

MISCELLANEOUS.

JENSON'S TRAVELS.

LETTER NO. LXVI.

Being a quarantine prisoner on board the Austrian steamer *Thalia*, lying off Beyrout, Syria, I have more time to read and write than I care for just now, and after perusing some literature on Egypt I feel impressed to cull a few items for the *News* in addition to what I have already written. I will explain that I sailed from Port Said, Egypt, in the evening of Wednesday, June 10th, bound for Syria and Palestine, and arrived off Beyrout the following day at 2 o'clock p. m. The ship and all on board were almost immediately put under ten days' quarantine on account of coming from Egypt where cholera is raging at the present time. From our place of anchorage we have a beautiful view of Beyrout, a city of about 100,000 inhabitants, and the mountains of Lebanon, the higher summits of which are still covered with the snow of last winter. Villages are seen on the lower mountain slopes everywhere. On the morning of our arrival off Beyrout, we had a good glimpse of Mount Carmel, in Palestine, as we passed by; also the sites of old Tyre and Sidon of Bible fame, lying on the Mediterranean coast and at the foot of the Lebanon range.

W. H. Davenport Adams, in his "Egypt Past and Present," opens his narrative in the following language:

Of all the countries of the Old Roman Empire Egypt is perhaps the most attractive both for the student and the traveler. Time has clothed it with a strange and solemn charm; has spread over it, so to speak, an atmosphere of mysterious romance; and the mind cannot but be impressed with awe and wonder which contemplates its sphinxes and its pyramids, its colossal statues and huge obelisks, its monument of a remote antiquity to which the antiquity of Greece and Rome is but a thing of yesterday. Long before the Cecrops founded Athens, long, long before an Etruscan colony sowed at Alba Longa the first seeds of imperial Rome, and long before Abraham walked with angels in the plains of Mamre, Egypt was studded with great cities, and had developed a complete system of civilization. You may trace back its annals for some four thousand years before the birth of Christ, and many of its documents are undoubtedly the most ancient memorials of human skill and labor existing in the world. We are accustomed to think and speak of the Hebrew patriarchs as the world's gray forefathers; but in truth, Egypt was a powerful and opulent empire even in the days of Joseph, and while Jacob and his sons still tended sheep in the grassy solitudes of the Asiatic plains. It was in the Egyptian schools Moses was trained to become the lawgiver of the Jewish people. Its pyramids were rising on the bank of the Nile at an epoch coeval with that of Abraham and Isaac.

We see then that Egypt was the cradle of the world's civilization. Thence Greece derived her art, her literature, her science; and, improving them in the light and fulness of her own exquisite imaginations, handed them down to imperial Rome whose mis-

sion it was to diffuse them over western Europe.

And such as Egypt was in the dawn of human history, such is it now. In many important respects, no land on the face of the globe has undergone so little change. True it is that its palaces are masses of ruin, half buried in sand; that of Memphis, and of Thebes and Karnak only the shadow of their former glory survives; that in the seat of the Pharaohs and the Ptolemys sits the descendant of an alien race. But then consider that its pyramids survive almost uninjured, that its language remains; that the Nile still rises and swells with annual regularity; that the animal life teeming on its banks is the animal life worshipped, loved or dreaded, three thousand years ago by the subjects of Rameses; that the khamsin (a hot south wind) still scorches the meadow-land with hot fierce breath; that beyond the narrow belt of verdure which the bright river traversed still spreads the boundless yellow expanse of the dreary desert; that the husbandman still finds his sustenance and support in the palm and cultivates his little garden of leeks and other vegetables; that the creaking water wheel is plied now as it was plied in the days of Nectanebus; consider these things, and own that monotony is written everywhere on the face of the land.

Egypt occupies the northern corner of the African continent, where it is linked to that of Asia by the Isthmus of Suez and separated from that of Europe by the waters of the Mediterranean. It stretches inland from that old historic sea (which for ages has been one of the principal channels of the world's commerce) to the first cataract of the Nile, that of Assouan, the ancient Syene; or from the parallel of latitude $31^{\circ} 31'$ to that of $24^{\circ} 3'$ north. Its eastern boundary is formed by the Red Sea; on the west it is bordered by the ever shifting sands of the Libyan Desert. Following the track of the Nile, we may compute its length at about 530 miles; its breadth may be measured by that of the Nile river valley, for the cultivated territory does not extend beyond the limits marked by the yearly inundations of that river. Three fourths of the Egypt shown upon the maps are a rocky sterile waste, and except the valley already spoken of the only cultivated and habitable portion is found in Lower Egypt, or the delta, an area of between 4,000 and 5,000 square miles.

The average width of the Nile Valley according to Mr. Adams, is up to the 30th parallel, about seven miles, while that of the cultivable land does not exceed five miles and a half. The valley is simply a strip of alluvial deposit annually fertilized by the riverine sediment. Between Cairo, in Lower Egypt, and Edfon, in Upper Egypt, the maximum breadth may be taken at eleven miles the minimum at two. Further south, between Edfoo and Assouan the contraction of the valley is so great that it may more justly be called a ravine, as scarcely any soil exists on either bank; but from the waters of the Nile the rocks spring up like cliffs from the sea, bold, abrupt and precipitous.

Lower and Middle Egypt are deficient in wood, though not utterly bare, as its

scenes are adorned with the tamarisk and the palm, and on the border land of the desert bloom bright sweet gardens of Jessamine and orange. Whenever the soil is fairly cultivated and properly watered, it amply repays the toil of the husbandman, yielding luxuriant crops of tobacco, cotton, sugar cane, indigo, etc. Among the shallows of Lake Manzaleh lingers the once-prized papyrus. In the beautiful valley of Faioum myriads of roses burden the air with fragrance; and every peasant's tiny nook of ground affords a supply of leeks, garlic, melons and cucumbers. Nature, however is much more genial in Upper Egypt; and a recent traveler declares it impossible to paint a more pleasant ideal of a summer-land than the Egypt above Thebes.

The soil of Egypt is remarkable for its fertility, and it is fertile because it consists of nothing more or less than the deposits of its river-waters. "Nile mud," as described by St. Hilaire, is a sort of brown earth emphatically called *terre d'Egypt*; it consists of rather stiff clay, but with an extremely fine grain. It is very soft and unctuous to the touch, dissolves readily in water and possesses scarcely any odor. When dried it becomes very hard, as may be seen in the deep cracks which furrow the ground some time after the waters have retired.

The trees of Egypt are not only few in number, but of few species. First and foremost must be ranked the date palm which is for the Egyptian what the bread fruit tree is for the Polynesian, or rice for the Hindu. It supplies him with food and clothing, and house and furniture; it is his all-in-all, his stay, his wealth, his very life. Scarcely inferior in importance is its congener, the doum or dom palm. The arcacia or sot tree of the Arabs, is also common; it furnishes the skittim wood of the Bible, is the *Mimosa Nilotica* of botanists, and extensively adapted for ship building and for similar purposes. Add to them the sycamore and the tamarisk and our enumeration of the principle trees of Egypt is complete.

The animal life of Egypt is far more varied and abundant. There are five breeds of the horse, the ass and the camel, the last named being the favorite beast of burden. The giraffe has been driven into the wilder districts by the unrelenting advance of modern civilization. The hippopotamus is only found in the far reaches of the Nile; but the hyena, the wild dog and the jackal still prowl at night through the streets of the large towns. The ichneumon, the stork, the heron, the purple goose and the sacred ibis are almost as common now as in the olden time, though the unreasoning passion of English travelers for making large bags of game threatens to extirpate them from the land.

"Egypt" as Mr. Howard Hopley in his "Under Egyptian Palms" remarks, is wonderfully populous with the feathered tribes; their division and sub division are infinite. From the smaller birdlings that dwell in the mimosa whose plumage gorgeous with all rainbow hues, absolutely bewilders you with its beauty, up through the ranks of wild and water fowl, to those big vultures and august eagles which perch solemnly on desert peak or crag, or skim lazily aloft in mid-air, there are endless gradations. Their tameness appears to be extraordinary. You may almost walk into a flock of pigeons on a stubblefield, which, when it rises around you, is so dense as