



IN SIGHT OF THE PYRAMIDS.

## EGYPT OF TO-DAY.

BY A RESIDENT.



**O**f all countries in the world none has been more written about than Egypt, and we are inclined to think that a great deal still remains to be told. The addition to her territories of the vast extent of the Nile valley that she has recently regained will in itself ensure a large appendix to her modern history, and may add a chapter too to the romance of warfare and diplomacy.

When one looks at our wintry sky and recalls the enchanted firmament that shines over Cairo, one regrets that there the season is not in full swing until January. But when once amid the mosques and bazaars, the drives and rides, and the gaiety of that cosmopolitan city, it takes at least the seductions of a Nile trip, under the tutelage of Messrs. Cook, during the winter, and nothing short of the flies and heat during summer, to free the land of its thousands of pleasure-seeking visitors.

Still, it is not a run up to Assouan on a dahabiyeh that we are bent upon just now, nor our personal experiences at the Pyramids, nor yet an account of our rambles in the old and picturesque parts of Cairo.

One wonders often if the average winter visitor remembers that there are other towns in Egypt than this Cairo. He may perchance recall his landing at Ismailia, and have ridden round Port Said on a donkey, or run down by train to Alexandria. If he has done these he thinks he has "done" Egypt, and from my experiences one may conclude generally that the Egyptian has "done" him.

The other day I happened to be shopping in Port Said when a P. & O. steamer, homeward bound, was in the port. I inquired the price of his articles of a turbaned vendor of photos—one Ali Hassan.

"One shillin' each, sir," said the smiling Oriental. "Very good photograph—one shillin'."

Then I ventured to express my opinion in



A CAIRENE DONKEY DRIVER.

Arabic touching these pictures, knowing they were about fivepence each.

"Very good, sir; how many you take? Two piastres each. I not know you from P. & O. passenger!"

There was at Suez a very intimate acquaintance of mine, a donkey boy. One evening he came to me, his face beaming, to recount his day's experiences.

"Sir," he said, "you see that trooper lying at the docks. To-day I take out three officers an' one lady—very fine English lady—p'raps two hours round the canal, that's all, and they give me fifteen shillin'!"

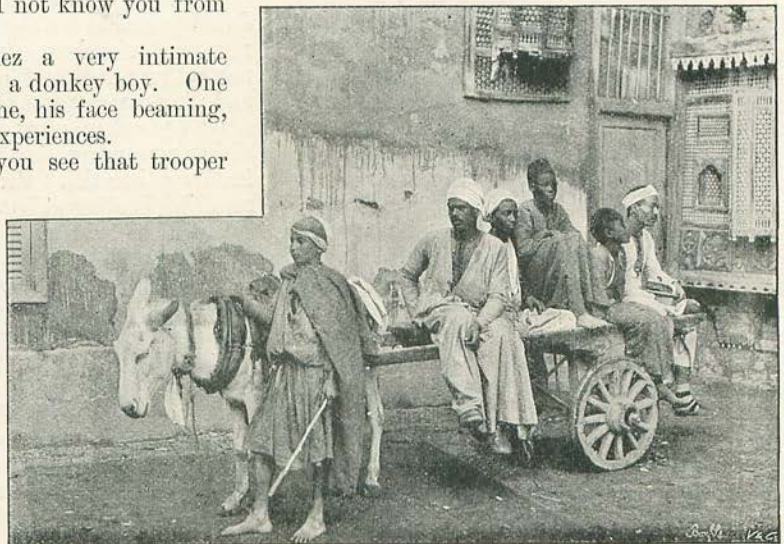
He thought of shortly buying a new galabiyeh, or long loose robe, which was the chiefest part of his clothing.

Spending a winter in Cairo, one cannot boast of having seen Egypt. It is difficult to observe, amid the gaiety and semi-Europeanism of that romantic city, the slow and silent but certain effects of our occupation on the people of the country. It is true that in Cairo and its neighbourhood there are splendid high-grade educational establishments, but most of these existed before the time of our entering the country, and some are old institutions, revived from beginnings made by Mehemet Ali and other past rulers.

But if one cares to obtain an insight into the world of whitewashed villages that stud the delta, bowered in the boundless expanse of green, one can learn something of the people, and how they live out their industrious and monotonous but happy lives. One can then compare the lot of the population of to-day with what it was till recently.

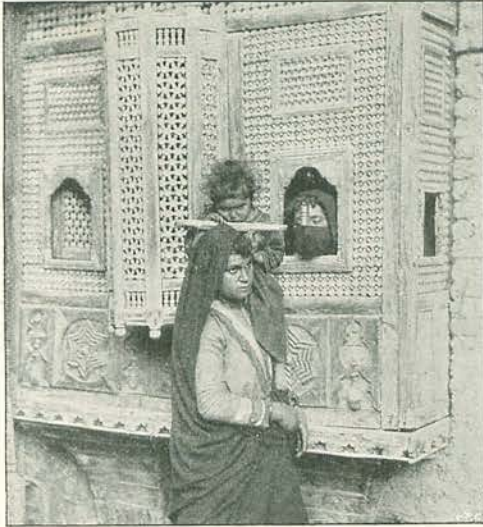
Under the barbarous abuse of the *corvée*, when almost all the able-bodied men were liable to be dragged off to work at clearing and digging canals, or taken away in chains to be made soldiers of, their lot was a very miserable one.

Ever since Herodotus penned his "Travelers' Tales" Egypt has been famed as the land of paradox, and so it has come about that the most tractable and easily-governed people of the world experienced the worst oppression and misrule. Under Mehemet Ali, who has been styled the "Napoleon of Egypt," it is well known that the now picturesque Mahmoudiyeh Canal was dug under the



ARABS EN ROUTE TO CAIRO.

system of the *corvée* by thousands of his wretched subjects, often without spade or shovel. They had to work like slaves, digging with their bare hands. The Suez

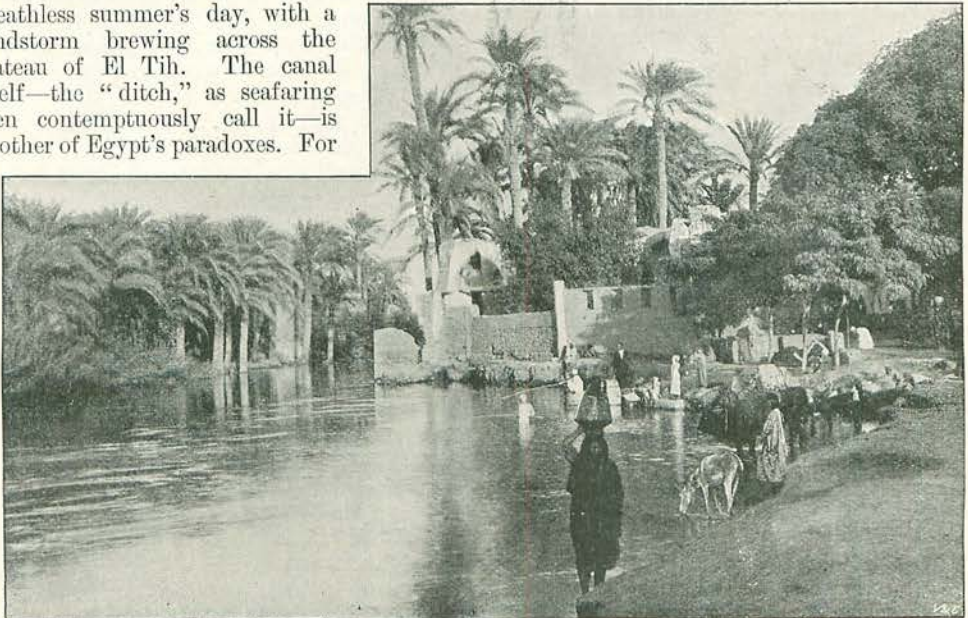


AN EGYPTIAN HOUSEHOLD.

Canal too is a work performed under such inglorious, but certainly much improved, conditions by these preternaturally patient *fellaheen*. Those best know what that gigantic undertaking must have cost the wretched labourers who have steamed through it at five miles an hour on a breathless summer's day, with a sandstorm brewing across the plateau of El Tih. The canal itself—the “ditch,” as seafaring men contemptuously call it—is another of Egypt's paradoxes. For

while the country has on one of its borders the greatest engineering feat of modern times, its people derive no appreciable benefit from it, though the work has revolutionised the trade of half the world. In fact Egypt lost by it an enormous overland traffic of mails and passengers, and seems to have but little gain, if any, from its existence, except that the British occupation may be prolonged on account of it.

Of this occupation no sensible Egyptian can justly complain, though many who ought to be considered enlightened wish us further. One of the greatest benefits to the country brought about by our presence is the gradual evolution of a partially Europeanised middle class of society. On such a middle class much depends; on their honesty and industry hangs much of the future of the country. Go where you will in Egypt nowadays you find such professions as those of clerks, accountants, railway, postal and telegraph officials filled by this most useful product of our interference there. These individuals are mostly those educated like the rest in the primary schools, and chosen to be sent to the secondary establishments, whence they procure such situations as the above, purely by reason of showing the possession of brains and capability, irrespective of creed and rank. Many positions once held ordinarily by Europeans are now reserved for those natives whom we have thus taught to think and



“WHERE EVERY PROSPECT PLEASES.”

work, but not always to love us. Still, despite the well-directed efforts of the Government, the mass of the fellahen are intensely ignorant—a puzzling, apathetic, hard-working but immovable people.

Recent events have proved that we have taught the fellah one thing, which is to be a steady and obedient soldier. Gradually we are making an impression on him as a class. We have wisely left his religion alone, but



EGYPTIAN WOMAN CARRYING A WATER PITCHER.

have infused certain elements of our spirit and influence into his laws, his finances, and his education.

It is a fact however that no race of men can be raised without a contemporaneous attempt to raise their women also. But here in Egypt is another paradox. We are doing all we can to elevate the men from their strange state of apathy and indifference to everything save their daily work. On the

one hand are justice, civilisation, and progress stretching out a hand to the ignorant, light-hearted and sun-loving people; and on the other are their habits of polygamy, their old customs, and their irradicable ideas of the inferiority of women, all holding them back to the mud floors and miserable huts where they have lived so long.

The average fellah regards women as made to satisfy his lust, and then to be a beast of burden. There is no richer field for medical and female mission work than in the vast green plain of the delta among these toiling and helpless folk of Egypt. Though they toil so incessantly, and all seven days of the week, there is no one more keenly appreciative of the comic side of things, or of feasts, and fairs, and sightseeing.

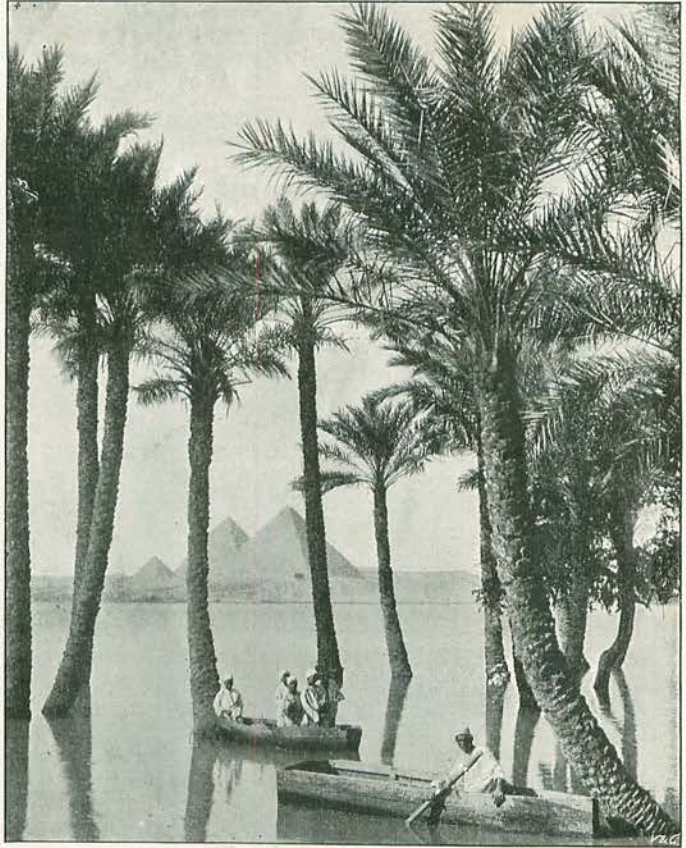
Their year being lunar, the periodic festivals and fasts, which they observe religiously, come round at a slightly different season each year. Thus the month of Ramadhan, when the whole of Islam keeps a fast every day for the month, falls for a succession of years during summer. Then the poor folk endure a most trying ordeal, and it is no wonder that, at the sunset gun, a cry goes up from the children of every village in Egypt as they leave their half-hearted games and rush home to be fed.

For the average native the three great events of his life are those of circumcision, marriage, and the pilgrimage. On the occasion of the first ceremony there is generally a picturesque torchlight procession about the streets, with music, and the effect of the changing lights on the coloured dresses, and the gaily-clad children running hither and thither, is very fine. Arrived at the house, the company is greeted with the trilling *zaghareet* of the women, which is their well-known expression on joyful occasions, and a feast is usually made for visitors and friends. With regard to the marriage feast and ceremony, it is extremely rare among the upper classes for a man to see his intended wife unveiled. He never sees her face until the nuptial ceremonies are complete, the match being usually arranged by relatives or friends, and until the marriage is over the man must be content with flowery and eloquent descriptions of the charms of his beloved. A young Egyptian gentleman of my acquaintance, and a Bey, was recently married to a cousin. He had been educated at a French school, and was Europeanised to a great extent. But until she was his wife he never saw the woman unveiled. Among the lower classes no such

delicacy prevails, but still a certain reticence is often observed in this respect. Among the people the wedding night, like that of the circumcision, is the occasion of a torchlight procession, with music and singing, and outside the house where the wedding feast is given are often performed "zikrs" or chantings of the Koran, when one may see men half frenzied with the violence of their gestures and the fearful effort of the long monotonous chants.

Perhaps the summit of an Egyptian's ambition is reached when he undertakes to go on the prescribed pilgrimage to Mecca. At the annually-recurring pilgrim season a great stir takes place at Cairo when the historic Mahmal sets out for Mecca, with its attendant escort of mounted troops, a few pieces of artillery, and a caravan of camels carrying the military stores. The Mahmal itself is a handsomely brocaded covering, with a pyramidal top, made up on a skeleton wooden frame, the whole being borne on a large and richly caparisoned camel. Though it is now usually empty, the Mahmal is a relic borne in memory of a famous queen of Egypt in the Middle Ages. Accompanying the gay cavalcade is the annually-renewed carpet for the Caaba, the Mohammedan holy of holies at Mecca. Two of these carpets are presented every

year, one from Constantinople and the other from Cairo, and the old ones are torn and dispersed as sacred relics among the people.



PALM TREES AND PYRAMIDS.

Many tales are on record of the privations and sufferings of the pilgrims, but nowadays matters are much improved so far as Egypt is concerned. Still, it is a very

common sight at Suez, where thousands embark, to find numbers of wretched people, awaiting the steamers for Jeddah, sleeping under the shelter of a paling fence encircled by their scanty baggage. During the season Suez presents a very busy sight, for here collect pilgrims from



STREET IN PORT SAID.

Turkey, the western parts of Asia, all the northern coasts of Africa, and of course from Egypt itself. Each nationality is very markedly distinguished from the others by dress, appearance and speech. On board the steamers, where all are mixed indiscriminately, the scene is one of confusion and often horrid filth. A small steamer will carry as many as eight hundred pilgrims, and to get from end to end of the vessel it is almost necessary to walk over the tight-packed mass. At Suez the final act of the pilgrim season is the procession round the town of the Mahmal, with its whole cavalcade, accompanied by music, banners, and a huge concourse of the people. The effect is wonder-

board all vessels entering the canal, pilgrim ships and others, and ensure clean bills of health before pratique is given. The place being recognised as the one great gateway between East and West, the value of this constant inspection of ships is very great and may often serve to prevent the appearance of epidemics on the Mediterranean littoral and in Europe generally.

One hears often in the Press the echo of a cry, "Egypt for the Egyptians." And if the English do not make the effects of their occupation felt at all points, and make Egypt more truly for the Egyptians, we can see many good excuses for them. One great drawback lies in the "Capitulations," which

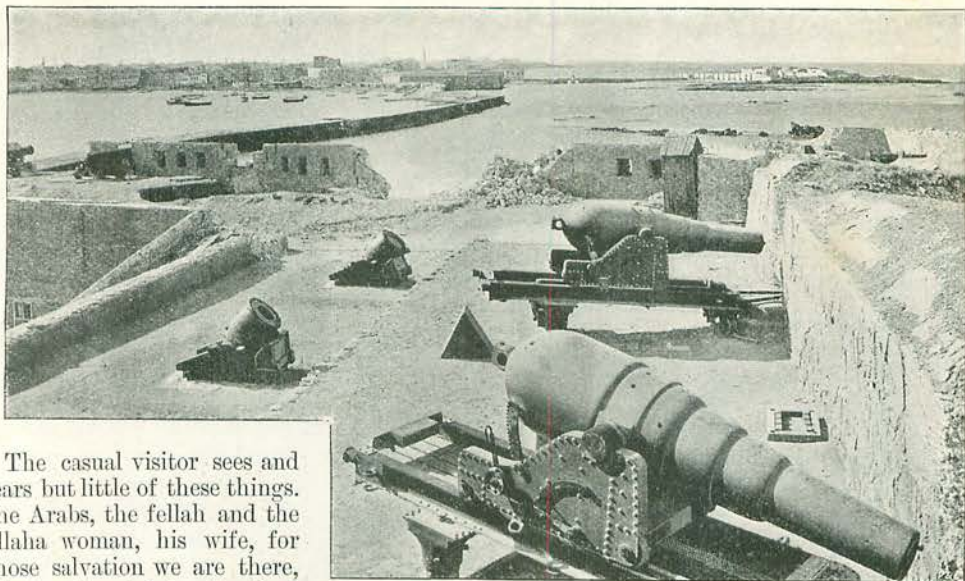


GENERAL VIEW OF CAIRO.

fully bright and gay, with the changing mass of colour, the brilliant atmosphere and the happy, excited crowd. On the return of the Mahmal with the last year's carpet from the Caaba, a similar procession is formed, but the horses, camels and soldiers appear jaded and worn out after the trying experiences of sea and desert travelling.

In cholera years the mortality among the pilgrims is sometimes frightful, but under English direction the quarantine arrangements at Suez are being greatly improved and amplified. These are being made with a view to prevent the introduction of any epidemic disease whatever through Egypt or the canal. With this object a staff of inspecting doctors are stationed at Suez, who

are a series of old enactments conferring several benefits and immunities on foreigners resident in the country. Thus we find thousands of Greeks, Italians, Frenchmen, Austrians, and of course the English colony, enjoying great advantages over the native-born population. Our work is therefore made slower, and the channels of wealth, which the natives are not capable of utilising, fill the pockets of everyone save the Egyptians. So it comes to pass that in Alexandria nearly the whole wealth of the city is possessed by the Greeks. Port Said and Ismailia are French. In Cairo it is more distributed, while the inland towns in the delta region, such as Damanhour, Tantah and Zagazig, employ much foreign capital.



FORTIFICATIONS AT ALEXANDRIA.

The casual visitor sees and hears but little of these things. The Arabs, the fellah and the fellaha woman, his wife, for whose salvation we are there, fail to attract his attention. Even the free and lordly air of a Bedouin, fresh from the boundless deserts, passes unnoticed.

Even to a resident the charms of the fine climate, the inexhaustible romance of her history and monuments, the manifold and picturesque life of Cairo and Alexandria, the seductive charm of the perfect winter days and lovely summer nights, are apt to overshadow his interest in the questions touching the people whom we are fathering back to a renewed manhood. But whether the former or the latter sides of Egyptian life appeal the more to us, having once visited the country one wishes to see it again.

There is no more solemn or weird experience than a quiet trip to the Pyramids by moonlight, when one almost expects the

sphinx to open her stony mouth to utter her riddle, and the wide illimitable desert is all alive and moving in the floods of brilliant light. Nothing is more enchanting than the Nile trips to the historical student or brain-weary traveller. To the student of social evolution there is nothing more engrossing than to witness the gradual emerging of a nation, under our tuition, from the results of centuries of warfare, oppression and misery. This last study is rendered the more interesting when we see how they labour under the disadvantages of an unprogressive religion, a stiff burden of taxation, competition with foreign capital, and the feeling that however well they are governed they are not free.

