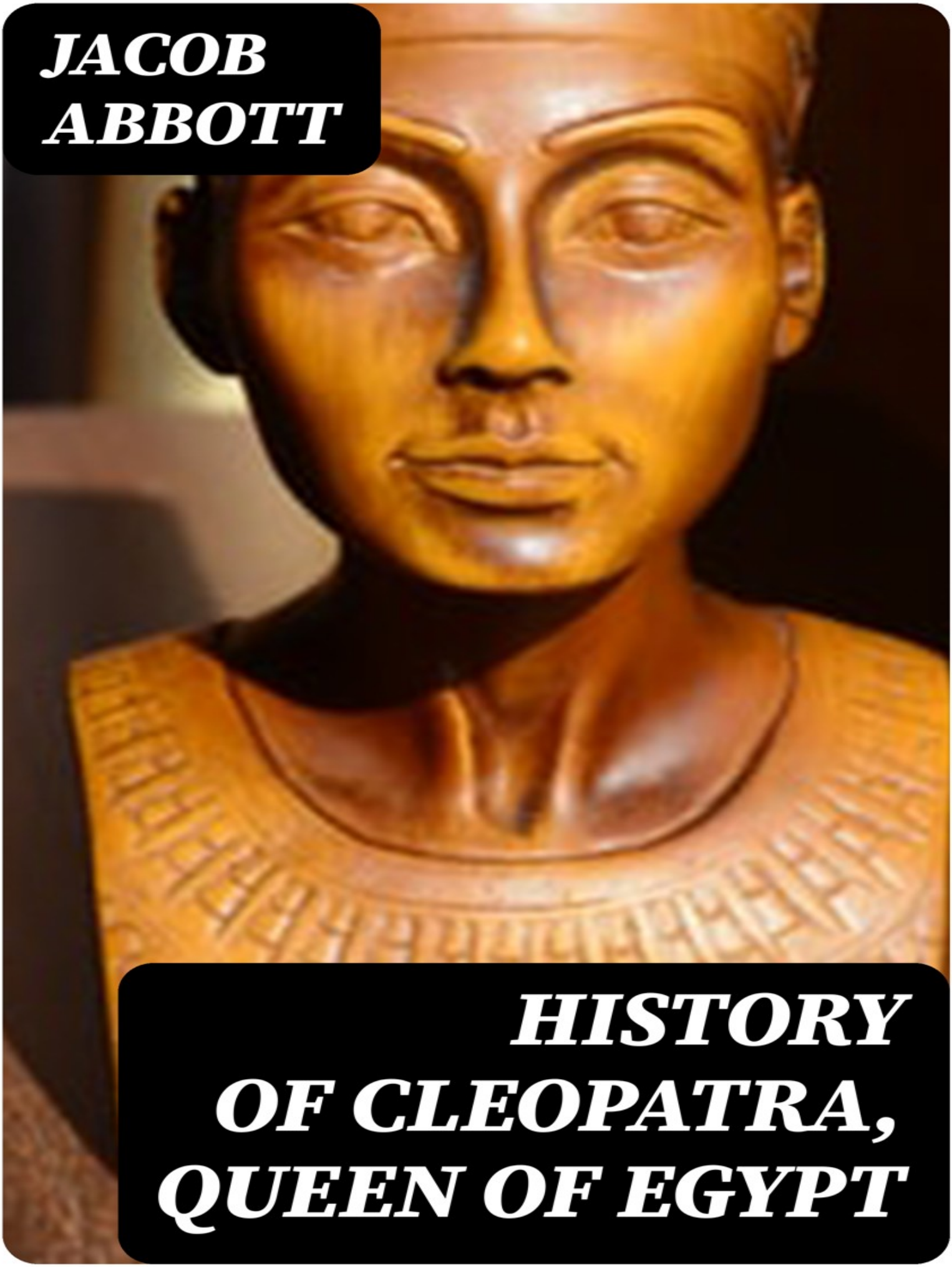
JACOB ABBOTT



HISTORY OF CLEOPATRA, QUEEN OF EGYPT

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PREFACE.

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In selecting the subjects for the successive volumes of this series, it has been the object of the author to look for the names of those great personages whose histories constitute useful, and not merely entertaining, knowledge. There are certain names which are familiar, as names, to all mankind; and every person who seeks for any degree of mental cultivation, feels desirous of informing himself of the leading outlines of their history, that he may know, in brief, what it was in their characters or their doings which has given them so widely-extended a fame. This knowledge, which it seems incumbent on every one to obtain in respect to such personages as Hannibal, Alexander, Cæsar, Cleopatra, Darius, Xerxes, Alfred, William the Conqueror, Queen Elizabeth, and Mary, queen of Scots, it is the design and object of these volumes to communicate, in a faithful, and, at the same time, if possible, in an attractive manner. Consequently, great historical names alone are selected; and it has been the writer’s aim to present the prominent and leading traits in their characters, and all the important events in their lives, in a bold and free manner, and yet in the plain and simple language which is so obviously required in works which aim at permanent and practical usefulness.

ENGRAVINGS.

CLEOPATRA.

Chapter I.

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The Valley of the Nile.

THE story of Cleopatra is a story of crime. It is a narrative of the course and the consequences of unlawful love. In her strange and romantic history we see this passion portrayed with the most complete and graphic fidelity in all its influences and effects; its uncontrollable impulses, its intoxicating joys, its reckless and mad career, and the dreadful remorse and ultimate despair and ruin in which it always and inevitably ends.

Cleopatra was by birth an Egyptian; by ancestry and descent she was a Greek. Thus, while Alexandria and the delta of the Nile formed the scene of the most important events and incidents of her history, it was the blood of Macedon which flowed in her veins. Her character and action are marked by the genius, the courage, the originality, and the impulsiveness pertaining to the stock from which she sprung. The events of her history, on the other hand, and the peculiar character of her adventures, her sufferings, and her sins, were determined by the circumstances with which she was surrounded, and the influences which were brought to bear upon her in the soft

and voluptuous clime where the scenes of her early life were laid.

Egypt has always been considered as physically the most remarkable country on the globe. It is a long and narrow valley of verdure and fruitfulness, completely insulated from the rest of the habitable world. It is more completely insulated, in fact, than any literal island could be, inasmuch as deserts are more impassable than seas. The very existence of Egypt is a most extraordinary phenomenon. If we could but soar with the wings of an eagle into the air, and look down upon the scene, so as to observe the operation of that grand and yet simple process by which this long and wonderful valley, teeming so profusely with animal and vegetable life, has been formed, and is annually revivified and renewed, in the midst of surrounding wastes of silence, desolation, and death, we should gaze upon it with never-ceasing admiration and pleasure. We have not the wings of the eagle, but the generalizations of science furnish us with a sort of substitute for them. The long series of patient, careful, and sagacious observations, which have been continued now for two thousand years, bring us results, by means of which, through our powers of mental conception, we may take a comprehensive survey of the whole scene, analogous, in some respects, to that which direct and actual vision would afford us, if we could look down upon it from the eagle’s point of view. It is, however, somewhat humiliating to our pride of intellect to reflect that long-continued philosophical investigations and learned scientific research are, in such a case as this, after all, in some sense, only a sort of substitute for wings. A human mind connected with a pair of eagle’s wings would have solved the mystery of Egypt in a week; whereas science, philosophy, and research, confined to the surface of the ground, have been occupied for twenty centuries in accomplishing the undertaking.

It is found at last that both the existence of Egypt itself, and its strange insulation in the midst of boundless tracts of dry and barren sand, depend upon certain remarkable results of the general laws of rain. The water which is taken up by the atmosphere from the surface of the sea and of the land by evaporation, falls again, under certain circumstances, in showers of rain, the frequency and copiousness of which vary very much in different portions of the earth. As a general principle, rains are much more frequent and abundant near the equator than in temperate climes, and they grow less and less so as we approach the poles. This might naturally have been expected; for, under the burning sun of the equator, the evaporation of water must necessarily go on with immensely greater rapidity than in the colder zones, and all the water which is taken up must, of course, again come down.

It is not, however, wholly by the latitude of the region in which the evaporation takes place that the quantity of rain which falls from the atmosphere is determined; for the condition on which the falling back, in rain, of the water which has been taken up by evaporation mainly depends, is the cooling of the atmospheric stratum which contains it; and this effect is produced in very various ways, and many different causes operate to modify it. Sometimes the stratum is cooled by being wafted over ranges of mountains; sometimes by encountering and becoming mingled with cooler currents of air; and sometimes, again, by being driven in winds toward a higher, and, consequently, cooler latitude. If, on the other hand, air moves from cold mountains toward warm and sunny plains, or from higher latitudes to lower, or if, among the various currents into which it falls, it becomes mixed with air warmer than itself, its capacity for containing vapor in solution is increased, and, consequently, instead of releasing its hold upon the waters which it has already in

possession, it becomes thirsty for more. It moves over a country, under these circumstances, as a warm and drying wind. Under a reverse of circumstances it would have formed drifting mists, or, perhaps, even copious showers of rain.

It will be evident, from these considerations, that the frequency of the showers, and the quantity of the rain which will fall, in the various regions respectively which the surface of the earth presents, must depend on the combined influence of many causes, such as the warmth of the climate, the proximity and the direction of mountains and of seas, the character of the prevailing winds, and the reflecting qualities of the soil. These and other similar causes, it is found, do, in fact, produce a vast difference in the quantity of rain which falls in different regions. In the northern part of South America, where the land is bordered on every hand by vast tropical seas, which load the hot and thirsty air with vapor, and where the mighty Cordillera of the Andes rears its icy summits to chill and precipitate the vapors again, a quantity of rain amounting to more than ten feet in perpendicular height falls in a year. At St. Petersburg, on the other hand, the quantity thus falling in a year is but little more than one foot. The immense deluge which pours down from the clouds in South America would, if the water were to remain where it fell, wholly submerge and inundate the country. As it is, in flowing off through the valleys to the sea, the united torrents form the greatest river on the globe —the Amazon; and the vegetation, stimulated by the heat, and nourished by the abundant and incessant supplies of moisture, becomes so rank, and loads the earth with such an entangled and matted mass of trunks, and stems, and twining wreaths and vines, that man is almost excluded from the scene. The boundless forests become a vast and almost impenetrable jungle, abandoned to wild beasts, noxious reptiles, and huge and ferocious birds of prey.

Of course, the district of St. Petersburg, with its icy winter, its low and powerless sun, and its twelve inches of annual rain, must necessarily present, in all its phenomena of vegetable and animal life, a striking contrast to the exuberant prolificness of New Grenada. It is, however, after all, not absolutely the opposite extreme. There are certain regions on the surface of the earth that are actually rainless; and it is these which present us with the true and real contrast to the luxuriant vegetation and teeming life of the country of the Amazon. In these rainless regions all is necessarily silence, desolation, and death. No plant can grow; no animal can live. Man, too, is forever and hopelessly excluded. If the exuberant abundance of animal and vegetable life shut him out, in some measure, from regions which an excess of heat and moisture render too prolific, the total absence of them still more effectually forbids him a home in these. They become, therefore, vast wastes of dry and barren sands in which no root can find nourishment, and of dreary rocks to which not even a lichen can cling.

The most extensive and remarkable rainless region on the earth is a vast tract extending through the interior and northern part of Africa, and the southwestern part of Asia. The Red Sea penetrates into this tract from the south, and thus breaks the outline and continuity of its form, without, however, altering, or essentially modifying its character. It divides it, however, and to the different portions which this division forms, different names have been given. The Asiatic portion is called Arabia Deserta; the African tract has received the name of Sahara; while between these two, in the neighborhood of Egypt, the barren region is called simply *the desert*. The whole tract is marked, however, throughout, with one all-pervading character: the absence of vegetable, and, consequently, of animal life, on account of the absence of rain. The rising of a range of lofty mountains in the center of it, to produce a precipitation of

moisture from the air, would probably transform the whole of the vast waste into as verdant, and fertile, and populous a region as any on the globe.

As it is, there are no such mountains. The whole tract is nearly level, and so little elevated above the sea, that, at the distance of many hundred miles in the interior, the land rises only to the height of a few hundred feet above the surface of the Mediterranean; whereas in New Grenada, at less than one hundred miles from the sea, the chain of the Andes rises to elevations of from ten to fifteen thousand feet. Such an ascent as that of a few hundred feet in hundreds of miles would be wholly imperceptible to any ordinary mode of observation; and the great rainless region, accordingly, of Africa and Asia is, as it appears to the traveler, one vast plain, a thousand miles wide and five thousand miles long, with only one considerable interruption

to the dead monotony which reigns, with that exception, every where over the immense expanse of silence and solitude. The single interval of fruitfulness and life is the valley of the Nile.

There are, however, in fact, three interruptions to the continuity of this plain, though only one of them constitutes any considerable interruption to its barrenness. They are all of them valleys, extending from north to south, and lying side by side. The most easterly of these valleys is so deep that the waters of the ocean flow into it from the south, forming a long and narrow inlet called the Red Sea. As this inlet communicates freely with the ocean, it is always nearly of the same level, and as the evaporation from it is not sufficient to produce rain, it does not even fertilize its own shores. Its presence varies the dreary scenery of the landscape, it is true, by giving us surging waters to look upon instead of driving sands; but this is all. With the exception of the spectacle of an English steamer passing, at weary intervals, over its dreary expanse, and some moldering remains of ancient cities on its eastern shore, it affords scarcely any indications of life. It does very little, therefore, to relieve the monotonous aspect of solitude and desolation which reigns over the region into which it has intruded.

The most westerly of the three valleys to which we have alluded is only a slight depression of the surface of the land marked by a line of *oases*. The depression is not sufficient to admit the waters of the Mediterranean, nor are there any rains over any portion of the valley which it forms sufficient to make it the bed of a stream. Springs issue, however, here and there, in several places, from the ground, and, percolating through the sands along the valley, give fertility to little dells, long and narrow, which, by the contrast that they form with the surrounding desolation, seem to the

traveler to possess the verdure and beauty of Paradise. There is a line of these oases extending along this westerly depression, and some of them are of considerable extent. The oasis of Siweh, on which stood the far-famed temple of Jupiter Ammon, was many miles in extent, and was said to have contained in ancient times a population of eight thousand souls. Thus, while the most easterly of the three valleys which we have named was sunk so low as to admit the ocean to flow freely into it, the most westerly was so slightly depressed that it gained only a circumscribed and limited fertility through the springs, which, in the lowest portions of it, oozed from the ground. The third valley—the central one—remains now to be described.

The reader will observe, by referring once more to the map, that south of the great rainless region of which we are speaking, there lie groups and ranges of mountains in Abyssinia, called the Mountains of the Moon. These mountains are near the equator, and the relation which they sustain to the surrounding seas, and to currents of wind which blow in that quarter of the world, is such, that they bring down from the atmosphere, especially in certain seasons of the year, vast and continual torrents of rain. The water which thus falls drenches the mountain sides and deluges the valleys. There is a great portion of it which can not flow to the southward or eastward toward the sea, as the whole country consists, in those directions, of continuous tracts of elevated land. The rush of water thus turns to the northward, and, pressing on across the desert through the great central valley which we have referred to above, it finds an outlet, at last, in the Mediterranean, at a point two thousand miles distant from the place where the immense condenser drew it from the skies. The river thus created is the Nile. It is formed, in a word, by the surplus waters of a district inundated with rains, in their progress across a rainless desert, seeking the sea.

If the surplus of water upon the Abyssinian mountains had been constant and uniform, the stream, in its passage across the desert, would have communicated very little fertility to the barren sands which it traversed. The immediate banks of the river would have, perhaps, been fringed with verdure, but the influence of the irrigation would have extended no further than the water itself could have reached, by percolation through the sand. But the flow of the water is not thus uniform and steady. In a certain season of the year the rains are incessant, and they descend with such abundance and profusion as almost to inundate the districts where they fall. Immense torrents stream down the mountain sides; the valleys are deluged; plains turn into morasses, and morasses into lakes. In a word, the country becomes half submerged, and the accumulated mass of waters would rush with great force and violence down the central valley of the desert, which forms their only outlet, if the passage were narrow, and if it made any considerable descent in its course to the sea. It is, however, not narrow, and the descent is very small. The depression in the surface of the desert, through which the water flows, is from five to ten miles wide, and, though it is nearly two thousand miles from the rainy district across the desert to the sea, the country for the whole distance is almost level. There is only sufficient descent, especially for the last thousand miles, to determine a very gentle current to the northward in the waters of the stream.

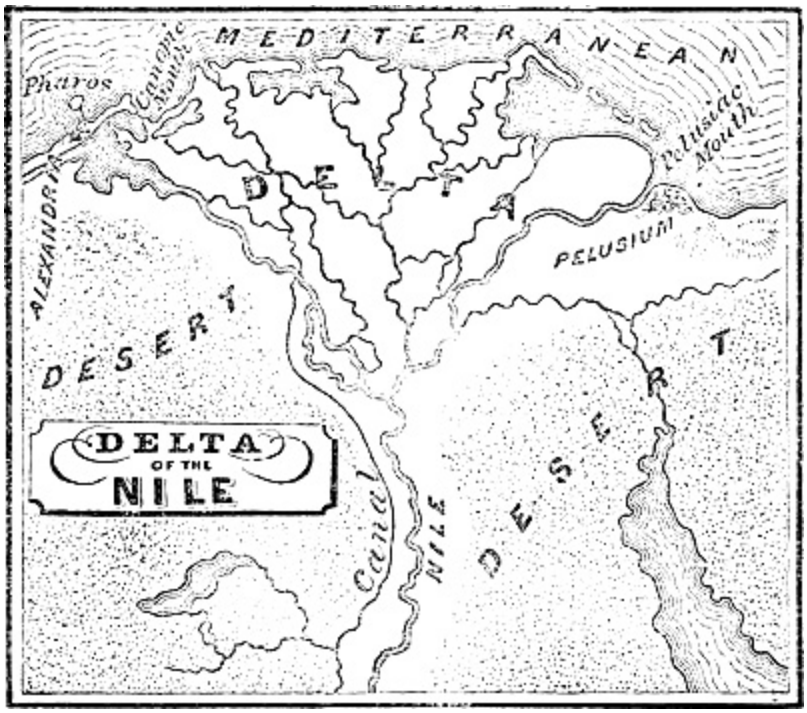
Under these circumstances, the immense quantity of water which falls in the rainy district in these inundating tropical showers, expands over the whole valley, and forms for a time an immense lake, extending in length across the whole breadth of the desert. This lake is, of course, from five to ten miles wide, and a thousand miles long. The water in it is shallow and turbid, and it has a gentle current toward the north. The rains, at length, in a great measure cease; but it

requires some months for the water to run off and leave the valley dry. As soon as it is gone, there springs up from the whole surface of the ground which has been thus submerged a most rank and luxuriant vegetation.

This vegetation, now wholly regulated and controlled by the hand of man, must have been, in its original and primeval state, of a very peculiar character. It must have consisted of such plants only as could exist under the condition of having the soil in which they grew laid, for a quarter of the year, wholly under water. This circumstance, probably, prevented the valley of the Nile from having been, like other fertile tracts of land, encumbered, in its native state, with forests. For the same reason, wild beasts could never have haunted it. There were no forests to shelter them, and no refuge or retreat for them but the dry and barren desert, during the period of the annual inundations. This most extraordinary valley seems thus to have been formed and preserved by Nature herself for the special possession of man. She herself seems to have held it in reserve for him from the very morning of creation, refusing admission into it to every plant and every animal that might hinder or disturb his occupancy and control. And if he were to abandon it now for a thousand years, and then return to it once more, he would find it just as he left it, ready for his immediate possession. There would be no wild beasts that he must first expel, and no tangled forests would have sprung up, that his ax must first remove. Nature is the husbandman who keeps this garden of the world in order, and the means and machinery by which she operates are the grand evaporating surfaces of the seas, the beams of the tropical sun, the lofty summits of the Abyssinian mountains, and, as the product and result of all this instrumentality, great periodical inundations of summer rain.

For these or some other reasons Egypt has been occupied by man from the most remote antiquity. The oldest records of the human race, made three thousand years ago, speak of Egypt as ancient then, when they were written. Not only is Tradition silent, but even Fable herself does not attempt to tell the story of the origin of her population. Here stand the oldest and most enduring monuments that human power has ever been able to raise. It is, however, somewhat humiliating to the pride of the race to reflect that the loftiest and proudest, as well as the most permanent and stable of all the works which man has ever accomplished, are but the incidents and adjuncts of a thin stratum of alluvial fertility, left upon the sands by the subsiding waters of summer showers.

The most important portion of the alluvion of the Nile is the northern portion, where the valley widens and opens toward the sea, forming a triangular plain of about one hundred miles in length on each of the sides, over which the waters of the river flow in a great number of separate creeks and channels. The whole area forms a vast meadow, intersected every where with slow-flowing streams of water, and presenting on its surface the most enchanting pictures of fertility, abundance, and beauty. This region is called the Delta of the Nile.



The sea upon the coast is shallow, and the fertile country formed by the deposits of the river seems to have projected somewhat beyond the line of the coast; although, as the land has not advanced perceptibly for the last eighteen hundred years, it may be somewhat doubtful whether the whole of the apparent protrusion is not due to the natural conformation of the coast, rather than to any changes made by the action of the river.

The Delta of the Nile is so level itself, and so little raised above the level of the Mediterranean, that the land seems almost a continuation of the same surface with the sea, only, instead of blue waters topped with white-crested waves, we have broad tracts of waving grain, and gentle swells of land crowned with hamlets and villages. In approaching the coast, the navigator has no distant view of all this verdure and beauty. It lies so low that it continues beneath the horizon until the ship is close upon the shore. The first landmarks, in fact, which the seaman makes, are

the tops of trees growing apparently out of the water, or the summit of an obelisk, or the capital of a pillar, marking the site of some ancient and dilapidated city.

The most easterly of the channels by which the waters of the river find their way through the Delta to the sea, is called, as it will be seen marked upon the map, the Pelusiac branch. It forms almost the boundary of the fertile region of the Delta on the eastern side. There was an ancient city named Pelusium near the mouth of it. This was, of course, the first Egyptian city reached by those who arrived by land from the eastward, traveling along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. On account of its thus marking the eastern frontier of the country, it became a point of great importance, and is often mentioned in the histories of ancient times.

The westernmost mouth of the Nile, on the other hand, was called the Canopic mouth. The distance along the coast from the Canopic mouth to Pelusium was about a hundred miles. The outline of the coast was formerly, as it still continues to be, very irregular, and the water shallow. Extended banks of sand protruded into the sea, and the sea itself, as if in retaliation, formed innumerable creeks, and inlets, and lagoons in the land. Along this irregular and uncertain boundary the waters of the Nile and the surges of the Mediterranean kept up an eternal war, with energies so nearly equal, that now, after the lapse of eighteen hundred years since the state of the contest began to be recorded, neither side has been found to have gained any perceptible advantage over the other. The river brings the sands down, and the sea drives them incessantly back, keeping the whole line of the shore in such a condition as to make it extremely dangerous and difficult of access to man.

It will be obvious, from this description of the valley of the Nile, that it formed a country which was in ancient times

isolated and secluded, in a very striking manner, from all the rest of the world. It was wholly shut in by deserts, on every side, by land; and the shoals, and sand-bars, and other dangers of navigation which marked the line of the coast, seemed to forbid approach by sea. Here it remained for many ages, under the rule of its own native ancient kings. Its population was peaceful and industrious. Its scholars were famed throughout the world for their learning, their science, and their philosophy. It was in these ages, before other nations had intruded upon its peaceful seclusion, that the Pyramids were built, and the enormous monoliths carved, and those vast temples reared whose ruined columns are now the wonder of mankind. During these remote ages, too, Egypt was, as now, the land of perpetual fertility and abundance. There would always be corn in Egypt, wherever else famine might rage. The neighboring nations and tribes in Arabia, Palestine, and Syria, found their way to it, accordingly, across the deserts on the eastern side, when driven by want, and thus opened a way of communication. At length the Persian monarchs, after extending their empire westward to the Mediterranean, found access by the same road to Pelusium, and thence overran and conquered the country. At last, about two hundred and fifty years before the time of Cleopatra, Alexander the Great, when he subverted the Persian empire, took possession of Egypt, and annexed it, among the other Persian provinces, to his own dominions. At the division of Alexander’s empire, after his death, Egypt fell to one of his generals, named Ptolemy. Ptolemy made it his kingdom, and left it, at his death, to his heirs. A long line of sovereigns succeeded him, known in history as the dynasty of the Ptolemies—Greek princes, reigning over an Egyptian realm. Cleopatra was the daughter of the eleventh in the line.

The capital of the Ptolemies was Alexandria. Until the time of Alexander’s conquest, Egypt had no sea-port. There were