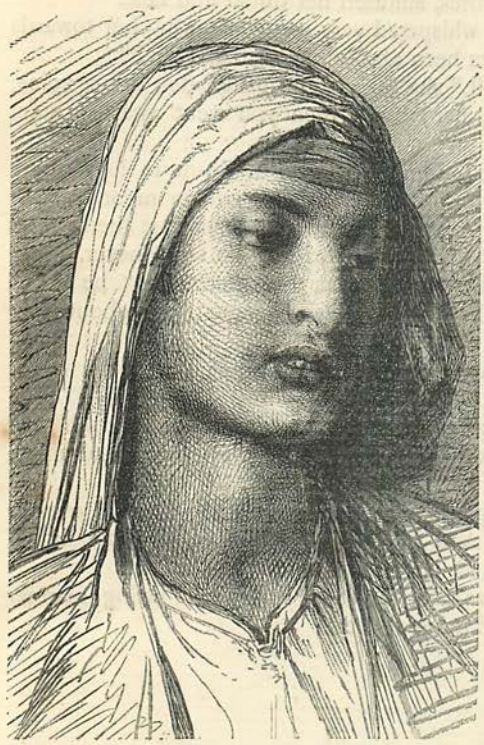
To-night, as we gazed, this exquisite old-world tone was invisible. The still ascending moon threw down her soft and silvery light, and touched the Pyramids with her own peculiar magic. It was not at all the magic we had enjoyed with Osman when looking down upon the moonlit Tombs of the Caliphs; matchless monuments, that, compared with the Pyramids, are but of yesterday.

Here the effect was very different. From our sandhill, with sandhills and plains stretching away into spaces "measureless to man," within a stone's-throw of the sleeping waters of the Nile, we seemed, whilst gazing upon the oldest, most gigantic monument of the world, to have left that world far behind us. The death-like silence around seemed as if it could never be broken; not more dumb and portentous the Sphinx at our feet; not more solemn the Pyramids beyond; not more eternal the far-off sky with its travelling constellations.

And looking upwards those same stars appeared to be shedding down a silent benediction upon this little spot of antiquity, where, combined with the vastness of Divine creation, everything that was great and noble in the work and mind of man had been brought to a magnificent and imperishable conclusion.

THE PYRAMIDS "AT HOME."

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Letters from Majorca," etc., etc.



A Maiden of Cairo.

IT was very difficult to leave all the magic of the Pyramids by moonlight; the solemn silence and solitude of the vast surrounding plains; the beauty of the heavens with their countless, moving stars, over which the Queen of Night seemed to reign with such soft and subtle influence: very difficult to turn away from the contemplation of a scene in which the elements seemed more of heaven than of earth, and come back to the trivial and the commonplace. But we could not stay here for ever: and we presently found ourselves standing on the sandy terrace between the Pyramids and the Mena House Hotel.

The small hours had long struck; we were absolutely alone; every one had retired, and probably many were dreaming of the morrow, picnics, evening dances and mild flirtations. What to them the moonlit Pyramids, the mysterious Sphinx, the sacred atmosphere of antiquity—sacred as we hold the dead sacred, and possessing all the repose and solemnity of death? Such influences were as a lost language to the sleepers—who in their way perhaps were none the less happy. Those to whom the higher senses are given, have too often to pay for the privilege by infinite sorrow and suffering, in which the intervals of happiness play a very small part.

The hotel was wrapped in silence. The door stood open—house-

breakers and highwaymen are unknown in these latitudes, or if known, do their work boldly and openly. A sleepy porter, whose office was a sinecure, reposed in a huge chair and scarcely opened his eyes to give a smile all pity and sarcasm to the singular Englishmen who preferred moonlit Pyramids, a mysterious Sphinx and desolate plains to a comfortable bed and easy slumbers. The electric lights were extinguished, but here and there a ruby lamp threw its warm glow over the scene: very warm after the pale moon which had guided our steps and thrown our dark shadows over the sandy plains. Up the wide staircase we went to our respective rooms, where from our own window—as fate would have it—we could still look out upon the moonlit outlines of the Great Pyramid, whose very shadow almost touched us. Alone as we now were, the grandeur and solemnity, the almost appalling silence and solitude of the whole scene was immeasurably heightened.

From the open window, the influence of these mighty structures more than ever enfolded us. There was no thought of bed and rest, slumbers and dreams: all one's bodily needs retired before this divine night. It was so clear that a small object would have stood out boldly on the outlines of the Pyramids, but those outlines were unbroken; no desecrating foot rested upon them; no earthly sound broke that eternal silence. If they were haunted, it was only by ghosts and shades invisible to mortal eye.

All the mystery and speculation that has enshrouded them as countless ages have rolled on, seemed prominently before us to-night.

We remembered how, from all times, excepting the very earliest, there had been conjectures as to their destiny. By some speculative thinkers—such as Jomard—the Great Pyramid was supposed to have been built solely for scientific uses. Gazing far down the interior passage towards the opening, the eye rested at night on the Polar Star of the ancients—not our Polar Star of to-day. Thus it was supposed to serve an astronomical purpose. In the sarcophagus of the tomb-chamber Piazzi Smyth considered that he saw a standard authority on the weights and measures of Ancient Egypt: and in "Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid," he has worked this fancy out with great ingenuity, but without sufficient proof. Like almost all suppositions connected with the Pyramids his arguments are more theoretical than practical.

In ancient Arab legends it is recorded that the Pyramids were built before the Flood to preserve scientific treasures from destruction. Again, they were imagined to have been granaries built by Joseph, by those who knew not that they were almost solid erections. Some thought they were observatories and sundials, the hours marked, not on the flat surface but by shadows cast upon the sand: a poetical idea that would not bear looking into. Others supposed them watch-towers, lighted at night to guide travellers in crossing the desert: also poetical, but unneeded where the unchanging stars formed a truer

beacon. The desert plains were not a troubled sea with rocks ahead. By some it was thought that in their solemn and secret chambers priests were dedicated to their religion: and others even declared they were not the work of men's hands, but, like trees, had mysteriously grown up out of the earth.

The Second Pyramid, erected by Khafra or Chefren, is not generally climbed by travellers. Bedouins haunting the top of the Great Pyramid will offer to run down it and up the second in an impossibly short time for backsheesh; and will do it; but the ascent is difficult, and serves no purpose. It is smaller than the Great Pyramid, but the plateau being higher, it almost looks the larger of the two. The interior possesses the usual chambers and passages, but they are smaller than those of the Pyramid of Cheops. The sarcophagus of red granite in the tomb-chamber is larger than that of Cheops, and when found by Belzoni, contained the bones of an ox. No doubt Chefren had once reposed here, and why his body was not left in peace, remains amongst the eternal mysteries of earth.

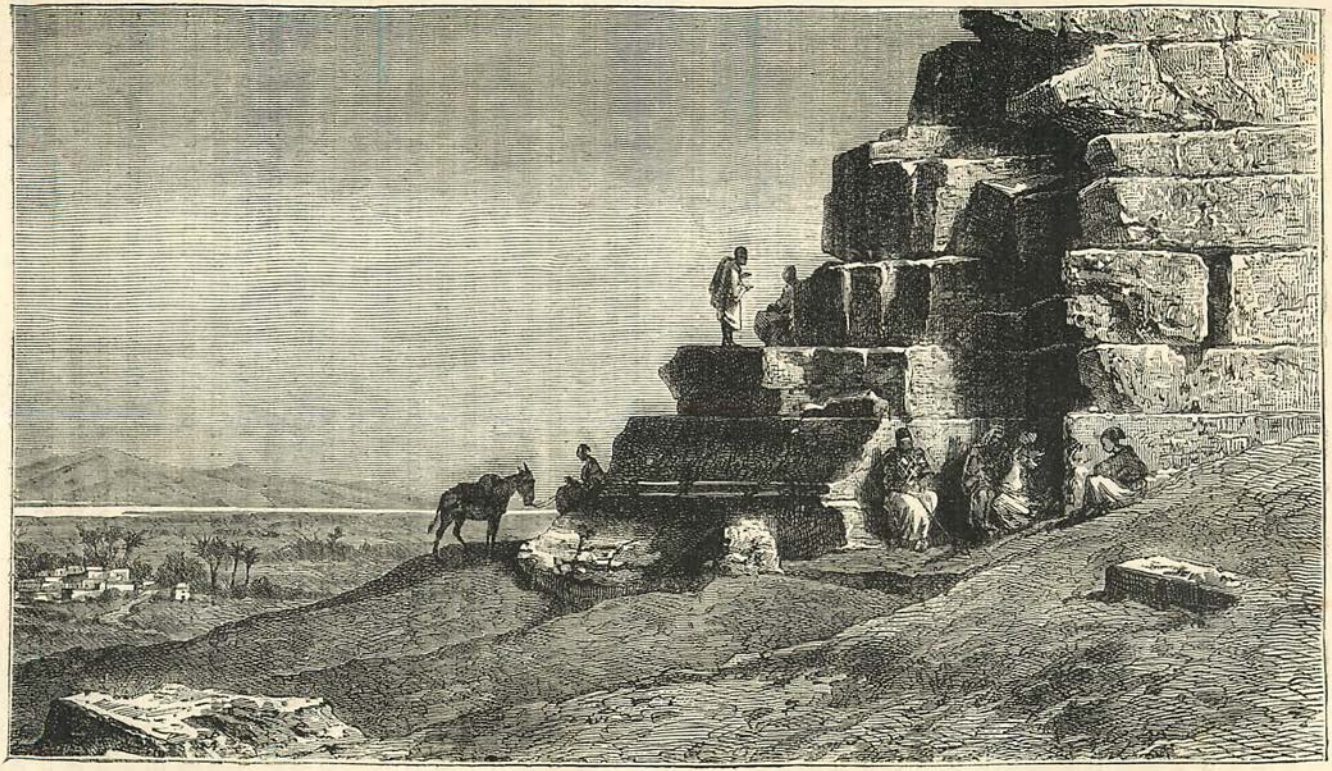
This Belzoni was one of the most indefatigable and greatest of discoverers. His career was remarkable and romantic.

Born in 1778, son of a humble barber in Padua—that quiet but charming city—he was destined for the cloister. In Rome, brought up as a monk, he very soon distinguished himself. Then came the occupation of Rome by the French; he fled to England, and supported himself by sitting to artists as a model for Hercules and Apollo, for he was a man of great physical as well as mental strength.

Whilst in London, he also studied water-engineering, and renouncing all idea of returning to the cloister, took unto himself a wife in every way fitted to be his companion.

In 1815 they went to Egypt, where Belzoni supported himself by dancing in public. How such a man must have mistaken his vocation by dreaming of the cloister, with all its limitations! Here he attracted the notice of Mohammed Ali, with whom he soon became a favourite. Henceforth his days of poverty and uncertainty were at an end. He thoroughly justified the monarch's partiality, and began his exploring career by opening the Second Pyramid and discovering its hidden chambers and recesses. He discovered the tomb of Seti I. at Thebes, opened the Rock Temples of Abû Simbel, discovered the emerald mines of Sabara, which had been long lost, and the ruins of ancient Berenike on the Red Sea.

Belzoni died at the age of forty-five whilst on a journey into the interior of Africa: a journey that but for this untimely end would probably have led to great results. He was a man in advance of his time, and possessed unbounded energy and courage; his mental gifts were as stupendous as his stature was great; nothing daunted him. He was skilled as an engineer, though it never became his vocation, and his talent for drawing was remarkable. In his wife, he had a devoted help-meet, and from the day of his marriage to the day



AT THE FOOT OF THE PYRAMIDS.

of his death, they were scarcely ever separated. Her own mental qualities were of a high order, enabling her to enter into and comprehend all her husband's thoughts and aspirations. She became as great an enthusiast as himself in all his labours and explorings; and after his death edited such of his valuable works as were yet unpublished.

It is pleasant to contemplate careers so successful; the lives of two beings well matched, working harmoniously together, devoted to each other. The contrary is so often the case in this world of cross purposes. But Belzoni was a man of immense, almost universal influence. All who came beneath it, yielded to his mesmeric power: of which the great secret was that allied to his mental gifts was the charm of sympathy, without any of the weakness that sometimes accompanies the virtue. His heart was always under the guidance of his reason. The Arabs thought him almost superhuman, and yielded a blind obedience to him. Had he been a monarch, he might have swayed the world. The only sad feature in his life was its shortness: he died with his mental powers at their highest, and when the greatest possibilities of his career were only developing.

But though to Belzoni belongs the honour of having opened the Second Pyramid, not to him belongs the honour of discovering the building or Temple near it, over which the Sphinx keeps watch and ward.

This was reserved for Mariette Pacha, after it had been buried 1000 years in the sand. And here in a well, as we have recorded, he also discovered eight statues of Chefren, the best of which is now in the Boulak museum; the hieroglyphics on the walls of the temple proving that the Egyptians of those days possessed the art of writing, and were already highly civilised. Over this temple, we have seen, the Sphinx presides with a silence never broken and a mystery never lifted. To the ancients it was the image of a god: the type of Har-em-Khu: Horus in the sun-rising: emblem of light conquering darkness, life rising out of death.

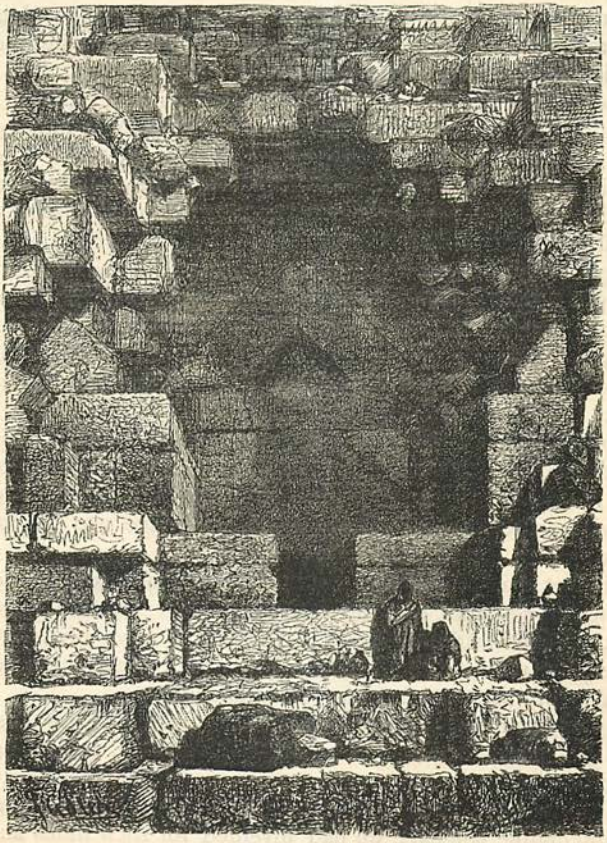
In the Necropolis Har-em-Khu was the emblem of the resurrection; at the sun-rising, he was light and life; overlooking the vast plains of the country, he represented fertility. His image, in the form of the Sphinx, the Egyptians called Hu, signifying *the watcher;* and never image more solemn, serene, full of calm force, could have been imagined by heathen people: a human head allied to the body of a lion: highest combination they could conceive of mental and physical power.

From the courts of the temple the worshippers would mount the steps, the grand form ever in sight, and perform their sacrificial rites on the altar that lay between its enormous paws. Here the incense ascended, lighted by a people groping in darkness, yet in much so nearly approaching the truth. How was it with them, when for each the Dark Valley was reached, and the great mystery became known?

There was no one to return from the dead and tell them what lay beyond the veil. Ages had to elapse before Moses and the Prophets arose; and again before St. Paul was to stand forth and declare to the men of Athens Him whom they ignorantly worshipped as the UNKNOWN GOD.

But to return to our Pyramids and the present time.

The moon has travelled far; the stars are waning: let us close the



ENTRANCE TO THE GREAT PYRAMID.

casement, for a short repose before Horus rises in the east, and a new day is born to earth.

The next morning it was not the same thing at all. Last night's romance had vanished and evaporated, "as a dream dies at the opening day." This garish light was an enemy to poetry and contemplation: quite as much as the small crowd thronging the steps of the hotel, the hall, the morning-room, the chatter of the breakfast-room;

those mild excitements consequent upon approaching excursions on donkeys or camels, in carriages or dahabeeyehs.

There was no repose anywhere. The Bedouins at the foot of the Great Pyramid were already on the alert for their daily victims, and the venerable Sheykh, imposing and dignified, who might have been one of the ancient patriarchs, invested them with great discretionary powers. True grandeur of face and form have some of these Egyptian sheykhs, and it is difficult to conceive that their lives are not equally free from the petty faults and greater vices which so often cloud the lives of mankind. For, "come sune or syne," a man's life, for good or evil, is reflected upon the countenance.

The terrace before the hotel was crowded with vehicles of every description, and luncheon-baskets were carefully stowed into invisible recesses. Some had planned to visit a distant pyramid, others an important ruin; others again to encamp for a day in the desert or to spend it amongst the reeds and rushes and lotus flowers of the Nile: all to reassemble towards sundown, the hour for the important ceremony of *table-d'hôte*.

"I invite you to inspect the interior of the Pyramids," said one of the managers to us, literally translating his French into English. "It is well worth a visit, and the experience is not in the least disagreeable. The whole does not occupy an hour. One moment! there goes Mohamet Ali—I will call him."

Without giving us time for an opinion, our active manager darted to the door and returned with the imposing Sheykh, whose presence seemed to fill the room, whose flowing garments folded and unfolded with grace as he walked, and whose voice was ringing and sonorous.

"Mohamet Ali," said the manager, "these gentlemen are desirous of visiting the chamber of the Great Pyramid." We had never said so, but that was beside the mark. "In fact, I have invited them," continued the manager more correctly, "and I leave them to your care. You will see that they are well attended."

This was appropriating us with a vengeance, and we hesitated. Osman had advised us not to attempt the interior, and Osman was always right.

"We are in for it, and had better go," laughed H. in a composite and unintelligible language we had invented for such times and purposes. "If we don't these people will be hurt, and think we have not done our duty." For H. is careful of other people's feelings. "In fact," he continued, "we haven't a voice in the matter: we are prisoners on parole."

It seemed so; for the Sheykh with a profound reverence, a lordly mien and majestic step we should have vainly tried to imitate in European costume, took us under his ample wing and conducted us in solemn procession to the entrance of the Pyramid. Here we found a number of Bedouins anxious to be our guides, and it was only the

A Personally-Conducted Mounting the Great Pyramid.

exercise of supreme authority that the Sheykh appointed two out of the number to conduct us to the Tomb-Chamber.

But we were not to be alone. Other visitors were there for the same purpose, and some were entering whilst others were coming out, like bees at a hive.

The entrance was in the centre of the north face, about forty-five feet from the ground. In the days of Herodotus and Pliny, the entrance was unknown. A perfectly smooth surface was all that was visible; a huge stone blocked up the passage. It was the arrangement of this passage and of the interior generally, which caused Mr. Piazzi Smyth and other writers to conclude that the Pyramids had fulfilled some higher purpose than that of a tomb. All this, however, is mere conjecture, no matter how cunningly and skilfully they work out their theories. Herodotus mentions that the Pyramids had subterranean communication with the waters of the Nile, by which means the secret chambers could be inundated at will; though for what reason it is hard to imagine. This at any rate could not apply to the Tomb-Chamber so very far above the level of the river.

It is not known whether the ancient Egyptians ever revealed the secret of the existing chamber. To have done so would have been a violation of their principles and of the purpose for which they were constructed. A false opening led to a narrow passage and a lower chamber, and even Herodotus is not supposed to have known more than this—which might account for his Nile theory.

The Pyramid, it is supposed, was first disturbed during the wars of the Seventh to the Tenth Dynasty, more than 2000 years before the Christian era. Whether it was then rifled or not, can never be known. The aperture was again closed up and remained so for ages. It was reopened by the Persians about the sixth century, and the Romans obtained access to it.

Then came the Arabs, who concluded that these gigantic monuments must be treasure chambers, and did their utmost to discover the secret.

In the ninth century it is said that Khalif Mâmûm, son of Haroun-al-Raschid—the wonderful monarch we have all met in fable—once more opened the Great Pyramid, in the hope of finding such inexhaustible treasures as the 'Arabian Nights' love to describe. Tradition had handed down marvellous tales of gold and precious stones, all buried in these gigantic structures. Infinite pains were taken by the engineers of that time to discover the opening, but accident and not skill revealed the secret. An inconceivable amount of time, money and labour was spent in the fruitless effort; a host of workmen were employed. All in vain.

Yet the engineers must have drawn their conclusions from some solid reasoning, for they were not far out in their judgment. They took the centre of the Pyramid as the basis of their operations; but the ancient Egyptians, foreseeing such a moment as this, had not placed

their passage in the centre. The Khalif, however, was not to be daunted, and engineers by dint of vast labours, disturbed the polished surface and removed the huge stones, gradually burrowing into this apparently impenetrable cavern.

At length, one day, when they had excavated to a considerable distance they heard, fifteen feet to the left, the falling of stones and masonry, loosened by their own work. Changing their course they soon discovered the secret passage, which led to the tomb-chamber.

Disappointment resulted. If gold and precious stones had once been there, they were there no longer. Even the very tomb itself—the mausoleum of Cheops—was empty, and the huge stone lid was gone. The workmen, baffled of their "treasure trove," threatened to revolt.

Then the Khalif cunningly had a certain amount of coin secretly transported to a niche in the passage: and the sum was found to be exactly equal to the sum spent in opening the Pyramid. It seemed, however, a reward for labour, and though no one was the better for it, every one was satisfied. In the jar was found a parchment bearing the following prophecy:

"Mâmûm, son of Haroun-al-Raschid, will in the year 813 open the Great Pyramid in search of treasure. There will only be found sufficient to repay him for his work."

This more than satisfied the men, who plainly saw that they had been merely carrying out the will of the prophet. The task had to be done, and they had had the honour of doing it. But as usual, fabulous stories of vast discoveries and untold wealth went down to posterity, rivalling the 'Arabian Nights' in their inexhaustible resources. These stories would please the Arabians of all times, whose gorgeous imaginations revelled in the luxurious and the impossible. They were only children of a larger growth, just as we all are to-day.

All that the Khalif, his engineers and workmen found was an empty tomb-chamber of polished granite, formed of huge blocks so cunningly placed together that the joins were almost invisible. Eight square blocks composed the floor, eight the roof, eight the ends, sixteen the sides. The room was oblong. Like the Tombs of Thebes and other places, it is probable that this chamber had been rifled of its treasure long ages before, when all had been closed up again and made secret. And probably those who rifled it had not to seek for the entrance, like the Khalif Mâmûm. In the earlier ages it was always known to a certain number of Egyptians, any one of whom might have been open to bribery.

The only treasures ever found in the Pyramids were discovered by the English some fifty years ago: and this not in the Great, but in the Third Pyramid. But these treasures enriched science, and had nothing to do with gold, silver, and precious stones.

This is the most perfect of all the Pyramids, and has been called by the Arabs the "red pyramid," from its covering of granite. Here

was found a magnificent sarcophagus of basalt, beautifully veined with blue, and part of the mummy-coffin which had contained the king's body. Herodotus had declared that this Pyramid was built by Menkara—the Mycerinus of his own country—some 4000 years before the birth of our Lord, and the following inscription on the chest now in the British Museum proved him, as he so often was, correct: "Thou hast become Osiris, ruler of the north and south country, King Menkara, living for ever, born of Nut the goddess of heaven and of Sab the god of earth. The wings of thy mother Nut shall spread over thee as a shelter: thee, in whose name is hidden the secret of heaven. May she grant thee to be as a god, striking to earth all who oppose thee. King of the North and South—Menkara, living for ever."

The sarcophagus, which was also to have reposed in the British Museum, was unfortunately wrecked off the coast of Spain, and reposes instead at the bottom of the sea. There it possibly fulfils a more romantic destiny, as the tomb of some royal and illustrious mermaid—if mermaids ever die.

The "north and south country," mentioned in the inscription, refer to heaven and earth.

The tomb-chamber of the Third Pyramid is built entirely of polished granite, and the roof rises to a pointed arch resembling our Early English architecture. There are other rooms in the Pyramids; and according to history and tradition, another body—that of a woman—was buried here. This was the famous Queen Nitocris of the 6th or Elephantine Dynasty, of which Pepi-Merira and Neferkara were the representative monarchs. Nitocris was celebrated for her beauty, and for long was confounded with Rhodopis, the wife of Sappho's brother and the favourite of the Pharaohs. Rhodopis became celebrated in Arabian legend and was turned into a sort of baneful divinity, haunting the Pyramids; her flashing eyes and syren voice luring travellers to destruction.

Other legends, however, are more kindly to Rhodopis. She was the Cinderella of this imaginative people. According to the poetical story, the wind one day carried away her sandal whilst she was bathing with other maidens on the seashore. It finally dropped into the lap of King Memphis, as he was sitting in judgment. Struck by the wonderful beauty and smallness of the sandal, he immediately ordered that its owner should be discovered and brought to him. She was found at Naucratis; the sandal exactly fitted, and she was presented to the monarch, who immediately fell in love with and made her his wife: and when she died, buried her in the Third Pyramid.

Other legends are connected with the Pyramids which are supposed to be haunted by various spirits. According to the Bedouins, one of them has the form of a boy, another that of a man, who appear at nightfall and burn incense to the honour of the dead supposed to lie within. And as ignorant and superstitious people will often not go

INUNDATION.

near a churchyard in England after nightfall, so many in the darkness will not approach the Pyramids. But the legends are all full of poetry and romance, and rather add to the charm of these monuments of antiquity.

The supposed mummy of Menkara is now in the British Museum, and those who will, may gaze upon the remains of 5000 years ago. It was embalmed according to Egyptian art and custom with resin and aromatic spices. Remains of the woollen winding-sheet and other cloths are also there. Linen cloths were used in a later age.

Of all the Pyramids the interior of that of Cheops is the most easily examined, and is the only one open to general inspection. And so, thanks to the manager of the Mena House Hotel, who left us no choice in the matter, we found ourselves committed to the ordeal. It seemed much more formidable than last night's climbing expedition.

The entrance is twenty-four feet from the true centre, and forty-five feet from the ground, level with the thirteenth step of the "Jacob's Ladder" we had scaled last night. The human bees going in and out were therefore some distance above us.

Scrambling over a heap of stones, the accumulation of years, we reached an entrance composed of huge blocks of granite bearing a modern inscription. The passage was dark, low and narrow, scarcely allowing explorers to pass each other. The sense of entering this mysterious corridor, of having this immense weight of stone above one's head, was almost appalling. We felt as the traveller must feel who passes under Niagara—it was doubtful whether we should return alive. Our Bedouins lighted candles and hurried us in; no time was allowed for hesitation or second thoughts.

We first descended a narrow passage at an angle of 26°, about three feet six inches high, and nearly four feet wide. This passage continues for some 340 feet, and ends in a subterranean chamber—the sepulchral chamber found in all pyramids. Into this, if anywhere, the waters of the Nile must have flowed, as recorded by Herodotus, but no signs exist of their ever having done so.

This long passage and sepulchral chamber are not as a rule shown to travellers. After a distance of twenty yards we left it, and branched upwards into the passage leading to the Great Hall or Gallery and the King's Chamber. Half-way down, a horizontal passage diverges, leading to the Queen's Chamber. At the end of the twenty yards from the entrance, and at the commencement of the upward passage, we found ourselves confronted by a huge block of granite: the falling of which from the roof had long ages before revealed the passage to the workmen of the Khalif Mâmûm.

Passing round this stone into the upward passage, the air grew more warm and oppressive as we went on. Any lady given to fainting might have been excused for fainting here. The whole weight of the Pyramid seemed crushing down upon us. Our upward way

had to be made almost on hands and knees—a crawling performance uncomfortable as any that could possibly be imagined. Every now and then we slipped a step or two backward, and felt as if the end of all things was at hand. The guides threw a faint light around, which did little more than make darkness visible. The construction of the passage was so perfect that turning at the further end we could see the sky through the entrance; and at night we might have looked direct upon the North star of the ancients.

Here and there we passed explorers whose ordeal was nearly over, and we envied them. In the pale glimmer they looked ghastly and subdued, but this was probably only imagination. We would not ask them how they had fared, preferring to remain ignorant of coming evils. It seemed cowardly too. Stalwart inhabitants of the Old and the New World with superabundance of strength and animal spirits know nothing of weak nerves and feeble muscles: and we are none of us proof against ridicule.

So we went on for about 130 yards, when we branched off into the Queen's Corridor, where at last we had level ground to walk upon.

We found the Queen's Chamber small and nearly square, about 18 feet each way, roofed with enormous blocks of stone, over which 5000 years had passed as a day. The chamber is immediately under the apex of the pyramid; 67 feet above the base, 71 feet below the King's Chamber, and 407 feet below the original summit.

The room was empty and the air stifling; we soon satisfied curiosity, and turned back to continue our way up the main gallery. Here we came upon an opening called the *well*, 191 feet deep, and rather more than two feet square. It was probably never used as a well, but as a means of communication from one passage to another.

The gallery in which we now found ourselves was 150 feet long, 28 feet high, and about 7 feet wide. There were notches at regular intervals in the stonework, supposed to have been used in transporting the sarcophagus to the tomb-chamber, and certainly of use to modern pilgrims. But for these we should have found our progress a very slow and backward affair. As it was, in due time we reached the end of the gallery, from which a small passage led to the King's Chamber and the end of our pilgrimage.

Here, too, the atmosphere was insupportable, the tenebrous darkness only fitfully lighted by the candles held by the guides. The shadows flitting about might have been ghosts of those who had lived 5000 years ago. In this place of eternal night there could be no rest: no glimmer of daylight that ever penetrated, no cock-crowing ever heard.

But there were too many people present for a ghostly performance: whilst an unmistakable twang loudly speaking into the sarcophagus would have sent the most hardened ghost flitting back to the remotest regions of the land of shadows.

This was the chamber of the sarcophagus, or tomb-chamber; the largest of all and the most important: the reason for which the Pyramid existed. Here the body of the King was to repose for ever.

The room certainly looked as if myriads of ages might pass over it harmlessly; huge blocks of granite piled one upon another, their joints invisible. The flat granite roof had not moved a hair's breadth in all its forty or fifty centuries, and in spite of the more than 300 feet of masonry above it. It was composed of nine blocks resting on the side walls, each measuring nearly twenty feet. The chamber was over thirty feet long, seventeen feet broad, nineteen feet high. At the further end was the only object it contained; the only object within the whole Pyramid—the sarcophagus destined to hold the body of Khufu, the Egyptian monarch: a plain tomb of red porphyry, about seven feet long, three feet wide, three feet high. The lid has disappeared. When struck, the tomb gives forth a bell-like sound. Enterprising "tourists" are chipping off pieces to carry away as memorials, and in course of time the sarcophagus will no doubt follow the example of the lid and vanish away.

How long the body of Cheops reposed here, or who first entered and rifled the tomb of its treasure, will never be known. It must have been long ages before the days of Haroun-al-Raschid and the Khalif Mâmûm. If the mummy were still there it would add very much to the interest and solemnity, not only of the tomb-chamber, but of the Pyramid itself. As it was, Osman was right in saying that the ordeal was painful and the reward insufficient. The moment you enter the narrow corridor haunted by bats, who find a fitting home in this impenetrable darkness, you are oppressed with a sense of suffocation. In the King's Chamber it was intolerable, but happily there was nothing to detain us within its gloomy limits. The tomb has not even an inscription, and the walls are smooth and bare.

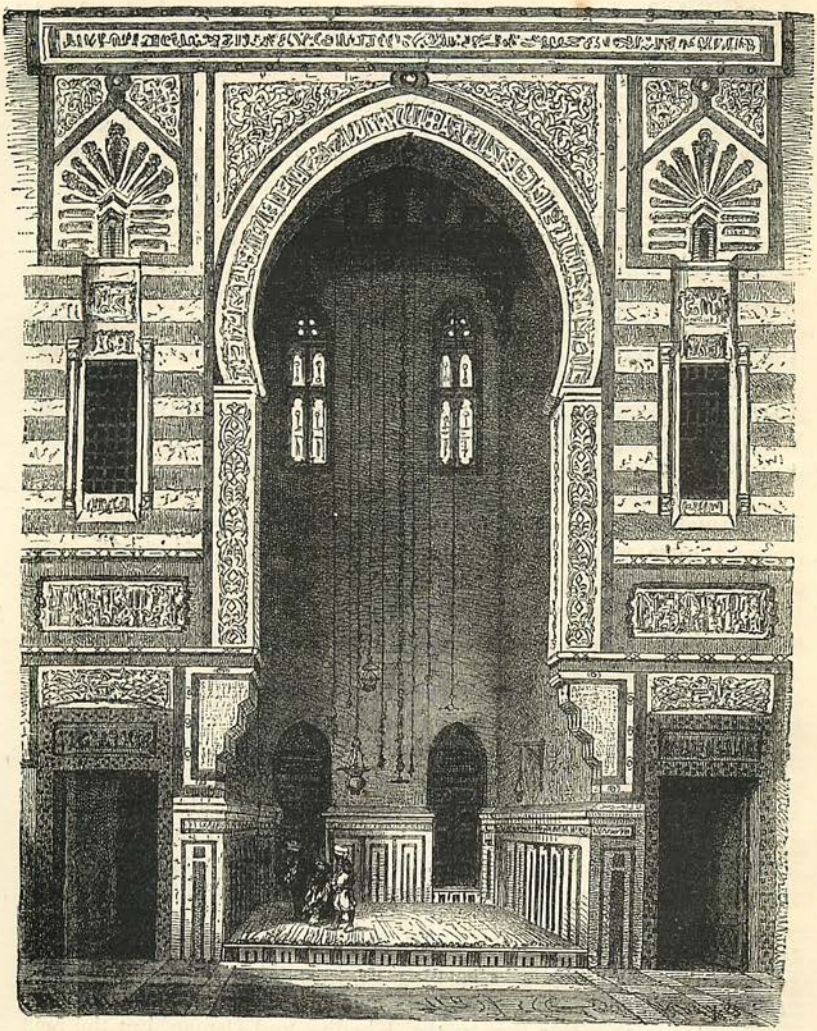
The chamber is not immediately under the apex of the Pyramid, like that of the Queen, but lies a little to the south.

Above it are five chambers one upon another, built to relieve the tomb-chamber of the immense weight of masonry which must otherwise have crushed it in. These chambers are of comparatively recent discovery, but they have served one good purpose. The name of Khufu is found in them, written by the very workmen who built the Pyramid, one or two of the names having been let into the walls upside down: confirming beyond all further controversy that Khufu, or Cheops, was the builder of the Pyramid, and that for some unknown period of time his embalmed body reposed in the tomb-chamber.

In the first four chambers the roofs are flat; in the uppermost, the blocks are placed obliquely. The first was discovered by Davidson in 1763, and is called after him: the last, discovered by Perring and Vyse, bear the inappropriate names of Wellington, Nelson, Lady Arbuthnot and Colonel Campbell.

We were more than glad to turn away from the King's Chamber,

and retrace our steps. Even H. in the pale glimmering candlelight looked in need of an air-pump, and remembering sundry occasions in boyhood, when even the atmosphere of church had been too much for him, and we had helped him out only just in time, a sudden fear



PRAYER NICHE IN MOSQUE.

seized us that perhaps something of the sort would happen again here. But all proved well. The downward slope was even more uncomfortable than the opposite, and with great rejoicing we found ourselves once more at the entrance. Never was light of day or draught of

fresh air more grateful. As we came out several were going in, one of them a lady, who grasped our arm without ceremony, and begged to be enlightened.

"Is it very terrible?" she asked. "I want to go, and I hardly dare go. Is there much to see? Have they air-pumps, and the electric light? Is there a refreshment stall in the tomb-chamber? No! But suppose some one fainted? You don't mean to say these miserable little candles are all the light we have to guide us? And what if they go out? candles won't burn in bad air. We should be at the mercy of these ferocious-looking Bedouins, who are positively terrifying with their dark faces, flashing eyes, and loud voices. Such creatures! Pray excuse so many questions. You see, I am a poor hysterical creature, and when an attack does seize me, it takes a very strong arm to hold me up. Now, if you would only——"

This last sentence was addressed to H., who looked equal to any emergency. In goodness of heart and susceptibility of emotions, he would there and then have offered his escort, and once more gone through the terrible ordeal—two ordeals on this occasion. But we were beforehand: and holding him with an eye of warning, we advised the hysterical but robust-looking lady—more than slightly inclined to *embonpoint*—to give up the idea of entering the Pyramid, and remain satisfied with seeing it with other's eyes.

Her expression immediately changed. The hysterics had only been "manufactured on the premises," and finding them unsuccessful, they at once withdrew into the background. A pitying look was bestowed upon H., a withering flash upon us: a muttered "Barbarian!" the grasp on our arm relaxed, and the substantial syren with firm and not small footsteps passed into the gloom of the corridor.

"Mentor," said H., "you rescued me from a troublesome task. I fear I should have given in to the lady's suggestion, and no one could be of any use in a case of hysterics in these passages. Besides, she really looked anything but a 'poor creature.'"

"Beware of syrens on your way through the world, Telemachus," we replied. "If we have saved you this time, on many a future day you will have to look to yourself. Our syren thought she would like your escort, and you would have found your task difficult, but not agreeable."

The old Sheykh, on the watch for us, escorted us with much ceremony to the hotel. Reaching its hospitable doors, we noticed a long string of carriages approaching in procession. At the first moment our thoughts flew to the Khedive and Osman, but the next we perceived that an absence of all state marked the cavalcade. The inmates of the carriages seemed all more or less excited, and the "repose of royalty" did not distinguish them.

"What does it mean?" we asked a manager, who stood with us at the door. "Who are these?"

The manager smiled, and for a moment did not reply: possibly giving time for our wonder to develop. "Members of some archæological or antiquarian society?" we suggested.

"Only in the matter of wearing apparel," he laughed. "These are a party of Cook's tourists, personally conducted. Their arrival was telegraphed to us this morning. As they have little time to spare, we are obliged to have everything ready for them."

Some of the carriages contained seven people: three on each seat and one with the driver: others had only five. They all rapidly alighted and swarmed up the steps. The manager advanced: we retired; a sort of "set to partners" figure. Every one spoke at once and the air seemed full of sound. Added to this was a noise of many feet and seven-leagued boots. As it chanced, H. caught sight of a face familiar to schoolday recollections.

"Why, Beauchamp!" he exclaimed, "fancy meeting you at the Pyramids, and in such a motley assemblage—you, the most fastidious of us all in those past days! What is the mystery?"

"Simply health," laughed Beauchamp. "I had overworked in reading for honours at Oxford. The doctor hinted at all sorts of possibilities if I didn't throw everything up for a time; I must go abroad, but not alone: the greater the change the better. 'Join a party of Cook's tourists,' suggested the Pater; 'no greater change than that, I should think; plenty of movement and excitement.' 'My dear,' mildly objected my lady mother, 'think for a moment; is the society quite——' 'Bother society,' cried Sir Hector; 'he'll have plenty of that by-and-by; it's a matter of health and this is the very thing for him: a host of people and no harm amongst them. I never did approve of his going in for honours. They won't help him to manage his tenants and raise his crops.' So it was settled—the Pater always did get his way, you know—and here I am."

"Doing Egypt?"

"Doing Egypt," laughed Beauchamp. "We have 'done' other countries too, or they have 'done' us, if you'll excuse a bad pun. Though I must say Cook's tourists get much less taken in than ordinary travellers: that is something in their favour in these days, when you are charged for every glass of water you drink and the very chair you sit upon."

"How long have you here?" asked H. "Can't we manage to have a day together, whilst the Personally Conducted are otherwise engaged? You might rejoin them to-morrow morning."

"A day together!" laughed Beauchamp. "It would be glorious, but impossible. Why, we are here for only three-quarters of an hour: and in that time are supposed to climb the Pyramids and refresh ourselves after the performance. See," he continued, "there they go; they have already commenced the ascent, and my meeting you here has lost me the opportunity. Not that I ever meant to take it," he added hastily, as H. began to apologise for detaining him. "I have

accompanied the party in their scrambles, but haven't scrambled half as much as they. Very often I prefer to look on. But if I had arranged to climb the top twenty times over, meeting you would have knocked it all on the head. So you are going through life with the sword, whilst I must be content with the pruning-hook! I envy you, and you probably envy me: it's always so. 'Man never is but always to be blessed!' I believe Pope is answerable for that line, and for a great deal of the malignant crossness of events that afflict us poor mortals. To foretell is to make happen."

"And I always foretold that if you went in for honours you would take them," laughed H. "We none of us had a chance against you in those days. I hope you haven't paid too heavy a price for them."

"I'm as right as possible," returned Beauchamp. "The whole thing was exaggerated. I got into a sleepless state through doing too much: reading by day, wine parties at night. Not that I cared about the parties or ever drank the wine: the stuff we get up there is so much poison: but I saw it gave pleasure to others, and so I kept them up. Weak, you will say, but amiable. True, and weakness and amiability are the cause of more than half the failures—far more than downright vice, which is the exception to the rule. At last, one day, when I had written Finis to my college life, I suddenly found that memory was failing me; sight was sometimes dizzy; and the doctors said I must take a long rest and change. Now I'm all right again: and as I don't suppose I shall ever construe another page of Greek or Latin as long as I live, my brain will hardly go wrong from overwork. But I am glad of what I have done. To become a scholar is every one's duty who goes up to the University. It gives you immense power; stability of character, wisdom to rule. All that *you* will get," he added, "even more than I: my training breaks off at this point; yours goes on through all the splendid discipline of a military life. You, too, will take honours some day, though a later day than mine. You have got it in you, and, as Disraeli said in his maiden speech, it will come out."

H. laughed. "That is all very well," he said, "but we have need of patience. Ours is a 'waiting game,' full of uncertainties and vicissitudes. Do what we will, the element of chance has to be reckoned with."

"I think not," returned Beauchamp. "There is no such thing as chance. And you can afford to wait. *Festina lente*, remember. But that doesn't apply to Cook's tourists," he went on laughingly. "Look at them at the top of the Pyramid—a crowd of some seventy excited beings. Now they are beginning to come down, like a swarm of flies on the side of a precipice: one almost hears them buzzing."

"I repeat that I can't imagine you in your present surroundings," said H. "You must have had some strange experiences."

"Wonderful!" laughed Beauchamp. "I set out with the determination not to be ruffled or inconvenienced by eccentricities, and

I have been often amused beyond expression; but there are a few really nice people amongst the party, and altogether I don't in the least regret becoming one of the personally conducted. As you know, most of the ground is old to me, and I might have turned myself into one of the personal conductors. Once or twice I did so, just by way of amusement. You have no idea what a capital showman I made."

"At what stage of the performance have you arrived?" asked H.

SEPULCHRAL CHAMBER OF MENKARA.

"Almost at the last. Our steamer sails to-morrow morning from Alexandria. The rest of the party have still some work before them, but I hope to be at Lisle Court by this day fortnight, giving a few days to Rome on my way through Italy. Here they all come—the Pyramid looks lonely and deserted. And now before we part, promise to come and spend a fortnight with me at the Court at your very first opportunity."

An unexpected meeting—a short interview—a hasty farewell—and the incident was over. Even as we had seen the wonderful procession arrive, so we saw it depart. The organisation certainly seemed admirable. The managers had their flock well in hand; not one was left behind; not one was even a minute late. All seemed to fall into their proper places, just as if they had answered to a roll call. It spoke well for those who had the controlling of affairs.

"Military time, indeed," said General A., who also watched their departure. "It really resembles another Exodus from Egypt, only this time they are turning their backs upon the desert. These are remarkable days, and men run to and fro upon the earth."

A cloud of dust; a string of carriages passing rapidly down the long, straight road; a hum of excited voices gradually dying upon the air; the cavalcade diminishing and disappearing in the distance; and the Pyramids returned to comparative repose.

The hour struck for us also. We, too, had to bid farewell to this wonderful region, where the voices of 5000 years ago seem still speaking to us; where we are overpowered with a sense of grandeur; the greatness of the men of those early days; their majesty of conception; how they realised man's immortality with unerring instinct, and made it evident in their religious records; evident even in those stupendous works, their mighty temples and tomb pyramids; the very sense of religious mystery enveloping the Sphinx with an atmosphere that is never lifted: all suggesting a Beyond and a Hereafter.

We left one morning when the sun was pouring his hot rays upon the mighty Pyramids and the vast plains; the hour when romance slept, and everything seemed realistic, and even the dignified Sheykh and the active Bedouins were robbed of some of their picturesque glamour. It was a sad farewell; we needed a succession of days and moonlit nights to get the spirit of the scene thoroughly into our minds: to feel that it belonged to us, that we also had our inheritance in these things. On such occasions we all say to ourselves that we will return some day; but life is short and the world is wide; we can only retrace our footsteps at the expense of some other lost experience.

As we re-entered the city, we turned a little aside for the purpose of visiting one of the Coptic churches in Old Cairo.

After the comparative repose of the Pyramids, the streets seemed full of life and sound; the houses looked old and picturesque with their ancient doorways and mushrabeeyeh windows, their small, quaint pulleys by which things were conveyed from the street to the uppermost storey. The women full of grace, and—as one could only suppose—full of beauty, were bearing their pitchers of water to and from the Nile. Their European sisters might well envy the unconscious dignity of their carriage, the freedom of their movements, the elasticity of their well-shaped limbs and beautiful feet. More than ever, after this short absence, we were impressed with the charm and

picturesqueness of Oriental life, in comparison with which all that is European fades into the hopelessly common-place and un graceful.

In a narrow street, where some of the houses looked centuries old, we found our Coptic Church ; the oldest of the churches, but not the most beautiful: so concealed by houses that without a guide we should never have discovered it.

We passed through a narrow passage, ancient and not very cleanly, where we fancied fevers might lurk, waiting for their prey. The exterior of the church was a plain, unadorned wall, with no attempt at architecture. The interior was not very much like that of a Christian church. It is called the Church of Abu Sergeh, after St. Sergius. Large and lofty, it consists of a nave and aisles. In the centre is a large and magnificent screen of carved ivory and wood. The light is subdued, the general effect is heavy and gloomy; yet a want of repose characterises it. The nave and Tribuna have open roofs, supported by elliptical beams, but the left side-chapel has an Arabian dome gracefully proportioned. To the left of the screen a series of wooden panels bear sculptured Scripture subjects and the image of St. George, patron saint of the Copts.

The high altar is raised above the nave by seven steps of coloured marbles. Colour, indeed, but not refinement and repose, is the prevailing impression of this interior, in spite of various points of merit. The walls have some rich and beautiful mosaics of coloured marbles, mother-of-pearl, and blue opaque glass which looks like exquisite lapis lazuli.

The side walls of the nave are composed of two rows of columns, one above the other, the lower row separated by arches, the upper, supporting the gallery, connected by an architrave. There are many small paintings about the church, none of any merit; but the church once possessed valuable relics, removed some years ago.

These pictures on the walls enter largely into the Coptic religion. Its members begin their devotion by paying homage to the Saints and the Virgin. They also practise confession and fasting. The women occupy one part of the church, the men another. Their services often last three hours, and as there are no seats, they bring crutches with them on which they lean.

Silence and reverence form no part of their worship. Whilst the priests are officiating, the congregation talk and argue on all manner of subjects : often so loudly that the high priest turns and reproves them. During the service incense is burnt; the priest, carrying the censer, leaves the hekel or sanctuary and passes amongst the congregation, swinging the censer and blessing each member individually. The Sacrament is frequently administered, but the priest alone communicates, with the exception occasionally of those members who have previously confessed. He is dressed very much after the manner of the Roman Catholic clergy. Small round loaves bearing

a Coptic cross are brought to him by an acolyte. These are blessed, then placed upon the altar and covered with a white cloth, whilst he moves to and fro in the sanctuary accompanied by the choristers with lighted candles. The bread is then broken, placed in a chalice, and wine is poured over it, which he eats with a spoon, giving a little to the assistant priests and the choristers.

On Palm Sunday after service, basins of water are placed in front of the sanctuary. One priest then stands in front of them with his face to the altar, whilst another reads the Gospel in Arabic. The water is then consecrated. After this the congregation go up to the basins, tumbling over each other without reverence or ceremony, and dip palm wreaths in the water. These they wear under their tarbushes during the whole year, as a charm against witchcraft and all other evils.

On the 18th January, kept by them as the anniversary of our Lord's baptism, all the male members of the congregation plunge into the large bath of the church, whose water has been previously consecrated. Many also plunge into the Nile, into which consecrated water has been thrown. On the eve of the 18th, and on Holy Thursday, the priest washes the feet of the whole congregation.

It is said that the Coptic religion has become a mere matter of forms and ceremonies: but this is the tendency of all extreme ritual, whether Coptic, Protestant or other. It seems to be a truth from which there is no escape, that the ceremonial can only exist at the expense of the spiritual.

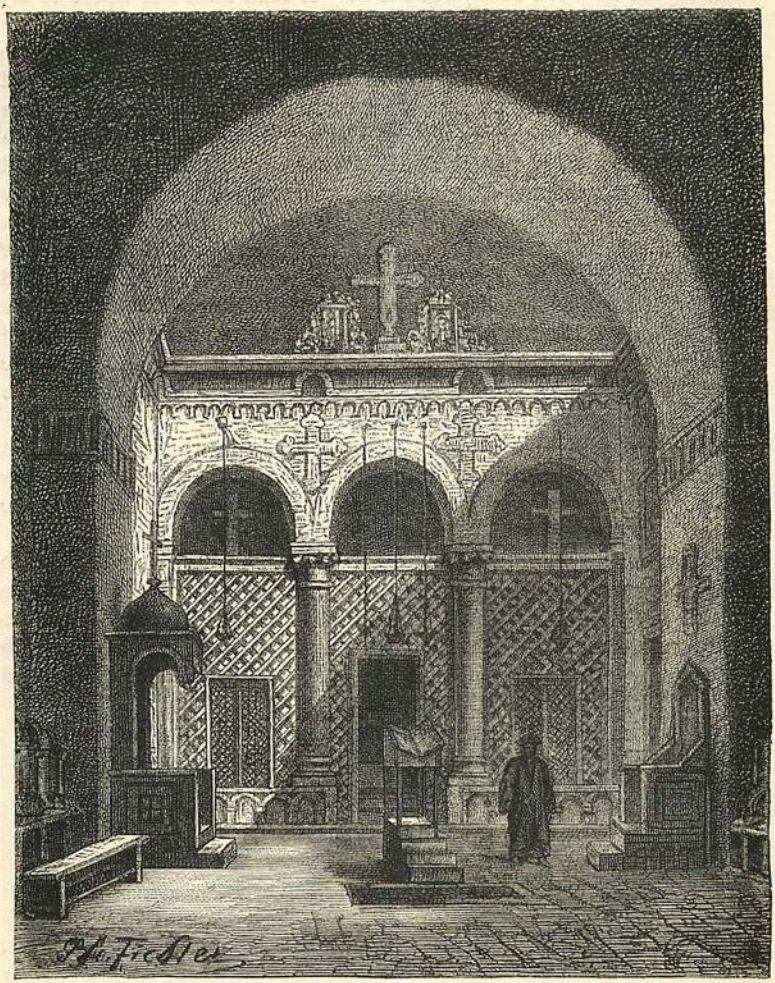
But the most interesting part of the church of Abu Sergeh is the crypt, a three-aisled subterranean chapel, which looks far more ancient than the church itself, and is dedicated to St. Mary.

Four pillars on each side form the centre and side aisles. In the walls of each of the aisles is a large niche or resting-place, and here Joseph, Mary, and the Infant Saviour are said to have stayed a month after their flight into Egypt. Whether true or not, we are willing at the moment to accept the statement.

Immediately the ground on which we stand seems to become holy ground, the crypt sacred as no other crypt ever visited. Before us rises a vision of the patient and wondering mother bending over her sacred Charge, unable to realise the stupendous miracle that has happened, for which she has been the chosen medium; yet knowing that in some mysterious way an eternal change has passed over the world; already conscious that between herself and this Heaven-sent Child there is a separating link which time can only widen. Even now she dimly feels that she bears in her arms what is not only man but God; that the time will come when, her mission fulfilled, this woman, blessed indeed among women, will cease to be the mother of her Son, for the earthly sonship will be merged in the heaven-appointed Saviour: Saviour no less to her than to the rest of mankind.

As we looked we seemed to be taking part with the scenes of those

far-off days. In a few moments the whole drama of that wonderful life passed before us: from the Birth in the manger and the Flight into Egypt, to the long series of miracles, followed by the Agony in the Garden, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. By some strange influence we fell back into touch with those days and times, as new, as



INTERIOR OF A COPTIC CHURCH.

real, as important to us at this hour as they were to the disciples who witnessed them. There was a holiness, a sanctity, a pathos about this little crypt not to be described: almost we seemed to hear a voice saying to us, as to Moses of old: "Take off thy shoes from off thy

feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." It was bare and comfortless, and must have been even more so in those early days; only the extreme poor and humble would avail themselves of its shelter: and it brought vividly before one the words spoken years afterwards by the Saviour: "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head."

More than eighteen centuries had since passed, yet the spot on which we stood might be exactly as it then was. None ever visited by our Lord could touch the heart more: not the garden in which He passed through the agony; not Calvary itself; not Bethlehem in which He was born, nor the Sea of Galilee from which He worked some of His miracles. For in this poor crypt, we felt the essentially human side of the tragedy: the weakness and weariness of the human mother, the helplessness of the divine Infant, over whom the hosts of heaven were keeping special watch; above all the lowliness and humility, the self-accepted poverty of Him who was possessor of the whole realm of Nature, King of kings, and Lord of lords. "Could I not pray to my Father, and He would presently give Me twelve legions of angels?" Even then, Mary, filled with wonder, must have pondered all these things in her heart.

We passed from this atmosphere of holiness in which we had lost ourselves in contemplation, into the world around us: the busy picturesque streets of Cairo: a city in itself so great a link with the past.

And when we entered the crowded hotel, we felt our last touch with the Pyramids of Egypt fall away. But we found a compensation awaiting us—as in this world, in spite of all sorrow and sighing, compensations never fail—a note from Osman, asking us to join him on our return from Gizeh, and declaring that he had plans and surprises for us which would not tarry.

This we might have expected from such a nature as Osman's; and before long we were crossing the Esbekeeyeh Gardens with their shady trees and well-kept borders on our way to the unknown.

MEMPHIS AND SAKKARAH.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S. Author of "Letters from Majorca," "In the Lotus Land," etc., etc.

Elephant over the Door of a House in Cairo, as a Protection against the Evil Eye.

THE impossible happens, and for once, and one day only, once for all, we found ourselves, like James Beauchamp, amongst the "personally conducted."

It was one of our regrets that we had not time to go up the Nile. Not only the Second, but the First Cataract was out of the question. Yet we had our consolation even in this. We found there was only one way of doing the river: chartering your own dahabeeyeh, for your own small party. Egypt was crowded: Cairo was overflowing: people were coming in at the risk of choosing between the streets and the very worst of accommodation. Though it was already late in the season, the usual Nile boats bound for the cataract were thronged. No new arrival had any chance of joining, unless a berth, long taken, happened to fall in. Messrs. Cook and Son have the exclusive management of these excursions, and so far may be said to possess Egypt, of which they are the modern Pharaohs. It could not be in better hands and everything is admirably arranged. But to take passage in one of these vessels; to live for two months, more or less, in close contact with a multitude who may prove charming, or may jar every nerve in your body—this was out of the question. Even with time at our command, we should have given up all idea of the Nile for that year.

Nevertheless we felt that we should like one single day upon the sacred river. As yet we had not even dipped our hands in the water

which may almost be called miraculous. It was clearly a duty to gaze upon the spot where once stood ancient Memphis, and pass on to the Step Pyramid of Sakkarah, the Serapeum and Mariette's house. This could only be easily done by joining one of Messrs. Cook and Son's excursions: and we accepted the condition. Whatever the experience, it would be a matter of hours, not weeks or months.

The eventful day arrived, lovely, warm, a brilliant sky and wonderful atmosphere. Everything was undertaken by the organisers, excepting luncheon, and this was provided by our hotel, packed in a small hamper.

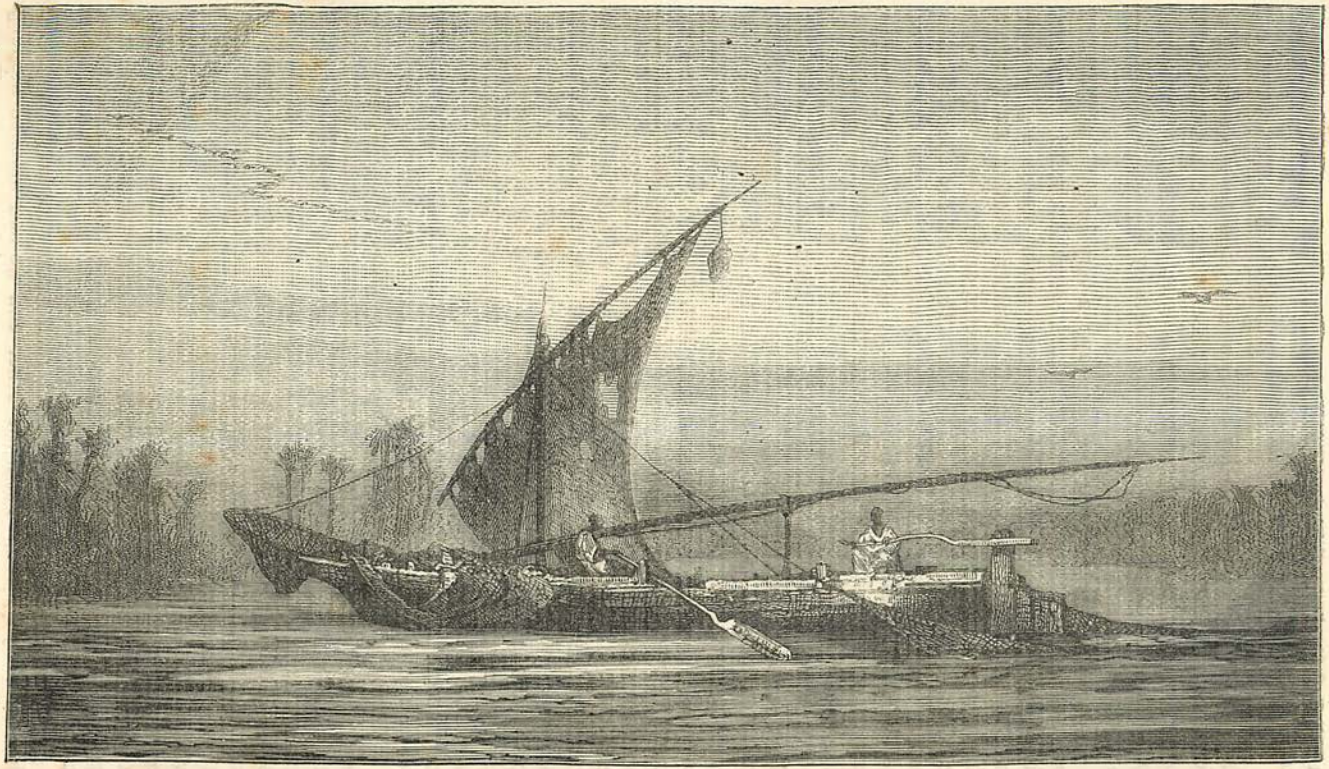
Our dahabeeyeh was moored to the banks of the Nile, not far from the iron bridge. The river, glittering in the sunshine, had never looked more bright and blue, and one longed to add solitude to its charms. But those days have long passed; the solitary places of the earth are now the inaccessible. To-day, the boat was crowded, and as usual by far the larger number of people were American.

On this occasion we were alone, with Aleck in attendance: Aleck restored to power and happy at being able to command. With Osman, who had his own personal attendants when any were required, he was seldom wanted; he resented Osman accordingly, without daring to show it. Osman had arranged to accompany us, and we had felt it an offering to friendship. "The spirit of the scene will evaporate under such conditions," he laughed. "But it will be a new experience and we must support each other. Perhaps we may even be amused."

But once more fate stepped in, though Osman's absence was not exactly for diplomatic reasons. The Khedive was not well; he had upon him one of those strange fits of depression which occasionally though rarely attacked him; warnings, possibly, of the early death that was to overtake him. He had desired Osman, to whom he was strongly attached, to remain with him for the greater part of that day: and Osman could only bow to the royal command.

"We are not to visit Sakkarah together," he said to us in a note despatched early in the morning by a trusty messenger; "and I shall have to see the excursion with your eyes. You will dine with me to-night and tell me all your impressions: and you shall make our Egyptian coffee, in which art you are now more skilled than I."

So it fell out that we were alone. Our dragoman rejoiced, and if acquainted with English proverbs, no doubt thought it an ill wind that blew no one any good. He marshalled us on board, making way, like the "clearers" of ancient days, and we had to follow. "Crowded boat, sir," he turned to say; "you will not like it." For by this time he knew something of our ways and habits, likes and dislikes. To people as intelligent as our dragoman, who in their way see much of life, and for their own purposes are always unconsciously studying human nature, this knowledge comes quickly. It becomes



FISHING-BOAT ON THE NILE.

a sort of instinct with them, and they soon learn to "adapt themselves to their company."

Aleck had some way of generally doing the best thing even in the face of difficulties, and to-day was no exception to the rule. He found us two seats in the stern of the vessel, where a crowd could not come, and we were in comparative solitude. On the upper deck people could scarcely move, but their voices by no means suffered a similar restraint.

The dahabeeyeh started on her way: a very bright and brilliant way. Cairo, its Mosques, minarets and splendid citadel, began to fade in the distance. Old Cairo, with its quaint streets and houses, mushrabeeyeh windows, and graceful women bearing their water pitchers; Roda Island, with its Nilometer, and half-wild but lovely gardens—all melted away as a dream. The banks of the river were picturesque with occasional strings of camels, with signs and sounds of Oriental life, and overshadowing trees; splendid sycamores spreading in the plains and graceful palms that found their reflections in the water.

We were nearer the "sacred stream" than those on the upper deck, and its quiet ripplings came up to us with grateful sound. Nothing could be more picturesque than the Nile boats passing on their upward way; whilst the windings of the river made the scene ever changing. Ever and anon the water, disturbed by our passage, surged amongst the reeds and rushes of the riverside with a delicious swishing murmur that carried us back to days far gone: days of early youth, when in distant French villages we had first learned the beauty of these sounds, punting amongst the marshes and small streams; watching the quaint villagers cutting and stacking their peat; and gathering scores of rushes too often for no other purpose than the amusement of the hour. But childhood is prodigal: Time lasts for ever, and the world's resources are inexhaustible. To-day came back the lovely sound, with an Egyptian flavour about it: but it was not equal to those bygone happy Decembers and warm Julys.

Yet to-day we had more; for we had only to stretch out our hands and pluck the exquisite lotus flowers of this enchanted land. True they did not abound like the reeds and rushes, but they were the more prized for their rareness. In spite of opposing influences, to some extent conquered, it was a delicious experience, an exquisite morning. We realised how great must be the charm of sailing up to the Second Cataract in one's own boat, taking one's own time, visiting leisurely all the ruins and remains that lie on its banks: above all accompanied by one's own friends. It may well be called the most restful and health-restoring of all journeys. There is a peculiarly soothing element in a river journey altogether absent from the sea.

To our left lay the long straight road leading to the Pyramids we had so lately visited. From the other end we had watched the long

STATUES OF SEKHET.

cavalcade of personally-conducted tourists; had sympathised with James Beauchamp in his strange experience, and found our sympathy to some extent wasted. Though only beginning life, he was one of those happy men who make the best of all things, and always see the brighter side of the shield. It may be done, though sometimes with an effort: and it makes all the difference to life's pilgrimage. We little thought at that moment that we should be in the same position ourselves before long, though only for a few hours. Yet there was a difference; and the most unpleasant part of these "personally-conducted" excursions would be absent to-day.

We made way under the brilliant skies. The reeds and rushes accompanied us, and the water brought out all their music. On either hand stretched the wide plains, with their occasional groves and villages.

After a time we reached Bedrasheyn, where we had to leave the boat; and were almost sorry to change our quarters. The passage up the river, so singularly pleasant and dreamlike, had taken us in imagination to the days of Ancient Egypt: to Antony and Cleopatra and their gorgeous pageants; the living sacrifices that were wont to be offered to the Nile in the past; the wonderful record of towns and nations appearing and disappearing as the ages rolled on; to the long-sought source of the river, and the interest it has borne for all students of ancient history.

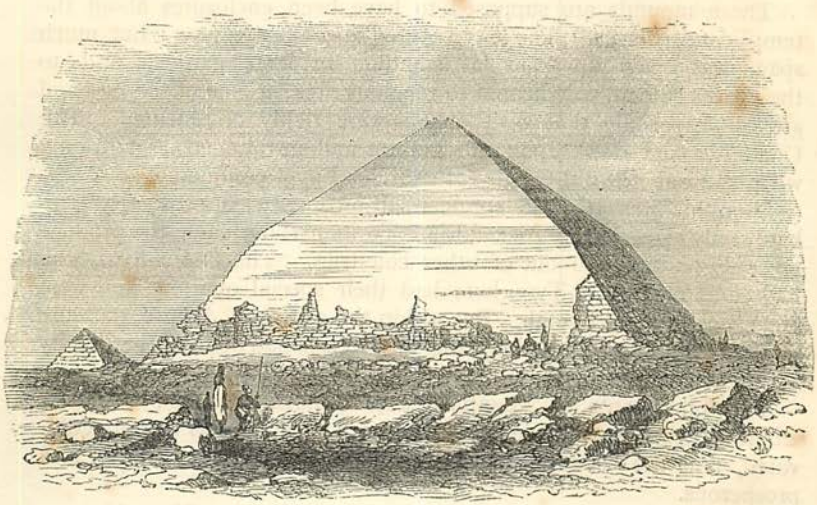
On the banks stood a large party of donkeys, every donkey accompanied by its boy: the boys all excited and talkative, each fearing his own donkey would prove just the one too many. Aleck was the first to land and secure what he considered the best of the animals. "There is as much difference in donkeys, sir, as in people," he remarked, with his tendency to philosophise, as he adjusted the stirrups. "You can do anything with some, nothing with others. These are good beasts, and I shall be at hand to see that the boys behave themselves."

Bedrasheyn was a large Fellah village, composed, as usual, of mud huts: less poverty-stricken than many of their kind, but this is not saying very much: excursionists land here in large flocks on their way to Sakkarah and leave small doles behind them. It was conspicuous for its magnificent palm-groves which make it an oasis in a desert, wonderfully refreshing to the eye. The trees threw their long shadows upon the ground, and after some distance of winding embankment we passed into their cool obscurity, the lights and shades which chequered the dyke roads.

The ground on which we gazed was really sacred in point of antiquity. On this very spot once stood ancient Memphis, capital of Lower Egypt, its largest and most flourishing city; without a rival until Alexandria arose; and, later on, Fostat and Cairo; and extinguished its glory. The very stones of Memphis went to the building of the latter.

It was a city of wonders: of palaces and temples, of academies celebrated for their learning; of kings who swayed Egypt despotically, almost governed the world; of powerful merchants, and inexhaustible wealth and luxury. The most costly material was not too good for their palaces; the richest marbles, the most refined sculpture of which they were capable, went to the adorning of their streets. So magnificent and substantial were many of their finest buildings, that but for man's destruction they might have been standing to-day: rivalling the Pyramids in defiance of time. But this was not to be, and to-day there remains no faintest trace even of ruins.

Herodotus has handed down his record of the city. Menes was supposed to have been its founder. It was therefore still older than



PYRAMID OF DASHOOR.

the Pyramids, and was built in days when the most gigantic, almost impossible enterprises had no terrors for that wonderful people.

Memphis was the old home of the Pharaohs, and here they lived when many of the events recorded in Scripture took place. We have already remarked that for this reason Egypt must ever be the most interesting country in the world, but there are other reasons why it should be so. If Omar's general, Amroo, had not founded Fostat, Memphis might have continued to flourish; and Cairo, with its citadel-crowned rock, its mosques, its lovely chains of hills, need never have existed. But though Memphis of old might have possessed larger and more splendid monuments, temples, palaces, nothing could have rivalled the beauty of some of the mosques of Cairo and the Tombs of the Caliphs.

The situation of Memphis, too, was not so striking. Lying in the vast plain, near the flowing waters of the Nile, it owned a less elevated though still beautiful citadel, whilst no chain of hills rose in the immediate background. Menes had diverted the course of the Nile, once running under the shadow of the Libyan hills, into a more westerly channel: or if it possessed two branches, which seems probable, had turned the water of the eastern branch into the western. This gave him the necessary tract of land for building the city. He constructed dykes against the overflowing of the river; but though these existed in the time of Herodotus, and were kept up by the Persians, no trace of them remains.

Beyond Bedrasheyn lies Mitrahenny with its singular mounds; distinct remains of Ancient Memphis, or at least marking its site.

These mounds are supposed to have been enclosures about the temple and palaces. The city covered an immense area: but much space was given up to villas standing in large gardens, and to the groves solemnly dedicated to religious rites. Some of these sacred groves—especially that of Proteus—were richly ornamented. The Citadel looked down upon all; a white wall surrounded it; and only when the wall fell did Cambyses consider Egypt conquered.

Memphis was great in commercial prosperity; a prosperity probably only exceeded by Alexandria. To its harbour came the produce not only of the Nile but of other countries. The Phœnicians, who had come over from Tyre, here had their special quarters, and were great, wealthy and liberal. But within the groves of Astarte, pleasure and licentiousness abounded: the Phœnicians had none of the dignity and solidity of the Egyptians.

The inhabitants of Memphis were famous for their factories, embroideries, every species of handicraft. Science was equally cultivated, and the schools attached to the temples were learned and prosperous.

Four centuries after Herodotus had passed away Memphis was still flourishing, though its glory was on the wane. From being the largest and most brilliant city in the world, Diodorus writes of it at that time as having yielded to Alexandria. After that it rapidly diminished. In the time of Strabo, not long before the Christian era, it still existed, but in partial ruin. Its temples were the last to disappear, when Theodosius endeavoured to put down idolatry.

Then came the Arab invasion, and the wealth and greatness of Memphis winged their flight to Fostat. If the founding of Alexandria and the reign of the Ptolemys gave the first blow to its downfall, Fostat and Cairo gave the last. But long after Alexandria flourished, Memphis was still looked upon as the religious capital of Egypt, its kings were crowned there, its temples were held specially sacred. A modern parallel exists in the kings of Norway and Sweden, who have their capital in Stockholm and Christiania, but are always crowned at Tronjheim.

STEP PYRAMID OF SAKKARAH.

Memphis had at least four temples famous for their size and magnificence: the temple of Ptah, the tutelary divinity of the city, and the temples of Athor, Apis, and Serapis. The last was the Serapeum in the Necropolis, which we shall presently come to. Menes is said to have built the temple of Ptah, and succeeding kings added to it, until it became colossal. Rameses caused various statues to be erected in front of it, his own statue of enormous dimensions being still visible at Bedrasheyn.

Theodosius in his attempts to put down idolatry in the fourth century, unfortunately directed his zeal against the temples of Memphis. But for this they might have remained to the end of time, imperishable monuments to the greatness of a departed people and their profound religious convictions. Had the temples remained, Memphis might never have utterly disappeared, but their downfall completed her ruin.

Vestiges of the city were still visible in the twelfth century, for a writer of those times records that a marvellous extent of ruins yet existed. In spite of the antiquity of Memphis, of all the various governments she had been subjected to, often oppressed as slaves or bondsmen; in spite of centuries of effort to efface her from the earth, even to the carrying away of her stones for building new cities; in spite of a lapse of four hundred years after these devastations, her ruins in the twelfth century were still marvellous enough to confound all who gazed upon them, for they were beautiful and astonishing beyond description.

During the indolent reign of the Mamelooks, the dykes were neglected, the river overflowed annually and covered the plains with mud, as it does still, and for three hundred years the very site of Memphis became nothing but an uncertain tradition: "a name writ in water." In the present century a search for the ruins brought their traces to light, and these, though trifling, are profoundly interesting.

Inestimable treasures had once existed in these ruins, which tempted the cupidity of the population in the twelfth century—when the Wars of the Crusades were going on elsewhere—until the thirst for gold became a disease, not only then but in succeeding centuries also. Golden statues disappeared; treasures of gold and precious stones were unearthed and carried away; splendidly carved images were broken up or bored in the hope of finding concealed hoards: until at length nothing remained. Only long after the Nile had year by year overflowed its banks, and the ruins of Memphis had become a mere name, did all searching cease.

But though Fostat completed the downfall of Memphis it never attained to a tithe of its grandeur, which was more nearly approached by Modern Cairo. Yet between Cairo and Memphis there will always exist this great difference: the interest of the one is comparatively modern, the other goes back to the most remote ages. Thus the glory surrounding Memphis can never touch Cairo. The one

witnessed all the tragic events of sacred and profane history from the earliest known records: the other, is, so to say, of to-day. Before Memphis existed, we know not what was going on in the world: whether man had already been created, or whether the earth had only then reached the period when life was first given to her.

Yet the time came when Memphis with all its greatness and grandeur, was to become as a dream or fable.

And as fables are the records of all those wonderful cities of the past; we seem as infants in comparison with those early nations. The study of all they attempted, all they accomplished, is an education to any one destined to take active part in the world. It will broaden his views, enlarge his mind, deepen his capacities, and enable him, more than anything else, to realise that to determination of purpose and earnestness of character scarcely anything is impossible.

Memphis was the name given to the city by the Greeks: Men-nefer, the name given to it by Menes, signifying *Fair Haven*, or *Haven of Good*. It had other names also, such as the "City of the White Wall," alluding to the castle which was known to exist. It was also called *Ha Ptah*, the "House of Ptah," in allusion to its temple: the largest, perhaps, the world has ever seen. The temples of other gods were included within its boundaries, and the whole was surrounded by a wall overshadowed by sacred palm groves.

Ptah, as we know, was the tutelary god of the Egyptians. His temple at Memphis begun in the early days of Menes, was added to, adorned, enriched, down to the times of the Roman Emperors. Ptah was the creator of life and light; of the egg which, breaking, sent forth the sun and the moon. Ptah-Sokar-Osiris—a trinity of names from which the word Sakkarah is derived—was Lord of the Necropolis of Memphis, gave to the setting sun the power to rise again, to departing souls eternal life. Apis, the bull, was sacred to Ptah. According to some writers, a portion of the temple, called the Apieum, was curtained off and set apart for his use. Others state that the Apieum, though close to the temple, was a separate building. Here he reposed on cushions and was delicately fed. The power to see into the future, even to influence it, was given to him: and when answers were needed to questions, they were decided by taking food to him. If he ate the food, the answer was favourable; if he refused, the contrary. In this manner he foretold deaths and pronounced judgments.

Here, too, was kept a sacred serpent; on the lake within the temple boats were ever floating about dedicated to this wise deity, whilst a sacred grove overshadowed the waters.

And of all this what remains to this day?

A few mutilated statues; a few stones scattered about the sandy ground; a few rubbish heaps. Nothing that can positively tell you the exact position of a single street or house or temple belonging to that vast city which might well be ranked amongst the wonders of the world. All has disappeared; but its Necropolis remains. The City

of the Dead has been spared, and in a state of remarkable preservation. But this is no exception to the rule in Egypt: whilst cities with all their magnificence were overthrown, cemeteries were left untouched: as though conquerors sympathised with the description of the Egyptians given by the Greeks: "They looked upon their house as unstable and vanishing, but their tomb as eternal; their life as a phantom, death as the commencement of eternal life."

It was to this site of Ancient Memphis that we steered our way on leaving the dahabeeyeh. As we moored alongside nothing could look more picturesque than this Nile-boat reposing on the stream: nothing more quaint and curious than the motley crowd of donkeys, men, women and donkey-boys, all curious and excited, with a background of mud-huts, palm-trees, and small minarets.

Landing for most had been a scramble, the guide having intimated that in the matter of donkeys it would be a matter of first comers having first choice. Every one therefore wanted to be in front, and some confusion ensued. We quietly took possession of our donkeys when the rush was over, and in the meantime amused ourselves in watching the struggles of others to mount: the saddle that *would* turn with a lady of capacious dimensions never intended for anything less than a full-grown horse; the huge disproportion between a son of Anak and his meek over-laden quadruped; the terrors of some of the females of the party when their donkeys went off at a gallop, and of others, unprepared for so much energy, who were suddenly brought to earth.

But at last the whole cavalcade was off; a struggling, irregular procession, in which the ludicrous element was more conspicuous than any other.

How, in such an atmosphere, could one get up the right spirit and feeling for the site of Ancient Memphis, for the Necropolis, the Step Pyramid, the Apis tombs? It was impossible.

We left behind us an interesting Jewish cemetery, in keeping with all the feeling of desolation and decay inspired by this ancient site. We passed between mud-huts, some of which were evidently empty and deserted, their occupants probably away earning the daily bread, whilst from others came women surrounded by children, whose small feet and voices tried to keep pace with our donkeys, crying "backsheesh—sheesh—sheesh," with small outstretched hands. But many of the riders had their own hands far too full, their attention far too occupied in steering their donkeys and keeping their seats, to listen to the little cries for charity.

We galloped under the palm-trees, and presently came to the fallen statue of Rameses II., a huge figure of polished granite, nearly fifty feet long, lying on its face, in a sunken enclosure. It is further protected by a wall, and you look down upon it from a platform. When discovered it was offered to the British Museum: but as one of the few relics of antiquity adorning the site of Memphis it is in better

CURIOSITIES (NOT EGYPTIAN) PERSONALLY-CONDUCTED.

keeping where it reposes. This is no doubt one of the statues which Rameses—the Sesostris of the Greeks, and one of the Pharaohs who oppressed the Children of Israel—caused to be erected to himself, in front of the Temple of Ptah. There were many of these colossal statues according to Herodotus, but this is the only one as yet discovered.

Every one dismounted to gaze upon the wonderful image. An old American gentleman accompanied by his daughter immediately took out a voluminous diary and entered notes according to the lady's directions.

"Are you there?" said the daughter, for all the world as if she had been speaking into a telephone. The question was not addressed to the statue but to the old gentleman.

"Proceed, my dear," he returned in homely phrase. "I am all attention."

The lady closed her eyes for a moment, evidently invoking inspiration; then opened them, stared with wide eyes at the image as one in a trance, and began: "Gazed upon the image of the Great Rameses for the first time under the azure skies of Egypt. Dismounted for the purpose from our amiable but upsetting donkeys; on getting down we both felt very much shaken up and unsteady on our legs——"

"My dear," protested the old gentleman, "you are wandering from the subject. May I remind you that my diary is only an octavo manuscript of some four hundred pages."

"Don't interrupt my flow of ideas," returned the daughter. "I must do things my own way, or not at all. Where was I? On dismounting——"

"Already entered," cried the father, with excusable irritability. "If you waste any more time, there will be nothing left to do but to mount again. Describe the statue."

"Reclining in the cradle of antiquity—"

"I don't see any cradle," interrupted the owner of the note-book. "I want facts, not imagination."

"You are nothing *but* fact; matter-of-fact; prosy fact, and dull as ditch-water," returned the daughter wrathfully. "If you interrupt me again I won't say another word. Are you there?"

"Looks very much like me," murmured the old gentleman sarcastically, breaking the point of his pencil in his anger, and bringing out another. "Proceed."

——"lies the body of Rameses the Second," went on the lady from the point at which she had been interrupted. "Said to be Rameses II., last oppressor of the Children of Israel, who caused the ten plagues of Egypt, and was subsequently drowned in the Red Sea."

"Just as if he could have been drowned *before* the plagues," murmured the old gentleman; "besides, I've an idea it wasn't *that* Pharaoh who was drowned at all." Luckily the daughter did not hear the remark.

"Has a very calm, placid and amiable expression—which some people of the nineteenth century would do well to imitate," she pointedly added. Considering that the statue was lying upon its face, the lady was bringing more imagination to bear upon her subject. "This amiable expression convinces me that this is not Rameses II., tyrant and oppressor, and that all antiquarians until now have been wrong on this point. It remains for me to put them right. This is more probably the statue of Menes, the first mortal monarch of the earth, who succeeded to the dynasty of the gods. We have no record of that dynasty, but my inner consciousness tells me that it existed. This statue is colossal; great breadth across the shoulders; well developed chest. Beautiful granite, with a high polish. Menes himself was a highly polished gentleman. We feel that the statue should not be left here lying in mud, but should be removed to the hall of the British Museum, where its grandeur would impose upon all visitors."

How much longer the lady's inspiration and fancy might have lasted cannot be known, for at that moment the guide gave the signal for departure. Some four or five young men who had profited by the halt to eat oranges, now amused themselves by a parting fling of orange-peel at the head of the image, each trying to be nearest the mark; each thereby showing his reverence for the remains of antiquity. "Shameless and scandalous," murmured the lady, as she moved off to rejoin her amiable donkey. "I wonder the mild expression of that benign countenance does not change into the frowns of Jove, and hurl anathemas and thunderbolts at those desecrating vandals." We thought it strong language, yet could not altogether disagree with her. But in a personally-conducted assemblage there must always be a large number of such spirits who must be accepted for what they are worth.

On went the cavalcade, leaving the statue of Rameses to its violated repose. Soon we reached the village of Mitrahenny, which was very similar to that of Bedrasheyn, though the palm groves were finer and more abundant. These mud-huts invariably look sad and poverty-stricken, and only in such a climate could they be habitations for human beings: but they have the advantage of fresh air uncontaminated by a crowded population; air laden with the influences of the sea, or the endless wastes of the desert.

Here too we were still on the site of Memphis, which stretched from the banks of the Nile to Sakkarah and the Necropolis.

A wide plain of rich fields, already beginning to turn green; for here the Nile overflows and deposits its fertilizing soil. In the distance were groups of pyramids. Far away, gigantic amongst them all, stood the Pyramid of Cheops: and nearer, conspicuous in its own group, the Step Pyramid of Sakkarah, chief object of our excursion. Beyond it rose the Pyramids of Dashoor.

These different groups of Pyramids form the Necropolis of Memphis:

marvellous and wonderful tombs, of which the eye can still take in more than eighty at a glance. How many have gone to ruin, is unknown. Including the distant Pyramid of Meydoom, built by Seneferoo of the 3rd dynasty—the first king whose name is recorded on contemporaneous monuments—this vast Necropolis stretches over a tract of country forty-five miles long. Added to these kingly pyramids were countless tombs carved out of the limestone rock: mausoleums even more time-defying than the Pyramids themselves.

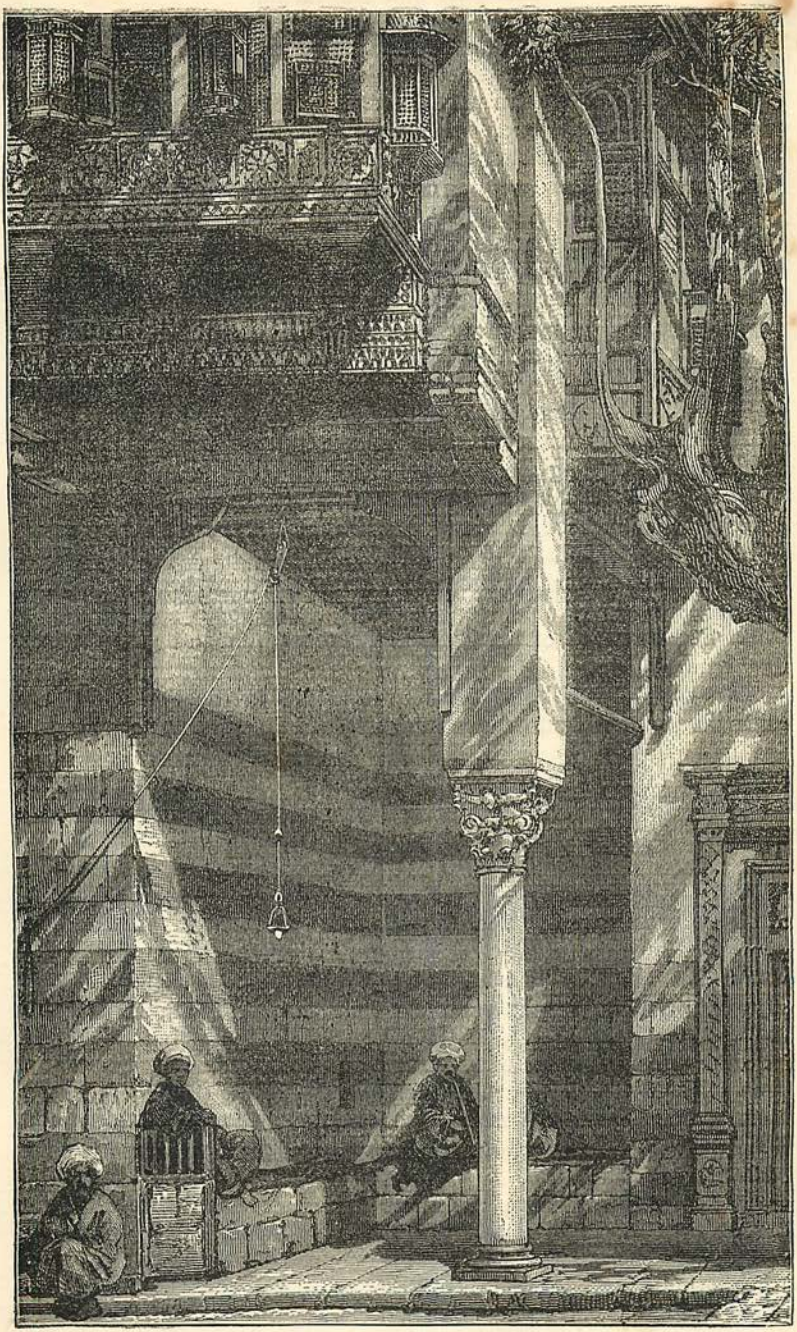
These Pyramids cannot fail at all times to excite our sense of the sublime. Their destiny, enormous size, antiquity, and imperishable nature, make one feel how great were the giants of those days. Yet, gazing at them with astonishment and delight, there comes also a sense of pain: a keen realization of the broken dreams and visions of our little lives which so quickly "have their day and cease to be."

It all gives one some idea of the greatness of Ancient Memphis, its magnificence, power, and extent: as well as the length of the ages during which it reigned, greatest and most civilised city of the world. The whole epoch of the building of the Pyramids was marked by prosperity, and more or less by peace. It was a period of great learning and research, and many scientific and religious works were written. The priesthood were advanced, and did much to instruct the people in theology. Astronomy was already a well-directed study, and the calendar of the heavens was systematically drawn up. The Pharaohs were more than kings: they were representatives of the immortals: each monarch being supposed a direct incarnation of the Sun-god Ra. The name—Per-aa in Egyptian, Pharaoh in Hebrew—signifies "The Great Gate:" the gate through which every one passed to the land of light and immortality.

From Mitrahenny we went westward out of palm groves. A small picturesque villa, overshadowed by trees, stood in the plain, built by one to whom this ancient spot strongly appealed, who loved the melancholy atmosphere of the Necropolis. For a little in the distance rose the Pyramids, Sakkarah towering above them all.

The village was small and uninteresting, like all these villages of the plains, and we turned northwards towards the pyramids and more groves. Near them was a magnificent sycamore that must have stood for ages, and close to it a spring of water and the tomb of a sheykh.

We were on the very edge of the desert. Before us stretched the wide plains hot and glistening in the sunshine, here and there pyramids breaking the monotony of the flat surface. One gazed almost appalled at the immense measureless expanse, which seems to make the world so large. Here again, on the plateau of the Necropolis, we stood on ground sacred to antiquity. Besides the tombs, were buildings that have long since disappeared, whose ruins indeed exist, but are buried in the sand.



HOUSE OF A SHEYKH.

As we have seen, from the earliest ages immense pains, labour and time were bestowed in ornamenting the tomb-chambers. One reason for this profuse decoration must have been that the people of 4000 and 5000 years ago, upon whom this talent had dawned as a revelation from the gods, wished to hand down examples of their skill to future generations, and nothing could be better suited to their purpose than the walls of the everlasting tombs.

Here once stood the sacred lake across which the body of Apis was rowed to its burial in the Serapeum whenever a bull died at Memphis. Here stood green and fertile plains which have been compared to the flowery meads of Asphodel. Here stood the temple of Hecate, the gates of Cocytus and Truth, the headless statue of Justice.

Everything has disappeared excepting a few of the tombs.

The Serapeum was the outer temple, placed above the Apis Mausoleum. A long avenue of Sphinxes led up to it; and the head of one of these Sphinxes obtruding from the sand caused the discovery that delighted Mariette Pacha almost more than any other of his labours. Whilst living, the bull existed in the Apieum attached to the temple of Ptah at Memphis: but when dead he was brought across the sacred lake and conveyed with great pomp and ceremony through the avenue of Sphinxes to the Serapeum, and carried down to the mausoleum.

The people worshipped the remains, dead, in the Serapeum, just as, living, the bull had been worshipped in the Memphis Temple.

No expense was spared in the funeral rites of Apis; and in the reign of Ptolemy Soter, so extravagant had the priests become, that they had to borrow fifty talents from the king, a sum exceeding £11,000, advanced by the monarch without hesitation or rebuke.

Attached to the Serapeum was an institution of monks, as cloistered as any Roman Catholic order of the present day. These monks were connected with the worship of Serapis. On joining, they gave up the world and all they possessed; their only food henceforth being supplied to them by relatives. This was passed through a hole in the wall, for they never left their cells. The Temple of Isis also had its order of religious recluses. The ambition of these monks was to become insensible to all external impressions, to die completely to the world by a perpetual warfare with nature; the true death in life. From these early institutions no doubt arose the Christian orders of seclusion of a later date.

In the Egyptian Mausoleum were found some 3000 monuments or Apis tombs, hewn out of the solid rock; and above each tomb was a small chapel; a sloping passage connecting one with the other. But the bulls were interred in different ways, according to the custom of the period in which they existed.

The Egyptian Apis Mausoleum we visited was marvellous, stu-

pendous, inexpressibly solemn. A short passage led to the modern iron gate which guards the entrance, and admitted us into a long, gloomy passage, dimly lighted by candles and torches, with weird effect. We seemed to be walking amongst the ghosts and phantoms of the past.

Sixty-four vaults are now accessible: twenty-four containing the immense granite sarcophagi that held the Apis remains. The chambers were simply cut out of the solid rock, and may certainly last as long as the world itself. Mariette has described his overwhelming impressions on first entering these vaults and corridors. One of the chambers had been walled up in the reign of Rameses II., and until Mariette entered, had not been disturbed for nearly 4000 years. Yet everything remained as it had been left during the unbroken silence and repose of forty centuries.

The very finger-marks of the Egyptians who had put in the last stone were still apparent, the prints of naked feet upon the loose sand were distinctly visible, though a breath of air would have obliterated them. On the sarcophagus were the embalmed remains of the bull, undisturbed.

The Apis Mausoleum was divided into three parts, and it is the last section that is shown, grandest and most magnificent of all. Its galleries or corridors extend nearly 400 yards and the immense sarcophagi, that human power could scarcely move, are of granite.

It is doubtful whether this wonderful Apis Mausoleum does not give one even a more vivid idea of the gigantic energy and greatness of the early Egyptians, even than the Great Pyramids of Geezeh. The vastness of the corridors, the endless excavations of solid rock, the innumerable repetitions of enormous tombs, combined with the profound darkness and gloom, the eternal silence, fill the mind with an awe, almost a terror, defying all description. We appear to touch the very confines of the mysterious and the supernatural: there seems a hidden meaning within and beyond it all, which the mind in vain endeavours to fathom.

Near all this was Mariette's house, where he lived whilst his explorations were going on. We had dismounted, and our donkeys were left to graze upon such food as they might find, whilst we rested and explored. The verandah was soon a scene of laughter and chatter that seemed almost unholy within these realms of antiquity. Under the very shadow of the Step Pyramid, in all probability the oldest monument of the world, frivolity once more asserted itself, and the Bedouins who now occupy the house, looked on in their dark cloaks with a gravity that might have been a reproof.

The view was remarkable. On the one hand the green valley of the Nile, with its palm-trees, a strange contrast to the long pale stretches of desert beyond. Far off, rising into the blue sky like a dream-vision, the Mosque of Mohamet Ali with its slender minarets above the Citadel of Cairo. To the left the Great Pyramids, and,

nearer, those of Abusir. The rocky plateau of the desert between Abusir and Sakkarah, contained numberless Tomb Chambers: and still nearer to us were the grottoes of the sacred Ibis Mummies and of the Cats: none of which are now visited. There are still many open shafts scattered about, some of them fifty feet deep, leading to ancient tombs; pitfalls for the unwary.

Of the Step Pyramid we saw only the outside. It is different from all other pyramids. Its interior passages and chambers are more numerous and complicated; its four sides do not face the cardinal points of the compass; the base is not a perfect square; and one of its entrances faces southward. It was surrounded by a wall, and the enclosure was held sacred. It seems to have been built for some other purposes than that of the later pyramids of Egypt. Some writers have thought that it was the first pyramid consecrated to the use of the bull—an Apis Mausoleum: but there is not sufficient data for this theory, which would assign to it a later period than that of its probable construction.

Near it was the Pyramid of King Unas, opened in 1881, which we entered. It contains two large chambers and a smaller one communicating with each other by narrow passages. The granite sarcophagus of the king stood in the second chamber, and its alabaster walls were adorned with paintings still brilliant in colouring.

Brilliant also were the colours in the Tomb of Tih, though mutilated and defaced by visitors.

Tih was a priest who lived at Memphis under the 5th Dynasty—between 4000 and 5000 years ago. He was of humble origin, but attained to the highest rank and married Neferhotep, a member of the royal family of Tatkara. He became the king's intimate and familiar, Chief of the Gates of the Palace, Chief of the Royal Documents, Commander of the Profits. History records his great affection for his wife, who appears to have combined all spiritual graces with extreme beauty of form and feature. The walls of the tomb are covered with scenes from the domestic life of Tih, of the most interesting description. It is wonderful how the colours have retained their brilliancy for nearly fifty centuries, owing to the protection of the sand: and it is equally sad to see how in the period of ten years, they have become wilfully defaced and destroyed.

The drawings and paintings upon the walls are singular, spirited, and varied.

Tih is seen in every attitude and occupation; now hunting the wild boar and hippopotamus, now navigating his vessel on the Nile, now urging his field-labourers to greater exertion in reaping. Above one of the latter scenes is the inscription in hieroglyphics: "This is harvest time: man, when he works, is full of sweetness and content; such am I."

In every scene Tih stands upright, the commander's baton in hand. Here two magnificent statues of himself and his wife were found, now

ITINERANT DEALER, CAIRO.

in the Boulak museum. Man's occupation in those days was chiefly agricultural, full of peace and a certain calm gliding of the waters of life. For Tih, and for such as he, life was full of quiet pleasure, without dramatic incidents and violent emotions; crowned with plenty: surrounded by domestic happiness, a wife and children. He was looked upon with envy by those whose lot was less favoured. But all was the result of industry, mental power, and uprightness: he only reaped the fruits of his labours.

Few short excursions round Cairo are more interesting than this visit to Sakkarah, where you are surrounded by all that is most ancient in Egypt; where you feel that every footstep planted upon the sand covers a spot where traces of wonderful monuments and buildings still exist. Here once reposed the waters of the Sacred lake, here the Serapeum: there stood the Temple of Hecate, gloomy and vengeful goddess, and there the gigantic images of Truth and Justice, the latter not only blind but headless. The eye rests in amazement upon the clusters of tombs unchanged though thousands of years have rolled over them; upon the green plains over which the Nile spreads its fertilising waters; upon the vast sandy desert beyond. We are surrounded by the silence and solemnity of the ages: overwhelmed by the feeling that before these monuments nothing existed upon the earth due to the labour of man. We seem to stand face to face with primæval times, the early days of creation.

A short visit—above all, a visit disturbed by an unsympathetic crowd—is not sufficient. You would remain here and take up your abode in Mariette's house—it is possible to do so with permission—and gaze alone upon these wonders, not only by day but under the solemn solitude of night and darkness, the flashing stars, the pure and peaceful moon. Then the true atmosphere of these records of all the ages would come forth with all their magic, all their romance and power.

To-day this experience, which is surely there, was not for us. As far as possible, by detaching ourselves from the restless crowd, we endeavoured to become familiar with the spirit of the place; but our stay was numbered by moments, not by days. Too soon the word of command for reassembling and remounting was given; each claimed his own donkey, just as, at the Confusion of Tongues, every man called for his own sack.

We turned our backs upon the sublime and faced the ridiculous. Most of the cavalcade was in front, a very incongruous element upon the site of Ancient Memphis. Some were in danger of flying over the heads of their animals, others insensibly glided too near to the tails. Again the pantomime was played out. A scream from some fair equestrian would startle the air as her frisky quadruped landed her without ceremony upon the sand; or a spirited donkey, anxious to get to its journey's end, ran away with a maid, like Miss Bayley's perfidious captain. On this occasion there was no tragedy, but the

cries, joltings, and prayers for rescue would have made the fortune of a travelling circus.

As for ourselves, we lingered behind, unwilling to lose all the fun so liberally supplied. Over the undulating ground, scouring the plain, traversing the palm groves, riding along the embankments, away they went; until at last, the village of Bedrasheyn with its mud huts and small minarets, opened up, and our dahabeeyeh, calmly awaiting us on the Nile, announced the end of the performance.

The whole village seemed to have turned out to inspect us. The cavalcade dismounted, donkey-boys were given their backsheesh.

Immediately the air was rent with howlings, protestations, weeping and lamentation. None of them were satisfied. No matter what is given, their principle is to ask for more. Such agony and distress were never seen. The donkeys, their work over, stood still and silent; the play was evidently no novelty to them; whilst the personally-conducted, unmindful of the general hubbub, serenely embarked.

Not until we moved from the shore, did the donkey-boys give up their appeals; but once away in the stream, they threw up their arms and indulged in a wild war dance, evidently happy and jolly as the sand-boys they were.

Aleck secured the same seats on our return journey. Again the plash and murmur of the river threw out its soothing influence, whilst a cool breeze from the surface, rose like an exhalation singularly pleasant and reviving. Again the reeds and rushes by the riverside threw out their calm delicious music, and as we passed onward, a blue lotus flower raised its head, courting our affection. In a moment it was in our hand, and we fell into contemplation of all its sweetness and beauty. It is sad that these flowers are becoming so rare in Egypt. Our eyes were not to be gladdened by another until "twice twelve moons had waxed and waned," and in a marshy pond in a wide plain of South Africa, we once more came upon the lovely blue flower of the Lotus. In a moment, in the magic halls of memory there rose up a vision of that bygone day at Sakkarah, of every incident we had gone through: and of H. who was now with his regiment under the burning skies of India.

So even in our little lives, come shifting scenes and changes: and the events of this year are a reason why the very opposite should be found on next year's canvas.

That night we were to dine with Osman, and in due course found ourselves clasping his hand in friendship.

After our day's experience, it was delight and relief to find ourselves in this calm atmosphere, surrounded by all the charms of refined life; all the magic of Osman's eloquence, all the warmth of his hospitality. Again everything was so perfectly appointed that the resources of the *Arabian Nights* seemed to have been brought to our

aid, and we had only to summon the "Slave of the Lamp" to be surrounded by all the marvels of that wonderful world. Again the hours ran in golden sands.

"And now," said Osman, when the attendants had withdrawn, and from the coffee equipage a delicious incense was stealing upon the room, "before another word is said, tell me: have you not missed me during every hour of your excursion to Sakkarah?"

Our reply needs no record.

(*To be concluded.*)

SEVEN YEARS.

SEVEN years since we made up our quarrel!
I remember the little low room
And the garden out of the window,
And the second roses in bloom.

You had suffered—it may have been bravely,
But a pang never passed without trace,
And if any atonement was needed
It was there in the look of your face.

The sad eyes too wet to be lifted,
The sweet lips which quivered with pain,
Blotted all out.—Forgiveness?—O darling,
What need when I had you again?

Seven years!—life still rises against us,
And still keeps our footsteps apart;
Again the cold anguish of patience
Must silence the voice of the heart.

But I think of the tears that were hidden,
That day in the little low room,
And the garden out of the window,
And the second roses in bloom.

C. E. MEETKERKE.

JUSQU'AU REVOIR.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Letters from Majorca," etc., etc.

Stealing a Glance at the World.

THE time was drawing near for Osman's departure and we thought of it with keen regret. He had prolonged his stay into weeks, and those hours and days had been some of the pleasantest in our remembrance. For once the malignant crossness of events had been stayed in our favour; Fate was kindly in throwing us together; accidentally as it appeared: only that with James Beauchamp one feels inclined to say that nothing happens by chance or accident. The almost daily events of life seem to contradict this theory; but we who cannot see beyond the veil; cannot see the end from the beginning of any single chapter of existence; may well assume that the apparent chances of life are all designed incidents, bearing upon a given purpose and termination: each event the separate sections of a puzzle one day to become a perfect whole. If Nature worked by violent means, the machinery of the world would soon be out of joint. There is no jarring in the wheels which keep the universe on its way. The turning of a straw appears very often to influence the whole life for good or ill; and we know that no single life is regulated by mere straws. Nothing is truer than that Providence works by small means to great ends.

"I am recalled and I must go. My presence in Constantinople has become a necessity," said Osman. "I lament my departure. Never has Cairo so charmed me; never have days passed so swiftly. My only consolation is that what has been may be again. You will

come to me in Constantinople; and, indeed, in what spot of this fair globe might we not meet, when I shake myself free of diplomacy and am able to roam at will?"

Our time for departure was also drawing near. Another week, and we should have turned from Cairo and all its wonders with infinite sorrow: though far less than if Osman had remained. He had still three days before him; we six.

"I wish we could have travelled together," he said. "Nay, you might even have accompanied me as far as Constantinople, and continued your way through Austria. One week with me, and you should have been as much at home as I myself."

This also was impossible. H.'s leave of absence was drawing to an end; in forming our plans we had allowed only sufficient time for the homeward journey.

"That shall be our last recollection of Cairo!" cried Osman. "We will have a day in the desert, with nothing but the solitude and breadth and repose of nature around us. I will arrange it all, and it shall be to-morrow. Be with me at nine o'clock and our horses and attendants shall be ready. We will go to the Petrified Forest, and pass into the Valley of Wanderings; and take our luncheon at Moses' well, in the shelter and shadow of that great amphitheatre of rocks which seems to match so well those desert solitudes. Bring nothing with you but yourselves: the attendants shall carry our nectar and ambrosia."

We had been spending the evening together; an arrangement which had become a recognised law five days out of the seven. It was drawing towards the hour of separation; and a remark of H.'s about the Petrified Forest: as to which species the fossil remains belonged, and comparing the sandstone of the Mokattam hills with the meiocene of Farafra with its bubbling springs: had caused Osman suddenly to exclaim that we would go and see these things for ourselves.

A day in the desert, with Osman as guide, philosopher and friend, seemed the perfection of human enjoyment; and the matter was no sooner proposed than arranged.

The next morning was bright and clear as usual, the skies were blue, the air was sparkling: everything was favourable to our enterprise. Punctually at nine o'clock we found ourselves with Osman. The horses in the courtyard—small, thoroughbred Arabians of the greatest beauty—awaited our arrival, impatiently pawing the stone pavement. In a very few moments we had started, three attendants on horseback following.

We went quickly up the Mouskee, and turning sharply to the left, passed out of Cairo by the Bab en-Nasr: the "Gate of the Help of God," near the great Mohammedan cemetery. The ancient city wall, running westward, formerly connected this gate with the Bab el-Futûh, or Gate of Victory; and both gates were

constructed upon the lines of an old Roman castle, built on the ruins of Fostât by Cambyses, in the sixth century B.C., when New Babylon was founded where Old Cairo now stands; afterwards, it may be remembered, the head-quarters of one of the three Roman legions stationed in Egypt when that people occupied the Lotus-Land.

It has been well said that every footstep in Cairo awakens some historical fact or record of more than ordinary interest.

We turned to the right, skirting the wonderful tombs of the Caliphs, and passing under the very shadow of the Tomb-Mosque of Barkook. To our left rose the remarkable Gebel el-Ahmar or Red Mountain, its inexhaustible quarries supplying building material from the earliest ages; and from which the two musical statues of Thebes are said to have been taken. Here, too, many fossils have been found. The romance of the spot has been broken by a railway, which carries away to the world the products of the quarries. Further to the right rose the Mokattam range. We looked back upon the minarets of the Tombs of the Caliphs and our thoughts naturally took the same direction, without any touch of mesmerism.

"Do you remember that night, and our wonderful moonlight experience?" said Osman. "Had you ever met with anything like it before—or since?"

It was a difficult question. Our moonlight visions at the Great Pyramid had not possessed the intricate details, the refined delicacy of these Tombs of the Caliphs; but for grandeur, simple majesty of outline, silence and solitude, everything that appeals to the heart of man, perhaps nothing on earth could equal those Royal Tombs of Gizeh.

We were now passing into another matchless but very different solitude: the outskirts of the mighty Sahara, with all its untold possibilities. Before us lay a wide, pathless world; an ocean of desert country; sandy plains stretching to right and left. It happened that we were alone. Of the numberless inhabitants of Cairo, none had chosen that day for visiting the Petrified Forest; or it might be that we were too early for them. All the charms of the wilderness took possession of us. We might have been starting on a long journey to Mount Sinai, where the tables of the Law were delivered to Moses, and Elijah found refuge after the priests of Baal had been slain at the brook Kishon. Such a journey could not be done under a fortnight; or even more if much time was spent at the Monastery of St. Catherine. Here in the early days the Christians settled, far from the world and mankind; monks and recluses in good earnest, existing amidst these rocky mountains, whose hidden springs of water quenched their thirst; locusts and wild-honey and an almost barren vegetation scarcely satisfying hunger. They might well suppose that here they would be left in peace to worship in their own way, and escape persecution. But even here fanaticism found them out, and we read of raids, massacres and abominable cruelties.

A Young Cairene.

Beasts of prey will spare each other, but man is less merciful to man.

"It would be a charming excursion," said Osman. "I took it many years ago with my father, and the impression is as vividly with me to-day as then. I can conceive how you would enjoy it—how thoroughly we should enjoy it together."

The Convent of St. Catherine, he added, existed under the very shadow of the Mount of Moses. The visitor passed out by the garden of the institution, and by a well-indicated path commenced the ascent of this chain of rocky mountains. Various excursions led to ruined monasteries, to small oases where water fresh and clear is for ever found; to a chapel dedicated to Elijah and Elisha; to the small cave 500 feet above the monastery, in which Elijah is said to have lived until all danger to his life was over: as described in the First Book of Kings.

"Almost as poorly fed as Elijah then was are the monks of the monastery to-day," said Osman. "It is an irregular, straggling pile of buildings, 5000 feet above the sea, strongly protected by massive walls. There are rooms set apart for pilgrims and visitors, who may stay here, as long as they care to do so, contributing a small sum towards their humble fare; very humble if they bring no supplies with them. A long wooden gallery opens to these rooms, which are close to the cells of the monks. Here they breathe air that is worth a king's ransom and keeps life in them to a far old age, in spite of fasts and privations."

"Are they as strict in their observances as other monastic orders?" H. asked.

"Much more so," replied Osman, "considering how few are their temptations to frivolity and dissipation, the thousand-and-one small sins and errors that earnest men and women, bravely fighting life's battle in the world, meet with every day and overcome. They take neither meat nor wine. Meat indeed would be an impossible luxury in the centre of the great desert. Oil is forbidden during their fasts, which occur frequently. Fish is permitted; and also a liqueur made from dates—the latter in small quantities. Perhaps that is wise—for it is very good. They assemble for prayer four times in the twenty-four hours, twice during the silent watches of the night. Long slumbers and self-indulgence are not for them. Once women were not admitted within the monastery walls, but that rule has been abolished: a happy thing for lady travellers who venture so far: the next shelter is a very long ride from St. Catherine's."

"Is it anything of an oasis?" we asked. "Do trees and flowers and fruits flourish there?"

"Indeed yes," returned Osman, "and in great abundance. Within the walls surrounding the monastery cypress and other trees are found, whilst flowers and evergreens do their best to turn this barren spot into a wilderness that blossoms as the rose. Vines

On the Nile.

and apricots grow upon the sunny walls, and bear good fruit. The monastery is a curious building. Narrow irregular passages meet one everywhere; and a guide is needed to pilot one through the numberless courts enclosed within the walls. Everything bears the mark of antiquity. All might almost have existed in the time of Moses; and near at hand is the well at which Moses is said to have watered the flocks of Jethro's daughters. The garden itself is enclosed in high walls and marked out in terraces. Every sort of fruit tree flourishes: magnificent almonds, apricots, apples, pears, plums, figs, olives: what you will. The climate is so splendid that only a little water is needed to make the earth abundantly productive."

"I think I will turn monk," laughed H., "and join this earthly paradise. May the monks eat of their own fruits?"

"Yes; each has his portion. Vegetables are scarcer, though one would think more necessary. But things flourish better above the ground than in the ground or upon its surface. After a few years' residence on Mount Sinai some of the monks return to their homes, and are ranked as martyrs."

"An easy martyrdom," laughed H. "A few years of repose; enjoyment of the best fruits of the earth; penances no doubt largely mixed with indulgences; a sea-watch division of time: and then canonisation. I think we will go on and try the experience of St. Catherine's."

Not for us to-day this experience; no pilgrimage into the wilderness, for which we longed earnestly as we had ever desired the voyage of the Nile. Longed for the wonderful solitude and desolation; the lonely communing with Nature; all the grandeur of these immense plains which seem boundless almost as eternity: the vision of those wonderful oases, where hidden springs for ever flow, and, surrounded by an ocean of sand, white and dazzling, the eye falls with a relief only known to those who have experienced it, upon rich vegetation: emerald green plains on which palm groves throw their long and grateful shadows. Some are surrounded by rocky undulations, which help to fertilise these cultivated spots, and sometimes hide them until the traveller is close upon them, so that almost in a moment he passes from the depths of despair to a very Eden of delight. But these are the small oases. The larger oases stretch over a great tract of desert. In many of them, the Dead Sea fruit grows on trees about six feet high. But crops good for food are also found here: such as rice, wheat and barley; the date-palm in abundance, and of a superior sort; olive and other fruit trees: besides cotton and indigo in smaller quantities. Thus these rare spots are oases indeed. Of the animals that roam there are few excepting the gazelle, the jackal, and the fox.

Our journey to-day would be limited to the Petrified Forest and its surroundings; but even this would give us a foretaste of what the more remote plains of the desert yield to the traveller: delights

which Osman had frequently experienced and described with all the magic of his eloquence.

The river divides the deserts; the Arabian from the Nubian. Here ages ago passed out a great multitude in the dead of night, after spoiling the Egyptians. Here the children of Israel began their forty years' wandering under Moses; waxing impatient and idolatrous; gathering manna day by day; their wants miraculously supplied; delivered out of the hand of generations of oppressors; with every reason for rejoicing; yet constantly thrown back by discontent and unrighteousness.

Away we galloped this morning, perhaps in the very track of the Israelites of old; Cairo and its civilisation soon left behind us. Our very horses seemed to rejoice in the freedom of the desert, and scoured the plains as if distant Sinai had been the end of their ambition. Before long we were surrounded by the vast stretches and undulations of the wilderness. Very far off, we still saw the Citadel of Cairo and the Mosque of Mohammed Ali rising heavenwards; vague as a dream; a dim foundationless outline that would presently dissolve and disappear.

Onwards yet, until nothing but long reaches of tableland met the view; low sand-hills, waves upon waves of arid plains, a rocky stratum of limestone witnessing to the barren earth. Far away in the interior, we come to rich ranges of mountains stretching westward, broadening as they advance, until they reach the Nile at Assooan. These mountains, rising to a height of 6000 feet above the sea, are rich in granite, porphyry, serpentine marble, and other products, including alabaster and gypsum. In the Arabian desert, too, you light upon ravines and precipices, which might be made productive, if not so far out of the world.

And some of these oases are largely inhabited. The Great Oasis of El-Khargeh, for instance, has a population of over 6000. Its other name, Menamoon, signifies "the abode of Amen." Herodotus probably refers to it when writing of "a city seven days' journey from Thebes, called by the Greeks the Island of the Blessed."

Here the army of Cambyses halted on its way to the Oasis of Ammon, and perished in the desert.

The smaller oases used El-Khargeh as a city of refuge; and here Nestorius was banished after he had been condemned by the Council of Ephesus, in the year 435, dying in exile. It is the largest but not the most fertile of the oases: immense tracts of cultivation with wide stretches of barren sand between, extending in all for about ninety miles from north to south, and about twelve miles east to west.

"A hundred and fifty springs are said to water these fertile plains," said Osman, "specially rich in the date palm, whose trees exist in tens of thousands. In their season many of the caravans you meet are laden with the fruit of the oases which finds a ready sale in all Eastern towns, whose inhabitants look upon dates as their daily

bread. What more picturesque or poetical way of earning one's livelihood, than by cultivating the fruits of the earth? At night these wandering merchants repose under tents, rising before the sun, and resting again during the extreme heat of the day. How many a time have I not done the same!"

"But after all," H. observed, "the caravans you meet, the Arab encampments, are the exception, not the rule. The condition of the desert is silence, solitude, and desolation: a world waiting for its people. Is it not so?"

"It is," replied Osman; "owing to the vastness of the wilderness; for more people inhabit it than one might imagine. The history of Africa lies in the future. In the western Sahara, you will meet the fearless Arabs on their thoroughbred horses, now rushing like the very wind itself before an advancing sandstorm; now quietly pursuing their way to some distant town or to the banks of the Nile; now reposing day after day in tents in the midst of the desert; a small colony whose precise object for haunting that spot no one knows and no one ventures to inquire. At times they are open and frank enough, will give you shelter and take salt with you; at others, when they have secret and inscrutable plans in operation, they will be dumb as an oracle, silent as the grave. Their horses are their confidants, even as they possess their hearts; and, faithful creatures that they are—and beautiful as faithful—they never betray their masters."

A foretaste of this wild and charming life was ours to-day. Never before had we experienced or realised this desert solitude; as lost to the world as if days instead of hours had seen us travelling through the pathless wilderness. A wild freedom possessed our senses; the chains of life seemed to fall away; new and untold possibilities were on the eve of dawning; body and spirit were being gifted with wings, and we should control the air. Absolute calmness and repose surrounded us like an atmosphere. The lesser troubles of life here had no place. A lightness of heart fell upon us such as we had never enjoyed in our happiest moments. It seemed possible to embrace the whole world of delight, thought and sensation, in one glance of the eye, one outstretching of the arms. Heart beat and pulses quickened as the horses galloped madly over hill and plain, and, for all one could see, might gallop for ever. This was life indeed, and one longed for a succession of days and nights in these wild and boundless solitudes.

We passed through sandy wastes, hot and glistening in the sunshine. Never was sky so blue and brilliant, so ethereal and celestial, as the sky above us. This alone must have made one intensely happy. We could almost see the sparkling air with its wonderful luminous bloom as we neared the beautiful Mokattam range. A yellowish hill stood at the mouth of a narrow winding valley or gorge, and over a broken path of loose stones we ascended for more than a mile to where the rocky pass opened out in a bold

FLYING FROM A SAND-STORM IN THE DESERT.

and imposing amphitheatre. Here flourished a strange and solitary fig-tree enclosed in a wall built as a shelter from the wind by the quarrymen who once worked here. And here we found Moses' spring or well, as it is called : a small rivulet of water flowing from a cleft in the rock. It is more than probable that the spring did not exist in the days of Moses, but was brought to life by the labours of the quarrymen. The water was bitter as the waters of Marah, and even our horses would have none of it. But the water varies, and there are times when its brackishness disappears for a season. The gorge was full of fossils and desert plants.

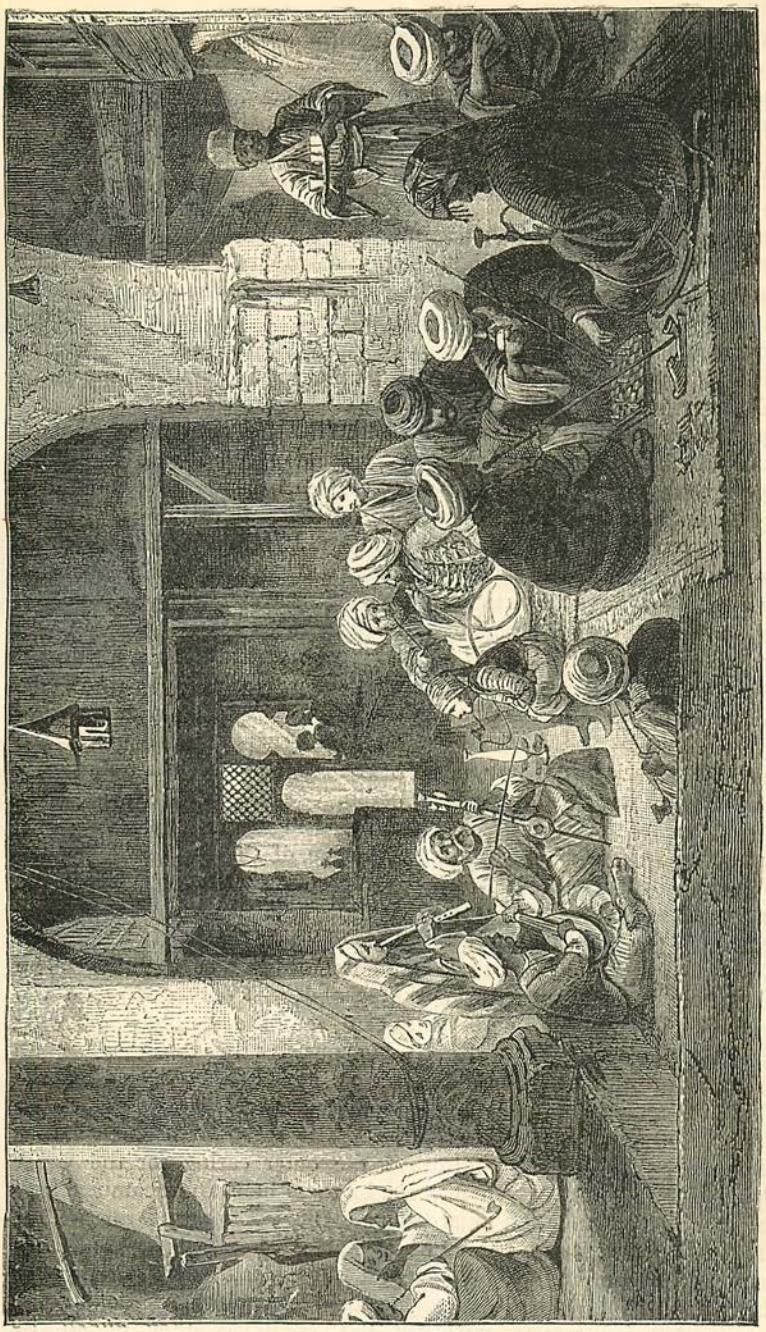
Here we halted, and Osman consulted his watch.

"It is yet early," he said. "If you are equal to it, we might push on to the Great Petrified Forest, for rest and luncheon. Our horses are swift, and the exhilaration of flying over these sandy wastes forbids all sense of fatigue. We shall reach the so-called forest in an hour and a half, or less. Even then it will scarcely be noon; we shall have two good hours for rest and roaming; and you will become a little more acquainted with these desert solitudes. Let us first take a glance at the lesser Petrified Forest, so that you may know what to expect from the greater."

Passing down the gorge to the yellow hill, we turned to the right and continued our way to the foot of the range, presently reaching a black, glazed-looking rock, with lower hills opposite where Osman pointed out some curious oyster-fossils. Fossils, indeed, seem to be the condition of these regions, which ought to be the delight of antiquarians and geologists. Immediately beyond these hills was the Petrified Forest.

At the first moment we felt rather bewildered. We had heard of the wood that could not be seen for the trees, but here we found neither wood nor trees. If we had thought much about the matter, it was to expect a forest, more or less extensive, of trees standing and turned to stone by the flight of time, the action of the atmosphere and other causes : antiquities from the hand of Nature as wonderful and well-preserved as antiquities from the hand of man in the Boulak Museum. Happily, the desert itself with all its charms, the emotions it aroused, was a thousand times sufficient recompense for our day's excursion; but those to whom these wild and vast solitudes do not appeal, will scarcely find the Petrified Forest any reward for their trouble.

Yet they are considered one of the wonders of Egypt, these remains which strew the sand in the neighbourhood of the Mokattam hills. Black fragments of wood turned to stone were lying about : fragments fast disappearing under the hand of tourists and fossil-collectors. All seem to belong to one species of tree, allied to the cotton plant or balsam, but of a gigantic size unknown in the present day. The whole question is involved in mystery. It is doubtful whether in remote ages the trees grew here, or whether they were floated up by



EGYPTIAN COFFEE HOUSE.

water. If the former, then this part of the desert must have changed very much in character in the course of time: the rolling away of century on century. As records of a long past age, these fossils were interesting, but they were mere petrified fragments, not a forest.

"You are surprised," said Osman. "You expected much more than you find. In fact you find nothing. Nothing but a few black pieces of wood turned to stone, which, as they do not grow like mushrooms, will very soon disappear. And these remnants of what must once have been a forest, here or elsewhere, are only interesting as fossils. In other parts of the great desert such remains are also found—are even embedded in the sandstone rock, proving that thousands of years ago Nature was passing through a state of transition resulting in what we now see. Huge trunks strew the Little Kashab for many miles. As the rock crumbled away in the course of ages, the roots, loosened and detached, scattered themselves over the surface of the plains. The fossils around us have very much the appearance of coal. Every one who comes here carries away a specimen, and the forest will soon become a tradition."

There was little need to linger. The fossils were certainly curious as specimens of the hardening effect of time upon a substance originally soft: as witness to the march of time itself: but there it ended: and not to "censure others by the dignity of excelling," we put small examples into our pockets as memorials of our visit. Then we turned to what was infinitely more full of charm: the great plains of the desert. A short gallop across the plateau brought us to the southern slopes of the Mokattam hills, where by means of a narrow path we turned into the "Valley of Wanderings." The view was magnificent, almost painful from its very length and breadth.

"There in the far distance you see rising the hills of Tura with their vast quarries, lying on the very edge of the sea," said Osman. "Long ago I inspected them all: subterranean caverns, chambers and passages, which have existed for thousands of years, for they were formed in the days of the Pharaohs. Nothing daunted the ancient Egyptians, who were not afraid of darkness or evil spirits. The Arabs, on the contrary, fear darkness, and will only quarry on the surface. Even from here you can see the outlines of what was once a powerful fortress. No quarries in Egypt are more interesting: the only example at all approaching them is the Red Mountain we passed on our way this morning, which is both worthy and easy of inspection. The stone from the quarries of Tura is said to have furnished the outer casing for the Great Pyramids. Even now, you may see in these halls and chambers how the ancients carved and quarried: and no workman of the present day surpasses them in accuracy and finish. I visited these quarries years ago with my father. We spent a whole week here, and day after day I used to lie on the slopes, reading, dreaming, overlooking the lovely changing waters, watching the boats as they glided by

with their white sails, taking no account of time, satisfied with the happiness of the present, giving little thought to the future. That," he added, "has been one of my rules of life: or perhaps it is part of my mental bias, and has influenced me unconsciously. I have always lived in the present, allowing the future to look to itself; taking the full benefit of to-day without wishing for to-morrow. They who do so are wise, for they find at least twice as much in life as those who are always dating forward."

He pointed out a desert gorge between the hills; a gorge wild, desolate and severe, bounded by lofty precipices of rock; full of windings, communicating after many long miles with other and more remote ravines, stretching far away to Helwan, where you are once more in touch with civilisation, with streets and crowds and railways: influences which do their best to obliterate from one's memory all the charms of desert life.

"How well I remember one day in particular," continued Osman, "when I had left my father and gone up that majestic ravine without him. I wanted to be alone with all that grand severity; had risen at four o'clock and gone out upon the heights to enjoy the sunrise. I suppose I was tired, for throwing myself down in a sheltered spot, I unconsciously fell asleep and slept for four hours. I shall never forget my father's alarm, or his joy at seeing me return: and, good father and friend that he ever was, he never gave me a word of reproach. As a rule I never left him even for an hour, when we were travelling together: we were more like brothers than father and son: and I had been absent for eight hours when I returned. I never did it again, for he was then getting old, and, as far as I was concerned, was growing a little nervous. I was as the apple of his eye, and I think that my death would have been his own."

All this time we were scouring the plains out of sight of all trace of life and habitation. Nothing seemed to tire our horses, and the faster they went the more enjoyable was the motion. No ride we had ever taken could equal this ride in the desert. As Osman had said, a sense of fatigue was impossible. When we reached the Greater Petrified Forest we felt that we could have gone on until sundown unwearied.

Osman led the way to a quiet spot under a rock, where the advancing sun afforded little shade, though that little was grateful. Here for a couple of hours we encamped, feasted on Olympian fare, talked of times past and present, scenes and adventures we had met with; the turnings of straws which had influenced the current of our lives: all the mysterious, unseen influences which surround every one of us individually, and from which there is no escape.

The moments ran in golden sands; all was freedom, repose and sunshine; a new world, another state of existence. More than ever we wished for a longer spell of this enchantment; for days spent in travelling into the interior, and nights passed under the quiet

stars: ending in a sojourn at the monastery of St. Catherine, and long interviews with the monks, during which we might learn their views of life and death, seclusion and penance: and discover how far their narrow existence advanced them towards the perfection all desire and none attain to. We would take long walks up the Mount of Moses, and inspect the ruined temples, the crumbling mosque the devotion of Mohammedans once raised here: and in visiting the haunts of those holy men of old, it might be that something of the patience of Moses and the mantle of Elijah might fall upon us.

But St. Catherine's was far off: we were not to see it; perhaps shall never see it: yet mentally we picture that small religious oasis where the rising and setting of the sun alone mark the days; and the death of an aged monk is the sole tragedy which breaks in upon the even tenour of this little fraternity, over which the sun shines, and the rain falls in its season, and the stars look down in nightly benediction.

The hour glass was turned, and too soon the golden sands ran out again: we could not stay here for ever. But in returning we took our time, and did not travel as the arrow flies. Refreshed by a long rest we spent hours in the delight of scouring sandy plains and passing over hills and undulations. During the whole time we saw no sign of living creature; not so much as a jackal, fox, or gazelle. The latter, indeed, with its graceful form and soft black eye, we wished for, but they are found more in the interior, and, in their extreme timidity, seldom venture so near the haunts of men. Once only in the distance we saw a file of camels, heavily laden, plodding towards Cairo.

"A caravan!" cried Osman: "let us meet them and inquire whence they come and whither they go."

Our horses were not long in reaching them, and we found they were merchants from Jedda, laden with mother-of-pearl, coffee, essential oils, and silken stuffs. The merchants were enveloped in long cloaks, and little was seen of their faces excepting the eyes, as a protection from the sun. Osman spoke to them in their own language, and what he said had the effect of causing an immediate halt. They uncovered their faces, made profound Eastern salutations, and placed themselves and all they possessed at his service. Handsome, stalwart men, with dark flashing eyes and patriarchal countenances. Some had grey beards, but the burden of years sat lightly upon them; they seemed as strong, as well able to bear fatigue, as those who were only entering manhood.

"You have had a long journey," remarked Osman. "I thought that there were now easier ways of transporting goods and precious stones from Jedda to Cairo and the outer world."

Then they explained that they were pilgrims as well as merchants. They had made a pilgrimage to Mecca, nearly fifty miles to

ENTRANCE GATE TO BAZAARS.

the west of Jedda, and had vowed to cross the desert on foot. Nothing, however, prevented them from making it at the same time a matter of business: and so it came to pass that they were now approaching Cairo and the end of their journey. After a short conversation they once more set out towards the great city, and we watched their slow and patient progress as they stood out in picturesque file against the sky, until the undulations of the plains hid them from view.

So it came to pass that towards the decline of the afternoon we found ourselves still in the desert, on the top of the Mokattam hills, surrounded by a wide and wonderful view. Behind us the great desert, in which we had just spent one of the pleasantest days of our lives: before us, the visible signs, almost sounds, of the great city, overshadowed by its splendid citadel and the mosque which crowned it; on the one hand the windings of the Nile, with the Great Pyramids beyond. The sun went down and we found ourselves still upon the hills, at the ruined mosque of Giyûshi. Cairo lay at our feet, bathed in splendour. Everything was tinged with the flush of sunset. The sky shot forth colours indescribably brilliant; the whole earth reflected the glory of the heavens. The majestic, slow-moving river was for the moment turned to blood-red, whilst the Great Pyramids had changed the grey tones of antiquity for the loveliest, most inappropriate colours of the blush-rose. The minarets of the Citadel Mosque seemed on fire; everything suggested the contrast of life and death; in these buildings, decay, the heritage of time; and in the sun and sky an emblem of the Resurrection and of eternal youth.

Alas, time would not stand still; for us it sped all too quickly, and before another sun had twice risen and set, we found ourselves at the railway station, bidding Osman a melancholy farewell.

"You have promised to come and stay with me," he said. "I hold a promise sacred; it must be so with you. Do not delay, for life is full of uncertainties. Here we have spent delightful days, but there I am even more at home. No door closed to the world shall be closed to you: and no wish you may have shall be unfulfilled. You will come too," he added to H. "We deal in magic, you know."

The rare magic of friendship and influence, of sympathy and a kindly nature, combined with singular mental powers, a profound knowledge of mankind; the charm of unbounded wealth and an exalted station: this magic he possessed and exercised as it has been given to few.

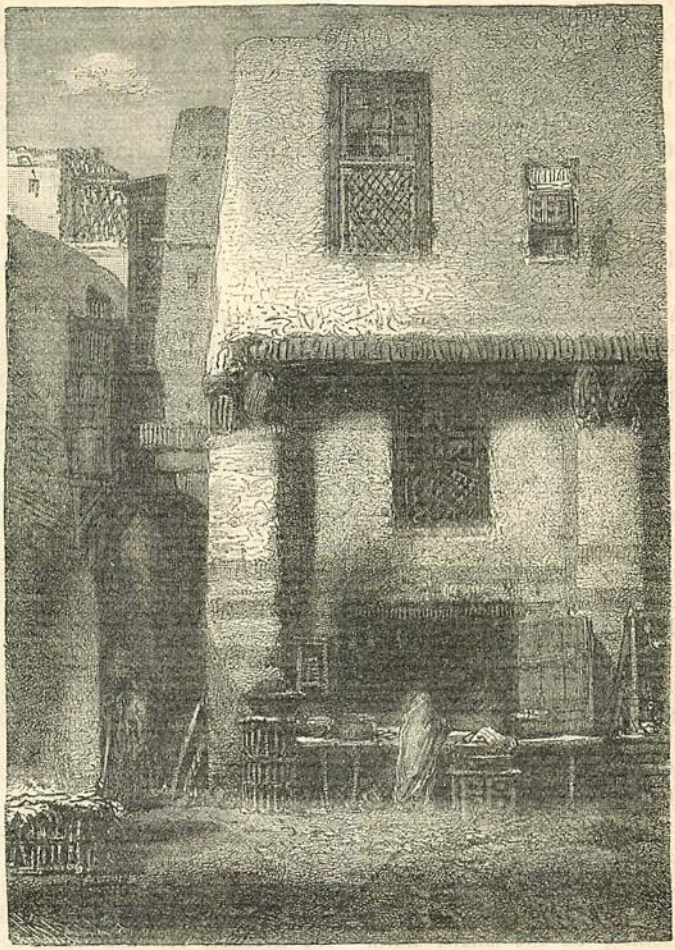
The last moment arrived; the train slowly moved; the station-master and a small group of attendants stood in the background. Osman's pale, powerful, yet sympathetic Greek face was framed in the open window.

"Adieu," we said, as the carriage moved slowly onwards.

"*Jusqu'au revoir*," he replied.

A few moments more, and the train was out of sight. We turned back into Cairo, whose streets for us now seemed empty and deserted.

Our own sojourn in the Lotus-Land was drawing to a close. Three



SMALL EGYPTIAN EATING-HOUSE, CAIRO.

more risings of the sun, and we too should have passed away from Cairo with all its charms and attractions.

One of our last excursions must be recorded in few words.

H. wished to visit an ostrich farm, and this, combined with a visit to the Obelisk of Heliopolis, was easily arranged. The time was

the day after Osman's departure. The splendid little Arabian horses had been placed at our disposal for the remainder of our stay : a graceful act of which we did not avail ourselves. This would probably be our last excursion, and we thought we should like to become better acquainted with the donkeys of Cairo, as inseparable from the city as its bazaars and mosques, the very Nile itself. Therefore our dragoman was commissioned to exercise his skill and choose with discretion. He alone rejoiced in the departure of Osman, which reinstated him in pomp and power. Aleck loved to command.

It was a bright, clear morning; the skies were not in sympathy with Osman's departure, and that Cairo was so much the poorer. The air was sparkling and exhilarating; no one could indulge in the luxury of a melancholy mood under its influence. Our donkeys were full of life and animation ; as we have said before, one soon grows used to the action of these Eastern animals ; and they are so strong and willing that there are those—we were not of the number—who prefer them to horses.

We found ourselves trotting through the streets of Cairo, charging as it were the citadel, which loomed ahead of us, crowned by its ever-memorable mosque. We passed straight up the crowded Mouskee, and Aleck went before us, clearing the way; very much in his element. Voice and whip had no rest; and again we trembled for consequences which never happened. Remonstrance was useless. But every now and then some ludicrous incident would occur which convinced us that with all his despotic propensities a certain love of humour in our dragoman redeemed the apparent sternness of his character. The truth was, in his small way he was a philosopher ; he knew the nature of those with whom he had to deal; experience had taught him what he had to do and how far he had to go : the limits seemed to us beyond the bounds of discretion, but he knew better : the end always justified the means. Before the day was over we discovered that he had brought us this round-about way for the sole purpose of commanding the loiterers in the Mouskee.

As usual, it was crowded with a motley gathering of Easterns and Europeans : the latter often suffering by contrast. The entrance to the bazaars was of course impassable ; the streets were full of cries ; the money-changers at the corners seemed unusually lively and full of work. The calm Citadel looked down in dignified silence upon the scene, and its Mosque reminded the world that it was hastening to the silent land. We listened for the voice of the Muezzin, but it was not the hour of prayer : the minarets sent forth no warning. It was a relief to pass out of the noisy thoroughfares and by a long *détour* which really made us angry with our dragoman, turn into the direct road for Shoobra, Heliopolis, and the Ostrich Farm.

Down the long, straight road, through long avenues of trees, out into the open country. Crossing some rough, desert-like

fields, where the plough had been at work, and putting to flight a number of cruel-looking vultures—the first we had seen in the neighbourhood of Cairo—we reached a long, narrow embankment over which our donkeys scrambled with a certain amount of effort. Another mile of flat, loose, rugged, sandy waste, which tried the patience of our animals, and we saw rising before us, a large enclosure; a sort of straggling bungalow or wooden shanty: the whole very much like a zoological settlement in the desert.

The ostriches themselves were in a circular erection divided into sections; each section containing its complement of birds, old and young. Altogether there seemed an enormous number, but all had plenty of space for moving. Some every now and then darted off from one end of their "beat" to the other with the speed of the wind, whilst others would come and look at us through the grating with wide, startled eyes, as if they would have turned us into martyrs with the greatest pleasure. Strong and powerful are these ostriches both in the wing and the leg. Few creatures can equal them in speed, and they never tire; whilst a kick from one of them is not easily forgotten. They are stupid, as every one knows, and no one will wonder at, when he sees the small head; and they can be excessively cruel, perhaps as much from shyness and fear as from natural tendency. Very curious they looked as they stalked about, with their long legs, round, egg-shaped bodies and crane-like necks, their heads constantly in the attitude of intense listening, as if for ever on their guard against an unseen enemy. The feathers which make these birds so valuable adorn them far less than they do the fair heads they ultimately decorate. A great source of industry and a lucrative, are these ostrich farms, but few and small compared with those of South Africa, where the birds are presented with "the freedom of the country," and roam at will, yet are seldom lost. The office of the farm had a collection of eggs and feathers for sale sufficient to have supplied all the fashionable milliners of Paris and all the head-dresses for many a Queen's Drawing-room.

From this we turned back across the ploughed fields, over the embankment, and on to the high road again, where through magnificent avenues of trees, and past gardens laden with fruit trees and brilliant with flowers, we reached the village of Matariyeh, with its garden containing the Virgin's tree: a sycamore now old and covered with names, beneath which the Virgin is said to have rested with the Holy Child during the flight into Egypt. But the original tree came to an end two centuries ago, when the present tree was planted. It flourishes therefore, like the Papal See, by right of succession.

The garden, luxuriant and fertile, is well watered by a reservoir supplied by springs, the only water in the neighbourhood good for drinking. The reservoir is called the "Water of An," and is mentioned in Coptic legends of great antiquity. Here once

flourished the balsam plant from which was made the celebrated balm of Gilead given by Solomon to the Queen of Sheba. And here was first grown the cotton plant, destined to become so great an article of commerce in our Lotus-Land.

Soon after this we came to the ruins of Heliopolis, the famous "City of the Sun," that played so great a part in the religion of Ancient Egypt.

Here was the temple of Ra or Tum, a deity appearing under seventy-five different forms, each form having its own special attribute, Tum being the evening sun, Harmachis the morning sun. The place was also called An, or Benna, the House of Phœnix, identical with the Hebrew On, mentioned in the Bible.

The sun temple of Ra in fame and antiquity came next to the temple of Ptah in Memphis, and its ceremonies were even more prolonged and gorgeous than those of the temple of the Apis bull. The two temples, however, were intimately connected. The Mnevis bull of Heliopolis was sacred to Ra; and the Apis bull of Memphis, sacred to Ptah, had its abode in Heliopolis until it was transferred to Memphis. Its college of priests was more celebrated than all others, one of the priests being Potiphar, whose daughter, Asnath, Joseph married. Herodotus declares that the sages of Heliopolis were the most learned in the world.

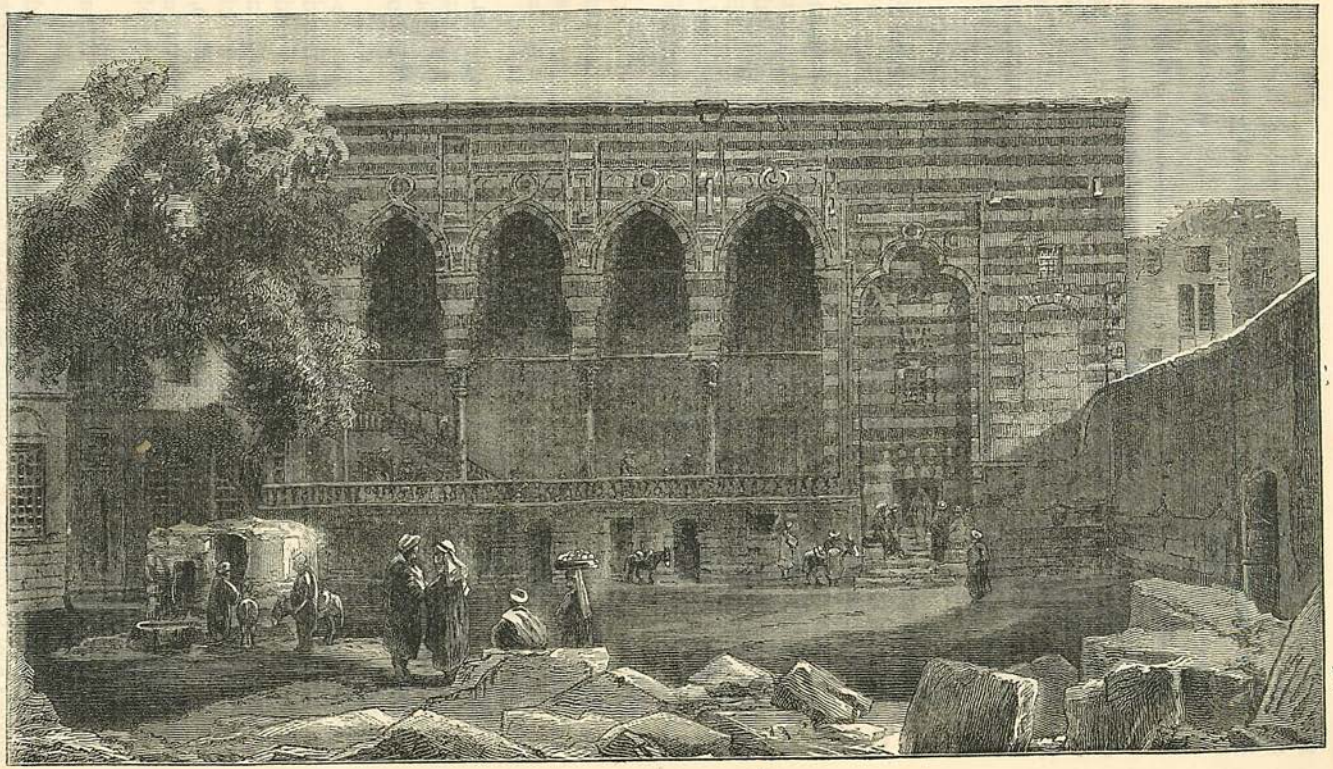
Of the ruins of this great city, these mighty temples, nothing remains excepting the obelisk; the oldest in Egypt.

This once stood, with its lost companion, in front of the entrance to the temple. Before them was a long avenue of sphinxes; and nothing more dignified and imposing, or better suited to the country in grandeur and simple outlines, can be imagined.

The obelisk was erected in the reign of Osirtasen, second king of the twelfth or Theban dynasty, some three thousand years before the Christian era. Its long inscription, written in the character of the old empire, is repeated on all four sides.

There are still remains of mounds and brick walls to be seen, so much the colour of the surrounding sand that at the first moment it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. These ruined walls marked an enclosure of some five thousand feet, supposed to have been the vast open space in front of the temple dedicated to sacred uses.

As a remnant of antiquity, this Obelisk of Heliopolis is one of the most interesting objects in the Lotus-Land, and once more when gazing upon it, we are brought into touch with all that grand past history and people of whose study there literally seems to be no end. The deeper we dive into the history of Egypt, the more profound become its truths, the more magnificent the foundations on which they built up their glorious kingdom, their complicated and beautiful, though heathen faith. Vaster than any people's that have since followed were their conceptions; their minds seemed limitless as



COURT OF A HOUSE IN CAIRO.

their great deserts, and their efforts steadfast as the course of their sacred river. The country remains and the river flows on ; but of the nation which grew and grew in power as hundreds of years rolled downwards into thousands, there remains only a record and a name.

The sun was overhead as we turned our backs upon Heliopolis ; the obelisk threw no shadow, hot and barren were the plains, the mounds and the ruined brick walls. The gardens looked cool and delightful as we passed them ; many of their walls were loaded with creepers of gorgeous bloom which trailed for long distances and fell gracefully, rivalling the hanging gardens of the Hesperides. The shady avenues were a grateful repose after the glare of the cloudless Eastern sky. We passed through the fashionable drive of Cairo, but it was still early, and the roads were deserted.

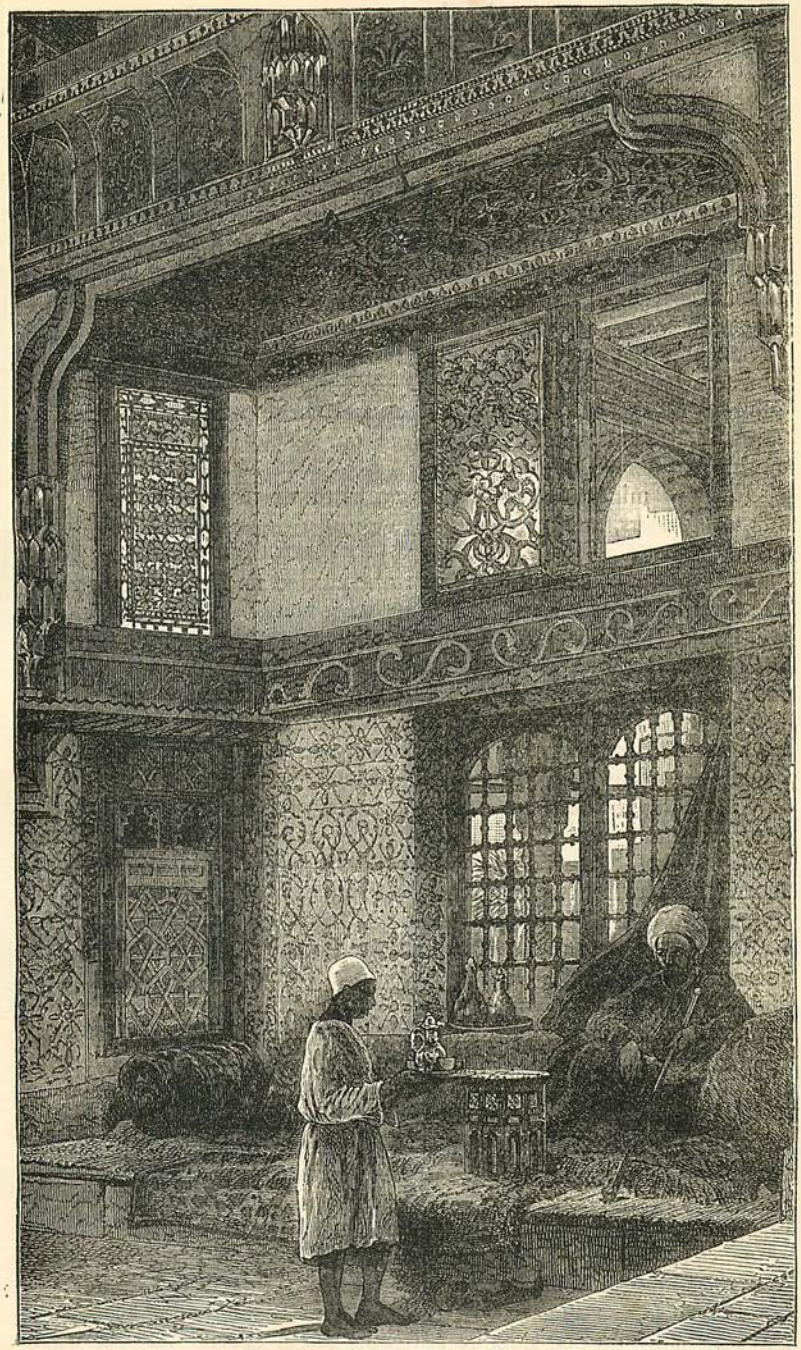
The afternoon of that same day, we had dismissed our donkeys, and were walking through some of the streets of the city, feeling that we should soon look upon them no more, when entering one of the quieter thoroughfares given up to large houses with gardens enclosed in high walls, we came upon what apparently was a festive scene. A certain house was decorated and adorned with drapery and lanterns, especial care being bestowed upon the doorway. A small crowd stood outside surrounding a brass band, which sent forth its harsh and peculiar Egyptian music. We asked the meaning of this excitement, and were informed that it was a marriage ; all this was part of the wedding festivity. As we passed the door, we halted an instant to gaze down the long wide passage decorated with drapery of some rich Eastern material. Flowers and evergreens also contributed their effect of colouring and freshness, and the whole arrangement was by no means unpicturesque.

At that moment a young man, none other than the bridegroom, simply dressed and very prepossessing, came forward, and seeing that we were strangers, politely asked us in. Apparently we were not expected to refuse, for he immediately turned and signed to us to follow.

Feeling suddenly placed under strange circumstances, but remembering that at Rome one should do as Rome does, we entered and accompanied our guide. Down a long wide passage draped and garlanded, until in a large courtyard we mounted some steps to a raised platform, where he ushered us to places of honour, a sort of canopy with a daïs. Seated round the platform or raised room, were richly dressed, venerable-looking men, several of whom were imposing and dignified sheykhs. These were all waiting the arrival of the bride, who might now be expected at any moment.

All rose as we entered, saluted us in Eastern fashion, and sat down again.

Laughter formed no part of the entertainment ; a few looked solemn and composed, as if assisting at funeral rather than marriage



RECESS IN HOUSE OF A SHEYKH.

rites, whilst others discoursed with great earnestness and animation. The bridegroom moved about from one to another, the most merry-looking and animated of all. Bashfulness and nervousness seemed unknown to him.

The scene was striking and novel. The raised room or kiosk—impromptu for the occasion—was splendidly decorated. Beyond it was the courtyard, where palms and small orange trees flourished, whilst flowers and garlands abounded. A small fountain sent forth its musical plash. Beyond rose another section of the same house, with mushrabeeyeh windows. An enormous mushrabeeyeh screen, forming, as it were, part of the wall, concealed from view what lay behind. Whether bright eyes were looking down upon us, more invisible than cloistered nuns, we could not tell. We would have given much for a glimpse of the bride, but might as well have wished for Aladdin's lamp. Even if she arrived before our departure, we should see nothing of her veiled features.

In a few minutes coffee was brought to us in cups with delicate filigree holders, and presented with great earnestness by the bridegroom himself.

Unfortunately everything had to be carried on by dumb motions: the assembled guests could not understand our language, nor we theirs. A few civilities we exchanged with the bridegroom, interpreted by our dragoman, but he was only able to divide his favours, and we limited our remarks to an earnest desire for his happiness. He laid his hand upon his heart, bowed, and smiled in such hopeful content, that we could only trust our wishes might add something to his felicity present and future.

One thing was evident: the courtesies of life were intended and were gracefully offered. Seeing us strangers and pilgrims in a foreign land, they had tendered us that hospitality which is a marked feature in the East. If there was anything singular in this invitation of the moment to two unknown wayfarers passing their gates, it was not for us to criticise, but to accept in the spirit of the offering. Evidently to refuse would have been to bring a regret upon the bright and amiable face of our passing host.

It might be, too, that some slight superstition was added to the hospitable thought, and that a refusal would have been equivalent to throwing a slight shadow upon the life of the bridal pair. Superstition is one of the foundation stones that build up the character of this people in whom many excellences dwell, and it is a weakness not to be disregarded until rooted out by reason and education. To respect the prejudices of others is one of the first laws not only of good breeding but of Christianity. Probably the most cultivated and enlightened amongst us has his own pet superstition deep down in his heart; it is, as Goethe says, a part of the very essence of humanity; and if it is not the vulgar turning of money at the new moon, or getting out of bed habitually on one side, or searching for a second magpie when

LIGHT OF THE HAREM.

one crosses our path, it may exist in some more profound and unsuspected phase, as closely clung to, as religiously observed, as the open superstition of the Arabian.

Suddenly there was a stir and commotion without; a wilder discord of music; a sound of carriages dashing up, of a crowd making way. The bride's procession had arrived; all rose to receive her.

The bridegroom went forward, nothing marking his emotion beyond a quickened footstep, a brighter eye.

Then the bride entered, followed by her maidens and relatives. She was closely veiled; more closely than usual; even the colour of her eyes could not be seen. These of course were dark and soft. The outline of her form could only be imagined; but she appeared tall and graceful, with a small, well-balanced head. We could therefore fancy her pretty, and that the fortunate bridegroom had secured a prize in the matrimonial market.

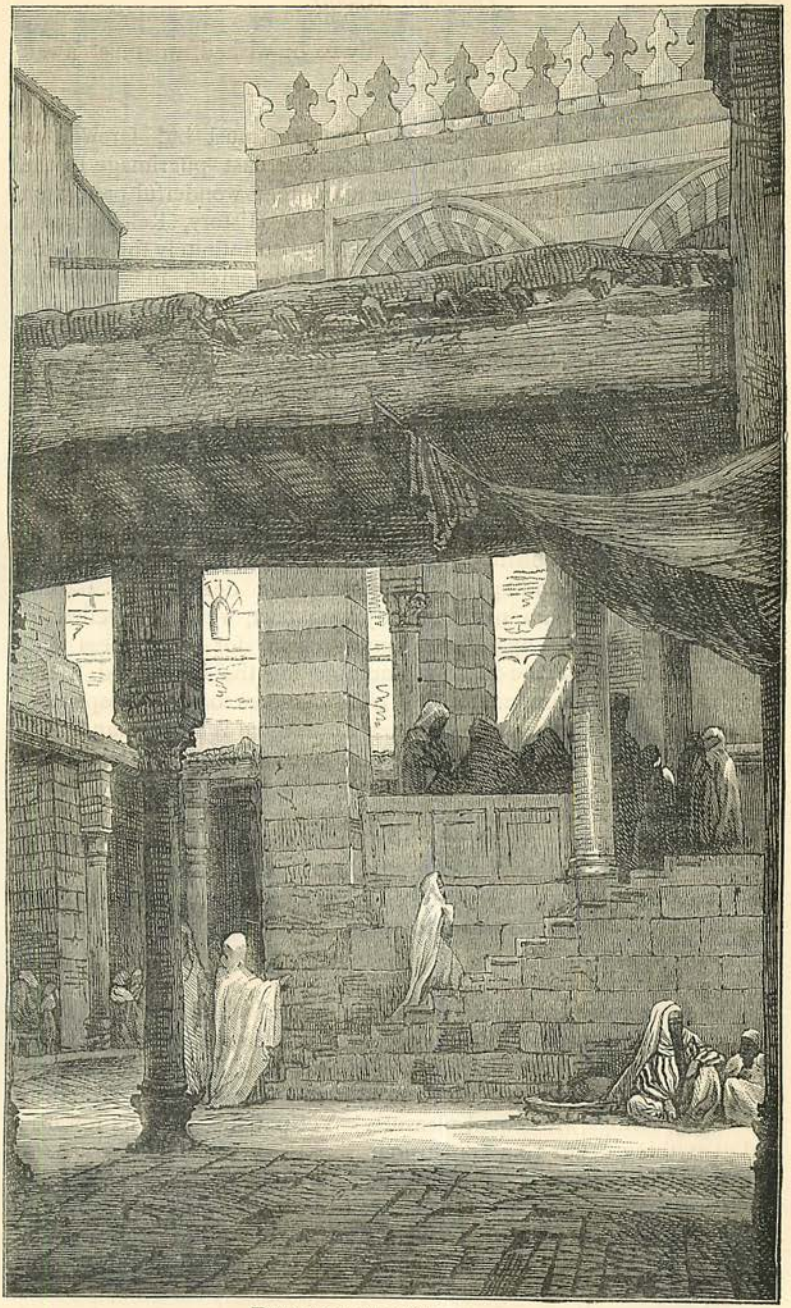
She did not mix with the bridegroom's friends. Slowly but without pausing, the bridal procession passed up the passage, and disappeared behind the large mushrabeeyeh screen, to the apartments dedicated to the harem. Here the bride would pass the remainder of the day in quietude and silence, with downcast eyes, spoken to by her friends and not replying, until one by one they would depart and leave her with no other attendant than her old duenna.

The bridegroom and his friends during this time would be enjoying each other's society. Presently a banquet would be served, followed by coffee and cigarettes, and at the hour of prayer, all would repair to the Mosque with lighted torches and tapers: after which the day's ceremonial would close.

But long before this we had taken our departure: as soon, indeed, as the bride's procession had disappeared within the seclusion of the harem.

With a final expression of our wishes for the happiness of our young host, we bade him farewell. He accompanied us down the garlanded passage, and as he had received us at his threshold, so there he bade us God-speed, shaking hands in a fashion more English than Oriental. To us it was a very pleasant incident, resulting in a momentary glimpse of one of the most important ceremonies and customs of this people, and yielding a happy remembrance for the time to come.

It was also one of our closing impressions of the Lotus-Land; one of the last Eastern pictures that gilded our path. And so it was well that it should be of a sunny nature, with so much in it that was of human interest. There had been something especially winning in the young bridegroom: and somehow one felt that if all the nice people of earth could be turned into Positives and placed in one hemisphere, and all the opposite became Negatives and were placed in the other, the happier region would not be an empty paradise.



ENTERING THE SANCTUARY.

But for this consummation, devoutly to be wished, we must await the millennium.

And so the hour rang out when we too must bid farewell to the City of the Pyramids; when we took our last pilgrimage to the Citadel, and looked for the last time upon that wonderful panorama which embraces so many objects sacred to History, Religion, and Antiquity, without which the world would be so infinitely the poorer.

Before us the numberless mosques and minarets, in which we had delighted, towered above the streets and houses of Cairo, gilded and glorified by the declining sun; again the waters of the sacred Nile changed to blood red, and those marvels of Gizeh wore the tint of the blush-rose. These sunsets are the rule, not the exception in this Lotus-Land. Behind us, rising in unearthly vision, the slender minarets of Mohammed Ali were landmarks pointing heavenwards even to the far-off desert plains. The voice of the Muezzin rang out clear and distinct upon the startled air: "Allah! Allah! Allah! There is no God but God!" At our feet, in the pure and exquisite ruins of the Tombs of the Caliphs, the dead slept in surroundings that almost make death itself beautiful. Here on a certain night already long past, we had revelled in a moonlight scene unparalleled upon earth for chasteness and refinement: a scene the more memorable for the new-found friend who had sailed before us for the classic shores of the Bosphorus. But in Friendship, as in its twin sister Love, there is a talisman which laughs at time; one day becomes as a thousand years; and the new friendship seems only the friendship of some previous existence taken up where it had been interrupted.

We looked upon the scene until the sun went down, and the gorgeous colours died out of the sky; and we pictured to ourselves the wonderful silence and solitude of those great desert wastes beyond the Pyramids, as Tum spread his mantle and Night and Darkness crept over the earth.

It was our last sunset from these heights, and with it our task ends.

To us the chronicling of these records has been a labour of love, for we cannot remember the time when the Lotus-Land had no place in our affections; but we hardly dare hope that the reader has followed us in our wanderings with equal pleasure. Yet patience has its reward: and everything draws to a conclusion.

Before another sunset we had turned our faces westward, away from the Lotus-Land. Our days had been crowded with interest, our nights with dreams of flowing rivers and mighty cities and a great people, mixed up with all the wonders of the Arabian Nights. The hours had passed as moments.

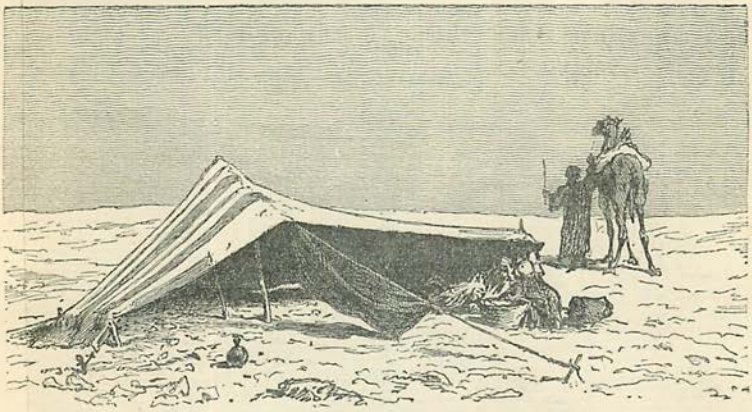
Only too soon does the end come on these occasions; as the end comes for all things in this changing world. Our life is made up of

THE MECCA NICHE.

fragments; much attempted, little accomplished; and the undertones are those saddest of all words: Farewell and Nevermore. These like solemn bells for ever sound in our ears. All pleasures, all delights, are overshadowed by the thought: *This also shall pass away;* and wise was that mighty Eastern king who had it engraved upon his ring as his life's motto. For the joys of everlasting youth, the repose of perfection, surcease of sorrow, each must wait until he has crossed a river far longer, deeper, colder, more terrible than the Nile, and taken a journey more solitary than the most untrodden wilds of the Great Desert itself.

But until the Dark Shadow falls and the silent wings are outspread; until the silver cord is loosed and the wheel is broken at the cistern; until the very last grain of life's golden sands has run out: there remains to us this glorious world, crowded with all its beauties of nature, art, antiquity: wonders even now beyond our mortal grasp: of which the Lotus-Land possesses more than its share.

And in taking leave of our beloved Lotus-Land, what better form can we employ than the words spoken by Osman as his train steamed away towards Alexandria: "*Adieu jusqu'au revoir?*"



A Desert Home.