



DISTANT VIEW OF THE PYRAMIDS FROM OLD CAIRO: SUNSET.  
*From a picture by John Varley in the possession of the Author.*

## ROUND THE PYRAMIDS.

BY JOHN WARD, F.S.A.\*

LET us suppose, as Euclid has it, that Cairo has been visited, and that we are now driving out under the shade of the beautiful leafy road that leads us, in an hour or so, to the foot of the rocky platform on which the Great Pyramids stand.

Though twenty miles away, the three mountains of masonry arrest attention and are clearly seen, dominating the landscape. But in Cairo itself we lose sight of them altogether, as the city lies low and the banks of the Nile are fringed with tall palms, from which Ismail's shady avenue leads westwards for seven miles or more. So we do not see the Pyramids again until we are almost under their shadow. Whether Isma'îl planned it so, I know not; but it is, in my mind, a great advantage to the first visit. One forgets them, riding through the motley throng of the Kasr el Nil Bridge, and the busy crowd of natives in every kind of conveyance, mounted on camel or donkey, or rapidly trudging along on foot. For it is a populous region, and the great city of Cairo

absorbs vast supplies of agricultural produce. Processions of patient camels, overladen with fresh clover from the meadows, impede the way. The bridge is hardly passable in the morning, or at noontime, when the carts, camels, and donkeys return, unladen save by their masters bringing home their gains. Then the bridge has to be opened for an hour or so, to allow the *gyassas* or trading boats to pass up or down.

In the evening the road becomes the fashionable drive for mounted representatives of British occupation, in mufti, and for native gentlemen and their ladies, veiled and unveiled. For the Moslem women carefully hide their faces, while the Coptic ladies are not unwilling to show them. Smart little victorias carry the cosmopolitan, mercantile population of Cairo out for an airing in the cooler atmosphere of the evening. The crowd is brightened up by British soldiers of every sort of uniform, walking along as if the place belonged to them.

We are bent for "Mena House," the excellent hostelry situated on the verge of the desert, just below the Pyramid-platform. As we near this, every peep which we get

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through the trees at intervals shows us the increasing size of the Great Pyramid, till at length, when we descend at the foot of the widely extended terrace, the huge structure seems to fill up the landscape. As the sun lowers it casts its shadow for a mile or more, and towards sunset stretches right across the wide Nile valley.

Emerging from the shade of Ismail's leafy *lebbekh* trees, we have unexpectedly arrived at Mena House, a long, irregular series of buildings climbing up the sandy slope of the desert platform. We sit under the shade of the hotel verandah and enjoy our tea in the

regain health, as he had done himself. He was fortunate in finding an accomplished English architect in Cairo, Mr. Henry Favarger, to whom he gave *carte blanche* as to design, aspect, and style of architecture, etc. But without spring water such a building would have been a failure, so Mr. Favarger's first effort was to sink a well. Boring down into the dry sand, at thirty feet or so he discovered an unlimited supply of crystal water. This was all done by native labour. The spring has never failed, and gives sufficient for all the wants of the great establishment, for a large stock of



DATE PALMS GROWING ON THE SITE OF LOST MEMPHIS.

open. The two Great Pyramids seem a part of the hotel establishment, and in the clear air seem only a few yards off, in reality under half a mile.

Now let us enter the hotel; no matter how warm the external air may be, it is always cool inside. An English gentleman of wealth had resided here for some seasons in a small house rented from the Khedive. The desert air restored him to health, and someone suggested that he should buy a large tract, mainly desert-land, and establish, for the good of mankind, a hotel or sanatorium. So his gratitude took the form of building a hotel where people might sojourn to

cattle and horses, and also supplies a marble swimming-bath. Favarger chose for his style of architecture that of the most beautiful mosque in Cairo—the shrine, it may be called, of Kait Bey. Every opening in the spacious dining-room is copied from one of those of this gem of Saracenic architecture; the result is the most beautiful, cheerful, and commodious of dining-halls. The decoration is simple, and, strange to say, though copied from a tomb, there is nothing sad in its style; it is the most cheerful of apartments, lofty and airy, utterly free from draughts, though cool and fresh when the hottest weather reigns outside. The hall and pas-

sages, the drawing and music rooms are all in equal taste. Many of the doors and carved *mushra-biyeh* work are ancient, inlaid with great taste and beautiful arabesque designs. Mr. Favarger spent several years in collecting these old pieces of valuable marquetry, which are quite superior to modern production. The staircase and passages of the hotel are of marble, simply treated. The spacious porch is of carved wood, which completely excludes the sun, and yet the full view of the

Great Pyramid is uninterrupted. This is a good house of rest for as many days or weeks as can be spared.

But I undertook to describe the first ride round the Pyramids. It is well to start early; whether humble donkey or stately camel be chosen must depend on the traveller's taste or experiences. The donkeys here are good, and there are some fair camels to be had. As to guide, if Ali Gabri can be secured, he is the best. "An honest gentleman," as Pro-



CAMEL FAIR, NEAR THE PYRAMIDS OF GIZEH.

fessor Petrie terms him, after an acquaintance of many years. This native antiquarian was Petrie's servant and friend in all his wonderful survey of this Pyramid field for several years. He learned much from his kind master. (Dr. Petrie's splendid work on the Pyramids is unfortunately out of print, but much of the information is given in the learned Professor's "History of Egypt," Vol. I.) Ali can point out where, several feet beyond the present stonework, the line



THE PYRAMIDS OF GIZEH, FROM THE SOUTH.

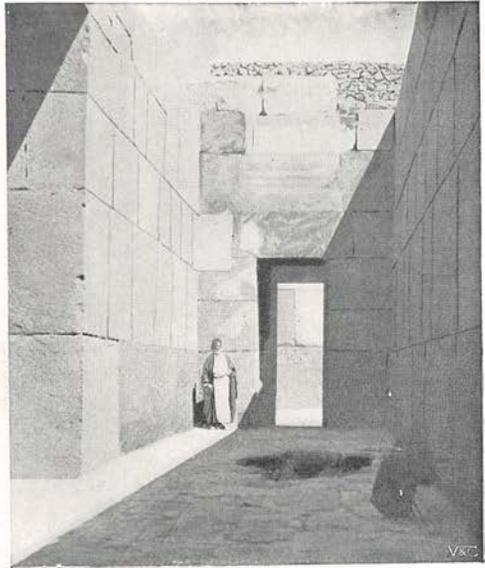
*From a picture by the Author.*

of the ancient marble casing of the Great Pyramid can still be traced. He can also show, cut into the rock under the sand, all the points of Petrie's measurements, and for those who trust themselves to his guidance days and weeks can be profitably spent. Everything known about the wonderful monuments is familiar to him; he is perfectly truthful and one of the most modest and gentle of men. For a number of years he has been my guide to the Pyramids, and every time I learn something from him that is new to me.

Let us ride round the nine Pyramids of Gizeh. The first is the oldest, the greatest, and by far the best built. This, always known as the *Great Pyramid*, was built by Khufu, the Cheops of the Greeks, about 3950 B.C. It covers as much space as Lincoln's Inn Fields, and when perfect was over 480 feet in height. It is well worth ascending to the top. Then you see that there are many other Pyramids, group beyond group, extending to the south, as far as the eye can reach along the edge of the great Libyan Desert, looking down on the green valley of the Nile. The warmly tinted eastern cliffs, whence came all the stone for the artificial mountain on which we stand, bound the landscape. These are the Mokattam Hills. The blocks were floated across the Nile during the inundation. Cairo, with its thousand minarets, lies at our feet. Northwards another group of Pyramids once existed, those of Abu Roash. Now, however, nothing but their sites remain, marked by heaps of broken stone and granite.

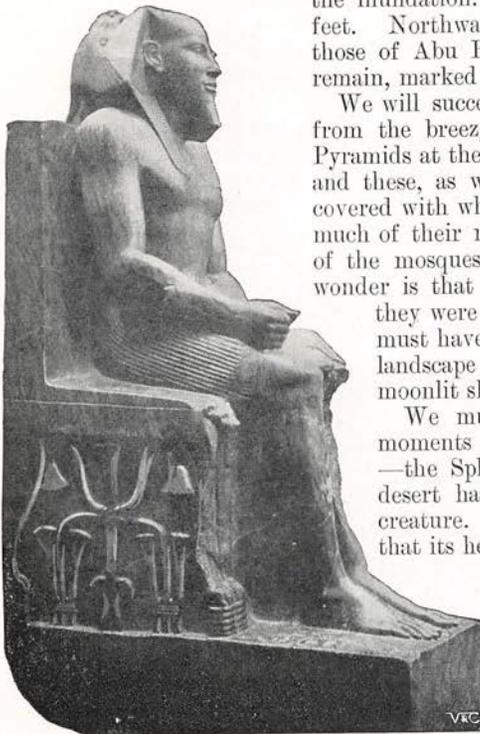
We will successively visit all the Pyramid fields. Descending from the breezy summit, we have a peep at the three small Pyramids at the western side, built for the daughters of Khufu, and these, as well as the great one, were, when perfect, all covered with white polished limestone. All have had this, and much of their rocky core, stolen away. We are told that most of the mosques of Cairo were built from the Pyramids—the wonder is that so much remains. In the days of the Romans they were perfect, and their glistening, polished surfaces must have been a marvellous sight, gleaming in the sunny landscape or under the light of Egypt's glorious starry or moonlit sky.

We must, however, direct our attention for a few moments towards a far older monument than Pyramids\*—the Sphinx. Once on an eminence, the sand of the desert has swallowed up the substructure of the huge creature. The Greek and Roman writers all assure us that its head and face were lovely; now, the poor battered countenance, with the nose entirely gone, has little trace of its former beauty. But the



THE TEMPLE OF THE SPHINX.

*Ali Gabri in the rear; and the well where the sixteen statues were found.*



STATUE OF KHAFFRA.

*Found in the well of the temple near the Sphinx.*

\* The interior of the Great Pyramid should be visited to see the wondrous masonry of the several mysterious passages and the two chambers. In one of them the empty granite coffin of the king still remains. It is so much larger than the entrance that it must have been built in at the beginning. The lofty ascending passage in the interior is most extraordinary, and its use has never been explained.



THE GREAT PYRAMID, THE SPHINX, AND THE GRANITE TEMPLE.



THE SPHINX.

great, earnest eyes are perfect, and in certain lights seem to glow with life and intelligence. The mouth, too, is uninjured. The head was perfect up to 1200 A.D., and it was only when the fierce Mamlouks were a power in the land that they made it a target for their matchlocks—regarding it as an evil spirit. I possess a little model, in green basalt, found near the spot, which shows what a sweet expression the ancient face once bore. The Sphinx was there, a monument of hoary antiquity before the Pyramids were built.

Each Pyramid possessed a causeway—still to be traced—which was made to carry the vast blocks from the Nile's bank to the site required. The river, at the time of the erection of the Pyramids, flowed



ANCIENT MODEL OF THE SPHINX.

close to them. The causeway of the second Pyramid was diverted in order to avoid injuring the Sphinx, which was carved out of the living rock of the desert.

Let us descend into the great temple, which has recently been dug out, beside the Sphinx. It seems now a crypt, but once stood high above the desert level. This was built by Khafra,



PLOUGHING BY THE GREAT PYRAMID.

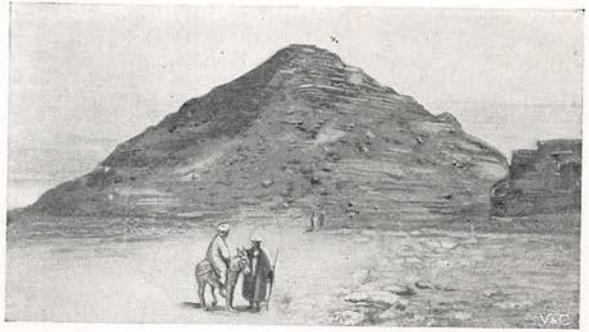
the builder of the second Pyramid. Only a portion of it has been excavated. The temple is made of magnificent blocks, eighteen feet long, of red Assuan granite, so exquisitely jointed that the seams are scarcely visible. The inner chambers are lined with polished alabaster. A deep well was found here, into which sixteen statues of Khafra had been violently thrown—possibly at the time of the Persian invasion. The most perfect statue is in Cairo Museum, and evidently a portrait from life, cut in diorite, one of the hardest stones known. It is the oldest portrait in the world.

We mount our steeds once more and ride up the ancient causeway to the second Pyramid. It was built by Khafra about 3860 B.C. It seems loftier than the "Great" one, but this is only because it stands on higher ground and possesses, near the top, part of its original casing. It was really,



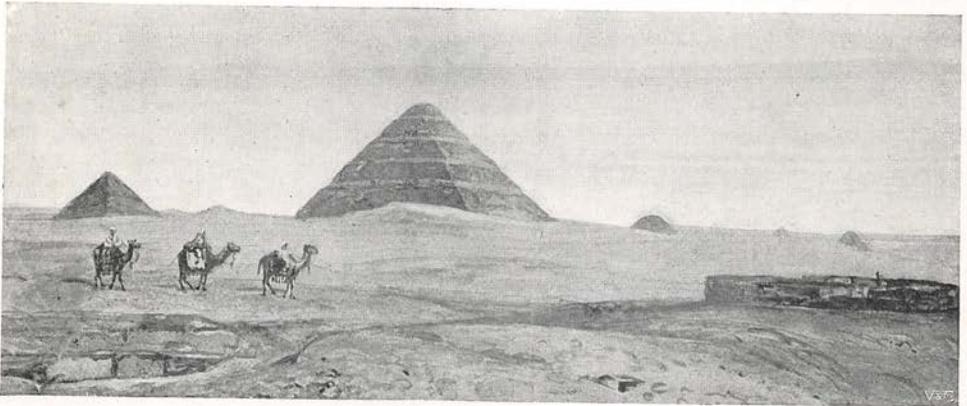
LOST MEMPHIS: STATUE OF RAMSES THE GREAT.

some ten feet less in height when both were perfect. On the east side there are the ruins of a temple, which must have been a superb structure. Some of the polished granite blocks are still to be seen below, and the whole ground for some acres around is full of chippings of alabaster, granite, and diorite, many of which have polished sides, showing that they are fragments of sculptured objects. A ride round the second Pyramid is worth the trouble; we then see that a vast platform for the great building has been excavated behind, and a terrace extended out in front. Here Petrie found the dwellings (or, rather, their foundations) of the 100,000 workmen



ABUSIR, THE GREAT PYRAMID.

possible. Therefore the giving employment to 100,000 men was a praiseworthy object. To do such good work they must have been

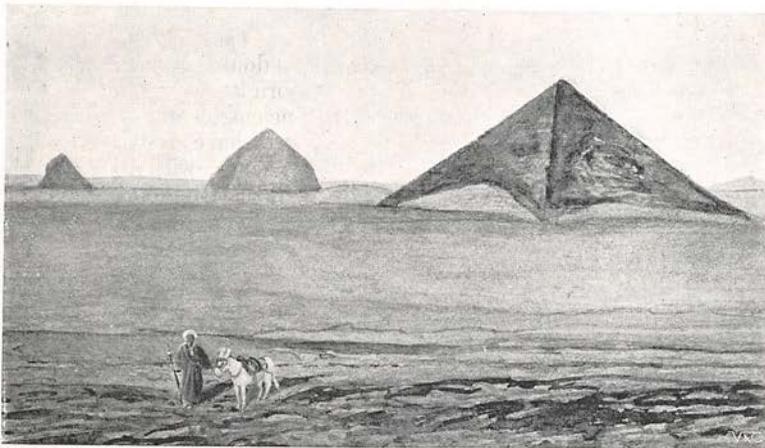


THE STEP PYRAMID OF SAKKARAH: MARIETTE'S HOUSE ON RIGHT.

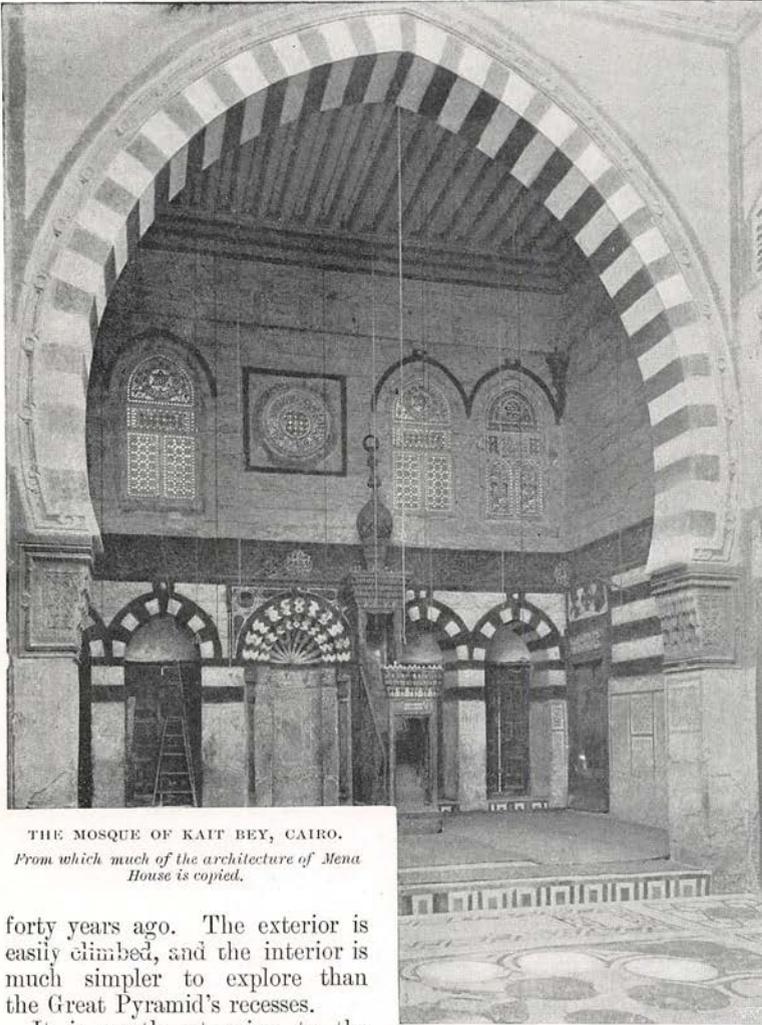
who were employed in building the first Pyramid, during the summer seasons of twenty years. For in summer the Nile covers all the land; no agricultural labour is

well fed and well paid. There is no appearance of forced labour or scamped work about the first Pyramid. We are now near the enclosure of the third Pyramid, and

should ride round it. It also had its temple on the east side, and had three small pyramids on the south side. These were all undoubtedly built by Menkaura, for himself and his family. It is much smaller than either of the two large ones, but was encased with red granite, perhaps as compensation. The coffin and body of the king were found in it some



PYRAMIDS OF DAHSHUR.



THE MOSQUE OF KAIT BEY, CAIRO.

*From which much of the architecture of Mena House is copied.*

forty years ago. The exterior is easily climbed, and the interior is much simpler to explore than the Great Pyramid's recesses.

It is worth returning to the hotel by the western rocky desert—the sunsets seen from there are lovely in the extreme. When nearing the Great Pyramid we notice numbers of stone *mastabas*, or built tombs, with flat roofs, and doors opening into small apartments. These are frequently carved and painted. These tombs have deep shafts sunk in the rock, where the mummies were deposited. They were made for the great ones connected with the courts of the kings whose tombs were the Pyramids themselves. The common people were of no account in those days, and were buried in pits, huddled together anyhow.

For those who have time, Abu Roash, the ruins of the northern group, about seven miles off, can be visited in four or five hours, starting early by the desert track and returning by the villages under the palm-trees'

shade when the sun is high.

The Pyramids of Abu Roash have nearly all been quarried away, but there is still to be seen a vast chamber cut out of the rock, once the centre of the largest Pyramid, and the ground all around is strewn with red granite chippings, showing that much of this great structure must have been built of granite from far Assouan. There were many pyramids here, we are told, but the names of their royal owners, whatever they were, have not yet been discovered.

The next excursion to pyramid fields should be past the Gizeh group, about six miles across the desert, to that of Abusir. These are not so old as those we have seen, and have been built with less care and with inferior stone. But they are

worth visiting. There were fourteen of them, and each contained, no doubt, the body of a king, possibly of V Dynasty (3500 B.C.). No doubt proper research would discover their origin, and perhaps they still contain their ancient tenants.

But when we have rested awhile, the Pyramid of Sakkarah, with its stepped outline and noble situation, tempts us onward. We have ridden for many miles over the ancient necropolis of the lost city of Memphis—for all the desert, from the first pyramid to the last, is one vast burial-place. We actually ride for miles over hard sand strewn with human bones—so ancient are they that they are light as pith. In the hot summer months, when no tourists are about, the Arabs rifle the mummy pits and tombs, seeking for beads, scarabs, and curios of all

sorts among the mummy cloth. The scientific searchers are not much better—it is seldom that *savants* “tidy up” after their work. It



ALI GABRI AND HIS SON, THE “HADJI.”

is not right—the poor remnants of mortality should be returned to their native earth. To resume our journey—five miles from Abusir we arrive at the Pyramid-platform

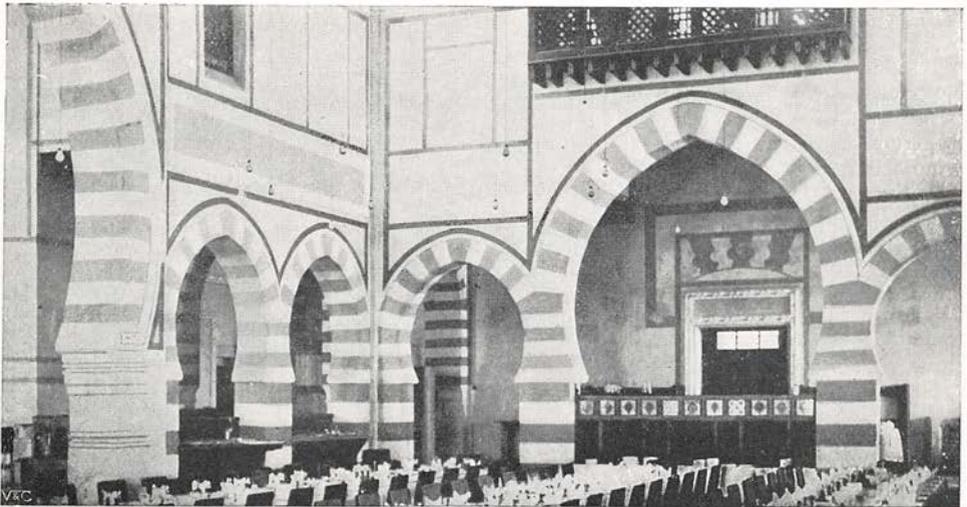
of Sakkarah. Here we are in the centre of another necropolis, still possibly containing the ashes of the inhabitants of Memphis, or, it may be, of some other lost city, whose very name or site we do not know.

Every part of the ground seems to contain tombs, and there are dangerous pits all around, making it difficult to ride over, so we must proceed with caution. These shafts have been made by the

Arabs in search of plunder, and some of the larger openings lead down to painted sepulchres, which were discovered by Mariette and De Morgan and other scientific disturbers of the dead. Several of these painted tombs have now gates and janitors appointed by the authorities, and tickets for inspecting them have to be purchased. The tomb of Meri is worth visiting; it is triple, like a great underground house, with separate wings for himself, his wife, and his son. Then



MR. FAVARGER, ARCHITECT OF MENA HOUSE.



DINING-ROOM, MENA HOUSE.

there is, a little way off, the tomb of Thyi, who was a great man in his day and had charge of several of the Pyramids. All the scenes of his life are depicted—his country house and his sporting scenes. He extols his importance and his wealth, as a proof that he is worthy of good treatment at the hands of the gods in a future life.

A wooden hut in the desert is thoughtfully



SOUTH BRICK PYRAMID, DAHSHUR.

*Showing the shafts by which the Author descended with M. de Morgan; now closed up.*



KING HOR, XII DYNASTY.

*Wooden statue found at Dahshur.*

the holy Apis. Many of these are monoliths of granite, brought all the way, no one knows how, from Assouan. When the sun's rays are not so fierce, we mount our steeds once more and ride round the great Stepped Pyramid—it is a remarkable object, and evidently number one of such structures. Built of small stones and without mortar of any sort, it is wondrous how it has stood for, possibly, 7,000 years or more. The king who built it must have been a powerful ruler, but his architect of not much account when compared with those who built the great Pyramids we have seen.

Then we pass the ruins of the Pyramid of Unas. This is worth alighting to visit.

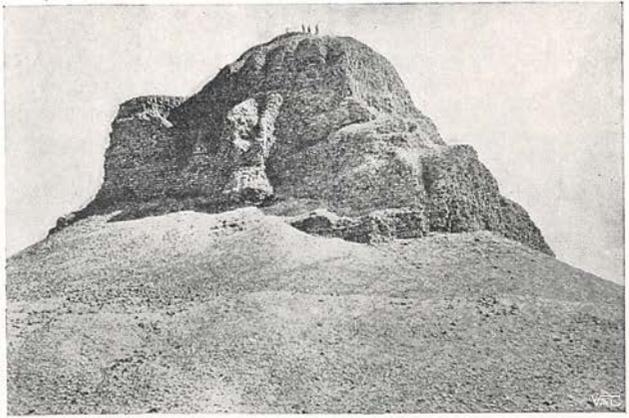
placed at the disposal of tourists at this point. Here they can rest from the fierce sun. It is by no means luxurious. But in refuge from the heat, lunch is welcome, though enjoyed on bare boards and sheltered by rude stone walls.

This was the house of the great explorer, Mariette. He lived here for several years. The Mausoleum of the Sacred Bulls, lost for 2,000 years, was discovered by him quite near this. It is a long, dark journey underground, but should be visited. There are many granite coffins, each as large as a room, which once contained



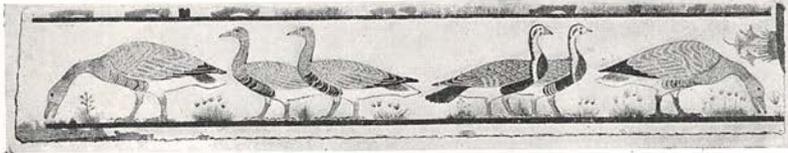
THE BOAT FOUND IN DAHSHUR PYRAMID, 5,000 YEARS OLD.

Mr. John Cook had it opened. The central chamber is easily entered and is perfect. The king's last resting-place is there, intact, and his stone coffin. In it were found his bones, which they carried off to the Museum. They might have left them there and protected them from further insult. None of the older Pyramids possess written records on their walls. This one is stored with hieroglyphic texts and prayers for the rest of the soul of the king till the Resurrection. The hieroglyphs are beautifully done, carved in the rocky walls and painted in pale blue. Unas was a great king, and lived about 3560 B.C. I have a scarab of his which possibly came from this Pyramid. There are many heaps of rubbish about, which we know mark the sites of the Pyramids of



NORTH BRICK PYRAMID, DAHSHUR, NEAR WHERE TREASURE WAS FOUND.

quicken their paces, and we are, in less than an hour, among the greenery which shades the site of the once greatest city of the world, Memphis. The first king we know of who ruled over all Egypt was Mena, the sponsor for the name of our hotel. He diverted the course of the Nile and built himself a city where its bed had been.



THE OLDEST PICTURE IN THE WORLD.  
*From Medum.*

Pepi, Teta, and other great ones of the same old family of kings.

It is time now to turn homewards. Let us vary the route by the green fields and shady palm-groves which hide buried Memphis. It is a charming ride through a rich and populous country, once we descend from the sandy desert platform inhabited only by the dead. Before quitting the higher level, however, let us rein up and look away south and west. There are still Pyramids to be visited; four or five are in sight which we have missed — we must come back another day to see them. Now our beasts, their heads being turned homewards,

This was surrounded by dykes, to keep out his enemies, or at least to regulate the annual inundation. Perhaps, long after his time, some enemy of Egypt cut the dykes—in any case, Memphis was swallowed up, and all its temples and palaces are underground



THE PYRAMID OF MEDUM.

or beneath the present Nile. Nothing remains but vast mounds of rubbish and a few pools to mark where once were the Sacred Lakes. Two colossal statues of Ramses the Great lie, where Herodotus saw them standing, before the Temple of Ptah or Vulcan. The city of Memphis was, therefore, in a perfect state about 450 B.C. Now it is gone for ever. One of the prostrate statues is very perfect, though the rising waters have weakened his understanding, and his feet have given way. He lies with his placid, handsome face looking up to heaven, like a warrior taking his rest. The dagger in his belt bears his name, clearly cut in hieroglyphics. The title is repeated more fully on his shoulder, that no one may mistake the identity of the greatest monarch of his time. As there is nothing more to be seen of Memphis, we get back to our hotel, wondering if old Mena, with all his glory, was as comfortably lodged.

We can ride another day through the palm-groves of Memphis (their shade is charming), and make our way direct, leaving Sakkarah on our right, to the Pyramids of Dahshur. There are four Pyramids, two of stone and two of brick, at Dahshur. The stone pyramids have never been explored, and are almost as perfect as when built. They may be older than those of Gizeh. Some day these pyramids will be tunneled under and their ancient tenants' names discovered. The two heaps of rotten, sunburnt brick, nearer the Nile valley, were once, externally at least, handsome structures. Both these Pyramids were recently explored by M. de Morgan. Here the tombs of two royal princesses were found, deep down in the rock. These had escaped spoliation in ancient times, while hundreds of others had been systematically rifled—not by Arabs, but by good old Ramses the Great himself—the gentleman we saw lying on his back, looking up to heaven, smiling and happy. For the royal resting-places at Dahshur, though "late" structures (about 2600 B.C.) for Egypt, and, therefore, only built of brick internally, were once "whited sepulchres" and encased with marble. De Morgan showed me the white polished casing still remaining round their hidden bases—all the rest had been stolen away. But Ramses the Great, who lived only 1250 B.C., had "late" ideas, and needed money, so he systematically robbed the sepulchres of his predecessors of their gold and jewels. These two small tombs of princesses had been for-

gotten. M. de Morgan showed me them himself. I was lowered down a shaft about forty feet, then led along a tunnel in the rock, with tomb-chambers on each side. Jewellery and gold ornaments to the value of £70,000 were discovered. They are now all to be seen in the Cairo Museum, and are the finest ancient jewellery ever found in any country. In another tomb De Morgan found the coffin and wooden statue of a hitherto unknown king, by name of Hor—a handsome man, who must have died young.

From this wide desert platform, in the far distance we see yet another Pyramid, standing alone on an eminence. This is the great stone core of Medum Pyramid, a very ancient one, of which Seneferu, who lived before Cheops (4000 B.C.), was undoubtedly the builder. Few tourists visit it, and yet the finest and most ancient objects in the Cairo Museum were discovered in its vicinity. I trusted to finding camels or donkeys there—I found some wretched animals, but saddles there were none; there had never been such a thing at Medum. The very word for a saddle was unknown in the district. I mention this, for saddles and good donkeys should be taken by railway from Cairo with those who would visit Medum.

It is well worthy of a visit. It stands on a vast heap of white stone chippings, for the whole outer structure of the Pyramid has been carried off, and is even now being quarried, and the stone burnt for lime, or shipped down the Nile. There was a vast cemetery here. The celebrated wooden statue in the Cairo Museum, known as "The Shekh el Beled," also the stone statues of Rahotep and his wife Nefert, came from Medum. The oldest painting in the world, a flock of geese, precisely like life, was found in a tomb here.

A short railway journey beyond this leads to the Fayum, where the ruins of two other Pyramids are found—those of Illahun and Hawara. They were built of crude brick, plated with white polished limestone. The kings interred within them were ascertained by the indefatigable Petrie to be the two monarchs of the XII. Dynasty (Useratesen II. and Amenemhat III.), who, by the irrigation and reclamation of the Fayum oasis, added a new province to Egypt, and chose the scene of their successful labours to be the locality of their Pyramid tombs. This remote province has for 4,500 years been one of the richest in Egypt.