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***THE HISTORY
OF ANCIENT
EGYPT***

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The History of Ancient Egypt

EAN 8596547392422

DigiCat, 2022

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Table of Contents

- [I. The Land of Egypt.](#)
- [II. The People of Egypt.](#)
- [III. The Dawn of History.](#)
- [IV. The Pyramid Builders.](#)
- [V. The Rise of Thebes to Power, and the Early Theban Kings.](#)
- [VI. The Good Amenemhat and His Works.](#)
- [VII. Abraham in Egypt.](#)
- [VIII. The Great Invasion—The Hyksôs or Shepherd Kings—Joseph and Apepi.](#)
- [IX. How the Hyksôs were Expelled from Egypt.](#)
- [X. Thothmes I., The First Great Egyptian Conqueror.](#)
- [XI. Queen Hatasu and Her Merchant Fleet.](#)
- [XII. Thothmes the Third and Amenhotep the Second.](#)
- [XIII. Amenhotep III. And His Great Works—The Vocal Memnon.](#)
- [XIV. Khuenaten and the Disk-Worshippers.](#)
- [XV. Beginning of the Decline of Egypt.](#)
- [XVI. Menephtah I., The Pharaoh of the Exodus.](#)
- [XVII. The Decline of Egypt Under the Later Ramessides.](#)
- [XVIII. The Priest-Kings—Pinetem and Solomon.](#)
- [XIX. Shishak and His Dynasty.](#)
- [XX. The Land Shadowing With Wings—Egypt Under the Ethiopians](#)
- [XXI. The Fight Over the Carcase—Ethiopia v. Assyria.](#)

XXII. The Corpse Comes to Life Again—Psamatik I. and His Son Neco.

XXIII. The Later Saïte Kings.—Psamatik II., Apries, and Amasis.

XXIV. The Persian Conquest.

XXV. Three Desperate Revolts.

XXVI. A Last Gleam of Sunshine—Nectanebo I.

XXVII. The Light Goes Out in Darkness.

I.

The Land of Egypt.

[Table of Contents](#)

In shape Egypt is like a lily with a crooked stem. A broad blossom terminates it at its upper end; a button of a bud projects from the stalk a little below the blossom, on the left-hand side. The broad blossom is the Delta, extending from Aboosir to Tineh, a direct distance of a hundred and eighty miles, which the projection of the coast—the graceful swell of the petals—enlarges to two hundred and thirty. The bud is the Fayoum, a natural depression in the hills that shut in the Nile valley on the west, which has been rendered cultivable for many thousands of years by the introduction into it of the Nile water, through a canal known as the "Bahr Yousouf." The long stalk of the lily is the Nile valley itself, which is a ravine scooped in the rocky soil for seven hundred miles from the First Cataract to the apex of the Delta, sometimes not more than a mile broad, never more than eight or ten miles. No other country in the world is so strangely shaped, so long compared to its width, so straggling, so hard to govern from a single centre.

At the first glance, the country seems to divide itself into two strongly contrasted regions; and this was the original impression which it made upon its inhabitants. The natives from a very early time designated their land as "the two lands," and represented it by a hieroglyph in which the form used to express "land" was doubled. The kings were called "chiefs of the Two Lands," and wore two crowns, as being

kings of two countries. The Hebrews caught up the idea, and though they sometimes called Egypt "Mazor" in the singular number, preferred commonly to designate it by the dual form "Mizraim," which means "the two Mazors." These "two Mazors," "two Egypts," or "two lands," were, of course, the blossom and the stalk, the broad tract upon the Mediterranean known as "Lower Egypt," or "the Delta," and the long narrow valley that lies, like a green snake, to the south, which bears the name of "Upper Egypt," or "the Said." Nothing is more striking than the contrast between these two regions. Entering Egypt from the Mediterranean, or from Asia by the caravan route, the traveller sees stretching before him an apparently boundless plain, wholly unbroken by natural elevations, generally green with crops or with marshy plants, and canopied by a cloudless sky, which rests everywhere on a distant flat horizon. An absolute monotony surrounds him. No alternation of plain and highland, meadow and forest, no slopes of hills, or hanging woods, or dells, or gorges, or cascades, or rushing streams, or babbling rills, meet his gaze on any side; look which way he will, all is sameness, one vast smooth expanse of rich alluvial soil, varying only in being cultivated or else allowed to lie waste. Turning his back with something of weariness on the dull uniformity of this featureless plain, the wayfarer proceeds southwards, and enters, at the distance of a hundred miles from the coast, on an entirely new scene. Instead of an illimitable prospect meeting him on every side, he finds himself in a comparatively narrow vale, up and down which the eye still commands an extensive view, but where the prospect on either side is

blocked at the distance of a few miles by rocky ranges of hills, white or yellow or tawny, sometimes drawing so near as to threaten an obstruction of the river course, sometimes receding so far as to leave some miles of cultivable soil on either side of the stream. The rocky ranges, as he approaches them, have a stern and forbidding aspect. They rise for the most part, abruptly in bare grandeur; on their craggy sides grows neither moss nor heather; no trees clothe their steep heights. They seem intended, like the mountains that enclosed the abode of Rasselas, to keep in the inhabitants of the vale within their narrow limits, and bar them out from any commerce or acquaintance with the regions beyond.

Such is the twofold division of the country which impresses the observer strongly at the first. On a longer sojourn and a more intimate familiarity, the twofold division gives place to one which is threefold. The lower differs from the upper valley, it is a sort of debatable region, half plain, half vale; the cultivable surface spreads itself out more widely, the enclosing hills recede into the distance; above all, to the middle tract belongs the open space of the Fayoum nearly fifty miles across in its greatest diameter, and containing an area of four hundred square miles. Hence, with some of the occupants of Egypt a triple division has been preferred to a twofold one, the Greeks interposing the "Heptanomis" between the Thebais and the Delta, and the Arabs the "Vostani" between the Said and the Bahari, or "country of the sea."

It may be objected to this description, that the Egypt which it presents to the reader is not the Egypt of the maps.

Undoubtedly it is not. The maps give the name of Egypt to a broad rectangular space which they mark out in the north-eastern corner of Africa, bounded on two sides by the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, and on the two others by two imaginary lines which the map-makers kindly draw for us across the sands of the desert. But "this Egypt," as has been well observed, "is a fiction of the geographers, as untrue to fact as the island Atlantis of Greek legend, or the Lyonesse of mediæval romance, both sunk beneath the ocean to explain their disappearance. The true Egypt of the old monuments, of the Hebrews, of the Greeks and Romans, of the Arabs, and of its own people in this day, is a mere fraction of this vast area of the maps, nothing more than the valley and plain watered by the Nile, for nearly seven hundred miles by the river's course from the Mediterranean southwards."¹ The great wastes on either side of the Nile valley are in no sense Egypt, neither the undulating sandy desert to the west, nor the rocky and gravelly highland to the east, which rises in terrace after terrace to a height, in some places, of six thousand feet. Both are sparsely inhabited, and by tribes of a different race from the Egyptian—tribes whose allegiance to the rulers of Egypt is in the best times nominal, and who for the most part spurn the very idea of submission to authority.

If, then, the true Egypt be the tract that we have described—the Nile valley, with the Fayoum and the Delta—the lily stalk, the bud, and the blossom—we can well understand how it came to be said of old, that "Egypt was the gift of the river." Not that the lively Greek, who first used the expression, divined exactly the scientific truth of the

matter. The fancy of Herodotus saw Africa, originally, *doubly* severed from Asia by two parallel *fjords*, one running inland northwards from the Indian Ocean, as the Red Sea does to this day, and the other penetrating inland southwards from the Mediterranean to an equal or greater distance! The Nile, he said, pouring itself into this latter *fjord*, had by degrees filled it up, and had then gone on and by further deposits turned into land a large piece of the "sea of the Greeks," as was evident from the projection of the shore of the Delta beyond the general coast-line of Africa eastward and westward; and, he added, "I am convinced, for my own part, that if the Nile should please to divert his waters from their present bed into the Red Sea, he would fill it up and turn it into dry land in the space of twenty thousand years, or maybe in half that time—for he is a mighty river and a most energetic one." Here, in this last expression, he is thoroughly right, though the method of the Nile's energy has been other than he supposed. The Nile, working from its immense reservoirs in the equatorial regions, has gradually scooped itself out a deep bed in the sand and rock of the desert, which must have originally extended across the whole of northern Africa from the Atlantic to the Red Sea. Having scooped itself out this bed to a depth, in places, of three hundred feet from the desert level, it has then proceeded partially to fill it up with its own deposits. Occupying, when it is at its height, the entire bed, and presenting at that time the appearance of a vast lake, or succession of lakes, it deposits every day a portion of sediment over the whole space which it covers: then, contracting gradually, it leaves at the base of the hills, on

both sides, or at any rate on one, a strip of land fresh dressed with mud, which gets wider daily as the waters still recede, until yards grow into furlongs, and furlongs into miles, and at last the shrunk stream is content with a narrow channel a few hundred yards in width, and leaves the rest of its bed to the embraces of sun and air, and, if he so wills, to the industry of man. The land thus left exposed is Egypt—Egypt is the temporarily uncovered bed of the Nile, which it reclaims and recovers during a portion of each year, when Egypt disappears from view, save where human labour has by mounds and embankments formed artificial islands that raise their heads above the waste of waters, for the most part crowned with buildings.

There is one exception to this broad and sweeping statement. The Fayoum is no part of the natural bed of the Nile, and has not been scooped out by its energy. It is a natural depression in the western desert, separated off from the Nile valley by a range of limestone hills from two hundred to five hundred feet in height, and, apart from the activity of man, would have been arid, treeless, and waterless. Still, it derives from the Nile all its value, all its richness, all its fertility. Human energy at some remote period introduced into the depressed tract through an artificial channel from the Nile, cut in some places through the rock, the life-giving fluid; and this fluid, bearing the precious Nile sediment, has sufficed to spread fertility over the entire region, and to make the desert blossom like a garden.

The Egyptians were not unaware of the source of their blessings. From a remote date they speculated on their

mysterious river. They deified it under the name of Hapi, "the Hidden," they declared that "his abode was not known;" that he was an inscrutable god, that none could tell his origin: they acknowledged him as the giver of all good things, and especially of the fruits of the earth. They said—

"Hail to thee, O Nile!
Thou showest thyself in this land,
Coming in peace, giving life to Egypt;
O Ammon, thou leadest night unto day,
A leading that rejoices the heart!
Overflowing the gardens created by Ra;
Giving life to all animals;
Watering the land without ceasing:
The way of heaven descending:
Lover of food, bestower of corn,
Giving life to every home, O Phthah!...

O inundation of Nile, offerings are made to thee;
Oxen are slain to thee;
Great festivals are kept for thee;
Fowls are sacrificed to thee;
Beasts of the field are caught for thee;
Pure flames are offered to thee;
Offerings are made to every god,
As they are made unto Nile.
Incense ascends unto heaven,
Oxen, bulls, fowls are burnt!
Nile makes for himself chasms in the Thebaid;
Unknown is his name in heaven,

He doth not manifest his forms!
Vain are all representations!

Mortals extol him, and the cycle of gods!
Awe is felt by the terrible ones;
His son is made Lord of all,
To enlighten all Egypt.
Shine forth, shine forth, O Nile! shine forth!
Giving life to men by his omen:
Giving life to his oxen by the pastures!
Shine forth in glory, O Nile!"²

Though thus useful, beneficent, and indeed essential to the existence of Egypt, the Nile can scarcely be said to add much to the variety of the landscape or to the beauty of the scenery. It is something, no doubt, to have the sight of water in a land where the sun beats down all day long with unremitting force till the earth is like a furnace of iron beneath a sky of molten brass. But the Nile is never clear. During the inundation it is deeply stained with the red argillaceous soil brought down from the Abyssinian highlands. At other seasons it is always more or less tinged with the vegetable matter which it absorbs on its passage from Lake Victoria to Khartoum; and this vegetable matter, combined with its depth and volume, gives it a dull deep hue, which prevents it from having the attractiveness of purer and more translucent streams. The Greek name, Neilos, and the Hebrew, Sichor, are thought to embody this attribute of the mighty river, and to mean "dark blue" or "blue-black," terms sufficiently expressive of the stream's ordinary colour. Moreover, the Nile is too wide to be

picturesque. It is seldom less than a mile broad from the point where it enters Egypt, and running generally between flat shores it scarcely reflects anything, unless it be the grey-blue sky overhead, or the sails of a passing pleasure boat.

The size of Egypt, within the limits which have been here assigned to it, is about eleven thousand four hundred square miles, or less than that of any European State, except Belgium, Saxony, and Servia. Magnitude is, however, but an insignificant element in the greatness of States—witness Athens, Sparta, Rhodes, Genoa, Florence, Venice. Egypt is the richest and most productive land in the whole world. In its most flourishing age we are told that it contained twenty thousand cities. It deserved to be called, more (probably) than even Belgium, "one great town." But its area was undoubtedly small. Still, as little men have often taken the highest rank among warriors, so little States have filled a most important place in the world's history. Palestine was about the size of Wales; the entire Peloponnese was no larger than New Hampshire; Attica had nearly the same area as Cornwall. Thus the case of Egypt does not stand by itself, but is merely one out of many exceptions to what may perhaps be called the general rule.

If stinted for space, Egypt was happy in her soil and in her situation. The rich alluvium, continually growing deeper and deeper, and top-dressed each year by nature's bountiful hand, was of an inexhaustible fertility, and bore readily year after year a threefold harvest—first a grain crop, and then two crops of grasses or esculent vegetables. The wheat sown returned a hundredfold to the husbandman, and was

gathered at harvest-time in prodigal abundance—"as the sand of the sea, very much,"—till men "left numbering" (Gen. xli. 49). Flax and doora were largely cultivated, and enormous quantities were produced of the most nutritive vegetables, such as lentils, garlic, leeks, onions, endive, radishes, melons, cucumbers, lettuces, and the like, which formed a most important element in the food of the people. The vine was also grown in many places, as along the flanks of the hills between Thebes and Memphis, in the basin of the Fayoum, at Anthylla in the Mareotis at Sebennytus (now Semnood), and at Plisthiné, on the shore of the Mediterranean. The date-palm, springing naturally from the soil in clumps, or groves, or planted in avenues, everywhere offered its golden clusters to the wayfarer, dropping its fruit into his lap. Wheat, however, was throughout antiquity the chief product of Egypt, which was reckoned the granary of the world, the refuge and resource of all the neighbouring nations in time of dearth, and on which in the later republican, and in the imperial times, Rome almost wholly depended for her sustenance.

If the soil was thus all that could be wished, still more advantageous was the situation. Egypt was the only nation of the ancient world which had ready access to two seas, the Northern Sea, or "Sea of the Greeks," and the Eastern Sea, or "Sea of the Arabians and the Indians." Phœnicia might carry her traffic by the painful travel of caravans across fifteen degrees of desert from her cities on the Levantine coast to the inner recess of the Persian Gulf, and thus get a share in the trade of the East at a vast expenditure of time and trouble. Assyria and Babylonia

might for a time, when at the height of their dominion, obtain a temporary hold on lands which were not their own, and boast that they stretched from the "sea of the rising" to "that of the setting sun"—from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean; but Egypt, at all times and under all circumstances, commands by her geographic position an access both to the Mediterranean and to the Indian Ocean by way of the Red Sea, whereof nothing can deprive her. Suez must always be hers, for the Isthmus is her natural boundary, and her water-system has been connected with the head of the Arabian Gulf for more than three thousand years; and, in the absence of any strong State in Arabia or Abyssinia, the entire western coast of the Red Sea falls naturally under her influence with its important roadsteads and harbours. Thus Egypt had two great outlets for her productions, and two great inlets by which she received the productions of other countries. Her ships could issue from the Nilotic ports and trade with Phœnicia, or Carthage, or Italy, or Greece, exchanging her corn and wine and glass and furniture and works in metallurgy for Etruscan vases, or Grecian statues, or purple Tynan robes, or tin brought by Carthaginian merchantmen from the Scilly islands and from Cornwall; or they could start from Heroopolis, or Myos Hormus, or some port further to the southward, and pass by way of the Red Sea to the spice-region of "Araby the Blest," or to the Abyssinian timber-region, or to the shores of Zanzibar and Mozambique, or round Arabia to Teredon on the Persian Gulf, or possibly to Ceylon or India. The products of the distant east, even of "far Cathay," certainly flowed into the land, for they have been dug out of the ancient

tombs; but whether they were obtained by direct or by indirect commerce must be admitted to be doubtful.

The possession of the Nile was of extraordinary advantage to Egypt, not merely as the source of fertility, but as a means of rapid communication. One of the greatest impediments to progress and civilization which Nature offers to man in regions which he has not yet subdued to his will, is the difficulty of locomotion and of transport. Mountains, forests, torrents, marshes, jungles, are the curses of "new countries," forming, until they have been cut through, bridged over, or tunnelled under, insurmountable barriers, hindering commerce and causing hatreds through isolation. Egypt had from the first a broad road driven through it from end to end—a road seven hundred miles long, and seldom much less than a mile wide—which allowed of ready and rapid communication between the remotest parts of the kingdom. Rivers, indeed, are of no use as arteries of commerce or vehicles for locomotion until men have invented ships or boats, or at least rafts, to descend and ascend them; but the Egyptians were acquainted with the use of boats and rafts from a very remote period, and took to the water like a brood of ducks or a parcel of South Sea Islanders. Thirty-two centuries ago an Egyptian king built a temple on the confines of the Mediterranean entirely of stone which he floated down the Nile for six hundred and fifty miles from the quarries of Assouan (Syêné); and the passage up the river is for a considerable portion of the year as easy as the passage down. Northerly winds—the famous "Etesian gales"—prevail in Egypt during the whole of the summer and autumn, and by hoisting a sail it is almost

always possible to ascend the stream at a good pace. If the sail be dropped, the current will at all times take a vessel down-stream; and thus boats, and even vessels of a large size, pass up and down the water-way with equal facility.

Egypt is at all seasons a strange country, but presents the most astonishing appearance at the period of the inundation. At that time not only is the lengthy valley from Assouan to Cairo laid under water, but the Delta itself becomes one vast lake, interspersed with islands, which stud its surface here and there at intervals, and which reminded Herodotus of "the islands of the Ægean." The elevations, which are the work of man, are crowned for the most part with the white walls of towns and villages sparkling in the sunlight, and sometimes glassed in the flood beneath them. The palms and sycamores stand up out of the expanse of waters shortened by some five or six feet of their height. Everywhere, when the inundation begins, the inhabitants are seen hurrying their cattle to the shelter provided in the villages, and, if the rise of the water is more rapid than usual, numbers rescue their beasts with difficulty, causing them to wade or swim, or even saving them by means of boats. An excessive inundation brings not only animal, but human life into peril, endangering the villages themselves, which may be submerged and swept away if the water rises above a certain height. A deficient inundation, on the other hand, brings no immediate danger, but by limiting production may create a dearth that causes incalculable suffering.

Nature's operations are, however, so uniform that these calamities rarely arise. Egypt rejoices, more than almost any

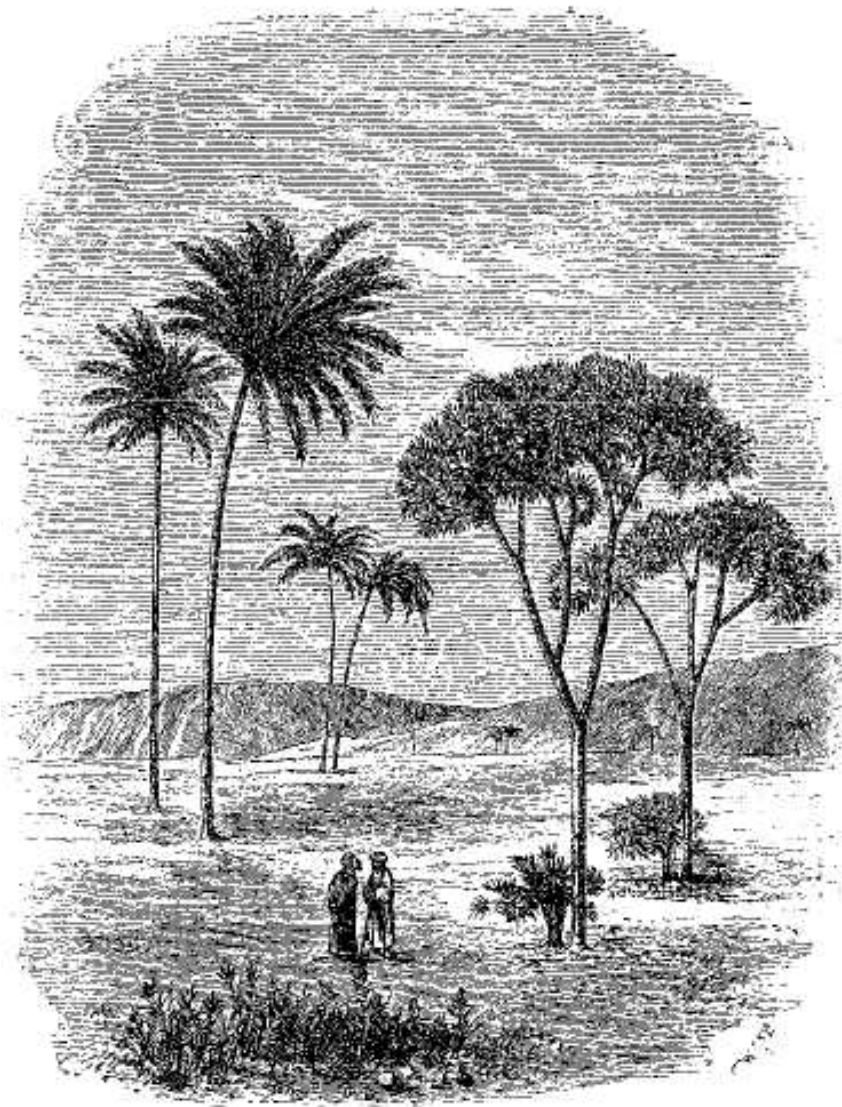
other country, in an equable climate, an equable temperature, and an equable productiveness. The summers, no doubt, are hot, especially in the south, and an occasional sirocco produces intense discomfort while it lasts. But the cool Etesian wind, blowing from the north through nearly all the summer-time, tempers the ardour of the sun's rays even in the hottest season of the year; and during the remaining months, from October to April, the climate is simply delightful. Egypt has been said to have but two seasons, spring and summer. Spring reigns from October into May—crops spring up, flowers bloom, soft zephyrs fan the cheek, when it is mid-winter in Europe; by February the fruit-trees are in full blossom; the crops begin to ripen in March, and are reaped by the end of April; snow and frost are wholly unknown at any time; storm, fog, and even rain are rare. A bright, lucid atmosphere rests upon the entire scene. There is no moisture in the air, no cloud in the sky; no mist veils the distance. One day follows another, each the counterpart of the preceding; until at length spring retires to make room for summer, and a fiercer light, a hotter sun, a longer day, show that the most enjoyable part of the year is gone by.

The geology of Egypt is simple. The entire flat country is alluvial. The hills on either side are, in the north, limestone, in the central region sandstone, and in the south granite and syenite. The granitic formation begins between the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth parallels, but occasional masses of primitive rock are intruded into the secondary regions, and these extend northward as far as lat. $27^{\circ}10'$. Above the rocks are, in many places, deposits of gravel and sand, the former hard, the latter loose and shifting. A

portion of the eastern desert is metalliferous. Gold is found even at the present day in small quantities, and seems anciently to have been more abundant. Copper, iron, and lead have been also met with in modern times, and one iron mine shows signs of having been anciently worked. Emeralds abound in the region about Mount Zabara, and the eastern desert further yields jaspers, carnelians, breccia verde, agates, chalcedonies, and rock-crystal.

The flora of the country is not particularly interesting. Dom and date palms are the principal trees, the latter having a single tapering stem, the former dividing into branches. The sycamore (*Ficus sycamorus*) is also tolerably common, as are several species of acacia. The acacia seyal, which furnishes the gum arable of commerce, is "a gnarled and thorny tree, somewhat like a solitary hawthorn in its habit and manner of growth, but much larger." Its height, when full grown, is from fifteen to twenty feet. The *persea*, a sacred plant among the ancient Egyptians, is a bushy tree or shrub, which attains the height of eighteen or twenty feet under favourable circumstances, and bears a fruit resembling a date, with a subacid flavour. The bark is whitish, the branches gracefully curved, the foliage of an ashy grey, more especially on its under surface. Specially characteristic of Egypt, though not altogether peculiar to it, were the papyrus and the lotus—the *Cyperus papyrus* and *Nymphæa lotus* of botanists. The papyrus was a tall smooth reed, with a large triangular stalk containing a delicate pith, out of which the Egyptians manufactured their paper. The fabric was excellent, as is shown by its continuance to the present day, and by the fact that the Greeks and Romans,

after long trial, preferred it to parchment. The lotus was a large white water-lily of exquisite beauty. Kings offered it to the gods; guests wore it at banquets; architectural forms were modelled upon it; it was employed in the ornamentation of thrones. Whether its root had the effect on men ascribed to it by Homer may be doubted; but no one ever saw it without recognizing it instantly as "a thing of beauty," and therefore as "a joy for ever."



DOM AND DATE PALMS.

Nor can Egypt have afforded in ancient times any very exciting amusement to sportsmen. At the present day gazelles are chased with hawk and hound during the dry season on the broad expanse of the Delta; but anciently the thick population scared off the whole antelope tribe, which was only to be found in the desert region beyond the limits of the alluvium. Nor can Egypt, in the proper sense of the word, have ever been the home of red-deer, roes, or fallow-deer, of lions, bears, hyænas, lynxes, or rabbits. Animals of these classes may occasionally have appeared in the alluvial plain, but they would only be rare visitants driven by hunger from their true habitat in the Libyan or the Arabian uplands. The crocodile, however, and the hippopotamus were actually hunted by the ancient Egyptians; and they further indulged their love of sport in the pursuits of fowling and fishing. All kinds of waterfowl are at all seasons abundant in the Nile waters, and especially frequent the pools left by the retiring river—pelicans, geese, ducks, ibises, cranes, storks, herons, dotterels, kingfishers, and sea-swallows. Quails also arrive in great numbers in the month of March, though there are no pheasants, snipe, wood-cocks, nor partridges. Fish are very plentiful in the Nile and the canals derived from it; but there are not many kinds which afford much sport to the fisherman.

Altogether, Egypt is a land of tranquil monotony. The eye commonly travels either over a waste of waters, or over a green plain unbroken by elevations. The hills which inclose the Nile valley have level tops, and sides that are bare of trees, or shrubs, or flowers, or even mosses. The sky is generally cloudless. No fog or mist enwraps the distance in

mystery; no rainstorm sweeps across the scene; no rainbow spans the empyrean; no shadows chase each other over the landscape. There is an entire absence of picturesque scenery. A single broad river, unbroken within the limits of Egypt even by a rapid, two flat strips of green plain at its side, two low lines of straight-topped hills beyond them, and a boundless open space where the river divides itself into half a dozen sluggish branches before reaching the sea, constitute Egypt, which is by nature a southern Holland—"weary, stale, flat and unprofitable." The monotony is relieved, however, in two ways, and by two causes. Nature herself does something to relieve it Twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, the sky and the landscape are lit up by hues so bright yet so delicate, that the homely features of the prospect are at once transformed as by magic, and wear an aspect of exquisite beauty. At dawn long streaks of rosy light stretch themselves across the eastern sky, the haze above the western horizon blushes a deep red; a ruddy light diffuses itself around, and makes walls and towers and minarets and cupolas to glow like fire; the long shadows thrown by each tree and building are purple or violet. A glamour is over the scene, which seems transfigured by an enchanter's wand; but the enchanter is Nature, and the wand she wields is composed of sun-rays. Again, at eve, nearly the same effects are produced as in the morning, only with a heightened effect; "the redness of flames" passes into "the redness of roses"—the wavy cloud that fled in the morning comes into sight once more—comes blushing, yet still comes on—comes burning with blushes, and clings to the Sun-god's side.³

Night brings a fresh transfiguration. The olive after-glow gives place to a deep blue-grey. The yellow moon rises into the vast expanse. A softened light diffuses itself over earth and sky. The orb of night walks in brightness through a firmament of sapphire; or, if the moon is below the horizon, then the purple vault is lit up with many-coloured stars. Silence profound reigns around. A phase of beauty wholly different from that of the day-time smites the sense; and the monotony of feature is forgiven to the changefulness of expression, and to the experience of a new delight.

Man has also done his part to overcome the dulness and sameness that brood over the "land of Mizraim." Where nature is most tame and commonplace, man is tempted to his highest flights of audacity. As in the level Babylonia he aspired to build a tower that should "reach to heaven" (Gen. xi. 4), so in Egypt he strove to startle and surprise by gigantic works, enormous undertakings, enterprises that might have seemed wholly beyond his powers. And these have constituted in all ages, except the very earliest, the great attractiveness of Egypt. Men are drawn there, not by the mysteriousness of the Nile, or the mild beauties of orchards and palm-groves, of well-cultivated fields and gardens—no, nor by the loveliness of sunrises and sunsets, of moonlit skies and stars shining with many hues, but by the huge masses of the pyramids, by the colossal statues, the tall obelisks, the enormous temples, the deeply-excavated tombs, the mosques, the castles, and the palaces. The architecture of Egypt is its great glory. It began early, and it has continued late. But for the great works, strewn thickly over the whole valley of the Nile, the land of

Egypt would have obtained but a small share of the world's attention; and it is at least doubtful whether its "story" would ever have been thought necessary to complete "the Story of the Nations."

II. **The People of Egypt.**

[Table of Contents](#)

Where the Egyptians came from, is a difficult question to answer. Ancient speculators, when they could not derive a people definitely from any other, took refuge in the statement, or the figment, that they were the children of the soil which they had always occupied. Modern theorists may say, if it please them, that they were evolved out of the monkeys that had their primitive abode on that particular portion of the earth's surface. Monkeys, however, are not found everywhere; and we have no evidence that in Egypt they were ever indigenous, though, as pets, they were very common, the Egyptians delighting in keeping them. Such evidence as we have reveals to us the man as anterior to the monkey in the land of Mizraim. Thus we are thrown back on the original question—Where did the man, or race of men, that is found in Egypt at the dawn of history come from?

It is generally answered that they came from Asia; but this is not much more than a conjecture. The physical type of the Egyptians is different from that of any known Asiatic nation. The Egyptians had no traditions that at all connected them with Asia. Their language, indeed, in historic times was partially Semitic, and allied to the Hebrew, the Phœnician, and the Aramaic; but the relationship was remote, and may be partly accounted for by later intercourse, without involving original derivation. The

fundamental character of the Egyptian in respect of physical type, language, and tone of thought, is Nigritic. The Egyptians were not negroes, but they bore a resemblance to the negro which is indisputable. Their type differs from the Caucasian in exactly those respects which when exaggerated produce the negro. They were darker, had thicker lips, lower foreheads, larger heads, more advancing jaws, a flatter foot, and a more attenuated frame. It is quite conceivable that the negro type was produced by a gradual degeneration from that which we find in Egypt. It is even conceivable that the Egyptian type was produced by gradual advance and amelioration from that of the negro.

Still, whencesoever derived, the Egyptian people, as it existed in the flourishing times of Egyptian history, was beyond all question a mixed race, showing diverse affinities. Whatever the people was originally, it received into it from time to time various foreign elements, and those in such quantities as seriously to affect its physique—Ethiopians from the south, Libyans from the west, Semites from the north-east, where Africa adjoined on Asia. There are two quite different types of Egyptian form and feature, blending together in the mass of the nation, but strongly developed, and (so to speak) accentuated in individuals. One is that which we see in portraits of Rameses III, and in some of Rameses II.—a moderately high forehead, a large, well-formed aquiline nose, a well-shaped mouth with lips not over full, and a delicately rounded chin. The other is comparatively coarse—forehead low, nose depressed and short, lower part of the face prognathous and sensual-looking, chin heavy, jaw large, lips thick and projecting. The

two types of face are not, however, accompanied by much difference of frame. The Egyptian is always slight in figure, wanting in muscle, flat in foot, with limbs that are too long, too thin, too lady-like. Something more of muscularity appears, perhaps, in the earlier than in the later forms; but this is perhaps attributable to a modification of the artistic ideal.

As Egypt presents us with two types of physique, so it brings before us two strongly different types of character. On the one hand we see, alike in the pictured scenes, in the native literary remains, and in the accounts which foreigners have left us of the people, a grave and dignified race, full of serious and sober thought, given to speculation and reflection, occupied rather with the interests belonging to another world than with those that attach to this present scene of existence, and inclined to indulge in a gentle and dreamy melancholy. The first thought of a king, when he began his reign, was to begin his tomb. The desire of the grandee was similar. It is a trite tale how at feasts a slave carried round to all the guests the representation of a mummied corpse, and showed it to each in turn, with the solemn words—"Look at this, and so eat and drink; for be sure that one day such as this thou shalt be." The favourite song of the Egyptians, according to Herodotus, was a dirge. The "Lay of Harper," which we subjoin, sounds a key-note that was very familiar, at any rate, to large numbers among the Egyptians.

The Great One⁴ has gone to his rest,
Ended his task and his race;
Thus men are aye passing away,

And youths are aye taking their place.
As Ra rises up every morn,
And Turn every evening doth set,
So women conceive and bring forth,
And men without ceasing beget.
Each soul in its turn draweth breath—
Each man born of woman sees Death.

Take thy pleasure to-day,
Father! Holy One! See,
Spices and fragrant oils,
Father, we bring to thee.
On thy sister's bosom and arms
Wreaths of lotus we place;
On thy sister, dear to thy heart,
Aye sitting before thy face.
Sound the song; let music be played
And let cares behind thee be laid.

Take thy pleasure to-day;
Mind thee of joy and delight!
Soon life's pilgrimage ends,
And we pass to Silence and Night.
Patriarch perfect and pure,
Nefer-hotep, blessed one! Thou
Didst finish thy course upon earth,
And art with the blessed ones now.
Men pass to the Silent Shore,
And their place doth know them no more.

They are as they never had been,
Since the sun went forth upon high;
They sit on the banks of the stream
That floweth in stillness by.
Thy soul is among them; thou
Dost drink of the sacred tide,
Having the wish of thy heart—
At peace ever since thou hast died.
Give bread to the man who is poor,
And thy name shall be blest evermore.

* * * * *

Take thy pleasure to-day,
Nefer-hotep, blessed and pure.
What availed thee thy other buildings?
Of thy tomb alone thou art sure.
On the earth thou hast nought beside,
Nought of thee else is remaining;
And when thou wentest below,
Thy last sip of life thou wert draining.
Even they who have millions to spend,
Find that life comes at last to an end.

Let all, then, think of the day
Of departure without returning—
'Twill then be well to have lived,
All sin and injustice spurning.
For he who has loved the right,
In the hour that none can flee,
Enters upon the delight

Of a glad eternity.
Give freely from out thy store,
And thou shalt be blest evermore.

On the other hand, there is evidence of a lightsome, joyous, and even frolic spirit as pervading numbers, especially among the lower classes of the Egyptians. "Traverse Egypt," says a writer who knows more of the ancient country than almost any other living person, "examine the scenes sculptured or painted on the walls of the chapels attached to tombs, consult the inscriptions graven on the rocks or traced with ink on the papyrus rolls, and you will be compelled to modify your mistaken notion of the Egyptians being a nation of philosophers. I defy you to find anything more gay, more amusing, more freshly simple, than this good-natured Egyptian people, which was fond of life and felt a profound pleasure in its existence. Far from desiring death, they addressed prayers to the gods to preserve them in life, and to give them a happy old age—an old age that should reach, if possible, to the 'perfect term of no years.' They gave themselves up to pleasures of every kind; they sang, they drank, they danced, they delighted in making excursions into the country, where hunting and fishing were occupations reserved especially for the nobility. In conformity with this inclination towards pleasure, sportive proposals, a pleasantry that was perhaps over-free, witticisms, raillery, and a mocking spirit, were in vogue among the people, and fun was allowed entrance even into the tombs. In the large schools the masters had a difficulty in training the young and keeping down their passion for amusements. When oral exhortation failed of success, the